AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE PERSONALITY TRAITS

OF AN EFFECTIVE TEACHER IN A NONTRADITIONAL SCHOOL

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James Christopher Long

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Student Name: James Christopher Long

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Dissertation Committee:

  Dissertation Chair: Dr. Steve A. Davidson

  Methodologist Member: Dr. P. Mark Taylor

  Content Member: Dr. Tony Dalton

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Abstract

Teacher retention in schools is a problem in general. In this study, the researcher looked at the issue of teacher retention, specifically in a nontraditional school. The researcher questioned a population of three teachers currently working at a nontraditional school in an urban school district, three teachers who formerly worked at the school, and twenty students at that school regarding the personality traits that would make a teacher successful at a nontraditional school and want to stay in their positions for a period of longer than five years. The researcher gave current and former teachers a job satisfaction survey and Angela Duckworth's grit assessment. The researcher then interviewed teachers regarding their experiences at the school, while students completed the PRAXIS student survey. Six of the students were convened in a focus group to discuss the results of the teacher interviews and the surveys. Conclusions drawn from the data showed the importance of teaching skills, empathy toward the students, and the importance of building relationships with the students. Also, a strong connection was seen between the teachers' level of grit and a tendency to remain in their positions. Information gathered would prove useful in future school staffing, though further study with a larger population was recommended.

      Keywords: nontraditional schools, job satisfaction, grit, empathy, relationships, teacher retention

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my family: my parents Melvyn and Sharon Long, and my sisters Sherry Seal and Kim West. Without their lifelong love and support this endeavor would not have been possible.

I would also like to extend thanks to the teachers in my life who have provided encouragement and inspiration throughout this process. This includes my mentoring teachers Amy Davis and Elizabeth Honeycutt and my work family: Jannice Clark, Marcia Southern, and Erin Stewart.

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CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

The importance of a high school diploma in the lives of students, and for the economy in general, could not be understated. Studies have shown that had the dropouts from just one year graduated, the economy would have gained an estimated $154 billion over those students' lifetimes (Carlson, 2014). Nontraditional and alternative school programs have provided an important pathway to a high school diploma. Though once thought of as a dumping ground for discipline problems and attendance issues, nontraditional schools and their reliance on individualized education and teacher-student relationships have become increasingly important in today's educational landscape (Edwards, 2016). This study focused on one such school, located in a mid-sized urban school system in East Tennessee. This school was founded to provide students in danger of not graduating with their cohort an alternative pathway to graduation.

Statement of the Problem

It was during his tenure at this school that the researcher noticed a definite disparity in the attitudes of his co-workers. While some teachers expressed satisfaction with their positions and their work, a proportion of the teachers openly related negative feelings toward the school. The teachers might have directed their negative feelings at administration, the school's organization in general, or their individual positions within the school. The commonality was a general sense of dissatisfaction. The result of this dissatisfaction tended to be the teachers' leaving their positions at the school, either through retirement or transfer to a traditional school.

The researcher wondered what exactly caused this difference in opinion of the nontraditional setting. This particular school enjoyed smaller class sizes and an unusual sense of teacher autonomy within their subject area. The researcher wondered if there could be some

more underlying reason, perhaps a series of personality traits that could indicate whether one teacher would find their job in a nontraditional school satisfying, while another would be less than happy there.

Purpose and Significance of Study

This study sought to define and describe a series of characteristics or personality traits that would indicate a new teacher would find satisfaction in their work in a nontraditional setting. It was hoped that an overabundance of teacher turnover would be prevented through the hiring of personnel more suited to their positions by using this profile of an ideal teaching personality which referenced the opinions of both teachers and students at a nontraditional school.

The administrators of nontraditional schools found an advantage in beginning the hiring process with an idea in mind of who would be well suited for these positions. Nontraditional schools tended to have smaller class sizes filled with students who often rely on building relationships with their teachers in order to achieve success (Elias, 2009). In addition, it often fell on such schools to teach beyond the curriculum and impart social and emotional skills that could be used by the students in the future (Elias, 2009). The administration should be able to distinguish between applicants who possess these skills and applicants who might need reinforcement in these areas.

Theoretical Foundation

In 1943, Abraham Maslow developed a hierarchy of needs as a series of levels, each of which represented some of the basic human requirements. These needs ranged from the basics like food and shelter to the more abstract needs, such as creativity and self-fulfillment. Maslow's idea was that needs in the upper level cannot be filled before needs in the lower levels

are met; for instance, searching for food or housing on a daily basis would prevent one from being creatively sustained (Cutler, 2010).

If one applied Maslow's hierarchy to the research in question, one would need to think of which level of need fulfillment the teachers at a nontraditional school are operating. One can assume the satisfaction of the bottom levels of food, shelter, and security—or one hopes this is true. One could even extend this and wish most professional adults are finding satisfaction in the "belonging" category and have a network of friends or family (Cutler, 2010). The disconnect could show up in the self-esteem or self-actualization categories. In the former, the teacher would be looking for recognition and respect, while in the latter, the teacher would be looking for a creative outlet (Cutler, 2010). The disconnect would possibly have an effect on the outlook on one's position.

Research Question

What are some of the personality traits of a teacher that would aid them in staying in a position in a nontraditional school for longer than five years?

Rationale for the Study

The rate of teacher turnover could have significant effect on student achievement. Students from high-risk groups, magnify this effect. Schools that rely on teacher-student relationships can find this irreparably harmed due to high teacher turnover. Also, school funds and work hours that could be spent on students are of necessity spent on new-teacher training (Johnson, 2012).

The nontraditional school involved in this research was in this situation. With most core subjects taught by only one instructor, each new hire brings with them a new set of instructional methods, as well as the building of new relationships with students. An improvement in school

culture, as well as a better allocation of school funds, would result from the curbing of teacher turnover.

Researcher Positionality Statement

The researcher is an experienced educator with twenty years of experience in the classroom, much of which was in a nontraditional school setting. It was during this time that he began to notice that his co-workers' opinions of the school and their positions varied greatly. This was the impetus of this research.

Since nontraditional schools of the type in question are of limited number—there is only one in the researcher's system—and operates with a limited faculty, the researcher was forced to interview teachers with whom he had an extensive working, and in some cases personal, relationship. In order to avoid bias, the researcher would need to keep extensive records of his interviews with his coworkers, review interview findings with the interviewees, and make extensive use of peer evaluation of findings.

Also, findings would need to be triangulated through the use of interviews with the staff—both current and former, surveying students in regarding staff performance, and the conduction of a focus group of students in order to review the findings of the student survey.

Definition of Terms

In order to give clarity throughout the study, the researcher has defined the following terms critical to the research.

Grit. The passion and perseverance one possesses for long-term goals (Duckworth, 2016).

Job satisfaction. Satisfaction resulting from day-to-day work activities (Shaukat, 2018).

Job tenure. The measure of the length of time an employer has employed an employee (MBASkool, 2019). In the case of this study, tenure will be limited to the time employed by the nontraditional school, not total time employed by the school system.

Nontraditional school. A public elementary/secondary school that (1) addresses needs of students that a regular school cannot meet, (2) provides nontraditional education, (3) serves as an adjunct to a regular school, or (4) falls outside the categories of regular, special education, or vocational education. (Sable, Plotts, and Mitchell, 2010). Though Sable used this definition regarding alternative schools, the definition was in-depth and included nontraditional schools within it.

Teacher. A professional school staff member who instructs students in prekindergarten, kindergarten, grades 1–12, or ungraded classes and maintains daily student attendance records (Sable, Plotts, and Mitchell, 2010). In the case of this study, the definition would be limited to grades 11 and 12.

Organization of the Study

This study was organized into five chapters. The introductory chapter included items such as the theoretical framework of the study, a statement of the problem researched in the study, and the limitation and delimitations of the study. The researcher then listed and defined terms to be used in the study. The second chapter was a general review of the background literature applicable to the study. This would include a look at nontraditional schools in general, specifically nontraditional schools of the type studied. Also included would be a review of Duckworth's concept of "grit" and Maslow's hierarchy of needs as they relate to the study. A review of the factors which lead to teacher job satisfaction or dissatisfaction was also included.

The methodology of the research comprised chapter three. Chapter four related the results of the study. Finally, in chapter five the researcher drew conclusions from the study and made recommendations based on the conclusions.

Summary

The study interviewed ten teachers associated with a nontraditional school, five current teachers, and several former teachers regarding their time with the school. The researcher questioned the teachers on their views of the school's administration, management, and organization. The researcher asked former teachers to describe the circumstances around and mindset regarding their departure. Teachers also completed a short job satisfaction survey.

A survey was also given to a population of students at the school regarding the attitudes and effectiveness of their teachers, both former and current. The researcher collected results from the student survey and formed the basis for a focus group of five students. The purpose of this focus group was to give insight into the survey findings. The researcher then used the results from the interviews, surveys, and a focus group to create a picture of what could be considered an ideal mindset for a teacher at a nontraditional school.

CHAPTER TWO: Review of the Literature

The topic of teacher job satisfaction was broad, and many aspects could be brought under discussion in relation to it. As this study involved students who attended a non-traditional school, this review of literature began by first defining what was meant by the term, here changed to the more commonly used term "alternative school." Studies that have investigated the roots of teacher job satisfaction have tended to limit themselves to a more traditional school setting; therefore, any review of the literature would by necessity need to view the findings of those studies in terms of how they can be extrapolated to include a non-traditional, alternative education setting.

Essential Historical Literature on the Topic

As the focus of this study was teachers in an alternative school setting, importance was given to obtaining a clear definition of an alternative school. The term "alternative school" has been utilized to describe various types of programs. Generally defined as "educational activities that fall outside the traditional K–12 curriculum (Porowski, O'Connor, & Luo, 2014)," this term has been used to include programs at opposite ends of the educational spectrum, including academic magnet programs and behavior management programs. Porowski, O'Connor, and Luo (2014) discovered in their report attempting to define the term that the general term "alternative school" was used to describe behavior modification programs in 35 states. In order to clarify the term, they suggested that any definition of an alternative education program includes such things as the structure of the program, whom it serves, and how it operates (Porowski et al., 2014).

Despite its attachment to behavior modification, the term "alternative school" has been used throughout the years to refer to many different types of educational institutions. In order to clarify and streamline the literature, Mary Anne Raywid in 1994 categorized alternative

programs into three types. Raywid described a type I school as one that implements alternatives to "make school challenging and fulfilling for all involved" (para.7). An example of this type of school would be a magnet school program.

Raywid's type II schools emphasized behavior modification and were more in line with the general concept of an alternative program, as alternative placement would be provided for students generally considered as behavior problems. Raywid's type III alternative schools were remediation schools utilized by students only until the academic level of their peers was reached, after which they would return to their regular school program. Raywid also emphasizes that alternative schools may be, and often were, blending of these three types (Raywid, 1994).

This blended definition best describes the program included in this study. Though closely related to Raywid's type III, the school used in this study targets students who have fallen behind their classmates and assists them in graduating high school with their original cohort, though not through their original high school. Schools of this type tend to consist of a small class size, a small teaching staff, and focus on individualized, one-on-one education (Simon Youth Foundation, 2019).

Literature Related to Theoretical Lens

In 1943, Abraham Maslow introduced his hierarchy of needs. This set of five levels represented what Maslow described as the basic needs of a human (see Figure 2.1). According to Maslow, the needs expressed on one level of his hierarchy would need to be fulfilled before the needs on the next level could be addressed just as the bottom of a glass must be filled before the top.

Figure 2.1

Maslow's hierarchy of needs displayed as a pyramid with deficiency needs on the bottom

(Burton, 2019)
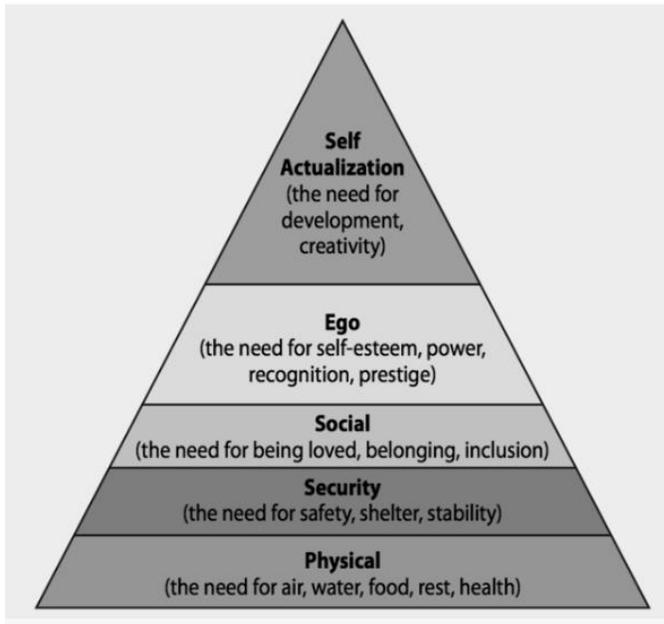
Maslow described the bottom four levels as "deficiency needs" in that one would not notice when they were met but would noticeably feel their absence (Burton, 2019). These needs included such things as food, shelter, or interpersonal relationships. For instance, one would tend not to notice when one's belly was full but would probably express the fact to all around when one was noticeably hungry.

The uppermost of these levels, titled "Self-Actualization" by Maslow, was described as a "growth need." Maslow felt that this level was required for one to reach their fullest potential as a human being. Maslow also felt that few would be able to achieve this level, as the personal qualities required to arrive there—honesty, creativity, awareness—were not available to most people (Burton, 2019).

Applying Maslow's concepts to the workplace, one must look at how those levels were fulfilled on the job. The first two of Maslow's levels, often referred to as the psychological and safety levels, require fulfillment in order for the employee to find fulfillment at work (Pontefract, 2016). For instance, if the employee does not experience joy when with their coworkers or does not feel as if they were rewarded monetarily for their service, the employee will not feel as if they were safe and valued in their positions.

When one finds the upper tiers of Maslow filled in the workplace, one finds a more purpose-driven employee. With the added benefit of self-actualization added to workplace safety, an employee can be said to find the workplace more meaningful (Pontefract, 2016). This type of employee can be said to view their position as more than a mere job and feel as though their presence makes a difference. While a good salary and stable position can add to this position, an employee's reliance on their own creativity and expression was needed to complete the transition to the upper tier.

In the classroom, Maslow was often spoken of in relation to the attitude of students. For instance, a new teacher would make sure their students were not thirsty or that the temperature of the classroom was adequate before beginning a lesson. The teacher would then want to be sure the students had time to properly socialize during the lesson. A student would be expected to take charge of their own learning only after those steps had been achieved (Hanson, n.d.).

Applying Maslow to the teacher, one could expect the deficiency needs to become the responsibility of the teachers themselves. Remaining hydrated and fed should be part of an adult's toolkit; taking time for oneself and not allowing one's work-life to encroach on one's personal time would be a skill-set that one would develop out of necessity (Brassell, 2015).

Reaching the self-actualization level would require more from the teacher's skill set. Those who have attained the level of self-actualization would treat their jobs as a purpose and tend to have an interconnected view of life. A person with a high level of self-actualization would tend to view their career only from the aspect of how they would be of service to the world around them (Kaufman, 2018). Guiding an employee to this self-actualization level would require an administrator or manager to shift reliance on extrinsic motivation—the self-actualized employee would care little for a bonus or a vacation—and over to the more intrinsic motivators, such as allowing the employee to set their own goals and have more creative input over their position (Rogers, 2016).

Maslow's social need for belonging was identified in a 2019 study by Tim Cockerill in which attempted to show the success of a shared placement program. In this program, British students with behavior or emotional problems had their educational hours divided between a regular education program and an alternative school. While the study proved inconclusive as to whether the shared educational experience was successful for the students, the researcher found that a measurement of the student's feeling of belonging in one program or the other was a definite indicator of the student's educational success (Cockerill, 2019).

Literature Related to the Study

In this review of literature related to the topic of teacher job satisfaction, both academic databases and internet searches were utilized. The general search term "teacher job satisfaction" was used at first for a general overview. As specific subtopics within that term began to appear, further search terms were added to the original, such as "leadership style," "years tenure," or "grit." While researching the student-centered aspect of the study, search terms such as "student views of teachers" or "student perception of teacher job satisfaction" were used. While no

specific journal tended to be represented more than others, studies conducted and articles written within the last ten years were given preference. Exceptions were made however, for general knowledge items such as a job satisfaction survey created in 1994.

Questionnaire development. Past studies performed regarding teacher job satisfaction tend toward the quantitative side of research. Of the studies reviewed, all make use of some form of job satisfaction survey though some surveys were modified toward teachers. One survey example would be the "Job Satisfaction Survey" developed by Paul Spector in 1994. This 36-question survey poses statements to the participant such as "When I do a good job, I receive the recognition for it that I should receive" or "I find I have to work harder at my job because of the incompetence of people I work with" (para 1) and asked the participant to rank their agreement with the statement on a one to five scale.

Another version of this study was developed by Allesandro Pepe in 2011. In this model, called the TJSS-9, the 1994 Spector survey was pared down to nine items. These items were developed to measure specific aspects of a teacher's job satisfaction. This included three items related to a teacher's satisfaction with their co-workers, three items related to a teacher's satisfaction with their students' parents, and three items related to a teacher's satisfaction with the behavior of their students. As with the longer Spector survey, the teacher was asked to rank each item on a one to five scale, with a ranking of one expressing extreme dissatisfaction and a ranking of five expressing extreme satisfaction. (Pepe, 2011)

In a 2017 study to test the effectiveness of the TJSS-9, Pepe and his coauthors used it to test the job satisfaction of a population of almost three-thousand teachers in six different countries. Though the purpose of the study was to discover the effectiveness of the TJSS-9 in the study of job satisfaction, the study did find a strong correlation between the satisfaction of

teachers in their jobs and the social interaction with their coworkers, showing teachers who expressed satisfaction with their co-workers tended to be more satisfied in their positions (Pepe, Addimando, & Veronese, 2017).

Echoing this sentiment was a 2016 report for the Society for Research on Educational Effectiveness. This study of New York City middle school teacher turnover rate discovered four main factors that lead to teachers staying in their positions. These were principals who valued professional development, high student expectations within the school, and a safe school environment. The fourth deciding factor for staying in their job was—as in Pepe's study, social connectedness with their coworkers (Matthew, Marinell, &Yee, 2016).

As for the TJSS-9, the study found that teachers polled responded favorably to the shortened length of the survey—nine questions versus Spector's 36 question survey. In addition, teachers who completed the survey on paper expressed more satisfaction with the survey than did those who completed it electronically (Pepe et al., 2017).

Job satisfaction and years' experience. A 2010 study by Robert Klassen and Ming Chiu looked less at the effectiveness of a survey tool and more into how job satisfaction was related to teacher stress, gender, and years of experience. Using a survey entitled "What Motivates Teachers," Klassen and Chiu questioned nearly 1 500 teachers who attended a teacher conference. In analyzing their results, it was found that teacher stress had a direct relationship to job satisfaction. In conjunction with this, Klassen and Chiu discovered that female teachers tended to describe more job stress, and therefore reported less job satisfaction (Klassen & Chiu, 2010).

Also of interest in Klassen and Chiu's study was the connection between years on the job and job satisfaction. The study discovered low levels of job satisfaction among teachers early in

their careers, in addition to low levels of efficacy. As the number of years the teacher had worked increased, so did their level of job satisfaction and efficacy. Interestingly, after reaching a peak at mid-career, levels of job satisfaction and efficacy began to decline throughout the rest of the teacher's career (Klassen & Chiu, 2010).

Lending support to Klassen and Chiu was a 2010 study by Zülfü Demirtas, who looked at 289 teachers in a Turkish primary school. The teachers were given a five-question teacher satisfaction survey (see Appendix A) originally designed by Ho and Au for a study conducted involving teachers in China (Ho & Au, 2006), and their responses were correlated to their ages. In results similar to Klassen & Chiu, Demirtas discovered the highest levels of job satisfaction were reported among teachers in both the 26-30 and in the above 40 age ranges. The lowest levels of job satisfaction were discovered in the 41 and over age groups (Demirtas, 2010).

A 2016 study by Xiaoyan Gu appeared to contradict these findings. In this study, Gu used Spector's 36-question job satisfaction survey to question 36 teachers in New York public schools. Gu then correlated the results of the study to the number of years' experience of the participants; the experience of the teachers ranged from one month to thirty years. In his results, Gu found only an insignificant correlation between years taught and teacher dissatisfaction with their job (Gu, 2016).

Job satisfaction and leadership style. The relationship between administration leadership style and job satisfaction was explored in a 2001 study by Ronit Bolger. In this study, Bolger questioned 745 Israeli teachers regarding their positions and their experiences with their leadership. Regarding job perception, Bolger discovered that teachers who viewed their positions with prestige and with a high sense of autonomy tended to have higher rates of job satisfaction.

Concerning leadership style, a teacher's job satisfaction tended to increase as they described their leadership as more transformational and less transactional (Bolger, 2001). In terms of this study, a transformational leader would be viewed as one who allowed their staff a more autonomous position; a transactional leader would be one who tended to be more dictatorial and kept staff mostly away from the decision-making process (Bolger, 2001). In support of this was a 2013 study by Ayhan, Sarier, and Uysal, which used a meta-analysis of twelve previous studies of schools in Turkey. The results of this meta-analysis showed that as an administrator became more transformational and less transactional, the job satisfaction and commitment shown by teachers began to increase (Ayhan, Sarier, & Uysal, 2013).

Credence was given to the democratic leadership style in a 2017 study by Ch, Ahmad, Malik, & Batool in which 200 public school secondary teachers were given questionnaires to determine both the leadership style of their principals and their level of job satisfaction. In this study, the teachers ranked the leadership style of their principals by agreeing or disagreeing with a series of statements such as "my principal makes all decisions by himself" or "my principal takes opinions from teachers and follows them," (Ch, Ahmad, Malik, & Batool, 2017, p. 51) placing their principal on a spectrum from autocratic to democratic leadership. Job satisfaction surveys took a similar agree/ disagree approach with statements such as "I feel I am an important part of the school" and "I am satisfied with the benefits of this profession." (Ch, Ahmad, Malik, & Batool, 2017, p. 52)

The results of the study showed a strong correlation between the level to which a teacher expressed satisfaction with their job and the level to which they ranked their principal as a democratic leader. In addition to this, the teachers that described their principal as having a more autocratic leadership style tended to have a much lower level of job satisfaction (Ch et al., 2017).

These studies, however, were in opposition to an earlier study by Heller, Clay, and Perkins wh0 surveyed 339 teachers regarding their job satisfaction. While the study indicated that job pay had a negative correlation with their job satisfaction and relationship with co-workers showed a positive correlation, the leadership style of the administrator appeared to have no relationship to whether the participants were satisfied with their positions (Heller et al., 1993).

Job satisfaction and grit. Another factor to be considered in job satisfaction was Angela Duckworth's concept of "grit," which was defined in terms of an individual's willingness to stay with a task when presented with opposition or failure (Fessler, 2018). In a 2014 study by Robertson-Kraft and Duckworth, this concept was used as a predictor of how long novice teachers could be expected to remain in their positions. The researchers used around 450 subjects in two low-income school districts and had the teachers self-score themselves using the grit survey created by Duckworth (see appendix A). In addition to the grit self-scores, other information that could be an indication of teacher effectiveness was collected. This included the new teacher's college GPA, their SAT scores, and information regarding their leadership potential collected as part of their original job interview (Robertson-Kraft & Duckworth, 2014).

The results of this study found that teachers who self-scored as being high in grit were more likely to stay at their jobs throughout the entirety of their first year. For example, a teacher scoring one unit higher on the grit scale than their coworkers were over twice as likely to be retained throughout the school year. In addition, the study indicated that none of the other factors collected were as likely to indicate this teacher retention (Robertson-Kraft & Duckworth, 2014).

This mimics results from a similar, earlier study by Duckworth in which she investigated a population of 390 new teachers. Duckworth surveyed the teachers regarding their grit, their

satisfaction with their lifestyle, and their optimism prior to beginning their first year of teaching.

At the end of the year, the teachers surveyed were evaluated according to the gains made by their

students. Duckworth discovered that only the information regarding grit and lifestyle

satisfaction showed correlation with gains made by students, with teachers scoring high in grit,

and satisfaction showing more significant student gains (Duckworth, Quinn, & Seligman, 2009).

Other studies involving grit include a 2015 study by Jeremy Madden. In Madden's study,

grit was viewed as an attribute of administration rather than that of the teaching staff. Principals

in several Alabama public schools were given Duckworth's grit assessment. This was compared

to teacher surveys regarding their trust in the principal and their commitment to the institution.

The results of this study showed no connection between principal grit and teacher trust or teacher

commitment, with principals ranking both high and low on Duckworth's grit scale showing

similar overall levels of trust from and support by their teachers (Madden, 2015).

Job satisfaction and students. Studies investigating the link between a teacher's job

satisfaction and their students often involve the academic performance of those students. A 2016

study by Iqbal Asif and his co-authors looked at a population of 322 high school teachers in

Pakistan. Teachers were surveyed regarding their job satisfaction, and these results were

compared to the standardized test results of the students they taught. Results did not show a

strong correlation between the satisfaction of the teachers in their jobs and students who

performed strongly on the exams (Asif, Fakhra, Tahir, & Shabbir, 2016).

An earlier study looked at Italian junior high school teachers who were surveyed

regarding their job satisfaction and their beliefs about their own efficacy. The final grades of the

students were monitored over two years. The study did conclude a positive correlation between

the teachers' beliefs in their own efficacy, job satisfaction, and student performance. The

researcher indicated that the increased student performance was the cause of the increased job satisfaction, however, and not that the satisfied teachers were causing the increase in student achievement (Capara & Barbanelli, 2003).

A 2015 study by Neena Bannerjee and her co-authors looked at both teacher job satisfaction and school culture's effects on student achievement. In the study, elementary students in 23 different schools were tested regarding their math and English proficiency over several years. In addition, teachers were surveyed regarding their job satisfaction and the culture of their school. Bannerjee found that teacher job satisfaction alone had no effect on student math scores and only a modest effect on student English scores. Banerjee also discovered that school culture, combined with teacher job satisfaction, had a great effect on both aspects of student achievement in that a strong, positive school culture seemed to engender an upswing in teacher job satisfaction. When both of these increased, an increase in student achievement could be observed (Banerjee, Stearns, Moller, & Mickelson, 2015).

Research has also indicated that a teacher's performance evaluation has a questionable effect on their level of job satisfaction. A 2016 study by Pamela Downing looked at the Ohio Teacher Evaluation System (OTES) and how this evaluation system affected the job satisfaction of the teachers in Ohio. At the time of the study, the OTES was a new method of teacher evaluation. Previously, Ohio teachers were evaluated regarding their performance in the classroom; the OTES emphasized the academic performance of their students on state tests over teacher classroom performance (Downing, 2016).

Three-hundred twenty-one teachers throughout Ohio were given an online job satisfaction survey around the same time as their OTES evaluation would have been returned to them. Analysis of the results could determine no correlation between the teachers' job

satisfaction and their performance on the OTES. The researchers did note that the survey

included several open-ended questions with which the teachers could express their opinions of

the OTES. While the majority of opinions expressed by the teachers were negative toward the

evaluation system, these opinions also held no correlation to their overall job satisfaction

(Downing, 2016).

Student perceptions of teachers. Adding detail to the overall perception of teacher

success in this study would be the views on their job performance by the students under their

care. This was taken into consideration in a 2010 study by Lewthwaite and McMillan in which

science education in the local school attempted to incorporate the traditional cultural views of the

local population along with the modern science curriculum. In the course of the study, the

researchers interviewed fifth through eighth-grade students through questionnaires, individual

interviews, and group interviews. The researchers also observed six teachers of varying

ethnicities who had previously been identified as successful teachers (Lewthwaite & McMillan,

2010).

In interviews with the students on what they viewed as educational success, the students

tended to identify working toward a result as an educational success. The students interviewed

viewed assignments such as completing a major project or completing a series of math problems

as working toward a result and worthy of completion. When questioned about what made for a

positive educational environment, students referred to the caring nature of the teachers and that

their teachers took a personal interest in them. For example, one student stated, "She can bother

me, and it is because she cares. We think that she cares about everyone the same way"

(Lewthwaite & McMillan, 2010, para. 38).

In their view of assignments, other studies reinforced the functional opinion of the Inuit students. In a 2016 Australian study, 34 Trinidad and Tobago secondary science students were questioned on their opinion of the homework assignments given by their teachers. The resulting data showed that 65% of the students viewed homework as a "waste of time," and 71% felt that homework was not "meaningful or beneficial." (Maharaj-Sharma & Sharma, 2016, p. 154)

The researchers also discovered that over 71% of the students did not complete or submit over half of their homework assignments. The reasons given by the students tended to implicate teacher actions, such as the teacher did not collect the homework, the homework did not align with the assignments, or the students knew the teacher would not grade the homework. External factors not related to their teacher tended to implicate duties external to school, such as household chores (Maharaj-Sharma & Sharma, 2016).

The emotions expressed by teachers also have been seen to have an impact on their students. In a 2018 study by Toraby and Modarresi, Iranian university students were questioned regarding the emotions expressed by their teachers and the extent to which they felt their teachers had taught successful lessons. The researchers found a positive correlation between the perception of successful lessons and the expression of emotions such as enjoyment and pride; in addition, teachers expressing boredom and anger tended to have lessons perceived as unsuccessful by their students (Toraby & Modarresi, 2018).

A reverse view was seen in a 2012 study involving over one thousand Turkish university students. In this study, students were polled regarding their teachers' main reason for discriminating among their students. Of the choices given—such as the students' political opinions or faith—over 71% of the students stated that their socio-economic background was the

most common source of discrimination by teachers, with this opinion equally distributed among both males and females (Tomul, Celik, & Tas, 2012).

Specific Literature Related to the Current Study

Leadership style. One aspect of job satisfaction that must be considered in any school was the leadership style of the administrator. A school leader may assume one—or more than one—of several guises in order to find the style that best serves their staff. The leadership styles listed below have been used as common examples.

In an authoritarian leadership, a leader would assume total control of their staff. The decision-making process would involve only one person. The rare team meeting would be deemed unnecessary, as it would be used only to distribute rules and guidelines to staff (Pande, 2015). Under an authoritarian, the chain of command would consist of only two people, the leader and those who follow the orders.

Though this would seem out of place in a modern school, under certain situations, this would be an ideal leader. Outside of a school, this would normally be seen in a military situation where not following orders would have more dire consequences than low test scores. Within a school, however, this type of leader would be more in place when a young or inexperienced staff requiring explicit guidance makes up the majority of the faculty (Smith, 2017).

The democratic leadership style was described by John Gastil (1994) as including "self-determination, inclusiveness, equal participation, and deliberation" (p.956) among its people. Gastil also goes on to make a distinction between authority and leadership, stating that the members of a democratic leadership "act as leaders, even though they have no formal authority" (p.957).

Authority was the key to Gastil's definition, as he gives a democratic leader three main jobs. The first was to give assignments to their constituents, the second was to "empower the membership," and the third was to "aid…in deliberations" (1994, p. 958). In the business world, Steve Jobs was often viewed as a democratic leader in his revitalization of Apple in the early 2000s, especially in his mentoring of Tim Cook, who later became CEO of the company (Gill, 2016).

A laissez-fair, or "hands-off," leader would do little actual governing. This leadership style would give immense freedom to its followers. However, it would also provide them with the resources needed to solve problems, and an expectation of followers to be self-sufficient. A leader of this type would only flourish in unique circumstances, such as with an experienced and driven—and not novice—staff. Also, creativity would be of value, as it tends to thrive under uninhibited circumstances (Cherry, 2017).

A transactional leader would "give followers something they want in exchange for something the leader wants" (Judge & Piccolo, 2004, p. 755). In a school, for example, bonuses would be given for improved test scores, or students would be given celebrations for good behavior. A downside of that would be that transactional leadership does not value innovation and creativity (Aarons, 2007). Followers of a transactional leader would be working with a reward in mind and would be loath to innovate in fear that the goal of reward would not be attained. A teacher may be afraid to try an untested technique out of fear that student results would decline, resulting in a missed bonus check. In a 2017 address, Lee Duemer warned of the danger of transactional leadership as "our most valued and defining principles such as academic freedom, shared governance, and participatory decision-making come to be regarded as obstacles rather than common values we all share" (Duemer, 2017, p. 8).

In "Transformational and Transactional Leadership: A Meta-Analytic Test of Their Relative Validity," Timothy Judge and Ronald Piccolo (2004) used the apt descriptor "charismatic leader" to describe the transformational leadership style. In this article, the authors stated that such leaders "display conviction, take stands, and appeal to followers on an emotional level" (pg. 755). They also mentioned that employers of this leadership style acted as mentors to their followers and were concerned with the feelings and emotions of their followers, as well as their job performance. Transformational leadership does not work well within an overly defined structure. For a leader to be truly transformational, a certain amount of freedom was needed (Spahr, 2016).

A situational leadership style places its focus solely on those being led and changes what it was based on what they needed. This style was introduced in the 1970s by Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard, who felt that no one style would be effective for all situations (Mulder, 2013). The situational leader is given several options depending on what was needed.

Hersey and Blanchard looked at the independence of the employees and modified the leader accordingly. Employees with low independence will need a leader with a strong sense of direction, giving strict rules and regulations. Employees with a high level of independence will need a leader to be in the role of advisor rather than a ruler (Mulder, 2013). In this sense, the situational leader would be able to vary their behavior from authoritarian to laissez-fair, depending on the situation.

The idea of servant as leader was espoused by Robert Greenleaf (1970) in his book Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness. In it, he describes coming across the idea when reading a novel in which a band of explorers was thrown

into chaos after their manservant disappears. With the person upon whom they relied on having their everyday chores completed gone, the band was unable to function.

Greenleaf classifies several characteristics of the servant leader. These include listening and empathy, as well as community building and commitment to growth (Russell & Stone, 2002). The view was that the role of the servant leader was to make life easier for those they serve. In the educational setting, this could be as small as making sure the proper supplies have been stocked. On a larger scale, this could also mean providing professional development opportunities that would benefit the staff in the future.

Grit. Another important idea related to teacher job satisfaction and teacher retention would be Angela Duckworth's concept of "grit." In looking at what grit actually was, one would find several succinct definitions. One such definition read, "grit is passion and sustained persistence applied toward long-term achievement, with no particular concern for rewards or recognition along the way" (Fessler, 2018, para. 1). This definition also states that grit "combines resilience, ambition, and self-control in the pursuit of goals that take months, years, or even decades" (para. 1).

This definition of grit would give one an idea of what grit actually was—passion and persistence—with the added concept that this passion would be present even in the absence of reward. The second portion of the definition allowed the reader to know the actual timeframe of grit; the idea that the passion for a project or an idea might take a significant amount of time to reach fruition. In this definition, one would view grit as a level of persistence for a wanted goal that persisted over an indefinite timeline in the absence of reward.

In a 2013 TED talk by Angela Duckworth, it was interesting to note that she came upon her idea of grit when she was a seventh-grade teacher noticing that the talent of her students was

not a clear indicator of their actual grades. Duckworth pursued this insight and entered graduate school in her thirties to research this concept and look at it as it related to populations of spelling bee contestants, West Point cadets, and inner-city teachers (Duckworth, 2013).

Her results, that grit was a better indicator of success than IQ or talent, was surprising. Duckworth made the statement that subjects high in grit viewed life's challenges as long-term goals, exerting their energy toward projects with an eye toward the future, and not the quick gains (Duckworth, 2013).

Duckworth admitted to there being little knowledge of how grit was instilled in students. She did mention that teaching students about "growth mindset," as espoused by Carol Dweck had some success. The student who learned about Dweck's theory would learn that their mind never lost the ability to change and grow and tended to view setbacks as temporary. Duckworth emphasized the need to learn more about grit and how to instill it in students (Duckworth, 2013).

Understanding that any success takes a significant amount of time and effort, one can understand that the temptation to give up and move on to something else would be appealing. In a list of ways to cultivate grit, John Gordon acknowledged this but also acknowledged that grit was a necessary aspect of becoming a successful leader (Gordon, 2017).

Gordon mentioned acceptance of failure as an important aspect of grit, stating that failure "builds the character to succeed," and that it "doesn't define you, it refines you." (Gordon, 2017, para. 8). This was similar to Duckworth's espousal of the growth mindset and learning that it was essential to know that failure does not end things, but was temporary.

In addition, Gordon mentioned the importance of ignoring critics and plowing through to one's goal (Gordon, 2017). Group criticism of leadership would be counterintuitive to this,

though tapping into grit would help one ignore critics and keep eyes on the goal, whether that would be student success or success in one's own position.

The growth mindset. Hand in hand with Duckworth's concept of grit would be Carol Dweck's concept of a "growth mindset." In a 2014 talk to Stanford University alumni, Dweck describes this mindset as the "power of yet" about a group of Chicago students who were given the designation "not yet" as opposed to "failed" when satisfactory progress was not made on standardized tests. Dweck described the growth mindset as emphasizing the process of learning, rather than on the outcome, and noted marked increase in the success of students who cultivated this mindset in their daily work (Dweck, 2016).

In applying the growth mindset to the classroom, Dweck later stated that teachers who successfully implemented it into practice through the celebration of mistakes and acknowledgment that failure was part of the learning process were often guilty of falling back onto fixed mindset attitudes. This was most often through the praise of effort alone and not through what new outcomes the failed effort could provide. Dweck suggested this could be remedied through the acknowledgement that both the fixed and the growth mindset exists within each learner in order to be cognizant of what triggers the fixed mindset (Dweck, 2015).

Summary

Looking at the research, it became apparent that the majority of studies were quantitative and tended to focus on the co-relation of only one pre-selected aspect's relationship to teacher job satisfaction. Examples in the review of the literature included Klassen and Chiu's (2010) studies involving job satisfaction's relationship with teacher tenure and stress level or Bolger's study, which compared levels of job satisfaction to the principal's leadership style.

Another trend seen in the literature was its reliance on a quantitative research style. Each of the studies discussed above used a version of a teacher job satisfaction questionnaire. This includes the more extensive 36-question survey developed by Paul Spector (Spector, 1994), the much shorter, 9-question TJSS-9 developed by Allesandro Pepe (Pepe, 2011), and the even shorter 5-question survey used by Demirtas (Demirtas, 2010). Though each survey varied in length, they shared a connection in that each consisted of a series of statements the teacher ranked from one to five, with a score of one indicating complete disagreement and five indicating complete agreement.

The results of the studies presented offered varying findings. Overall, the trend seen is that teacher tend to be more satisfied in their positions when they have a firm foundation in the concept of grit (Duckworth, 2009; Robertson-Kraft & Duckworth, 2014), though that seems to hold true only for instructional staff and not administrators (Madden, 2015). Teachers also tended to be less satisfied in their positions early on in their careers and later in their careers (Klassen & Chiu, 2010; Demeritas, 2010).

Regarding administrators, although grit seemed not to be a factor in whether they were trusted by their staff (Madden, 2015), their leadership style affected whether their teaching staff was happy. Several studies have indicated that a principal who affected a more transformational leadership style, showing concern over their teacher's emotional state as well as their job performance and leaving teachers with a bit more autonomy (Judge & Piccolo, 2004), have more satisfied teachers under their watch than transactional administrators, who work on the basis of rewarding good performance and undervaluing creativity (Judge & Piccolo, 2004).

Relating teacher job satisfaction to student performance was a bit trickier. While the Asif study discovered no relationship between teachers happy in their job and students performing

well in school (Asif et al., 2016). The Bannerjee study did find a relationship, but only when teacher job satisfaction went hand in hand with a positive school climate (Bannerjee et al., 2017).

In a review of how students view the job performance of their teachers, several trends emerge. First, students have consistently rated teachers who expressed genuine emotion for them higher than teachers who did not (Lewthwaite & McMillan, 2010) and were responsive to positive emotions and words from their instructors as opposed to negative ones (Toraby & Modarresi, 2018). Students have been seen to be perceptive of teachers who hold prejudices against them, such as against their social status or economic class (Tomul et al., 2012).

Regarding assignments, students were shown to have an awareness of the types of assignments required by their teachers and responded to assignments that had them working toward a goal (Lewthwaite & McMillan, 2010). Students also were seen to be sensitive to the importance of their homework and were less likely to complete assignments they deemed them to be trivial or assignments they knew would not be graded by their instructors (Maharaj-Sharma & Sharma, 2016).

Upon review of the data, one can surmise that quantitative research has discovered many possible solutions to the question of what gives a teacher job satisfaction. Qualitative interviews with teachers, on the other hand, might allow them the freedom to express their own personal views on what makes them satisfied in their work. This would also allow the reasons for that satisfaction to be discovered from the interviews and not hemmed-in by as many predetermined factors.

CHAPTER THREE: Methodology

During the review of the literature, the researcher discovered the abundant use of quantitative research regarding educator job satisfaction in a traditional school setting. In this study, the researcher changed both aspects by conducting the research qualitatively and studying the job satisfaction level of teachers working in a nontraditional school

Qualitative research stemmed from the idea that it "seeks to understand and interpret human and social behavior as it is lived by its participants in a particular social setting" (Ary, Jacobs, Sorenson, & Walker, 2014). In that the working atmosphere was different in an alternative school than in a traditional school, one would imagine the stressors and pleasures found in those situations would be different. Qualitative research and its assumption that the social world was constructed of variables that were difficult to measure (Ary et al., 2014) provided the freedom to allow the educators to describe the factors that gave them a satisfactory workplace, rather than selecting them from a predetermined list.

Research Question

What are some of the personality traits that would aid a teacher in staying in a nontraditional school for longer than five years?

Population and Sample

In this study, the researcher utilized a smaller sample population than had been described in the literature because teachers in an alternative or nontraditional setting received the focus. Alternative schools in this system tended to focus on student behavior, making the schools most like a type I alternative school as described by Raywid (1994), in which students attend due to excessive discipline issues requiring their separation from their peers.

The school utilized in this study resembled Raywid's type III alternative school in that it aimed to aid students who had fallen behind their peers academically and required remediation not available in a traditional school setting (Raywid, 1994). Students at this school may have faced behavioral or emotional problems in their past educational experiences, but that was not the primary reason they had moved from a traditional education setting. Unfortunately, this school was the only one of its type in the system; this limited the teacher population size to that of the school's staff. The school also contained a small student population, composed only of students in the eleventh and twelfth grades.

In that vein, the teachers questioned during the survey consisted of two populations: teachers currently at the school for over five years and teachers no longer at the school, who left before reaching the five-year employment mark. It was possible to obtain a population size of three participants in both categories. Teachers who left the school before the five-year mark included both retirees and one teacher who transferred to a traditional school. Both populations of teachers were Caucasian and ranged in age from their late 30s to the early 60s.

The researcher also questioned students regarding their teachers, querying students who were instructed by a teacher currently employed at the school and a former teacher. The transitory nature of the student population made this problematic. Students over eighteen years of age were given preferential placement in the study; however, this age requirement was of little concern since the school catered to students in the seventeen to eighteen age range. The researcher anticipated a population of ten to fifteen of these students to be available for the study.

Description of Instruments

The researchers asked both current and former teachers to fill out two surveys before their interview (see appendix A). The first was the six-question job satisfaction survey designed

by Ho and Au (Ho, 2006), followed by Duckworth's grit survey (Duckworth, 2016). The researchers instructed former teachers to view the job satisfaction survey in light of their previous position in the nontraditional school. Teachers were then interviewed one-on-one about their beliefs and their feelings regarding their current or past teaching assignments (see Appendix B).

Students involved in the survey were first given the PRAXIS Student Survey for Secondary Grades (Educational Testing Service, 2013). Students completed the entire survey (see appendix C), though only questions relating to study were used in data collection. The researcher instructed students to respond to the questions through reflection on their teachers as a whole and not any individual teacher. The researcher then selected a focus group of six students from those who had completed the questionnaire. The researcher used the results of the survey to drive the discussion points for the focus group.

Research Procedures for Study

After the researcher selected the participants, they were contacted and asked to complete the pre-interview questionnaires and provide informed consent forms (see appendix D). The researcher also provided parents or guardians of students who would complete the survey with informed consent forms. Students completed their questionnaire during a homeroom period during school hours after parental permission was received.

Next, the researcher conducted teacher interviews. Interviews were loosely structured, enabling teachers to reflect and expound upon the personality traits that led to their satisfaction in or dissatisfaction with their positions. Job satisfaction factors found in the literature review; such as administration leadership style, years in service, or teacher grit level were used to form topics included in the interviews

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The researcher also conducted a focus group of six students selected from those who had previously taken the student survey. The researcher questioned the students on their opinions of their teachers based on the results of the student survey and factors discovered in teacher interviews. The results of this focus group were used to construct a list of positive and negative teacher characteristics as viewed by the students.

The data were triangulated through the use of interviews with current and former teachers, surveys completed by the current students, and through a focus group of six students who had participated in the study. Once interviewed, the researcher asked the participants to review the researcher's conclusions to corroborate the inferred results with the participants. Student members of the focus group were contacted individually to discuss results from the focus group. The researchers used input from the interviewees during follow-up interviews to refine the data.

Data Analysis Procedures

The coding process began after the teacher interviews. The researcher transcribed and open coded teacher responses according to their similarities. For example, the researcher placed answers referring to administration in one category, while placing responses referring to the student population in another. After the establishment of these beginning categories, axial coding of the categories began. In the axial coding, the first categories were reviewed and placed in groups according to common themes that relate to the personality or level of job satisfaction of the teacher.

Student surveys were open coded according to the percentages of students who answered questions in the same manner. These categories were used to inform questions asked during the student focus group, which also served as a member check for the student surveys. Topics

resulting from responses from the focus group were open coded according to general categories, such as the teacher's relationship with students or difficulty of the teacher's class, then axial coded according to themes relating to the teacher's personality traits as viewed by the students.

Limitations, Delimitations, and Assumptions

Limitations of the study fell into two categories. First, the researcher selected teachers and students to include in the study from only one school within the researcher's school system—a school at which employed the researcher. As other nontraditional schools within the researcher's system focused on discipline or mental health issues, they were not similar to the nontraditional school in question and would not apply to the study.

Second, the researcher's relationship with the teachers interviewed was notable. In addition to being the sole nontraditional school of its type within the system, the school employed a small staff. One or two teachers per subject area were the norm in this school, making an overlap between the personal and professional all but impossible.

A delimitation in the study was the researcher's use of only a nontraditional school. While this limited the size of the research participant pool, this also limited the findings of the study to only nontraditional environments, as was the study's stated purpose. In conjunction with this delimitation, the researcher had an extensive work history in nontraditional schools, which gave an added familiarity with the school, its students, and its organization.

Ethical Considerations

The trustworthiness of data collection and presentation was imperative throughout the study. The researcher initially sought permission from both the Research Review Committee of Knox County Schools and Carson-Newman University's Institutional Review Board. Once granted, the researcher sought permission from each student, parent of the student, and teacher

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participant in the study. Each participant was ensured anonymity throughout the data collection process, and the researcher referred to each participant pseudonymously throughout the research.

The researcher attempted reflexivity through journaling before each of the teacher or student interviews. These journal entries described what student or teacher opinions the researcher expected to encounter during the interview. The researcher then compared these expectations to what was encountered in the interviews, identifying, and eliminating researcher bias. After data collection, the researcher discussed his conclusions with a colleague who was a fellow educator and doctoral student. The researcher then compared his interpretation of the data that of his peers and evaluated his interpretation's validity.

The researcher archived the audit trail for this research both in online data storage and offline in an external hard drive. The researcher kept handwritten documents in a separate file in addition to scanning and keeping them electronically. This archive included audio recordings of each teacher interview. Text files included in the archive include researcher notes made during each interview, researcher notes made during peer debriefing, participant surveys, and detailed information on the participants in the study.

Summary

The goal of this study was to discover factors that make a teacher in a nontraditional school setting want to remain in their position for longer than five years. The researcher looked into factors that influence teacher job satisfaction. The researcher surveyed former and current teachers in a nontraditional school and then interviewed them regarding their views on their positions and satisfaction with their jobs. The researcher also surveyed students at this school regarding their teachers and held a focus group of these students discussing the results of the teacher interviews and the student surveys. The researcher derived results from the data through

open and axial coding of the interview and survey results. The researcher used information

found in the interviews to develop themes in the data.

CHAPTER FOUR: Presentation of Findings

In describing alternative or nontraditional schools, Mary Anne Raywid defined three types of programs that differed based on whether the school was created to provide discipline for a wayward student, challenge an excelling student, or remediate a struggling student (Raywid, 1994). Just as these programs may be varied, the educators that staffed them must also differ from traditional-school educators. In this chapter, the researcher presented results of interviews and surveys of current and former nontraditional school teachers to discover commonalities in their descriptions of a nontraditional school teacher and what personality traits would make one effective in such a position. Nontraditional school students were also surveyed and interviewed so that conclusions gleaned from the teacher interviews could be substantiated.

Participants

Three populations of participants comprised this study. The first population consisted of three teachers currently employed at a nontraditional school in an East Tennessee school system. These teachers were Caucasian females, over forty years of age, and employed at that school for greater than five years, and referred to as C1, C2, and C3 throughout this study (C indicating a current teacher).

The second population consisted of three former employees of the same nontraditional school as above. This population consisted of two Caucasian males and one Caucasian female. One male and one female were over fifty years of age and had retired from the nontraditional school. The other male was under forty years of age and had left the nontraditional school to teach in a regular secondary school, where he still worked at the time of his participation in this study. The participants were identified as F1, F2, and F3 throughout this study (F indicating a former teacher).

The third population consisted of twenty students currently enrolled in the nontraditional school. The students were all seventeen or eighteen years of age and consisted of a blending of ethnic groups and sexes. These students completed the PRAXIS Student Survey (see Appendix C) and were used to guide a focus group. This focus group of six students was drawn from the original twenty students in order to discuss the findings of the student survey more profoundly. This focus group consisted of one white male, one black male, and four white females. All students participating in the focus group were eighteen years of age. The students in the focus group were identified as S1through S6.

Data Presentation

Table 4.1 shows responses to both the grit survey and the job satisfaction survey (see appendix A). The average grit score of the current teachers in the nontraditional school is 4.07, placing them in the 70th percentile among Americans. The average grit score of the former teachers is 3.50, placing them in the 40th percentile (Duckworth, 2014).

Table 4.1

Results of grit survey and job satisfaction survey

Teacher Code	Grit Score	*Job Satisfaction Survey Responses*				
		1	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*
C1	3.8	2	1	4	3	5
C2	4.2	5	3	5	4	5
C3	4.2	4	2	2	2	5
Average	4.07	3.67	2.00	3.67	3.00	5.00
F1	3.8	5	5	5	3	1
F2	3.5	3	4	4	4	4
F3	3.2	3	4	3	2	3
Average	3.50	3.67	4.33	4.00	3.00	2.67

In the job satisfaction survey responses (see Table 1), current and former teachers answered much the same, save for one exception: the lowest-rated statement for the current teachers (the conditions at my school are ideal) was the highest-rated statement for the former teachers. Conversely, the highest-rated statement for the current teachers ("If I could choose again, I would be in my current/ former profession") was the lowest-rated statement for the former teachers.

The researcher transcribed the responses to the teacher interview questions and open-coded them. The themes discovered in the open coding were then axial coded to look at specific topics addressed by each teacher within the major themes (see Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1

Data sorted in levels of coding
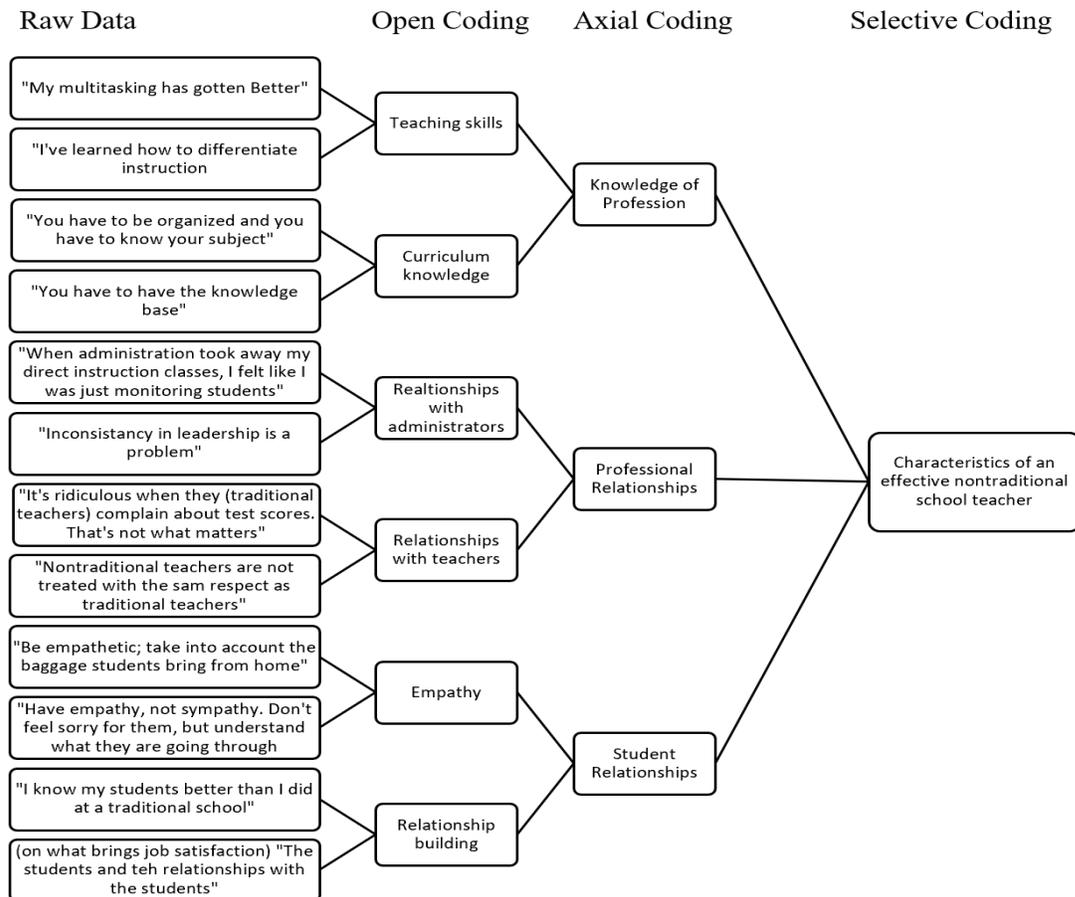
The researcher used the student survey primarily to triangulate themes found in the teacher interviews and to provide topics discussed in the student focus group. Only seven of the thirteen survey questions were used, as not all of the survey questions directly related to the students' experiences with their teachers. The survey questions addressed general information regarding the school and its curriculum.

Study Findings

The major themes found within the teacher interviews were *knowledge of profession*, *professional relationships*, and *student relationships*. The open codes found within each axial code were based on information gathered during the interviews with the teachers. The researcher used the teacher designations mentioned above and the pronouns *they* and *them* in the discussion of the interviews to ensure anonymity.

Knowledge of profession. A teacher's level of experience has been shown to have extensive ties to both their job satisfaction and effectiveness. In studies by both Klassen and Chiu (2010) and by Demirtas (2010), it was shown that the number of years a teacher has been in the classroom has a direct correlation to job satisfaction and performance in the classroom. In this study, teachers interviewed mentioned the importance of both knowledge of their curriculum and classroom skills as having importance for success in a nontraditional classroom.

Teaching skills. When asked about skills from traditional schools that apply to nontraditional schools, the teachers interviewed stressed the importance of classroom management skills that one would typically think necessary for a teacher. C1 stated that their skill at classroom discipline was important in their nontraditional role. I n contrast, F1 stressed the importance of organization, stating that they might have "twenty students at twenty levels on

twenty different subjects in one classroom" at any given time. C2 reflected this by stating that their multitasking skills have improved due to their nontraditional position.

Another skill that presented itself was differentiation, which was brought up four times during the interviews. C1 and C2 both stated that this was a skill they may have lacked initially but gained through their experience in a nontraditional environment.

Curriculum knowledge. C2 and F1 stressed the importance of a knowledge base, as they were responsible for multiple classes at multiple levels, not just one subject and one level. F2 stated that one was required to have "a breadth of information as opposed to a single subject." F1 also stated that they felt it was important not to go "overboard with the curriculum." They felt that most of their students did not have the tolerance for "beating the curriculum to death," and that they had learned to "hit the high points and move on."

Professional relationships. Teachers interviewed often mentioned past experiences with both administration and fellow educators. Often, both were mentioned as a detriment to job satisfaction and not a boon. Teachers interviewed tended to view administration as a hindrance to job performance and would express a feeling of exclusion when referring to nontraditional school teachers.

Relationships with administration. When asked what was most detrimental to their job satisfaction, five of the six teachers interviewed referred to problems with administration. C1 felt that it "has been detrimental that we do not make decisions based on the need of students. We make decisions based on the needs of central office." C2 pointed out a lack of communication among stakeholders, while C3 cited frequent changes in administration and stated, "The constant change in leadership causes me to have very high anxiety. It makes it stressful when there's always someone new." F1 felt at time administration was at times more

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concerned with "making a name for themselves" than the welfare of the school. Lastly, F3

recounted an incident when the administration removed their direct instruction classes, classes

which they felt had shown a notable success. They then stated that this action left them feeling

as if they "were just monitoring students and felt worthless."

   Relationships with other teachers. Teacher C1 specifically pointed out that their

colleagues give them the most satisfaction in their position, stating that they "have caring

colleagues who feel like they are there for a reason; like family." This sentiment was echoed by

teacher F1, who stated they gained satisfaction from the successes of their students and from

colleagues who feel the same way about students. Teacher F2 stated that they felt that traditional

teachers did not treat nontraditional teachers with respect. They also felt that nontraditional

school teachers were not thought of as real teachers by the rest of the profession. In this vein,

teacher F1 stated that they felt amusement when traditional teachers "have complaints…about

testing and how important it is. I was one of them at one point, and now I think that's a joke."

   Student relationships. Previous studies have espoused the importance of the student-

teacher relationship. Lewthwaite and McMillan (2010) noted the importance students placed on

the realization that their teacher cared for them and how this caring formed what was for them a

positive educational experience. In this vein, Tomul, Celik, and Tas found that students were

aware of discrimination by their teachers and noted their socio-economic status as the most

common basis for discrimination (2012). This theme of the empathetic student-teacher

relationship was common among the data gathered.

   Empathy. The term *empathy* was used seven times in the teacher interviews, and each of

the teachers interviewed expressed its importance in working with nontraditional students.

Teacher C3, for example, related empathy to "taking into account the baggage the students bring

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from home." Teacher C2 stated that they had grown more compassionate toward their students than they had been at a traditional school. Teacher F2 related their empathy to the obtaining of an "understanding of our culture in general" and that they are now able to "meet people where they are and understand different viewpoints."

Not all of the teachers interviewed cited empathy as a skill they possessed when they entered their nontraditional career. Teacher F3 stated that they were raised in an upper-middle-class, two-parent home with an educator as one of their primary caregivers. Through their tenure at the nontraditional school, they were able to "understand why a kid would blow up at school," and that they gained the ability to help the students cope.

Relationship building. The teachers mentioned the importance of building a relationship with their students seven times during the interview process. Teacher C3 stated they gained experience in relationship building during their tenure at a traditional school, and that these skilled carried over to their nontraditional position, the demographics of the two schools being much the same. Teacher C2 mentioned gaining satisfaction from the post-secondary successes of their students, and that students would often return to share these successes with them.

This idea was carried on by teacher F3, who compared their current position in traditional high school to their former nontraditional position through the types of relationships built. Teacher F3 stated that in his traditional position, they have a more constant relationship with students. Student relationships in the nontraditional school tended to be more in-depth, however. Teacher F3 cited examples of helping students fill out job applications and finding and moving furniture for newly independent students. Teacher F3 also stated that those skills seldom apply to the traditional classroom.

Student surveys. Students completed the entire PRAXIS survey, although only specific questions were applicable to the research question. Non-applicable survey questions were not used in the collection of data. Question 1 asked if the student understood the rules and expectations of the class. Eighteen of the 20 students surveyed scored this question a 5, meaning *always*. Question 3 asked if the student was engaged in the class. Seven students scored this a 5, meaning *always.* Twelve students scored this a 4, meaning *most of the time*. Question 7 asked if the students knew how to get help with their assignments. Thirteen students scored this a 5, and 6 students scored this a 4.

The low scoring questions still had a majority of responses in the 4 and 5 range, but responses in the 3 (*often*) and 2 (*rarely*) range bore noting. Question 2 regarding timely feedback garnered three responses in this range. Question 8 stated that the teacher "wants to know about me and listens when I talk" had five responses in this range. Question nine stated that the teacher is "aware of everything that is happening in the classroom also had five responses in this range.

Free-response question 14 asked the students to relate what has been helpful for their learning at the school. Eleven of the twenty responses mentioned help from a teacher. These responses include referencing one-on-one instruction, being able to ask a teacher for help, and the teacher being able to explain the material. Students' responses in this vein included stating a preference for "when someone shows me how to do something and they walk me through it to make sure I learn it." One student stated, "I have found that the teachers are always able to help."

Other popular responses included being able to work at their own pace (three responses) and smaller class sizes (four responses). Students' responses included, "letting me do my own thing, not treating me like I'm a child…just letting someone do something at their own pace."

Regarding class size, students stated, "the small amount of students helps teachers pay more attention to us."

Free response question 15 asked for ideas that might improve the students' learning. Eighteen of the students stated that they could not think of a response, or that they did not have a response. Additional responses included reducing work from books or utilizing more online or technology-based components in their classes (4 responses). Students responded to this with, "I believe the only issue is the lack of more modern software…the integration of things like Google docs," and "I hate doing the book work. I could get done faster if there was not any book work."

Student focus group. The student focus group consisted of six current students from the nontraditional school and took place during the students' homeroom time during the school day. The researcher began the meeting by addressing the low-rated questions in the survey and asked for student input on the issues. S1 discussed one particular teacher whom they described as having difficulty explaining new concepts and an over-reliance on the textbook to explain the material. S1 stated that they felt a teacher was not necessary if they were to rely on the book.

S1 also described another teacher, whom they felt was overly strict, curt, and had an angry demeanor. This feeling was corroborated by student S5, who stated this teacher often singled them out for arriving late to school, though the administrator had approved this late arrival time. Student S5 also stated that at times it is difficult to tell whether this teacher is joking with them or is angry.

When asked for an example of an ideal teacher, student S4 described a particular teacher with a relaxed attitude and stated that the teacher "is laid back. I can talk to (them) if I need help getting work done." Student S6 stated, regarding another teacher, that they "have big classes" but that they "still help me one-on-one."

Regarding the work at the nontraditional school, student S3 felt the work both more accessible and more challenging. The student was unable to elaborate on this when questioned. Regarding the technology level, Student S6 felt that the school did rely too heavily on textbooks and paper. They also felt that the staff should have more extensive training in online learning platforms in order to make work less paper-and-book based. Student S6 also felt that the school lacked some amenities present in traditional schools, such as extra-curricular activities.

Comparing and Contrasting Student and Teacher Findings

The teachers surveyed each mentioned problems with administration, while none of the students questioned did. Conversely, the student focus group mentioned problems with the lack of teacher use of technology and school facilities, with student S4 mentioning less than ideal restrooms and the lack of extra-curricular activities. None of the teachers interviewed mentioned these problems.

Both groups expressed the importance of teacher-student relationships, though in different ways. Teachers interviewed were more forthright in stating the importance of these relationships, while students viewed this in terms of one-on-one assistance and the attitude of the teacher towards them.

Summary

This study attempted to describe the personality traits that would make a teacher an effective educator at a nontraditional school. In this study, the researcher interviewed three current and three former teachers at a nontraditional high school in an East Tennessee school district regarding their job satisfaction levels and what characteristics they felt would make an educator successful in a nontraditional setting. The teachers were also surveyed regarding their grit levels and general job satisfaction.

Twenty students at the nontraditional were also surveyed regarding their teachers' performance and completed free-response questions regarding what they feel make their teachers successful educators and what their school could do better. The results of this survey guided a focus group of six current students at the nontraditional school. Students in this focus group commented on the student survey and teacher interview results.

The results of this study indicated that professional knowledge, professional relationships, and student relationships were vital to success. Areas included in professional knowledge included knowledge of subject-area and teaching skills. Professional relationships included positive interactions with the administration and with coworkers. Student relationships included having empathy for the students and the ability to build personal connections with the students. The importance of these areas was corroborated through the student surveys and focus group. Chapter Five will include a discussion of the findings of the study and will discuss opportunities for future research.

CHAPTER FIVE: Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

The researcher designed this study to answer the research question: What are some of the personality traits of a teacher that would aid them in staying in a position in a nontraditional school for longer than five years? The researcher interviewed both former and current teachers at a nontraditional school in an urban school district regarding what caused them to find satisfaction in their position and what caused them distress. The teachers also filled out two surveys, one regarding their job satisfaction and one regarding their level of grit as defined by Angela Duckworth (2012).

The researcher also surveyed several students in the school regarding the effectiveness of their teachers. The researcher then convened a focus group composed of six of the students who participated in the survey to elaborate upon themes discovered in the questioning of the teachers and in the student surveys.

Conclusions

In a review of the data, three conclusions became apparent. First, nontraditional teachers expressed the need for the development of strong personal relationships with their students. Second, the need to have empathy toward their students was an evident theme in the findings. Interviews with teachers and students supported these conclusions. Third, a nontraditional teacher should have extensive knowledge of their profession, both in their familiarity with the curriculum they taught and in the practice of their classroom management skills.

In light of the theoretical framework of this study, the fulfillment of these needs would effectively move teachers toward the *self-esteem* and *self-actualization* levels of Maslow's hierarchy. In these levels, the struggling teacher would find respect in their position and would

view their post more in terms of a creative outlet rather than merely a job to be completed (Cutler, 2010).

Empathy. F3 expressed the importance of empathy in a nontraditional school by stating that "you don't need to feel sorry for them, but you need to have an understanding…of the crazy backgrounds they come from." F3 also stated that they had to come to this realization during their tenure at the nontraditional school, as their upbringing consisted of "both of my parents at home…being able to try to connect and understand what they (the students) were going through would be the best trait you could probably have."

C1 recognized that empathy is a trait not possessed by all teachers, but it is a necessary trait, stating "you need to make sure that you understand what it takes a kid to come and ask for help when they've never asked for help before—and they're a senior in high school." C2 stated that they might not have possessed an aptitude for empathy initially, but they had "grown more compassionate toward the student than I was originally 30-plus years ago."

The teachers interviewed looked at empathy more as an attribute they gained from their tenure at the school rather than one with which they entered the school. C2 stated this outright, while F3 viewed his gaining of empathy in light of their upper-middle-class upbringing. While teachers described empathy as a necessary character trait, the teachers also saw it as a gained if one possessed adequate skills of insight and reflection.

Students reflected on the importance of empathy from their teachers by recounting teachers who were less than empathetic. S4 and S5 mentioned one of their teachers who they felt to have an angry demeanor, one student stating that they felt "picked on" due to their consistent, unavoidable tardiness to the first block, even though the administration had excused the tardiness. Students were also more likely to view the empathy of their teachers in light of the

completion of classes. S6 stated that one teacher with large classes would take time to help them one-on-one and acted like they cared whether the student completed the work.

Students conveyed a sense of hurt when describing unempathetic teachers, giving the researcher the feeling that they took the slights personally. Students also tended to agree with each other regarding problem teachers. For instance, Other students who had witnessed the behavior supported the student who relayed the tardiness. Witnesses to the incidents nodded in agreement with the story and did not attempt a defense of the teacher.

Relationships with students. Teachers interviewed for this study stressed the importance of forming strong relationships with students. Teachers with experience with both traditional and nontraditional schools would point out that the nontraditional school experience required a more in-depth interpersonal relationship. For example, C1 stated that they know their students much better in the nontraditional setting, giving them knowledge of how far they can push the students and what they are capable of accomplishing. F3, who currently teaches in a traditional high school, stated that their current relationship with their students lasts for a more extended amount of time, but is not as in-depth as the relationship they formed with nontraditional students. F3 also stated that they would help students with such tasks as moving into new apartments, something to which he is no longer is exposed.

C1 also linked relationship-building to school administration, stating that decisions are "based on the needs of central office" and not the students. C2 echoed this with their observation that communication between stakeholders is often lacking. This lack of communication is a cause of dissatisfaction in their position. Students in the focus group reflected this, stating that the teachers they preferred excelled in one-on-one instruction. Student S4 discussed their

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favorite teacher and said that their "laid-back" demeanor made talking to them more comfortable, thus making their work more easily accomplished.

Students tended to blend the need for relationships with the need for classroom skills. When speaking of their favorite teachers, students would mention how the teacher helps them individually with coursework before mentioning the ease with which they could speak to the teacher. Teachers with whom they felt ill-at-ease tended to be the teachers of the classes they viewed as difficult.

Classroom skills. Teachers in this study cited the importance of classroom skills but placed it secondary to the interpersonal skills required to build relationships with the students. In interviews, both current and former teachers emphasized that they were required to be familiar with a variety of classes and that they taught several topics simultaneously with students at a variety of levels. Teachers used terms such as *multitasking* and *organized* to express the skills necessary to be successful in their classrooms. The student focus group reflected these skills; several of the students expressed frustration with teachers who were unable to instruct them in their courses, and places focus on learning from a textbook.

Teachers placed a diminished focus on classroom skills when compared to empathy and relationships. Teacher F1, for instance, compared her former position to that of teachers in a traditional classroom and stated that teachers in a traditional school placed undue emphasis on testing. F1 also noted that testing "is not what really matters." This was a common theme among the teacher interviews—that the student came before the curriculum. The teachers conveyed a sense of sadness that this was not more commonplace among teachers in traditional schools.

Students also reinforced this need for curriculum knowledge. S1 expressed problems with one teacher, stating that the teacher "mumbles when (they) try to explain things" and that the teacher had an overreliance on the textbook, wondering why the teacher was there when "I can look it up myself." Conversely, S4 and S6 stated their preference for the one-on-one help they received from one of their teachers.

When conveying stories of teachers less-than-skilled in their subjects, students expressed anger more than anything. S1, when relating the story of the mumbling teacher, had to be calmed by the researcher in several instances. The students viewed this ineptitude the same way one might view an unskilled plumber or gardener—they required a teacher to do a job, and that job was not being performed adequately.

Grit and administration. Teachers in the study also expressed concern over poor administration. Five of the six teachers interviewed mentioned administrational difficulties as a significant source of dissatisfaction with their positions. Also, the teachers who had left the school tended to have much lower grit scores than teachers who remained at the school.

In the teacher survey, the current teachers scored question 2 ("The conditions at my job are ideal.") the lowest, with an average score of two. Former teachers scored question five the lowest ("If I could choose again, I would be in my current/ former position.") with an average score of 2.67. Taken individually, this indicated that the current teachers were dissatisfied with their jobs, while former teachers were glad they had moved on.

The questioning of the teachers did not support that impression. Current teachers spoke favorably of their students and the classes they taught, while former teachers indicated a fondness for the school. Regarding their reasons for leaving, the former teachers seemed to emphasize that their reasons (retirement or other positions elsewhere) did not involve

dissatisfaction with the school itself. The interviewees agreed that their main source of dissatisfaction was problems with administration, be it an overabundance of administrative turnover or being shut out from the decision-making process regarding the school.

Looking at this concerning grit scores—current teachers scored much higher than former teachers in this area—one could make the connection that a higher level of grit lent itself with an ability to withstand problems at the school better. For instance, two of the current teachers interviewed were at the age of retirement, though neither had done so. Both teachers also mentioned problems with administration—regarding communication and decision-making—yet neither had left the school or the profession. Of the three former teaches interviewed, two had retired.

This connection between grit and longevity, however, was not reflected in the student surveys nor the student focus group. Student surveys focused on classroom interactions with their teachers, and focus group questions were based on the results of the student surveys. As the relative amount of grit of their teachers would be a concept foreign to most high-school students, this connection was not mentioned by the students.

Implications

Teacher turnover rate has become an issue of concern in recent years, with data indicating that schools located in the Southern United States have the highest rate in the nation at 16.7%, with teachers in core subjects such as math and science leaving at the highest rate (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Information on how to stem this efflux of teachers would be at a premium, with an estimated $20 000 needed to replace each teacher that leaves the profession (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017).

During the staffing process, alternative school administrators would be well-served to keep in mind the conclusions of this research, looking for an aptitude for forming student relationships and an empathetic nature in interviewees for open positions. Also, a teacher with excessive experience in their subject area, having taught multiple courses within it and not focused solely on one class, would be preferable. More experienced teachers would also be at an advantage, as teachers interviewed for this study expressed a definite need for classroom management and multitasking skills.

School administrators would also find value in these results in the mentoring of struggling teachers. Rather than focusing on test scores or lesson plans, the results of this study indicated that success at an alternative school would involve the nurturing of interpersonal skills and the development of an empathetic relationship with the students.

Recommendations

The teachers and students surveyed and interviewed for this study were all located from one nontraditional school in an urban school district. Also, only six teachers altogether were interviewed to compile the data in this study. The researcher recommends that future studies be expanded to include more nontraditional schools in other school systems of varying socioeconomic makeup. Along with more and diverse school systems, more teachers should be included in the interview and survey process.

The student population involved in this study gave added insights to the research question. The students who participated in the focus group were both blunt and unflinching in their assessment of their teachers' capacities as educators. Unfortunately, this study only used a focus group of six students who met only once. Future studies should better utilize this resource by expanding both the number of students involved in the focus group process and increasing the

number of groups. Also, the length of time allowed for each group to meet should be extended past the thirty minutes allowed for the group in this study.

The connection drawn between a teacher's level of grit and the ability to work under a less-than-ideal administrator needs further scrutiny as well. Though most of the teachers interviewed mentioned problems with the administration as a point of dissatisfaction with their positions, none of the former teachers interviewed listed it as a reason for leaving their jobs. The connection between grit level and ability to withstand workplace stressors may bear further scrutiny, such as input on the idea from the student group. However, it gives the impression of an idea that bears noting.

Summary

One can draw three conclusions from the data gathered. First, an effective teacher should be empathetic toward their students. Second, an effective teacher should take care to form relationships with their students. Third, an effective teacher should have a sufficient knowledge base of their subject. Interviews with both current and former teachers at a nontraditional school supported these conclusions. The questioning of students at the nontraditional school also reflected these findings.

A fourth conclusion—that a higher level of personal grit would support the teacher through problems in the school—could be drawn through the information gathered in the teacher data. However, this conclusion was not reflected, nor was it investigated, in the student data.

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Appendix A

Teacher Surveys

Teacher Survey Questions

Please rate the following items on an agreement scale of one to five, with five being a complete agreement with the statement and one being complete disagreement.

1. In most ways, teaching is my ideal profession.

2. The conditions at my school are ideal.

3. I am satisfied with my teaching position

4. My most important needs as a teacher are being met at my current position.

5. If I could choose again, I would stay in my current position.

Teacher Grit Survey

Here are a number of statements that may or may not apply to you. There are no right or wrong answers, so just answer honestly, considering how you compare to most people. At the end, you'll get a score that reflects how passionate and persevering you see yourself to be.

1. New ideas and projects sometimes distract me from previous ones.

- Very much like me

- Mostly like me

- Somewhat like me

- Not much like me

- Not like me at all

2. Setbacks don't discourage me. I don't give up easily.

- Very much like me

- Mostly like me

- Somewhat like me

- Not much like me

- Not like me at all

3. I often set a goal but later choose to pursue a different one.

- Very much like me

- Mostly like me

- Somewhat like me

- Not much like me

- Not like me at all

4. I am a hard worker.

- Very much like me

- Mostly like me

- Somewhat like me

- Not much like me

- Not like me at all

5. I have difficulty maintaining my focus on projects that take more than a few months to

complete.

- Very much like me

- Mostly like me

- Somewhat like me

- Not much like me

- Not like me at all

6. I finish whatever I begin.

- Very much like me

- Mostly like me

- Somewhat like me

- Not much like me

- Not like me at all

7. My interests change from year to year.

- Very much like me

- Mostly like me

- Somewhat like me

- Not much like me

- Not like me at all

8. I am diligent. I never give up.

- Very much like me

- Mostly like me

- Somewhat like me

- Not much like me

- Not like me at all

9. I have been obsessed with a certain idea or project for a short time but later lost interest.

- Very much like me

- Mostly like me

- Somewhat like me

- Not much like me

- Not like me at all

10. I have overcome setbacks to conquer an important challenge.

- Very much like me

- Mostly like me

- Somewhat like me

- Not much like me

- Not like me at all

Appendix B

Teacher Interview Questions

Teacher Interview Questions

1. Do you feel you are satisfied with your current position? Why or why not?

2. Have you ever taught in a traditional school setting? If so, what skills from that setting most apply to your current position?

3. What teacher skills have you acquired due to your current position?

4. What personality traits best serve a teacher in a nontraditional school setting?

5. What one thing has been most detrimental to your satisfaction with your current position?

6. What one thing has given you the most satisfaction with your current position?

7. What—if anything—has changed about you due to your current position?

   Relevant follow-up and clarification questions were asked by the researcher during and/or at the conclusion of the interview. Examples of these questions included the following:

- Tell me more about [specific issue or experience]…

- What was that like for you?

- Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix C

Student Survey

Student Survey Questions

Mark each item according to the following rating system:

1=never, 2=rarely, 3=often, 4=most of the time, and 5=always

Statement Rating

1. I understand the rules and expectations in this class.

2. I receive clear and timely feedback on homework and projects so that I can improve my learning.

3. I am engaged in this class.

4. I problem solve and think critically through my learning experiences in this class.

5. I am comfortable talking with my teacher.

6. The classwork and homework enhance my learning.

7. I know how to get help with my assignments and learning.

8. My teacher wants to know about me and listens when I talk.

9. My teacher is aware of everything that is happening in the classroom.

10. I believe that I can learn in this classroom.

11. I can explain my thinking verbally and in writing.

12. I learn effectively in small groups.

13. Learning is exciting in this class.

Answer the following two questions briefly and in your own words:

14. What have you found to be helpful for your learning?

15. What suggestions do you have for changes that would improve your learning?

Appendix D

Informed Consent Forms

Informed Consent Form - Teacher

TITLE OF STUDY: An Investigation of Personality Traits that Ensure Teacher Success in a Nontraditional School

RESEARCHER: James Christopher Long

INTRODUCTION

This informed consent is for a dissertation in the Department of Education at Carson-Newman University conducted by James Christopher Long. The purpose of this study is to investigate what personality traits increase teacher job satisfaction and teacher success in a nontraditional school setting

You have been invited to participate in this study because you have met the following criteria:

1. You are a full-time classroom teacher in a nontraditional school who is responsible for assessing and grading students.

2. You have been at your current position for a period longer than five school years

PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate in this study, there will be one written survey, two separate interviews, as well as additional contact or conversation. These interviews will be recorded using an audio recording device and may take place in person, over the phone, or via communication technology (Skype, Zoom, etc.). Below is a summary of these two interviews:

1. Details of Experience – The first interview will focus on your current experiences as a nontraditional school teacher. The primary interview question is: Do you feel you are satisfied in your current position? Why or why not? The interviewer will also ask relevant

follow-up and clarification questions during the interview. This interview will be scheduled at your convenience and will last approximately 20-30 minutes.

2. Reflection on the Meaning – The second interview will provide an opportunity for you to reflect on the previous interview, explore in more depth any of the concepts previously discussed, or share new details of the phenomena of a standards-based grading implementation. This interview will be scheduled at your convenience and will last approximately 20-30 minutes.

   Participation in this study will vary in length, depending on participant and researcher availability. In addition to the two interviews outlined above, contact will be made to introduce the study and provide transcripts of the interviews to the participant for further reflection or clarity.

RISKS

There are very minimal risks involved with participation in this study. Risks that do exist include the possibility of feeling uneasy or uncomfortable with questions related to your job satisfaction. You may voluntarily withdraw from this study at any time, and any data collected will be immediately destroyed or deleted. If you feel you have been negatively impacted or affected by this study, please contact Carson-Newman University Institutional Review Board (IRB) at (865) 471-2000.

BENEFITS/COMPENSATION

There may be no direct benefit to the participant in this study. You will not endure any monetary costs to participate in this study, excluding possible travel cost or time allocation.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS

Participation in this study is voluntary, and the participant may withdraw from this study at any time. As a participant, you have the right to refuse to answer specific questions, withhold documents, or withdraw from the study at any time. In the case of withdrawal, all previous forms of data will either be directly returned to the participant, deleted, or destroyed.

CONFIDENTIALITY

In accordance with applicable laws and regulations, all identifiable information provided to the researcher will be kept confidential. This may include the names of individuals, schools, or locations. Instead, pseudonyms will be chosen to represent the participant and groups of participants. No identifiable data will be used in any publication that may allow a reader to personally identify a participant. All documents pertaining to this study will remain in direct possession of the researcher. Password-protected computers, locked filing cabinets, and fireproof deposit boxes will be utilized in order to ensure the confidentiality and protection of the participant.

Individuals likely to examine the data in detail include the researcher (James Christopher Long), the dissertation committee chair (Dr. Steve A. Davidson), and dissertation committee members (Dr. P. Mark Taylor and Dr. Tony Dalton). Pseudonyms for teacher and student names will be used in copies to interview transcripts. When the data is no longer deemed necessary to possess, it will be permanently deleted or destroyed.

Please note that in the case of a detailed examination of Carson-Newman University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), data provided to the researcher may be inspected or reviewed in order to ensure compliance and appropriate data analysis.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions about your participation in this study at any time, please contact the following:

Researcher: James Christopher Long

                     jclong@cn.edu

                     865.789.7912

Dissertation Chair: Dr. Steve A. Davidson

                     sdavidson@cn.edu

SIGNATURE

Your signature below indicates that this informed consent document has been read and explained to you in its entirety. You have had a chance to ask questions and receive clarification on any of the above sections. Your signature indicates that you have voluntarily agreed to participate in this study. You maintain the right to withdraw from this study at any point, even after signing this document. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you.

I, _____, consent to participate in this study.

   (PARTICIPANT NAME)

_____

Participant Signature   Date

_____

Researcher Signature   Date

Informed Consent Form – Parent/Student

TITLE OF STUDY: An Investigation of Personality Traits that Ensure Teacher Success in a Nontraditional School Setting

RESEARCHER: James Christopher Long

INTRODUCTION

This informed consent is for a dissertation in the Department of Education at Carson-Newman University conducted by James Christopher Long. The purpose of this study is to investigate the personality traits of teachers that ensure their success in a nontraditional school setting.

You have been invited to participate in this study because you have met the following criteria:

1. You are enrolled as a student in the participating school for this study; and

2. You are a student who is now or has been enrolled in a class taught by one of the teachers who is also participating in this study.

PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate in this study, you will complete a written survey that will investigate your experience with the instructors at your school. In addition, there will be a focus group interview conducted during noninstructional time at the participating school for five students who have completed the written survey. This focus group will be recorded using an audio recording device and will take place in person.

The focus group interview will focus on the survey results in addition to your current experiences as a student in a nontraditional school. The primary interview question is: What are the characteristics of your favorite/ least favorite teacher? The interviewer will also ask

relevant follow-up and clarification questions during the interview. This focus group

interview will be scheduled during non-instructional time and will last approximately 30-45

minutes.

RISKS

There are very minimal risks involved with participation in this study. Risks that do exist

include the possibility of feeling uneasy or uncomfortable with questions regarding your

teacher's performance. You may voluntarily withdraw from this study at any time, and any

data collected will be immediately destroyed or deleted. If you feel you have been negatively

impacted or affected by this study, please contact Carson-Newman University Institutional

Review Board (IRB) at (865) 471-2000.

BENEFITS/COMPENSATION

There may be no direct benefit to the participant in this study. You will not endure any

monetary costs to participate in this study, excluding possible travel cost or time allocation.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS

Participation in this study is voluntary, and the participant may withdraw from this study at

any time. As a participant, you have the right to refuse to answer specific questions or

withdraw from the study at any time. In the case of withdrawal, all previous forms of data

will either be directly returned to the participant, deleted, or destroyed.

CONFIDENTIALITY

In accordance with applicable laws and regulations, all identifiable information provided to

the researcher will be kept confidential. This may include the names of individuals, schools,

or locations. Instead, pseudonyms will be chosen to represent the participant and groups of

participants. No identifiable data will be used in any publication that may allow a reader to

personally identify a participant. All documents pertaining to this study will remain in direct possession of the researcher. Password-protected computers, locked filing cabinets, and fireproof deposit boxes will be utilized in order to ensure the confidentiality and protection of the participant.

Individuals likely to examine the data in detail include the researcher (James Christopher Long), the dissertation committee chair (Dr. Steve A. Davidson), and dissertation committee members (Dr. P. Mark Taylor and Dr. Tony Dalton). Pseudonyms for teacher and student names will be used in copies of interview transcripts. When the data is no longer deemed necessary to possess, it will be permanently deleted or destroyed.

Please note that in the case of a detailed examination of Carson-Newman University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), data provided to the researcher may be inspected or reviewed in order to ensure compliance and appropriate data analysis.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions about your participation in this study at any time, please contact the following:

Researcher: James Christopher Long

                               jclong@cn.edu

                               865.789.7912

Dissertation Chair: Dr. Steve A. Davidson

                               sdavidson@cn.edu

PARENT/GUARDIAN PERMISSION SIGNATURE

Your signature below indicates that this informed consent document has been read and explained to you in its entirety. You have had a chance to ask questions and receive clarification on any of the above sections. Your signature indicates that you have voluntarily agreed to give permission for your student to participate in this study. You maintain the right to withdraw your student from this study at any point, even after signing this document. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you.

I, _____, give permission for my student to

       (PARENT/GUARDIAN NAME).   participate in this study.

_____

Parent/Guardian Signature   Date

_____

Researcher Signature   Date

STUDENT ASSENT SIGNATURE

Your signature below indicates that this informed consent document has been read and explained to you in its entirety. You have had a chance to ask questions and receive clarification on any of the above sections. Your signature indicates that you have voluntarily assent to participate in this study with parent permission. You maintain the right to withdraw

from this study at any point, even after signing this document. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you.

I, _____, assent to participate in this study.

   (STUDENT PARTICIPANT NAME)

_____

Student Participant Signature   Date

_____

Researcher Signature   Date