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Breaking Point: An Examination of the Factors and Motivators That Determine Whether a Teacher Will Stay in the Classroom or Choose to Leave the Profession

Katherine Treloar
University of Denver

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Abstract

Teachers are quitting the profession in droves, leaving classrooms empty or overcrowded. As a result, students are receiving a sub-par education from unexperienced or underqualified teachers (Watling et al, 2010). Retaining teachers for more than five years is no small feat. Teachers face unrealistic expectations, chronic high stress, and mental and physical health problems that lead to widespread burnout. However, some teachers are able to overcome these obstacles and stay in the profession for long periods of time (Buric & Penzic, 2019). This study identifies the internal motivations and external factors that influence teacher job satisfaction and describes how those motivations and factors work together to influence a teacher's behavior.

The theoretical framework for this narrative study is Social Cognitive Theory. The study reveals how the internal motivators and external factors a teacher faces influence job satisfaction in a post COVID 19 landscape.

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Paul Michalec

Second Advisor
Norma Hafenstein

Third Advisor
Brette Garner

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Katherine Treloar

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Advisor: Paul Michalec

Author: Katherine Treloar
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Abstract

Teachers are quitting the profession in droves, leaving classrooms empty or
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Chapter One: Introduction

Introduction

When I became a teacher, I believed I was entering a hallowed profession where I would be a respected and celebrated member of my community. I would help shape young lives and would provide interesting and engaging learning opportunities for my students.

I served my community for nine years, teaching in three different schools. I strove to create exciting curricula that would help my students hone the skills they would need in subsequent grades and throughout their lives.

I loved teaching. I loved listening to my students make connections between literature and their personal lives that I never would have considered. I enjoyed the challenge of coming up with fresh ideas to get them excited. I enjoyed experimenting with different types of instruction and learning from my successes and my failures. I looked forward to school, and I missed my students during breaks.

Until I didn't. There came a time in my career when my passion felt like it was suddenly absent. I no longer cared about creating interesting learning opportunities, the idea of grading student essays made me sick, and I would sit in my car for at least fifteen minutes when I got home just trying to get the energy to face my dogs. I dreaded going to school and relished my breaks. I daydreamed about other jobs, other fields, and of the school suddenly shutting down for an extended period of time.

It wasn't until COVID hit and the school was actually shut down for an extended period of time that I realized that I was suffering from an extreme case of burnout. The perpetual pressures that I placed on myself as a teacher combined with the external pressures I faced to perform and to get my students to perform on tests had finally taken their toll. I suffered from a variety of stress-related illnesses that took months to resolve. Even after two years out of the classroom I still feel sick to my stomach when I think of teachers going back to school after break.

After reflecting on my career and its sudden demise, I began to wonder if I was alone. Unfortunately, my experience is not unique. Twenty percent of teachers leave the profession within their first five years (Sims & Jerrim, 2020). This high attrition rate leaves classrooms empty, costs school districts money, and leaves students learning from inexperienced teachers (Watling et al, 2010). All these factors contribute to lower student achievement (Blatchford et al, 2011).

Retaining teachers for more than five years is no small feat. Teachers face unrealistic expectations, chronic high stress, and mental and physical health problems that lead to widespread burnout. However, some teachers are able to overcome these obstacles and stay in the profession for long periods of time (Buric & Penzic, 2019).

When considered through the lens of Hertzberg's Motivation Two Factor theory, the reasons that teachers experience burnout and eventually leave the profession become much more apparent (Praston & Powell, 2021).

Hertzberg's Motivation Two Factory theory states that in order for a person to be happy in their job certain factors must be present. Conversely, if other factors are present they can be a detriment to job satisfaction and can ultimately cause employees to vacate

their positions. Hertzberg labels factors that lead to job satisfaction as *Satisfiers* and factors that lead to job dissatisfaction as *Dissatisfiers*.

Table 1

Motivations from Hertzberg's Two Factor Motivation Theory

Satisfiers	Dissatisfiers
Performance and achievement	Salary
Recognition	Working conditions
Job Status	The physical workspace
Responsibility	Relationships with colleagues
Opportunities for Advancement	Relationships with supervisors
Personal Growth	Quality of supervisor
The work itself	Policies and rules

These categories, derived from Hertzberg's Two Factor Motivation theory, outline the different internal and external motivators and factors that influence job satisfaction.

Internal Motivators

The Work Itself, Responsibility, Personal Growth and Performance and Achievement are all powerful internal motivators that can affect a person's job satisfaction. People who feel that their work is important and who take personal satisfaction in completing their work are more likely to be satisfied in their positions than people who don't. People who are performing their jobs at high levels and who feel that they are able to grow and improve also find higher levels of job satisfaction than those

who don't. These internal motivators are important to consider when considering job satisfaction.

External Motivators

Recognition, Relationships to Supervisors, Policies and Rules, Working Conditions, Salary, Job Status, Opportunities for Advancement, Quality of Supervisor, Relationships with Colleagues, and The Physical Workspace are all external factors that affect job satisfaction.

In order for teachers to continue to teach satisfiers must outweigh the dissatisfiers. When the dissatisfiers compound on one another, teacher burnout occurs and leads to the widespread loss of experienced and talented teachers from the profession. A review of the literature revealed that many teachers who identify as being burnt out report being subjected to multiple dissatisfiers including working conditions, physical workspace, relationship to supervisor, salary, and policies and rules. These categories are important for better understanding the internal motivators and external factors that affect teacher burnout. When considered together, they provide important insight into why teachers are experiencing high levels of burnout and are choosing to leave the profession.

Working Conditions

Many teachers state that the unrealistic expectations and the extremely heavy workload that they face on a regular basis leads to stress and stress related illnesses (Brassfield et al, 2019). When teachers are expected to not only teach, but also to act as social emotional coaches and disciplinarians their stress levels increase (Barnes, 2019). Overtime, these high levels of stress can lead teachers to suffer from stress related

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illnesses including heart palpitations, sleep difficulties, extreme exhaustion, anxiety, and depression (Merida-Lopez & Rey, 2017).

The heavy workload that teachers face not only causes them undue stress, it also causes teachers to feel inadequate. Carroll et. al (2021) report that teachers are often given so many tasks that they feel they cannot complete them all to their high personal standards. This makes teachers feel like they are doing a poor job and that their students are missing out on high quality learning opportunities.

Not only are teachers overstressed, they can also be subjected to both physical and verbal violence from their students (Moon et al, 2020). These kinds of interactions with students cause teachers to feel unsafe at work.

Physical Workspace

Not only are the working conditions less than ideal for teacher retention the physical workspace also plays a role in teacher dissatisfaction (Carroll et al, 2021). Teachers often complain that the resources they are provided with are ineffective (Harris et al, 2019). When teachers are provided with ineffective teaching resources they often feel compelled to gather or create their own resources which leads to a heavier workload.

Some teachers state that there is a lack of technology available and that there are not enough training opportunities for them to learn how to effectively use the technology that they do have access to (Carroll et al, 2021). This leads to feelings of frustration and contributes to the overall unhappiness that many teachers experience.

Relationship to Supervisor

Teachers relationships with their administrators play an important role in their job satisfaction. When their administrators are weak teachers report feeling unsupported and

unrecognized (Ellison & Woods, 2019). Recognition is strong motivator that affects job satisfaction. When a person feels recognized they take more pride in their work and enjoy their job more. With the heavy emphasis on standardized test scores teachers often suffer from not being recognized for their hard work at all, or only being recognized if their students score well on standardized tests. As a result, the internal motivation of the teacher suffers because they do not feel recognized or successful (Ellison & Woods, 2019).

The lack of support from administrators is especially apparent when it comes to dealing with student discipline problems (Harris et al, 2019). When teachers are left to deal with discipline problems on their own their attention is taken away from teaching and is redirected on quelling classroom disruptions. These disruptions make teaching more difficult and lead to feelings of helplessness (Kaynak, 2020). Teachers who faced either physical or verbal violence in the classroom reported that the lack of support from their administrators after the incident was more a factor of their leaving than the incident itself. (Moon et al, 2020). When teachers feel helpless or unsupported their job satisfaction plumets and they are more likely to face burnout. Returning to a position where they feel they do not have control or where they feel unsafe due to poor student behavior raises teacher's cortisol levels and results in higher levels of stress and anxiety (Merida-Lopez & Rey, 2017). This in turn causes teachers to burn out and leave the profession.

Salary

Salary is also a condition that teachers complained about. According to Klimek (2019) teachers earn 30% less than people working in fields requiring comparable

degrees. When teachers realize how little they make compared to people in other professions it makes them feel like they are less valued members of society. These feelings of unappreciation and of being seen as unimportant by the greater society lead to feelings of burnout (Harris et al, 2019).

Barnes et al (2019) state that declining pensions also lead teachers to vacate their positions. A low salary combined with a declining pension make teaching a monetarily unsound activity.

Policies and Rules

By far the greatest factor leading to teacher burnout and the mass exodus of teachers from the profession are the policies and rules that teachers must work under. Klimek (2019) writes that not only are the stringent policies that teachers face difficult to maneuver they also reduced the way that teachers are regarded as professionals. Klimek (2019) goes on to write that when the larger public sees how many rules and policies are in place to police teachers and the way that they teach they begin to regard teachers with distrust and to believe that they are not capable of doing their jobs without extreme oversight. These attitudes demoralize teachers and leave them feeling unappreciated and unimportant.

Brasfield et al (2019) state that policies like *No Child Left Behind* increase stress and fuel burnout in teachers. The increase in teacher accountability and standardized testing has left many teachers feeling inadequate and has led to bullying from administration. The constant pressure to get kids to perform well on standardized tests wears on teachers and leaves them feeling apathetic towards teaching and their students (Kaynak, 2020).

Not only is standardized testing a great dissatisfier the constant changes in curriculum and curricula that is over complicated or too dense contributes to teacher burnout (Carroll et al, 2021). Teachers report feeling frustrated with having to learn a new curriculum as soon as they have become familiar with the old curriculum. This constant change prevents them from becoming experts and reduces the effectiveness of their teaching (Carroll et al, 2020).

When these factors are considered it's no wonder that 16% of America's teachers leave their classrooms each year (Harris et al, 2019). The toxic environment created by unrealistic expectations, a daunting workload, unsupportive administration, and degrading policies combined with an embarrassing salary push teachers towards burnout at an alarming rate. 20% of the teachers in the United States quit teaching after five years (Wiggin et al, 2020) and 59% quit before reaching retirement (Jerrim, 2020).

As a teacher in the Aurora Public School district I saw these factors at play against teachers every day for nine years and fell victim to them myself. I watched as fresh new teachers full of enthusiasm and new ideas were crushed by policies and red tape that eventually turned them into cynical and apathetic educators before they left the profession all together.

Even worse I witnessed children being taught by teachers who were so burnt out that they had no energy to adapt to their changing student body and instead continued to teach in the same way they did twenty years ago. These teachers didn't enjoy teaching, but stayed because they were close to retirement and had no idea what they would do instead.

Each year the schools I taught at would go through high amounts of turnover. New teachers would come in an need to be coached on where things were and which curricula we were using. They would have to set up their classrooms and would need to get to know the student body and their fellow teachers. This period of transition was hard on both the teachers and the students.

Teachers came and went and negativity reigned supreme in the hallways. People were miserable and being forced to hold their frustrations and disenchantment in only made it worse (Buric et al, 2019).

However, in this miasma of negativity and despair there were shining lights of positivity. Teachers who, despite the odds, were happy. Teachers who enjoyed teaching and looked forward to every day they had with students. Teachers who couldn't imagine doing anything else and who didn't want to do anything else.

These rare specimens stood apart from their peers. Their excitement for each day stood in stark contrast to their coworkers who eagerly awaited the end of day bell.

Running into a teacher like this was a rare treat. They often gave excellent advice for how to help a struggling student because they had been teaching so long that they had seen almost everything. They were willing to sit down and problem solve in positive ways and could navigate changes in curriculum and expectations with apparent ease. While they clearly had some bad days they didn't let those days bog them down or dampen their spirits. They never considered leaving the profession and seemed to glow with a secret light that kept them safe from the conditions that took so many of their compatriots down.

These teachers are the focus of my study. The factors that not only keep them in the classroom, but that allow them to thrive as teachers are of upmost importance to me. I believe that when we begin to understand what drives teachers like this we can begin to support other teachers in new ways that will actually result in their staying in the profession.

Research Problem and Significance

Research Problem

Districts around Colorado are experiencing high rates of teacher turnover, which leave many classrooms empty or overcrowded. To combat high rates of teacher turnover it is important to understand what motivates teachers to not only stay in the classroom but allows them to thrive in their positions. Understanding these motivations can help create policies that support and motivate teachers to continue teaching and allow them to thrive as educators.

Significance of the Problem

Teachers are fleeing the profession at an alarming rate, leaving classrooms full of students without teachers. At the beginning of the 2022-2023 school year, 722 teaching positions remained unfilled (Colorado Department of Education, 2023). This is a 64 percent increase from the previous school year and indicates that the trend is not slowing down.

The ongoing teacher shortage has not only left classrooms empty but has forced class sizes to sky-rocket. Larger class sizes lead to decreases in student achievement and increases in poor classroom behavior (Blatchford et. al., 2011). This in turn leads to increased pressures on teachers.

Teachers complain of burnout due to extreme stress, unrealistic expectations, and reduced feelings of accomplishment (Camacho et. al., 2021). These factors, combined with the physical and mental illnesses that teachers endure, have pushed many skilled and experienced teachers out of the classroom. This mass exodus from the classroom drains school systems of their most valuable resources. When experienced teachers leave there is no one to mentor new teachers or take up teacher leadership positions in the building. Student achievement suffers as a result as does the morale of the remaining staff (Cardichon, et.al., 2020).

This issue is not isolated to the teaching profession. Health care professionals, childcare workers, and social workers are reporting high levels of burnout and are vacating their positions as well COVID -19 brought to light many of the societal issues inherent in the caring professions, including the unrealistic demands placed on caring professionals, unsafe work environments, limited amount of personal time, and low wages (Schroeder & Leighton, 2023).

Madigan and Kim (2021) performed a meta-analysis to better understand teacher burnout. They discovered that teachers suffer from both physical burnout and mental burnout. These two factors combined lead to intense job dissatisfaction—and ultimately— the decision to leave the profession. The intense stress teachers endure day to day and from year after year causes them to become cynical and disconnected from their students and colleagues, and it can manifest as depression and anxiety.

COVID 19 had a huge impact on the way our educational system is viewed by parents, students, and community members. Post COVID many teachers report feelings of disregard and outright anger and resentment from both parents and students (Pressley,

2021). These feelings translate into behavioral problems in the school and contribute to anxiety and compassion fatigue in teachers (Yang, 2021). There is intense pressure from school districts to get students caught up and to make up for the loss in learning time that students encountered during the pandemic. These new pressures that teachers face have not been thoroughly studied and need to be understood in order to help create policies and procedures that will increase teacher job satisfaction and keep teachers from vacating their positions.

Teacher retention is an equity issue. Schools in "hard to serve" areas suffer from higher rates of teacher attrition and more teacherless classrooms. This in turn negatively affects student achievement. Learning opportunities do not occur without teachers. High-level learning opportunities occur when students are taught by experienced teachers who are committed to the profession and to their students. In fact, students who have effective teachers for three years in a row score 50 percent higher on standardized tests than students who do not have experienced teachers (Klimek, 2010).

If we hope to create equitable learning opportunities for all students, we must be committed to creating and supporting positive teaching environments for teachers. Teachers who thrive in the classroom are better able to connect with their students and treat them with higher levels of empathy and care (Brasfield et al, 2019).

Study Purpose

The purpose of this study is to determine what internal motivators and external factors influence teacher job satisfaction and their ability to thrive in their positions. This study offers a unique window into the internal motivators and external factors, and how they work together to affect teacher job satisfaction in a post COVID world.

Research Questions

The research questions examined through this study are:

1. What internal motivators influence teacher job satisfaction?

2. What external factors influence teacher job satisfaction?

Research Design and Methodology Overview

This is a narrative study that delves into the personal stories of eight veteran teachers post COVID. Data from the study was examined through the lens of Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) in an attempt to determine how the internal motivations and external factors that a teacher faces influence their job satisfaction and decisions about whether or not to leave the classroom.

Based on the literature, job satisfaction is often an indicator of a person's intent to leave or stay in their job (Perrachione et. al, 2008). For the purpose of this study, job satisfaction will be defined as the level of enjoyment one feels in their job (Lankford et. al., 2022).

This qualitative study was conducted through a series of interviews with eight veteran (five or more years of experience) teachers who teach in the Denver Metro area. Four teachers are planning to return to the classroom during the 2023-2024 school year. The other four teachers have left the profession within the last three years.

The interviews were conducted during the summer of 2023. They were recorded and were coded according to a code book through the lens of Social Cognitive theory. Through my analysis I discerned patterns and themes in the motivations for teachers to both stay in and leave their positions.

Strengths and Limitations of the Study

This study has many strengths. First, this problem is extremely relevant to our educational system. Teachers are leaving the profession at an alarming rate and understanding what factors help them decide to stay in their positions is of paramount importance if we hope to keep teachers in the classroom. The juxtaposing insights of these teachers enabled me to truly understand the factors that are motivating both the teacher who is staying and the teacher who is leaving. It was interesting to understand what kept the leaving teacher in the classroom for as long as they stayed, and what finally made them decide to leave and how those factors are similar or different to the factors that motivate the staying teacher to stay.

This qualitative study is important because it lifts the voices of the teachers who are in the classroom and experiencing the phenomenon firsthand. Because of the personal nature of teaching and the nuances that are inherent in the profession, it is impossible to understand the experiences of veteran teachers without speaking to them. This study allows veteran teachers to speak freely about their experiences in the classroom and about the internal motivations and external factors that influenced their decisions to either remain in the classroom or to leave.

On the other hand, time is a major limiting factor in the study. If I had more time, I could have interviewed additional teachers.

Summary

COVID changed the world and people's perceptions of education and our educational system. Teachers are leaving the profession in droves. Classrooms full of students are devoid of teachers. The absence of teachers from classrooms hurts the educational opportunities of these students and causes them to fall behind their peers who are fortunate enough to learn from an experienced teacher. Without teachers, our educational system cannot function. It is extremely important to understand the factors that motivate teachers to retain their positions so policies can be created that protect and elevate these factors in an attempt to keep teachers teaching.

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

Theoretical/ Conceptual/ Empirical Basis

The theoretical framework that was used to frame this systematic literature review was Hertzberg's Motivation Two Factor Theory. Hertzberg states that there are two categories of factors that increase or decrease a person's job satisfaction. If one category outweighs the other, the person will either be satisfied or dissatisfied with their job.

Understanding teachers' motivations to either stay in their positions or leave the classroom is important for understanding and why teachers stay and the factors that allow them to thrive in the classroom.

Literature Review Purpose

The purpose of this literature review is to analyze existing literature that focuses on the factors that allow teachers to thrive in the classroom.

Literature Search Procedures

Literature Review Method

Inclusion Criteria:

1. The study was published in English in a peer-reviewed journal.

2. The study focused on veteran teachers (5+ years).

3. Participants taught grades K-12.

4. The study examined internal motivations, external factors, or both that influenced teacher job satisfaction.

Electronic Database Search

ERIC and PsycInfo were both searched using the following search terms between 2017-2022: ("teacher" OR "educator") AND ("resilience" OR "thrive")AND ("elementary education" OR "elementary school" OR "primary education" OR kinder* OR "grade 1" OR "grade 2" OR "grade 3" OR "grade 4" OR "grade 5" OR "middle school" OR "grade 6" OR "grade 7" OR "grade 8" OR " high school" OR "grade 9" OR "grade 10" OR "grade 11" OR "grade 12")

The initial search of the ERIC database yielded 270 articles. Of these 222 were excluded based on disqualifying information reported in the title or abstract. I reviewed the full text of 48 articles. Of these, 17 articles were excluded because the teachers studied had been teaching for less than 5 years (k=9), or the study was not focused on the factors that allowed teachers to thrive in the classroom (k=7), or the study was focused on substitute teachers (k=1).

The initial search of the PsycInfo data base yielded 121 articles. Of these 116 were excluded based on disqualifying information reported in the title or abstract. 5R articles were duplicates of articles retained from the ERIC search.

Hand Search and Ancestral Review

After performing the initial searches of ERIC and PsycInfo, I executed an ancestral review of a prior literature review (Booth et. Al. 2021), which did not yield any further studies.

Finally, I conducted a hand search of the journals *Teachers and Teaching,*

the *International Journal of Psychology and Educational Studies* between the years

2017-2023, which yielded no further articles. I also conducted a hand search of the

journal *Educational Psychology* 2017-2022, which returned one new article (Shim et al,

2022).

After performing the initial search of ERIC for the second literature review, I did

executed an ancestral review of a prior literature review (Mullen et al, 2021), which did

not yield any further studies. Afterward, I conducted a hand search of the journals

Teachers and Teaching, the *International Journal of Psychology and Educational Studies*

and Educational Psychology between the years 2020-2023, which did not yield any

further articles.

Literature Review Results

Identified Articles

The review returned 31 articles (Barnes, 2019, Baroudi et al, 2022, Buric &

Penezic, 2019, Carroll et al, 2021, Chan et al, 2021, Danijlidou et al, 2020, Mullen et al,

2021, Eginli et al, 2020, Ellison & Mays-Woods, 2019, Gilmour et al, 2022, Gray et al,

2019, Han & Hur, 2022, Kaynak, 2020, Ker et al, 2022, Mahatmya et al, 2022, Munroe,

A.M, 2022, Olivier et al, 2021, Palermo et al, 2022, Peist et al 2020, Phillips, R, 2021,

Phillips, K, 2021, Polat & Iskender, 2018, Pressley, 2021, Rajendran et al 2020, Sulit &

Davidson, 2020, Sungok et al, 2022, Shim et al, 2022, Ullukan & Ullukan, 2021,

Vincente de Vera Garcia et al, 2019 Wink et al, 2021, Won et al, 2021, Yang, 2021),

which included 31 independent samples encompassing 6,683 teachers. The teachers

ranged from elementary to high school and were all considered to be veterans (5+ years

of experience). The studies took place in the United States, Greece, Australia, Poland, and Turkey.

Themes

Six themes emerged from the literature review, including performance and achievement, recognition, responsibility, personal growth, teacher safety, administrative support and the work itself.

The emergent themes were determined based on the number of articles the theme appeared in. If the motivator appeared in three or more articles it was considered a theme. Many motivators only showed up in one or two articles and were not considered themes because they were isolated.

Table 2

Themes and the Articles they Appear In

Theme	Articles the Theme Appeared In
Performance and Achievement	(Carroll et al, 2021), (Chan et al, 2021), (Han & Hur, 2022), (Kaynak, 2019), (Palermo et al, 2022), (Ker et al, 2022), (Peist et al, 2020), (Shim et al, 2022), (Vera Garcia et al, 2019)
Recognition	(Barnes, 2019), (Buric et al, 2019), (Danijidou et al, 2020), (Han & Hur, 2022), (Peist et al, 2020),
Responsibility	(Danijidou et al, 2020), (Ellison & Mays-Woods, 2019), (Kaynak, 2019), (Phillips, R, 2021), (Munroe, 2022),
Personal Growth	(Barnes, 2019), (Carroll et al, 2021), (Han & Hur, 2022), (Ker et al, 2022), (Palermo et al, 2022), (Polat & Isekender, 2018)
The Work Itself	(Gary et al, 2019), (Kaynak, 2020), (Shim et al, 2022), (Sungok et al, 2022), (Wink et al, 2021)
Teacher Safety	(Gilmour et al, 2022), (Ker et al, 2022), (Moon et al, 2020), (Olivier et
Administrative Support	(Eginli, 2021), (Peist et al, 2020), (Shim et al, 2022), (Pressley, 2021)

Performance and Achievement

To begin with, performance and achievement, as defined by both the teacher and external factors such as administration and student test scores, were mentioned in 9 of the combined 31 retained articles. Teachers stated that when they felt that they were effective as educators they were less likely to burn out and leave the profession (Vera Garcia et al, 2019). Teachers who were given autonomy in their classrooms reported feeling that they were performing their jobs at a higher level because they were able to make decisions that positively impacted their teaching and the achievement of their students without having to worry about backlash from administrators (Kaynak, 2019). Both Kaynak (2019) and Shim et al (2022) wrote that teachers needed to feel a sense of autonomy in their classrooms. Allowing them to have this feeling of control led to higher job satisfaction and higher retention rates. Shim et al (2022) also wrote that when teachers were given autonomy, they felt more competent as educators and were able to enter a flow (high level of satisfaction while teaching) state while they were teaching. This led to higher enjoyment with teaching.

Kaynak (2019) also stated that when student achievement was high teachers felt more successful as educators and enjoyed this tangible evidence that they were competent. Palermo et al (2022) wrote that when physics teachers did not feel that they were having a positive impact on their students they were more likely to leave the classroom in pursuit of another career. Piest (2020) wrote that when teachers felt that they were having a lack of impact on their students they were more likely to become burnt out and their job satisfaction suffered.

Self-efficacy was also important to teacher job satisfaction according to Carroll et al (2021), (Chan et al, 2021), (Han & Hur, 2022), (Shim et al, 2022) and (Kaynak, 2019). When teachers felt that they could control their own behavior and overcome challenges within the classroom they were more likely to feel happy and successful in their positions. Teachers experienced high rates of burnout when they were unable to make their own decisions in their classrooms and felt micromanaged (Shim et al, 2022). Han and Hur (2002) wrote that then teachers felt limited in the techniques they were allowed to use in the classroom or experienced low levels of independence and their job satisfaction suffered.

Recognition

To continue, recognition was mentioned in 5 of the 31 retained articles. Teachers enjoyed being recognized as competent professionals and felt valued when their ideas and creativity were taken into account and allowed to flourish (Barnes, 2019). They also enjoyed feelings of success and job satisfaction when their strengths were embraced by administration and were called upon when other teachers were in need (Danijidou et al, 2020). Being recognized by a supportive administration who saw its teachers as assets and as professionals is paramount to teacher happiness and job satisfaction according to Buric et al (2019). When these factors were absent or when teachers felt that their administration did not recognize them or celebrate them as successful individuals, teacher job satisfaction plummeted (Buric et al, 2019).

Piest (2020) reported that teachers who felt a lack of recognition and respect from parents, students, and colleagues suffered high levels of burnout and were more likely to leave the classroom. Han and Hur (2022) also wrote that when teachers do not feel

positive recognition from the community in which they teach they become disenchanted with their positions.

Responsibility

Responsibility was mentioned in five of the thirty-one retained articles. Teachers who felt responsible for equipping students with the skills and knowledge they needed to be successful in life felt more satisfied and fulfilled in their positions than teachers who did not (Ellison & Mays-Woods, 2019). Danijidou et al (2020) stated that teachers who felt that they were making a positive difference in their students' lives were more likely to stay in the classroom than teachers who did not. These teachers also felt more passionate about teaching and were more willing to put time and effort into their lesson planning than teachers who did not.

Kaynak (2019) also reported that teachers who felt that they were responsible for choosing and teaching the content that was presented in their classrooms felt more successful.

Phillips, R (2021) wrote that some teachers feel that they have a faith-based responsibility to educate future generations. The teachers who participated in this study taught at both public and private schools. They felt that they were predestined to educate children and took their responsibilities very seriously. As a result, they experienced high job satisfaction and were likely to stay in the classroom for a prolonged period of time.

Some teachers felt that they had a responsibility to expose their students to subjects that they might not be exposed to in other arenas. Munroe (2022) wrote that one of the participants in their study felt that it was her duty to expose students to quality

music education. She felt that if she did not expose them to this level of education, they might not get it elsewhere and would miss out on important experiences.

Personal Growth

Opportunities for personal growth were mentioned in six of the thirty-one retained articles. Teachers who had opportunities to attend professional development and expand their knowledge of their content reported high job satisfaction (Carroll et al, 2021). Barnes (2019) writes that teachers who had frequent opportunities to develop personal and collaborative creativity felt successful in their positions. These opportunities for development also kept the teachers interested in teaching and gave them opportunities to try new methods of instruction.

Polat & Isekender (2018) wrote that teachers who had a growth mindset and felt that the organization or school they were a part of also had a growth mindset were more likely to stay in their positions because they were able to try new things and grow professionally. Ker et al (2022) write that when teachers are able to attend professional development and collaborate with other teachers, they feel more satisfied in their positions.

Han and Hur (2022) and Palermo et al (2022) write that when teachers are not given opportunities to grow as educators, they become frustrated or "stuck" and their job satisfaction suffers as a result.

The Work Itself

A love of the work itself appeared in five of the thirty articles. Gary et al (2019) studied a group of veteran physical education teachers who stated that they stayed in the classroom despite the odds because they truly loved what they did. These teachers loved

teaching physical education and could not imagine doing anything else. They loved

working with the students and loved watching them learn and grow.

Kaynak (2020) found that teachers who felt that their workload was reasonable

took great pleasure in teaching. They were able to plan and teach to a level that made

them feel successful and not overwhelmed.

Sungok et al (2022) wrote that teachers who were able to find a flow in their

teaching truly enjoyed what they were doing. They felt successful and were more likely

to take pride and experience joy in their work.

Shim et al (2022) wrote that teachers who enjoy high levels of autonomy and

were able to find their flow, an optimal psychological state characterized by the

enjoyment and absorption in what one is doing (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014), while teaching

experienced high levels of job satisfaction. These teachers reported that they loved their

jobs and truly enjoyed teaching.

Wink et al (2021) found that teachers who had high levels of empathy for their

students and were able to connect with them on deeper levels enjoyed their jobs and

teaching more than teachers who were unable to empathize with their students.

Teacher Safety

Teacher safety or the feeling of wellbeing a teacher experiences while in the

classroom was mentioned in five of the thirty one retained articles. Moon et al (2020)

wrote that when teachers were subjected to physical violence, verbal violence, or both

they became extremely dissatisfied with their positions especially if they did not feel

supported by the administration when dealing with these issues.

Gilmour et all (2022) and Olivier et al (2021) found that when teachers were exposed to acts of student violence their levels of job satisfaction rapidly decreased and their levels of burnout rapidly increased. Conversely, Ker et al (2022) found that teachers who felt that they worked in a safe and orderly environment were more satisfied in their positions.

Pressley (2021) discovered that teachers who were afraid of contracting COVID 19 while teaching experienced high levels of anxiety, burnout, and job dissatisfaction.

Administrative Support

Administrative support appeared in four of the thirty one retained articles. Eginili (2021), Pressley (2021) and Shim et al (2022) found that when teachers felt supported by their administrations, they felt a higher level of job satisfaction. Moon et al (2020) write that when teachers feel their administration is not supportive, they become unhappy in their positions.

Discussion of the Literature Review

Conclusions

This review provides a synthesis of the literature and illuminates some of the factors that allowed teachers to thrive in the classroom.

Seven themes emerged from my review of the literature. Performance and achievement, recognition, responsibility, personal growth, and the work itself. When teachers experienced these factors they were motivated to stay in their positions and felt that their work was important. They also enjoyed their work more and were more likely to put extra effort into creating high level learning opportunities for their students.

These themes support Hertzberg's idea that a variety of factors work together to influence a person's satisfaction in their job, but they fail to reveal the true complexities of how internal and external factors work together to influence a teacher's willingness to stay in the classroom. Being unable to understand how these factors and motivators work together to influence a teacher's job satisfaction would allow for a more complex understanding of why teachers decide to stay or leave the classroom. This understanding could lead to the development of policies or procedures that result in higher rates of educator retention. Despite the lack of information concerning how the factors and motivators work together to influence teacher job satisfaction, the information gathered was still important and informative. Four internal motivators and three external motivators emerged as themes through the literature review as denoted in the Table 3.

Table 3

Internal and External Motivators

Internal Motivators	External Motivators
Performance and Achievement	Recognition
Responsibility	Teacher Safety
Personal Growth	Administrative Support
The Work Itself	

While the literature review supported Hertzberg's idea that there are many different factors that influence a person's job satisfaction, it failed to shed light on how the internal motivations and external factors work together to influence teacher job satisfaction. The review of the literature also did not fully take into account the pressures

that teachers now face as a result of the COVID 19 pandemic and the changed landscape they now exist in.

Limitations

This review only examined the articles that were found in two databases, ERIC and PsycInfo. It also excluded articles that were focused on teachers that had been teaching for less than five years.

Areas of Future Research

More studies need to be performed on the factors that influence teacher job satisfaction post COVID. The COVID 19 pandemic changed the world we live in and altered the educational systems that teachers exist in. During the pandemic, new technologies were introduced (Yang, 2021) and parent and student attitudes toward teachers and education changed. Teachers now face an incredible amount of pressure to "catch kids up" as a result of the "missed learning opportunities" that students faced during thepandemic. These factors must be examined in order to better understand the external factors and internal motivators that affect teacher job satisfaction in this new landscape.

Personal Significance for Study

My literature review helped me to better understand the plight of teachers and the factors that work for and against them regarding job satisfaction. As I was reading, I could see myself in many of the situations the study participants found themselves in and could identify with both their enjoyment with teaching and their dissatisfactions. Like the participants in these studies, I truly enjoyed the act of teaching and interacting with

students, however, I also felt the crushing pressure and the weight of the untenable expectations that the participants in these studies faced on a day-to-day basis.

My experience as a teacher informed my understanding of the themes that emerged from my literature review because I had experienced the situations and environments that were described in the study. I was able to appreciate the stresses that the participants in the study experienced and understand the connections between the internal motivators and external factors that worked together to influence the job satisfaction of the educators who were being studied. This insight allowed me to garner a more encompassing understanding of how the factors and motivators influence teacher job satisfaction and helped me to come to the realization that the factors and motivators are deeply entwined. No one factor or motivator was responsible for pushing a teacher to decide to stay or leave the profession. Instead, these factors and motivators interacted in a way that would influence a teacher's job satisfaction and their ultimate decision on whether to stay in or leave the classroom.

This echoes my own experience. I was not influenced to leave the profession by only one factor or motivator, but instead I made the ultimate decision to leave when an overwhelming number of factors and motivators began to have a negative effect on my job satisfaction. Understanding how the motivators and factors work together to influence a teacher's job satisfaction and ultimate decision on whether to stay in the classroom or to leave it is important to in order to mitigate teacher burnout and attrition.

The research solidified my commitment to discovering ways to create a better work environment for teachers. It reiterated the need for information about what allows

teachers to thrive in the classroom and the importance of retaining veteran teachers in relation to student achievement.

My review of the literature also revealed gaps in the research that I feel compelled to fill. These gaps include failing to include the personal experience of the teachers in the evaluation of what factors influence a teacher to stay in the classroom. The literature review also failed to reveal how the different internal motivators and external factors work together to influence teacher job satisfaction. Teaching is an extremely personal act that is full of nuance. In his book Parker Palmer (2007) writes, "…good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher (p.10)." Quantitative studies alone cannot capture these nuances or the personal experiences and identities of individual teachers. Without a deep understanding of the experiences and identities of individual teachers it is impossible to understand why teachers choose to stay in the classroom or make the extremely difficult decision to leave. I know, that by interviewing veteran teachers and allowing them to tell their stories I can truly begin to understand what keeps them coming back to the classroom year after year to not only survive, but to thrive.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

This study explored the experiences of eight teachers and the factors and motivators that affected their job satisfaction. A better understanding of this phenomenon will help solidify our understandings of what pushes teachers towards burnout and will help districts create policies and procedures that help keep teachers in the classroom. The following research questions were examined:

1. What are the internal motivators that influence teacher job satisfaction?

2. What are the external factors that influence teacher job satisfaction?

Setting

The setting for this study was the Denver Metro area. This area was chosen because it is a diverse area that encompasses a wide variety of schools that teach students from many different socioeconomic statuses and racial and ethnic background.

Table 4

Combined Descriptive Statistics for Districts in the Denver Metro Area

Combined Descriptive Statistics for Districts in the Denver Metro Area	Percentage
Student population from historically marginalized populations	75%-86%
Free and reduced lunch	62%-72%
Teacher population from historically marginalized populations	24-26%

Researcher in Context

As a former teacher in the Denver Metro area and as one who experienced extreme burnout and eventually left the profession, I do have some biases against the educational system and the pressures that are placed on teachers. I controlled for these biases by not talking about my personal experiences during the interview or with my participants and attempted to create interview questions that were not pointed and did not lead my participants in a direction that agreed with my own experiences. After each interview I wrote down my feelings on a sticky note or notes that I revisited as I was analyzing my data. This allowed me to understand how my biases were changing as I conducted my research. I noticed that toward the end of my study or after a particularly difficult interview, my feelings toward the education system and teaching itself had become more negative. I had to remind myself not to allow this negativity to taint my analysis of the data or my subsequent interviews. I did not want my negativity to influence the way that the teachers in future interviews answered the questions.

Before interpreting my data, I reviewed my reflective notes and reminded myself of my biases. This helped me to be more aware of my biases before beginning my analysis. Because I was aware of my biases before beginning my analysis, I was better able to figure out when my biases were affecting my analysis and was able to correct the behavior more efficiently.

After analyzing each interview and then the interviews as a whole, I went back through my notes to make sure that I had not allowed my biases to influence my interpretations. When I found a questionable data point or analysis that may have been influenced by bias, I took a break and then returned to the data with fresh eyes to see if I would make the same analysis. In this way I was able to control for my biases while analyzing my data.

Participant Selection Procedures

For this study I used social media and word of mouth to find highly qualified candidates. I posted advertisements (Appendix B) for the study on my personal Facebook and in professional groups that were frequented by teachers in the Denver Metro area. These advertisements were aimed at teachers who were teaching in the Denver Metro area or people who knew teachers in the area. I decided to post my advertisement on my personal Facebook and in groups that were frequented by teachers in attempt to reach as many teachers as possible and to allow teachers to feel comfortable with reaching out to me if they were interested in participating in the study. Facebook allows for some anonymity while also creating an easy way to connect with people. Teachers did not have to sign into their personal email accounts or call me if they wanted to participate or get more information about the study. Instead, they could simply click a button to be

connected. The elimination of extra steps made it easier for more people to inquire about the study.

Advertising on Facebook also alerted people that I had known or formerly been connected to while teaching that I was performing the study. I did not reach out to individuals but hoped that my advertisement on social media would encourage people that I had known and who I knew to be great teachers to volunteer for the study. The advertisement also allowed people who were not in the field of education, but who knew an educator to reach out to their friends and encourage them to contact me. This connection transformed me from being a nameless face, to someone their friend knew. I hoped that this connection would encourage more teachers to volunteer for the study because they would not be talking to a nameless person, but to someone their friend knew. I hoped that even this small connection would increase the comfort level of my potential participants.

I was looking for teachers who had taught or were teaching in the Denver Metro area, and who had five or more years of classroom experience. I also wanted to find teachers who were not teaching or who had not taught in traditional school settings. I was hoping that by reaching out to a large number of people I would get responses from people who had taught in nontraditional settings such as Montessori schools. I believed that this diversity in teaching experiences would allow for a greater understanding of the commonalities that exist between teachers concerning the factors and motivators that influence their job satisfaction.

The advertisements fit well with my research questions because they reach a large number of teachers who worked or had worked in the Denver Metro area and resulted in a large, and diverse pool of potential participants.

I received a lot of interest from teachers and from people who knew teachers and referred them to the study. I initially had 30 teachers who expressed interest in participating in the study.

Table 5

Number of participants and where they were found

Number of participants	Source
10	Personal Facebook
12	Recommendations from non-educators who saw the advertisement
8	Professional groups

I contacted the interested parties and asked them the following questions:

1. How long have you or were you a teacher?

2. Do you teach/did you teach at a school in the Denver Metro area?

3. What was your last assignment as a teacher?

4. Are you still teaching or when did you leave the profession?

5. Did you or do you enjoy teaching? Why or why not?

By asking these questions I was able to determine if the teacher met the inclusion criteria for the study. The inclusion criteria is listed below:

1. The participant must have taught for at least 5 years.

2. The participant must have left within the last 3 years or must be returning to the classroom for the 2023-2024 school year.

3. The participant must have taught or must currently teach in the Denver Metro area.

4. The participant must, at some point in their career, have enjoyed teaching.

Fifteen of the teachers who originally expressed interest did not respond to my questions or responded after the study was complete. Of the 15 teachers who responded, 3 had left the profession more than three years ago, 2 had taught in districts that were out of state, and 1 made me feel very uncomfortable on a personal level. They asked for too much personal information and sent an excessive number of messages to me.

Of the 10 candidates who were left after the initial screening 8 identified as being female, and 2 identified as being male. 5 of the candidates were previously known by me through professional contacts and previous teaching experiences and 5 had been referred to the study or had volunteered for the study on their own and were not previously known by me.

The 8 teachers who were selected from the study had five or more years of teaching experience, were planning to return to the classroom during the 2023-2024 school year or had left within the last three years, taught or had taught in the Denver Metro area, and had at some point in their career enjoyed teaching.

Table 6

Respondent Years of Experience, Gender, Race/Ethnicity and Referral Source

Respondent	Years of Experience	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	Referral source
Respondent 1 (Nora)	12-13	Female	White	Recommendation
Respondent 2 (Bridget)	9	Female	White	Professional group
Respondent 3 (Rebecca)	13	Female	White	Personal Facebook
Respondent 4 (Hazel)	13	Female	White	Professional group
Respondent 5 (Jake)	18	Male	White	Recommendation
Respondent 6 (Anna)	10	Female	White	Personal Facebook
Respondent 7 (Lauren)	13	Female	Filipino	Personal Facebook
Respondent 8 (Iris)	10	Female	White	Personal Facebook

Lauren, Iris, Anna, and Rebecca were previously known to me and were chosen because of the passion I knew that they had for teaching. I knew that each of these candidates loved teaching and saw themselves as lifelong teachers. Tyree (1996) defines passion as the investment that a teacher has in their profession. These teachers were, or are, very invested in the profession. They took on extra learning opportunities to develop their craft and felt strongly about their decision to become teachers. They enjoyed working with students and devoted time and energy into planning engaging lessons. All of them had said at one point that they had planned to be classroom teachers until retirement. Sadly, due to workload, a decline in mental and physical health, and a reduced feeling of efficacy, three of these candidates had recently left the classroom and I believed that their answers to my interview questions would give great insight into the factors and motivators that affect teacher job satisfaction.

Jake was recommended for the study through a former colleague who had seen my advertisement on my personal Facebook and who thought Jake as a great candidate for the study. I had met Jake on occasion through professional development opportunities when I was a teacher and knew him to be a tenured teacher who could provide insight into how teaching has changed over the past two decades and how the factors and motivators affecting teacher job satisfaction had changed over time.

Bridget, Nora and Hazel were unknown to me. Nora was referred to me through a friend and Bridget and Hazel volunteered for the study after seeing the advertisement in a professional group on Facebook. These three participants were chosen based on their levels of experience. Bridget and Nora had the added benefit of having taught in nontraditional settings. The inclusion of teachers who taught in nontraditional settings

was important to the study so I could gather more data that encompassed the experiences of more teachers. By including teachers from nontraditional settings, I was able to gather data that more fully illustrated the factors and motivators that influenced the job satisfaction of all teachers rather than just that of teachers who taught in traditional school settings. Finding commonalities in these factors and motivators among teachers from different settings allowed me to better understand the phenomenon.

Grade level was also a factor when I chose my participants because I wanted to ensure that I was able to gather information from teachers who taught different levels of students. 4 participants taught middle school, and 4 were elementary school teachers. The two teachers who were not selected for the study were both elementary school teachers. No high school teachers agreed to be a part of the study.

Four of my participants came from my personal Facebook. I tried to account for shared bias and group think among these participants by ensuring that they did not work in the same school. These four participants also did not know one another. They are not connected through Facebook and do not have any personal or professional experiences together. It was important to me to make sure that my participants did not know each other to better ensure the diverse nature of my participants and better understand the commonalities that exist between teachers who had different experiences as teachers.

I accounted for my own bias by making sure that I chose some participants that I did not know before the study. Choosing teachers that I had not previously met gave me a more diverse understanding of the factors and motivators that influence teacher job satisfaction.

Participants

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6 of the participants for this study were white females. One was a white male, and one was a Filipina female. Four of the teachers were currently teaching in schools in the Denver Metro area, and four of the teachers had left teaching within the last three years. All of the participants are passionate educators.

The participants for the study had diverse teaching experiences, which are listed in the table below.

Table 7

Participant Statistics

Participant	Years of Experience	Number of Schools	Most Recent Type of School (s)	Grade Level	Teaching Status
Nora	12-13	5	Expeditionary Charter School	Elementary	No longer teaching
Bridget	9	5	Private	Elementary (Kindergarten)	Currently teaching
Rebecca	13	2	Public	Middle	No longer teaching
Hazel	13	3	Public	Elementary (5th)	Currently teaching
Jake	18	2	Public	Middle	Currently teaching
Anna	10	2	Public	Middle	Currently teaching
Lauren	13	3	Public	Elementary	No longer teaching

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Iris	10	1	Montessori	Middle	No longer teaching

Five of the participants of the study, Jake, Anna, Lauren, Rebecca, and Hazel have spent the entirety of their careers in traditional public schools. Two of these participants, Lauren and Hazel, were elementary school teachers and three of them were middle school teachers. Anna has spent her career teaching middle school in K-8 schools, while both Rebecca and Jake have spent their careers teaching middle school in traditional middle schools (6th-8th grade).

Two of the participants in the study, Iris and Nora, spent the entirety of their careers teaching in non-traditional settings. Nora taught in an expeditionary charter school, while Iris taught in a Montessori school.

Bridget was unique because she had experience teaching in a fully online setting before transitioning to a public elementary school.

These diverse experiences were important to the study because they allowed me to investigate the experiences of a wide range of teachers. This study is not focused only on public school educators, but also includes teachers from non-traditional settings. Because of this, the factors and motivators that influence teacher job satisfaction can be examined across a wide variety of settings and teachers. This makes the data more generalizable and provides a greater understanding of what influences teacher job satisfaction.

Research Design

Qualitative research allows the researcher to empower their participants to share their experiences and gives the researcher greater insight into how those experiences can illuminate the intricate nuances of the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2007). Qualitative research focuses on the human experiences and interactions that people have with the world around them and allows us to better understand the how the shared experiences of people and how those experiences shape the world around us. This study is focused on providing an in-depth understanding of the factors and motivators that affect teacher job satisfaction through the experiences of eight educators.

Narrative inquiry design is a paradigm that exists within qualitative research. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) wrote that the study of narrative is the study of the ways humans experience the world. Narrative approaches to research allow the participants to share their lived experiences in detail and helps the research garner a better understanding of the phenomenon being studied through the stories that their participants tell. Narrative is an excellent approach to answering the research questions for this study. Listening to and drawing connections between the stories that the participants in the study gave me a greater understanding of the internal motivators and external factors that work together to determine whether a teacher will stay in the classroom or will leave the profession.

The research questions examined were both qualitative and narrative based because they attempted to understand how the individual stories of different teachers could highlight the factors and motivators that affect teacher job satisfaction and eventually lead to the teacher staying in the classroom or leaving the profession.

The individual stories of eight teachers were explored through sixteen questions (Appendix A) during a series of loosely structured interviews. Each participant was interviewed once. The interviews ranged from 18 to 56 minutes in length.

Table 8

Length and Number of Interviews

Participant	Number of interviews	Length of the interview (minutes)
Nora	1	47:49
Hazel	1	24:45
Jake	1	47:58
Lauren	1	18:27
Iris	1	35:25
Bridget	1	25:09
Rebecca	1	34:38
Anna	1	56:10

Social Cognitive Theory was used to frame and guide the development of this narrative study. Social Cognitive Theory explores the relationship between environmental factors and personal motivators to describe the behavior of an individual (Yang, 2021). Bandura (1997) theorizes that human behavior is influenced by internal factors and environmental factors. The behavior a person exhibits is based on the internal factors and environmental factors that a person faces. According to Social Cognitive Theory, a

teacher's decision to continue to teach or to leave the profession is dependent upon their internal motivators and the environmental factors that they are exposed to.

Social Cognitive Theory helps to explain the interplay between the internal and external motivators that are outlined in Hertzberg's Two Factor Motivation Theory. Hertzberg's theory helps to identify the factors and motivators that affect teacher job satisfaction such as workload, personal growth, recognition, administrative support, and teacher efficacy, but fails to demonstrate how the internal and external motivators work together to determine a teacher's behavior. Social Cognitive Theory helps explain how the environmental and internal factors interact to influence the job satisfaction of the teacher and their ultimate decision concerning whether to remain in the classroom or to leave.

In their studies Yang (2021) and Eginli (2021) used Social Cognitive Theory in an attempt to flesh out the factors that affect teacher retention. The triarchic models they used for their study provided them and their readers with a clear understanding of how the different internal motivators and external factors influenced a teacher's decision to remain in the classroom. I have attempted to build on this work by using a triarchic model that shows how the internal motivators and external factors faced by teachers affect their job satisfaction. The following model was created using ideas from Social Cognitive Theory in combination with Hertzberg's Two Factor Motivation Theory. I created a model that included the internal and external factors that influence teacher job satisfaction that were identified through my literature review and Hertzberg's theory and then added it to the triarchic behavioral framework outlined by Social Cognitive Theory. By combining the two theories into one model I was able to create a study that not only

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examined the factors and motivators that influenced teacher job satisfaction, but also how they worked together to influence teacher's decisions about whether to stay in the classroom. It was then used to create the interview questions that were used during the interview process.

Figure 1

Theoretical Model based on Social Cognitive Theory
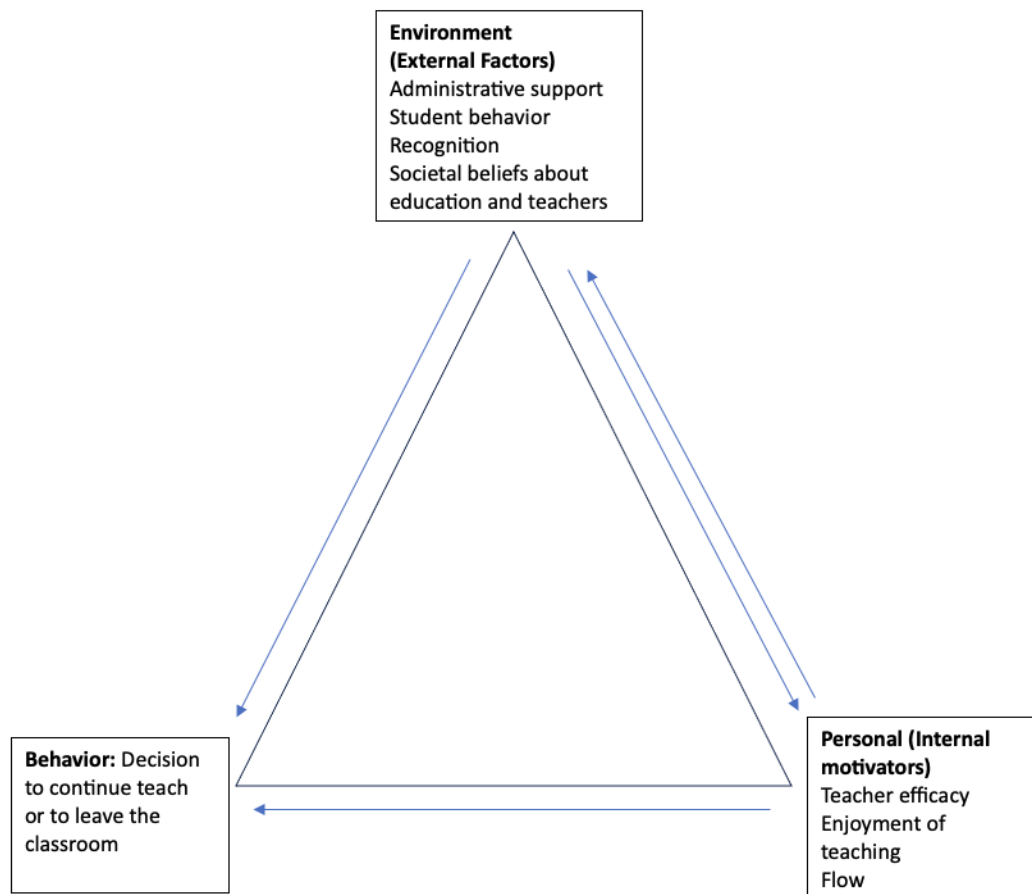
This model demonstrates how an individual's environment (external factors), personal factors (internal motivators), and behavior interact to influence their job satisfaction (Eginli, 2021). The external factors (administrative support, student behavior, recognition, societal beliefs about education and teachers) and the internal

motivators (teacher efficacy, and enjoyment of teaching) interact to influence a teacher's behavior. The arrows show how the external factors and internal motivators influence a teacher's decision to stay in the classroom or leave. According to Social Cognitive Theory, if the internal motivators and external factors are positive or if the positive and negative factors balance out the teacher should decide to stay in the classroom. If they do not, the teacher should decide to leave the profession. By understanding how these factors and motivators interact we can better understand teacher job satisfaction.

The research questions for this study were explored using interview questions that were based off the ideas presented by Social Cognitive Theory and through careful consideration of the previous literature related to teacher job satisfaction.

Research Question 1: What are the internal motivators that influence job satisfaction?

Research Question 1 was explored by analyzing the personal factors or internal motivators of each individual teacher. In the past, teacher efficacy, flow, and feelings of success have been correlated with teacher job satisfaction (Palermo et al, 2022; Chan et al, 2021; Shim et al, 2022). For the purpose of this study, flow is defined as "the optimal psychological state characterized by the enjoyment of deep absorption in what one is doing" (Shim et al, 2022). These themes were explored through the interview questions asked of my participants while allowing them to expand on these ideas to possibly reveal additional internal motivators.

To determine the internal motivators that influenced their job satisfaction teachers were asked:

1. What keeps/kept you going when teaching gets/got hard?

2. What does it mean to you to thrive as a teacher?

3. Describe a time when you felt deep enjoyment as a teacher.

These questions helped my participants to begin to think about the internal factors that influenced their job satisfaction. I also allowed my participants to veer away from the questions or to expand upon their answers. It was important to allow my participants to expand on their ideas and responses to the original questions to better understand their individual experiences as teachers. The interview questions served as a guide and a starting place to get teachers to talk about the internal motivators that influenced them. By allowing my participants freedom to tell stories or go off on tangents, I was able to better understand their experiences and could draw more conclusions from the data.

Research Question 2: What are the external factors that influence job satisfaction?

Research Question 2was analyzed by exploring the environment or external factors that each individual teacher faces on a daily basis. In previous studies administrative support, student behavior, recognition, and societal beliefs and the treatment of teachers (Olivier, 2021; Han & Hur, 2021; Ker et al, 2022, Eginli, 2021; Piest et al, 2020) have had a major influence on teacher job satisfaction.

These themes were explored through the following interview questions:

1. How do you feel about the day-to-day tasks that are inherent in teaching?
2. How do you balance your job with your personal life?
3. What opportunities do/did you have to grow as an educator?
4. Describe the school/community culture in your building?
5. How does/did the school or community culture of you building affect your job satisfaction?

6. Describe your administration and how they affect/affected your sense of job satisfaction.

7. When was the last time you were recognized for your work either positively or negatively? How did that make you feel?

8. How do you think society views educators?

9. How did the COVID 19 pandemic affect your feelings towards teaching?

These questions allowed teachers to extrapolate on the environmental factors that they faced every day and to describe how the factors affected their job satisfaction. Teachers were then allowed to go off on tangents or expand upon their answers allowing me to have a better understanding of the environment in which they were working.

I invited teachers to expand on their answers by asking "Why?" or by returning to the point and asking them to tell me more. Most of the teachers wanted to talk at length especially about the things that negatively affected their job satisfaction apart from Lauren who kept her answers very short and concise despite my prompting.

Procedures

Interview Process

Individual interviews were scheduled based on the needs and availability of the different participants. Each participant was interviewed once. The interviews lasted between 18 and 45 minutes. The interviews took place via Zoom during August and September of 2023. The participants in the study adopted pseudonyms to protect their identities. Interviews were structured using the interview questions (Appendix A), but participants were allowed to talk about issues or topics that they felt were important to the study and I allowed myself to ask follow-up questions to better understand the lived

experiences of the individual participants. The interviews felt more like a conversation than a formal interview. When I wanted more information, I would ask "Why?" or "How did you feel about that?" or prompted my participants to tell me more. At the end of the interview, I asked participants if I had missed anything or if there was anything else they wanted to add. Many of participants took advantage of this opportunity to add more information.

Before the interview participants were asked to sign a voluntary consent form (Appendix C) and were allowed to voice any questions or concerns they had about the study. Interviews were recorded using the Zoom software with the consent of the participant.

Data Analysis

After conducting the interview sessions, the interviews were transcribed using the NVIVO software. The transcriptions were reviewed for accuracy. After reviewing the transcripts, I coded the data according to the themes that were framed by Hertzberg's Two Factor Motivation Theory, Social Cognitive Theory, and the themes that emerged from my literature review.

Once coded, I read through the transcripts again and coded for any unexpected themes that arose between or within the interviews. I read through the interviews and took note of any ideas that I saw come up in more than one. One theme that emerged that I hadn't accounted for was mental health. Mental health was not a theme that emerged from the literature or from Hertzberg's Two Factory Theory. However, as I read through the interviews a second time, I noticed that many of the teachers talked about how their mental health had declined while they were teaching.

After I determined the themes that had emerged through my interview data, I read through the data again to systematically link the categories and codes together in a way that succinctly described and explained the phenomenon (Saldana, 2009). I did this by considering which themes were internal motivators and which themes were external factors. I considered how the internal motivators and external factors interacted to influence teacher behavior and job satisfaction. I looked for commonalities and differences between teachers who were continuing to teach, teachers who had left the profession, and then between both groups.

The data that emerged from these analyses were used as the findings for this study.

Ethical Considerations

Talking about motivations for staying in the classroom or for leaving can be an emotionally charged and difficult topic. To account for this I allowed teachers to take a break if they needed it or offered to continue at another time. None of the participants in the study needed either one of these interventions.

Timeline

This study took place between June and September of 2023. Participant selection took place during June and July of 2023. Participant interviews took place during August and September of 2023. Data was analyzed shortly after the last interview was completed in September of 2023. All of the data was analyzed at the same time. This helped me to avoid allowing any bias that emerged from my data analysis to influence my future interviews.

Summary

This narrative study was conducted through a series of loosely structured interviews consisting of 16 questions. Four current teachers were interviewed and four teachers who had left the profession within the last three years were interviewed for the study. Teachers were asked about their experiences as teachers and how those experiences affected their job satisfaction. Data was analyze using a code book and the NVIVO software to identify themes within and between the lived experiences of the individual participants.

Chapter Four: Findings

Introduction

Interviews with eight current and former teachers provided insights into the factors and motivators that affect teacher job satisfaction and their ultimate decision about whether to stay in the classroom. The purpose of this study was to investigate the factors and motivators that affected teacher job satisfaction. A qualitative, narrative focus was used to gather data and stories from eight current and former teachers. The following research questions were examined through this study:

1. What are the internal motivators that influence teacher job satisfaction?

2. What are the external factors that influence teacher job satisfaction?

The following chapter represents the findings based on an analysis of the interview

data

including the themes that emerged from the individual stories told by the teachers through the interview process. The findings are organized by the stories of the individual participants and the emergent themes.

These are the stories of the teachers who stayed in the classroom

Bridget

Bridget entered the teaching profession in 2014 and has been a teacher in both California and Colorado. She entered the profession hoping to educate children in a way that honored their personhood and ignited curiosity and a love of learning within them.

She especially enjoys "when they're [her students] a sponge, they're just taking everything in and discovering new things every day."

Bridget's previous school was a Title 1 elementary school. Ninety-six percent of the student population came from historically marginalized populations. Ninety-eight percent were economically challenged. Bridget taught kindergarten in the school and started her position halfway through the school year after leaving a position at an online school.

Bridget and her husband have two young children. She wakes up at 6:20 a.m. and rushes to get her boys ready for day care. At 7:30 a.m. she drops them off and heads into school. She returns from work around 5:30 or 6:00 p.m. and tries to get the children home and ready for bed. When I asked Bridget about this schedule she said "it is very hard and I am definitely having trouble. And that's kind of trial and error too, in figuring things out. So even though my husband is home, it's still hard because I want to come home and relax and I can't because things need to be done."

Bridget spent the 2022-2023 school year teaching in an elementary school. She took over for a teacher who left midyear and stated that "that's hard in itself". She was unhappy because she felt that she was constantly being micromanaged even to the point where she had to limit the bathroom breaks that students were allowed to take and when they were allowed to take them. At one point during the year, a kindergarten student accused Bridget of touching her head inappropriately. Bridget felt that because of the student's relationship with the superintendent the alleged incident was blown completely out of proportion and was a major impetus for her finding a job in a private school across

town for the following school year. She said "But it was just one thing after another and you're focusing on that rather than the whole classroom that needs the help to grow."

Bridget was also concerned about being forced to teach according to a curriculum and did not appreciate having to learn new curricula all the time. She stated "I couldn't teach the way I wanted to. And if I didn't follow and read everything that was in the book, then I wasn't doing my job." She thought it would be better "If you could take what you know and what you learned and put that out there and you're teaching from the heart."

Throughout the interview Bridget expressed concerns about teacher pay and the hardships her family faced because of the low wages that are offered to teachers. She said:

> "We have the hardest job out there. And we're not nearly rewarded as anybody else and are one of the lowest-paying jobs. If there weren't us, there weren't us as elementary teachers, especially, there wouldn't be the future. And nobody gets that. We're not recognized. We're not appreciated."

She expressed frustration with administrators who didn't trust their teachers to do their jobs saying "We shouldn't be micromanaged. Principals, assistant principals, counselors, whatever should be there for support and to make sure that we're not stomping on children. You know, but other than that. They should be leaving us alone."

At the end of the interview I asked Bridget what it meant to thrive as a teacher. She said:

> "Seeing the kids excited about learning. And what to take that information that they've learned and tell others. Tell whoever will listen and really be excited to

come to school. If they're excited to come to school and learn and tell others, I've done my job. And especially kindergarten. When they're a sponge, they're just taking everything in and discovering new things every day. That's like the best feeling and the best motivation to continue."

Hazel

Hazel entered the teaching profession thirteen years ago. She has been a teacher in one district in the Denver Metro area, but she has been a teacher in three schools within that district. Six years into her career Hazel took a yearlong break from teaching to consider her options but eventually decided to continue teaching.

Hazel teaches 5th grade at a traditional elementary school. Approximately twenty-three percent of the students in the school come from traditionally marginalized populations. Eighteen percent of the students in the school are economically disadvantaged. Parents are very involved at Hazel's school. She is supposed to have the support of an English Language teacher.

Hazel and her husband have two children under three at home who require a lot of energy and attention. Hazel leaves her house around 6:45a.m. to arrive at school by 7 a.m. Her students arrive at 7:35 a.m. and Hazel teaches her fifth-grade students until they leave at 2:35 p.m. Hazel typically leaves school around 4 p.m. unless she is running an afternoon Girls on the Run club or is attending other meetings. In which case, she leaves around 4:30 or 4:45 p.m. During the day, Hazel has a 45-minute plan time to plan differentiated lessons in all subjects for all of her students.

Hazel makes a conscious effort not to bring work home and tries to avoid checking her email from her phone. She said, "I taught for 6 years, quit for a year, and

then came back. So kind of during that time I was like, you know, I'm going to make this more of a work-life balance. So I really, I rarely work at home."

When asked if she took work home during her first six years of teaching Hazel exclaimed, "My God! And then I would go in once a weekend every weekend." She said that this over commitment to work negatively affected her job satisfaction and eventually contributed to her decision to step away from teaching for a year.

When asked about how administration affected her job satisfaction she said that:

"It was a major factor. I think that's a big reason why I quit. Because the last 3 years I had a principal who just every new initiative, every new initiative. She was like, yep, we're doing that. Yep, we're doing that. Yep, we're doing that. So it was like, I cannot do 800 things."

She went on to say:

"The whole program was extremely hard core like it was extremely demanding and grueling like we would have 10 observations a year with a peer evaluator. I put in quotes, peer evaluator. They were not a peer like they were not part of our building. They came in, and, like my first year, all I got was just like negative feedback after negative feedback after negative feedback."

Hazel acknowledges that this feedback made her a better teacher but maintains that the initiative was extremely hard and that the lack of support from her principal made it even harder.

Hazel's current principal is more supportive, but does not always listen to suggestions from teachers which makes them feel undervalued and leaves them feeling frustrated. However, during her last post observation meeting her principal paid her a

very kind compliment and acknowledged her expertise and value as an educator. She said:

 "It made me feel really good. But it was like a private thing. He has never really acknowledged really, anyone publicly like he'll, you know, send an email and say, you know, I appreciate you all. And it's like, Okay, that's nice. But it's not super meaningful when it's just an email to 60 people."

I asked Hazel to describe the culture at her school and she said:

"That's a loaded question this year because, we were about 430 kids last year, and this year we are shy of 600 kids, because the school right next to us closed. So most of those kids are coming into our school. So I think I have like 6 or 7 kids from the closing school in my class. We went from 3 classroom teachers per grade to 4 classroom teachers per grade and so we've invited in like 30 new staff members like, it's crazy. We just got a new building last January, and I just moved into the addition that opened up like August first. So I mean, we worked really, really hard all last year to like merge the two communities successfully. But it is interesting because of you know, [school name], the school that was closing. They fought, like their community fought really, really, really hard to stay open so you know, they didn't necessarily want to come to our school and know it's like again, we can empathize with that like it wasn't our choice. However, we're gonna welcome you with open arms, and, you know, make you feel like part of our home. Because that is a big reason that I have stayed at [school name] like it's it definitely feels like a good home like. Whereas, like my last 2 schools were just so strict and culture just wasn't as good."

The addition of so many new staff and students has been hard on the school culture at Hazel's school, however, she appreciates the effort that has been made to welcome them in.

I asked Hazel how COVID 19 affected the way she felt about teaching and she said:

> "I don't know. I can't think of anything. It maybe helped me appreciate it more like I just felt like the kids were so adaptable, and know nobody liked wearing a mask every day, but they just did it and don't know. Yeah. I don't think it changed anything, but if anything, maybe in a more positive way, like I just grew to appreciate the kids more and our staff more."

When asked what it meant to thrive as a teacher Hazel stated, "…I think seeing kids grow in whatever way that might mean. whether it is academically or emotionally…"

Jake

Jake has been teaching in the same district for 18 years. He has seen the district go through many different transitions, curriculums, and then come back around again. Jake is deeply committed to his students. He believes in them and strives to provide the best possible math instruction for his middle school students that he can, often sacrificing hours of personal time to plan.

Jake teaches 7th grade math at a traditional middle school. Ninety-three percent of the students in the school come from historically marginalized populations. Ninety percent are economically disadvantaged. Jake's school is a Title 1 school. Parents are somewhat involved.

Jake starts his day at 4:15 a.m.he gets up and walks his dogs. Then he gets ready and drops his boys off at school before starting his workday at 7:30 a.m. He has duty at 7:45 a.m. and then immediately starts his day with his students, eventually leaving school around 4 p.m. On the weekends he commits several hours to work to ensure that he is ready for the upcoming week.

I asked Jake to describe the school culture at his current position and he stated: "Go back a few years. You know, I took the job back at [school name]. I was going to work for a group of people that had had really revamped the school and made the school a nice place to be. The principal at the time took a job within the upper level of district management. So, after a year of an interim, which we knew they hired a principal who did, I think, a fantastic job and we really enjoyed him, or at least I did. And then about halfway through, I guess it was 2022, he decided to look for another job. And so when he left, we're in this situation and trying to find a principal and the district tried to post an interim principal that we as a collective whole really struggled with. We as a collective whole did not want that person to be our principal. The district pushed back on trying to do a proper interview process, but they finally conceded to do a proper interview process. In the end, the interim got the position. And so, last year was a big struggle. I would say at least 40 percent of our staff left. I know of at least two people that left with a week before school opened. And they left towards a different district that's just right down the road from us. So I think we still have nine spots open."

Jake went on to say:

"But there's a good number of us that this will be our last year at the school if things don't significantly change. And it's and it's you know, and there's some people that are lifers that have been at this middle school that don't want to move, but things have just gotten out of control."

I asked Jake what it would take to keep him in his position at his current school next year and he stated, "I mean we as a building need to get control back over the students and that's not in the negative way. But just to put some more decorum back into the building."

When asked about the workload that is required of teachers Jake stated, "I don't hold a grudge because this is extra work that I do. That's just what I do. That's who I am. I think it's important. I do get frustrated when work is piled up on me that prohibits me from doing things that I think are really important."

When I asked him to describe some of the things that prohibit him from doing what he deems important he went on to say:

"Well, like the district has mandated some training, which they didn't really give us time to do during the school day. So now we have to do this training during my time at home. Working from home. That's my choice. But if I'm being required to get these trainings done by a certain day, then that means I'm doing stuff outside of the workday.

When you bring that to the administration's attention that we're having to do this outside of the day, they go, 'I'm sorry you have to get this stuff in.'

It puts you in that situation where you're kind of in an analogous situation because the district just requires it. And if you don't do it, you get in trouble. And the

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administration is not going to give you time because they feel like you can squeeze it in that ten minutes of, you know, bathroom break or whatever. So those are the kind of things that that add up."

Jake is thankful for the close relationships that he has formulated with his teammates. He said, "Yeah, I think that's probably the best way to saying it is just, you know, that, you know, having that group of people that you can trust can be very can help you get through these things."

Jake says that his current school administration is at odds with the needs of the teachers within the school. He said:

"I'm looking at a situation where there's been some rumors within my current building that during our planned time in the morning from 7:45 until 8:30, we're going to be required to be all of us and be required to be in the library to do this plan. If that's the case, that's just going to throw us up into an uproar because we can plan together, but we all have to be in the same place.

Now, I'm not a very big person in being in a very loud environment with a lot of people. I like to be in more intimate situations. And my colleague and I, you know, we do real good work in, you know, being in those kind of small places. So if that's going to be that close, that's not something that, you know, is what I can see that becomes that battle. So, like, why are you forcing us to do these kind of things? What's the plan? Just expect us to plan for this with that respect that we're going to get that done. If I'm not getting it done, then you have a conversation with me, but don't put us all in one place so that you are monitoring what we are doing. That doesn't build trust."

I asked Jake how COVID 19 affected the way that he feels about teaching and he stated, "It is what it is. I thought it had some major impacts. I'm not convinced it was COVID itself. I think it was. The political nature of COVID that that that that did the damage."

When asked about how society views teachers Jake said that he thinks the deeply political nature of teaching and education is having a hugely negative impact on schools. He stated, "But that feeds down into the kids because kids listen to their parents or whatever. And so that just kind of escalates that direction. So I think a lot of these kids behaviors and or actions and behaviors, a lot of what's happened to the kids is because of what they saw going on with the adults."

When asked what it means to thrive as a teacher Jake stated, "knowing that my kids, they may hate me for right now, which is absolutely fine. I take no issues to that whatsoever. But knowing that in the end they're going to be more successful than when they came in."

Anna

Anna entered her teaching career believing that she would spend her working life as a classroom teacher until she retired and wanting nothing more. She loves teaching. Loves creating curriculum, interacting with students, and instilling a love of literature and writing within them. She enjoys planning and collaborating with other teachers to develop methods of teaching that reach all students. Anna is an incredible teacher. Her students consistently show growth that is far beyond their cohorts in other schools within the district and state. Anna's students consistently score in the top tier for the state on

standardized tests. Anna specializes in working with marginalized populations and finds joy in creating lasting relationships with her students.

Anna and I taught together for two years during the beginning of our careers before I moved on to another school. During her most recent teaching assignment Anna taught 6th grade Literacy, Science, and English Language Development. Eighty-nine percent of the students in her school came from historically marginalized populations. Seventy-three percent were economically disadvantaged. Parents in Anna's school were semi supportive.

When I interviewed Anna at the end of the 2022-2023 school year, she was teetering on the edge of deciding whether to continue her teaching career. She had begun to feel like she was no longer creating a lasting impact on her students and was recovering from the impacts of dealing with an extremely unsupportive and toxic administration who refused to intervene when student behaviors became completely unmanageable. Despite the odds and the incredible pressure and feelings of defeat that Anna was facing, she decided to continue teaching for one more year to see if she could rediscover her passion.

On a typical day Anna would arrive at school and begin planning for her day. She had 45 minutes during the day to plan for Literacy, ELD, and Science for her sixth-grade students. She stated:

"I just have too many preps right now. So I've currently been teaching literacy ELD and science, and so just preparing for that many classes per day with only 45 minutes of prep time, it's just unsustainable. You know, I stay at work until like 5:30 or 6 every night to feel like I'm just barely ready for the next day. You know,

not as well thought out or forward plan as I would like. So I'm just always feeling like I'm never caught up. So that's something that I've been really struggling with. I do like to participate in extra, you know, beyond the day kind of activity."

Anna is the type of teacher who likes to be well prepared so she can deliver thoughtful instruction to her students so this feeling of being unprepared took a huge toll on her job satisfaction.

Anna also mentioned that over the past few years behavior management:

"…has gotten just steadily more and more and more difficult every single year to the point where it's like, I just, don't even know how to deal. I really felt like I was living the life of a first-year teacher all again this year, like a decade in which is not okay. That's not an okay feeling to have just with behavior just so escalated and out of control."

Anna went on to say that her administration told their staff that they would not intervene with behavior management unless what the student was doing was illegal. She said:

"Explicitly, these are their words. Explicitly said their behavior philosophy is unless it's against a state law, they won't support or intervene. And then even when things would be against state laws, they would support oftentimes with like drugs or weapons, like a lot of that went ignored as well. Yeah. So just truly on your own. And then any time any teacher, any grade level would like request support or ask for help or try to have like, "Hey, how can we collaborate as like a bigger team, whether it's, you know, including admin, including speed support, you know, mental health team, everything would come back to just you need to

form better relationships, you know like if the kid liked you more or they wouldn't behave this way."

She described her feelings in regard to this as:

"I feel like we haven't had any behavioral support or any type of collaboration that way. So it's just kind of like every man to themselves and then just feeling like anything that I'm attempting solo isn't working is just one of the most frustrating feelings. Just knowing, every day I'm going to show up to the same battle again and again and again. And just being worried about, well, what's going to happen with it today? Like, how far is it going to escalate today? You know, and just try to figure out how to de-escalate. And just not feeling successful. Just when it happens day after day after day after day, it just wears you down so much."

When asked to go further into how administration affects her job satisfaction Anna said:

"It's definitely just a place full of like toxicity, and that toxicity is constantly thrown back at staff. Admin will constantly bring up if anyone brings up any type of complaint or even just like a question or a pushback, it's like you're contributing to the toxic environment of this school. Like you need to stop. So it's very much like putting the blame of what our culture and community is on staff, which is frustrating.

That discipline issue is, you know, the number one problem with our culture. Also like our social committee, completely fell apart this past year. So we also don't have opportunities for staff connections, whether it's a breakfast potluck or a

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happy hour or. You know, baby showers for people or, you know, whatever kind of events you're used to having.

There's just no attempt at any positive community building either, which is not great.

One thing that my principal has made a really big deal for the past three years is she wants to really focus on everyone's values. And so, like, at first felt like, hey, we're moving in like a great direction where she really wants to learn what each staff members individual values are and really thinking like, how could she use that as a leader, you know, to help her communication, her interactions with different staff members.

And then she's in the process of completing her doctorate right now on principal burnout. So I wonder how much you guys have crossed learning's there. So she had everyone engage in different like values surveys during a staff meeting. And then we were all like reflecting on everyone's data in terms of like, here are different ways that people feel burnt out. And she, like explicitly said, like in a staff meeting in front of the whole, you know, whole group, like 'if your values are not lining up with our school, we're not changing. There's the door. You can leave.'"

Anna described one of her favorite aspects of teaching as:

"So definitely, like relationships are number one, like forming those connections. There are still students I taught, ten years ago who I still am in contact with.. And that's just so meaningful. But I definitely feel like the past, or maybe even since COVID, those relationships, I just know I'm not having those connections

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anymore. I really feel like the cohorts I've taught in the past three years, I don't think there are students who I will stay in touch with. And that makes me very sad. But knowing that I do have students who, you know, will invite me to a quinceanera after I taught them five years ago, you know, like stuff like that just feels really special."

She is also highly motivated by data and stated, "data is something I really like. I do really like that. Like objective, you know, quantifiable. Like here is like proof of success."

When asked about how the COVID 19 pandemic affected her feelings towards teaching Anna said:

"I definitely feel like COVID, like what? Broke my admin. I liked them a lot. And if I didn't like them, I wouldn't have returned to the school. I wanted to come back to the community, but if the admin was like a huge red flag, that's not worth it.

But I think COVID was just. I mean, I'm really glad that I didn't have to make those types of leadership decisions. So, I'm not judging whatsoever, but I think it just broke them. And then I feel like everyone was kind of given permission just to get by, just to survive. And I think for a lot of people, that turned into do the bare minimum. And so then I think that expectation then hasn't been pushed back to where it should be. And then I think a lot of people feel some resentment when then it's a new curriculum drops and it's the insane micromanaging of implementation. And then there's a disconnect, though, in terms of, this is how hard we were working and this is how hard we're being expected to learn. And I

feel like with anyone, any staff, even students, right, you're not going to raise or rise to that level of expectation if you don't feel that support. And if you don't believe in it and see purpose and feel like you have like an aligned value or a vision."

When asked what it means to thrive as a teacher Anna said, "In most years I've felt just like such joy and gratification of seeing kids see their growth and then see kids get inspired by their growth."

These are the stories of the teachers who left the classroom

Rebecca

Rebecca entered the teaching profession seventeen years ago in a Pennsylvania. Six years ago, she moved to Colorado and continued teaching in a middle school in the Denver Metro area. Rebecca and I taught in the same school for one year before I moved on to another position. When I first met Rebecca, I immediately recognized her as a highly energetic, extremely knowledgeable, and passionate educator. She expressed a love of teaching and interacting with students that was rare in other veteran teachers. She enjoyed learning new techniques and exploring new curricula to the point that she made a trip from Pennsylvania to Colorado, to attend a professional development before beginning her job in Colorado.

Devastatingly, this highly motivated and passionate teacher resigned from her teaching position in the fall of 2021, not because she disliked teaching or her students, but because the pressures and expectations placed upon teachers were such a heavy burden that they were no longer sustainable mentally or physically.

Rebecca's last teaching position was in a linguistically diverse, traditional middle school. Seventy percent of the students in the school were economically disadvantaged. Seventy-six percent of the student population came from traditionally marginalized populations. Some of the parents at Rebecca's school were very involved while others were not. Rebecca was an 8th grade literacy teacher and had one teammate and access to a coach in her building.

When I asked Rebecca what a typical day looked like for her while she was teaching, she said that she would wake up around 5 a.m. to go to the gym and work out and then would head to school around 7 or 7:15 a.m. (about thirty minutes before her duty day started) to get ready for the day. She had crosswalk or door duty three days a week before school that would eat up some of her planning time. From there she would immediately start teaching and then would leave school around 4:30 p.m., thirty minutes after her duty day ended. When asked what she had to do during the day besides teaching her eighth-grade students, Rebecca said:

> "Yeah, I mean, I was required to contact parents, if I ever had a behavior issue before I could even write the referral, I had to contact parents. I was expected to contact parents for positive things as well. And so, you know, between that and then IEP meetings and all of the different tasks, there was a lot of paperwork that was involved, plus all the professional developments. And we were getting new curriculum about every three years for literacy. So having to learn the new curriculum, having to train new teachers, mentoring new teachers, it was very overwhelming."

Rebecca liked her administration and said that her principal was supportive and always considered her suggestions. However, student expectations in the school were lax and varied depending on the dean who was dealing with behavioral incidents. As a result, behavior management was difficult and tended to eat up a lot of time and energy. Rebecca said:

"A lot of time and energy was spent in managing those classroom behaviors. And so it did feel like it was affecting my ability to teach. I would say where the frustration came in is I felt like there was a certain percentage of students that consistently had negative behavior that was impacting other students and their education. And so that was frustrating to me that I felt like I had to give a lot of time and energy and attention to. The 15 percent of students that had negative behavior. Yeah. It was like constant redirection needing to have proximity to those students, things like that, needing to call home."

Rebecca tried to balance her school and personal life by leaving work at school and setting boundaries. She would stay later at school to finish tasks so she wouldn't bring them home and learned to let go of certain things. She stated:

"I would say later after school to finish my tasks. And then I would cut myself off at a certain time. And then if things just didn't get done, they weren't getting they didn't get done. And I started to make a rule for myself to not take things home on the weekends. I would say, though, then because of that, it there were definitely parts of my job that weren't up to the standard that I would have liked, but that was the only way that I felt like I could balance my life with my career. The expectation was, was while [school district] likes to say that they value the

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balance of home and work, the amount of things they were asking us to do was impossible. So, at some point something had to give, so I wasn't getting everything done."

School culture and administration had a major effect on Rebecca's job satisfaction. The culture of her school in Pennsylvania was much different than the school culture in her school in Colorado. When describing her school culture in Pennsylvania she said:

"Most of the teachers were really good friends and so even new ones that came in, we learned how to work together really well. So there was definitely a different culture of we're in this together, we're going to figure this out together and people are a lot more flexible, fluid problem solving and trying to figure things out. But I think that was really impacted because of also their ability to like choose their own curriculum and make decisions for themselves."

Teachers at her school in her previous state worked together to problem solve and were genuinely friendly and supportive of one another. Administration at her previous school also allowed teachers autonomy in their classrooms.

At her school in Colorado, the previous administration had set up systems that pitted teachers against one another and that feeling of back biting and competition did not go away when new administration took over. Rebecca described the culture at her school in her current state by saying:

"There was a culture of fear. I think over the years that culture became a deep pervading culture, and so a lot of teachers acted out of fear. Then so as a result, a lot of teachers were getting pitted against each other. So some were praised for

certain things that they did, and then others felt like they weren't being recognized. So there was sort of this culture of like, I need to keep up, you know, why don't you act like this particular teacher? I think over the years as well, there was a really big push against suspending students or I think they wanted to have a restorative justice as a big part of the culture. But instead of like really empowering teachers to understand what that meant, I think what ended up happening was students weren't getting consequences for their actions. Towards the end of teaching, there was this sense of like, students are really getting away with a lot of things. There were like lack of consequences. I think that that that, you know, for me personally, I had pretty good classroom management. So I think within my structure I was able to maintain control. But then I know in other spaces it felt like teachers had a harder time maintaining control. I think then that ended up pitting us against each other because administrators weren't really involved in helping, you know, dole out those consequences so teachers would get mad at each other."

This pervasive culture of competition and fear on top of an overwhelming workload took a toll on Rebecca's mental health and resulted in her making the decision to leave a career she loved.

At the end of interview when asked what it meant to thrive as a teacher Rebecca stated:

"I think it's when I see students who are passionate as well. I got into education because I wanted to create a safe place for students where they could be passionate, and they could create. I think when I feel like I'm thriving the most is

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when I'm able to create a classroom culture where students are creating things and they're passionate and they feel like they're safe and that their voice matters."

Lauren

When I first met Lauren I was inspired and intimidated by her intense commitment and passion for teaching. Lauren deeply believed that each and every one of her students could achieve great things and worked to ensure that all her students had the academic opportunities that they needed to excel. Lauren's zeal for teaching the most marginalized populations and her commitment to their success were contagious. When she was in a meeting talking about instruction nothing could distract her and she made sure to stay focused on her student's strengths. Lauren's fifth-grade students showed unprecedented growth during the academic year they spent with her but more importantly they developed a love of reading. Her students would excitedly talk about the books they were reading in her class and would anxiously await the sequel. In some instances, they would go so far as writing the sequel themselves if it was taking too long to come out.

Lauren cared deeply for her students, and they knew it. They knew that her high expectations and firm classroom management policies were created out of love and they rose to the challenge. Previous students would visit and still email her to tell her about the books they were reading and how they are doing. Lauren wanted nothing more than to continue teaching until retirement. Unfortunately, this gifted and beloved educator decided to leave the classroom after the 2022-2023 school year.

During her last position as a teacher Lauren taught 5th grade literacy in a traditional elementary school. Approximately seventy percent of the students in the school came from marginalized populations. Sixty-four percent were economically

disadvantaged. Many parents were involved. Lauren had the support of an English Language Development teacher and a social worker.

During the school year Lauren would start her day at 5:30 a.m. She tried to get to school around 7 or 7:30 a.m.in order to plan and prepare for the day even though her students did not arrive until 9 a.m. This early morning, voluntary, planning time was often interrupted by tasks or meetings that were unrelated to instruction. Lauren had a forty-minute plan time during the day. One day a week her plan time was taken up by a professional learning community meeting, but she says that her principal was very conscientious of her time and Lauren's requirement that she walk away from the meeting with something that she could immediately implement in class.

Lauren would leave school around 4 p.m. and would continue to work and plan at home around 6 p.m. When asked about her work life balance Lauren stated: "In order to do it well, you have to sacrifice. That sounds dramatic, but you have to sacrifice like your work-life balance, your happiness, your well being."

When asked about her administration Lauren said:

"Yeah. She was an expert. I think she was an expert. Not only was she an expert in being a principal, she was an expert, I believe, in being a teacher. She was an expert in coaching. I think she had great people skills where she knew how to interact with adults, differentiate for them. She was always considering what was best for students. So, I can see her passion and that just instilled the passion within me to keep going as well. Also, she knew how to manage all the parts of a school very, very well. I think that protected us from a lot of stressors that other people may have experienced."

I asked Lauren about the culture in her former school and she said:

"I think the school and community culture kept me there. One of the they were

one of the reasons that I remained as long as I did, because I knew after leaving

the administrator that I had worked with for so long and I was in a new setting in

[another district] and I had another administrator. I always knew that Marion was

strong. But then when I experienced someone else, I realized how vital it is to

have a strong administrator. So I stayed with her because I like how she ran the

school and brought positivity within the community. I also really like the families

and the kids and that just that just kept me there."

Lauren said that one of things that really negatively affected her job satisfaction

were the impossible demands passed down on teachers from district leadership. After

COVID 19 she said district administration reacted in the following way:

"Oh gosh, the kids are behind, they're continuing to be behind. So rather than

giving grace, they just threw a ton of responsibilities on us where it's like due to

COVID, you need to, you know, address their social emotional health. Due to

COVID, you need to catch them up academically. And then we will make sure

that we have more of a presence in increasing demands for you to do that. So I

think after the pandemic and with the intensity increase, that's when I started to

realize this is not a sustainable job for me."

These unrealistic expectations combined with a crushing workload eventually led

to Lauren making the impossible decision to leave teaching. She said her mental and

physical health were deteriorating to the point where teaching was no longer sustainable.

She misses her students and teaching, but needed to focus on her mental and physical health.

When asked what it means to thrive as a teacher Lauren stated:

"I think it means to help kids see the potential within themselves. So I think that I have succeeded as a teacher. If, you know, I sparked something within the kids and they've realized like, I can do this, whatever this is, if it's like I can be an artist, you know, then I have thrived."

Nora

Nora began her teaching career fifteen years ago believing that she would spend her time working with children and making a difference in their lives. Soon after she began her career, she began working at an Expeditionary school in the Denver Metro area. She loved the school and the community it served. So much so that she poured hours into planning outside of her normal duty day. Around her third year she realized how much of herself she was giving and decided to pull back after realizing that teachers are expected to give more of themselves than is humanly possible.

Still she carried on for ten years creating lessons that were exciting and thought provoking for her third graders, until one day, after the pandemic, while being asked to return to school and complete duties that she felt unsafe engaging in, Nora decided enough was enough and left her position mid-year during the 2021-2022 school year. She began working with an educational consulting company that has enabled her to garner a bird's-eye view of the educational system on a national level. She is not impressed.

During her last teaching position Nora taught third grade at an expeditionary charter school. Forty-four percent of the students at Nora's school come from historically marginalized populations. Twenty-eight percent are economically disadvantaged.

On a typical day of teaching Nora would arrive at school around 7:30 a.m. Her students arrived at school at 7:45 a.m. Nora devoted Mondays to staying late at school to make sure that all her planning for the week was complete so she could leave on time for the rest of the week without feeling pressured to work at home. She said "I started by saying , like putting up boundaries, which felt very hard for me as a as an adult even. I was just like, I'm not going to work on the weekends, so I need to do whatever it is I need to do to not work after Friday and before Monday." She would leave school around 6 or 7 p.m. on Monday evenings having prepared for the rest of the week. Nora said that putting up these boundaries between work and personal time was important for her mental and physical health and was one of the reasons she was able to continue teaching for so long.

When asked about the workload that teachers faced Nora said: "So it's too much. That's the short answer. It's just it's just not reasonable. So you never feel great at anything you're doing, which is also, I think, a big contributor to teacher burnout. You just feel like a failure all the time."

She went on to say that the system was designed to "groom" teachers into believing that if they did not work overtime or spend their personal time planning, they were failing the students in front of them and were not doing the job they were "born" to do. This idea that teachers are expected to be pawns in a system that is designed to fail recurred throughout our conversation.

Nora stated that she felt lucky to have the administrative support that she did and that the school community was incredible. She stated, "She [her principal] was amazing she was what I call what I call the teacher principal like she was for the teachers, protective of the teachers, great administrator."

Observations and the conversations that followed were constructive, not pejorative, and left Nora feeling empowered to continue to grow as an educator.

Nora's principal also encouraged teachers to spend time together. She said:

"And I think [staff] build a lot of kind of like wiggly, mostly cushy, sort of like time together. And I think that that's really important because everybody's working really hard and they, they know that they're all working together and in a common in a common thread. And really the administration, I think, has always been really strong, really knowledgeable , and really they put caring for teachers as much on the forefront as they can amidst all the competing priorities that they're being faced with. So, and again, this is a charter school. Some of the things like evaluation, you know, it's not systematized, it's in-house and it's responsive to the like the local context."

Nora described her school culture as:

"Like it was a place where everyone felt like they belonged, and kids felt that way. And we had community circle and community events and we balanced character traits and social emotional learning as almost as heavily as academics. We valued that and it kept me a long time. If I wasn't at a place like that, I would have been done a lot sooner."

While Nora had been considering a career change before the COVID 19 pandemic, the fallout from the pandemic pushed her over the edge. Nora stated that society's views on educators changed as the pandemic wore on due to political reasons. She said for one moment parents though teachers were heroes, but then immediately changed their tune and started demanding that kids get back to school. She also stated "… if we really cared about kids and we really cared about education, it wouldn't be funded to fail."

These realizations, the incredible workload that she faced, and the requirement that she enter an environment that she did not feel safe returning to contributed to Nora's ultimate decision to leave a community and job that she loved.

When asked what it means to thrive as a teacher Nora said:

"I think to thrive is to understand their purpose. And I think that that means a lot of different things. But I think giving that purview would be really helpful for teachers. Like here's the systems, here's how everything works, and here's your role. And like, you know, it's like, do you want to really polish that knob on the Titanic? Or like, are you just going to like wipe it down and be like, "That's fine, I'm doing my part," you know, I don't know. That's a really jaded way to think about it. But I think that as long as teachers find their passion and they know that it's like putting everything in perspective, it's really helpful. And teachers don't get that perspective until afterwards. Usually until the end."

Iris

I met Iris at a CrossFit gym when we were both first-year teachers. She was exuberant, full of energy, and would incessantly talk about the lessons she was creating

for her students late into the night and in the same breath, she would circle back to joyfully recount her day and all of the cool things her students did that day. When school supplies came out in the fall, Iris would joyfully fill her basket and then hurry home to restock her home office where she spent countless night and weekend hours creating units and lessons for her middle school students. I once asked Iris if she saw herself doing anything else and she scoffed at me stating that she was going to be a teacher for the rest of her life because she loved it and never wanted anything else. Iris had returned to the Montessori school she had attended as a child and planned to continue teaching there "until she died."

Not only was Iris a teacher at this school, she was also the middle school curriculum coordinator and had built the middle school program from the ground up.

Years went by and children were born. I had only spoken to Iris a few times until I sat down to interview her for this study. As our interview started, I was immediately struck by the quiet disposition of my friend. Gone was the ebullient teacher with the extremely loud voice and excited propensity to talk nonstop about her students and teaching. For the first time since I had known her, Lauren looked tired, subdued, and defeated. Something had happened to push this life-long passionate teacher out of the classroom.

Iris' school was a Montessori school that included students from kindergarten through 8th grade. Iris taught all subjects to all of the middle school students.

When Iris was a teacher, she would wake up at 5:45 a.m. to get herself and her daughter ready for school. Her daughter attended the same school that Iris taught at and was the first legacy student to attend. She now attends a public elementary school.

Iris would arrive at school around 7a.m. and would make her way to her classroom. Her morning plan time was spent rearranging the classroom and making sure that all her supplies were present and accounted for. From 8:30 to 9 a.m. Iris and her co-teacher taught physical education because there was no PE teacher. Then the class would settle in to learn for the rest of the day. Her students left at 3 p.m. and Iris would leave school at 3:30 p.m. She would drop her daughter off at home and then head to her second job. During her workday Iris had 34 minutes of plan time.

When asked about work-life balance Iris said:

"Um, I tried really hard not to [work at home], which only worked a little bit at the time, but to not look at my email when I was not at school, which was only difficult because there were sometimes when, like parents would email you at night about something they actually needed an answer for the next morning. I stopped responding to text messages from students and parents outside of school unless it was an emergency, because all of our students and parents have our phone numbers."

When asked how she felt about the tasks that were inherent in teaching Iris stated that she absolutely loved teaching her students, but unfortunately, she only felt that she actually taught them 15 percent of the time. I asked what she was doing the rest of the time and she said:

"Putting a classroom back together, or like supporting kids who were struggling with things like anxiety or depression or stress or communicating with parents all the time about all the things or responding to admin and things that were unnecessary, that I did not need to be doing."

Many of Iris' students had severe emotional and physical needs, which resulted in Iris becoming extremely emotionally invested in her students. She worried about them constantly and found herself checking and responding to emails from home. Two of her students tried to commit suicide and one had a severe seizure disorder, which would cause him to have very long seizures throughout the day. Iris described these episodes as:

"One of them struggled with functional neurological disorders. So that student was constantly like having very strange seizures in the classroom. So it started out where he would just have seizures. Then, like a single seizure could last for 18 to 20 minutes. And most of the time those are like five to tens. Yeah. And then they'll come out of it and then have another one.

Like a single one would be 18 to 20 minutes long. Then they evolved to where he would be in a seizure, but also would stand up and start walking around while in a seizure. And we're on the second floor of a building, so it's like we can let him go down the stairs. And then he will inevitably, while he is standing, just like drop. So, like, I would have to stand there, like with my arms underneath his armpits for when he did drop because I was the only one strong enough to be able to, like, hold him up.

And then, like, so like, between those two students and like, dealing with that, like I still probably have PTSD. So, like, if there is a sound that sounds like a sound that he made while he had a seizure, like it will cause my whole body to tense up. Or like if someone talks about seizures in some way, like it still kind of makes me anxious."

When asked how the COVID-19 pandemic affected her views on teaching Iris said:

"I think everything changed. I think that we had to re-imagine this new world and new way to teach and that it was it felt so incumbent upon the teachers that we had to be the ones to solve these problems and that we couldn't rely on our administration or, you know, even. I assume, in public education, which I've never really worked in, but that, you know, you're trying to rely on like lawmakers and things like that, people with even more power than that to help support you as you navigate this.

And there just wasn't that support from anywhere because there were so many people that couldn't let go of what life was like before. And as teachers, we just didn't we couldn't do that. We had to only forward think and only, you know, adapts often multiple times a day, every single day of how are things are different now. And so it went from like adapting. Like instantaneously almost, because we found out on a Thursday afternoon we weren't coming back. The next week we got a single Friday without the kids to like completely change everything. And then we were expected to restart online the next Monday. So while some districts were like, we're just having an extended spring break, my school being the private school was like, Nope, we're just going straight in.

So we had our regular spring break with one week after that week, but we didn't have a choice to not change. And it's like in Montessori, it's so much about this community we create within the classroom and like how we work with each other in the classroom and trying to change that to something online when we didn't

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even use that many online resources to begin with was like this huge shock. So we're sitting there and kind of just constantly in crisis mode of supporting this and just trying to get them to like log in, even if they don't turn their cameras on so that we know that they are okay and that they are safe and that, you know, that they're still mentally moving forward.

And then, you know, we then the next year, it was like now you guys are doing a hybrid because some of your kids have to be home and some of them have to be in school. And you're like, Great, I guess we're going to figure out how to make that work, but not really getting any again, support of, I don't know, how do you make this work? How do you keep the kids six feet apart? How do you keep their masks on? How do you keep them from looking each other?

And then it's like, okay, now we're trying to do group work and you're trying to I guess everybody's on Zoom even though and in the same classroom and who forgot their headphones and the whole thing. Everybody needs a Chromebook. Chromebooks only work 30% of the time. What are all these online resources that we now all have to use?

And then like there became so much more issues with students like the instances of anxiety and depression and like stress related issues, just like skyrocketed immediately with that, especially with the lessons that I taught, you know, students with like very mild ADHD, suddenly it became way more pronounced and things like that. And just like their emotions like they couldn't regulate them at all and their social skills just got completely screwed up…"

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When asked why she ended up leaving a school she loved and a program she built Iris stated:

"So like, you get really invested in all of these students and then it's just like it's so draining on you. And then when you have like all of these episodes happening, there's not really support at the school. So I had to on my own, research and find mental health resources and like started working with a therapist in order to pretty much just be able to make it through the school year and then also get on medication in order to like bring down all these things that were happening. So it just it just became so much that had I continued at the rate that I was going like I would, I would have worked myself into the ground emotionally."

Iris says that months after leaving her position she is still recovering from the stress. She finds that she is constantly tired and has to take multiple naps throughout the day. She does say that she is starting to feel better and has noticed that her mind and body are starting to bounce back.

When asked what it means to thrive as a teacher Iris said:

"I think as a teacher, you thrive when you are connected with all of the students that are in your classroom and you are like being who you are as a teacher. Because we know that there are so many different types of teachers and different ways of teaching. And then when you find like your genuine teaching style and are able to execute it with your genuine teaching style and connect with your students, ' that's what that's where you thrive and that's where you like find that part of your heart where you're like, I love coming to school every day and like spending time with these kids and doing things in this way."

Emergent Themes

      The following themes emerged after analysis from the interviews were analyzed and coded. The interviews were analyzed through the lens of Social Cognitive Theory and Hertzberg's Two Factor Motivation Theory. I determined that a data point was a theme if it appeared in five or more of the interviews.

Table 9

Themes and the interviews in which they were found

Theme	Interviews the Theme Appeared In
Workload	Bridget, Rebecca, Nora, Hazel, Jake, Anna, Lauren, Iris
Student Behavior	Bridget, Rebecca, Hazel, Jake, Anna, Iris, Lauren
Enjoyment	Bridget, Rebecca, Nora, Hazel, Jake, Anna, Lauren, Iris
Teacher Efficacy	Bridget, Rebecca, Nora, Hazel, Anna, Lauren, Iris, Jake
Admin	Bridget, Rebecca, Nora, Hazel, Jake, Anna, Lauren, Iris
Autonomy	Rebecca, Hazel, Jake, Anna, Lauren
Work Personal Life Balance	Bridget, Rebecca, Nora, Hazel, Jake, Anna, Lauren, Iris
Mental Health	Rebecca, Nora, Anna, Lauren, Iris

These themes resemble the satisfiers and dissatisfiers outlined in Hertzberg's Two

Factor Motivation theory and the themes that emerged from the literature review. One

theme that emerged from the data that was not found in the literature review is mental

health.

When considered together these themes revealed the factors and motivators that affected teacher job satisfaction and teacher's decisions about whether to stay in the classroom or to leave the profession.

Description of Findings in Relation to Research Questions

Research Question 1: What are the internal motivators that influence teacher job satisfaction?

Enjoyment

All the participants of this study mentioned staying in the classroom for as long as they did, or continuing to teach due to a level of enjoyment that they experienced while teaching and interacting with their students.

When asked the interview question "What keeps you motivated when teaching gets hard?" Seven of the eight teachers stated that their students and an enjoyment of being with their students is what kept them motivated. Rebecca said:

"I was definitely an educator who, even through COVID, even through all the ups and downs, I still enjoyed being with the kids. And so because of that, that kept me going." Nora answered, "Time with the kids? I think that's the obvious answer. I love it. I loved teaching." Hazel said "I care about all of my kids and think I enjoy it. And I come back every day because the kids make me smile. They make me laugh like even when they're really hard and really challenging…".

All of the teachers recalled a level of enjoyment from teaching their students. They recounted times when everything just seemed to fall into place and students were fully engaged in the lesson being taught. Anna said "it's just so fun to see kids just turn

into, like, voracious readers and like, you go through, you know, just tons of novels and exploring different genres and like upping their level of complexity and just like feeling that excitement whenever kids say stuff like, you know, I used to hate to read, but like, now I know fantasy is my favorite genre, you know, just like, stuff like that." She loved watching them fly through books during her 40-novel challenge and really enjoys when they come back to visit or send her emails.

Jake said even though his kids might hate him in the moment "knowing that in the end they're going to be more successful than when they came in." He said that he loved it when students came back and told him that they appreciated his high expectations and that they were thankful to have learned a lot from him.

All eight teachers interviewed truly enjoyed teaching at some point in their career and enjoyed spending time with their students.

Teacher Efficacy

All participants in this study mentioned they were either positively or negatively affected by feelings of teacher efficacy. All the teachers felt positively toward their job when they felt that they were able to do a good job and create and deliver meaningful lessons to their students. All the teachers mentioned feeling negatively towards their job when they felt that their effectiveness as a teacher was diminished.

In regard to feeling successful as a teacher, Bridget lamented "I don't think they got their kindergarten learning because I know I couldn't teach the way I wanted to."

Other teachers mentioned that they felt very happy in their jobs when they experienced high levels of teacher efficacy. Anna said that one of the things that kept her going was seeing her students grow and seeing proof of that growth in their high scores

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on standardized tests. She said these feelings of success were instrumental in keeping her in the classroom. Lauren stated, "You can see the difference that you're making in the data just within like the kids themselves. So, making a difference, that was very fulfilling and important to me."

All eight of the teachers expressed that their job satisfaction was positively impacted when they felt that they were successfully teaching their students.

Mental Health

Five of the teachers interviewed stated that their mental health or lack there of negatively impacted their job satisfaction. All four of the teachers interviewed, who are no longer teaching, stated that their lack of mental health was a major impetus for their decision to leave the classroom. Iris said:

> "So like I had to on my own, like research and find mental health resources and like started working with a therapist in order to pretty much just be able to make it through the school year and then also get on medication in order to like bring down all these things that were happening. So it just it just became so much that had I continued at the rate that I was going like I would, I would have worked myself into the ground emotionally."

Nora stated "I'm feeling like a pawn in a broken system and like, my mental health and my physical health is not worth it." Rebecca said that she had to wake up early in the morning to work out so she could calm her anxiety and be ready to face a day of teaching.

Anna, who is still in the classroom, talked about feeling defeated and mentally beaten down by her administration and the demands of the job to the point where she was considering leaving the profession.

Mental health had a major effect on job satisfaction of five of the participants who were interviewed.

Research Question 2: What are the external factors that influence teacher job satisfaction?

Student behavior

All study participants mentioned student behavior as a factor that affected their job satisfaction.

Lauren said "…increased negative behaviors where they're more dysregulated or stamina." These increased negative behaviors made it harder for Mel to engage her students and impacted her job satisfaction in a negative way.

Iris said "…like there became … issues with students like the instances of anxiety and depression and like stress-related issues, just like skyrocketed…". She went on to say that these increased negative behaviors were emotionally draining to the point where she had nothing left for her family or friends.

Jake stated, "But I mean we as a building getting control back over the students and that's not in the negative way. But just to put some more decorum back into the building, then this can work, but right now it's a battle of wills." He went on to state that if things did not drastically change in regard to student behavior this would be his last year in his current building.

Bridget mentioned that because she had a student that accused her of touching her head inappropriately, she decided not to return to her position in the school during the subsequent year.

Rebecca lamented that most of her time in the classroom was spent not on teaching, but on dealing with the negative behavior or about ten to fifteen percent of her students. She also said that the behavior issues in the building were so bad that teachers were pitted against each other because there was no consensus concerning how to deal with the issues. Not only were the behavior issues bad in class, but because of the behavior issues Rebecca had to spend her plan time calling parents to talk about the behavior instead of planning for her classroom.

Anna recalled feeling like a first-year teacher during her ninth year of teaching because behavior in her classroom was so out of control that she was unable to create a safe learning environment for herself and her other students. This made her feel like an ineffective teacher and negatively impacted her overall job satisfaction.

Overall, student behavior had a very negative impact on the job satisfaction of the participants in this study.

Autonomy

Five of the teachers interviewed for the study mentioned that having autonomy in their classroom and the way they taught affected their job satisfaction. Often teachers talked about autonomy or the lack of autonomy in relation to feeling micromanaged by administrators or district expectations.

Bridget said that "And that's true teacher burnout, because if you have to learn something new and teach by that, then you're not doing your job. If you could take what

you know and what you learned and put that out there and you're teaching from the heart." Her job satisfaction was negatively impacted when she felt overly constrained or micromanaged by administration and was not able to teach her students in the way that she knew was best for them.

Jake felt frustrated by the idea that his administration was going to require teachers to plan in the library instead of trusting them to plan in the way that was best for them. He felt that by taking away their autonomy his administration was reinforcing the idea that teachers were incapable of doing their jobs.

Anna expressed fear at being required to blindly follow a new curriculum. She said "And so I'm anticipating that same type of just like we're blindly following this new curriculum, like we're putting it all in. So just that like blind following the blind is scary to me and not actually digging into standards knowledge."

On the other hand, Iris stated "So the school trusted me a lot to do what was necessary without necessarily micromanaging me or checking in." This level of trust allowed her to create lessons and projects that were interesting to her students and allowed her to be a creative teacher. Lauren said:

> "I have, like, resistance toward certain curricula. And when I talk to her and when we looked at data, she trusted me to make decisions on my own for what's best for students because the data presented itself well. And I know that she had conversations with her boss, the person above her, about allowing me to make these decisions. So I think that also kept me there because I love the creative aspect of teaching, and I felt like I could be creative and have some choice."

Autonomy, or the lack of autonomy, negatively or positively influenced teacher job satisfaction. Teachers who experienced higher levels of autonomy reported feeling more satisfied in their jobs than teachers who reported less autonomy or more micromanaging.

Administration

Administration had a major impact on the job satisfaction of all study participants. Unsupportive administration negatively affected teacher job satisfaction, while supportive administration positively affected job satisfaction.

Anna talked at length about how unsupportive her administrators were, saying they refused to help with student behaviors, told teachers who were unhappy to seek selfcare or leave the school, and created "a place full of … toxicity, and that toxicity is constantly thrown back at staff." She said that this lack of support and culture of blaming teachers for issues contributed to feelings of negativity among staff and led Anna, a once extremely positive teacher, to feel negatively toward her job and to feel helpless in the classroom. This eventually caused Anna to leave her position at the school and to begin to question whether she wanted to continue being a teacher.

Rebecca recalled that previous administrators at her school had created a culture of fear in her building. She went on to say:

"I think over the years that culture was deep pervading culture, and so a lot of teachers acted out of fear. And then so as a result, a lot of teachers were getting pitted against each other. So some were praised for certain things that they did, and then others felt like they weren't being recognized."

She said that this negative culture was so pervasive that even when new administration came into the building they were not able to overcome it. This negative culture and atmosphere was a major contributor in Rebecca's ultimate decision to leave the profession.

Jake mentioned that his current administration was at odds with the staff. He said his previous administration was excellent and made the staff feel valued and was able to create a culture of learning in the school. The new administration and their refusal to meet teachers halfway has resulted in Jake considering leaving the school if things do not change. He is also wary of their micromanaging and does not trust the administration to create policies and procedures in the school that he feels are conducive to creating a positive learning environment.

Hazel said that prior to her one year break from teaching she had experienced an administrator who volunteered to take on every new initiative that the district came up with. This led to teachers being forced to learn new things all of the time and often led them to having to engage in new programs that were grueling and time intensive with little support from administrators. Hazel says that this lack of support and the unobtainable expectations from administration pushed her to take a year off to consider whether she wanted to continue teaching at all. She says that her new administration is more understanding and listens to her ideas even though they do not always implement them. This has resulted in a higher level of job satisfaction for her, but she still feels frustrated.

Many of the teachers interviewed mentioned that not only was school administration important, but that district administration could have a huge impact on

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teacher job satisfaction. Both Jake and Lauren said that when district administration passed down directives to schools and teachers that were unreachable or seemed to be disconnected from what was going on in the school, it could negatively affect teacher job satisfaction and could increase feelings of unease and overwhelm in the teachers the directives were aimed towards. Anna mentioned that her curriculum had changed three times over the past six years. She said that learning these new curricula and being required, by district administrators, to teach it blindly according to the teacher's manual was exhausting and often caused her to question whether it was really the correct thing to do.

Jake said that he believed that the previous "superintendent, in my opinion, has destroyed this district." He is not sure whether the district will ever recover.

On the other hand, Lauren stated that she stayed in the classroom for as long as she did because her principal was extremely knowledgeable and supportive. She said that her principal tried to shield her from district directives and would often argue on her behalf when it came to trying to force her to use a curriculum that she was wary of.

Nora also had positive experiences with her administration. She said that her principal was very supportive and worked hard to create a positive culture within her building that supported teachers. She said that she and her principal were friends and that she felt very lucky to have had her as her administrator.

Clearly, administration can have a profoundly positive or negative effect on teacher job satisfaction. Unsupportive administration can cause teachers to experience high levels of discontent in their jobs, even resulting in them leaving their positions all

together. Supportive administration can encourage teachers to remain in the classroom and can result in high levels of job satisfaction.

Work- Life Balance

All study participants stated that work-personal life balance impacted their job satisfaction. Lauren said that she and her partner had:

"…found a great deal to go on an all-inclusive vacation and I decided that we couldn't go because I needed that time to make sure that I was on top of it with my class. So I feel like just now, for the first time in 13 years, I'm realizing …how difficult that was and how demanding it was." Iris went on to say that not having time to decompress on the weekends or at night took a toll on her relationship with her partner.

Hazel recalled that prior to taking a year off she was devoting time at night and one weekend day a week to go into school and complete work so she could feel prepared for the following week. After her year off she has tried not to bring work home and no longer goes to school on the weekends. This has resulted in higher levels of job satisfaction for her.

Jake admits to working hours from home each night and on the weekend. He says that he and his wife are "…trying to schedule date nights and stuff like that to really kind of be forward thinking about really just giving us some time because we're not doing that as well as we should. And it's been it's been challenging," He says that he makes the choice to give up his personal time for school because that is "just who he is" and it makes him feel more successful as a teacher.

Iris said that she used to spend a lot of time working at home but had to put up boundaries. As a result of her boundaries, she felt that she had more time with family and experienced a higher level of job satisfaction.

All of the study participants expressed a need for boundaries between school and work. They stated that they felt pressured to give up their personal time for work and felt that they were less successful as teachers when they did set their boundaries. However, many of the teachers interviewed also stated that working from home was not sustainable for their relationships or physical and mental health.

Workload

All of the teachers interviewed stated that the workload placed on the shoulders of teachers was completely unsustainable and was the single most important factor when considering teacher job satisfaction and a teacher's ultimate decision about whether to stay or leave the profession.

When asked the interview question "How do you feel about the tasks that are inherent in teaching?" the participants responded in the following ways:

Rebecca stated:

> "Yeah, I thought they were they were super overwhelming. I think going into teaching, especially with Aurora, I thought that I would just be with students for, you know, the day to daytime that I was supposed to be with them. But it was all of the other tasks that added up that were really tough."

Nora said:

> "I mean, they're crazy. I think it's too much is the short of it. It's too much. No one can do all of those things well…So you never feel great at anything you're

doing, which is also, I think, a big contributor to teacher burnout. You just feel like a failure all the time."

Hazel stated "So anyway, I think all the other busy stuff like all the extra stuff. I just try to be really thoughtful about what I do and what I don't do. And I've had to minimize it to increase my job satisfaction."

Anna said:

> "I just have too many preps right now. So I've currently been teaching literacy, ELD, and science, and so just preparing for that many classes per day with only 45 minutes of prep time, it's just unsustainable. You know, I stay at work until like 5:30 or 6 every night to feel like I'm just barely ready for the next day. You know, like not as well thought out or forward plan as I would like. So I'm just always feeling like I'm never caught up. So that's something that I've been really struggling with."

Lauren lamented:

> "In order to do it well, you have to sacrifice the sounds like dramatic, but you have to sacrifice like. Your work life balance, your happiness, your well-being. And I saw how it trickled into my home life. And my partner did, too. So it was it was really hard because not only were the demands so high, so intense, because I worked with a demographic that was struggling academically and there were increased pressures from the district to get them to continue to grow, but also just the demands of the large class sizes, like 30 kids who understandably want your individualized attention and want to tell you one story after the next, you're always on."

Iris felt that most of her time was spent doing required tasks that were not actually related to teaching. She said "I feel like I did actual teaching. Maybe 15 percent of the time. And then 85 percent of the time I was doing things that were not teaching."

Jake thought that many of the tasks he was required to do on a daily basis were a waste of time and went on to say:

"I think we get smart because, you know, they'll stand up and tell you, here's the format we're going to use. Like, you know, give us six months, it'll change. We saw that last year. You know, they had this eight-page form that we had to do four places and it wasn't being done in December. You know, after December, nobody was doing it. And so those are the kind of things that that are frustrating and can tear people down."

To recapitulate, the themes that emerged from the data in relation to the research questions reveal that teacher job satisfaction is affected by the following internal motivators; teacher efficacy, enjoyment, and mental health and the following external motivators; workload, administration, work-life balance, autonomy, and student behavior.

Description of findings in relation to previous research

Previous literature suggested that teacher job satisfaction was affected by performance and achievement, recognition, responsibility, personal growth, the work itself, teacher safety, and administrative support. The data collected from this study suggests that the internal motivators and external factors affecting teacher job satisfaction are teacher efficacy, enjoyment, mental health, workload, administration, work-personal life balance, autonomy, and student behavior.

There are many similarities between the themes that arose through the current study and the previous literature, including teacher job satisfaction being affected by performance and achievement (teacher efficacy), the work itself (enjoyment), and administrative support. However, there are some stark differences arose between the current study and the previous literature. The job satisfaction of the teachers interviewed for the study was very dependent upon workload, student behavior, work-life balance, and autonomy.

The teachers in the study mentioned that it would be nice to be recognized for their work, but this factor did not have a major impact on their job satisfaction. The participants of this study also mentioned that they felt deep enjoyment when they helped a student grow social and academically, but did not mention, to the point that it arose as a theme, that they felt a deep responsibility to society for their job or that their job satisfaction hinged on their responsibility to the students to help them grow.

The participants of the study did not mention that they felt unsafe at school but did express dismay at the increase in negative behaviors that they have seen in their students since the COVID-19 pandemic. When asked specifically if the negative student behaviors made her feel unsafe, Rebecca said that they did not make her feel unsafe, but that they were a time drain that prevented her from doing her job well.

The themes that arose from an examination of the previous literature and the themes that arose through the current study included some similarities and many differences, suggesting that the factors and motivators that affect teacher job satisfaction are evolving.

Description of Findings in Relation to Social Cognitive Theory and Hertzberg's Two Factor Motivation Theory

The themes that emerged from the study closely resemble many of the themes highlighted in Hertzberg's Two Factor Motivation Theory. The internal motivators and external factors that emerged from the study are categorized in the table below according to Hertzberg's theory that there are a variety of satisfiers and dissatisfiers that contribute to the overall job satisfaction of an employee.

Table 10

Themes categorized into Satisfiers and Dissatisfiers Based off of Hertzberg's Two Factor Motivation Theory

| Satisfiers	Dissatisfiers
Enjoyment (internal)	Workload (external)
Teacher efficacy (internal)	Student behavior (external)
Supportive administration (external)	Lack of autonomy (external)
	Unsupportive administration (external)
	Work-life balance (external)
	Mental health (internal)

These satisfiers and dissatisfiers work together to determine the level of job satisfaction that a teacher experiences. Similar to Hertzberg's theory almost all of the satisfiers that emerged from the study were internal motivators with the exception of mental health. Teachers felt more satisfied with their jobs when they enjoyed high levels of teacher efficacy and enjoyed being around their students.

Like in Hertzberg's Two Factor Theory, more external factors that affected job satisfaction were identified through the study. These external factors were able to negatively impact the job satisfaction of the study participants and in many cases overshadowed the internal motivators that positively impacted job satisfaction.

When these factors and motivators are considered through the lens of Social Cognitive Theory the way that they interact to affect a teacher's job satisfaction and ultimate decision about whether to continue teaching or to leave the classroom becomes apparent. Figure 2 illustrates the triarchic relationship between the internal motivators and external factors that emerged from the study and how they affect a teacher's behavior.

Figure 2

*Triarchic model of the interactions between internal motivators, external factors, and
behavior*
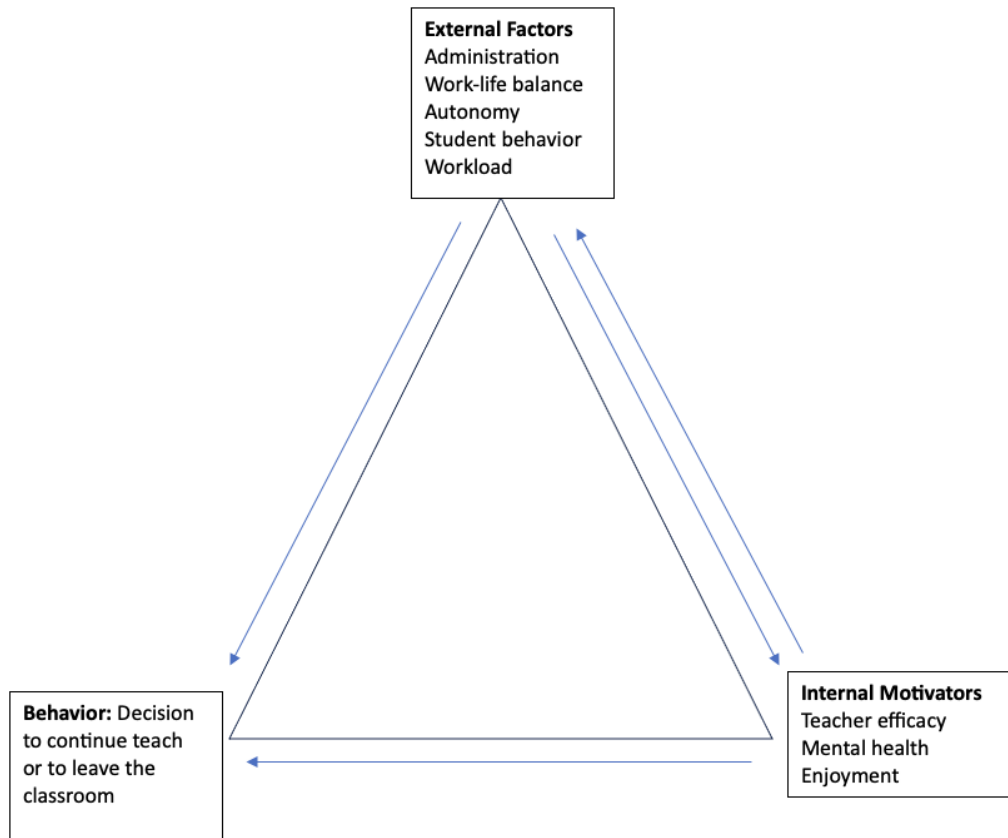
This model was created with Social Cognitive theory in mind and is based off of
the findings of the study. The model shows the relationship between the internal
motivators and external factors in a teacher's decision to stay in the classroom or to leave.
The factors work together to influence a teacher's decision on whether to stay in the
classroom or to leave.

Social Cognitive Theory posits that the internal motivators and external factors
that a person faces on a daily basis work together to determine their behavior (Bandura,

2007). This idea is reflected in the decisions that the participants in the study made regarding whether to remain in the classroom. The internal motivators, teacher efficacy and enjoyment, balanced the external motivators, heavy workload and unsupportive administration, that Jake, and Anna faced resulting in their willingness to keep teaching. On the other hand, Lauren and Nora made the difficult decision to leave the classroom because the heavy workload and their deteriorating mental health outweighed the positive internal motivators and external factors.

Unfortunately, it is very difficult to understand exactly which internal factors and external motivators will ultimately result in a teacher deciding to leave their position. Jake has an extremely heavy workload and toxic administration, coupled with a poor work-life balance, but continues to return to the classroom year after year. Nora had a wonderfully supportive administrator and had placed boundaries between her work and her personal life, but she still made the decision to leave the classroom.

Another example of this conundrum occurs between Anna and Lauren. Anna was experiencing an increase in the number of behavior problems and did not have administrator support to help handle them. Rebecca also complained of increased behavior problems in her classroom and a lack of administrator support. Both complained that their desire to set boundaries between work and their personal lives made them feel like they were less effective as teachers. Rebecca and Anna both love teaching and interacting with students. Yet despite these commonalities, Rebecca decided to leave the classroom while Anna decided to return.

While Social Cognitive Theory is useful in determining the interaction between behavior, internal motivators, and external factors for teachers on an individual level, it is

difficult to apply to a diverse group of teachers. The teachers who decided to continue teaching have enough internal motivators or external factors in common to make a clear connection between how these factors interacted to help these teachers decide to keep teaching. Each participant's decision to stay in the classroom was unique. The factors and motivations that influenced their actions were exclusive to them.

However, when considering the group of teachers who decided to leave the profession some common factors and motivators begin to emerge that drove them to decide to leave the classroom. Figure 3 illustrates how the common internal motivators and external factors interacted and resulted in these four teacher's ultimate decision to leave the classroom.

Figure 3

Internal Motivators and External Factors Effect on Behavior of Participants Who are No Longer Teaching
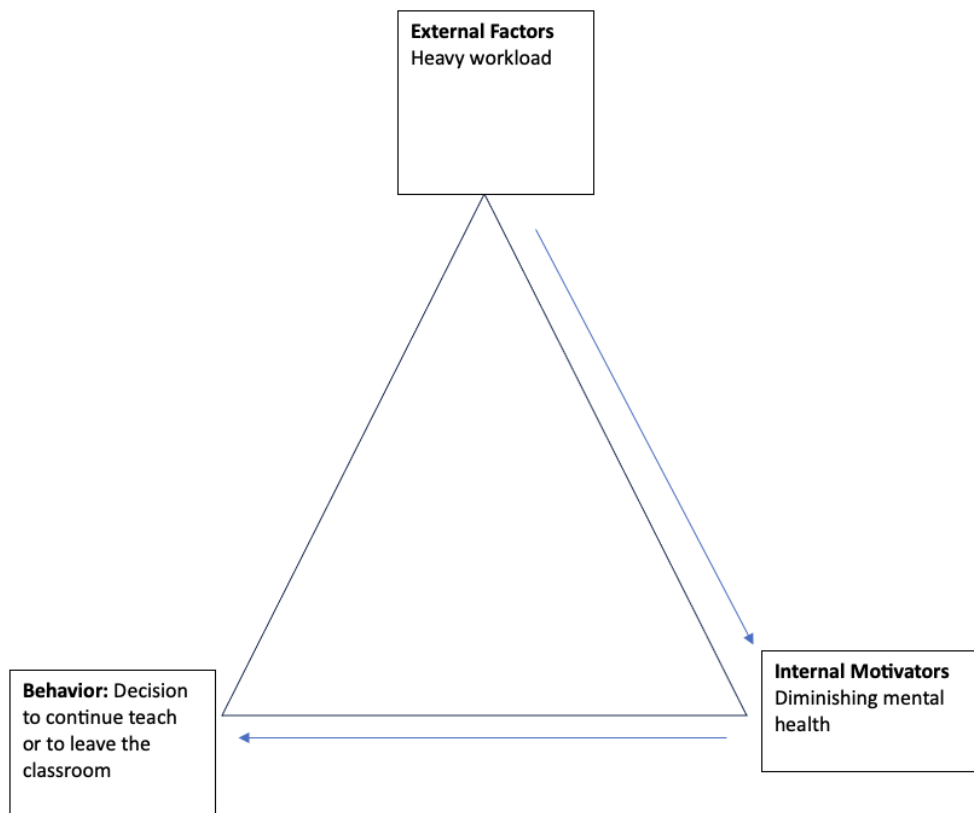
I created this model to show the relationship between workload and mental health. As the workload increases it results in diminishing mental health. This in turn causes teachers to make the decision to leave the classroom.

The group of teachers who decided to leave the classroom all shared one external factor and one internal motivator. Lauren and Nora had wonderful principals. Iris and Rebecca had semi supportive principals. Nora, Iris, and Rebecca had attempted to create boundaries between work and their personal lives, while Lauren had not. Lauren and

Rebecca felt that their teacher efficacy was faltering, while Iris and Nora did not. Lauren, Rebecca, and Iris complained of an increase in negative student behaviors, while Nora did not. Lauren, Iris, and Nora enjoyed a degree of autonomy, while Rebecca was required to teach a required curriculum.

The only external factor that all four teachers shared was workload. The only internal factor, besides a love of teaching, that these four teachers shared was deteriorating mental health. When considering these factors from a Social Cognitive standpoint it can be surmised that the heavy workload faced by these teachers had a negative effect on their mental health, which ultimately led them to make the decision to quit teaching.

Limitations

This study was limited by the amount of time that could be devoted to the study. More time is needed to fully understand the factors and motivators that affect teacher job satisfaction of former and current teachers in the Denver Metro area. If more time were allotted to the study, more teachers could be interviewed allowing for a broader understanding of the factors and motivators that affect teacher job satisfaction.

The study was also limited by geographic location. To truly understand the factors and motivators that affect teacher job satisfaction, teachers from a wider geographic area should be interviewed.

Chapter Five: Discussion

Summary of Findings

After analyzing the interview data from all eight teachers, nine themes arose that highlighted the factors and motivators that affect teacher job satisfaction. The themes were a mix of intrinsic motivators and extrinsic factors. The intrinsic motivators included enjoyment and teacher efficacy and mental health. The extrinsic factors included workload, student behavior, administrative support, autonomy, COVID-19, and work-life balance. Factors and motivators were considered themes if they were found in five or more of the eight interviews.

Significance

This qualitative, narrative study of eight current and former teachers revealed that teacher job satisfaction is greatly affected by teacher efficacy, enjoyment, mental health, autonomy, student behavior, workload, administration, and work-life balance.

When these themes are considered together it becomes apparent that many of the external factors and internal motivators that affect teacher job satisfaction stem from the unrelenting workload that teachers face on a regular basis.

For example, a balance between work and personal life is hard to manage when teachers feel pressure to use their personal time to complete the insurmountable tasks that are placed before them. Lauren illustrated this impossible task best when she said "…just another example is …last fall break. We found a great deal to go on an all-inclusive

vacation, and I decided that we couldn't go because I needed that time to make sure that I was on top of it with my class."

Workload also affects the dichotomous relationship between teachers and administrators. When teachers feel that their administration is placing too much on their plate and not allowing teachers time to complete the tasks at school, they begin to feel resentful toward their administrators and their job satisfaction suffers. Jake exemplified this idea when he stated "…the administration is not going to give you time because they feel like you can squeeze it in that ten minutes of, you know, bathroom break or whatever."

Teacher autonomy suffers when they are required to learn and teach with fidelity a myriad of new curricula every year. This in turn reduces teacher job satisfaction because teachers do not feel that they are able to teach in a way that is best for their students. Learning a new curriculum is a lot of work and requires teachers to spend extra time learning how to use the curriculum. This increases teacher workload.

Teacher workload is increased when teachers are required to call parents every time students exhibit negative behavior and when administration refuses to assist with negative behavior. When teachers are left to deal with negative behavior on their own, they end up spending their planning and lunch time facilitating conversations about behavior with students and contacting parents instead of planning for instruction. As a result of this loss of plan time teachers feel like they need to stay late at school to get caught up or bring work home.

To continue, teachers' mental health is negatively affected by the huge amount of work they are expected to complete. When the work is not completed or is not completed

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to the standard to which the teacher holds themselves too teachers feel inadequate, overwhelmed, ineffective, stressed and anxious about their jobs. Over time, these feelings of unease negatively affect their mental health and can have serious physical side effects. This prolonged stress response often creates feelings of burnout in teachers and negatively affects their job satisfaction. The four former teachers who were interviewed for this study reported having feelings of anxiety and extreme stress due to their job and that this eventually resulted in their decisions to leave the classroom.

While many factors and motivators that affected teacher job satisfaction arose through the study none were as pervasive and insidious as the unrelenting workload that teachers face every day.

Implications for policy

Policies must be created and implemented that reduce teacher workload. The huge amount of work that teachers are expected to complete negatively affects their job satisfaction and negatively influences the other factors and motivators that arose from the data collected during this study.

Policies should also be enacted to allow teachers to access mental health services through the district and at times that are convenient for them. Having mental health professionals available for teachers to talk to on campus or close by would allow more teachers to be able to access mental health care. Many times teachers are leaving school after mental health practices have shut down and they are unable to access these resources. Taking care of teacher mental health should be a top priority for school districts if they hope to keep their qualified and experienced teachers returning to the classroom over a long period of time.

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District administrators and school level administrators need to develop policies and procedures that reduce teacher workload if they hope to keep teachers in the classroom. Policies should be enacted that limit the amount of tasks that teachers are asked to perform and that address the amount of plan time teachers are allotted. Teachers should be allotted at least one hour of uninterrupted plan time for each subject that they are required to teach. This would require major shifts in the way that elementary schools are structured, but would allow teachers the time they need to plan meaningful instruction for each subject. Forty-five minutes of plan time per day is not enough if a teacher is expected to teach four or five different subjects.

Additional staff should be hired to reduce the number of extraneous tasks teachers are required to take on, including dealing with student discipline or cross-walk duty. If this is impossible, current staff, including deans or paras should be assigned these duties to protect the planning time of teachers.

Reducing the amount of tasks that are placed before teachers will result in higher levels of job satisfaction among teachers and will keep more teachers coming back to the classroom year after year.

Implications for practice

Conducting these interviews was much harder for me than I had anticipated. The raw dejection and deep sadness that many of the participants projected while talking about the state of education burrowed into my chest and blanketed me in a dark melancholy. The experiences of these teachers resembled my own experiences as a teacher. From times of great joy to instances of feeling completely unsuccessful despite my best attempts to help my students.

The deafening quietness that had fallen over the once exuberant Iris, and the utter exhaustion I saw on Anna and Lauren's faces as they recounted the hours of lesson planning they did only to discover that they were just barely prepared for the day and were being asked to do more haunt me. I can identify with Nora's fury towards a system that asks so much of teachers with complete disregard for their mental or physical health.

The teachers who were interviewed for this study were teachers who wanted to teach. They loved their students. They loved teaching. They wanted nothing more than to be in the classroom. Unfortunately, the pressures they faced on a day to day basis, many of which have nothing to do with instruction, pushed four of these teachers out of the classroom and has led one to the brink of leaving.

If the overwhelming workload that is placed on teachers is not addressed the mass exodus of teachers from the classroom will continue. Systematic change is needed to combat this issue and to improve teacher job satisfaction. Districts need to start to consider the teacher time and work-life balance before beginning new initiatives. They should carefully consider whether the initiative is necessary and should not only think about how student academic success will be impacted by the initiative, but how teacher job satisfaction will be impacted. Teachers should be given a voice and should be listened to before any new initiatives are enacted.

Administrators at individual schools need to start cutting down on the amount of extra work that their teachers are expected to do. Redundant or unnecessary paperwork should be eliminated from teacher workloads. Administrators should support with student behavior to ensure that teachers are able to use their planning time to plan instead of to

make constant calls home. Administrators should also be a voice for their teachers when meeting with district administrators regarding teacher workload.

To help overcome the effects of burnout teachers should seek mental health care at the beginning of their careers. They should establish a relationship with a trusted counselor or therapist before they begin to experience the effects of burnout. This may help to counterbalance the effects of burnout and will give teachers an established support system to fall back on when they need it.

Teachers should also set firm boundaries between work and their personal lives at the beginning of their careers. Teachers in the study who set boundaries too late in their careers found themselves already in a state of burnout and their boundaries did not significantly increase their mental health to the level necessary to keep them in the classroom. Setting boundaries early in one's career should help counter balance or stave off the negative mental health effects of burnout allowing teachers to remain in the classroom for longer.

If I had regularly visited a counselor or therapist at the beginning of and throughout my career or if I had made a commitment to creating boundaries between my personal life and work early in my career I might have lasted longer. Maybe I would still be teaching. I miss my students and I miss creating inspiring lessons. I miss attending graduations and watching my students morph into young adults with exciting futures ahead of them.

I don't miss the crushing weight of an untenable workload and the unrealistic expectation that teachers sacrifice themselves for the good of their students. Without systematic change, teachers will continue to flee the profession, teacher preparation

programs will continue to shut down due to a lack of students, and children will continue to stagnate in classrooms with unfilled teaching positions. Change is crucial to reversing this trend and to bettering our educational systems. Schools can't exist without teachers.

Areas for Future Research

Future research is needed to fully understand the external factors and internal motivators that keep teachers in the classroom. Many of the teachers in this study including Jake and Anna, stayed in the classroom despite a number of negative elements. Understanding what drives teachers like Jake and Anna to overcome these negative elements to continue teaching will allow us to understand how to better support teachers.

Anna's story is especially interesting. A longitudinal study of teachers of a series of years is necessary to understand why some teachers continue to teach from year to year. At the time of our interview Anna was extremely tired and was feeling the effects of burnout after a very difficult year. However, she had decided to stay in the classroom to continue to teach for the upcoming school year. It would be interesting to study how this school year was going for Anna and if she was going to continue to teach or would leave at the end of the year. Understanding her motivations and experiences in the current school year would help administrators and policy makers create policies that support teachers and help them remain in the classroom.

Summary

This qualitative, narrative study centered on the experiences of eight current and former teachers. Their experiences were examined through interviews with each of the teachers. The following research questions were examined.

1. What are the internal motivators that influence teacher job satisfaction?

2. What are the external factors that influence teacher job satisfaction?

The data collected through the interviews was analyzed and the following factors and motivators that affect teacher job satisfaction emerged: enjoyment, teacher efficacy, mental health, student behavior, administration, autonomy, work-life balance, and workload.

The most prevalent theme was workload. Teacher workload influenced all the other factors and motivators. All the teachers interviewed reported feeling crushed by the amount of work that they were being asked to do every day and lamented that it was negatively affecting their job satisfaction to the point where some of the participants chose to leave the classroom. If teacher workload is not significantly decreased more teachers will chose to leave the profession leaving classrooms empty and students without teachers.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

4. How long have you been teaching?
5. How many schools/districts have you taught in?
6. What is your current position?
7. Will you be returning to the classroom next year or when did you leave?
8. What does a typical day look like for you? What time do you wake up, get to school, daily tasks, leave, etc.
9. How do you feel about the day to day tasks that are inherent in teaching?
10. How do you balance your job with your personal life?
11. What opportunities do you have to grow as an educator?
12. What keeps you going when teaching gets hard?
13. Describe the school/community culture in your building?
14. How does the school or community culture of you building affect your job satisfaction?
15. Describe your administration and how they affect your sense of job satisfaction.
16. When was the last time you were recognized for your work either positively or negatively ? How did that make you feel?
17. How do you think society views educators?
18. How did the COVID 19 pandemic affect your feelings towards teaching?
19. Describe a time in your career when you felt a deep sense of enjoyment
20. What does it mean to you to thrive as a teacher?

Appendix B

Social Media Posting:

Hello! I am a PhD student at the University of Denver who is completing a research study on teacher job satisfaction for my dissertation. I was a teacher for nine years before experiencing extreme burn out. Because of my experiences in the classroom, I am very interested in discovering what factors influence job satisfaction with the hope that this information can be used to create policies and procedures that support teachers and support high levels of teacher job satisfaction.

I am looking for teachers who have been teaching for 5 or more years and who are planning to return to the classroom for the 2023-2024 school year or who have left teaching within the last three years. This study will take place during the summer of 2023 and consists of one interview and the creation of an artistic rendition of a time when you felt high levels of job satisfaction as a teacher.

If you, or someone you know would like to be a part of this important and exciting study please send me an email at Katherine.collins@du.edu . I look forward to hearing from you!

Appendix C

UNIVERSITY *of* DENVER

Consent to Participate in Research

Study Title: Why Stay? An examination of the factors and motivators that influence teacher job satisfaction.

IRBNet #:

Principal Investigator: *Katherine Treloar PhD student*

Faculty Sponsor: *Paul Michalec PhD*

Study Site: *Zoom or a public space in the community*

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Your participation in this research study is voluntary and you do not have to participate. This document contains important information about this study and what to expect if you decide to participate. Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to ask questions before making your decision whether or not to participate.

The purpose of this form is to provide you information that may affect your decision as to whether or not you may want to participate in this research study. The person performing the research will describe the study to you and answer all of your questions. Please read the information below and ask any questions you might have before deciding whether or not to give your permission to take part. If you decide to be involved in this study, this form will be used to record your permission.

Purpose

If you participate in this research study, you will be invited to *participate in an interview either over Zoom or in person regarding the factors and motivations that influence your job satisfaction as a teacher.*

- The purpose of this study is to determine the factors and motivations that influence teacher job satisfaction. The study will take place during the summer of 2023.
- Requirements of the study include a 45-60 minute interview and the collection of an artistic rendition of a time when you truly felt happy as a teacher. The questions asked during the job interview will pertain to factors the teaching environment and the internal motivations that influence(d) your job satisfaction as a teacher.
- You may choose to refuse to answer any question during the interview or to decline to create an artistic rendition of a time when you felt happy as a teacher.

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Consent v2 June 2019
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Risks or Discomforts
There are no expected risks to you as a result of participating in this study.

Benefits
The benefits which may reasonably be expected to result from this study are *a sense of accomplishment at having participated in an important study regarding teacher job satisfaction.* We cannot and do not guarantee or promise that you will receive any benefits from this study.

Confidentiality of Information

The link between your identifiers and the research data will be destroyed after the records retention period required by state and/or federal law.

Limits to confidentiality
All of the information you provide will be confidential. However, if we learn that you intend to harm yourself or others, including, but not limited to child or elder abuse/neglect, suicide ideation, or threats against others, we must report that to the authorities as required by law.

Government or university staff sometimes review studies such as this one to make sure they are being done safely and legally. If a review of this study takes place, your records may be examined. The reviewers will protect your privacy. The study records will not be used to put you at legal risk of harm.

Data Sharing

De-identified data from this study may be shared with the research community at large to advance science and health. We will remove or code any personal information (e.g., your name, date of birth) that could identify you before files are shared with other researchers to ensure that, by current scientific standards and known methods, no one will be able to identify you from the information or samples we share. Despite these measures, we cannot guarantee anonymity of your personal data.

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Consent to video / audio recording / photography solely for purposes of this research
This study involves video/audio recording, and/or photography. If you do not agree to be recorded, you cannot take part in the study.

_____   YES, I agree to be video/audio recorded/photographed.

_____   NO, I do not agree to be video/audio recorded/photographed.

<u>Questions</u>
For questions, concerns, or complaints about the study you may contact *Katherine Treloar at Katherine.collins@du.edu or Paul Michalec and paul.michalec@du.edu* .

If you are not satisfied with how this study is being conducted, or if you have any concerns, complaints, or general questions about the research or your rights as a participant, please contact the University of Denver (DU) Institutional Review Board to speak to someone independent of the research team at 303-871-2121 or email at IRBAdmin@du.edu.

Signing the consent form
I have read (or someone has read to me) this form, and I am aware that I am being asked to participate in a research study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. I will be given a copy of this form**.**

Printed name of subject	**Signature of subject**	**Date**

Please take all the time you need to read through this document and decide whether you would like to participate in this research study.

If you decide to participate, your completion of the research procedures indicates your consent. Please keep this form for your records.

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