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How Do Educators Avoid Teacher Burnout?

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HOW DO EDUCATORS AVOID TEACHER BURNOUT?

by

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To my family and friends, for whom I strive toward balance. Without you, balance and the avoidance of burnout would not be as urgent. You give me a purpose for making teaching my career, but not letting it become my lifestyle.

"You can't stop the waves, but you can learn to surf."
 - Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Wherever You Go, There You Are*

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The responsibilities and stresses placed upon teachers have changed greatly from those my grandmother faced in the 1940s as a beginning teacher in a one-room country schoolhouse. Teachers today perform in a time of high-stakes testing, discussions on budget cuts, and teacher accountability. In the face of such stressors, many teachers are beginning to say, "Enough is enough," while others are able to maintain a sense fulfillment through their work. In my early years in the classroom, I saw many teachers around me become engulfed in the profession, letting it take over their lives until they seemingly collapsed under the pressure. While it is not plausible for me to eliminate all stresses from my life, I can work to control the ways that I react to those stresses; as Jon Kabat-Zinn says, "You can't stop the waves, but you can learn to surf." As a young educator who hopes to have many fulfilling years of teaching ahead of me, I want to "learn to surf" by studying the "surfers" around me. It is my purpose to discover sustainable teaching practices that will help me to steer around burnout and allow me to persist in the field for decades to come. I aim to understand what makes teachers who thrive different from those who burnout. I want to seek out the descriptions, perceptions, and thinking of teachers who effectively avoid teacher burnout in order that I might adopt their practices. It is my intent to pursue the question: How do educators avoid teacher

burnout? I will accomplish this through a review of current literature related to teacher burnout followed by a qualitative study involving one-on-one interviews with teachers who avoid burnout.

My Formative Years

My awareness of the quality of life of teachers stems from my childhood. I come from a legacy of public school teachers, including my mother, aunts, and grandmothers, and stretching from a one-room schoolhouse in Princeton, Minnesota to three urban public school districts near Minnesota's Twin Cities. The importance of public education was impressed upon me from an early age. In addition to the educational talk I overheard growing up between the teachers in my family, I also began to notice the amount of work and dedication that went into being a teacher. Nights after dinner were spent around the kitchen table doing homework – and I don't mean just the kids; my mother, too, would begin to unload her bag full of "schoolwork." I carried with me the idea that "a teacher works until the work is done" when I transitioned from my family home to college.

Undergraduate Work

As an undergraduate student - knowing my family history and the workload involved in education - I was compelled to find a path of my own. I pursued a degree in biology. I took a handful of education courses, volunteered at local schools, peer tutored in math, and worked as a resident assistant, planning and facilitating educational programs for the on-campus community. Some of my peers were able to adopt a treat-it-as-a-job mentality, setting limits for how long they would spend studying. For me, there was no end to studying – I felt there was always something more that I could do. The same

struggle for balance I felt as a college student followed me into the classroom when I finally found my way into the field of education.

Entering the Job Force

Despite my attempts to explore the world outside of education, I could not deny the enjoyment and energy I received from working with children nor the natural aptitude I seemed to have for teaching others. After dipping my toe in the field as an environmental educator, I finally took as job as a middle school science teacher. Without teaching certification, I was able to secure a position with an urban charter school in Denver, Colorado using the credential of my bachelor's degree. Focused on bringing struggling students up to grade-level, the charter school included an extended school day, extended school year, Saturday school, and after school opportunities. The charter school prioritized the core subjects of reading, writing, and mathematics. Unfortunately, science was not a core subject. I was given the state science standards in lieu of a scope and sequence, but little in way of resources. My enthusiasm for the subject bolstered my motivation, but I quickly began to feel overextended, taking "schoolwork" home with me every night and having to create all of my own plans and props. It was while working as a middle school teacher that I began to deliberately think about sustainable teaching practices. I started to take notice of who seemed to be swimming and who seemed to be sinking. Some teachers – the "swimmers" or perhaps the "surfers" – appeared to be able to fulfill their responsibilities "on the clock," leave work at school, and have time for things like cooking or the gym outside of their work days. Others were on the track to burnout and showed signs of sinking: fatigue from too many back-to-back early mornings

and late nights at school, inability to keep up with responsibilities, and no time outside of work for non-school activities. As a first year teacher, I tended toward the sinking side. I couldn't get away from the idea that there must be a more efficient and effective way to accomplish what I was trying to do: teach. After all, teaching is not a contemporary concept; humans have been engaging in some form of education since the dawn of humankind.

Graduate School and Beyond

I decided after teaching at the charter school that it was time to gain some formal training in education in order to deepen my understanding of vetted teaching methods and credible educational resources. I enrolled in the MAT program at Hamline University. My coursework at Hamline exposed me to new resources and helped to formalize some of my methods and instincts, but it didn't fully address the issue of how to successfully manage the workload that goes along with being a teacher.

After finishing my coursework on campus at Hamline and earning my teaching certification, I took a job at a startup charter school in Colorado Springs, Colorado with similar methods to my original charter school – extended school day, extended school year, trying to catch up on learning gaps. I was optimistic that, knowing many of the pitfalls that I had encountered previously in regard to sustainable teaching practices, I would be better able to manage my workload and maintain a healthy lifestyle complete with homemade meals and time for fitness. In practice, my experience at the second charter school was similar to the first. The state science standards were again my lone guide, and I was left to create all of my student and teaching materials from the ground

up. One of the school leaders described our job on more than one occasion as developing

and presenting a dissertation on a new topic every day. I felt as if I was again being

asked to reinvent the wheel each day in the classroom. This time around, however, I was

armed with my training from Hamline, and I knew that teaching did not have to be as

trying as it had been in my previous experience. Thanks to my coursework at Hamline, I

had a better repertoire of vetted resources to draw from for my lessons and a solid sense

of effective lesson planning and classroom management. As time would prove, the more

I succeeded, the more responsibility was piled on my plate, and again the closer I edged

toward burnout. I acted as grade-level chairperson, department chairperson, led

professional and curriculum development, founded the honors program, and co-founded a

partnership program with a local private school that culminated with a three-week

off-campus experiential learning program for 90 students. For four years, I helped the

start-up charter school establish its roots. Professional development opportunities were

few and far between, and development beyond the topic of classroom management was

nonexistent. I was celebrated for my leadership skills and my classroom management,

but I recognized that those four years had done little to improve my craft as an educator.

I have since moved on to a small public school district in Colorado Springs where I

teach science at the district's only junior high. I am surrounded by teachers who are

"swimming" - teachers who appear to be successful in avoiding burnout, who give the

impression that they are able to balance their work and life responsibilities, and who

seem to be fulfilled in their work with students - and I want to be one of them! I am now

in a place where I can see my vision of sustainability as a potential reality.

I want to be an educator who is a swimmer. I recognize that the workaholic habits I harbored as a college student and as a beginning teacher are not healthy and in the long term could lead to burnout. Although feasible for short periods of time, I realize now that my all-or-nothing approach to work does not facilitate a satisfying quality of life and could end in teacher burnout.

I do not want to end up as a teacher who succumbs to burnout. I want to avoid behaviors and mindsets that lead to burnout and rather seek out practices that lead to sustainability. Sustainability in teaching means that I am able to feel content in both my professional and personal lives. Professional success means that I am able to plan and facilitate quality lessons, build rapport with my students, and perform as an effective member of a team of teachers. Outside of school, I want to feel like I have time to engage in those activities that help me to recharge and be reflective – hiking, cooking, working out, and socializing. Realistically, I may never feel fully satisfied in both my professional and personal lives at the same time – such a feeling may be idealistic. However, it is my thought that pushing toward the ideal will help me steer around burnout and ensure that I do not get too far off the pursuit of striking a balance in life.

I want teaching to be my career, not my lifestyle. As a beginning teacher in Colorado, I felt like every free minute could and should be spent planning and grading. As a result, my "extracurriculars" fell to the wayside and I was headed for burnout. Moving forward, I intend on decreasing the possibility of burnout by understanding and avoiding practices and mindsets that lead to burnout. It is my purpose to identify the descriptions, perceptions, and thinking of teachers who effectively avoid teacher burnout

in order that I might emulate their habits. To that end, I will pursue answers to the

question: How do educators avoid teacher burnout? I will do this through a literature

review and my own primary research. Chapter 2, which follows, is a review of literature.

Chapter 2 reveals that both environmental and personal factors play a role in stress and

teacher burnout. In my review of literature, I summarize the interactions between

environmental factors, personal factors, and teacher burnout, as well as actionable

strategies for avoiding and intervening on teacher burnout. Chapter 3 summarizes the

methods I employed in my primary research in which I identified and interviewed

teachers who avoid the symptoms of burnout. Chapter 4 presents the results of my

interviews as well as the results of an initial survey utilized in order to identify interview

participants. Chapter 5 discusses the conclusions, reflections, and implications of my

exploration of how educators avoid teacher burnout.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

As an educator still in the "spring" of my career, I am compelled to understand

teacher burnout and how it can be avoided. I love the work that I do in the classroom and

it is my desire to retire many years from now as a classroom teacher. In order to persist

in the profession for years to come, I aim to understand why some teachers burnout while

others do not. I examine here the research related to: How do educators avoid teacher

burnout? I start by defining teacher burnout and its dimensions and continue with a

review of literature associated with teacher burnout including related factors and

solutions. A review of the literature reveals three areas of consideration related to teacher

burnout: environmental factors, personal factors, and strategies.

Stress, Burnout, and Factors of Burnout

Commonly cited throughout the literature, the elements of stress, burnout, and factors

of burnout help to lay the foundation for understanding teacher burnout. Below, I explore

definitions for stress, explain the connection between stress and burnout, define the

dimensions of burnout, and identify the factors of burnout prevalent in research related to

teacher burnout.

Stress. Much of the literature related to teacher burnout strives to define the sources

and symptoms of stress and burnout specific to educators. Morris and Morris (as cited in Rieg, Paquette, & Chen, 2007) summarize a number of general definitions of stress to include: "the non-specific responses of the body to any demands made on it, a behavioral adjustment triggered by certain environmental conditions, and a response to pressures, responsibilities, and real or imaginary threats from the environment" (p. 212). In their 2017 article, Ryan et al. summarize current research on teacher stress, saying it "has been linked with adverse professional outcomes, including burnout, absenteeism, stress, and attrition" (p. 2).

 Burnout. While stress is unavoidable in life - in fact, it is to be expected - stress can compound into feelings of burnout. Richards makes the connection between stress and burnout specific to teachers, stating, "If teachers experience stress over time and do not see any way out, they are candidates for burnout" (2012, p. 307). Lim and Eo further underscore the relationship between stress and burnout, saying, "Burnout is the endpoint in the process of unsuccessfully coping with chronic stress" (2014, p. 139). It is generally agreed that when stress becomes a chronic condition, it can lead to burnout. The development of the concept of burnout is most-frequently attributed to Maslach. Aloe, Amo, and Shanahan comment on the history of burnout, explaining, "The formal concept of occupational or job burnout originated in the 1970s and has been attributed to the work of both Freudenberger (1974, 1975) and Maslach (1976)" (2014, p. 103). According to Maslach and Jackson (as cited in Evers, Gerrichhauzen, & Tomic, 2000), "Burnout is a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and diminished personal accomplishment" (p. 5). Lim and Eo further define each dimension or symptom

of burnout:

> Emotional exhaustion reflects feelings of being emotionally overextended and
>
> depletes one's emotional resources. Depersonalization reflects a negative,
>
> callous, or excessively detached response to other people, who are usually the
>
> recipients of one's services or care. Lack of personal accomplishment reflects a
>
> person's negative self-evaluation in relation to his or her job performance. (2014,
>
> p. 139)

Evers et al. (2000) explain that burnout is especially prevalent in professions in which

people work with or for people, "the so-called human professions" (p. 6). Richards

paints a dire picture of the impact that burnout and its manifestations can have on

teachers:

> Burned-out teachers are apt to distance themselves from both students and other
>
> teachers, accomplish less, and feel emotionally empty and depressed. They no
>
> longer believe their efforts make a difference in the lives of their students. They
>
> have given up and feel powerless to change what is causing them distress. (2012,
>
> p. 307)

While stress is not a new concept to the human condition, prolonged stress can lead to

burnout. Evers et al. leave us with hope: "Burnout is not situation in which someone will

have to live for the rest of his or her life, but it can be mastered with adequate support and

intervention" (2000, p. 7).

Burnout factors. In order to effectively avoid feelings of burnout, it is important to

understand the factors that contribute to burnout. Sources related to teacher burnout often

differentiate between environmental factors and personal factors. Environmental factors - also referred to as: organizational climate, workplace conditions, organizational factors, contextual factors, organizational practices, or situational variables - indicate conditions external to one's self. Personal factors include aspects that are internal to one's self and may also be labeled as: personality factors, personality characteristics, or dispositional variables.

Teaching - like many other professions - is stressful, and the exposure to chronic stress can lead to teacher burnout. Burnout, which includes the dimensions of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment, is associated with absenteeism, attrition, and feelings of negative emotions. The literature related to stress and burnout includes both environmental (external) factors and personal (internal) factors that impact the experience of burnout.

Environmental Factors

Many researchers emphasize the importance of environmental factors in relation to burnout. Barnwell identifies multiple specifics that fall beneath the environmental factors umbrella when he says, "Several factors strongly influence teacher satisfaction: the provision of ample time to collaborate during the school day, strong and supportive principals, and common vision that's shared and executed by teachers and staff" (2015, para. 17). Other specifics cited in the literature related to teacher burnout include: effective administrators (Barnwell, 2015; Marston, Courtney, & Brunetti, 2006), a sense of voice and input into key decisions (Phillips, 2015), autonomy (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010), opportunities for professional development and growth (Williams, 2012), a

common school vision (Barnwell, 2015), support for new teachers (Williams, 2012), a school's ability to positively manage student behavioral issues (Phillips, 2015), school climate (Malinen & Savolainen, 2016), time pressure (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010), and test-based accountability pressures (Ryan et al., 2017). While the examples of environmental factors vary, many consent to the connection between environmental factors and teacher burnout.

Collaboration. One environmental factor that appears time and again in relation to teacher satisfaction and teacher burnout is collaboration (Barnwell, 2015; Godsey, 2016; Lim & Eo, 2014; Phillips, 2015; Schaffhauser, 2014; Williams, 2012). Most agree that collaboration is a mitigating factor against burnout (Barnwell, 2015; Lim & Eo, 2014; Phillips, 2015; Schaffhauser, 2014; Williams, 2012). Bandura explains (as cited in Lim & Eo, 2014), "According to Social Cognitive Theory, positive social interactions with colleagues may be considered as one of the strongest predictors for an increase in the sense of efficacy, but a reduction in burnout and stress for workers in the organization" (p. 139). Lim and Eo expand on this idea, connecting social interactions, environment, and burnout; it specifically investigates opportunities for reflective dialogue and organizational politics, stating, "When teachers work in conditions of higher reflective dialogue with colleagues on teaching and learning and lower perceived organizational politics, they are unlikely to get burnout" (2014, p. 144). Alternatively, Godsey describes collaboration as a potential predictor of burnout for introverted teachers, arguing that introverted teachers can experience "collaborative overload" (2016, para. 9), a term coined by *Harvard Business Review*, in light of the recent trend for an increase in

collaborative activities in all fields. Godsey (2016) asserts that introverted teachers need time to recharge but that time is not easily found in an environment of collaboration and meetings. Though some discussion of collaboration is cast in a negative light, the majority of sources point to collaboration as necessary for avoiding burnout.

Compensation. Another environmental factor that appears on both sides of the burnout coin - as both a positive factor and a negative factor - is teacher compensation. Both young and veteran teachers identify pay, benefits, or job security as important factors for staying in the profession (Marston et al., 2006; Williams, 2012). Williams cites a report in which young teachers name "differentiated pay for high performance" (2012, p. 40) as something they desire in a teaching position. However, Barnwell argues for the other side, referring to the inflated salaries sometimes offered in hard-to-staff areas as "combat pay" (2015, para. 15), going on to say that inflated salaries aren't proven to keep quality teachers in the classroom – that "such tactics have fallen flat" (2015, p. 5). Despite the assertion that inflated salaries don't work in the long run, teachers still perceive salary as an important factor of job satisfaction.

Conjunction between environmental and personal factors. Some research on teacher burnout has been conducted in order to investigate the connection between environmental and personal factors. In a study of primary school teachers, Kokkinos finds that "both personality and specific job stressors were associated with burnout dimensions, thus … in order to better understand its process, we should take into account both environment and personal variables" (2007, p. 238). The Kokkinos study (2007) concludes that emotional exhaustion and depersonalization are associated with

environmental stressors, whereas decreased personal accomplishment is linked to personal factors. Richards further underscores the importance of personal factors and intervention-type strategies:

> Teachers cannot change the school, the poverty, the principal's level of support, the number of students in the classroom, or the availability of materials. The only power teachers may have is the determination to improve and practice effective coping strategies proven helpful by teachers who have shared their successful approaches. (2012, p. 308)

Thus, the work of Kokkinos and Richards make the case for why we cannot stop at environmental factors when looking to stave off burnout.

As discussed, a myriad of external, environmental factors coalesce to impact feelings of burnout experienced by teachers. Environmental factors include support from administration, time for planning, class size, and opportunities for development. Opportunities for collaboration as well as compensation surface frequently in the literature as two important environmental factors related to teacher burnout. Environmental factors and personal factors are argued to impact the three dimensions of burnout differently, so the conversation does not end with environmental factors, but continues with the impact of personal factors on teacher burnout.

Personal Factors

In addition to environmental factors, personal factors are another facet that emerges in relation to teacher burnout. Tomic, Evers, and Brouwers (as cited by Loonstra, Brouwers, & Tomic, 2009) make a case for why addressing personal factors may be more

effective than addressing environmental factors, saying, "Intervention programmes focusing on personality factors are likely to be more effective than those focusing on environmental conditions because they appear to be more easily altered than organizational factors" (p. 752). Personal factors include individual aspects such as personality traits, perceptions, beliefs and mindsets, and self-efficacy.

Personality traits. In regard to personality and burnout, the literature evaluates specific traits including existential fulfillment, introversion, neuroticism, conscientiousness, and resilience.

Existential fulfillment. In his research on feelings of existential fulfillment and burnout among secondary teachers, Yalom (as cited by Loonstra et al., 2009) explains:

> Existential fulfilment refers to a way of life full of meaning and purpose, and reveals an existential psychological approach to life. Characteristic of existential psychology is the attention paid to the boundary experiences of human beings as determinants of human existence. (pp. 752-753)

The research of Loonstra et al. (2009) concludes that existential fulfillment accounts for the avoidance of the negative burnout dimensions of exhaustion and cynicism. An argument is made that existential fulfillment should be fostered in teachers in order that they might avoid burnout.

Introverted personality. Godsey (2016) discusses the impacts of an introverted personality on burnout in teachers, referencing the work of Brian Little, psychology professor at Cambridge University. Little (as cited by Godsey, 2016) warns against introverts acting as extraverts even for limited amounts of time, explaining that

"protracted free-traited behavior many compromise emotional and physical health" (para.

11). While taking on a more gregarious personality in the classroom - much like a stage

personality - may be a tempting coping mechanism for some introverted teachers, Godsey

(2016) emphasizes the potential negative consequences on the health of the teacher.

Conscientiousness and neuroticism. Kokkinos (2007) looks at the role of

personality traits in relation to the three separate dimensions of burnout: emotional

exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of personal accomplishment. Kokkinos (2007)

concludes that a correlation exists between the traits of conscientiousness and

neuroticism and the dimensions of burnout. In their five-factor model of personality,

Costa and McCrae (as cited by Kokkinos, 2007) provide definitions of neuroticism and

conscientiousness: Neuroticism is "the susceptibility to psychological distress, inability to

control urges, proneness to unrealistic ideas and inability to cope with stress" (p. 230);

conscientiousness is "the tendency towards persistence, industriousness and organization"

(p. 230). In regard to conscientiousness, Kokkinos (2007) finds low levels of

conscientiousness linked with higher levels of depersonalization, and high levels of

conscientiousness associated with higher levels of personal accomplishment. In regard to

a neurotic personality, Kokkinos (2007) concludes that neuroticism is a predictor of all

three dimensions of burnout.

Neuroticism and resilience. Pretsch, Flunger, and Schmitt (2012), like Kokkinos,

investigate the connection between neuroticism and well-being, adding in the trait of

resilience as well. Rutter (as cited by Pretsch et al., 2012) explains that resilience "refers

to the phenomenon that some people stay healthy and still experience well-being and

satisfaction despite being exposed to intense stressors and risks, whereas other people facing comparable conditions are prone to disorders and impaired health" (p. 322). Pretsch et al. (2012) find that a neurotic personality can predict physical illness and exhaustion in teachers, and the absence of neuroticism can lead to the absence of illness and exhaustion. However, while low neuroticism leads to the absence of illness - perhaps a neutral outcome - absence of neuroticism alone does not lead to entirely positive outcomes. Pretsch et al. explain, "Therefore, it seems that low neuroticism is enough to prevent illness and physical symptoms of exhaustion, but among teachers it is not sufficient to obtain a state characterized by complete well-being and satisfaction" (2012, p. 333). This is where a connection to resilience is made: "The key finding of this study is that teachers need resilience in order to experience a positive state of well-being and satisfaction" (Pretsch et al., 2012, p. 333).

Perceptions. A second personal factor discussed in the literature related to burnout is teacher perceptions. Brewer (2014) looks specifically at Teach for America (TFA) in light of the lack of longevity of TFA "corps members" in the field of teaching. Brewer contends that TFA's Academic Impact Model, which concludes that "good teachers can overcome the ailments of socioeconomic disparities if they subscribe to notions of hyper-teacher accountability" (2014, p. 246), leads new teachers to a "false sense of reality that creates the opportunity for disillusionment and burnout" (2014, p. 246). According to this point of view, teachers should be encouraged to maintain a realistic view of what is and is not within their locus of control in order to have a healthy sense of reality and thus avoid burnout. McCarthy, Lambert, O'Donnell, and Melendres (2009)

investigate teacher perceptions within the scope of resources and demands. McCarthy et al. (2009) examine why some teachers prosper in their jobs while others in the same or similar environments experience stress, exhaustion, and burnout. McCarthy et al. explain:

> Teachers' experience of stress appeared to have little to do with differences between the various elementary school contexts. Most variance was accounted for by individual differences between teachers, suggesting that individual perceptions of the balance between resources and demands were most predictive of burnout. (2009, p. 296)

Here McCarthy et al. make a case that differences in environmental circumstances don't matter as much as differences in teacher perceptions.

   Beliefs and mindsets. A close relation to teacher perceptions, teachers' beliefs and mindsets are also linked to teacher burnout and retention. Literature on beliefs and mindsets includes the importance of professional values (Marston et al., 2006), sense of identity (Day, 2012), and a "novice" mindset (Day, 2012). Via interviews with veteran teachers (teachers who have been in the profession for 15 or more years), Marston et al. (2006) underscore the importance of teachers' beliefs, citing the reasons that veteran teachers identified as important to their decisions to stay in the teaching profession: "Core professional values, such as satisfaction in working with young people and satisfaction in fulfilling a professional commitment, were powerful motivators for keeping them in the classroom" (p. 125). It can be argued that the development of positive core professional values and the fostering of a sense of satisfaction from work

are two important components to avoiding burnout. Day (2012) explores the

relationships between professional engagement, motivation, and commitment to teaching.

Day concludes:

> Teachers' ongoing capacities, commitment and passion to teach to their best for
>
> the benefit of their students relate to: (i) professional life phase; (ii) the relative
>
> instability and stability of their sense of identity—so important to their sense of
>
> self-efficacy and agency; (iii) a passion for teaching: commitment, wellbeing and
>
> effectiveness. (2012, p. 11)

Day makes a case for experienced teachers to maintain the qualities and mindsets of

"novice" teachers, commenting on the mindsets of successful veteran teachers:

> Experienced teachers who are successful, far from being at the end of the learning
>
> journeys, are those who retain their ability to be self-conscious about their
>
> teaching and are constantly aware of and responsive to the learning possibilities
>
> inherent in each teaching episode and individual interaction. (2012, p. 14)

Experienced teachers who are able to retain the "novice" mindset and create a strong set

of core professional values are more likely to avoid burnout.

   Self-efficacy. Closely related to beliefs and mindsets is the idea of self-efficacy.

Bandura (as cited in Wang, Hall, & Rahimi, 2015) provides a definition for, self-efficacy:

"People's beliefs about their capacities to produce designated levels of performance and

exercise influence over events that affect their lives" (p. 121). Wang et al. explain the

importance of self-efficacy, stating, "Self-efficacy represents one of the most important

predictors of human motivation" (2015, p. 121). Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2010), Wang et

al. (2015), Zee and Koomen (2016) conclude that high levels of teacher self-efficacy related to high job satisfaction and low levels of teacher burnout. Wang et al. go on to identify impacts of self-efficacy beyond just teacher burnout, concluding that, "Teachers with stronger beliefs in their ability to engage their students in learning, and to a lesser extent, manage students' misbehavior and classroom activities, reported not only higher job satisfaction and lower burnout, but also less frequent illness symptoms" (2015, p. 127).

    Classroom management self-efficacy. Self-efficacy, especially concerning classroom management, is a significant factor of burnout (Aloe et al., 2013; Hong, 2010; Malinen & Savolainen, 2016). Hong (2010) makes a connection between self-efficacy, classroom management, and teacher burnout through interviews with pre-service and beginning teachers, both continuing in the profession and those who have left the profession. Hong concludes that, "Dropout teachers' interview data revealed that classroom management was one of the sources of burnout, and often their lack of efficacy in handling disruptive behaviours lead to emotional burnout" (2010, p. 1541). Aloe et al. (2013) expand on this idea, investigating the relationships between self-efficacy, classroom management, and the three dimensions of burnout. Aloe et al. introduce the concept of classroom management self-efficacy (CMSE), explaining that CMSE is "the extent to which a teacher feels that (s)he is capable of gaining and maintaining students' attention, and dealing with disruption and misbehaving students" (2013, p. 102). According to Aloe et al., "The current findings indicate that emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and (lowered) personal accomplishment all relate to classroom management self-efficacy"

(2013, p. 118). More specifically, teachers with high levels of classroom management self-efficacy experience more feelings of accomplishment, whereas lower classroom management self-efficacy is linked to an increase in emotional exhaustion and depersonalization (Aloe et al., 2013, p. 117).

 Collective teacher efficacy. Lim and Eo (2014) take a different approach to self-efficacy, examining the interaction between the collective teacher efficacy in a school and teacher burnout. Goddard, Hoy, and Hoy (as cited by Lim & Eo, 2014) describe collective teacher efficacy as "the perceptions of teachers in a school that the effort of the faculty as a whole will have a positive effect on students" (p. 139). Lim and Eo find that collective teacher efficacy, like self-efficacy, has an impact on teacher burnout, concluding that, "Collective teacher efficacy was negatively associated with lower levels of teacher burnout… When teachers perceived their school's capability as a whole to be higher, they were more unlikely to get burnout" (2014, p. 145). Both Aloe et al. (2013) and Lim and Eo (2014) underscore the importance of efficacy in teacher burnout and retention.

Some argue that personal factors are more important than environmental factors in combating teacher burnout. The case has been made for the impact of personality traits, perceptions, beliefs and mindsets, and self-efficacy on teacher burnout. However, the question then begs: How does one effectively change their personality or beliefs? In other words, what is within our locus of control? If it was as easy as telling one's self to be more resilient, less neurotic, and to have more self-efficacy, our work would be done. But it is not as simple as that, and so the next section explores actionable strategies that

can be employed to address teacher burnout.

Strategies

While research shows that personal factors - personality traits, perceptions, beliefs and mindsets, and self-efficacy - play an important role in teacher burnout and retention, this same research does not consistently identify how these personal factors can be impacted or changed. Thus, I next examine the body of literature that I have categorized as "strategies." Here, I identify material that offers solutions and actionable steps that teachers and schools can take. Richards champions the importance of teachers sharing coping strategies:

> One cannot alter a state's financial realities, decide how many more students will be added to a classroom, or choose whether to participate in mandated district or state testing. The only true power stressed teachers have is their choice of coping strategies as suggested by teachers who are managing to cope and even thrive in these challenging times. (2012, p. 300)

While the vast majority of material falling within the category of strategies includes very general advice, the peer reviewed literature includes the topics of teacher induction, intervention and wellness programs, classroom management strategies, and mindfulness or emotional regulation training.

Teacher induction. Various aspects of teacher induction are included in the literature related to teacher burnout and retention. Phillips (2015) summarizes the issue of teacher turnover in an interview with Richard Ingersoll, a professor at the University of Pennsylvania who studies teacher turnover and retention. Ingersoll (as cited by Phillips,

2015) stresses the importance of teacher induction programs. When asked in the

interview what is known about the effectiveness of induction programs, Ingersoll reports:

> I've done some of this research myself to answer that very question. We carefully
>
> went through a lot of research and found, indeed there are positive effects. That
>
> induction and mentoring help beginning teachers' classroom teaching practice. They
>
> help their retention. And they also had a randomized-control trial that showed that
>
> student achievement was better for those beginning teachers that got some
>
> [induction]. (Phillips, 2015, You say induction programs… section, para. 1)

Thus, Ingersoll advocates for quality induction programs, not only for their impact on

teacher retention, but also the potential positive impact on student achievement.

Schaffhauser (2014) echoes the connection between effective induction, teacher retention,

and student achievement in a summary on the report "On the Path to Equity: Improving

the Effectiveness of Beginning Teachers" by the Alliance for Excellent Education.

According to Schaffhauser, the report calls for "an induction program that includes

mentoring, common planning times and continual support from school leaders" (2014,

para. 12). Schaffhauser goes on to say, "Teachers who get those ingredients on a steady

basis are more satisfied with their jobs, get better ratings with their classroom teaching

practices and are "associated" with higher levels of student outcomes" (2014, para. 12),

corroborating the ideas of Ingersoll. Aloe et al. (2013) stress the importance of vicarious

and mastery experiences in conjunction with induction programs. Aloe et al. (2013)

suggest that vicarious and mastery experiences related to classroom management skills

can lead to increased classroom management efficacy, which can lead to decreased

symptoms of burnout. Marston et al. (2006) advocate for educating potential teachers

about the challenges of teachings in order for candidates to have realistic expectations

about the profession. While the presence of induction programs exists in many locations,

Ingersoll (as cited in Phillips, 2015), Schaffhauser (2014), Aloe et al. (2013), and

Marston et al. (2006) agree that inductions programs do not consistently incorporate the

types of experiences and learning that research has shown to impact teacher effectiveness

and retention.

    Intervention and wellness programs. While induction programs can have a positive

influence on beginning teachers, the issue of teacher burnout impacts teachers at all

stages of their careers. Thus, intervention programs within schools, districts, and states

have the potential to impact all teachers, regardless of years of experience. Kokkinos

(2007) advises for professional development interventions that help to build skills related

to teacher stress and burnout, such as strategies for classroom organization and time

management. Just as Marston et al. (2006) advocate for helping beginning teachers

develop realistic expectations, Kokkinos (2007) proposes educating teachers about the

challenges associated with teacher burnout. Kokkinos argues:

> Increasing teachers' awareness on the process of burning out, and providing them
>
> with opportunities for reflection on personal variables such as coping resources,
>
> together with discussions of alternative coping strategies, may be of great
>
> assistance in reducing the use of maladaptive or dysfunctional coping. (2007, p.
>
> 241)

Kipps-Vaughan (2013) also argues that school intervention programs should be put into

place in order to address teacher stress, suggesting stress management programming.

Kipps-Vaughan (2013) asserts that, because teacher stress can be a barrier to student

learning, such intervention programs have the potential to not only positively impact

teachers, but students as well. Kipps-Vaughan identifies that, "Effective stress reduction

programs include such interventions as stress awareness, physiological training,

environment adjustment, and cognitive coping strategies" (2013, p. 44). The California

Teachers Association (CTA) has taken the ideas regarding effective teacher intervention

related to teacher burnout to heart. Rosales (2011) conveys the experience of a teacher in

California who experienced acute burnout symptoms and the Survive and Thrive

Mini-Sabbatical Intervention Program available to this teacher through CTA. Rosales

describes the program, explaining that:

> The program consists of a five-day sabbatical in a retreat setting where a group of
>
> teachers (up to 15) reflect on their lives and careers as well as receive instruction in
>
> time management, stress management, nutrition, and relationship-building. After
>
> completing the program, there are follow-up sessions with instructors at intervals of
>
> three, six and nine months. (2011, How Teacher Burnout Starts section, para. 8)

While the average intervention program is not as intensive as the "mini-sabbatical"

available through CTA, strategies of organization, time management, reflection, and

coping are all themes that repeat in the literature about strategies to avoid teacher

burnout.

Classroom management strategies. Classroom management - especially as is

related to efficacy and teacher induction - is a contributing factor to teacher burnout.

Employing teachers with effective classroom management strategies could have the potential to counteract negative feelings about classroom management efficacy and teacher burnout. Clunies-Ross, Little, and Kienhuis (2008) verify the importance of classroom management by examining reactive versus proactive classroom management strategies in conjunction with teacher burnout symptoms. Clunies-Ross et al. summarize proactive versus reactive strategies:

> In general, proactive strategies are those behaviours that a teacher can use in order to lessen the likelihood of a child demonstrating inappropriate behaviour, and involve altering a situation before problems escalate (e.g., establishing rules, and praising appropriate behaviour; Little et al., 2002; Safran & Oswald, 2003). Proactive discipline plans can be conceptualised as being preventative and taking a positive approach to classroom management. Teachers are likely to use positive responses when students demonstrate appropriate behaviours (Little et al., 2002). In contrast, reactive strategies are teacher behaviours that occur following a child's inappropriate behaviour (e.g., providing an appropriate consequence; Little et al., 2002; Safran & Oswald, 2003). Reactive discipline strategies are essentially remedial in nature (Little & Hudson, 1998). Teachers using reactive strategies are more likely to respond negatively to students' inappropriate behaviours, rather than responding positively to students' appropriate behaviours. (2008, p. 695)

The use of reactive strategies is associated with elevated teacher stress, but interestingly, proactive classroom management strategies by themselves are not enough to decrease

teacher stress (Clunies-Ross et al., 2008). Clunies-Ross et al. attest that "the reported use of reactive strategies by teachers was a strong predictor of workload stress, student misbehaviour stress, time/resource difficulties stress, and poor colleague relations stress" (2008, p. 705). Because of the strong connection between reactive classroom management strategies and teacher burnout symptoms, Clunies-Ross et al. suggest that teachers should be made aware of the research regarding the connection between classroom management strategies, teacher stress, and student behavior, arguing, "Such preventative measures will assist in reducing teacher stress and increasing student learning opportunities" (2008, p. 709). Malinen and Savolainen comment on the complexity to developing classroom management self-efficacy:

> The most effective methods for building self-efficacy in behavior management may differ depending on the stage of a teacher's career. Observing examples of effective behavior management (vicarious experiences) and encouraging lectures (verbal persuasion) can be effective for student teachers and educators in the early stages of their careers. Experienced educators may benefit more from carrying out well-supported behavior interventions in their own classrooms (mastery experiences) and receiving emotional support when struggling with the emotions related to problematic student behavior (somatic and emotional states). (2016, p. 151)

While classroom management is an important component to teacher induction and a significant factor in regards to teacher efficacy, Clunies-Ross et al. (2008) and Malinen and Savolainen (2016) provide more-firm details as to the facets of classroom management that relate to teacher stress and burnout.

Mindfulness or emotional regulation training. Similar to how the work of

Clunies-Ross et al. gives an actionable focus regarding how to impact classroom

management, the theme of mindfulness gives an actionable focus for how to impact

personal factors. Knowledge of the personal factors that positively or negatively impact

teacher burnout is interesting, but not helpful if you are looking to take action to stave off

burnout. Mindfulness gives a framework for impacting your own traits, perceptions,

beliefs, mindsets, and self-efficacy. Kabat-Zinn (as cited by Roeser et al., 2013) -

considered the father of mindfulness - defines mindfulness as "paying attention in a

particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally" (p. 789).

Jones, Bouffard, and Weissbourd (2013) discuss the positive impacts of mindfulness and

other emotion-regulation type trainings. Jones et al. advocate for emotion-focused

training, explaining, "Emotional regulation can help educators cope with stress,

frustration, and challenges like the emotional burden of student trauma" (2013, p. 64).

Jones et al. go on to propose the use of mindfulness and stress reduction, explaining that

mindfulness practices may help educators to foster those qualities associated with

avoidance of teacher burnout, specifically helping teachers be "less reactive and more

reflective, responsive, and flexible" (2013, p. 64). Roeser et al. (2013) advocate for the

use of mindfulness training for teachers, suggesting that it can foster positive mindsets in

teachers. The results of Roeser et al. find that, "Compared to those in the control

condition, teachers in the intervention condition reported large declines in occupational

stress and symptoms of burnout, anxiety, and depression" (2013, p. 799). While

"mindfulness training" could refer to any number of interventions, Gold et al. (2010)

investigate Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), a structured, clinical course originally developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn. Gold et al. explain that, "MBSR is based on training attention through straightforward, secular, meditation techniques. It seeks to change our relationship with stressful thoughts and events, by decreasing emotional reactivity and enhancing cognitive appraisal." (2010, p. 185). Gold et al. (2010) report that most participants show decreased stress, depression, and anxiety after participating in MBSR. Gold et al. elaborate on the findings:

> In sum, our results indicate that benefits may accrue following mindfulness training in terms of personal well-being, reduction in mental health difficulties, achievement of personally relevant goals, and enhanced ability to cope with the demands of teaching in a modern primary school. (2010, p. 189)

Jones et al. (2013), Roeser et al. (2013), and Gold et al. (2010) bridge the knowledge gap between personal factors that can lead to teacher burnout and action steps that can be employed to avoid burnout.

While research shows connections between teacher burnout and environmental and personal factors, the majority of the research I consulted leaves teachers without strategies for how to positively impact their situations and feelings. The research presented above bridges that gap by focusing on actionable strategies such as teacher induction, intervention and wellness programs, classroom management strategies, and mindfulness or emotional regulation training. These strategies can be employed by teachers or educational leaders in order to counteract negative effects of burnout.

While stress is not a new facet of the teacher experience, chronic stress can lead to

teacher burnout. Research strives to understand teacher burnout by identifying factors

related to stress and burnout specifically for teachers. Such factors can be categorized as

environmental (external) or personal (internal). While some argue the importance of

personal factors over environmental factors, actionable solutions in either category are

not always readily clear; there appears to be a gap in the literature between factors that

impact burnout and how these factors can be positively impacted. A handful of strategies

for counteracting the negative impacts of teacher burnout are present in the literature,

including teacher induction programs, intervention or wellness programs, the avoidance

of reactive classroom management techniques, and mindfulness or emotional regulation

training. The process of synthesizing the literature in this review has been insightful for

me personally as an educator. It has caused me to give pause when considering my own

stressors and how I choose to respond to stress. As Kabat-Zinn says in his bestselling

book, *Wherever You Go, There You Are*, "You can't stop the waves, but you can learn to

surf." I can't effectively impact all of the potential stresses in my life, but I can work to

positively change my reactions to stressors. All teachers experience stress, and yet some

burnout while others do not. It is my purpose in this study to hear the stories of teachers

who thrive in order that I might learn from them. Richards voices the importance of

sharing coping strategies, suggesting, "The only true power stressed teachers have is their

choice of coping strategies as suggested by teachers who are managing to cope and even

thrive in these challenging times" (2012, p. 300). My next step is to identify those

teachers who avoid teacher burnout and seek out what sets them apart from teachers who

burnout. In Chapter 3, details the methods employed to conduct my own primary

research, which culminated in one-on-one interviews in order to answer the question:

How do educators avoid teacher burnout?

CHAPTER THREE

Methods

In the current culture of high teacher accountability and high-stakes testing, most teachers experience stress, yet some thrive while others experience symptoms of teacher burnout. Teacher burnout includes the dimensions of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Teacher burnout can "sneak up" on over-extended teachers when stress becomes a chronic condition. As a teacher beginning to hit my stride in the classroom, I want to do what I can to buffer myself from the effects of teacher burnout. In my research, I explore: How do educators avoid teacher burnout? I want to discover what makes teachers who thrive different from those who burnout. I aim to discover the descriptions, perceptions, and thinking of teachers who effectively avoid teacher burnout in order that I might adopt the practices of those teachers who maintain a high level of job satisfaction. I accomplished this through a qualitative study which included an initial teacher survey and one-on-one follow-up interviews with select participants.

Research Paradigm, Rationale, and Methods

In order to address the question of how educators avoid teacher burnout, a qualitative study was conducted. A qualitative study was most appropriate because the research question above sought to discover the descriptions, mindsets, and thinking of teachers

who effectively avoid teacher burnout. Furthermore, the research question addressed perceptions and moods which can be difficult to identify through quantitative methods and are more effectively determined through qualitative methods.

Initial survey. First, a short survey was distributed in order to identify teachers who appear to be effectively avoiding burnout. The survey was administered using web-based Google Forms and distributed via email. The survey was voluntary and shared with all teachers in my school of employment. A letter was included with the initial survey, outlining the purpose of the study (see Appendix B). In the survey, teachers were asked to self-report in response to a series of questions. Survey questions - listed below - were been designed to address to each dimension of burnout: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment.

1. My work allows me time to build or maintain relationships with important people in my life.

2. I feel personally invested in the growth of my students.

3. I feel connected to the other staff members at school.

4. I have time to emotionally recharge outside of school when needed.

5. Work does not inhibit my ability to regularly get a good night's sleep.

6. I feel like I have the emotional resources to respond to the stresses of my job.

7. I find that the success I experience in the classroom adds to my overall sense of personal accomplishment.

8. I routinely feel effective in my job.

9. I am satisfied with the difference I make in my job.

Questions were formatted as statements to which respondents chose "agree" or "disagree" along a five-point scale. The names of teachers who participated in the survey were collected in order to follow up with teachers for interviews, however, responses remained confidential. Survey results were examined to determine individuals to be selected as interview participants. Once survey results were examined, names were deleted in order to maintain confidentiality.

Follow-up interviews. From the survey results identifying teachers who are effectively avoiding burnout (respondents with the highest scores), 3 participants were selected for one-on-one interviews. Interviews were most appropriate because of the small size of the proposed sample population and the qualitative nature of the study. Additionally, 2 lower scoring respondents were selected for follow-up interviews. In this way, interviews included comparison cases in order to contrast any patterns that arose and ensure that interview results truly correspond to burnout avoidance. In his book on qualitative interviewing, Weiss argues the importance of comparison cases, posing the question, "How can you be sure that phenomena you associate with the situation you are studying are in fact more frequent there than among people who are not in that situation?" (1994, p. 30). In accordance with the research question, an interview guide with clusters of related questions was utilized to ascertain how participants describe their experiences. As was true with initial survey questions, interview questions and prompts were designed to address the three dimensions of burnout: depersonalization, emotional exhaustion, and reduced personal accomplishment. Interview questions and prompts aimed to seek out answers to three overarching questions; a wrap-up question was added

after performing a trial interview. Overarching questions and potential follow-up questions are listed below:

1. How do you maintain a sense of connectedness to those around you?

    a. Ask about relationships both in and out of school, including with fellow teachers.

    b. How do you maintain relationships with the important people in your life?

    c. Do you seek out relationships with other staff at school?

    d. How do you foster report with your students?

    e. Describe your feelings of investment in your students.

    f. Are you able to maintain positive relationships when you have a challenging student? Explain.

2. How do you cope with the stresses of the job?

    a. Ask about resources for responding to stress.

    b. How do you safeguard against the emotional exhaustion that can accompany teaching?

    c. How do you "recharge" after a taxing day?

    d. Do you set limits to your work day? Explain.

    e. Do you set boundaries for participation in school-related activities outside of your teaching role?

3. What makes you feel a sense of personal accomplishment?

    a. How do you maintain a sense of effectiveness in role?

    b. Can you identify any strategies you employ to maintain a high sense of

effectiveness in your job? Explain.

    c. Do you seek out professional development?

    d. Do you seek out praise or feedback from peers? Supervisors?

    e. Do you track student data to measure the effectiveness of your instruction?

4. Wrap-up Question: What advice would you give to a new teacher just starting out in the profession?

All interviews were recorded for transcription and future analysis, but deleted at the completion of this project.

Setting and Participants

The initial survey was web-based and distributed to all teachers at my school of employment - a medium-sized, traditional, public secondary school. While names were collected, responses were kept confidential from the school staff and names are not reported in the results of this project. Follow up interviews were be a maximum of 35 minutes in length and took place at a time and location determined by the participant. Interviews were held in-person, in a public place; all interviews were conducted in teachers' classrooms. Participants included 5 current teachers at my school of employment, as selected through the initial electronic survey. All interview responses were kept confidential, and names and other identifying features have not been reported in the results.

Data Analysis

Initial survey data. Initial survey data was quantified using Google sheets. Low scores were assigned to responses indicating a low level of job satisfaction and a high

level of teacher burnout; high scores were assigned to responses indicating a high level of job satisfaction and a low level of teacher burnout. Individual results were sorted by score, and the highest 3 individual scores and 2 of the lowest scoring individuals were asked to participate in one-on-one interviews.

Interview data. Interview data was analyzed through transcriptions of recorded interviews, searching and noting themes and aberrations. Comparison cases were included in order to identify aberrations between those susceptible to burnout and those effectively avoiding burnout. Audio recordings of interviews were destroyed after each was transcribed.

Limitations

This study was limited in a number of key elements including: number of participants, selection of participants, and the subjective nature of analysis. This study was limited in the number of participants that were interviewed - 5 participants. Thus, large-scale assumptions about teaching may not be possible. Furthermore, participants were selected through self-reporting, based on a survey limited in questions and response options. While the design choices of the initial survey proved to be efficient for the purpose of this study, they invite opportunities for bias. In particular, the method of having respondents self-report about their experiences allows for discrepancies between perception and reality. Survey participants may unintentionally skew results one way or another depending on whether participants were experiencing a "good" day or a "bad" day. Finally, this study was limited in the subjective nature of interviewing and the analysis of the interviews. Although comparison cases were included in the follow-up

interviews, respondents did not always interpret questions in the same manner, and so responses - even to the same or similar questions - in some cases took different directions. As such, direct comparisons in order to note aberrations were not always possible.

In the very early years of my career, I witnessed fellow teachers affected and overcome by burnout. Managing the responsibilities of a teacher and the sheer number of decisions teachers have to make on a given day is stressful. Chronic stress can lead to feelings of burnout: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. As a teacher still finding my path in education, I want to ensure that I do not become overwhelmed by stress or succumb to burnout. Through an initial survey followed by one-on-one teacher interviews, I seek out answers to the question: How do educators avoid teacher burnout? Via teacher interviews, I hope to discover the habits, traits, characteristics, and mindsets of teachers who are resilient against burnout. Chapter 4 reports the outcomes of my one-on-one interviews with teachers as well as the data from the initial survey used to identify interview participants.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

This study culminated in one-on-one interviews investigating the question: How do educators avoid teacher burnout? Prior to interviews, teachers responded to a short initial survey. Survey results were quantified in order to identify participants for follow-up interviews. Interviews aimed to discover the descriptions, perceptions, and thinking of teachers who effectively avoid teacher burnout.

Data Analysis

Initial survey. An initial survey was distributed via email to all of the teachers at my school. A total of 39 teachers participated in the voluntary survey. The survey included nine questions, each corresponding to one of the dimensions of burnout (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment) and formatted as a statement to which respondents chose "agree" or "disagree" along a five-point scale. A score of one indicated a response of "disagree" and a higher level of burnout, whereas a score of five indicated a response of "agree" and a lower level of burnout.

The following figures represent the average findings from the initial survey. Figure 1 shows the average score for each question as well as the range of scores. In order to determine the average score for each question, the mean score for each question was calculated. The graph indicates the mean score with a triangle, and range is displayed

with a bar; the highest score possible for each question was 5.

Figure 1

Initial survey average scores and range of scores by question
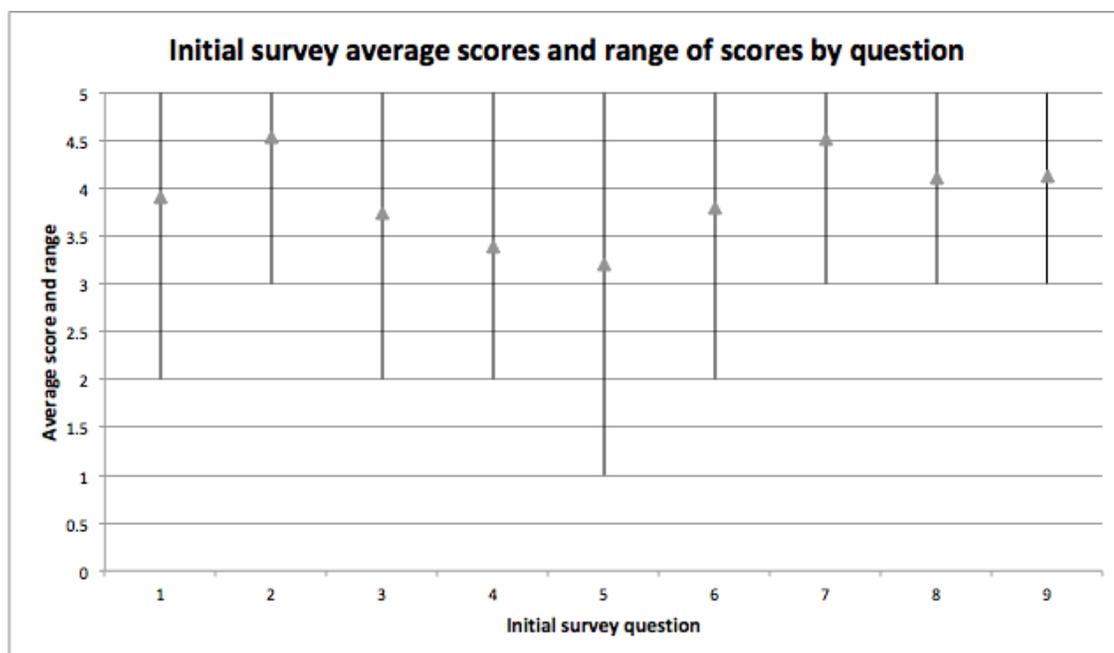
Initial Survey Questions

1. My work allows me time to build or maintain relationships with important people in my life.
2. I feel personally invested in the growth of my students.
3. I feel connected to the other staff members at school.
4. I have time to emotionally recharge outside of school when needed.
5. Work does not inhibit my ability to regularly get a good night's sleep.
6. I feel like I have the emotional resources to respond to the stresses of my job.
7. I find that the success I experience in the classroom adds to my overall sense of personal accomplishment.
8. I routinely feel effective in my job.
9. I am satisfied with the difference I make in my job.

Key: 1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree

According to Figure 1, participants scored highest on average on question 2 (I feel personally invested in the growth of my students.) and question 7 (I find that the success I experience in the classroom adds to my overall sense of personal accomplishment.);

participants scored lowest on average on question 5 (Work does not inhibit my ability to regularly get a good night's sleep.).

Figure 2 summarizes the average total score as well as the range of total scores according to each burnout dimension. The sum for each burnout dimension (depersonalization: questions 1-3; emotional exhaustion: questions 4-6; personal accomplishment: questions 7-9) for each participant was first found, then the mean total for all participants was calculated.

Figure 2

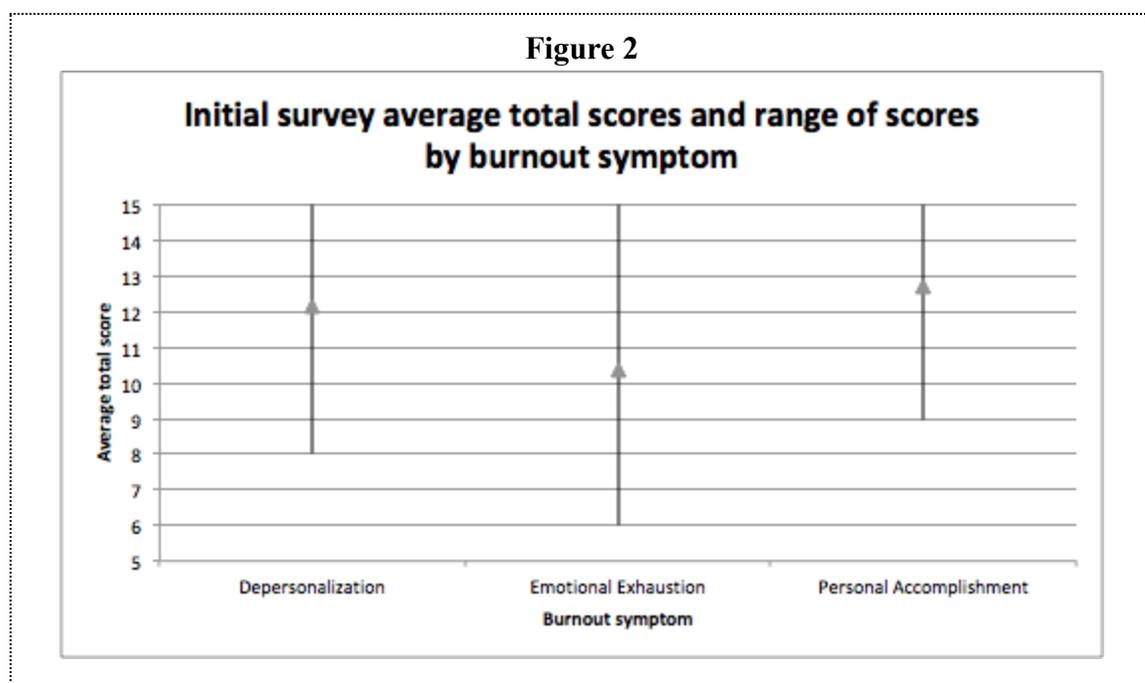Figure 2 illustrates that participants overall scored lower on questions related to emotional exhaustion. Total scores relating to depersonalization and personal accomplishment were both above total scores for emotional exhaustion, with personal accomplishment slightly higher and with a smaller range of scores than depersonalization.

Initial survey results were used to determine participants for follow-up interviews.

The highest three survey scores were selected for interviews (participants A, B, and C).

In addition, two of the lowest survey scores were selected as comparison cases

(participants D and E). The tables that follow summarize the scores for all interview

participants. Table 1 includes raw scores from the initial survey (each question was on a

five-point scale). Table 2 summarizes the total score by burnout dimension (15 points

possible) as well as the total overall score (45 total points possible).

Table 1

Interview participant raw scores

Participant	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9
A	5	5	4	5	4	5	5	5	5
B	5	4	5	5	5	5	4	4	5
C	5	5	5	4	4	4	5	5	5
D	2	4	3	2	2	4	4	4	4
E	4	4	3	2	2	3	3	3	3

Table 2

Interview participant total scores by burnout dimension and total overall scores

Participant	Depersonalization	Emotional Exhaustion	Personal Accomplishment	Total Score
A	14	14	15	43
B	14	15	13	42
C	15	12	15	42
D	9	8	12	29
E	11	7	9	27

Data Analysis

 Follow-up interviews. Follow-up interviews were conducted with participants based on initial survey scores. Using the results from the initial survey, the highest three - participants A, B, and C - and two of the lowest scores - participants D and E - were selected for follow-up interviews, allowing for comparison cases between those avoiding burnout and those more susceptible to burnout. Follow-up interview questions were designed to address the three dimensions of burnout: depersonalization, emotional exhaustion, and personal accomplishment.

 Depersonalization. Participants were prompted to describe how they maintain a sense of connectedness to others, which included both students and adults. While comparison case participants D and E described a lack of personal connections with others, especially as related to colleagues, participant A - the participant with the highest overall score on the initial survey - also reported a lack of relationships with others at school. When asked, "Do you seek out relationships with other staff at school?", participant A replied, "Only when I need to, because the job is so encompassing with what I do." Participants A and D both described having a strong network of friends outside of school with whom they socialize with on a regular basis. Participants B and C stated having regular, positive interactions with colleagues at school, especially with members within their departmental teams. Both participants B and E communicated not being particularly social. Participant B elaborated, describing being close, but not connected with those outside of work saying, "I'm the type of person that doesn't really need a lot of social interaction because I get so much with my job." Participant responses

related to personal connections with others were varied; no patterns were present between those reporting less symptoms of burnout and comparison cases.

In reference to relationships with students, most participants were able to identify at least one strategy that they use to build student rapport. Participants A, B, C, and E all described ways that they build relationships with students, whereas participant D neglected to identify concrete strategies, saying, "I'll try a bunch of different things." Participant D went on to insinuate a sense of unpredictability in students, explaining, "You just never know what's going to impact them." Participant A indicated the use of teasing students as a means to build rapport. Participant B alluded to a sense of reflection and deliberateness in regard to connecting with students. Participant C identified himself as a strict teacher with the intention of staying formal or neutral with students, yet went on to say, "Humor is probably the best avenue, if you can get them to laugh." Participant E stressed the importance of personal relationships with students, going on to say it's "just a matter of picking up on their interests, trying to notice what they are good at, pointing those things out, joking around a little bit." While describing relationships with students and investment in students, both participants D and E - comparison cases - indicated a decrease in feelings of investment toward students. Participant D explained that in the early days of his career, prior to getting married and becoming a father, he had more time to be invested in students and went on to say, "I'm not as invested … outside of the classroom with the kids." Participant E described how in prior years he would try several tactics when building rapport with challenging students, but admitted, "I now write them off much more quickly than I used to." While descriptions of building

relationships with students were mixed, comparison case participants identified a shift in feelings of investment toward students.

Emotional exhaustion. All participants indicated an awareness of setting boundaries between work and home life. However, the degree to which this was deliberate varied among them. All participants reported that they do not take much, if any, work home with them; participants B, C, D, and E all alluded that this was a change from earlier days in their careers, when taking work home was much more commonplace. Participant C summarized by saying, "I don't take homework home anymore. I used to… I try to do everything here." Participants B, C, D, and E indicated a sense of deliberateness to the separation of work and home life. Participant B described seeing other teachers packing up stacks of grading to take home in the evening and pinpointed the intentionality in her decision not to take work home by stating, "I'm not doing that… And that's a conscious choice on my end… I'm not going to take that home. I'm not taking on that stress." Participant C went on to reflect, "There's more work than you have time to do work in." Factors that impacted the decrease in work taken home included: a decrease in time spent lesson planning further into one's career, a shift in the type of work assigned, a decrease in the amount of homework assigned, de-emphasis on grades, changes to grading systems, the use of electronic assignments and grading, and the use of student conferences and student discussion in class as a means of assessment. Participant E in particular indicated a shift in personal expectations and innovation in planning that has allowed for stricter boundaries between work and home life. When describing working long hours in previous years, participant E (comparison case) explained, "That has

cutback, so lately - and part of that is - I don't change much anymore because those days are exhausting, and so now I'm like, it's good enough." The experience of participant E stands as a comparison case to participant C who expressed a desire to continue to innovate, saying, "I like to do new things; I get bored if I'm doing the same thing every year." All participants reported a separation between work and home life, however, some descriptions differed, especially as concerned innovation.

In addition to setting boundaries, participants also described their experiences engaging in school-related activities that fall outside of their teaching roles. The teaching role of participant A as a band director inherently involves a lot of time outside of school, including concerts, travel, and rehearsals; participants B, C, D, and E all have taken on coaching positions over the years. Participants B and C alluded that coaching was a source of undue stress, participant B stating, "Coaching was a bigger stressor" than teaching. Participants B, C, and D indicated that they have since resigned from their respective coaching positions. Participant C spoke of his decision to quit coaching, citing time with family as a priority and explaining, "That's not what I'm here for… You hired me to teach; I'm going to teach." Many conveyed the criteria they use to determine whether or not they choose to participate in school-related events. Participants A and C both explained that they draw the line with taking on more unless someone, particularly a superior, says something directly to them. Both participants C and E mentioned money or pay as a deciding factor for whether or not to participate in outside events. Participants C, D, and E indicated time as a critical factor in determining participation outside of school. Participant C commented on the cost-benefit balance between time

and money, explaining, "I can not get home at 5:30 every night, see my daughter for 2 hours and then put her to bed. … I just did it for a paycheck, and I've learned the errors of my ways with that" and going on to state that he would no longer take on coaching roles going forward.

Personal perspective played a role in the amount of stress reported by respondents as well as how they describe the stresses of their jobs. While the amount of stress varied among the respondents, those who described their jobs as stressful employed different methods of framing their experiences to reduce their stress. When asked, "How do you cope with the stresses of teaching?", participant A replied, "I really enjoy it, so I don't really get stressed out about teaching. I enjoy teaching." Participant B echoed the same sentiment, saying, "I don't think I have a particularly stressful job." In contrast, participant D (comparison case) acknowledged the stresses of the job, but put it into perspective in comparison to other jobs: "It's stressful. It's a lot of work, but I've done other things that are even more work." Similarly, participant B also indicated the importance of maintaining perspective in working with children. Describing her response to colleagues who get overwhelmed with teaching, participant B commented, "I always say to them, they're 12. Let it go. Don't give them that power." Participant C made a connection between expectations and stress, alluding to a professional development experience that has helped him manage his expectations of the job. Participant C summarized the message of the presenter: in a month of teaching, 2 days will be extraordinary, 2 days will be negative, and 20 will be normal. Participant C went on to explain that this mindset helps to ensure that "I don't get too up or down with things."

The ability to maintain a sense of perspective arose as an important consideration with almost all participants.

Interview participants described coping strategies that they employ for responding to the stresses of teaching. Coping strategies included: alcohol, exercise, music, quiet time or time with oneself, time outdoors, and venting with others. When explaining the importance of exercise in his life, participant E described an almost meditative quality to his long bike rides: "It is my time to think about the day… That time away from everyone." In regard to venting or talking with others about school, participants B, C, D, and E all stressed the importance of setting boundaries or limitations. Participant B described a general no-school-talk rule with friends who are also colleagues as well as at home. Participant B explained, "I don't talk about school at home. If it's a funny story, I might," and even goes so far with friends to state, "No, we're not talking about school." Participant B asserted, "I don't want a relationship to only be about academics." Participants C, D, and E described venting or talking with their respective spouses about school, but each also noted that this has its limits. Participant C, whose spouse is a secondary teacher in another district, explained, "We've done it so much that it gets to the point where I'm like, oh, another story about a kid. I just tune out after a while because we've done it for long enough." Participant D alluded to drawing a line to work-talk with his spouse, saying, "When it's not that helpful, I'll shut it down because I don't want all of our talk to be about work." Similarly, participant E indicated a deliberate balance when it comes to talking about work at home, explaining, "I try to do a split with stories. I complained, so now I have to tell something good." All participants identified

strategies that they use to cope with the stresses of teaching which included exercise and venting.

   Personal accomplishment. A sense of personal accomplishment is cited in the literature as a mitigating factor against burnout, however the source of personal accomplishment varied among interview respondents. All participants commented on the use of student outcomes and data - common assessment data, formative assessment data, student efficacy, and student readiness - as a measure of personal accomplishment and effectiveness. Participants C and E reported feeling a high sense effectiveness when students are highly engaged in learning. Participant E stated that he finds reflection upon student data especially meaningful if tasks are challenging or when "we've been working hard, and it comes back and the students have shown some great success," and Participant C summarized, "Kids saying they like the lesson… Or when they talk about the lesson walking out the door… Word of mouth, that's the best form of advertising, right?" Participant C elaborated by identifying feedback from parents via email or parent teacher conferences as a contributor to feelings of personal accomplishment. Participants A, B, and D emphasized the role of human-to-human connections in personal accomplishment. Participant A explained that collaborating and connecting with fellow band directors across the state feeds his sense of accomplishment. Participant B expressed that personal connections with students increases her sense of personal accomplishment, saying, "That helps me feel like I'm touching their lives, versus, do you know what a direct object is in this sentence?" Participant B also went on to say, "I feel more effective when they see me as a human." In response to personal accomplishment, participant D commented,

"I've been able to spend more time on personal relationships and less on academic relationships as that's gotten more at a place where I think it should be." Responses related to feedback were mixed. Participants A and C agreed that feedback from peers or administrators added to a sense of personal accomplishment. Participants B and E alluded that feedback from peers or administrators is nice and can feel good, but that it doesn't contribute to feelings of personal accomplishment. Participant D explained that feedback and collaboration from peers played a larger role in past years, but more recently, "Because things are working, I'm not seeking that feedback as much." Participants B, C, and E indicated that professional development trainings play a lesser role in personal accomplishment, commenting that they rarely find professional development effective or worthwhile. In looking back at professional development in earlier days of his career, participant E reflected:

> Those were extremely helpful because there was so much technical stuff in the background… Especially if I had a weakness in a subject area and got to listen to an expert… That was very helpful, and then - therefore - gave me a better feeling in the way I taught.

Here participant E identified a difference between professional development related to pedagogy versus professional development related to content knowledge, suggesting a preference for content-related professional development.

Advice to new teachers. To conclude the interviews, participants were asked to reflect on what advice they might give a new teacher starting in the profession. One theme that came across clearly in the responses of participants A, B, and C, but that was

lacking in the responses of participants D and E (comparison cases), was passion for students and learning. Participant A emphasized, "We're here for the kids, and we're here to watch them grow." Participant B echoed, "Don't do it for retirement. Don't do it for the summers off. Don't do it for vacations… Do it because you really enjoy kids and you like learning." Participant C asserted, "It takes a lot of work to even be mediocre at this job… I think you have to really love it." Participant C went on to explain, "When people are like, how's your job going? I go, I love it! I love my job!" In contrast, participants D and E discussed intrinsic motivation and a de-emphasis on comparisons. Participant E attributed his longevity in the classroom to an intrinsic drive and a de-emphasis on comparing himself with others. Participant E elaborated, saying:

It has to be intrinsic, because as soon as you start comparing, and going, well, I'm busting my butt and so-and-so is not, and he's getting paid what I am, it all starts to crash down… All I can do is affect myself, and if they're getting away with stuff, I just have to ignore it, because if I harp on it, I think it destroys teachers.

The description of participant E lacked mention of a passion for students and learning that was present in the comments of participants A, B, and C.

My primary research included an initial survey and ended in one-on-one interviews investigating the question: How do educators avoid teacher burnout? A total of 39 teachers participated in the initial survey. Self-reported initial survey results revealed that on average, teachers at my school scored highest on aspects of personal accomplishment and lowest on emotional exhaustion. From the 39 responses on the initial survey, five teachers were chosen for follow-up interviews - the three highest scoring teachers and

two of the lowest scoring teachers. Interviews aimed to discover the descriptions,

perceptions, and thinking of teachers who effectively avoid teacher burnout. Interview

results neglected to illustrate overt differences between the descriptions of teachers who

self-reported low levels of burnout symptoms on the initial survey and comparison cases

who self-reported high levels of burnout symptoms on the initial survey. While interview

responses varied and typically lacked a pattern when held up against comparison cases,

follow-up interviews suggested that people who love teaching children are less stressed

about teaching. Chapter 5 offers a comparison between the results of teacher interview

and the literature review as well as a discussion of the implications, limitations, and

recommendations of this study.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusions

When I started the MAT program at Hamline University almost a decade ago, I came directly from my first "real" full-time, classroom teaching experience. I had been teaching middle school science at a high-stakes, extended school day, extended school year charter school in Denver, Colorado. This experience certainly colored my perspective on education in America as well as my coursework at Hamline. When the time came to develop my capstone topic, my experience teaching at the charter school was not forgotten. I always thought that I would pursue a capstone related to science education or environmental education - topics related to my undergraduate degree, topics for which I am passionate about learning more, topics that I hoped at the time to teach to students. However, it became clear that the most pressing questions remaining in my mind after progressing through my coursework at Hamline were related to teacher burnout and making teaching a sustainable career for myself. Thus, I sought to investigate the question: How do educators avoid teacher burnout?

Those years ago, I recognized that, while education is a stressful profession, some individuals thrive while others step closer and closer to burnout. Through my capstone, my aim was to understand what makes teachers who thrive different from those who burnout by discovering the descriptions, perceptions, and thinking of teachers who

effectively avoid teacher burnout. As previously cited in the literature review, Richards

emphasizes the importance of learning from one another:

> Teachers cannot change the school, the poverty, the principal's level of support,
>
> the number of students in the classroom, or the availability of materials. The only
>
> power teachers may have is the determination to improve and practice effective
>
> coping strategies proven helpful by teachers who have shared their successful
>
> approaches. (2012, p. 308)

Similarly, Jon Kabat-Zinn says, "You can't stop the waves, but you can learn to surf." As

Richards and Kabat-Zinn highlight, I cannot control all of the sources of stress in my life.

However, I can "learn to surf" by looking to those teachers around me who are coping

well and demonstrating success. Thus, my goal at the onset of this project was to "learn

to surf." After a review of literature related to teacher burnout, I sought out and

interviewed teachers at my current school of employment who self-reported low

symptoms of teacher burnout in order that I might learn from their practices. In this final

section of my capstone thesis, I begin by comparing my results from teacher interviews

with the review of literature and go on to consider the implications, limitations, and

recommendations that have emerged from this study of how educators avoid teacher

burnout.

Revisiting the Literature Review

The results of my teacher interviews parallel the findings in the literature review,

especially as concerns depersonalization, mindsets, perceptions, and passion; no

divergence nor new findings were reported.

Depersonalization. Teachers susceptible to burnout typically correspond with higher levels of depersonalization. Richards explains the connection between burnout and depersonalization, saying, "Burned-out teachers are apt to distance themselves from both students and other teachers" (2012, p. 307). Comparison case interview participants similarly alluded to a decrease in feelings of investment toward students as compared to earlier in their careers. Participant E concluded, "I now write [students] off much more quickly than I used to." Here participant E indicated that he quits trying to help certain students quicker at this point in his career than he would have in earlier years in his career, a shift similar to the distancing identified in the literature by Richards.

Mindset. Mindset plays a critical role in teacher burnout. The literature reveals the importance in maintaining a "novice" mindset toward teaching; Day explains:

> Experienced teachers who are successful, far from being at the end of the learning journeys, are those who retain their ability to be self-conscious about their teaching and are constantly aware of and responsive to the learning possibilities inherent in each teaching episode and individual interaction. (2012, p. 14)

Participant C echoed this finding, indicating a sense of innovation in lesson planning: "The planning is done. I mean, it's not done, because there are always changes. I like to do new things; I get bored if I'm doing the same thing every year." In contrast, Participant E (comparison case) expressed a sense of complacency regarding innovation in planning, explaining, "I don't change much anymore because those days are exhausting, and so now I'm like, it's good enough." In my teacher interviews, the

presence of a "novice" mindset corresponded to lower levels of teacher burnout, whereas the absence of a "novice" mindset corresponded to higher levels of teacher burnout.

Perceptions. Perceptions of stress proved to be an important factor in both the literature review and teacher interviews. In a study of elementary school teachers in the same or similar environments, McCarthy el al. summarize:

Teachers' experience of stress appeared to have little to do with differences between the various elementary school contexts. Most variance was accounted for by individual differences between teachers, suggesting that individual perceptions of the balance between resources and demands were most predictive of burnout. (2009, p. 296)

A similar pattern emerged in my teacher interviews. Teachers who self-reported low-levels of burnout disregarded their jobs as stressful. Specifically, participant A asserted, "I really enjoy it, so I don't really get stressed out about teaching," and participant B reiterated, "I don't think I have a particularly stressful job." The feelings of participants A and B were subtly different from those of participant D (comparison case) who said, "It's stressful. It's a lot of work, but I've done other things that are even more work." While upon first impression, it may seem that all three participants are expressing a sense of perspective in regard to job stress, closer consideration reveals a distinction: while participants A and B diminish the stresses of teaching, participant D acknowledges the stresses, perhaps even accepting stress as a chronic condition of the profession. Whereas participants A and B do not perceive their jobs as very stressful, participant D approaches the stress with a deterministic attitude - as if "there's nothing you can do

about it." It could be argued that this difference in perspective contributes to the overall feelings of burnout experienced by the respective participants.

Passion. The difference between interview participants and comparison cases related to passion for teaching was an unanticipated outcome in interviews. However, in hindsight, this result should not have been surprising in light of the conclusions in the literature review. In reply to what advice they would give new teachers, participants A, B, and C underscored the importance of having passion for students and learning. This theme was lacking in the responses of participants D and E (comparison cases). In their research with veteran teachers and what keeps them in the classroom, Marston et al. explain, "Core professional values, such as satisfaction in working with young people and satisfaction in fulfilling a professional commitment, were powerful motivators for keeping them in the classroom" (2006, p. 125). The passion described by interview participants seems to correspond to the feelings of satisfaction identified by Marston et al., and the presence or lack of passion may account for the differences in participants' reported levels of burnout.

A comparison between the literature review and my teacher interviews reiterates the key roles of depersonalization, mindsets, perceptions, and passion in teacher burnout. Interview participants who self-reported fewer symptoms of burnout described having stronger connections to students, a "novice" mindset, fewer feelings of stress related to teaching, and a passion for students and learning. The comparison between teacher interviews and the review of literature does not reveal any aberrations or discoveries related to teacher burnout.

Implications

The outcomes of this study hold implications for those across all spectrums of education. The issue of teacher burnout - especially as concerns teacher retention and the economic ramifications of teachers burning out and leaving the profession - is of particular concern to legislators, local governments, and administrators. It behooves those in decision-making positions within the field of education to consider environmental factors - such as opportunities for teacher collaboration and compensation - when setting policy related to teaching if they are to recruit and retain effective teachers. It is important for universities, teacher training programs, and school administrators to realize the role of personal factors - such as personality traits, perceptions, beliefs and mindsets, and self-efficacy - in teacher burnout in order that they might help to foster positive traits in teachers and teaching candidates. Furthermore, knowledge of the criteria for effective teacher induction and intervention programs can also be essential to universities, districts, and administrators when planning teacher training, interventions for teachers in crisis, or general wellness programs. On the level of individual teachers, it can be helpful to have an understanding of the relationship between personal factors and teacher burnout so that individuals can step back, reflect, and perhaps seek support when warning signs are evident.

This study has already begun to impact how I personally approach and react to teaching and the stresses of the profession. In particular, I found the literature related to efficacy, classroom management, and mindfulness to resonate with me. Because of the strong connection between self-efficacy and teacher burnout, I now am more acutely

aware of times when I feel a decreased sense of efficacy. When these feelings arise, I seek out support in the form of collaboration with successful colleagues or professional development related to my perceived weakness. The literature highlighted the relationship between reactive classroom management strategies and high teacher stress. This research gave me new-found cause for avoiding reactive classroom management strategies in my own classroom. Perhaps the most salient outcome of my research was the literature on mindfulness. While it is good to be aware of the personality traits, perceptions, beliefs, and mindsets that lead to teacher burnout, awareness alone is not enough to stave off burnout; in order to avoid burnout, one must be able to alter his or her personality traits, perceptions, beliefs, and mindsets. Mindfulness at its best puts the control over such factors within the power of the individual. Since realizing the potential of mindfulness through the literature review, I have sought out and completed a course in Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR). The course was offered through the local teachers' association and taught by a local public school teacher who is also a trained MBSR teacher. The MBSR course met once a week for eight weeks and included a four-hour silent retreat one Saturday. The course introduced participants to a number of types of mindfulness practice, both formal and informal. Since participating in the MBSR course, I have begun my own home meditation practice. I found the course and my home meditation practice to be very instrumental in my own stress management and my ability to renew in times when I am tending toward emotional exhaustion. As a teacher and a mother of a toddler, I often feel as if my days are filled with talking and responsibility for others, and as an introverted person, I find this taxing. My mindfulness

meditation practice provides me with much-needed quiet time with myself in order to recharge and reflect. I find that I feel much more renewed after a 15-30 minute meditation session than I do from having an entire afternoon "off" of teaching and toddler responsibilities. I cannot unlearn the lessons that I have learned through this capstone about efficacy, classroom management, and mindfulness, and so I will continue to be aware of my feelings of efficacy, avoid reactive classroom management strategies, and include a regular mindfulness practice in my life.

Limitations

As discussed in Chapter 3: Methods, this study was limited by the number of interview participants, the selection of interview participants, and the subjective nature of interviews as a method of research. A total of five follow-up interviews were conducted, and participants were selected based on self-reported data. While comparison cases were included in follow-up interviews, the total size of the sample population for initial surveys played a limiting role in the data that was later collected during interviews. The initial survey was distributed to all teachers at my current school of employment, and 39 respondents participated in the voluntary survey. While survey responses were ranked and scores assigned accordingly, the range of scores was perhaps not great enough to garner overt differences between the experiences of teachers avoiding burnout (high scores) and those closer to burnout (low scores). The initial survey had 45 total points possible. Participants A, B, and C scored 43, 42, and 42 total points respectively; comparison case participants, D and E scored 29 and 27 total points respectively. Responses to individual questions were rated along a five-point scale, with a score of one

corresponding to "disagree" and high burnout, and a score of five corresponding to "agree" and low burnout. Thus, an entirely neutral response to all questions would equate to a total score of 27 - the lowest comparison case score. An individual exhibiting severe symptoms of burnout might respond with scores of one or two on individual questions, equating to a total score in the range of 9-18, much lower than any of the survey responses actually received. One interpretation is that the comparison case participants in this study were not truly in jeopardy of teacher burnout, and as such their experiences and descriptions do not diverge drastically enough from the other interview participants to accurately illustrate the differences between teachers with high levels of burnout and teachers with low levels of burnout. In light of the limitations of this study, the results cannot be generalized to a population of teachers at large. The results of teacher interviews provide anecdotal reports, corroborated by the review of literature which taken in concert can give broad characteristics of teachers avoiding burnout.

Recommendations

Based on the outcomes of the study and the findings summarized in the literature review, I have a particular interest in pursuing more experience with Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction. Knowledge of the factors that impact teacher burnout is not enough to steer around burnout; teachers must be able to take action on that knowledge through concrete steps. Examining the actionable strategies presented in the literature review (teacher induction, intervention and wellness programs, classroom management strategies, and mindfulness or emotional regulation training), mindfulness is the most pertinent to me at this point in my career - I am beyond the teacher induction phase, and

yet my whole purpose is to avoid the extreme feelings of burnout that necessitate intervention.

If I were to replicate this study, I would change key aspects of the sample size as well as the identification of interview participants and the longevity of the study. To begin, I would open up the initial survey to a much larger sample of teachers, across different schools, districts, or even cities or states if possible. My hope would be to capture the descriptions of a much more diverse range of experiences, potentially identifying comparison case participants who more-drastically exhibit symptoms of burnout to contrast against. With a larger number of initial survey respondents to select from, the number of follow-up interviews could then be expanded so that stronger conclusions and generalizations could be drawn from the results of interviews. The validity of the initial survey could be improved by incorporating the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI). Cited in much of the research in the literature review, the MBI has been used in burnout research for more than 35 years and is available for a moderate fee. In addition to the use of a self-reporting initial survey to identify interview participants, I would also add a peer recommendation component so that interview participation would not be based solely on self-reported data. As part of the initial survey, respondents could nominate peers who appear to 1.) be effective teachers and 2.) balance the responsibilities of the job with life outside of school. Peer recommendation would help to mitigate the bias associated with self-reported data and also boost the probability that interview participants not only have low levels of burnout but also harbor qualities worth emulating. Interviews were conducted in a single sitting, lasting no more than 35 minutes. In a future study, I would

like to expand on this time frame, allowing for longer interviews and more interviews with the same participants throughout different times of the year. My hope would be that widening the time frame would allow for stronger conclusions to be drawn in order that outcomes might be applied to teachers at large. I liked the format of the interview guide as opposed to a strict set of interview questions. However, not all participants interpreted questions in the same way or took the same vein on a line of questions. Expanding the time frame of interviews would allow the researcher to follow up on particular topics or themes that might naturally come up in one interview, but not in another. While I was able to derive personal meaning from the results of my teacher interviews, the interviews were limited in some key aspects, especially as related to the selection of participants. Addressing these limitations in a future study would allow for results that are more conclusive and that can be generalized to a larger population of teachers.

At the onset of this study, I was in search of ways to persist in the field of education for years to come. I had witnessed stressed teachers inching toward burnout, and I was terrified that the same would eventually happen to me. Yet, upon closer inspection, there were other teachers present who maintained a sense of resiliency and satisfaction in teaching. While I cannot "stop the waves" of stress that accompany the profession of teaching - nor motherhood, for that matter - I was determined to "learn to surf" by looking to those around me who "surf." I set out to investigate the question: How do educators avoid teacher burnout? This study culminated in teacher interviews with the "surfers." Teacher interviews echoed the outcomes of the literature review, specifically as concerns the roles of depersonalization, mindsets, perceptions, and passion in avoiding

burnout. These results have implications for anyone working in education, from individual teachers to policy makers. This study was limited, particularly in the number of interview participants and the selection of participants. A future study should address these limitations in order to strengthen the results and provide conclusions that can be generalized to teachers at large. I personally gleaned key information from my teacher interviews as well as from the review of literature that I have already begun to apply to my teaching practice. I am particularly interested in the role of mindfulness in my work life and home life, and I will continue to pursue a deeper understanding for how mindfulness can be a tool for avoiding teacher burnout.

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Appendix A

Permission to Conduct Research Study from Principal

Rebecca Hibbard
XXXX
XXXX, XXXX XXXXX

Date

XXXX - Principal
XXXX
XXXX
XXXX, XXXX XXXXX

RE: Permission to Conduct Research Study

Dear XXXX:

I am writing to request permission to conduct a research study at XXXX. I am currently working toward a Masters of Arts in Teaching with Hamline University in St. Paul, Minnesota, and I am in the process of writing my Capstone Thesis. My Capstone Thesis is investigating: How do educators avoid teacher burnout?

I intend to email a voluntary survey (questions attached) to the staff at XXXX in hopes of identifying 3-4 teachers who enjoy teaching and feel fulfilled and refreshed in their roles. Survey results will be examined to determine those individuals who most successfully maintain a sense of accomplishment and resilience, and these individuals will be selected for a follow up interview (questions attached).

If approval is granted, all staff will be invited to complete the survey and additional interviews will be held with 3-4 participants. Interviews will be held outside of school hours, in a public location as determined by the interview participants. The survey process should take no longer than one week, and follow up interviews should take no longer than an additional two weeks to complete. Names will be collected with survey results in order to follow up with teachers for interviews; survey and interview results will be analyzed for the purpose of the thesis project. However, individual responses will

remain absolutely confidential. The thesis project will not include any costs to XXXX or the participants involved.

Your approval to conduct this study at XXXX is greatly appreciated. In order to acknowledge your consent to this project, please sign below.

Sincerely,
Rebecca Hibbard
Enclosures: Letter to Staff with Initial Survey, Initial Survey Questions, Interview Questions

Approved by:

_____   _____   _____
Print your name and title here   Signature   Date

Appendix B

Letter to Staff with Initial Survey

Dear Teachers & Staff:

I am currently working toward a Masters of Arts in Teaching with Hamline University in St. Paul, Minnesota. I am in the process of writing my Capstone Thesis related to teacher burnout. I would greatly appreciate your voluntary participation in a research study investigating how educators avoid teacher burnout.

Attached is a survey of 9 multiple choice questions; the survey should take no more than 5 minutes to complete.

If you have additional questions about this survey and my study, please see the details below or email me directly.

Your response and time is greatly appreciated!
Rebecca Hibbard

What the study is about: The purpose of this study is to discover the descriptions, perceptions, and thinking of teachers who effectively avoid teacher burnout. The results of this survey will be used to identify participants for follow up interviews.

What you will be asked to do: If you agree to be a part of this study, I will ask you to complete the survey. The survey will include questions about your job satisfaction and the balance between your professional and personal lives. Some survey respondents may be asked to participate in a follow up interview. The interview will include questions about how you manage the stresses of your job.

Confidentiality: All results will be analyzed for the purpose of the thesis project, however, individual responses will remain absolutely confidential. Names will be collected for the purpose of identifying participants for follow-up interviews, but no names or results will be communicated with the employer. The written report of this study - including drafts and the final copy - will not include any information that will make it possible to identify participants. Survey results will be kept private; only the researchers will have access to the records.

Appendix C

Interview Consent Form

What the study is about: The purpose of this study is to discover the descriptions, perceptions, and thinking of teachers who effectively avoid teacher burnout.

What you will be asked to do: If you agree to be a part of this study, I will ask you to participate in a one-on-one interview. The interview will take approximately 30 minutes. The interview will include questions about how you manage the stresses of your job, your job satisfaction, and the balance between your professional and personal lives. Your participation in this interview is voluntary.

Confidentiality: All results will be analyzed for the purpose of the thesis project, however, individual responses will remain absolutely confidential. The interview will be digitally recorded for the purpose of transcription, but digital recordings will be deleted once transcription is complete. The written report of this study - including drafts and the final copy - will not include any information that will make it possible to identify participants.

If you have additional questions, please contact me or my academic advisor using the email addresses below:
Rebecca Hibbard: rhibbard@XXXX
Jeff Fink: jfink01@hamline.edu

By signing this form I agree that I am voluntarily taking part in this project. I understand that I do not have to take part, and I can stop the interview at any time.

_____

Printed Name

_____   _____

Participant Signature   Date

Appendix D

Interview Transcripts

Participant A
Interviewer (I): I'm going to start with connectedness and relationships. How do you maintain a sense of connectedness to those around you?

Respondent (R): Students? Or staff?

I: Could be students or staff or even outside of work, as well.

R: I'm pretty verbal, you know, so I just talk to people when I need to, I guess. And with students, I'm just on here all of the time, so I'm totally married to this job pretty much. So, you know, um, I… That's really my operandi, I just communicate when I need to. Kind of on a need-to basis. Yeah.

I: Do you seek out relationships with other staff at school?

R: Only when I need to, because the job is so encompassing with what I do as a band director, that, um, I'm here a lot. So, when I need to go seek someone, I will. You know what I mean?

I: Yeah. Do you find that you seek out relationships with people outside of school? Like, non-work related, not staff, just friends and things like that?

R: Oh, sure. Yeah, I've got a lot of friends. And being in the music world, there's a tremendous opportunity for lots of friends. So, um. I know most of the directors in Colorado, a lot of the middle school ones and most of the high school. Um, just because I've been doing this for 30 years, you know, so. Yeah, and um, my wife works at the [arts center], so I've… And she just got this job about 3 months ago, so I've been making new friends through her relationships there. And then I play in a lot of churches in town and in the chamber orchestra, so I've developed relationships with… it's the people that I'm around that I work around.

I: Yeah, uh-huh. A lot of network there, it sounds like.

R: Yeah, yeah. Exactly. But I'm not out trying to recruit friends. Because I have plenty

of relationships in my current life. You know.

I: How about with students? How do you foster rapport with students?

R: Um, this is funny. Are you recording this?

I: Yeah.

R: Oh, okay. I give them a hard… I tease the heck out of them. And, that's kind of part of it. And they really like that. You probably know that, too.

I: Yeah, yeah.

R: And, and, um, it's just a lot of communicating, because in music students can't hide any part of their personality when they have to perform on their instrument. Whatever they're able to do has to come out, and they're… you know what I mean? Like, they can't hide behind a veil, because they're showing you what they can do. You know, it's performance… very performance oriented, of course. So, and then a lot of communicating is, you know, feedback. And then they'll come in for help, and then all of a sudden they're telling me about stuff that happens at home, or with a sibling. And my job is 4th grade through 12th. You know, I teach at 2 elementaries, I help at the high school, and I teach here. So, being here for 21 years, I've grown up with a lot of these kids. So, I get to know about their lives as well as, you know, what we do in music. And I love that part of it. Does that answer your question?

I: Yeah, it does. Um, I'm wondering if you have had any experiences with students that are, like, particularly challenging to connect with, and maybe what strategies you draw from there if you've got a hard nut to crack.

R: Yeah, yes, every year I have some like that. I communicate verbally with them as much as I can. I try to involve the parent. If I need to go… If it's something curricular and I need to involve someone here, I will, like [the intervention team]. You know what I mean? Um, I had a student last year that, um… chronically lied to me all of the time. Very, very sincerely would just lie about, I've done this, I've done that. And I finally involved the parents, and they're like, no they haven't done that. And it was really weird. So. And that student couldn't continue in band. You know. I mean, I had a good relationship with them, it seemed, but they just couldn't do any work and they'd lie about the stuff they did. Forge practice cards, it was really weird. That's the extreme.

I: Okay. So, just communication.

R: Yeah, just communicate. Yeah, absolutely. And, and reaching them… Yeah, I mean, I just try to reach kids on a personal level, let them know that I care about them. You know, and then if there needs to be some tough love, at least they know that I'm not, like, throwing them under the bus, that I'm there for them. But, you know, sometimes they

need a kick in the pants, you know, so to speak.

I: So, teaching is a particularly stressful job, and I can imagine that your role traveling between schools has its own element. How do you cope with the stresses of teaching?

R: I really enjoy it, so I don't really get stressed about teaching. I enjoy teaching. What I get… what gets me is, um [hesitates, laughs]. But it's confidential, right?

I: Yeah!

R: Like, reading this book [school-wide PLC required reading], and, like, the chapters, and then reporting back. I take my job seriously, so I do all that stuff, but it's like, this really doesn't plug into what I'm doing with my curriculum. I'm creating extra work here, doing this stuff. But, like, um, some of the b.s. we have to deal with, that stuff.

[Student walks in]

I: I'm going to pause here. [Pause] Yeah, so not so much the teaching part, but those non-teaching tasks.

R: Yeah, some of the stuff that we have to do that, that… you know, it's like, I know it's… Yeah, exactly. I guess, to summarize it, yes.

I: Yeah. I imagine that some sort of coping strategies when things get stressful are sort of already built into your job, in terms of - not necessarily your job - but your… like, you talked about playing music around town, and that in and of itself is sometimes renewing, right?

R: Uh-huh. Yeah, oh yeah. Sure, like, playing. Yeah, definitely.

I: What about other things to recharge outside of music?

R: Um, skiing. I like to go skiing. Um, and, like, this weekend, I've got some work I'm going to do here tomorrow, but Sunday I'm not going to touch anything related to here. And just time with my wife, you know. So, but I've done this for long enough that I know what to expect, and I work until the job is done, so I rarely… I really don't get stressed that often about my job.

I: Yeah. That's a great segue to my next question: Do you consciously set limits to your work day? Or set boundaries for yourself in terms of how much it's impacting home?

R: Um, I, well… My kids are all grown up and they're gone, you know, so that helps a lot, you know. Um, I just get the work done, just stay and get it done. So I really don't… And if I can't get it done in the time that I'm here, then I'll come in on the weekend and finish. So I want to be on top of stuff here, and my wife totally knows that, so she's okay

with that.

I: And it sounds like that's happening here though; you're not taking things home and it's bleeding into the evening.

R: No, no. Things I get done, I get them done here.

I: Okay, so there's that sort of physical boundary? Like, work happens at work?

R: Yes. And very rarely do I take stuff home, and I probably would if I was an English teacher or grading papers, you know. But everything is real hands-on with the music and stuff. So, yeah.

I: I mean, your job has a lot of outside-of-school-time responsibilities.

R: Uh-huh.

I: How do you decide what other, non-teaching things you're going to participate in? I know I've seen you at the athletic events and things like that. So how do you decide what you will get involved in?

R: Well, so I'll get involved… Just, I… [The principal] is really trying to get me to do [staff committee], and I'm just like, no. [Laughs] You know, I've got… I'm doing 3 years past this year, and then I'm going to retire, so that's kind of one of those, I'm going to draw the line there. Unless somebody tells me, you really should do this because you've got too many dogs in the fight to not do it. Then I think I'd go, but I just… Yeah, like that. I draw the line there, like, I'm just not interested in doing that. Coming in summers, you know, or more extra time. Um, let's see. I do volleyball. So that's kind of my… You know, that's what I like to do. And that's pretty much it. I don't help with football or track or… I might have helped [coach] before when he's personally asked me, hey, I really need… And then, I'll do it for him.

I: Uh-huh. Okay. Um, I'm going to shift gears here a little bit. Personal accomplishment definitely plays a role in people's job satisfaction. So what makes you feel a sense of accomplishment about what you're doing?

R: Um, just that the band sounds good, and I feel like it get better at it every year. Yeah, just reaching musicians, and I give lessons to kids. And watching them over all the years I've been doing this. So, like, grow up, graduate, and continue to participate in the activity somehow makes me very satisfied.

I: Yeah, definitely. Do you, like… In order for you to feel - I think you said, you're getting better every year… What plays a role in that for you?

R: You know, really, feedback from [administrators]. They're great, I think, at that.

They're really good at it. And they're always… you know, I've told them a number of times, please let me know if you see something that I can get better at. Because I always want to get better. And I have a lot of good friends that are outstanding band directors, too, and so we bounce a lot of ideas off each other. And people will come here to watch. Like, these kids probably meet 2 outside people a week, that just come to observe the class. And then we sit and interact afterwards because I've been doing it for a long time so I can help them. And sometimes I'll get something from them, too.

I: Yeah. Do you… What does student data look like in your arena? And do you use student data to measure your effectiveness?

R: Mmm, well, just grades. And we have a practice cards and, like, evaluating these ensembles and giving a score for their progress. Um, I'm not all… it's… I'm not all about big-time data. I'm just not.

I: It might be more, um, with the performance, right?

R: Right.

I: How do you measure that they're getting better. That's, I guess, what I'm wondering.

R: Because I can hear it and I know about it. And so. And I'll give them rubrics. I'll give them stuff so that they know, too, because, I mean, they don't have nearly the experience. Um, but they know it, too. Because, you know, when they're getting better, they realize that, you know. I mean, they really do. It's like, you know… And a lot of times I'll remind a kid, like, last year at this time, you could not play this note, and now you're 3 notes above this, so before you get too, you know, hard on yourself, think about this. And then they'll kind of go, yeah, yeah, you're right. When they get frustrated with the current, I'll remind them about… or, when I worked with you in 4th grade, remember… oh, yeah, yeah. [Laughs] And that's kind of the cool part about what I do.

I: Definitely. A lot of growth there.

R: Oh, yeah. And then I've got a lot of these kids at the high school, too, so I just grow up with them kind of.

I: Yeah. That's what I've got. But I'd love to hear just if you had a brand new teacher sitting in front of you, what advice would you give them about coming into the profession at this point in time?

R: Oh, gosh. It's funny you would ask that. I've got a friend who has got to speak at a college, and he put this big post on Facebook: I don't know what I'm going to say because my retirement is going to suck because I'm young, and there are shootings every week if not twice a week, and all this stuff. And I just told him, like, dude, we're here for the kids, and we're here to watch them grow. And, so, but… He's really on the fence

about doing this talk because he's so down on the profession and where PERA is going, and how long he's going to have to work so he can retire, and all that stuff. So, I, I… What I tell musicians that want to be band directors is, I just tell them, what inspired you to go this direction is probably a teacher at somewhere along the line, and emulate everything good about what your experiences have been so far, and try to bring that to your students. And if you really feel like that's what you want to do, then you should be a teacher. Because we're certainly not here for the dough, you know? [Laughs]

I: Yeah.

R: You can make a decent living, but it's not… Yeah.

I: Yeah. Well, thank you so much for taking the time with me today.

Participant B
Interviewer (I): To start out with, I'm wondering how you maintain a sense of connectedness to those around you.

Respondent (R): To the staff? Or to people at home?

I: Potentially; people at home as well. Students, anybody who you think is important in your life. Like, how do you maintain a sense of connectedness with them?

R: Okay! I, um, I talk to some of my colleagues, mostly in my department, um, but some outside of the department just about things non-academic. Um, when I go out on, like, to go, for instance I'll meet a colleague this afternoon at Bristol. We will not talk about school; that's kind of the rule. When I meet [departmental peer] over the summer, that's the rule; we don't talk… no, that's off the table. And I've said to him in past years, 'cause I've known him for 13, when I say goodbye to him in May and go, "And we'll get together this summer," and then I see him again in August and I go, "I just, I don't know what it is. I don't want to associate… I don't want there to be this association with school and so I just kind of avoided getting together with you for lunch." Because I associate him with school. Over the years, I no longer do that, and we can just come to the table as two human beings and not talk about school. Um… I, you know, there's, there's so much academic minutiae that we can all talk about students and stuff that I try not to do that. Um, how do I stay connected at home? I don't bring school home. I don't, I don't grade at home. I don't talk about school at home. If it's a funny story, I might, like if something funny happened, I'd bring that home. Like, check this out. You know, listen to what this kid did. This was pretty funny. Um, but I keep going back to colleagues who get overwhelmed with this job, and I always say to them, they're 12, let it go. Don't give them that power. You're how old? Don't give them that power. Like, let it go. They're 12. And it's funny now, in retrospect, all these years later, I went through all my files over that last PLC day on Friday before break and just got rid of everything. I mean, these are empty. They have like food in them now. But I had all these model essays that I was clinging to. And there were so many names of students. Now, most of

them I went, oh yeah, fond memory; oh sure; oh, there's a funny one. Any, you know, I'd give it to [the principal] and go, remember this kids. Um, but there were so many names that I went, I don't... I have no recollection of who this kid is. And I have to keep that in perspective and go... you know, they can't rule me, I'm not going to give them that power. This is one job, for one time, one year. Sorry, that was a lot.

I: No, that was great! Um, do you, so you talked about like not, like that separation, um with colleagues, and at home as well. Do you feel like that's conscious on your part?

R: I do.

I: Do you ever verbally state that to other people on your part?

R: Yes. Yeah. And I've said to colleagues, "No, we're not talking about school." Um, if were on a bus somewhere doing something, no I don't want to talk about this. Um, I've seen the [married teacher couple] over summers, and if it goes into, and so-and-so, I'm like, no we don't talk about school. And that's for me, but I don't want to talk about school. Not that it's such a terrible place that I don't want to, you know what I mean, like, oh, I don't want to talk about school, it's so awful. It's not like that. I just want the separation. I don't want a relationship to only be about academics. And I don't want to be... it's easy to get downtrodden, and I feel like there's a morale, somewhat, I feel a little more this year, where people come in like doggedly and, ah, one more day, 46 more days, however many more months until I retire. People are doing countdowns, and I'm like, have you ever worked in another school? Because, kids came to school with breakfast, and they were told they were loved, and education is valued at home. That's easily 50% of my job, done. Done. I don't know what you're angry about; I have no idea. So, yes. It's a conscious decision. My mentor, when I was in college, and my very first year. So, I did a field period in college and then went back there after graduating and worked for 2 years at a boys residential facility. And my mentor, she was amazing, and so nurturing, and wonderful. But there was some acid there, too. There was some... she had a barbed tongue when she needed it. And she used to say to me, "Tiffany, the minute your hands touch this car, er, the minute your hands touch the car in the parking lot, you leave this place behind." And it was hard when I came here, because I took this job so seriously, and I took a lot of things home. But now all these years later, I very much do that.

I: Shifting gears a little bit. With students, um, do you feel like you take any, um, deliberate steps to foster relationships with students?

R: I do, and I think that's more my age. And maybe now that I'm a mom. Um, we all have personality differences. And no kid is... I'm... not every kid is going to like me. And to be really honest, I'm not going to like every kid. Right? So how do we, how do I remain professional and within those guidelines with certain kids who may trigger certain things out of me. Um, I think my first step is recognizing it. That kid's 12, and he's triggering something in me. And then just trying to communicate past that, or make a

motion, I know what my… my first response is to bristle a little bit and go, I see what he's doing there, I know what he's doing… in that New York, Joe Pesci. And he goes, and I go, I know what you're doing here. And then I go, simmer, simmer down, you're a 42 year old woman. That's a 12 year old kid. How are we going to get through this? He's just trying to, um, you know when, when it's silly stuff like, why do we have to write 3 poems? Why can't we just write 1? It's silly, but I know that kid, you know what I mean? And I know what he's trying to do. So how do I address that with him? That's easy enough to answer a question like that. But how, also, do I try to soften what he may feel is some kind of dynamic issue. Because Mom has come in already to meet with me because he doesn't find me approachable. What can I do now? Do I go out of my way? Not exactly, but are there little moments in class where I can, um, encourage positive behavior? Sure. See him in the hall, go out… not… I don't want to say go out of my way. But address him maybe more than I would. You know, I don't go down the hall and say "hi" to every kid who I see who I know. That would be really exhausting. But, you know, might I say, hey, how are you? How's your day? Just to show that there's not a weird rift that he might think is a weird rift. Does that make sense?

I: Yeah.

R: I feel like it's per kid. And because you ask, I'm just thinking of one kid in particular who I… It's so important developmentally for them, and I'll use their language, to be liked. Does she like me? It doesn't matter, like, is my stance. Right? But I'm an old, haggard woman. But it's really important to them. So when I think about that kid, I think he thinks, she doesn't like me. No, it doesn't matter. I don't think about you at all really. Do you know how to write an essay? Um…

I: Yeah, and you used the, you avoided the term "out of your way." But would it be fair to say deliberate? I mean, you're just… there's more of a deliberateness there.

R: Yup. Yes.

I: Okay. I'm going to shift gears again here. Just… I'm going to start kind of big picture and just see what you're thinking. Um, how do you cope with the stresses of the job?

R: I don't think I really recognize them. [Laughs] I don't think I have a particularly stressful job.

I: Okay.

R: Um, now that's year 13. What were some stressors in the beginning? Moms, I would say in my first 2 years. I would use the term bullied. Um, I always stood my ground. But now in retrospect, I realize that was what was going on. Back then I was told by administration we have… very… um, what was the word she would use? Not engaged, not assertive. Um, awares. Um, there's a better word, parents. Okay, okay, involved. Okay, that's fine. And that was kind of the euphemism, I would say, that was used for

moms in particular, in my case. I didn't really have an issue with too many dads, that I recall. Um, trying to undermine me and undermine some of my policies. And argue with me in one-on-one meetings. And say things like, when I would say, I'm sorry you feel that way, I had one mom once go, no you're not. [Laughs] And that was a mental shift for me to go, I'm going to do everything I can for your kid, because someday that kid is going to head for the hills and run so far away from you, the best I can do as his teacher is to equip him and be ready for the world. Um, so that was a… a stressor before. I used to go to the coffee shop on the weekends and grade essays. We do, um, in class grading now. We conference those, so I'm not going home with that homework. We do everything one-on-one so that, you know, a kid can come up and explain things. Um, so that helps me. I mean, it's better feedback for the kids and everything. But it helps me to not take that work home, because that's a stressor of the job, right. And I take home all this work, and I see teachers in the bleachers with bags of quizzes. And I'm like, uh uhm, uh uhm, I'm not doing that. Um, and that's a conscious choice on my end. And me going, no, no, I'm not going to take that home. I'm not taking on that stress. Um, I don't think we meet a lot. I don't think admin… and don't have really many issues with our administration. I don't have issues with kids. They're kids. I love kids wherever they… like, that's why I'm a teacher. You know what I mean? And our problem kids aren't really problem kids. Even if they were, you just give them a little nurturing.

I: Going back to the stressors you felt in the early years, what do you think has changed in terms of the hands-on-ness of the parents and that potentially being a stressor?

R: I think in this district in particular, my reputation. I think that changed. I think I… oh, new teacher? I'm going to stay at home and just watch as she plinks grades in and when I get that little ding I'm just going to call her. Um, I think they… they wanted to test the new teacher because they didn't have a whole lot else to do maybe. That's judgemental, um, and subjective. But I think that's changed. I think I've changed in… I wouldn't say allowing that because again, I always stood my ground. Um, but another thing that has seriously changed has been administration, sort of stopping that before it had to come to my room. I feel like I can go to administration now and say, you know I'm feeling - if that were - if that were still a case, I'm feeling she's going to meet with me and it's, it's you know going to be a little bit sour. Would you mind being there? Or… Previous administration would come to me and basically ask me to be soft with a certain parent, is how that translated. I don't get that anymore. Um, I… I'll never forget, and he will always, when I associate him, like, when I think about my memories of current administration, I think of a morning when I knew I had an angry dad who was coming to see me. And that was a whole other issue than the moms. Um, but I knew he was coming in. I knew he was angry, um, and I knew he was going to bark at me. And I said, hey [principal], can you be present in this meeting. And I came in at probably 5 after 7. My door was open, my light was on, and he already had 4 desks set up and was sitting at a desk with his cup of coffee, like ready. And I was like, that was so comforting, thanks chief. You got my back. We're here in this… you know, we're here together. And he didn't say really much in the whole meeting, just his presence diffused, i think what that dad could have come in with.

I: Do you feel like you have days where you need to recharge, like, because of the job? Or do you… it's just kind of life?

R: Yeah!

I: Like, you just recharge in life.

R: Yeah. I, um, I'm, you know, I'm at a place in my life now, where this is kind of a comfort zone. I know that's not a popular or universal thought around here, but I'm okay. I can roll with what's going on. The kids aren't really that big of a problem. I don't get stressed out a lot. Now, I don't coach 2 sports anymore, too. Coaching was a bigger stressor. Track coaching was a bigger, that was a big… it's a lot more kids, it's chaotic, you're trying to navigate with different coaches, and a football, you know, high school football field with high schoolers. Um, that was always a big stressor. Teaching English, um, hasn't been a big… a big stress.

I: Okay. Thank you. I'm going to move on here. Um, what… what makes you feel a sense of personal accomplishment in your job?

R: I think, and I miss it a little bit, when I look back to, you know, the boys residential facility. There was a lot more nurturing there than there was… iambic pentameter, for instance. Um, there was more of a need for my personal guidance than my academic knowledge. And so, that helped… helped me to feel that personal, um, sense of accomplishment. Even in [place], I taught there for a year when I lived in [place], and I remember having a moment with a girl who was being… ah, harassed by a boy. And I remember meeting with her, just kind of… I wanted to… or she wanted me to be there in a meeting with administration just as sort of an adult whom she trusted. And I remember saying to her, I'm not telling you this as a teacher, I'm telling you this as a woman who used to be a girl. Those moments seem fewer and far between here where these kids are, at least projecting the sense of being well rounded and well adjusted. Um, but, like right now we're doing our poetry anthologies. And, and I think there was a suicide last year that a lot of kids are still dealing with and it keeps showing up in their poetry. So there are these moments where I can say, hey, you know, if… if you'd like to talk to a counselor or anything. And they go, you know, we've talked to counselors before, and I go, okay. You know, this is awesome that you're putting into language and making concrete these very abstract thoughts and feelings and tough things to deal with and grapple with and I'm hoping that your writing helps you to move through that. Um, so that… that helps me feel like I'm touching their lives, versus, do you know what a direct object is in this sentence?

I: Is it fair to say, kind of that human-to-human connection?

R: Right. Yeah, yup. And I still have, you know, when I still have, I'll use first names, like a Nicole or an Ellen or an Amanda or a mom of a former. I had 3… 2 of her 3 kids.

Or a mom reach out to me all these years later. They're adults, I mean mom obviously, um, her kids are all adults though now. Um, whenever somebody from the past, a student or a mom, reaches out to me and says, hey, I wanted to get ahold of you because… and, you know, I've met with former students just… I met with one girl because she was like, I don't know what to do with my life, will you meet me for coffee? And I was like, I'll do what I can, Nicole. [Laughs] Um… that's cool. Like, really? I was your 7th grade English teacher and you thought of me to help you out with that? Like, that gives me a sense of accomplishment and go, oh, it does matter, sure. Um, and then when you hear about kids memories and stuff. Um, yeah.

I: Yeah. Are there any… Is there anything you do to help yourself maintain a sense of effectiveness?

R: In regards to the academics I teach? The effectiveness that I feel toward the human-to-human connection?

I: Either one.

R: Um, I mean, the easy academic answer is formative assessment, right? To look at effectiveness. What parts of speech are they getting, what parts of speech aren't they getting? Look at the final, look at the data. Um, my effectiveness as a teacher, human-to-human, I would say, I'm less of a battle axe now. I've softened with age. Not all of my students would agree with that. But, I used to be much colder and pricklier. Um, there's still a persona here to, not so much protect myself, but to keep a distance so that it doesn't go too far, so that we don't get too out of hand. But, you know, I have a 5th hour class, for instance, they're dynamite, the… and the dynamics in there are fun. And they're fun, and they're amazing at getting me off track. And then when I get us back on track, they're back. Which, doesn't happen. You know. In a junior high level. So one kid today said, well, what are your favorite words? And so I was like, I have 2. And so I started writing them. And then I started writing all these other words, and I was like, and I like this one, and I like vicissitudes, and I like quintessence, and I like… So, one of the kids said, well, what does serendipity mean? And I went through this long story about these students. Basically, this one kid whose name I didn't know, um, it happened that I found it out in a matter of 2 minutes, quickly, beautifully. And saw him around the corner and knew his name that he didn't think I knew. But I told this long story for like 7 minutes and they're all like… to the point where they're like, where is she going with this, and why is she telling us this story? And I ended it with [clap] and that's serendipity. It's just this beautiful marriage of all of these circumstances coming together, magically, in a way you never would have seen. And they're all like, oh, ask her another word. Like, I never would have done that before. I never would have let them in. I never would have, um… you know in my first probably 5 years I probably wouldn't have done that, because I viewed that as unprofessional. Like, we're not… you know what I mean. I see what you're doing. Don't ask me my favorite words. Maybe I wouldn't have said that, but I would have said, let's stick to the lesson. Um, now I'm, it's… we can have those moments where they can see me as human and I feel more

effective when they they see me as a human.

I: Yeah. How about… so you mentioned data, using that as a measure. Do you find that you seek out professional development as a way to help yourself feel fresh or effective or, um, and does praise from peers or supervisors play a role in your sense of effectiveness or accomplishment?

R: Um, I seek out professional development if it's something that I can benefit from on a personal level as well. Um, I feel like the better… and it's the, you know the term for 2017 and 18, being more mindful, right, and being more present. So when I went to the [recent] conference, it was, I went to all of the mindfulness things. Right? Like, how can I make my kids more mindful? Can I get them to journal more? And how am I more mindful? And how can I make [my children] more mindful? Um, and so, I approach especially professional development on a more selfish level and go, you know, if it's all about brain-based learning, I'm like… ack… dry. Sounds awful, and I don't go. But if it's, you know, inside the outdoor classroom, I'm like, I like the outside, I'm going to check that out. Or, snow science workshop, I'm like, maybe I can implement that into English, but it sounds fun for me. Um, is that because I'm older, I don't know. What was the second part of your question?

I: Um, well, let's see. Does praise or feedback from peers or supervisors play a role?

R: I… It doesn't play a role, but depending on… I would say depending on who it comes from and how it's delivered, it feels good to get praise. Not often, and not… not in a… um… superficial way. I will share a story that I thought was really cute and it was touching to me. You know, our secretary [name], I try to reach out and have a personal moment. How are you doing? How's [your husband]? Being connected, right? How are things? And she has that soft, lilting voice, and we have funny moments and funny stories. But for the most part, she's a little bit introverted. And in some ways I'm introverted, too, and so I just try to respect that about her. So one day I was in the copy room, and she says, [whispers] come here, come here. And you know our wall of the little things, right? The little papers.

I: The shout outs.

R: The shout outs. And I'm like, what does [the secretary] want? I took attendance. That's awful, right, but that's what I'm thinking. And she says, do you see this? And she said it's from [the principal], and it was, like, a little shout out, like, to me, thanks for being great or something and for the support. But she blocked out the thanks for being great, or whatever it was, and she goes, that's true, we all think that. And I was like, gosh, thanks. And I didn't even know who wrote that. I thought it was like my friend [name], like thanks [name]. See ya later this weekend and we'll hang out. But that it was from my supervisor and that she had pointed it out and made it known to me felt a little more special.

I: Definitely. That's it in a nutshell. Is there anything else that, like… If you had a piece of advice for somebody who was starting out in the career right now in terms of just how to be sustainable in the career. Is there any nugget that has helped you sustain this career for so long?

R: It's a list of don'ts. Don't do it for retirement. Don't do it for the summers off. Don't do it for vacations. Don't do it because you get planning periods. Don't do it because you think it's easy. Don't do it because you think [sarcastic] kids are fun. Don't do it because you think [sarcastic] you get to color. Do it because you really enjoy kids and you like learning. And you hopefully have a couple skills in there, too. Um, [colleague's name] and I like to say… he says, there are 2 types of teachers: those who loved being in school and learning and growing, and those who never evolved past where they ended in school and they just want to go back to those kind of glory days and live in that little nugget of their memory. I always say there are, and where we differ in this is I say there are 2 types of teachers: teachers who are in it for kids, and teachers who are in it for themselves. They often fall into the same buckets, um, but I'm not… I'm certainly not here for the pay. But I'm not, you know what I mean? Because some people get into it because it's easy and it looks easy and you get to talk to… no. No, no. And summers off, and I get to work other jobs. No, you… I'm in it for the kids. I like that relationship I have with each kid. I enjoy being with, I know people go, junior high, oh, god bless you. This is a fun age, still, for me. I haven't gotten to the point where I'm like, I'm ready to strangle them. No. High school, you know, if I ever flirted with switching jobs, I would flirt with the high school. Um, I don't think I would break out of teaching. I like it! I still like it. I'm still happy to come to work everyday. I don't wake up and go, ack. I don't at all. I'm still happy to be here everyday. Hi, hey! How is it? How are things going? And maybe that's that connectedness. I don't think I'm… I do it consciously and I don't think I'm really aware of it. But I circle around. I'd like to talk to everybody a little more. There's more connection I'd like to have, um, you, for instance. [Both laugh] But you know what I mean? But those people that I do circle with, that… that gives me… I feed off of other people's energy. I have my own energy, I know what that is. But when, when other people can work with me, whether they're kids and they're excited about something or I'm just aware of that. I don't know if sensitive is the right word. But it fuels me to be around other people. I hope that helps.

I: Absolutely! Thanks!

Participant C
Interviewer (I): I'm going to start with connectedness. So, how do you maintain a sense of connectedness to those around you?

Respondent (R): Like, personally, professionally?

I: All of the above. I'd love to hear about all of that.

R: Ah… ah… Um, well, obviously my wife and I live together and we're married. So,

we do email with each other like everyday at work. We do that, and that's just kind of like a, hi, how are you? What's going on? Do I need to get this? So we connect that way during the day 'cause we're both just so busy and it's easy to do. Um, obviously, I, you know, talk with… honestly I'm not very connected… I'm close with my brother and sister; we do not talk on a regular basis. You know, I'm not the type of person that calls them all the time or anything. We just don't really do that. We're close, but we don't connect in that regard. My mom, we do, I do talk and Facetime and stuff like that with her on a regular basis, at least once a week. Um, but we're much closer in that regard than my brother and sister. Um, and then, I'm the type of person that doesn't really need a lot of social interaction because I get so much with my job. So, outside of work, I don't really have… I mean, I have a lot of close friends that I went to high school with and things. But we don't, you know, talk on the regular or anything like that, so. I get… I'm kind of a loner in that regard. I don't really need a lot of social interaction, you know, personally. Um, I don't know. It's just a very general question, so I wasn't sure how to answer that.

I: No, definitely. Well, so I'll clarify. Is there anything that you find yourself doing to connect with colleagues at school?

R: I mean, you know [1st name] and I work… since we started working at the same time together, right next door to each other, we talk all the time. Um, my wife calls her my "work wife." Because we just spend so much time and we have in the past over the years developing lessons and curriculum. Um, and so we've spent a lot of time doing that. We don't talk as much as we used to because we're just further down the road and have taught all these lessons a million times. But, yeah, she's one, and obviously [2nd name]. And [3rd name] and I coached with one another, so, you know, that was a natural outlet. Um, but our whole department all works really closely. [2nd Name] and I are friends outside of school. We mountain bike and do things like that together. But, um, yeah, we're pretty tight-knit for the most part.

I: Um, what about, like, students? Are you deliberate about building rapport with students?

R: Ah, yeah, very. I mean, I try to be pretty formal. You know, I don't really tell them a whole lot about my personal life. Or anything like that. I try to be pretty neutral with students. Um. Here it's much easier because it's such a big school. You know, when we worked at [a smaller school] it was much different because I'd have the same kids for like 3 years in a row. So, you know, obviously they got to know me in a different level than, like, these kids do. I mean, our nanny is a sister of one of our former students. You know, and so, we're like… one of our students like adopted a cat that we had, a stray cat we found in our neighborhood. Like… you know, I mean, it's a closer vibe there because it's so small. You know, that's a school with only 120 kids, 6 through 12. So, you know, it's… You just get to know people a lot tighter than here.

R: Yeah. You mentioned formal… keeping things like formal and neutral. Do you feel

like you had that same mentality and it's just the nature of the time you spent that was different there?

I: Yeah. Just 'cause it's, ah… I don't know [laughs] how to really describe it. It's, ah… You just get to know people so well. I don't feel like… I'm glad I don't know people in that regard, in the same way here just because the blending of personal and professional was like a little too blended, you know? Um… working at a school like that… um. And, so, yeah. I'm glad to have more of a distance. Like, it's getting weird now, where I go to [grocery store], and I know people. You know? Like, I'm going to see somebody I know there. Whereas, um, when I worked in [previous city], I lived here still. So, I didn't really come across students, you know. I wouldn't be hiking in [local park] and just see somebody I knew. Whereas, like, if I go there now, I will, just because I've been here long enough and met enough people. So, I don't know. I don't really feel like I'm answering these correctly.

R: No, you absolutely are. Staying on the theme of relationships. Um, what's your approach when you have, like, a challenging relationship with a student? Or a… How do you navigate a relationship with a challenging student?

I: I guess humor is probably the best avenue, if you can get them to laugh. I had a student earlier - I don't know if you want me to say names of students.

R: It doesn't matter.

I: I don't know if you have [student]?

R: I do.

I: Like the first couple weeks, I just chewed his ass every day. And quickly found out that wasn't getting me anywhere, you know? And so, like, I just started playing around… I just started like, okay, I gotta lower… change the… I gotta just take the bar off with [student]. I don't really care when he turns anything in. I don't really care how complete it is. I just want him to, like, participate. Be there, be present. And so, and play around with him and have fun. And, he's a kid that, like, gave me presents at Christmas time. Granted, I think it was just like junk lying around his house. But… you know, like. It didn't work with a student like that to, like, I'm going to ride him hard and then he'll… you know… break, you know. Um, he's not like that type of student. So that's an example. I don't have a lot of behavior problems just because I'm pretty strict and I'm pretty, like, sit up, put that down, put the book away. You know, I'm the type to quickly discipline kids all the time. But… um, yeah, I think humor. I mean I've had some kids that I've never been able to break through. I've had a couple. Not many, but a couple like that. Where it's like, there's nothing redeeming in them. I can't find anything that I can hold on to and say, there's a sliver of hope. Um, I have had a couple like that, but not very many. I mean, like, a handful in all the years.

I: Does that kind of stick with you…

R: Oh, big time.

I: Or is it something…

R: Oh, it sticks with me. Oh, yeah. I can still name the kids… those kids, big time. The kids that you connect with, years go by and you will totally forget about them. Unless it's like a really, really, really deep connection. But, I don't know. I forget… Again, I see kids at [the grocery store] and I'll… I don't know your name, even though we literally spent days together in the same room. If you add up all the time. Um, but, yeah, the kids you don't connect with, those are the names, yeah, I'll definitely remember those ones. Yeah.

I: I'm going to shift gears. Um… So part of why I'm doing my research um… and one of the cornerstones of teacher burnout and teacher retention is stress. So I'm wondering how you personally cope with the stresses of the job.

R: Um, I don't know. [Laughs] I workout a lot, so I ride my bike a lot. That's kind of my therapy, for the most part is… I'm not like [colleague], but I love riding my bike. It's my favorite thing basically to do besides to be with my wife and child. You know, so. I love doing that. Um, I do it as much as I can when the weather's good. So that's kind of my main outlet, really. Um, obviously my wife's a teacher so we talk a lot about… about the job. Although, we've done it so much that it gets to the point where I'm like, oh, another story about a kid. I just tune out after a while because we've done it for long enough. Um, I mean those are my biggest outlets for stress. I try to always maintain the… somebody… I did a professional development one time, and somebody told me that in a, let's say you have 25 days of teaching in a month, you're going to have 2 amazing days, 20, like, 2 bad days, and 20, like, normal days. You know? Like, that's what you're going to have in a month. So I try to remember that when, in case a lesson goes bad, or I'm like, oh, this sucks, or why am I even doing this? You know, because it's like this roller coaster that you're always on. And I even feel like people that I know that have been teaching for a long time, they tell me the same thing. Like, it's not like it get easier - it get easier after, up to a point in teaching, and then it sort of plateaus, I feel like. And then you just ride that roller coaster. You know? Um, that's what I feel like. So I don't get too up or down with things. Um, I, like, try not to. But, you know, it happens. But. The longer you do it, the easier it gets to teach, but it's still the grind of doing it… It's just a job, it's doing it everyday, it's getting up, and doing it. And that's the hard part. So. I mean, I drink, too. But that's not really, like, my outlet, you know for dealing with stress. But, you know, if it's been a bad day, then it might be. [Both laugh]

I: Um, do you set limits to your work day?

R: I no longer take… I don't really do… I don't take homework home anymore. I used to. I don't really do that anymore. I try to do everything here. Um, I don't work as much

outside of school as I used to. Mainly because I've developed all these lessons, I've taught them a zillion times. So I don't have to do all the work that I did when I first started. Like, that, like, the first couple years, or when you change schools. That's where all the work is outside of class. Like, I used to do crazy amounts of work. I don't do that much anymore. I can pretty much just wake up and think in my head what I'm going to do and I can do it. But I couldn't do that, but it took a long time to get to that point. You know? So, that's a big limit for me. I try to leave work here as much as possible, but I'll still be doing stuff you know, at home, or the night before something. You know, there's always something I've got to do, so. But I try not to do it because there's more work than you have time to do work in. So. Um, but when, yeah, when I first started teaching it was a lot of work. I mean, just crazy amounts. But it was also at a school like [previous school], teaching 6 different classes. Teaching different subjects. Doing all that. And so when I got this job, I'm like, you want me to teach 2 classes? Like, I can do that in my sleep; that's easy. You know? Or, like, teaching 1 class, like [colleagues' names] does; that's all you do is teach this one class? It must be really easy. I guess I had baptism by fire early on and that made me, kind of like really used to a heavy workload. So this never seems like much.

I: Yeah, and so. I'm wondering just about sort of that balance of how you used to spend your time and, like… It sounds like the planning has alleviated some, because that's more…

R: The planning is done. I mean, it's not done, because there are always changes. I like to do new things; I get bored if I'm doing the same thing every year. But the majority of the work is done. And I, and the thing is again at a school like [previous school], I never had the opportunity to teach the same lesson more than once. It pretty much happened and was gone. Whereas, here, I actually get to know the lessons very well. And every year, I'm like, oh, yeah, this is that one joke I make every year in this lesson. You know? You remember that. Like, it comes to me on the day. Like, we were doing the Oregon Trail today, and I was like, can you imagine how many times they said, "Are we there yet?" You know, on the Oregon Trail. Only 6 months it took you to get there, if you lived. But, you know, I just remember those things now, because I've done it so many times.

I: Yeah. How has your grading load changed?

R: It's changed a lot. I give hardly any homework, maybe one assignment a week, like maybe.

I: Was that true at [previous school] as well?

R: No. I gave way more homework there. Way more.

I: Okay, so that's been an evolution since you got here.

R: Huge, huge. I give less work every year. Way less. I do assessments, quizzes or tests, whatever, at least once every 2 weeks. That's my main form. Um, I do projects here and there with the 7th graders; I do a lot of them with the 8th graders because I teach the honors kids and they can pretty much do anything you tell them to do. And… So… I do lots of the fishbowls with the 8th graders. That's my main thing. And it's very subjective. Um, but that's… I do a lot. Them in conversation with one another. And me, just sort of as the passive observer. Or, the person that sets it all up and figures out what they're going to talk about. But then I kind of want them to be on stage, 'cause I think they learn best when they learn from each other rather than learning from me, so… Um.

I: And that's, like, you say, a lot, I mean…

R: Like, a lot. Like, we've done at least 10 so far this year, which is a lot. Which is, in some years I did 3.

I: So are you doing that, like, for, kind of, formative? Or for summative assessment?

R: Yeah, I'll do it as, I've done it as summative assessment. Like, we did a whole, like, last year or the year before, we did our whole revolutionary war unit, and then I told them, I'm going to give you 3 questions about the revolutionary war, you need to research and prepare for all 3 questions, you're going to show up one day, you're not going to know what question your group, your fishbowl part you're going to be in. And that's going to be your test, that's your entire test is what you do in those 15 minutes you're in that fish bowl. If you feel like you need to say more, you can come see me. But… I had this professor in college who would do things like, ah… You did bad on a test? Okay, come to my office, tell me what you know. You know, like a masters defence, you know, like that kind of stuff. That really shows you what kids know, I feel like so much more than a fill-in-a-bubble or some score on a test. Like, that doesn't really tell you what they know. But it's hard to do that with a lot of kids. And I still don't really know. And I tell them at the beginning, I don't really, I mean these, I'm giving you a grade, but I don't know. I just look at the kid that blows my mind, like, I'm going to give him an A, okay, alright. Um… I don't even know… I try to give them, like, some criteria I want them to follow, and, like, here's what I expect you to do. I want you to show me that you're listening to people and not just waiting to talk, you know, like, refer to other people's comments, agree or disagree, build off what other people said. Um, use text evidence, you know, we always say that, use evidence to support your opinion. But don't just read me a paragraph and be like, sweet, I used evidence. No, because, like… Analyze it, judge it, you know, all the higher level thinking stuff. So I do that. Um, but like the other day, I had these, I got these new Chromebooks, and I had the kids do a fishbowl about manifest destiny. And, like, I had them do… comment. The people on the outside who are normally kind of passive, instead of being passive and waiting to ask, for me to pick on them to ask a question, they were chatting online on Google Classroom about what was going on in the fishbowl. And the people in the fishbowl were looking and seeing what other people… I mean, it was one of the best ones I've ever done. And I was like, nervous about doing it because I was like, I don't

know… I've never done it before. But the kids loved it. They walked away and were like, oh my god, can we do that tomorrow? And I'm like, no, we don't have time to do this everyday, but. I don't know, I mean, I like to use discussion as much as possible even though it's hard to grade. But I don't really care about grades. Grading is not important to me really at all.

I: And to what extent does that come up in parent conversations? Like, you know, you hear some teachers like, oh, I have 8 million parent emails.

R: Yeah. I don't know. With the honors kids, some of the parents, half of the parents love it. They love that I don't really care about grades. And that, guess what, your kid is probably going to get an A in this class because if they get a B that's like an F for these honors kids. Um, but some of the parents do want the hard and fast, why is this wrong? You know, they want that, it's not 2 plus 2 is 3. You know, they want it to be the obvious, objectively wrong thing. And I just try to tell them from the beginning, I'm just not really into that. This is like history. I don't ask them what date things happened and look for the right answer, I want their opinion on it, you know? Is manifest destiny good or bad? Justify it, that's what historians do. They don't like, just, you know, here are some answers. How many people died in the battle of Waterloo, you know. I mean, I don't really care about that stuff. So, that's what I want, and that's what I try and push parents on parent night. Like, that's what I'm looking for, is for your student to be sort of an historian. And, just be… use some evidence to support their opinion, and use it effectively. And that's what I try to teach them how to do in class. So… I don't know, that's where I kind of gear the whole class towards. And that's why it works really well for these kids, because they will work really hard. The 7th graders is harder because of the population. It's hard to do things like that, because some of them are so concrete, they can't see the shades of grey, they can't see the abstraction, and that's really challenging. So I don't really do much of that with the 7th grade. They're much different classes, um, as far as how I teach them.

I: Going back to the grading then. So, um… In terms of actual paper management then, is it really just assessments?

R: I do a lot of, yeah, I do a lot of assessments. I do a lot on Google Classroom. So, I've been trying to cut down on paper volume, like, a lot. So I give them a lot of… any, most assessments, I almost always give them on Google Classroom on forms, so they get their score back right away. It's more efficient, I feel like. Um, but I don't… Anything I give them on paper, I give them a rubric. Anything. I don't just give assignments, just do this and turn it in. I used to do the, looks good, check, next. Check. And that, I just was like, why am I doing this? This is pointless. It doesn't really… They don't even care, you know. Um, so like, I did these political cartoons, like, with the 7th graders, you know the other week. And, I give them a pretty specific rubric. And I'll take an entire class period to go over the rubric, because to me, like, dude! This is how I'm going to grade you. You may want to follow this, you know. So, I'm like very rubric oriented when it comes to paper assignments I actually give them. Projects, presentations, I don't do papers,

'cause I'm like, that's what the English department does. I don't really do that. Um. So, I try to use that as much as possible. But otherwise, I'm not a big, let's do this packet of work kind of… I don't really do that. It just doesn't seem, like, useful to me. I'd rather have discussion in class. To me, like, that shows me what you know, you know. Like, you and some others get up to the whiteboard and tell me about the 5 pillars of Islam. What would be the hardest one for you? You know? Like, do the higher level thinking stuff that I did in graduate school, for crying out loud. Not, like. When we were in school, like, when it was like, do the chapter 12 section review, kids. I don't even give them the textbook anymore in 7th grade, because I'm like, I've developed all of this stuff, I basically have my own textbook. So, um. I try not to do that. Like, old school, busy work, you know, unless I've got to be gone or something for a day. Then, they're probably going to do that.

I: Um, you mentioned coaching before. Um, how do you decide what you're going to participate in that's school related but outside of your teaching role?

R: Um… Coaching was hard, because I'm, I quit, I'm not doing it anymore. I was never into football. I never even played football when I was in school. I played soccer. Um, and I only became a football coach because somebody asked me [at my previous school] to do it. And so I did it for 3 years there. And then they wanted a coach here, so I did it for 2 years here. But this year was my breaking point. I was like, I can't do this. I can not get home at 5:30 every night, see my daughter for 2 hours and then put her to bed. Like, what the hell? So I can spend all this time with other people's kids? That's crazy. I don't even like this sport, I mean, I don't. It's stupid. I just did it for a paycheck, and I've learned the errors of my ways with that. So, I think, like, it has to either… Honestly, I've done some things that make you look good. Oh, Greg said Empty Bowl Night was important, so I came to the Empty Bowl Night my first year here. You know, put a face on. He wanted somebody to go to the school board meeting about the character thing, sure, I'll do it. I'll go talk to the school board. I've done some things that make me look good, and, like, put your face in front of people. You know. Um, for the most part, I'm here to teach. And I teach from 7:40 to 2:40. I've done all the extracurricular stuff at [previous schools], I'm like, I'm not really interested in doing that. That's not what I'm here for.

I: And you just say, no. And it's okay.

R: Say no. I mean, I'll do some chains at the football game next year, I'll do that, you know, and make a 100 bucks or something. But, I don't know, it's just not worth it. I would do things like that for money basically, but I don't really care about money that much. I mean, obviously, I'm in teaching so… It's obviously not that important to me. But… I've done… Ever since my daughter was born, I'm like, pfft, I'm not wasting my time on that. You know, if I don't have to stay for it, I'm not going to, you know. But, like, if it's really important, like the awards night or something, I wanna come because that's important for those kids, you know. Um, but. I don't know. A lot of the other things, like… I always say, like, oh, I'll go and listen when they're doing like the play

rehearsal or something, and I'll be like, I should really go. And then I'm like, eh, no, I guess not. Ah… I've just become way more, like, you hired me, you hired me to teach. I'm gonna teach. And extracurriculars… I'm just not as, I feel like I've done it. I don't really need to… I'm not like [colleague coach], where it flows through my veins and I have to coach. You know, that's just not me.

I: Cool, thank you. I'm going to shift gears a little bit. Um, let's see. So, what makes you feel a sense of personal accomplishment?

R: Kids saying they like the lesson. I mean, if they are… Or when they talk about the lesson, walking out the door. You've heard that. When I hear kids that say, coming in the hallway and their friends told them something we did in class. Like, how can I… Like word of mouth, that's the best form of advertising, right?

I: Yeah.

R: To me, that's like, you can't do any better. I mean, yes, it's nice to have a parent email you, or have somebody talk to you, or… Like the parent teacher conferences are usually pretty good. Like, people like usually like… Their students usually respond to me, the ones that come, you know? And say they like the class and give me lots of warm fuzzies and stuff. But, like, when the kids themselves are doing it, you know. Or like, when the parents are like, oh yeah, they told us all about such-and-such lesson. You know, that makes me feel pretty good. That, that like… That will keep you going for a long time. You know. Like, you have like… I always tell my wife, because she's really struggling with teaching and having the baby, and she's going to be taking a leave of absence for the next year. She's taking the year off to be with the baby. And I was like, do it. You know. Even though she is an art teacher, you know, which I equate to PE teachers. But, um. I always say, like, oh, what are we, what ball are we playing with today, you know. But, anyway. Um, I always say look for the one small, look for the small things. You know, the small, little accomplishments. The little… little comments a kids says to you. Or I love doing this, or… To me, like, that's what I do it for. You know, the small, little details, the little happy moments. Those are the best. I don't need the big, here's an award, you're the best type thing. I just look for daily little… There's always going to be something small and good, you know. The… One of my, my sister always does the: what's your rose and your thorn, you know, when they talk at their dinner table. Okay, what's your rose and your thorn for the day? So my wife and I try to do that sometimes. And sometimes, I'm like, I don't wanna fricken do that, you know. But, you know. You gotta try and find something, because it's hard to, um… You can't look for big, you're the best Mr. [last name], you know, things. You can't look for that all the time, 'cause you won't have it a lot of days. So. But, yeah, word of mouth from kids says a lot to me. You know, like… When they're like, the come back from lunch and they heard something that happened in class, I'm like, oh, sweet. They learned something. You know?

I: Yeah, they took it outside the classroom.

R: They took it outside. They're still thinking about it, you know. That, that means a lot. So, that's what I look for the most.

I: Um, related to personal accomplishment is feeling effective. So, how do you maintain a sense of effectiveness?

R: Pfft. I don't, I don't know. I have no idea. I don't know if I'm really effective. I really don't. I can only tell if I'm effective when, like, a kid takes my idea and goes so far beyond it, you know. And, I always feel effective that way. Where, like, I gave them, like, kind of an unfinished map and they drew the rest of it. Not like a literal map, a metaphorical map. To me that… To me, that is the most important thing. And just like, being a good person. You know, I'm big on, like, manners. You know, like… Somebody sneezes, I'm going to say, bless you. And… you know, with in 2 weeks, before I know it, other kids are doing it. You know, I want them to like, pick up on, like, say hello to people, look them in the eye, shake their hand, be a person, you know. Like, we're here, we might as well give it a try. Which is hard with this age, but as far as effective teaching… I don't know. I struggle with it. Like, that to me, like… I think a part of it is because of the whole [state teacher evaluation process] that we're evaluated on. And scores, and tests, and… You know, we give all of these common assessments in social studies, in our department. And, you know, the kids will do well on it, but… I don't know. I mean, I don't really know if it really tells me what they really learned. Um, I don't know if there's another… That's one I struggle with. I don't really know. I just do my job, and… hopefully the kids learn something. I don't know.

I: Well, and it sounds like, um… If I'm understanding that those small moments and the kids taking the ideas, that's…

R: Yeah, that shows effectiveness to me. I mean… Uh… But yeah, I still don't really know… I think if the kids are…if they're like, active, they're engaged, they're participating. If I feel like there's a… we're into this, you know, I mean, I think… I noticed recently this class I have 5th hour has really been one I've had to crack the whip with all year. Just 'cause there's a lot of big personalities in the class and things. So, I've just been laying into them, you know, recently. Just laying into them. And, all of a sudden, I've noticed there's just kind of a vibe that's gone over the room recently where, they kind of come in and they realize, like, oh, crap, he really wants us to learn, you know. Like. They've been, like, starting to respond. But it's February. It's taken me till February to get that. And it's come and gone in different… you know, ebbs and flows. But. That to me shows me I'm effective. Like, at least they've learned my style. I feel like that's so much of being a student. What's the teacher's style? Can you respond to their, to how they teach? You know, you gotta learn how they teach. And I feel like they are finally, are like, oh my God, he wants us to really have our binder out everyday. Oh my God, he really wants me to shut up and not talk. Oh my God, he wants me to sit up. Or… I don't know, I feel like they finally are coming together. Where my other classes have all figured that out, all figured that out in October. You know. But this class, it's

like, I've just had to work them, the whole year, you know.

I: Yeah, I can relate to that. So, if you weren't feeling effective, would you seek out professional development? Or does praise or feedback from peers or supervisors play a role there for you.

R: That does, more than… I've had very few good professional development experiences. I just really haven't. I just… It's always just somebody reading off some PowerPoint to you. Oh, great, here we go. How many hours of this do I have left? I don't know. I just, I feel like people… with professional development especially, they say one thing, they do another. You've got to create this engaging, effective lesson, but you know how I'm going to present this to you? In the least engaging and effective way possible. I've had very few… I did a couple terp classes with my wife 'cause I had to do this induction program. She was going through the terp program at the BOCES which is like being paid to student teach basically. So I had to go to a couple of those, and there were a couple teachers that did it the way it should be done. Which is: I want to teach you to be an effective, engaging teacher, and I'm going to do it in an effective and engaging manner. You know? And that was really good. But I haven't had very many of those. Ah, from colleagues and from [administrators], that means way more to me. Just because they're seasoned, they've all been around, they're all good at different things. Like [colleague 1] is super good at differentiation, you know. [Colleague 2] is really good with, like, hard luck, the hardscrabble kids, you know. And so they'll teach some of my lessons, and they'll be like, oh my God, that apartheid lesson went really well. And I'll be like, sweet! You know, that means a lot. And… Whereas I don't get that same satisfaction by doing a lot of the PD stuff that I have done. But maybe I haven't done the good stuff, I don't know. So…

I: Okay, cool. I keep finding myself ending interviews with just, um… Is there anything that you would tell someone coming into the profession in terms of what you think the key to your longevity has been?

R: I don't know. I mean, I do have a kid from [local college] coming here tomorrow that's doing some student observation. And I love to get these kids. Come up to the front of the class, tell us about yourself. And don't just sit there in the desk, you're going to help me teach. Come on! Let's do it, this is what we do, you know. This is what we do all day. Um, I think the biggest thing is, for me, for somebody… if you want to be good at it. Because, here's the deal, it takes a lot of work to even be mediocre at this job. That's the thing, that's what's crazy about it. But, um, I think to be good at it and to have longevity, I think you have to really love it. Like, you have to just… Like, I love history. I just, it flows through my veins. I was doing a lesson plan the other day about Babylon, and I came across some documentary on YouTube about the tower of Babylon and I ended up watching the whole thing. I'm not even teaching it, I just love it. You know. So you have to be genuinely enthusiastic about it, because the kids sense a fake in like, a mile away. So, that's… to me, you have to be genuinely interested in it. Like, I could never do math, because math to me is stupid, you know. I learned all the math I need to

know in 3rd grade. I don't need to do the x squared, b squared, whatever crap. Like, that, to me, I don't have a passion for that. But if you do, be a math teacher, you know. Or be an engineer and make twice as much money. But, like, passion is one. The other is just like, you gotta be willing to just strap on your boots and just work. And know that it's not always going to go well, and be okay with that. And that's hard to do, because I am kind of a perfectionist, and I always want things to work out the right way. But, you know, they don't. And you've got to get used to that. Um, I'm just trying to think of something that's not too generic, but… For me, the passion is all of it. Also, the other thing I'm going to… I tell everybody is, you need to, like, my first job in education was a one-on-one sped para. That was my first job. When we moved here, that was my first job at [school name]. I was a one-on-one sped para. And I'm like, if you really want to do education, you've got to do all of it. Be… work in special ed. Or go observe, eh, math. You have to do all the parts of it to really appreciate it. And, like, that was one of the best experiences I ever had was doing that. And it was only for like, 2 months, before I got a teaching job that I did that. But, that was great, because I got to really know what it was like. To be, like, in 8th grade again, basically. You know, with this handicapped kid. And, ah, and that was, that was a great experience. And I still think about that a lot. But, um… Yeah, you just gotta be willing to try. And, it's going to be hard. 'Cause, I remember somebody told me, like, yeah, you know your first 4 or 5 years are really hard. And I was like, 4 or 5 years?! What are you talking about?! That's crazy! So you have to be willing to do it long term. You gotta really enjoy it. Build relationships with the kids, that's the other huge thing, you know. You've got to get them… relate to them as a person, you know, not just some talking head, you know. So, I don't know, that's kind of where I'm at. But, yeah. You gotta love it! If you don't love it, just don't do it. I can't imagine, you know, having a job… I mean, I've had jobs where you stare at the clock half the day, you know. Pfft. That's no fun. You've got to really love it. And, so… I feel like, when people are like, how's your job going? I go, I love it! I love my job! You know, like… I don't know what else to tell you. It's like… But anything you love, there's good and bad about things that you love, you know. And it's not all puppy dogs and rainbows, so. Um, yeah.

I: Awesome! Well, thank you.

Participant D
Interviewer (I): Okay, so to start off with, I want to talk about relationships and how you maintain a sense of connectedness with those around you.

Respondent (R): Okay.

I: And this could be at school, at home, with kids, or with adults. Any of the above.

R: Okay. It's, um… We are very involved in our church. Um, and we have a group, like a smaller group of adults that get together every other Friday. Um, my wife is extremely social and extraverted, so she keeps us pretty busy. And, um, getting together with friends for dinner is a big way we do that. Um, I don't do social media; I'm a

face-to-face kind of guy. Um, so, that's a lot of how we keep, kinda that relational, social piece in our lives. I'm not that connected at work; when I was single, I was more connected at work. But I have a lot of friends and relatives kind of outside.

I: How about on the kid side? Do you have any deliberate ways that you foster relationships with students? Or foster report?

R: Um, not so much. Um, being a math teacher in junior high is kind of not the best subject to teach in junior high. And I teach a lot of kids who struggle in math, so those are strained relationships even to begin with. So, um… 'Cause we even thought about moving in the district, and we were like, no, I think it'd probably be better to have some distance, you know? I have relationships with some of the kids here just because we… I used to be a neighbor with a 7th grader here, so obviously we have a relationship. But I don't do a whole lot with students outside. Um, when I coach, that's a way I get some… you know, I can do that. I've taken a break from coaching. But, um, I did that my first 2 years here, and I'll probably do it again next year. And that… that to me is the best way to build relationships with kids, that's hard to do in a classroom. 'Cause as a coach, I have something they want. Math, not so many kids want… to be good at math, but they want to be good at sports. So it's just a totally different dynamic. Yeah.

I: Yeah. And you do teach some tough cookies. So, how do you… Do you do anything when you come across somebody who is a hard nut to crack? Or do you kind of just roll with it and wait it out?

R: It is a mixed bag. You know, I'll try a bunch of different things. And some things work one day; it's not going to work the next day. It's like our own kids. You know what I mean? And I don't spend as much time with these kids as I do with my own kids, so I don't get a chance to, kind of, see what works on a more-regular basis. But, it's amazing. Sometimes you'll think, wow, that was the hardest interaction, and then they come back the next day like, it has positively impacted them. But you just never know what's going to impact them. Yeah, so I try all kinds of things with different kids.

I: Can you describe your feelings of investment in your students?

R: Good question. Um, it's interesting. When I was single, I had more time to be invested. And I coached more, and that was awesome. And I remember a lot of coaches complaining, I hate when my parents won't pick their kids up ontime. And I was like, I love that time, because I could get one-on-one with kids, you know what I mean? So, I'm not as invested with my students here. One, I have a lot more students than I had in the past. And I'm not coaching as much as I used to. So I'm not as invested, kind of outside of the classroom with the kids.

I: Do you have… do you have an extra class this year? Or is it just class sizes in general?

R: Just class size compared to other schools I've been at. You know what I mean, so when you have a smaller number… And I used to teach PE, which is completely different, you know what I mean? 'Cause you can have those conversations a lot better in the gym than you can in the structured classroom.

I: Uh-huh. Yeah. Good. I'm going to shift gears a little bit. So, teaching can be stressful, and I'd love to hear how you cope with the stresses of the job.

R: Um, one is exercise. This is year 5 here, so now I'm getting in to a better exercise routine. Um, but that's crucial. But year 1 and 2, I couldn't do it, you know. So, the joke was, I'd try to work out once a month. [Both laugh] And then, it slowly became, now it's down to once or twice a week. It's still not where I want it to be, but that's a big way that I cope with it. Yeah. I'm not bringing as much stuff home, which is nice. I'm still here… I don't know how people get out of here at 3:10 everyday. I don't know how they do it. I can't do it, you know. So. It's stressful; it's a lot of work. But I've done other things that are even more work, so it's… 'Cause I used to be a business consultant, and we'd work 60, 70 hours a week, so it's…

I: Keeping that perspective, yeah?

R: Yeah. But a little bit of venting. And you've got to be careful… Like, my wife unfortunately is the person I vent with the most. You know. 'Cause I've been burned venting at work.

I: Oh!

R: Yeah. You know? So, and even just asking questions, I've been burned at work. So, work, I've learned is not a safe environment to have those conversations. So I keep them outside of work.

I: And, how does your wife feel about that?

R: She… well, she gets it. And she's like, well, just quit! And I'm like, no, no, no… no, it's not that I want to quit. These are the hard parts about the job, but there are so many things that attract me to teaching. Like, one is just the challenge. And fortunately, I like a challenge. And… I think this is the hardest age, you know. And I think math, science are some harder subjects. So, unfortunately, I find myself in a hard situation. You know. But the kids are doing well here.

I: Does she ever say, like, enough work talk? Or do you ever consciously shut that down?

R: Um, I try not to do it too much, you know. Because, I used to do it more, you know, in my earlier years. I do it less now, because when it's not that helpful, I'll shut it down, because I don't want all of our talk to be about work. And there's less stress now because

I've gotten in a routine. 'Cause we have a math book that is this thick; it used to be twice as thick. So guess what I had to do my first 3 years here. Create all the extra practice that is no longer in the math book. So that's a lot of work. I mean, you probably know that. You've got to create your own curriculum, and that's a lot of [laughs] work. But my wife notices a difference. Yeah, she's like… And I told her, give me 5 years and it will all calm down.

I: Yeah, yeah. So, recharging, exercise plays a role. What about more on the day-to-day, like, venting, anything else.

R: In the mornings, I used to have more of a quiet time. So, as a Christian, my quiet time is reading the bible and praying. Um, I'm doing that less now because I've started doing some mobility exercises in the morning to kind of help with my physical health, you know, so you can only… there's only so much time in the day. But, that's the other way I recharge.

I: Do you consciously set limits to the work day?

R: Um. Those are set for me. My wife's like, I need you home by this time, or you need to pick up your daughter at this time, or I'm going to drop your son off at this time. You know what I mean?

I: So there are natural limits. Yeah, okay.

R: So, those limits, unfortunately I don't set too many of them.

I: But in terms… I mean, you could extend your day by taking stuff home, and you said, that's not happening as much anymore?

R: Right, yeah. Absolutely.

I: And then, how do you set boundaries in participation in school-related activities that are outside of your teaching role? Like, you mentioned coaching, but the other activities that happen here? How do you decide if you're going to do them?

R: I don't do a whole lot of them. Yeah. Some of them I do. When my daughter was here I was more involved in some of that stuff. Yeah. So, I'll occasionally watch a sporting event. But I just don't have time for it. So, when my 5 year old is in kindergarten, it might change a little bit.

I: Yeah. So, I'm going to shift gears again, and this one's kind of abstract. But, um, what helps to make you feel a sense of personal accomplishment with your life?

R: Um, sense of accomplishment. Um, I'll start with school. Um, just… the kids are doing so much better than they did when I first started here. I mean, I was so depressed, I

had so many Ds and Fs. I'd never even seen that before. So, we've done some stuff, kind of placing kids a little differently. And I've been really involved in that. We've done that online program, which has helped considerably. So, just kind of seeing, just… I think a significant change from when I was here in my first, my first couple of years. I mean, we'd average like D or F on exams, and I'm like, what is going on? You know. So, um, just the fact that the average now is a B, I mean, that's obviously just, it's different. And we haven't changed the tests that much.

I: Yup, okay.

R: You know what I mean? So, that's… that's a huge accomplishment. Having kids come after school; every week I'm here Tuesday until 4 o'clock. I say, that day, I'll be here for extra help. And I have a handful of kids coming. I have less kids coming, which is good, because a lot of kids were misplaced and used to need so much support that we can't do in the classroom. You know? So I see a sense of accomplishment grade-wise, but also kids coming and getting help after school. You know, parents either commenting, emailing, phone, or personal, thank you. You know. So, I see that happening in school. Um, some of the relations with kids, I've been able to spend more time on personal relationships and less academic relationships as that's gotten kind of more at a place where I think it should be.

I: Yeah… Can you elaborate on that?

R: Yeah, so. For example, I'm going to have… I'm probably going to have 8 peer tutors next year, between [homeroom] and class. I couldn't even approach doing something like that in the past because I didn't have my classroom set where I would be able to take advantage of someone that could help. So, I have kids, who I look out… so I have relationships with, it's funny, because it's mostly 7th grade girls, you know what I mean, who are responsible kids, positive kids, that I want helping me next year in my classroom environment. So, those are better relationships. Um, we have some kids that want to move up in math, so I'm working on those relationships. They're coming and working on the computer, kind of like doing some work on their own. Um, so, I don't know if that makes… if that's answering the question or not.

I: Yeah.

R: And then at home, outside of work, accomplishment. Um, I mean, it's a lot with just our kids. You know, just building an environment where they can be successful. And spending time with them. Yet, there's, you know, ups and downs with raising kids. But we have a daughter who's doing great at the highschool. Um, so I think that's probably my biggest role right now, is to be a dad and to be a husband. You know. Um, but I've intentionally kind of held back on some personal relationships, like, my other friends invest in those. And hopefully I can get that a little bit back more in balance, because that's important as well.

I: Um, going back to the students, you talked about the numbers of Ds and Fs. To what extent do you track student data to measure your effectiveness?

R: Tons. All the time.

I: Like, formative? Daily? Weekly?

R: You know, um, it's just, it's, I don't, I mean… Yeah, daily, hourly, like all the time. I mean, I don't know how to teach without doing that. You know, and then someone starts to, their data starts to fall. You know, multiple things, not just grade-wise. You know what I mean? Participation in class, like, homework turn in, and then they either come in to Access, they come after school. I mean, there are so many different ways that… It's basically, not doing the work is almost not an option. And to me, that's more important than my personal relationship with the child, because I'm hoping that they're going to see that they've got to develop that. You know. So I had a parent email me yesterday; they're on a trip, at the airport. She's like, my son's doing math, he's working on his missing assignments, much to his dismay. So our relationship is strained, but, I mean, I don't… to me, that's the lesson that we're trying to teach them. So.

I: Are there any… so data would be one here. But are there any other strategies that you lean towards to help you maintain a sense of effectiveness or personal accomplishment? Like, seeking out feedback from peers, or from supervisors, or professional development? Things like that?

R: Um. It's funny, we talk a fair amount in the math department, but it seems like this year, everybody just seems so busy with their own thing. I think, because I feel like as a department, everybody's life outside of school has gotten, for whatever reason this year it's just been kind of a busy season outside. So, we're not collaborating as much as we have in the past. Um, I don't seek that as much. You know? I think early on I was, because I was like, what in the world is going on? You know? But I feel like I'm starting to get stuff figured out. Um, and that will probably change here pretty soon, I'll be kind of like, I don't have it figured out as much as I think. But because things are working, I'm not seeking that feedback as much. You know? And I'm not getting observed as much. Like, the first year, you're observed all the time, and now [administrators] are hardly ever here. So, um. Yeah.

I: So it's not playing as much of a role?

R: Huh-uh.

I: Awesome, well, I appreciate your time! Thank you.

Participant E
Interviewer (I): I want to start out by talking about relationships. And I'm wondering if you could describe for me the relationships you have both in and out of school with

important people in your life. How you foster relationships, and how you maintain relationships with others.

Respondent (R): Okay, um. So, fostering relationships. I am not all that social, so I don't have that many. But for me it's just someone who I enjoy being with, and if that is the case, then I like to see them professionally and spend more time with them and on rare occasions, even sometimes see them outside of work situations. Um, and then maintaining, I just… I wish I was better, but it's just treat… it's the Golden Rule kind of things. When I am treated well, it makes me feel good, and so I try if I can to make others feel the same.

I: How about with students? Is there anything that you feel that you do deliberately to foster relationships with students?

R: Yeah. I think a… a personal relationship is extremely important for successful teaching. And so, you know, that's just a matter of picking up on their interests, trying to notice what they are good at, pointing those things out, joking around a little bit. While school is extremely important, trying to get ah, a personal connection and mostly trying to have a little fun, because that's for me the biggest factor in all of this. If it's enjoyable for me, then it tends to be enjoyable for them, and then I think that I have a pretty successful relationship with that kid.

I: Is there anything in particular that helps you feel invested in students?

R: Um, well, I think as soon as they are "my" student, then I am already slightly [invested]. And, um, and so then I feel that it's not only my duty but it's my professional integrity that I, that I take some sort of role in that kid's life. The amount of role I take is… varies quite a bit, but I think the biggest thing is, just somehow it's an ownership. Like, that's my kid, and therefore I feel he has to be… I have to have put in some effort for this child. So, I think that's my biggest thing.

I: And what do you do if, if it's a challenging student or somebody who doesn't mesh with your personality or whatever the situation might be there?

R: I'll try several tacks, and if one fails, I'll try something else. Um, and then, and this is the older I get, what I've realized is, I now write them off much more quickly than I used to - which is wrong, but I do it - because at some point I say well I've tried those things that I've been successful with and they have failed and unfortunately I have so much effort and so much time and another life and so I don't put in those efforts that I used to.

And I used to go to extraordinary lengths, I'll go to their game or I'll try to see their interests outside of school and look at their stamp collection - no one does that anymore. And I don't do near that that I used to. I used to do a lot of that. Time has changed.

I: I want to shift gears a little bit here. So, I'd love for you to describe how you cope with the stresses of the job.

R: Alcohol. No, no, that's how you burnout, right? Exercise, I think. I think a regimented exercise. And then I never did for the stress but realize I think that has been extremely helpful. For me, my bike ride up the canyon has probably extended my career by a decade at least. Because it is my time to think about the day, to think about the good things, to think, boy, did I screw that up, I wish I wouldn't have done that, I'm not going to do that again. That time away from everyone. And if I didn't do that - I couldn't have done it at home, because at home there's too much. And so for me, it's that hour and a half or so where I can have the time to think and to think how am I going to do this, how am I going to fix that, I have the following 12 things coming. So that's been my biggest thing. Without that, I don't know that I'd still be teaching.

I: Do you think you could have gotten that same end without the physical exertion part?

R: Ah, maybe, because my first 5 years of teaching in Chicago, well, a few years anyway, I had a long commute. And the time was pretty similar. And it was good, but the physical part seemed to get rid of more of the stress. So sometimes I'd be more wired at the end, because now I was dwelling. Whereas otherwise, and I don't know if it's endorphins or fatigue, but it seems that at some point I go I'm done for the day. So, yes, to an extent, but not as… it would not work as well.

I: Um, so sort of related to what you were just saying there, at some point you say I'm done for the day. Do you find that you deliberately set limits to your work day?

R: I do, but - and I, the last few years I have been more strict on that - but it's been common throughout my career to have my day extended and part of that is coaching, but many, many hours past when I wish I was home. Because I know sitting the next day is that activity that is not prepared or whatever or I'm so far behind or some combination. So, sometimes it was open ended and 9 o'clock wasn't all that uncommon. That has cutback, so lately and part of that is I don't change much anymore because those days are exhausting and so now I'm like it's good enough.

I: What about setting boundaries for school-related activities that are outside of your teaching role, like you mentioned coaching, do you find that you deliberately set boundaries for how much you're participating.

R: Much more than I used to. I have cut back on - other than coaching - I used to try to attend a lot more games and work the games. And I said, something has to give, and that was one of the first things that went away.

I: So how do you decide what is enough for you?

R: For me, that was cost-benefit. So for that large amount of time - and it wasn't the cash - but it was, it was fun to pop in and watch a kid's game for 20 minutes. But to work a 5 hour track meet, no, because I've got 2 kids and I just, I have to pick up kids or do whatever, so it was, can I get that connection with the child in a half hour? I can still do it. 5 hours, it's gone.

I: So again, shifting gears. Um, I'm wondering what helps you to feel a sense of accomplishment in your job?

R: Oh, um. Enjoyment of a lesson for the kids. Ah, just ah, something where students are engaged, asking questions that show that they've been paying attention and are interested - questions maybe beyond the scope of a lesson. And, it's… doing something new and having it succeed. It still is a pretty good, pretty good sense of accomplishment. I've had a few this year that are just wonderful. So, all those things that were early on, I think we forget that that's a real buzz. That you go, wow, that was a really good lesson and that was enjoyable. So, those things that excited me 25 years ago are those same things that do it now. But, there are just fewer of them because, so much of it… it's just Groundhogs Day - we just know exactly, we do the same thing everyday. So there's not a lot of those moments compared to before.

I: Um, how - let's see. Can you think of any strategies that you use to maintain a high sense of self-accomplishment?

R: Ah, I… um, I guess for me it is just, being prepared. When I am prepared - when I'm winging it, I'm just going to survive this, I'll get through the day, but you always feel bad after. But when it's prepared and you're thinking this is going to be a good lesson and you walk out the day prior thinking it's all there, I know what I'm doing and it's the right length of time, it's going to be engaging. So it's upfront leg-work. That gives me the best chance of having an accomplished good lesson versus bad. So, being prepared.

I: Like, do you find that participation in professional development relates to your sense of self-accomplishment? Or, um.

R: I think almost all of that is individual. I haven't found, I have not, with some exceptions, I have not gotten a ton of accomplishment from Hub, etcetera. While enjoyable, I have rarely… So as far as that portion.

I: And do you feel like at any point in your career that that was different? That, like, you did find that those professional development opportunities helped you to feel like you were being more effective.

R: In coaching I do. Those were extremely helpful because there was so much technical stuff in the background. And there was some, sure, especially if I had a weakness in a subject area and I got to listen to an expert. I can think of Sam Malazo up at UCCS. And that was very helpful. And then therefore gave me a better feeling in the way I taught. I just, I witnessed some excellent stuff. And then I thought I could maybe have the skill to maybe pass that on myself.

I: Um, what about praise and feedback from either peers or supervisors? Do you feel like that plays any role in your sense of accomplishment?

R: I think, yeah, we're humans, we can't help that. And it's, it's always really nice. I think internal is more important. But, you know, I think it's nice to get a little pat on the back every once in a while, sure.

I: And to what extent to you use student data to…

R: Not nearly as much as I should.

I: But in terms of, like, personal accomplishment? Do you reflect on that data.

R: Oh! Yeah… I do! If there's a, especially something challenging, and we've really been working hard, and it comes back and the students have shown some great success, yes. If they've shown growth in a lab report, or they conquered a challenging test, it could be individual or wow, look at these kids, they've really knocked it out of the park. So, yeah, there is some that says well, I had a hand in that. Where they didn't know it before and now know it. So, yes, there is some.

I: Going back to connections with other people. Um. You're married. How do you maintain a relationship with your wife? Like is there anything in particular that you guys do or that you have…

R: We've struggled because sometimes she just like, you're still there, I don't want you around. Um, so for me, it's - that's when it's, oh, wow, I have to shut this down, and share the fun stuff, but don't dwell on it, right? I try to do a split with stories. I complained, so now I have to tell something good. So, it's either ignore it, or make sure that I share, oh this funny thing happened, and this kid was great. And those are the pleasant stories. That's better for the job and relationship. So, forcing yourself to say something good about it, which is hard sometimes.

I: You've been in the game awhile. Um, what - like, what advice would you give to somebody entering the profession?

R: Don't. Ah…um.

I: What do you think has added to your longevity in the classroom. You mentioned the bike rides being very instrumental in that.

R: That, and I swear for me it's habit. I'm just such a man of habit that I get up everyday and that's what I do. So that's a big part of me. Um… I guess, it has to be intrinsic, because as soon as you start comparing, and going, well, I'm busting my butt and so-and-so is not, and he's getting paid what I am, it all starts to crash down. And I have to force myself to say - and they may be saying it about me - but that is… I have to keep that separate. All I can do is affect myself. And if they're getting away with stuff, I just have to ignore it. Because if I harp on it, I think it destroys teachers. Because they're like, well, he does less, and then you get bitter and the only solution is to do less, because now it's equitable, but then the kid gets screwed. So, for me, that's the biggest one, to ignore what everyone else does. You can compliment, you can take things from them, but to not dwell on others who are doing what you consider to be inferior work, because it will kill you, in my opinion.

I: Any final thoughts?

R: I - as much as I've enjoyed it - I'm looking forward to the end. And I think that might literally be physical, I'm just really tired right now.