Perceived Job Satisfaction Factors Impacting the Retention of Middle School Teachers in Northwest North Carolina.

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Perceived Job Satisfaction Factors Impacting the Retention of
Middle School Teachers in Northwest North Carolina

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of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education

by

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August 2006

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Teacher retention, and Dispositions
ABSTRACT

Perceived Job Satisfaction Factors Impacting the Retention of Middle School Teachers in Northwestern North Carolina

by

Karen W. Farthing

The body of research related to teacher retention continues to grow but is limited concerning middle school teachers. The focus of this study was to examine the factors of job satisfaction for middle school teachers. A portion of the study compares teacher responses with Herzberg, Mausner, and Snyderman’s 1959 study of motivation. Additional components of the study provide middle school teachers’ feedback on their dispositions and recommendations to administrators and others for attracting and retaining quality middle school teachers.

This qualitative study includes a review of related literature and includes a historical perspective of job satisfaction and a discussion of Herzberg’s Two-Factor Motivation Theory. Teacher job satisfaction and dissatisfaction, along with current trends in teacher retention efforts, complete the review of literature.

Data for the findings were obtained from a demographic survey and semi-structured interviews of current and former middle school teachers. The data were then analyzed to learn what factors encourage middle school teachers to remain in the classroom or to leave. Responses related to teacher dispositions were also analyzed.
Findings of this study validate the research of Gawel (1997) based on Bellot and Tutor; salary was not found to be the highest motivator as in the Herzberg study. Instead, participants identified the work itself, their enjoyment of the early adolescent student, and their relationships with co-workers to be important areas of job satisfaction and what keeps them returning to their middle school classrooms. The personal dispositions identified by participants as necessary to being successful as a middle school teacher were a good sense of humor, a love of the age group, and being energetic, flexible, organized, enthusiastic, consistent, and firm.

This study will be of interest to universities and colleges with teacher preparatory programs. It will be of interest, also, to school administrators, principals, and staff development directors in their attempts to attract and retain quality middle school teachers in their schools. In addition, the study should be of interest of boards of education, state legislators who fund education, and State Departments of Education.
DEDICATION

This dissertation came to completion only with the love and support of my family.

My husband, Mike patiently understood the number of times I felt I had to say, “No,” to hiking, biking, sailing, traveling, sitting quietly with a good book, or watching a movie.

My wonderful parents, Lee and Maude Ward, never once complained that I did not visit enough.

My brother David, his wife Mitzi, and my niece Jenna ensured my parents were well cared for during this time.

My sons, Joshua and Matthew, continue to shake their heads at my desire to achieve in the academic world but are proud of me for my accomplishments.

My lovely daughter-in-law Shannon and the two delightful grandsons, Devin and Jarred, to whom she has given birth and who all bring me great joy.

My gracious and loving Heavenly Father who held me in His hands and walked me through the frustrations, hours of work, the excitement, and the joy of bringing this dissertation to completion.
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There are a number of people to whom I extend my deepest gratitude. Their work has made this journey far easier.

Dr. Nancy Dishner counseled me numerous times as I developed my ideas. Her endless hours of reading and rereading have refined and made this work far better than I could have done alone.

Dr. Louise MacKay made the transition back into the academic world a pleasant one, and her gentle guidance makes this dissertation one of greater quality.

Dr. Elizabeth Ralston introduced me to *The Saber-Tooth Tiger Curriculum*. I continue to share that small but insightful book with others. Her expertise, too, has been welcome in my efforts to complete this dissertation.

Hardly settled in his office at East Tennessee State University, Dr. Eric Glover was willing to take on the task of serving as one of my committee members. His perspective as a former principal and educational leader was a strong asset during the last months of this effort.

Dr. Robert Sanders reviewed and audited this work.

Karen D. Farthing, colleague and amazing teacher, willingly gave her time as a peer debriefer to validate this study.

The amazing group of doctoral students known as “Cohort Z” accepted me into their group as they were completing their core classes. Their professionalism and great personalities made my return to post-graduate work easier and filled many quick meals at Poor Richards with fun and laughter.
The interviewees gave willingly of their time, provided candid responses to my questions, and gave me a perspective other than my own about teaching at the middle school level.

Dr. Carol Truett, friend and mentor, and Dr. John Tashner, both encouraged me to apply to ETSU. Their high regard for the Ed.D. program at ETSU was certainly the impetus that finalized my decision to complete and submit an application for admission.

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Janeen Sherwood, my walking partner and dear friend, kept me reminded of my responsibility to maintain my health and physical fitness. Our walks and talks about our daily concerns and God’s goodness will continue in the years to come.

The wonderful faculty and staff at my school encouraged me throughout this process. Their patience was phenomenal as my need to trade duties or leave in time to arrive at a class created changes in our schedules.

The prayers and support of numerous friends during this venture encouraged and helped to see me to its conclusion.

Last, but by no means least, Christy Parker, devoted friend, transcriptionist extraordinaire, proofreader, and critic gave willingly and freely of her time and energy to ensure this dissertation met her standards of excellence as well as my own.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

What keeps teachers in the classroom or causes them to leave? In particular, what keeps middle school teachers in their classrooms?

Previous research indicated that teacher retention is an important consideration in the United States. Reasons for teacher attrition varied, and the intent of this study was to continue the discovery process of teacher retention as related to teachers in middle school (grades 6-8) settings. The area of focus was middle school teachers in two rural mountain counties in the northwest region of North Carolina. This area is approximately 2 hours from a major city and is home to two universities and one community college. The teachers in County A teach in designated middle schools, grades 6-8. The middle grades teachers in County B are placed in K-8 schools in which grades six, seven, and eight are considered middle school grades; these teachers are responsible for many of the students’ exploratory or nonacademic classes.

Retaining quality teachers must be a focus of all those involved in the educational process. While some system level supports such as mentoring programs, teacher induction programs, and staff development opportunities exist in these two systems, these resources have not been fully effective in keeping good teachers in these rural, middle grades classrooms. In an effort to assist administrators in identifying their professional development needs, classroom teachers were asked to provide the first hand information that could enable principals and other administrators to recruit and retain quality middle school teachers.
Statement of the Problem

Identifying the factors leading to long-term tenure and job satisfaction for teachers of early adolescents will be helpful in guiding the development of teacher preparatory studies, as well as assisting administrators and other teachers involved in the employment process in finding employees best suited for the middle school environment. Finding highly qualified teachers who are prepared to function in the middle school/early-adolescent environment should be complemented by finding teachers who can manage, appreciate, and enjoy the demands of the age group. In the same manner, identifying the factors promoting educators to leave the middle school environment could be helpful in providing appropriate guidance at the university and local administrative level, staff development for those already in the middle school environment, and training experienced teachers as mentors for new middle school teachers.

Continuity of teaching personnel in middle school is a concern for students, parents, and administration. Establishing the teamwork necessary for positive, ongoing communication, high standards, the flow of curriculum, and an understanding of families and community is a positive outcome when there is a teaching force with minimal or no turnover.

Data provided by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction indicated that the teaching population in the western portion of the state is more stable than the teaching population in other parts of the state (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2004). The initial purpose of this study was to identify the factors encouraging teachers of early adolescents in the two counties of northwest North
Carolina to remain in their teaching roles. In addition, the factors that seem to be contributing to the loss of middle school teachers were examined. Those responses were compared to Herzberg, Mausner, and Snyderman’s Two-Factor Motivation Theory.

The secondary purpose of this study proposed to determine some of the personal dispositions important to successful middle school teachers.

*Research Questions*

In order to gain an understanding of the reasons middle school teachers remain in this teaching environment in the two selected counties of Northwestern North Carolina; the answers to these questions were sought.

1. What factors seem to lead to a climate of job satisfaction for middle school teachers?

2. How do middle school teachers who experience satisfaction report that they maintain that satisfaction?

3. What avenues are or should be available to improve and support those middle school teachers who are dissatisfied so that they will remain in the profession?

4. What personal dispositions seem to be important for teachers to remain in a middle school setting?

*Definition of Terms*

To ensure the meaning and understanding of the terms chosen for this study, the following terms were defined.

1. *Job satisfaction:* Job satisfaction is defined as “simply how people feel about their jobs and different aspects of their jobs. As it is generally assessed, job satisfaction is
an attitudinal variable . . . a related constellation of attitudes about various aspects or facets of the job” (Spector, 1997, p. 2, as cited by Worley, 2005, p. 16).

2. **Teacher job satisfaction**: Specific to each teacher, “Teacher job satisfaction is a multifaceted construct that is critical to teacher retention, teacher commitment, and school effectiveness. . . It is a predictor of teacher retention, a determinant of teacher commitment, and, in turn, a contributor to school effectiveness” (Shann, 1998, p. 1).

3. **Hygiene-motivation theory** (also call the Two-Factor Theory): Hygienes are defined as those factors contributing to job dissatisfaction: supervision, salary, work environment, district and individual school policies, and relationships with co-workers. Motivators are considered as responsibility, recognition, promotion, achievement, the work itself, and professional/personal growth.

4. **Middle School**: Students in grades 6-8 were categorized as middle school for the purpose of this study.

5. **Personal dispositions**: “refers to the normal or prevailing aspect of one’s nature” (Laird, 1997, p. 225).

6. **Novice teacher**: A teacher with 3 or fewer years of experience was considered to be a novice teacher for the purposes of this study.

7. **Experienced teacher**: A teacher with 4 or more years of experience was considered to be an experienced teacher for the purposes of this study.

8. **Attrition**: Attrition refers to the number of teachers not returning to the classroom after having taught for a period of time.
Significance of the Study

This study intended to better inform school system administrators, teachers, staff development coordinators, and colleges and universities responsible for teacher preparation and induction programs of some of the factors related to job satisfaction and retention applicable to middle school teachers as reported by the teacher participants in this study. Greater knowledge of the needs of teachers in this teaching arena can provide the training needed to support both new and experienced middle school teachers. Middle school is a demanding environment; assisting quality teachers in remaining in the setting is important. Communities and schools need the consistency of teachers who remain and become knowledgeable of the families and the community. Determining the factors that professionals state encourage them to continue as middle school teachers along with the intrinsic reward(s) they find to be sustaining can supply guidance to those considering careers as a middle school teachers or further empowering those who are already teaching in that capacity. Potential teachers, new teachers, and experienced teachers may also benefit from advice given by those who continue to teach in the middle school environment.

Delimitations

This study was limited to two county school systems in northwestern North Carolina. Both school systems were in a rural, mountain region. This study employed a purposeful sample that may not be generalized to any population.

Limitations

1. This study was conducted by a teacher of 24 years experience; the last 5 of which were in a middle school setting in a K-8 school. Recognizing the potential biases of
my own frustrations and joys as a middle school teacher, questions were designed to protect against any of these known biases. Appropriate validity measures were taken to ensure the accuracy of the study.

2. The results found through this study were based on data received from responses to a socio-demographic profile administered to participants in two counties, and interviews appropriately conducted, recorded, transcribed, and peer reviewed.

3. The data gathered through this study are only representative of the two rural, mountain North Carolina counties in which participants are or were employed as middle school teachers.

4. The data reflect levels of job satisfaction at the time of the surveys and interviews.

5. The personal characteristics described by the participants of the study were reflective of the determination of the individuals regarding their characteristics at the time of the study.

6. Due to the demographics of the teaching population in the two counties studied, all participants were Caucasian; only 16.9 % of North Carolina’s teachers are minorities (NC Public Schools Statistical Profile 2005, Table, 16, p. 29).

7. Participants were skewed by gender with females predominating.

**Assumptions**

1. Job satisfaction or dissatisfaction is an individual perception. The data recorded for job satisfaction were limited to that gathered from the surveys and interviews pertinent to this study.

2. The individual perceptions of job satisfaction varied according to a number of factors including individual differences (McCacken, 2001).
3. The level of job satisfaction expressed in the surveys or interviews related to this study may or may not be affected by circumstances outside the teaching roles of those surveyed or interviewed.

4. The personal dispositions identified by participants were recognized as individual reflections and assessments of those participating in this study.

*Overview of the Study*

Nationwide and throughout much of North Carolina, the leave-taking of many teachers from the teaching profession occurs during the first 5 years of their career. This trend creates concern for school systems, individual schools and their communities, as well as the students who attend these schools. The goal of this qualitative study was to determine some of the factors influencing teachers of middle school students to remain or to leave the middle school teaching environment. The study employed a socio-demographic survey and one-on-one, in-depth, emergent interviews of 20 teachers from the two school systems (10 current teachers of young adolescents and 10 who have chosen to leave middle school for other teaching roles) provided data for this study. The study also examined personal dispositions current and former middle school teachers identify as important to being successful in that teaching role.

Chapter 1 introduces the study of job satisfaction, dissatisfaction, and personality characteristics of middle school teachers. Also contained in Chapter 1 is descriptive information pertinent to this study: the statement of the problem, definitions of terms, purpose of the study, significance of the study, assumptions, delimitations, and limitations related to the study.
A comprehensive review of current literature related to job satisfaction, dissatisfaction, and current trends is provided in Chapter 2. Also within this chapter, the Two-Factor Theory of Herzberg, Mausner, and Snyderman (1959) was explored as a basis for this study.

Chapter 3 of this study contains the methods of obtaining data: a socio-demographic survey and one-on-one interviews of current and former middle school teachers.

In Chapter 4, analyses of qualitative data collected through a demographic survey and interviews conducted with participants in the two northwestern North Carolina school districts are presented as they relate to the research questions stated in Chapter 1.

Chapter 5 of this study presents an analysis and discussion of the findings. The implications of this study are reported along with conclusions. Recommendations for additional study related to the retention or attrition of middle school teachers are shared along with recommendations for retaining middle school teachers.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Historical Perspective

As years have passed in the United States, the influence of research and legislation and the demands of society have mandated changes in the roles of educators. During the first half of the 1800s, the need for training and preparation of teachers was acknowledged, and normal schools were established in order to prepare teachers for their work. (Pulliam & Van Patten, 2003, pp. 128-149).

The early reforms underwent their own changes during the second half of the 1800s and continued into the 1900s and 2000s. These changes have produced knowledge for teachers concerning childhood growth and development, the needs of learners, multiple intelligences, learning styles, the functions of the brain, and improvements in pedagogy. The educational environment, however, has increased restrictions upon educators through individual curriculum designs as well as the expectations for success through a number of issues including high test scores and higher graduation percentages. These factors, in many cases, have decreased the levels of job satisfaction for educators and increased teacher attrition.

The increase of teacher attrition has created the need to understand why teachers choose not to remain in the classroom, a concern that is applicable to all grade levels. The study of job satisfaction factors is not new and began with managers who were concerned about worker productivity. Early studies included the ancient Egyptians as they built pyramids. Mencius (372-289 BC) studied what we now call production management techniques, particularly the division of labor. The ancient
Greeks taught soldiers specific models for preparing for battle and having weapons in readiness. Plato, too, discussed the division of labor in *The Republic* (360 BCE). Work became less important and devalued by the Greeks and Romans; slaves performed the work while members of those societies studied the arts, philosophy, and military history.

Attitudes toward work gradually changed. The years following the Reformation saw the development of the “Protestant ‘work ethic’” (“Employee Motivation, the Organizational Environment and Productivity,” 2005, Section 1, Historical Perspective, par 15), and Calvinism continued the encouragement of the principles associated with that work ethic. Work became a desirable and respected behavior.

The Industrial Revolution continued the practice of division of labor and added the components of “control, planning, and coordination” (“Employee Motivation, the Organizational Environment and Productivity,” 2005, par 10) as efforts were made to improve the productivity of workers.

Englishman Robert Owen made strong efforts in the early 1800s toward making the working environment better for employees. He recognized that factory workers tire after time on the job and needed better work conditions to improve their performance. He also led the way in not employing children 10 years of age or younger.

The environmental conditions of work continued to be a part of how job satisfaction was perceived, and other components were added as work and society underwent multiple changes.
Job satisfaction within the field of education is multi-faceted and influenced by a variety of factors. McNamara (1999) defines job satisfaction as

...one’s feelings or state-of-mind regarding the nature of their work. Job satisfaction can be influenced by a variety of factors, e.g. the quality of one’s relationship with their supervisor, the quality of the physical environment in which they work, degree of fulfillment in their work, etc. (par 1).

Job satisfaction was found not to be a determinant for motivation and high job performance in the McNamara (1999) research.

Hackman and Oldham’s 1980 research from Work Redesign was incorporated into French and Bell’s (1999) Organizational Development. The two researchers identified certain job characteristics leading to motivation within the workplace. These characteristics include “skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback from the job” (p. 222). The first three characteristics indicated the psychological state of experiencing meaningful work. The fourth characteristic of autonomy created a psychological state of feeling responsible for the “outcomes of the work” (p. 223). The fifth characteristic of feedback resulted in the psychological state of knowing what the results were from the activities pursued through the work. All five characteristics had the same four outcomes: “high internal work motivation, high ‘growth’ satisfaction, high general job satisfaction, and high work effectiveness” (p. 223). Hackman and Oldham also recognized the factors influencing the outcomes. They identified these as moderators and defined those moderators as “knowledge and skill, growth need strength, and ‘context’ satisfaction” (p. 223).

In The Human Side of Enterprise, McGregor (1960) touched on motivation in his discussion of Theory X and Theory Y. Theory X determined that most people disliked work and required established directions in order for them to produce the
desired amount of work. The idea that employees required more than financial compensation in order to motivate them was rejected as part of Theory X. Theory Y proposed that workers can develop professionally and personally, seek responsibility, and work to develop the goals of an organization. In his publication, *The Professional Manager*, McGregor (1960) clarified, “Theory X and Theory Y are not managerial strategies: They are underlying beliefs about the nature of man that influence managers to adopt one strategy rather than another” (p. 79).

Likert’s 1967 work, *The Human Organization*, identified four management systems related to motivation. Each of the systems defined a level of motivation with the first three systems more authoritative in nature. The first system, exploitative authoritative, motivations included the need for economic security, threats and punishment, high management responsibility, little communication upward or downward, no teamwork with “mediocre productivity” (p. 24). System 2 (benevolent authoritative) motivations stemmed from rewards with little communication, more responsibility for managerial personnel with little employee involvement, and virtually no teamwork. Productivity within System 2 was fair. Consultative management (System 3) motivators were rewards accompanied by a “substantial portion of personnel feel[ing] responsibility” (p. 15), more communication flowing from both vertical and horizontal directions, levels of teamwork which encourage individual and group interactions. Productivity was higher with the consultative approach. The fourth system, considered participative in nature and termed as a participative group, exhibited economic rewards related to previously set group goals,
full flow of communication, and all were participants in goal setting. Widespread responsibilities of the team members resulted in high productivity. (pp. 14-24).

The Two-Factor Theory of Herzberg, et al. (1959) for motivators leading to job satisfaction and hygienes resulting in job dissatisfaction was the theory used to examine teachers in this study. Herzberg, along with his fellow investigators, Mausner and Snyderman, studied 200 engineers in a Pittsburg industry. The results of their study provided evidence of two distinct categories (motivators and hygienes) related to job satisfaction. Six factors identified by Herzberg (Herzbert et al., 1959; Herzberg, 1966) were placed in the category of **motivators**: responsibility, recognition, promotion, achievement, the work itself, and professional or personal growth. In the second category of **hygienes**, the research team identified additional components related to job satisfaction: supervision, salary, work environment, district and individual school policies, and relationships with those in the educational setting, both peers and administrators. In *Work and the Nature of Man*, Herzberg (1966) wrote that motivators (“satisfiers,” p. 74) “described man’s relationship to what he does (1966, p. 74), and described hygienes as “preventative and environmental” (p.74) factors that determined the “dissatisfier” factors which “describe his [the worker’s] relationship to the context or environment in which he does his job. One cluster of factors relates to what the person does and the other to the situation in which he does it” (p. 74).

Another point made by Herzberg in his 1966 text continued the definition of hygienes and motivators.

The principal result of the analysis of this data was to suggest that the hygiene or maintenance events led to job dissatisfaction because of a need to avoid
unpleasantness; the motivator event led to job satisfaction because of a need for growth or self-actualization. At the psychological level, the two dimensions of job attitudes reflected a two-dimensional need structure: one need system for the avoidance of unpleasantness and a parallel need system for personal growth (p. 75).

While Herzberg’s Two-Factor Motivation Theory was originally designed to research the job satisfaction of engineers in a Pittsburg industry, the identified motivators and hygienes relate well to the level of teacher job satisfaction. The State of North Carolina began surveying teachers during 2004-2005 concerning these same factors. The interest in determining how these factors impact middle school teachers came partially from that now annual survey of teachers as well as listening to the conversations of middle school teachers.

In addition to determining reasons middle school teachers choose to remain in or leave the teaching environment, the discovery of personal dispositions that enhance or are detrimental to teaching in a middle school were important to this study. Creating a knowledge base for use by all professionals whose lives are impacted by the middle school environment provided much needed information for those contemplating, entering, or who are experienced in teaching middle school students.

The research related to job satisfaction and motivation provided insight into the issue of teacher retention as it continues to be at the forefront of educational issues for elementary and secondary schools. Studies in the 1980s drew attention to the possibility of a teacher shortage and became a concern for local education agencies, administrators, schools, and communities. These studies reported increasing student enrollment and a “graying’ teacher force” (Ingersoll, 2001, p. 4) leading to predicted teacher shortages from an expected mass number of retirements. The
greater impact, however, stems from teachers who remain in the profession for five or fewer years. Ingersoll’s (2001) study, *Teacher Turnover, Teacher Shortages, and the Organization of Schools,*

…while it is true teacher retirements are increasing, the overall amount of turnover accounted for by retirement is relatively minor when compared to that resulting from other causes such as teacher job dissatisfaction and teachers pursing better jobs or other careers (p. 5).

Teachers under the age of 30 were more likely to leave the profession than teachers who are in the middle portion of their careers. Teachers over 50 leave for various reasons, only one of which is retirement. Attrition occurred more often in those who teach special education, science, and math. School characteristics contributed to teacher attrition, and males were more likely to leave the profession than females. Teachers of non-Caucasian backgrounds were also found to exit the profession more often (Ingersoll, 2001). The pursuit of other jobs and teacher dissatisfaction were greater factors in teacher attrition than that of teachers reaching retirement age (Ingersoll). In a 2002 *Education Week* article, Viadero reviewed Ingersoll’s (a University of Pennsylvania researcher and associate professor of education and sociology) analysis of “federal survey data for more than 50,000 teachers nationwide” (par 2). Eleven percent was the rate at which most jobs experienced turnover; teachers, however, had a higher rate of 13.2% turnover each year during the first 5 years meaning that 29% leave the profession in their first 3 years and 39% during the first five years of teaching (Viadero, 2002).

Robert H. Benmosche, Chairman of the Board and Chief Executive Officer for MetLife, Inc., whose company conducted surveys to research issues related to
transitioning into teaching, stated in his message for MetLife’s 2004-2005 survey of teachers, students, and principals,

Thirty to 50 percent of new teachers leave the profession within the first five years. When demographics such as retirement of current teachers and increases in student enrollment are factored in, studies predict that 2.2 million teachers need to be hired in the next decade. For young people, every day presents changes in every aspect of their lives. Since our schools are filled with people in transition, we asked them how they experience those transitions, what their biggest challenges are and what support helps them succeed (p. iii).

MetLife’s 2005 survey found 12 characteristics that predicted reasons teachers are “likely to leave the profession of teaching to go into a different profession in the next five years” (Transitions and the Role of Supportive Relationships, 2005, p. 91).

1. Not satisfied with teaching as a career
2. Feels as if their job is not valued by their supervisor
3. Feels stress and anxiety related to reviews by their supervisor
4. Feels stress and anxiety related to personnel issues, union, low pay, teacher conflict, discipline, complaints and incompetence
5. Feels stress and anxiety related to unrealistic demands, workload, number of responsibilities
6. Fewer years of experience teaching
7. Minority teacher
8. Feels stress and anxiety related to safety
9. Feels stress and anxiety related to budget/lack of funding/financial constraints
10. Finds making a contribution to society a source of greatest teaching satisfaction
11. Feels stress and anxiety related to lack of resources
12. Finds pay/salary a source of greatest teaching satisfaction (p.91).

Teacher attrition has become a policy issue as well as the subject of continued studies. Despite this focus, research consistently indicated teachers leave the profession within the first 3 to 5 years of entering it (Ingersoll, 2001; Shann, 1998). This has brought about concern based on the impact teacher turnover has on students, individual schools, school systems, and communities. Because “teacher satisfaction
influences job performance, attrition, and ultimately, student performance” (Shann, par 4), school systems across the nation have implemented teacher induction programs and mentoring programs to better prepare them for the teaching environment and to slow the leaving of teachers. These attempts have not been highly successful.

“Teachers have one of the highest attrition rates of any profession; in particular, new teachers are apt to leave our schools” (Heller, 2004, p. 4). This summary of Heller’s research was supported by Ingersoll’s findings. Viadero’s April 10, 2002, article in Education Week adds:

Schools might have better luck meeting their demands for teachers . . . by making improvements in job conditions, such as increasing support teachers, raising salaries, reducing student misbehavior, and giving faculty members more say in school decision making (p. 5).

Brighton (1999) in Keeping Good Teachers: Lessons from Novices cited two reasons for new teacher attrition. The first was the differences teachers discover between their teaching preparation and their actual duties. The second reason Brighton found was the difference between what teachers expected and the job’s realities (pp. 198-199).

NEA President Weaver, in a statement for the National Education Association regarding the TEACH Act of 2005 (Teacher Excellence for All Children), was quoted in an NEA press release on June 9, 2005, as stating,

We know that every child deserves a high quality teacher in his or her classroom. Too often, poor working conditions, low salary and a lack of preparation and support leads to high turnover in our schools. This is especially true in schools of highest need, where students are from low-income families and need the most help to succeed. This bill addresses these concerns with common sense incentives for teachers to stay in the classroom (par 3).
Data released from the School and Staffing Survey for the 1999-2000 school year for public schools indicated 59.6% participated in a teacher induction program and 46.8% worked with a mentor teacher in the same subject area. Of those who participated in a mentoring program, 36.1% reported “their mentor teacher helped them to a great extent” (Schools and Staffing Survey, 1999-2000, Table 6).

To address this issue of teacher attrition, Thornton (2004) recommended teachers as the ones whom administrators should be asking questions. Listening to those who are “intimately involved with the real life challenges of being and remaining enthusiastic, dedicated, and effective teachers” (par 38) aid in determining long-term solutions for teacher retention. Thornton suggested, “. . . increased teacher voice and power, and reconfiguring teacher roles to be collegial, based on professional growth within a learning community are elements that may begin to address teacher needs” (par 38).

Recent studies of North Carolina Nationally Board Certified Teachers (NBCT) revealed, “With a growing need for top performing, quality teachers at an all time high, it seems imperative to listen to what teachers need to do their very best work (Petty, Dagenhart, and O’Connor, 2002-2003, par 7). The Executive Summary published by National Boards for Professional Teaching Standards for these studies of the North Carolina NBCTs recommended “the findings can also play a role in keeping teachers satisfied in their positions, thereby decreasing teacher shortages and increasing teacher quality” (par 7).

In Thornton’s (2004) article, *What Can We Learn About Retaining Teachers from PDS Teachers’ Voices?* she stated,
The typical middle school faculty is made up of teachers who have come to middle school teaching through very different career paths. Some are well-trained in Professional Development Schools (PDS) providing a strong field-based program focused on the pursuing of certification in middle level education. Others come to the middle school classroom via non-PDS preparation; elementary or secondary training; emergency, temporary, or provisional certification (par 3).

A study by Gillan (1978) revealed varying attitudes in teachers who were trained for middle school teaching and those who came to middle school by another route. The teachers trained and certified in teaching young adolescents reported being more satisfied with their jobs than did their counterparts who were not trained as middle school teachers. The teachers certified in middle school teaching emphasized the importance of advance preparation, as well as seeking certification for middle school teaching.

A 1999-2000 study of Philadelphia public schools found 93% of their middle school teachers were not certified in middle school. Most of these teachers received on-the-job training while teaching with emergency certifications or permits and were scheduled for professional development at local universities. The study produced recommendations for additional research and encouraged attention to “hiring and recruitment, retaining teachers, and teacher experience” (Watson, 2001, Abstract).


The challenge of attracting and retaining quality teachers is heightened by increased pressure for district and school accountability, often in the form of high-stakes testing and mandated curricular standards. In response to these mandates, districts are introducing reforms and initiatives at a frenetic pace. As a result, new teachers are struggling to learn their craft in dynamic and frequently chaotic environments (p. 6).
The earliest available data (1997-1998 school year) in the two counties in this study indicated that County A experienced 9.62% turnover and County B experienced 7.37% turnover (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2002, pp. 18-21). Both counties again experienced turnover in their general teaching population during 2003-2004: County A had an overall turnover rate of 7.11%, and County B had a turnover rate 12.50%. (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2002, pp. 15-16). The five-year average for County A was 7.2% and County B was 11.77% (pp. 19 & 21).

The 2003-2004 System Level Turnover Report for North Carolina provided data indicating an average turnover rate of all North Carolina teachers of 12.37%. The average turnover rate for 2002-2003 was 12.44%, and the average for 2001-2002 was 12.49% (p. 4). The 1997-1998 average teacher turnover was 12.30% (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2002, p. 21). Approximately one third (31.5%) of those leaving in 2003-2004 were tenured compared to 32.9% in 2002-2003 and 29.5% in 2001-2002 (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2004, p. 1). “For four of the last five years, the number one reason reported by school systems for teacher turnover is ‘to teach elsewhere,’ with 17%-20% of the teachers reported to have left for this reason” (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, p. 4). Almost 80% of those teachers, however, remained in North Carolina. Teacher turnover is also costly: “…approximately $11,000 or more for each recruit leaving in the first few years of teaching” (Improving Teacher Working Conditions in North Carolina, 2005, PowerPoint Slide 3).
The 1997-1998 Teacher Turnover Report also indicated that 11.3% of the 117 North Carolina school systems surveyed reported teacher shortages in middle grades. The North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research noted in its 2004 Accomplishments that “the subject areas of greatest shortage are math, science, special education, and foreign language” (Accomplishments in 2004, The North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research, par 4.), thus indicating that teacher retention in the middle grades area may be less of a concern than in 1997-1998.

The 2004-2005 MetLife Survey of The American Teacher centered on transitions and supportive relationships. Eight hundred new teachers, defined by the survey as “those with no more than five years of experience” (Transitions and the Role of Supportive Relationships, 2005, p. 1), were interviewed by telephone. New teachers noted that “relationships with other members of the school community emerged as important sources of support. New teachers . . . who have supportive school relationship are also more likely to have other positive school outcomes” (p. 3). The Executive Summary of the MetLife Survey reports new teachers needed the support of “their fellow teachers and principal” (p. 3) as they transition “to their first teaching position” (p. 3).

The MetLife Executive Summary continues with these statements:

New teachers’ satisfaction with and the quality of their professional connections is related to whether they plan to remain in the profession. New teachers who are likely to leave teaching in the next five years are less satisfied with their relationship with other teachers, their principal and with their students. They are also less likely to report that their principal creates a supportive environment and more likely to feel as if their job is not valued by their supervisor. These finding indicate that those interested in retaining qualified teachers in the profession would benefit by paying attention to the support systems available to new teachers (Transitions and the Role of Supportive Relationships, 2005, p. 4).
Teachers in the MetLife Survey reported they did not feel well prepared to find and solicit the support (resources, supplies, help from other educators) they needed. That knowledge led those who analyzed the survey results to ask, “Given these findings, what actions do schools take to welcome new teachers and help them with their transition into the school?” (Transitions and the Role of Supportive Relationships, 2005, p. 15). As a result of the survey the low number (19%) of new teachers who were provided a mentor was discovered. Of those, however, 80% stated that their mentor was “extremely (43%) or very (19%) helpful” (p. 17). Sadly, those who were not assigned a mentor (19%) added to those with poor mentoring experiences (16%), amounted to approximately one third (32%) of those new teachers surveyed having a poor mentor or no mentor at all (p. 17).

Examined as a part of the MetLife Survey was the satisfaction of new teachers with relationships – parents, students, and co-workers.

New teachers are most satisfied with their relationships with their students. Seven in ten (68%) describe this relationship as very satisfying. A majority of new teachers (57%) describe their relationship with other teachers as very satisfying, while half (53%) say they are very satisfied with their relationship with their principal. New teachers are least satisfied with their relationship with parents. Only one-quarter (25%) describe this relationship as very satisfying. New teachers in schools with a majority of low-income students are less likely to be very satisfied with their relationships with other teachers (52% vs. 62%), their principals (48% vs. 58%) and with parents (18% vs. 30%). It is important to note that teachers in low-income schools are just as likely as those in other schools to be very satisfied with their relationships with their students (65% vs. 70%) (Transitions and the Role of Supportive Relationships, 2005, p.26).

*Herzberg, Mausner, and Snyderman’s Two-Factor Theory*

Linking the data for teacher attrition and retention to the areas of job satisfaction and personal dispositions may be the needed key. In doing so, the Two-
Factor Theory of Motivation by Herzberg, Mausner, and Snyderman can be considered to evaluate the levels of job satisfaction and dissatisfaction related to the teachers’ experience.

Herzberg, along with his fellow researchers Mausner and Snyderman, developed the Two-Factor Motivation Theory in 1959. The theory was a result of their study of 200 engineers and accountants in nine widely varying companies in and around the area of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. These research participants were interviewed and “asked about events they had experienced at work which either had resulted in a marked improvement in their job satisfaction or had led to a marked reduction in job satisfaction” (Herzberg, 1966, p. 71). Herzberg identified first and second level factors in his definition of job-attitude factors. The first level factors he identified were recognition, achievement, possibility of growth (promotion), advancement (change in status/position or lateral movement “with increased opportunities for responsible work” [p. 46]), salary, interpersonal relations, supervision-technical, responsibility, company policy and administration, working conditions, the work itself, factors in personal life, status, and job security (pp. 44-49). These first-level factors were ordered by Herzberg by their frequency of appearance. They were “(1) achievement and recognition; (2) the work itself, responsibility, and advancement; (3) salary” (Herzberg, et al., 1959, p. 59).

The second-level factors were determined how a respondent’s “need and value systems led to his attitude towards his job at the time” (Herzberg, et al. 1959, p. 49). The factors identified were recognition, achievement, potential for growth, levels of responsibility, group feelings, and level of interest in job performance, as well as
levels of status, fairness, pride, and salary. These factors were ranked, and “the top five focus on the job itself: (1) on doing the job, (2) on liking the job, (3) on success in doing the job, (4) on recognition for doing the job, and (5) on moving upward as an indication of professional growth” (p. 63).

Effects observed as a result of the study included performance, employee turnover, mental health, interpersonal relationships, and attitudes (Herzberg, et al, 1959, p. 51-54).

Gawel (1997) summarized Herzberg’s theory by terming it a “two-dimensional paradigm of factors affecting people’s attitudes about work” (Gawel, 1997, par 4), and equated motivators (satisfiers) to “elements that enriched a person’s job” and “were associated with long-term positive effects in job performance” (Gawel, 1997, par 5). “Hygiene factors (dissatisfiers) consistently produced only short-term changes in job attitudes and performance, which quickly fell back to its previous level” (Gawel, par 5). Gawel went on to describe satisfiers as

a person’s relationship with what she or he does, many related to the tasks being performed. Dissatisfiers . . . have to do with a person’s relationship to the context or environment in which she or he performs the job. The satisfiers relate to what a person does while the dissatisfiers relate to the situation in which the person does what he or she does (Gawel, par 6).

Gawel contended that the factor of money in Herzberg’s theory was not applicable to teachers based on his study of participants in the Tennessee Career Ladder Program. Herzberg’s theory included salary; Gawel’s research indicated, “that the teachers in the program do not match the behavior of people employed in business . . . the findings disagree with Herzberg in relation to the importance of money as a motivator” (Gawel, 1997, par 3).
In his study of the Two-Factor Theory, Gawel (1997) reviewed the Tennessee Career Ladder Program (TCLP) and a study by Bellott and Tutor (1990). The 21st Century Report Card dated November 1996, from the Tennessee Department of Education indicated the career ladder to be voluntary. At the time of this report, Career Ladder certification was awarded to educators who have a direct impact on students: principals, assistant principals, instructional supervisors, general education teachers, special education teachers, guidance counselors, school social workers, school psychologists, attendance supervisors, consulting teachers and library or media specialists (21st Century Career Ladder Program, 1996, par 2).

Level I participants in the Career Ladder were the largest in number. The primary qualification for these participating educators included completion of “one year on probation and three years as apprentices” (par 3). These educators must also have had a positive evaluation. The 21st Century Report Card indicates most of those novice teachers participated in the plan. The report also specified 23% as a “fairly stable” percentage of participants at Levels II and III in the Career Ladder program (par 3).

Bellott and Tutor determined Herzberg’s work, developed in 1959, to be outdated and not applicable to teachers. The question asked of all teachers in the study was, “To what extent did salary influence your decision to participate in the (TCLP) program?” (Gawel, 1997). In reviewing the three levels (Level I, II, and III) of the TCLP, these researchers found the Level I teachers to be almost equally influenced by both motivation and hygiene factors.

Level I had a membership of 30,000 teachers. In Level II, however, a distinct difference was noted in the two factors. Motivation factors had a result of 101; hygiene factors, a result of 11. A similar result was noted with Level III educators;
motivation factors received a score of 149, and hygiene factors received a score of 24 (Gawel, 1997, par 9, Table 2). There were 141 respondents from Level I, 112 respondents from Level II, and 173 from Level III. It appears from this study that teachers change in their levels of motivation as they mature in their careers and hygiene factors become less important.

Do the reasons for teacher attrition align with the Two-Factor Theory developed by Herzberg? In a 2004 Teacher Working Conditions survey, North Carolina teachers responded to a variety of questions and shared their “perceptions of empowerment, facilities and resources, leadership, professional development, and time” (System Level Turnover Report, 2004, p. 4) in regards to the school system and specific school in which they taught. The highest degrees of satisfaction for North Carolina teachers were found in the areas Herzberg termed as motivators. These were “effectiveness, supportiveness, and professionalism of their school leaders and with the opportunities they had to design and engage in professional development and school leadership activities” (p. 4). Teachers were least satisfied with areas Herzberg referred to as hygienes. Those factors related to time: “time available to adequately engage in such activities as planning, teaching, and professional development critical to successfully reaching all students” (p. 4).

Teacher Job Satisfaction

Teachers find satisfaction in their jobs in various ways. Clarke (2004) reflected on his years as a high school teacher in England and what created job satisfaction for him:

So where does the job satisfaction come from? My wife watches me talking to ex-pupils I bump into in railway stations and supermarkets. ‘There’s your job
satisfaction,’ she says. ‘Look what you have given to the community’… Clearly, the professional who finds a particular skill, whether in the classroom or on the sports field, in art or science, or as a genuine ‘kids teacher,’ is in with a chance of making a difference. This is where the job satisfaction comes from, working with a group of youngsters, setting targets, expecting to achieve those results, and being motivated by the drive to equal or better last year’s results. I think that’s what kept me going and what even today sends me rushing to make my Liverpool Street connection and teach in a small faith school on the other side of London (par 14; 17).

As a 40-year veteran educator, Clarke’s statements reflect the heart of teaching as educators want it to be. Today’s educators deal with many of the same difficulties Clarke mentioned in his article: low pay, impoverished schools, and multi-faceted issues with students and families. The fascination and love for teaching, however, appears unable or insufficient to keep many new teachers in the profession.

Researchers Pennington and Riley (1991) determined job satisfaction to be an internal or external standard.

In their view, a person’s general assessment of how satisfied he/she is on the job is made according to an absolute frame of reference, while a person’s assessment of level of satisfaction with individual job facets is based on a relative standard that is specific to the work context and that involves comparison with the situation of other employees (p. 1)

Pennington and Riley’s review of literature found that teachers were satisfied with their jobs. Their research focused on the work of Chen and Cole (1977) as well as the work of Lester (1985) and the work of Lortie (1986). Just as Clarke reported in his examination of job satisfaction, it was the intrinsic rewards of teaching that created job satisfaction among teachers (Pennington and Riley, 1991, p. 1).

Syptak, Marsland, and Ulmer wrote in the October 1999 issue of *Family Practice Management*, “Satisfied employees tend to be more productive, creative and committed to their employers …” (par 1). Although the point of view of these authors
derived from a medical perspective, the same statement can be considered for those in
the teaching profession.

In Montana, job satisfaction factors related to attraction and retention of
teachers was studied. This study of the smallest schools in the state reflected job
satisfaction factors related to the rural environment. Feelings related to safety, parent
support, and the rural lifestyle were secondary only to teacher’s satisfaction with their
relationships with students in those small schools (Davis, 2002).

Thornton (2004) reported that America was producing a sufficient number of
teachers who were prepared for teaching. Her research indicated that school systems
should look seriously at the “exodus of teachers from the classrooms once they get
there” (p. 6). Thornton’s contention, based on the research of Hunt and Carroll
(2003), was that these teachers were leaving their jobs as educators in order to pursue
other jobs. Thornton (2004) expressed this thought,

The mistaken belief that the teacher supply is the core problem leads to
compromising the quality of teachers in an effort to recruit a sufficient
quantity of teachers (NCATE, 2003). An examination of teacher retention
may provide us with another potential solution without watering down the
definition of quality teaching, but instead strengthening it . . (p. 6).

In agreement with Thornton’s research, Ingersoll’s 2001 research suggested,

School staffing problems are primarily due to excess demand resulting from a
‘revolving door’ where large numbers of teachers depart their jobs for reasons
other than retirement . . . teacher recruitment programs will not solve the
staffing problems of such schools if they do not also address the
organizational sources of low teacher retention (p. 3).

A concentration on professional development was recommended in a study of
California and New Jersey schools. The need for “sustained opportunities to
experiment with and receive feedback on innovative practices, to collaborate with
peers in and out of school, and to interact with external researchers” (Foster, Lewis, & Onafowora, 2005, pp. 29-30) were factors identified as those needed for quality professional development. Unfortunately, current teacher in-service programs do not often reflect the needs teachers describe and request for their continued development as professional educators.

Teacher job satisfaction is critical to the success of teachers, students, communities, and school systems. Teacher job satisfaction is believed “to be a predictor of teacher retention, a determinant of teacher commitment, and in turn, a contributor to school effectiveness” (Shann, 1998, par 1). Shann also found an instance from researcher Zigarelli (1996) that indicated “a single, general measure of teacher satisfaction is a highly significant predictor of effective schools” (par 5). Other readings Shann pursued found teacher satisfaction to be “a multifaceted and complex construct” (par 5).

In a 2003 study of selected school districts in Essex County, New Jersey, Lanzo found middle school teachers were mostly satisfied. Those teachers may have experienced the kind of professional growth that Thornton (2004) described in her study:

The PDS [Professional Development Schools] teacher group identified the choice of paths [remaining in the classroom or leaving the profession] as being directly related to participation in a learning community. They had opportunities for critical reflection and dialogue about standards of practice built into their roles as educators and members of the master teacher cohort group. They continually engaged in inquiry into practice, collegial and dialogic professional development, and developing exemplary practice in a safe and open environment (p. 9).

Other predictors of job satisfaction found by Shann (1998) were “interactions with students, interactions with colleagues, professional challenges, professional
autonomy, working conditions, salary, and opportunities for advancement . . . student achievement” (par 5).

Teacher Job Dissatisfaction

Factors contributing to job dissatisfaction were aligned with “low salaries, inadequate support from the school administration, student discipline problems, and limited faculty input into school-decision making” (Ingersoll, 2001, p. 3). Shann (1998) reported sources of dissatisfaction to include “school structure or administration, such as large class sizes, lack of resources, and educational policies and procedures” (par 5). Thornton (2004) found job dissatisfaction to “be a major predictor of teacher retention” (par 6). The causes for dissatisfaction in her study were “lack of materials and resources, lack of parental support, lack of administrative support, student misbehavior, time pressures, limited input in decisions, and low salaries” (par 6). Three new factors of dissatisfaction, all attached to the forerunner issues of student assessment and teacher accountability, were added to the traditional factors. These new factors are the challenges of meeting the needs of individual students, lack of student motivation, and the absence of a collegial environment.

Harvey, Heller, McConnell, and Williams (1998) examined teaching assignments for new teachers and found that many times new teachers were given the classes with discipline and performance problems.

Nothing will cause burnout in a new teacher quicker than giving him or her all freshmen, or all remedial, or all discipline problems. If anything, these new teachers need time to test their new wings to try out their knowledge in an elective area. They bring with them freshness and enthusiasm straight from the world of academe. Tap into their resources – don’t let them go to waste (p. 142).
Beck-Frazier (2005) studied three first year, middle school teachers in North Carolina who came to the teaching profession in three different ways. The sixth grade science teacher entered the classroom after completing an accredited university teacher preparation program. The second teacher was a lateral entry professional (an individual coming to the classroom without having completed a North Carolina Department of Public Instruction approved education program) with an undergraduate degree who must actively pursue his teaching certification by completing a minimum of six semester hours prior to the beginning of each successive school year. The lateral entry teacher must also pass the required PRAXIS II test(s), if any (some areas of licensure do not require passing the PRAXIS II), prior to the end of the third year of employment. The third teacher entered teaching through an alternative licensure program called NC TEACH (Teacher Excellence for All Children). This program was designed to prepare individuals making a mid-career change. These teachers are required to complete both summer and weekend courses during their first year to obtain a continuing professional educator license. The areas of job dissatisfaction identified by these new middle school teachers stemmed from a lack of “administrative support, student motivation/parental influence, and low pay” (Beck-Frazier, p. 32). These three new teachers expressed the importance of active and positive administrative support with two important factors: “an approachable attitude . . . and the ability to make “the tough call”’” (p. 32). Student motivation and parental influence were noted as “societal issues of distrust” which “create special problems for the first-year teacher” (p. 32). Low pay was noted as the primary reason these three teachers would leave the profession:
The males are aware of their need to ‘support a family’ and are concerned that a teaching career will not allow this dream to materialize. Females are either focused on individual needs or else part of a family whose budget is supplemented by their teaching salary. The only option for higher pay is to leave the classroom (Beck-Frazier, p. 33).

Teachers trained as middle level educators in Professional Development Schools (PDS) viewed job dissatisfaction differently than did their counterparts who were not PDS trained. Those PDS teachers said they felt they were not respected for their advanced degrees or for their expertise as educators.

Much like the PDS and non-PDS teachers, upper elementary (Grades 3-5) Nationally Board Certified Teachers (NBCT) and non-Board Certified teachers expressed their dissatisfaction in different ways. NBCTs desired a larger role in the decision-making efforts of their school. They also expressed the desire to further expand their knowledge through additional study, research, and the reading of professional materials. These teachers shared, too, their need to fill leadership roles, and they were more willing to be risk-takers. A study of Board Certified and non-Board Certified teachers was conducted to determine the wants and needs of high school, middle school, and elementary school teachers in North Carolina. The NBCTs in middle schools expressed much the same needs as those in upper elementary. They also expressed the need to be heard, pursue additional professional growth, and serve in leadership positions. The high school NBCTs sought recognition for their accomplishments, desired roles in leading staff development, and expressed the desire to serve in areas of leadership. The NBCTs were “more satisfied in their current teaching positions” (Petty, Dagenhart, and O’Connor, 2002-2003, par 5) than teachers who were not Nationally Board Certified Teachers.
Urban schools have the most difficulty retaining teachers. Reported reasons for leaving those teaching positions include, “lack of administrative, collegial, and parent support and insufficient involvement in decision making” (Shann, 1998, par 2). Other research by Shann indicates additional components of job satisfaction important to retention: “satisfaction with principal leadership and support, salary, mentors’ emotional support, and satisfaction in general” (par 1).

According to the research of Ingersoll (2001), the turnover rate for public school teachers was 12.4%; private school teachers had a rate of turnover of 18.9% (p. 16). Low poverty and high poverty schools had turnover rates of 10.5% and 15.2%, respectively. Rural schools had an attrition rate of 11.2%; suburban and urban schools had turnover rates of 13% and 14%, respectively. Reasons provided by the teachers for their departures included retirement . . . moving and leaving . . . “school staffing cutbacks due to lay-offs, school closings, and reorganizations” (p. 22). . . and “personal reasons, such as departures for pregnancy, child rearing, health problems, and family moves” (p. 22). Ingersoll’s research also determined

Forty-two percent of all departing teachers report as a reason either job dissatisfaction or the desire to pursue a better job, another career, or to improve career opportunities in or out of education. Teachers who migrate to other schools list low salaries, lack of support from the school administration, student discipline problems, and lack of teacher influence over decision making as the primary reasons underlying their move. Likewise, dissatisfaction underlying attrition is most often reported as due to low salaries, lack of support from the school administration, lack of student motivation, and student discipline problems (p. 22).

Dispositions

In their study of dispositions, The Dispositions To Teach, Taylor and Wasicsko (2000) from Eastern Kentucky University, defined dispositions “as the
personal qualities or characteristics that are possessed by individuals, including attitudes, beliefs, interests, appreciations, values, and modes of adjustment” (p. 2). Teacher preparatory programs have included dispositions as a part of student coursework and practicing teachers of elementary and high school students have been trained through a “Teacher Effectiveness training model” (p. 8) with the purpose being “to improve dispositions or perceptions” (p. 8).

Collinson, in her 1996 work, *Becoming an Exemplary Teacher: Integrating Professional, Interpersonal, and Intrapersonal Knowledge*, listed both the ethics and dispositions of effective teachers. Ethics has two components: (1) an ethic of care that includes “caring/compassion, respect for self and others, understanding self and others, giving to and receiving from others, and courage;” (2) a work ethic in which the elements are work ethic/pride of effort, dedication/perseverance, and doing one’s best” (p. 7). “A disposition toward continuous learning” (p. 7) included “curiosity/creativity, risk taking, problem finding and solving, responsibility, and flexibility” (p. 7).

The research of Wubbels, Levy, and Brekelmans (1997) supported the categories defined by Collinson. They established the disposition for positive and significant relationships between teachers and their students exhibited by teachers maintaining control of their classrooms while at the same time exhibiting empathy toward their students.

Wubbles and his fellow associates asked students to define their idea of the best teachers. “The best teachers are strong classroom leaders who are friendlier and more understanding and less uncertain, dissatisfied and critical than most teachers.
The best teachers allow them [students] more freedom than the norm” (Wubbles et al., 1997, p. 83.) Their research also produced these characteristics or dispositions of good teachers:

Good teachers are both dominant and cooperative. They should be able to empathize with students, understand their world, and listen to them. They should be able to set standards and maintain control while allowing students to have responsibility and freedom to learn (p. 85).

Kellough and Kellough (1999), recognized for their extensive work in middle school teaching and philosophy, identified 22 distinct characteristics that aligned with recognized dispositions. In pages 85-87 of their work, *The Expectations, Responsibilities, and Facilitating Behaviors of a Middle School Classroom Teacher*, the following characteristics were listed.

1. The teacher is knowledgeable about the subject matter content expected to be taught.
2. The teacher is an active member of professional organizations, reads professional journals, dialogues with colleagues, maintains currency in methodology and about the students and the subject content he or she is expected to teach.
3. The teacher understands the processes of learning.
4. The teacher is an ‘educational broker.’
5. The teacher uses effective modeling behaviors.
6. The teacher is open to change, willing to take risks and to be held accountable.
7. The teacher is non-prejudiced toward gender, sexual preference, ethnicity, skin color, religion, physical disabilities, socioeconomic status, learning disabilities, or national origin.
8. The teacher organizes the classroom and plans lessons carefully.
9. The teacher is a capable communicator.
10. The teacher can function effectively as a decision maker.
11. The teacher is in a perpetual learning mode, striving to further develop a repertoire of teaching strategies.
12. The teacher demonstrates concern for the safety and health of students.
13. The teacher demonstrates optimism for the learning of every child, while providing a constructive and positive environment for learning.
14. The teacher demonstrates confidence in every child’s ability to learn.
15. The teacher is skillful and fair in the employment of strategies for the assessment of student learning.

16. The teacher is skillful in working with parents and guardians, colleagues, administrators, and the support staff, and maintains and nurtures friendly and ethical professional relationships.

17. The teacher demonstrates continuing interest in professional responsibilities and opportunities.

18. The teacher exhibits a wide range of interests.

19. The teacher shares a healthy sense of humor.

20. The teacher is quick to recognize a student who may be in need of special attention.

21. The teacher makes specific and frequent efforts to demonstrate how the subject content may be related to the lives of the students.

22. The teacher is reliable.

Current Trends in Teacher Retention Efforts

Teachers are offered a number of incentives when recruited. Among them are alternative routes to licensure, supplements or bonuses, student loan forgiveness, affordable housing, and tuition-free classes. As enticing as these are, they may need to be considered secondary to focusing on job satisfaction (which supports the Herzberg theory described earlier).

Foster, Lewis, and Onafowora (2005) noted the disagreements related to teacher recruitment, retention, and professional development. Some efforts made to recruit, retain, and develop teachers included “stiffer certification requirements by requiring additional coursework . . . recruit new teachers with higher college grade point averages and higher standardized test scores or students who have graduated from elite universities” (Foster et al., p. 29). Heller addressed this same point, insisting that entry into the teaching profession is more difficult and discourages potential teachers from becoming educators.

Ingersoll maintains the shortage of teachers is not being addressed appropriately. His research indicated the importance of retaining those in the
profession instead of continually recruiting to replace those who leave. He was quoted by Viadero as saying “It’s like pouring water into a bucket with holes,” (p. 7). His suggestions, based on an analysis of 1994-1995 federal survey data, for improving the rate of teacher retention relates to improving the conditions under which teachers are asked to perform. Greater support and decision making for teachers, better salaries, and addressing inappropriate student behaviors were among his suggestions for retaining teachers (Viadero, 2002).

Heller in his 2004 work restated the importance of investing in teacher development.

Clearly, investing wisely in teacher preparation and induction pays off in developing better teachers who are more likely to remain in the profession, while also offering the side benefits of enhancing professional development opportunities and professional esteem (as gatekeepers of the profession) for all teachers (p. 21).

The first-year middle school teachers interviewed by Beck-Frazier (2005) stressed the importance of positively influencing their students. Incorporating this need and understanding its impact on teacher retention and preparation programs may provide another key for universities, school systems, and mentors as they search for strategies in slowing down the attrition of professional, highly-qualified teachers in our schools.

In Tampa, Florida, the Hillsborough Classroom Teachers Association (HCTA) took steps to encourage and assist new hires. They saw a need beyond what their school district was doing and took steps to further help these new teachers. Each new teacher was assigned a mentor, and in this case all the mentors were Nationally Board Certified. They also instituted a hotline for calls from new teachers during the first
month of school and created a First Buddy program. The First Buddy Program provided friends who knew how to get started. Weekend workshops, just as the other interventions, were provided free of charge to new teachers providing support for a variety of tasks and concerns new teachers experience. This teacher association incorporated their building representatives into this program as well. In addition to recruiting, they provided support and connections for new teachers (“Reaching Out to the Newbies,” 2003, p. 13).

In Romulus, Michigan, at Halecreek Elementary, teaching interns are assigned mentors to assist with problems they face. The interns receive help in transitioning from student to professional, and experienced teachers receive the benefit of renewing their passion for teaching. Mentors “require their interns to help develop lesson plans; attend professional development and after-school staff meetings; meet with parents; coordinate service projects with students; and actually take over and teach for a minimum of three weeks” (“Learning to Teach,” 2005, p. 14).

Teacher induction programs were designed to focus on “integrating new hires into the system to ensure that they have a successful experience and remain with the school” (Heller, 2004, p. 28). Not only for teachers who come to teaching through the traditional methods of teacher training programs, induction programs are also crucial in transitioning those who choose to enter teaching from nontraditional routes.

Heller (2004) examined induction programs, which included mentors, from school systems in New York, Illinois, Louisiana, California, and Arizona. These school systems reported increases in returning first-year teachers as well as reductions in attrition rates.
Utah is among the states facing teacher shortages:

Members of the State Board of Education and State Board of Regents said Utah is losing 1,175 teachers a year. A projected increase in the number of students combined with that attrition rate means the state will have to fill about 80,000 teachers vacancies in the next 20 years (Cronin, 2005, p. B1).

Educators lobbied legislators to fund programs for recruiting, retaining, and training Utah’s teachers. With the projected need for teachers and increasing enrollments, teachers were asking “legislators to make up for low teacher salaries by maintaining undergraduate loan, licensing and mentoring programs and providing bonus pay for professional development” (Cronin, 2005, p. B1). These recommendations provide a year of tuition forgiveness for each year taught, grant monies to supplement the licensing of teachers and the funding of programs designed for mentoring and evaluating novice teachers, and increasing salaries for teachers who succeed in becoming Nationally Board Certified. (Cronin, p. B1).

In California and New Jersey, after-school labs with volunteer students from grades 1-4 receive academic assistance from both experienced and novice teachers. Novice teachers who participate in tutoring have the opportunity to plan with experienced teachers and attempt better and stronger instructional strategies (Foster et al., 2005).

Salary increases and bonuses are another method of recruiting and retaining teachers in the classroom. In October 2005, the state of North Carolina, seeking to adjust salaries to the national average, voted to increase teacher salaries by $600 for the 2005-2006 year with an additional guarantee of a 5% increase each year for the next three years. North Carolina Governor Easley “said the raises are needed to attract and retain teachers at a time when North Carolina has been losing ground to other
states” (Silberman, 2005, p. A1). Easley was also quoted as saying, “this year’s first installment was to improve North Carolina’s pay for beginning teachers, which trails most other states in the Southeast” (Silberman, p. A1). Formerly, North Carolina’s new teachers earned the average salary of $27,572 annually and ranked 38th in the nation.

Summary

Beginning Chapter 2 of this study was a historical review of work and job satisfaction. Additional related literature provided insight into the issues of teacher recruitment, retention, and professional development. A review of Herzberg, et al. 1959 research into job satisfaction and dissatisfaction was also explored within the chapter. Discussed, too, were teacher job satisfaction, dissatisfaction, and personal dispositions. The current trends in recruiting teachers and retaining them in the profession completed the chapter along with recent efforts in professional development for teachers.
CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Overview

This chapter provided the design and methods for a qualitative study of perceived job satisfaction factors for middle school teachers in two rural, mountain counties in northwest North Carolina. A qualitative study was chosen to best discover why current middle school teachers remain in their classrooms in the selected areas and what prompted former teachers to leave the middle school environment. In the emerging design of this qualitative study, respondents had the opportunity to further describe and elaborate on their experiences, thus providing the researcher with information not available through surveys or pre-existing statistical data. Teacher retention and attrition is a human event, and the reasons for either demand the creation of questions to fully investigate those reasons.

A number of studies have focused on teacher retention and teacher job satisfaction. The in-depth study of job satisfaction and retention of middle school teachers is the most recent in this field of research. Studies of North Carolina teachers in all grade levels have been undertaken; these, however, are statewide studies. The focus of this study was to collect, identify, and compare information related to two rural, northwestern mountain counties in North Carolina.

In this chapter, the participants and data gathering techniques are defined. The manner in which interviews were conducted and analyzed are also presented in this chapter.
Design of the Study

This study was designed as a qualitative study. Participant responses to interview questions and a demographic survey were used to gather data. These data provided a basis for comparison with previously gathered data from other researchers and the data gleaned from interviews.

Individual, semi-structured interviews were based on predetermined, open and closed-ended questions; allowances were made for an emerging design to facilitate the gathering of additional data important to the study. This homogenous sampling was inclusive to middle school teachers in northwest North Carolina.

In an effort to create a comprehensive study, the interviews were semi-structured in nature and were completed in the classrooms of the teachers who continue to teach in the middle school setting. Interviews with those who have left the middle school classroom took place in surroundings they chose as comfortable for themselves.

The Role of the Researcher

In this study, the first role of the researcher was that of a learner, both in analyzing the statistical data and during the interview process. Research indicates this role is preferable for putting participants at ease and gaining the greatest amount of information for a rich and full study (Bales, 2004). The interview process, in particular, allowed for full development with questions that came to the forefront from those initially prepared by the interviewer, thus creating a study with an emergent design. Patton (2002) defined an emergent design as “openness to adapting inquiry as understanding deepens and/or situations change; the researcher avoids
getting locked into rigid designs that eliminate responsiveness and pursues new paths of discovery as they emerge” (p. 40).

In this qualitative study, the participants had the opportunity to express their thoughts and feelings in a setting allowing for less structure and more than “yes” or “no” answers to be analyzed. The researcher continued the role of learner and pursuer of knowledge as interviews were conducted. Careful listening and encouragement for developing thoughts and ideas provided more in-depth detail about why teachers choose to remain in or leave the middle school teaching area.

The second role of the researcher was that of a disseminator of information following careful study of the results of the themes suggested by study participants.

Suggestions for further study are addressed in Chapter 5.

Trustworthiness of the Study

This research was carefully scrutinized to render it valid and trustworthy. To ensure early validity of the demographic surveys and interview questions, a pilot study was conducted with four middle school teachers (two female and two male) representing grades six, seven, and eight.

Interviews were transcribed verbatim from the audio tapes. The transcriptionist was certified through successful completion of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) training course. An auditor was identified to validate the study and was proficient in the techniques of qualitative research as demonstrated from his own research and subsequent dissertation process. The auditor was certified by the IRB. A peer reviewer with additional certifications and an advanced degree served as the peer debriefer.
Research Participants

Participants in this study were limited to middle school teachers in two rural school systems in North Carolina. They are currently employed as middle school teachers in grades six through eight, or they are former middle school teachers who have left the middle school environment.

The Public Schools of North Carolina 2000-2001 Annual Report entitled, “Staying the Course for Superior Schools,” defined the representative teacher as being “a 42-year-old white female” (p. 12). In the two counties this study focuses upon, the majority, 75%, of the educators surveyed were female. The mean number years of experience was approximately 17. Half of these educators had advanced degrees; nine were master’s level degrees and one is an educational specialist degree. None had earned doctoral degrees. All of these professionals were deemed “highly qualified” by No Child Left Behind standards in at least one academic area.

All participants completed a brief demographic survey along with the interview. Twenty individuals participated in the one-on-one, semi-structured interviews. Ten of those 20 are currently teaching in a middle school setting; 10 have chosen to leave. Gender, grade level, years of experience, and age were considered in providing balance for the interviews.

Copies of the demographic survey and interview questions can be found in Appendices A-C, respectively. The data from the survey and interviews provided additional information for job satisfaction among selected middle school teachers. It may also allow for comparison with other research relating to teacher job satisfaction.
as indicated by the Two-Factor Theory developed by Herzberg, Mausner, and Snyderman (1959).

Tape-recorded, individual interviews of a semi-structured nature provided in-depth information for the researcher. These data were analyzed and compared to job satisfaction factors and other previous studies. These interviews provided additional information related to job satisfaction and personal teacher characteristics.

Data Collection

A researcher prepared socio-demographic survey was completed by middle school teacher interviewees who volunteered and who were employed in the two northwestern North Carolina counties. All data remained anonymous and was self-administered by the participants. Interviews were semi-structured with interviewer-designed questions allowing for an emerging design. Data collected from those interviewed in the two counties were the focus of this study. Each volunteer from these school systems was a voluntary participant in the study and was asked to report information about his or her years of experience, age, gender, and subject(s) taught in addition to interview questions relating to their reasons for remaining in middle school classrooms or departing from that environment.

Volunteers for this study were obtained through letters of introduction and requests for participation after approval by the superintendents of schools for both counties and their individual school principals. Additional participants were needed beyond those who volunteered, and the technique of snowball-sampling (Patton, p. 194) was used to identify a larger number of interviewees.
Interviewees were assured of anonymity and confidentiality with reference to their responses, both written and oral. Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines were respected and strictly adhered to with regard to all participants.

*Data Analysis*

Participant responses were reviewed, coded, and categorized to establish themes. All analyses were peer reviewed and participant checked for validity. The qualitative responses from participants fostered an emergent research design and opened the door for possible areas of future research.

*Summary*

Chapter 3 provided the design for this qualitative study. It included the role of the researcher, trustworthiness of the study using the demographic instrument, and the interview questions. The research participants, (current and former teachers of two, rural, North Carolina school systems), interview questions, and survey employed in developing data as stated above were noted in this chapter. The collection of data and their analysis as it pertains to the two county school systems completed the chapter.
CHAPTER 4
DATA ANALYSIS

The winter months in northwest North Carolina often mean cold temperatures, bitter winds that seem capable of cutting a human in two, and occasional beautiful days and nights with softly falling snow. Only the harshness of the cold winds was present each time I made my way across that imaginary line to enter County A and interview practicing middle school teachers. Turning left off the main highway; I caught sight of a mountainside dotted with Frasier Fir trees. Making another left turn on a climbing, narrow, and curving asphalt road, I drove the distance of a football field until I found myself facing a middle school. Exiting my four-wheel drive vehicle and bracing myself against the cold and wind on several sunny afternoons, I walked the short distance from the parking lot of this middle school to the entrance with tape recorder and notebook in hand. Arriving inside the building on each occasion, I could hear the soft hum of activity from the two hallways joining the reception and media center areas. Students, parents, and staff members greeted one another as they passed through the area. Waiting at the reception desk for a visitor’s pass, I heard the voices of adults in the adjoining offices. Whether it was a teacher, staff member, or the principal, I was greeted at each visit with a smile and either cheerfully escorted or encouraged to move through the building on my own. Built into the hillside of a remote northwestern North Carolina town, this middle school has three levels with each level opening to the outside. Sixth grade students are located on the entry-level floor in their teams; seventh grade students and their teachers occupy the lowest floor along with band, chorus, art, and other exploratory or elective classes. The top floor
contains the eighth grade teams. Their floor has a central gathering area with adjoining classrooms and connects to the sun-lit multi-windowed hallway leading to the cafeteria. Each floor had displays of student work, the most memorable of which were in the red bricked, blue-carpeted, eighth grade commons area.

In County B, schools housing middle school teachers and students are either K-8 or PreK-8 schools with students and teachers for grades 6-8 in these mountain community schools located in separate hallways within the building. Two are located in small towns within the county; all others are located in rural areas requiring as much as 45 minutes driving time between the furthermost schools. Several of the building exteriors reflect the rock building style of the Works Progress Administration years.

In order to arrive at one of the rural schools, I drove through a pristine countryside of tawny-brown winter pastures with Black Angus cattle and various breeds and colors of horses. Squatters in these pastures were wild turkeys with tail feathers in full formation. In those misty morning moments, a doe leading her two fawns to a new grazing area crossed from one side of the road to the other with tails bobbing as they bounded up the side of the hill. A new housing development appeared to the right across the river just before approaching a historic 1883 store building, its outer siding an indication of the settling of the building over the years and an old gas company sign hanging at the front. It was already thriving with customers seeking the rare and famous five-cent cup of coffee and picking up mail at the old post office within.
A short distance along that road brought the school into focus. The original portion of the building indicated its vintage with its granite gray rock façade; the newer portions of the building were easily identified from their red brick exterior. The principal, wearing black earmuffs and black gloves, also wore his fluorescent orange and yellow mesh safety vest over his black winter coat directing a steady stream of traffic, assisting families, faculty, and staff members with access to the parking lot as other parents sought to deliver their children to the front entrance of the building.

To reach County B’s high school to interview former middle school teachers, my drive took me to a setting located near the center of the main town in the county. To access the school, I drove along a local four-lane road with businesses along each side in the middle of the afternoon. The traffic light at which I needed to turn right already had cars and yellow school buses lined up to exit the entrance road to the school. When my turn came to make the right turn and travel up the steep slope of the short, winding road, I located a parking lot to the right and chose the first available space. Students were exiting the building, most strolling slowly toward their cars while talking and laughing on cell phones and seemingly oblivious to a stranger in their surroundings. Walking toward the front entrance, another parking lot was to my left. Located along its perimeter were four gray and white modular units indicating the growth of the school and need for additional classroom space. Entering the lobby and office area, I waited for office staff to solve needs of three students and then enquired for the room number I needed. This first interview, as I learned, would be in one of the modular units. Returning to the outside, I quickly walked the short distance from the main building and was glad to find the door unlocked and a warm room full
of American History textbooks, posters, and related assignments lining the shelves and wall space. Moments later the teacher arrived and willingly shared her time and thoughts from the years she taught in middle school and what prompted her to make the change to a different setting.

Twenty educators shared their thoughts and feelings with me to assist in seeking the answers to my questions. Some of their responses, I had anticipated; I was unprepared for some. Several interviews left me feeling that I was a part of the greatest group of educators possible. Other interviews were emotionally draining and I left those knowing there was a teacher in that building who would most likely leave the profession or find another place to teach at the end of the school year. The commonalities and differences among these professionals, however, create points for consideration by anyone involved with training and developing those who teach in a middle school environment.

Selection of Participants

Participants for this study became available after receiving permission from the superintendents of the two school systems to approach the principals of each school for their consent to conduct research in their schools and with their personnel. Most principals provided lists of teachers who were willing to participate, and two principals provided blanket invitations to approach any of their teachers. Only one principal, after surveying her faculty, requested by e-mail that I not approach any of her teachers because their consensus was that each of them was overloaded with extra duties at that time.
Using the lists provided, I made contacts through phone calls and e-mail. The response from current middle school teachers created a random, but balanced, group of 10 participants teaching sixth through eighth grade who had various years of experience in the two counties. Females outnumbered males as anticipated by a ratio of 9:1. Discovering former middle school teachers from County B occurred much more quickly than in County A. The snowballing method was used to locate and secure the 10 former middle school teachers. The ratio of gender was much closer for this set of 10 participants: 6:4.

Years of experience for the 20 participants ranged from less than 6 months to 35 years. The mean number of years of experience for the two groups was 16.9. Separating the groups into current and former middle school teachers, those teaching in middle school have less than 6 months to 35 years of experience, and former middle school teachers have 2 to 20 years of experience. Three current teachers of middle school students fall into the category of new teachers with three or fewer years of experience. Seven of the current middle school teachers meet the criteria for experienced teachers.

The greatest number of teachers in one age group was six in the 46-50 age category. One teacher was in the 26-30 age range, and three teachers fell into the 31-35 age group.

The full group response for the number of years employed as a middle school teacher was a range of less than 6 months to 35 years with a mean of 9.4 years. Those currently teaching in middle school responded that they have taught in their current middle school from less than 6 months to 26 years with a mean of 8.48 years.
Of the 20 participants, 10 teachers reported their highest degree to be a BS or BA in education. Nine hold MS/MA degrees, and one teacher has the advanced degree of Educational Specialist in Curriculum and Instruction. Two of the 20 teachers interviewed were Nationally Board Certified, and all are considered “highly qualified” under No Child Left Behind guidelines.

According to data from County A, their middle school teachers have homeroom Advisor/Advisee memberships of approximately 14 with a mean of 23 students in academic classes (J. Moore, personal communication, June 5, 2006). Data from County B indicated similar numbers of students. Advisor/Advisee groups contained 12-15 students, and academic class sizes averaged 24 students with a maximum of 29 in some classes (C. Parker, personal communication, June 5, 2006).

Prior to conducting interviews, the necessary approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) was obtained. Both the researcher and the transcriptionist completed the appropriate training as a part of obtaining IRB approval. Required forms for approval were submitted and refined as requested by the IRB.

Interviews of both current and former middle school teachers provided sufficient data collection to reach a point of redundancy. All participants understood both their identity and confidentiality were protected with a number. Participants agreed to the use of their statements as a part of the body of research. Interviews took place at times and places convenient to the participants. Fifteen of the face-to-face interviews were conducted at school sites; two one-on-one interviews took place at a site away from school but yet convenient to the interviewees’ schedules and daily routes. Due to participants’ time constraints, requests, and adverse weather, three
interviews were conducted using a speakerphone in order to accurately record responses. All interviews were one-to-one with the exception of an interview in which two middle school teachers in County A were available during a shared planning time.

Before the beginning of each interview, participants received the informed consent form along with an explanation of its purpose. They were also briefed on the purpose of the study. After signing the informed consent form, interviewees responded to the brief, demographic survey. Just prior to beginning the interview, the tape recorder was introduced into the setting and participants were reassured of the confidentiality of their responses. In addition, each participant was guaranteed a copy of the transcript, the IRB informed consent form, and the opportunity to respond to the transcription of his or her interview in order to assure the validity of the transcript. Interviewees were asked to respond as fully as possible to the questions. During the interviews, the researcher wrote down information about participants’ nonverbal behaviors that could not be noted on the recording. The 20 interviews, ranging between 45 and 60 minutes each, ended with an opportunity for participants to add information, ask questions, or indicate any concerns. Participants, as at the beginning of the interview, were thanked for their time and participation in the study. Notes of appreciation, along with the copies pertaining to the participant, were forwarded once the transcripts were completed.

Taped interviews were heard prior to transcription, and each interview was transcribed verbatim. In only a few instances, background noise or the sudden lowering of the participant’s voice required the repeated playing of small portions of
an interview. The technique of member checking was implemented to assure the accuracy of the transcribed data.

Upon completion, the transcribed interviews were read and annotations made in the margins and within the text to assist in revealing common themes. Interview questions were referred to during each reading in order to extract the relevant data or to eliminate extraneous information. This repetitive process narrowed the focus of the study and provided sufficient data for a full analysis of the study. Coding and categories were identified allowing themes to develop from the data. These themes contributed fully descriptive information for application to the primary purpose of the study: comparing the job satisfaction of middle school teachers within the two identified counties to the Two-Factor Motivation Theory. The following research questions were the basis for the inferential information of the study:

1. What factors seem to lead to a climate of job satisfaction for middle school teachers?
2. How do middle school teachers who experience satisfaction report that they maintain that satisfaction?
3. What avenues are or should be available to improve and support those middle school teachers who are dissatisfied so that they will remain in the profession?
4. What personal dispositions seem to be important for teachers to remain in a middle school setting?
Research Question #1: What factors seem to lead to a climate of job satisfaction for middle school teachers?

Both current and former middle school teachers ranked the motivators of Herzberg’s theory - responsibility, recognition, promotion, achievement, the work itself, and professional/personal growth. Table 1 on the following page indicates the responses of new (N) and experienced (E) middle school teachers as well as the responses of former (F) middle school teachers. The ranking of “1” indicates the motivator is the most important job satisfaction factor for the participant. The ranking of “6” indicates the motivator to be the least important for the participant. In two instances, respondents grouped three motivators together stating that, in their opinion, the motivators of recognition, promotion, and achievement represented the same level of job satisfaction for them.
Table 1

*Analysis of Motivators for New, Experienced, and Former Middle School Teachers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
<th>Recognition</th>
<th>Promotion</th>
<th>Achievement</th>
<th>The Work Itself</th>
<th>Professional or Personal Growth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>5</td>
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Table 2, found on page 69, reveals that the work itself brought the greatest amount of job satisfaction for all of the participants. A majority of respondents indicated it to be the greatest motivator for them. Professional and personal growth were acknowledged by two teachers as their number one choice; responsibility and recognition each had one teacher who felt those motivators provided the greatest degree of satisfaction. The lowest ranked motivator of job satisfaction was promotion. Four teachers ranked another factor – recognition - as unimportant to them. The five factors of responsibility, recognition, promotion, achievement, and professional/personal growth had notable rankings in the middle for their importance to job satisfaction. In two instances, respondents grouped two or three motivators together which accounts for a number greater than 20 for some motivators.
Table 2

Summary of New, Experienced, and Former Middle School Teacher Motivation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Motivator</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
<th>Recognition</th>
<th>Promotion</th>
<th>Achievement</th>
<th>The Work Itself</th>
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</table>

Hygiene

The hygiene factors measured during the interviews were supervision, salary, work environment, district/individual school policies, and relationships with co-workers. The same key applies in Table 3 on the following page as in Tables 1 and 2: N represents new teachers, E is for experienced teachers, and F signifies former teachers. One experienced teacher chose not to address supervision and district/school policies. Rankings were measured in importance from 1 to 5 with 1 being the most satisfied and 5 the least satisfied in regard to the teacher’s job satisfaction. Current teachers measured their levels of satisfaction; former teachers measured their levels of job satisfaction based on their feelings and memories of the time they taught in middle grades.
Table 3

*Ranking of Hygiene Factors by New, Experiences, and Former Middle School Teachers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Supervision</th>
<th>Salary</th>
<th>Work Environment</th>
<th>District/School Policies</th>
<th>Relationships with Co-workers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N-1</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>N-2</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>E-7</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>F-10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sixteen of the 20 current and former middle school teachers rated relationships with co-workers to be the first or second most important hygiene factor in their job satisfaction. A close second in ranking was the work environment with 15 of the teachers choosing it as their most important or second most important hygiene factor related to job satisfaction. A ranking of 1 indicates teachers established the factor as most important; a ranking of 5 denotes the factor to be least important in their rankings of job satisfaction. Over half (60%) indicated supervision was important with 12 of the 20 teachers indicating it was first, second, or third in importance to them. Qualifying the ranking of supervision was the need for support in a number of areas: curriculum, mentoring, an administrator’s presence on the hall, and student discipline. Salary was ranked by 55% as the lowest of importance for the hygiene factors. Both current and former middle school teachers observed they were aware of salary restrictions when deciding to teach but chose to involve themselves in the profession regardless of salary concerns. One teacher pointed out that salary is an important factor because it is a reliable income with job security. A former middle school teacher needed to look at the factors in terms of how dissatisfied they made her feel. She labeled four hygienes - supervision, work environment, relationships with co-workers, and policies – as most important to her because she said they represented the complete work environment. Table 4 on the following page provides the data for the analysis of hygienes.
Table 4

*Hygiene Factors as Ranked by Order of Importance in Job Satisfaction by New, Current, and Former Middle School Teachers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ranking</th>
<th>Supervision</th>
<th>Salary</th>
<th>Work Environment</th>
<th>District/School Policies</th>
<th>Relationships with Co-workers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Comparison to the Two-Factor Theory*

Herzberg, Mausner, and Snyderman’s (1959) study of 200 engineers found the most important motivation factor to be that of achievement and was related to the “successful completion of a job” (p. 59).

In this study, the work itself provided the greatest amount of job satisfaction for teachers. Student achievement, rather than personal achievement, is at the core of the teacher’s role perhaps making the tasks of developing adolescents into an ongoing job that is not seen as complete until students graduate.

Recognition from “supervisors, peers, customers, or subordinates” (p. 60) was the second most important factor for one-third of the engineers.

These aspects were related to the nature of their work and were rewarding in themselves with or without specific achievement or recognition. Frequently cited desiderata were creative or challenging work, varied work, and an opportunity to do a job completely from beginning to end (p. 61).

For this study, one new teacher stated recognition to be the most important motivator. An experienced teacher said recognition to be second most in importance.
The majority of the participants, however, ranked recognition low in importance with the majority, 18 of 24 rankings, indicating recognition as a 5 or 6.

In Herzberg, Mausner, and Snyderman’s (1959) study, the work itself, along with responsibility and advancement were close in importance. The engineers in this study defined responsibility as “being allowed to work without supervision, being responsible for one’s own efforts, begin given responsibility for work of others, and being given a new kind of job, with new responsibilities but with no formal advancement” (p. 61). Teachers in this study valued the work itself as their most important motivator, and 15 teachers ranked responsibility as their second and third most important motivators important as a motivator of job satisfaction.

Advancement, or promotion, for the engineers was the fifth important motivator. Promotion was notably of the least importance as a motivator for teacher with 14 of the 20 (70%) ranking it as least important.

Professional and personal growth were the least important of the motivators for the engineers (p. 60). Teacher responses to professional and personal growth as a motivator had mixed responses. Three teachers each ranked the motivator of growth as first and third in importance. Six teachers each ranked it as second or fourth in importance. Two teachers ranked growth as fifth in motivation, and no one indicated growth to be the least of importance.

In the Herzberg et al. (1959) study, the hygiene factor of “company policy and administration is the single most important factor determining bad feelings about a job” (p. 71). These “revolved around company ineffectiveness, produced by inefficiency, waste, duplication of effort, or a struggle for power” (p. 71). The factor was further defined “as the deleterious effects of its policies. These include personnel and other policies that are viewed as unfair or that in some way have detrimental
effects on the respondent or his co-workers” (p. 71). Teachers in this study viewed policies in a somewhat different light. They related them primarily to the policies established by their local Boards of Education and indicated that while these were important, the policies were not a large part of their job satisfaction. Administration was equated with supervision of the principal of the school. Nine teachers, a majority in this case, indicated their level of satisfaction to be a 3, with four teachers ranking supervision as first and second in importance and five teachers ranking supervision as fourth and fifth in relationship to their level of job satisfaction.

Maintaining Job Satisfaction

Research Question #2: How do middle school teachers who experience satisfaction report that they maintain that satisfaction?

Inquiring how teachers seek greater job satisfaction resulted in a variety of strategies. The work environment is the major factor in job satisfaction for these teachers, and the strategies they choose involve their passion for the work, the drive to gain additional knowledge and expertise, a need for recognition, and ways in which they relieve the stress of the work environment.

Experienced Teacher 4 (E-4), face alight with enthusiasm, shared,

I try to know my students. I try to know as much as I can about my disciplines, particularly in science, is changing all the time. So I try to stay up with that, but it’s not hard, because I have a genuine interest there and I have a genuine interest in language, too, so it’s not hard.

This same teacher of early adolescents writes for personal satisfaction and shares that passion while instructing students in the art of writing. This teacher talked about a passion for the learning process, “Then also, just learning itself. I’m fascinated by the brain.”

Another experienced teacher (E-3) thrives in the learning environment. This science teacher glowed with excitement describing the love felt for the work itself:
I really like the fact that I try to do a lot of experiments in science. I want the children to be outside experimenting, in their environment, testing their environment in some way. . . .I enjoy seeing kids learning. I enjoy seeing kids happy learning, if that makes sense. It’s about the children. I enjoy learning.

Former middle school teacher F-5 loved the work as well, “It would be on the job – the work itself. I made sure I was there early every day and stayed late every night. I gave 100% to everything I had all day.”

F-8 and N-2 thrived on going beyond the standard curriculum content to increase their levels of job satisfaction within the work environment. Teacher F-8:

Things that I did that I chose to do…I worked with yearbook for three or four different years and that was something that I felt like was a building stone with small groups….I got excited about field trip activities…Anything I could do to try to widen their horizon was what I seek to be more driven for.

New teacher N-2 added, “I took a club, and I started the middle school hackey sack club…I noticed a lot of the kids at school in the first month were playing it.”

Earning additional degrees or certifications was another strategy teachers used to increase both their job and personal satisfaction. Two teachers have received additional master’s and educational specialist degrees. Two teachers have sought and successfully achieved National Board Certification. One teacher, N-1, plans to pursue National Boards during 2006-2007 school year. This teacher expressed her reason by saying, “I am pursuing National Boards Certification to increase my level of knowledge and my efficiency and productivity as an educator.” As teacher F-10 conveyed, “I sought National Board Certification while I was in the middle school and that helped a lot in terms of reaching a level of personal satisfaction.”

One former middle school teacher, F-5, now a high school English teacher, spoke seriously about choices for achieving greater job satisfaction within the work environment, “I got extra degrees. I worked closely with the community. I made sure that I had a personal relationship with every student. I still do that with 140.”
In line with additional degrees and National Board Certification, teachers expressed the importance of professional development as a method of creating greater job satisfaction. Teacher E-1 explained, “I enjoy the personal growth from that professional development. I enjoy the time with other people. That way you can communicate and talk about the new stuff that you pick up.” Former middle school teacher F-1 articulated it this way,

I try to get as much staff development as I can, because I think that’s one area you can go and see lots of different changes. I do a lot of staff development which helps me feel more responsible in my job environment. I look at activities that give me interaction with the students, activities which probably give me interaction with my co-workers, the people I work with, whether that’s staff development or other activities.

Teacher E-7, almost bouncing with excitement, shared, “I’m going to the middle school conference; several of us from our team are going. And to go to any sort of conference or workshop where you get to talk with adults [sic].”

Two teachers, one new and one experienced, stated that while recognition wasn’t one of the major needs of educators for job satisfaction, it was important enough to discuss. N-3, a math and science teacher, reviewed concerns about the lack of others knowing what happens within the classroom,

Well, I guess to get recognized in the classroom, you would have to do work with your fellow teachers whether it’s team teaching or co-teaching and so forth. So I think that as an activity, probably a lot of us do anyway, but that’s a way to get recognized.

Teacher E-2, who teaches language arts and social studies on a rotating basis, acknowledged that recognition is important:

Probably, number one with me is that I seek out the approval of the people that I work with…the affirmation that, ‘yes, I see what you’re doing. I see the repercussions of what’s happening as a positive manner.’ That’s very important. I love to see my kids come back and say, “thanks.” That is an incredible motivational factor for me. . . it’s probably the only thing that keeps me in the classroom. That’s probably a big one.
A former middle school teacher (F-1) who moved to third grade within the same K-8 school deliberately works to make the job environment a positive one:

For the work environment, I try to make it a positive atmosphere, to also be flexible, because I think that is a big part of the work environment, because if you’re not willing to make changes or be flexible in what’s going on whether it be your curriculum or what somebody else is doing, I think that helps make the work environment much more satisfactory if you’re flexible with everything that’s going on.

A math teacher (E-1) who has been a middle school team leader for a number of years chose to exit that role in order to make the work environment a better one. Sighing wearily, E-1 shared,

I think stepping out of the picture this year was hard for me, but I had to do it, and I can see things now going back to where we’re all saying we need to sit and work together. . . everybody kind of being the same, on the same page.

Teacher F-10, now an enthusiastic teacher of English in a high school, commented on how greater job satisfaction could have been sought as a middle school teacher:

I don’t see that there was much room to change things. . . I guess what I would do with that, thinking back on the work environment, to make it more satisfying, was plan different things with my students that were really satisfying. But see, that really doesn’t take care of the issue.

Teachers also look beyond their classrooms and total work environment to find ways of increasing their satisfaction during their time on the job. Exercise and personal tasks found favor with two teachers. Former middle school language arts teacher, F-7, looks forward to favorite activities after school hours, “The gym and probably being able to get out on the motorcycle and clear my head . . . I think gym time, maintaining my diet – the discipline there helps with discipline elsewhere.”

Teacher E-1, whose family has a small farm in one of the mountain valleys, has a great appreciation for the afternoon activities of feeding and caring for the animals: “I play; I go home and play.”
Relationships with co-workers is a vital factor in middle school teacher job satisfaction. Maintaining those relationships continues to be important for former middle school teachers as well as current teachers of early adolescents.

Former teachers value their co-workers from their years in middle school. The following comments provide a close-up view of those relationships. Teacher F-10 shared, “I maintained a really close relationship with one colleague there that I’m still in touch with even though I’ve been away from there for three years. That contributed to job satisfaction.” Teacher F-9, now a fourth grade teacher, enjoyed the middle school team during the two years they worked together.

We did things outside of school. We had conversations before and after school. We spent a lot of time on breaks in each other’s rooms. We ate lunch together. We just became friends first. We developed the friendship first and then we talked more about the working things . . .

Teacher E-5, part of a five-member team, depends on co-workers.

I definitely try to be personal with them [co-workers]. See how they’re doing. If they’re sick one day or whatever, and they do that with me, too. We take care of each other down here. And we do get in our own little classroom and everything, but we always have team meeting and the second encore, which is where we all come together.

Another teacher, F-6, was part of a five member 7/8 team. Voice dropping in volume and sentimentality of thoughts were apparent in this statement:

We met. We did things. I became very close with T and W. We’d walk in the summer. We’d go out for coffee. Whatever – those kinds of things. I had others at my house. We certainly met once a week – the middle school team all met once a week to kind of stay in touch. That was certainly something to lean on.

“My relationship with co-workers and the children is definitely the most important then and the reason why I’m here,” was E-6’s comment regarding the importance of co-workers.

Former middle school teacher F-7, related “I do try and go out with co-workers when we can, but the time being as it is, is kind of a fleeting thing.” F-7 now
has the responsibility of leading a team of third through fifth grade teachers and continues to understand the need for good relationships with co-workers.

I try to help out when I can. Even the little things: “Would you mind putting up this box of books?” The little things to let them know you’re thinking about them. …I want to be helpful. . . . I am also the principal designee for [Mr. S] so they all know if something pops up they can come and talk to me about it.

Now a high school math teacher, F-8, recalled the relationships with teachers from various middle schools. “I did try to build relationships outside of class and outside of the building to some degree.”

Responsibility is a part of job satisfaction for some teachers. Two teachers, one new and one experienced, discussed its importance to them.

Teacher N-1 commented, “In my experience, everything can be handled one-on-one with co-workers rather than having to depend on administrators or other staff members to solve issues that develop.” The same teacher added,

I’m also looking for ways to support the middle school team and the school environment as a whole by contributing to administrative tasks and discipline areas as well as in cooperation as we design a middle school plan and schedule.

Experienced teacher, E-2, one of the three senior members of the school’s entire K-8 staff, likes the responsibility inherent in her role at the school and passionately shared her thoughts.

I am probably – I’m the one person that’s been around for so long at that position that I know that things wouldn’t fall apart if I left, but having somebody say, “T’s there…she’ll fix it.” That’s nice and I like that. I also have this dream and goal of making it the best and most awesome middle school possible. We have a long way to go. We have a lot of problems but someone has to stay there and tackle then. This is also my county. I am vested. I am vested in that job and even though there are lots of things I could complain about, there are lots of things I can brag about the job. I just feel like people have to be vested and they have to take a personal interest in making things succeed. They can’t wait ‘til somebody else does it. You know? You do it. Try and change things that don’t work. Keep a log, if that’s what it takes. Keep a log of “tried this,” “done that,” “let’s do it again!”
Achievement was critical to one teacher. A former middle school language arts and social studies teacher and now a fifth grade teacher, F-6 laughingly recalled the need to have the best writing scores in the county, “I’m so competitive that I drove myself insane trying to raise test score both in writing and in reading…I wrote songs, did dances, dyed my hair blue.”

Almost all participants laughed when salary was discussed. Many, knowing the limitations of salary, shared these comments:

I decided a long time ago that I wasn’t in it for the money, so, you know, I’m just grateful when there’s a salary increase, and grateful that I now get longevity, and things like that. You know, I don’t get out and actively try to get a salary increase or anything; I just figure when it comes, it comes. I’m not in it for that; if I was, I wouldn’t be here” (Teacher F-1).

“Well, I take no steps, I guess, to increase my salary because I think of it as very much a public service that we provide” (Teacher E-2)

“I didn’t go to workshops unless it paid money… I got extra degrees. . . I’ve always worked a second job and taught summer school” (Teacher F-5).

“I make money on the side” (Teacher E-4, also an NBCT).

“I went and got a master’s degree so my salary would be better” (E-7).

Supervision was not a critical component for job satisfaction of these middle school teachers, but three teachers did share feelings about how supervision influences their work. Teacher N-1, a language arts teacher stated, “I think that if you’re a successful teacher, your supervisors become part of your repertoire for assisting students rather than something that works against you.”

Teacher E-3, whose school is undergoing stress and mediation with its supervisor shared,

With supervision, anything I say right now is going to be negative, is going to be bitter because I am really struggling with the supervision right now. . . Then a few weeks ago, realized that not only I, but several other people in this
building were feeling the very same way. We have taken measures with key people to rectify the situation.

New math teacher, N-2, who chose to enter teaching after managing a successful business and raising a family said,

I go to her [the principal] and I had to being, again, my age and live a rather autonomous existence, it is my first experience with having a supervisor. There are a lot of times when I was pretty sure I could figure a way out or what would be the best way and yet I would still go to her because I wanted her input.

Teacher F-8 found the district and/or school policies to be an issue related to the level of job satisfaction.

I spent a lot of time talking with administrators and trying to work with their policies and try to get their policies to be as effective as possible. . . that’s one of the reasons I moved to the high school is because I felt like I was in agreement and they were in agreement with me of what we wanted to accomplish in the classroom.

Needed Improvements and Support

Research Question #3: What avenues are or should be available to improve and support those middle school teachers who are dissatisfied so that they will remain in the profession?

Teacher E-2, laughingly addressed needed improvements and support for middle school teachers with this comment:

What needs to be in place to improve my personal job satisfaction is ending my job at school. And saying to yourself that it’s okay to end your job at school. If you didn’t get those papers graded, they’ll be there tomorrow and the world won’t come to a close.

Expressions and tone of voice becoming serious, this experienced, dedicated, and very passionate teacher added,

I think that that’s the one thing that I need. I think it would help my job satisfaction because I get burned out, too. And I put that pressure on myself; I know that but I think that’s also, and certainly not to be braggadocios in any way, I also think that’s a sign of a good teacher. I need to stop the job when I need to stop the job.
Professionally, I think that we have missed caring about whether teachers are satisfied in their job. I think it’s more lip-service because the percent of people leaving the classroom is so high. But what’s really been done to change what’s happening in the classroom? We’ve seen things from the State Department. We’re concerned about the number of retirees that are going to come to [County B], because our teacher population is at that retirement age or at least a high percentage of them are. What have we done to encourage people to stay? Have we lessened their hours? Have we lessened their workload? Have we decreased the amount of testing pressures? Have we really looked at, what in the classroom, is causing the most personal stress for that teacher and how we can address that?

Therefore, I think the system, and I can only speak to our system, but their system doesn’t put that as a high priority. I really do think it’s lip-service.

Teacher F-8, now a high school math teacher, needed the support and backing of administrators and authority figures.

Yeah, I think there could have been things that could have been different. But I don’t know how much of it is the nature of the beast and how much of it was my fit with middle school versus what could’ve been improved on. I needed a strong administrative leader that reinforced policies that we were all in agreement of. I don’t think we agreed on the policies to start with and then I didn’t feel like they backed me. I felt like I was kind of left hanging there trying to make it work by myself which is really hard. For me, it was too hard to do. The other teachers were able to do that and are able to command their own authority. Whereas, I needed the backup of an authority figure.

A long-time professional, teacher E-4, stated teachers’ voices must be heard, and their knowledge and expertise respected.

Well, this changes over time, but the main thing that’s important, I think is that teachers feel like they’re heard at the administrative levels in school, district, and beyond. Teachers, I think, feel empowered with their sphere, the small sphere in which they’re working, but I think a lot of teachers have a lot of great ideas about how the system can be improved and things that we’re doing system-wide which are counter-productive as much as anything else. To feel genuinely heard and respected in those areas really improves job satisfaction.

E-4’s comments are echoed by a colleague, teacher E-7.

I think that we operate under an assumption that we get to make decisions about curriculum and decisions about policies and decisions about the way things are run on a school-based level, but in reality, we have just more and more top-down management. . . They pretend to ask our opinions, but it still goes the way they want.
Indications of appreciation and acknowledgement of time and effort are needed according to teacher F-5.

Well, Mr. M was the principal at that time and, used to, at least once or twice a month, there was a note on your desk that he had come to your room (you had to leave your plans in there; he didn’t demand that, but he liked it)…there would be a note on my desk that he appreciated what I had done; he liked the way my room looked and he liked the way I interacted with everybody. He did that at least one a month. I still have the notes.

Another teacher expressed thoughts about time. Teacher N-1 considers it as an important element to address.

I think at this point, time is a major concern for everyone involved in the middle school. There are a lot of expectations placed upon you by the state, the local administration, by your school as a whole, particularly in a school this size where the tasks have to be divided among a small group of people. I think that all teachers at this school level face time stresses. We also teach a large number of students. We have a large number of parents who are involved and at this level, the content is becoming increasingly more difficult, so when you have a concern or an issue it takes more time typically to resolve that problem than it might have at the elementary school level.

Now a fourth grade teacher, F-9 had a unique position when first hired as one-half middle school and one half fifth grade. That situation, F-9 stated, could have been improved.

. . . I could have had some planning time. There were days that I had 20 minutes a day. There wasn’t a lot of planning time, so that could have changed. And then there was no one else in my same position that I had even known that had done that and just having somebody that was in my same situation; it was difficult being like the only one.

Having found more planning time in the high school setting, teacher F-10 suggested,

Well, I think middle school teachers should get 30 minutes for lunch every day. And that would increase positive relationship with co-workers. That would make teachers feel more like professionals. Administratively, that might seem like a small thing, but I think it’s a huge thing.

Time and excellence are notable concerns for former middle school teacher, F-2.

I was very frustrated also by some of the things, in my opinion, were really ridiculous waste of time amounted to babysitting. One of those things that frustrated me was (I don’t know what you call it at [interviewer’s school]) we
called mini-courses. . . What a stupid idea! They were truly, truly a waste of time; a waste of my time, a waste of the children’s time. They were supervisory nightmares depending on who you had in them. They were babysitting. They were just taking all the kids who didn’t have band, chorus, or art and putting them somewhere. I hated those things! . . . They are a fairly substantial part of the day – you know, they’re a couple of hours. That just irritated the dickens out of me which is another thing you don’t do in the high school setting. There’s nothing worse than wasting your time – kids or you. Kids don’t deserve to have their time wasted either. That was a huge thing, so you can mark that down!

In conjunction with the aspect of time, teacher E-5 noted that some of the workload was reduced through the addition of a teacher assistant for her team.

Now, she does a lot of different things. She has a period during the day that she’ll tutor a couple of kids and be all by herself with those kids. They’ve just done her schedule differently, but fifth period, which is my toughest period, she’s with me. Mainly because I have a couple of students in there who didn’t do as well, didn’t pass the EOG (End-of-Grade) last year. But anyways, I love the fact that she’s there, because she can help a lot. Another adult, whether it’s a teacher assistant, a volunteer, whoever, any adults that are there to help with those kids, and we’ve got some tutoring from different people, that’s what I think is going to really help. Because not only for relief for my stress but for the kids and to help the kids.

Former middle school teacher, F-7, discusses the amount of testing responsibility teachers carry as a concern for improvement.

I think one thing that would have been a little more helpful would have been to spread the testing responsibilities around a little bit more. I mean to carry all the seventh grade Language Arts is a lot because you’re looking at two-thirds of the writing or two-thirds of the total thing in seventh grade is the writing and reading responsibilities. That just added to the stress more than anything. I took home papers and graded papers until 10:00 because you’ve got all the seventh grade writing and then having to do the reading on top of that. I think being able to split that a little bit more effectively would have been helpful.

Several teachers discussed the importance of middle school teams especially in relationship to the work environment and their relationships with co-workers.

Teacher F-1, now a third grade teacher, commented that middle school teams are a vital component and should continue to be in place. Eyes twinkling and laughter bubbling, this teacher recalled the team and its influence.
I think for the work environment in the middle school I was in, we had teams, and I think that’s when you get into the team environment and you build that team and you work with your co-workers and we tried to adapt a team that we felt good about, that we felt good about coming in to work, and again, the salary, I just accepted what it was!

Older in years, but new to teaching, teacher N-2 stated that the middle school team was an important factor.

I think team meetings are one of the most effective ways for us to work on our individual differences. We have so much going on that it has been a while since we have had one. And it’s easy to get into your little space and feel like you don’t have to ‘well, if I don’t talk to them about what they’re doing this week, it’s okay. We’ll do it next week.’ And one of the teachers came to me and she said, ‘We have to meet. We’re not in touch and we need to know what each other’s doing.’

Noting that students have various levels of ability, teacher F-2 expressed her frustrations regarding heterogeneous groupings.

Another thing that did frustrate me and is different at the high school level is leveling. I know there’s a lot of controversy about that and we could argue all day about that but one of the things I felt I never really did on any given day in the middle school is meet the needs of all the children sitting in front of me because there’s one of me and there were twenty-some-odd of them and they were unleveled to take their academic courses. I had kids, who, you know this, were of all ability levels. It’s just almost impossible for one person to really effectively meet the needs of all of those different children and their ability levels all at the same time. I’m good but I’m not that good. When I came here, right now, I’ve got for example, three classes of advanced placement and three classes of standard level which are your two extremes. I cannot even fathom putting six groups together randomly and teaching them. It’s the same subject. It’s US History. I am presenting it on such a dramatically different level, the AP, if you’re familiar with it, you’re probably familiar with it, right? It’s a college credit and I really approach it like a college-level course. I have an online schedule. A lot of the work I just post on-line and they get it. The young man who just came in, he could have gone home and gotten it on-line. I think he forgot. But, I don’t hand out everything. They have a college text that is widely used across the country. *Woo* – flip the page. My standard level kids, who I love, I have a good time with them but, oh my gosh, there’s no way that I could teach them the way I teach the AP’s. Sometimes, in order to meet the needs of all of our children, we have to alter our instruction. Our instructional delivery needs to be different. The expectations need to be different. The work needs to be different. The interaction needs to be different. Everything needs to be different. You need to tailor it and you can’t do that if they’re all sitting in front of you in the same 45-minute time period. The words that come out of your mouth are out of your mouth one time. It’s ridiculous to assume. And that was another really big frustration I had with middle school. I tried to do
the best that I could to create alternative types of assignments for some of the kids, to produce tiered instruction and I actually did a lot of work preparing materials that covered the same objectives in different ways. But golly, I need a life. I can only do just so much and supervising all those different activities, it drove me crazy and I didn’t feel like that was the best way to do it. I’m sorry about all that self-esteem, blah, blah, blah. I think kids earn self-esteem by doing well. They do well when the instruction suits their level. That’s my take on that. That was another really big source of job frustration that I had: mini-courses and the unleveled classes, and the lack of accountability, and the children knew it. (Laughter) Because they’re old enough and smart enough to know it. I think probably if we don’t want to be here all day long, those are probably three things that are not present at the high school level that are present in the middle school level that aggravated me.

New teachers indicated greater concern for salary than more experienced teachers. New teacher, N-3, when asked what was already in place or should be addressed to improve the level of job satisfaction said, “I would say probably, not this as number one, but salary should be addressed.

Relating a particularly difficult year with an administrator, teacher F-6 would have liked to had better communication. Teacher E-3, too, shared the need for change in her school.

Supervision, administration…something needs to be done. There is a problem in this building. I think that several people have acknowledged that it is a sick building and right now, we need, I can speak for the middle school, we need teambuilding to a certain degree and we need to know that there is no division between the four of the middle school team. There has been division, and it is coming from the supervisor.

For both a new and former middle school teacher, the need for better discipline was expressed. Teacher F-7 said,

Then I think secondary to that [testing responsibilities] would have been just a - and I think part is this is because we had so many principals in and out – we didn’t necessarily have an effective disciplinary policy. T. has hers and that works, but it didn’t necessarily work for everybody. Our kids are fairly sure of themselves at [name of school].

Teacher N-3 stated, too, that discipline is an area to be addressed for greater job satisfaction and added these thoughts about salary improvements, saying,

“Probably, specifically in this school, discipline.”
Research Question #4: What personal dispositions seem to be important for teachers to remain in a middle school setting?

In seeking an understanding of what keeps middle school teachers in their classrooms, this fourth research question offered the opportunity to explore the personal dispositions these teachers possess or believe are important for teachers of early adolescents. The participants identified a lengthy list of their own dispositions as well as another list of traits they would recommend for those considering a career as a middle school teacher.

First on the list was a sense of humor. Being able to “joke with students, have fun with them, and tease them” as teacher E-7 said came through in many of the interviews. One teacher, E-2 said, “I’m a nut!” Being able to “be yourself” was important to current middle school teachers, and teacher E-4 laughingly shared it this way,

I’m a bit of a performer. I play music and things of that nature and that’s always worked for me. . . It has served me well over all the years. I used to almost be embarrassed by it. I’m a ‘ham.’ What’s my talent? I’m a ‘ham,’ but middle school kids really respond to that.

If you can’t laugh at yourself and laugh at the silly things these kids do, you’re too uptight. You can’t work with these kids. It truly is, and I know it’s an old cliché, of the nature of the beast. It’s true. If it’s true anywhere, it’s true in middle school. (Teacher E-2)

Also in agreement with being able to laugh was teacher E-5, “Well, part of it is the sense of humor. You have to be able to laugh with the kids.” New teacher N-1 also considered sense of humor one of her dispositions.

I think definitely a sense of humor is necessary. For one thing, these students are developing their own sense of humor, and their sense of humor is emerging, and they try to see humor in just about everything that they can, and I think that you have a good sense of humor that if you can try to lighten things up and not take everything seriously that they appreciate that and they respond to that.
Teacher E-7 adds to the comments about sense of humor,

. . . there’s a lot of us around here that just joke with the kids all the time and they love that and they eat it up. Even one of our eighth grade teachers who’s so dry and serious, he jokes with them and they just love it. . . . So they are eating out of your hand at that point. A good sense of humor is the most important thing you have to have.

Having a “tough skin” to handle the sometimes-frustrating “button-pushing” behaviors of this age group was another recommendation. Teacher N-2 emphasized that being embarrassed is not an option, “Middle school, you can’t ever get embarrassed no matter what happens.” New teacher N-3 agrees with those statements,

I think anybody that teaches in the middle school, more so than elementary or high school has to have a tough skin. And they have to be very strong in their convictions and their rules and discipline or they’re not going to make it. These kids will eat you alive.

The teachers recognized their enjoyment and their love for this age group with its particular characteristics. Believing in them, knowing that every child is important, and wanting to be a bridge for these young people as they strive for the independence of youth was important. Additional dispositions include getting along well with early adolescents, relating to them, having a connection with them, and building positive relationships with them. Teachers emphasized the value of knowing what this age group likes. One teacher compared the relationship to middle school student as the client and teachers as the provider of a service for the students.

Experienced teacher, E-2, says of these students,

I love my kids . . . I love being that bridge between the younger thought, ‘let me hold your hand and walk you through this’ to ‘this is the independence of a young adult.’ Being that bridge and being an understanding person who can say ‘well, yeah, but you screwed up and here’s how you’re accountable.’ You’re still accountable, but I can do it with a heart. I can do that with a loving tenderness. If you can’t do that, you can’t stay in a middle school because they’ll drive you nuts. They just will; it’s who they are. If you have a button, they will push it. You have to be in control of all those things.

Teacher E-3’s strongest disposition was stated this way:
would be the fact that I so believe in children. They all, like the rest of us, they come with their bumps and warts and one thing and another but the bottom line is they are absolutely wonderful people. They have a lot to offer. They have the right to test their wings to a certain degree. They have to have those limits. I just feel like my belief in children is one thing that keeps me here.

A former middle school physical education teacher, F-4, with a number of certifications, traded that teaching position for the opportunity to teach smaller classes of math at a high school. F-4 believes the strongest disposition as a middle school teacher continues at the high school level, “The connection between me and the kids. . . It’s the same thing keeping me here, ‘cause I’ve found that since I’m here, there’s still a bond with kids.” Another high school math teacher and former middle school teacher feels the same, “I think I had a real compassionate love for kids and the desire to prepare students.” Teacher F-2, now a high school history teacher, shared, “I get along well with teenagers, be they young adolescents or older adolescents. I like teenagers and I feel that I have a certain tolerance for the quirks of their age group.”

Teacher F-1, who chose to become a third grade teacher, has no regrets for the time spent as a middle school teacher,

I think I related well to that age group of children. I think I enjoy working with students that are challenging, but yet you could talk to them on an adult level and most of the time get through to them, most of the time.

Teacher E-5, eyes tearing, expressed a genuine love for middle school students in sharing a recent incident with one young man,

. . . I don’t know if this is good or not; I really get close to the kids sometimes, and I take it to heart . . . That’s the way I am . . . and when we were talking I just start crying. I start crying.

Other personal dispositions mentioned by these participants ran the gamut of adjectives: energetic, determined, tenacious, flexible, organized, consistent, firm, adaptable, enthusiastic and passionate about their work, tolerant, and last, but certainly not least, patient. Teacher F-8 said,
I think I have tenacity. I think I had a real desire to impact kids’ live for the better. . . I have a professionalism that causes me to want to do a good job presenting information to kids and seeing them succeed with it.

A middle school language arts and social studies teacher, E-2, is

. . . extremely organized. Being very organized allows me to just roll. My classroom just flows and that’s very important. It’s important to those kids because it maintains the consistency they need. It maintains the fact that I’ve never lost where we need to go next. Also, they never have that down time with me trying to find where we’re going or what we’re going to do. I think that’s important.

Three dispositions are important to teacher F-2,

You have to be very tolerant, especially with the middle age group. Middle school age group is a harder group to work with than the high school age group. Adaptability, flexibility. If you don’t have those, to me, you’ll go crazy because those kids change so fast. Those would probably be the characteristics I think that I would rank at the top.

As a first year teacher, N-2 said,

You have to be extremely flexible, and I am, and you have to be organized, but you also have to be very consistent and firm and I have that, too. A lot of that is from mothering, but that loving firmness is one of the techniques that I use the most in the classroom and the children respond to it.

Following along with Teacher N-2’s statements, experienced teacher, E-5, reviews the disposition of being

. . . able to discipline with love. They got to know you care about them. I think part of that’s the growing process . . . we all know they have to understand parameters. They have to understand what’s expected of them and where our lines are.

The participants’ personal dispositions encompassed every recommended disposition middle school teachers need. Teachers provided an additional list of dispositions they stated that middle school teachers need to be successful and remain in a middle school classroom. Teacher N-3 suggests middle school teachers must be “able to communicate your needs and your wants. . . to staff members or your principal, parents and kids.” Teacher E-2, eyes focused and face determined, shared the following.
I think you have to have a personal drive to change over the years as you are in the classroom. What worked last year is not going to work this year. You have to be able to be flexible and to change. I think you have to have your own intrinsic initiative to do whatever it takes in the middle school classroom to get the points across or to make the impact or challenge those kids. You’ve got to do whatever it takes. That’s a very giving person that does that and it’s very hard to do that. You almost feel like somebody’s wringing you out as if you were a sponge sometimes (giggling) and there’s just nothing else that you’ve got that you can give. You almost have to be endless in your energy and time and idealism that’s there. I guess I also think that people have to be personally motivated to do a very good job. They can’t let the administration set the standards because, unfortunately, most of the time, I don’t think those are high enough. You have to look at your classroom and say, “I’m responsible here. I’m taking charge of this and these are the things I’m going to achieve.” You have to be driven. You have to have an intrinsic drive to make things work well.

New teacher, N-3, adds this humorous but apt comment,

. . . I’ve heard this from a lot of the elementary ed teachers, you do have to be a little on the insane side (laughter) to be a good middle school teacher. In some respects, you do have to be just a little on the wild side. . . Having whatever that craziness is that allows you to not be appalled at the whole middle school mentality, is what it takes to be happy there.
CHAPTER 5
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

Practicing the art of teaching for 25 years with students in primary grades, middle school, and high school, and 4 years as a library media specialist, led the search for learning what factors are present for teachers who choose to remain in the middle school realm. The review of related literature and interviews with a combination of 20 new, experienced, and former middle school teachers in conjunction with those years of experience assisted in developing conclusions and recommendations.

Many responses to the interview questions were similar, but the viewpoints of some teachers generated additional insight. More teachers from County B (whose middle schools are contained in K-8 settings) established more of the reasons middle school teachers leave than did the teachers from County A, who are in schools with only grades 6-8 represented.

Conclusions from the Study

Conclusions from this study were defined by the research questions and central thought for factors promoting the longevity of middle school teachers. Interviews that were transcribed verbatim and field notes provided the basis for the analysis of the data. As themes developed, they were categorized and coded for the primary points for this study:

1. Factors leading to a climate of job satisfaction for middle school teachers,
2. How middle school teachers maintain their level of job satisfaction,
3. Avenues already available or that should be available to improve and support middle school teachers, and
4. The personal dispositions teachers deem important for successful careers in middle school.

The interviews provided detailed data. The findings from these data were specified and related to the professional literature significant to the study prior to recommendations being made.

Factors Leading to a Climate of Job Satisfaction for Middle School Teachers

Research Question #1: What factors seem to lead to a climate of job satisfaction for middle school teachers?

Findings

In examining the motivators from the Two-Factor Motivation Theory, the participants in this study overwhelmingly acknowledged the work itself brings them the greatest satisfaction in their jobs. Professional and personal growth were acknowledged as important to teacher job satisfaction. Responsibility and recognition were lower in priority; achievement was more important than promotion for the participants. The participants of this study also rated the hygienes from Herzberg’s theory. Relationships with co-workers were very important to almost all participants. Following in order of importance from greatest to least were work environment, supervision, salary, and district/school policies.

Professional Literature Connection

These dedicated middle school teachers do not all fall into the “Baby-Boomer” generation whose work ethic stems from post-Depression Era parents, but they all exemplify the values of the “Protestant ‘work ethic’” in which work is a desirable and respected behavior. They have an appreciation for division of labor, but they share the understanding that they must work together to achieve success for their students. Hackman and Oldham’s job characteristics quoted by French and Bell
Hackman and Oldham identified four outcomes from their characteristics: “high internal work motivation, high ‘growth’ satisfaction, high general job satisfaction, and high work effectiveness” (French and Bell, p. 223). Participants acknowledged their enjoyment of the work and their need to continue to grow professionally through attaining other areas of certification and degrees.

McGregor’s Theory Y (1960) is applicable to study participants. They develop themselves professionally, seek responsibility through the tasks inherent in providing instruction and assessment to early adolescents, and work together to develop the goals of their organization, in this case the school, to bring about learning and growth for their students. These teachers exemplify Likert’s System 3 and System 4 high levels of productivity resulting from consultative and participative management styles within their schools and teams.

No participants in this study had left the teaching profession; teachers had requested, however, transfers to other grade levels, both lower and higher, usually within the system in which they were employed. One teacher, whose love of the curriculum and desire to return home, sought to interview for a high school position in County B in order to bring personal dreams to fruition.

Ingersoll’s research, while focused on teacher attrition, is applicable to these teachers. His recommendations for improving teacher job satisfaction were echoed by teachers in this study: provide greater support, improve salaries, address inappropriate student behavior, and broaden the role of site-based management (Ingersoll, 2001).
The work of Gillan (1978) and Thornton (2004) determined greater job satisfaction exists for middle school teachers who trained in teaching early adolescents. Teachers interviewed in this study lend credibility to that research. They readily acknowledged their enjoyment of the age group and their recognition of the characteristics exhibited by the students.

Gawel (1997) considered Herzberg’s analysis of job satisfaction, particularly salary as a motivator, not to be applicable to teachers. The findings of this study found teacher salary to be an area of dissatisfaction, but because salary in North Carolina is determined by years of experience and degrees earned, teacher salary is accepted for what it is (or isn’t), and many teachers, particularly men, find ways to supplement their income. With the exception of one teacher whose spouse became disabled and three whose spouses also teach, salary for female teachers was found to be an additional family income.

For North Carolina teachers, the highest degrees of satisfaction according to Improving Teacher Working Conditions in North Carolina (2005) were found in the areas Herzberg termed as motivators. These were “effectiveness, supportiveness, and professionalism of their school leaders and with the opportunities they had to design and engage in professional development and school leadership activities” (p. 4). Teachers were least satisfied with areas Herzberg referred to as hygienes. Those factors related to time: “time available to adequately engage in such activities as planning, teaching, and professional development critical to successfully reaching all students” (p. 4). Participants in this study confirmed these same areas.

**Maintaining Job Satisfaction**

Research Question #2: How do middle school teachers who experience satisfaction report that they maintain that satisfaction?
Findings

These study participants had a passion for their work that was consistent and clear. Their passion, too, for the joy of learning, for both their students and themselves was evident. Earning adding additional certifications and/or degrees was one way in which teachers sought not only to better themselves professionally and financially but also to improve themselves intellectually. Staff development, workshops, and conferences fell into that same category and gave teachers more enthusiasm for the work. Within the area of the work environment, teachers indicated their appreciation for receiving recognition even though they readily acknowledged that it is not something educators expect to receive.

Relationships with co-workers for new, experienced, and former teachers of middle school students were found to be a major component of their job satisfaction. The daily interaction, support from and for each other, and the social events outside of school deepened the friendships and working relationships.

Responsibility, while inherent to the job, was a concern for most middle school teachers. Few wanted additional responsibility; most wanted less. Responsibility plays a major role in what these teachers do. Most commented that they had more responsibility than they would like and found it to be a hindrance to their job satisfaction. A minority either said they wanted more responsibility or were content with the level of responsibility they had.

Personal achievement and salary ranked low in satisfiers for teachers. While many of the teachers sought additional knowledge and expertise by adding degrees or certifications, few were interested in furthering their careers by entering administrative roles. When discussing salary, almost all responded that, it was not their reason for continuing in the classroom, and the salary was not enough. Several
teachers indicated they work a second job to support themselves. Some sought higher degrees or NBPTS certification to increase their salary but still feel the need to have additional income.

Supervision, for the most part, was not considered negative in relationship to job satisfaction. Some expression of better supervision was made in a situation in which a school is divided about the supervisor. Supervision that is more active was desired by another teacher. Mentoring did not receive high marks in that same situation.

Professional Literature Connection

Foster et al. (2005) noted the need for teachers to have “sustained opportunities to experiment with and receive feedback on innovative practices, to collaborate with peers in and out of school, and to interact with external researcher” (pp. 29-30). Thornton (2004), in her study of Professional Development Schools and teacher job satisfaction, found that teachers were more likely to remain in the classroom when they were “directly related to participation in a learning community” (p. 9). In addition, Thornton found those teachers had “opportunities for critical reflection and dialogue about standards of practice built into their roles as educators and members of the master teacher cohort” (p. 9). She further found that teachers who continued in “developing exemplary practice” did so in schools welcoming self-examining inquiry and collegial and dialogic professional development” (p.9).

In relationship to the importance of co-workers, Shann’s 1998 research identified additional job satisfaction predictors applicable to this study: “interactions with students, interactions with colleagues, professional challenges, professional autonomy, working conditions, salary, and opportunities for advancement . . . student achievement” (p. 2). Shann also noted from her research the positive impact of
collegial support as impacts job satisfaction and retention of teachers (par 4). The MetLife survey affirms the importance of co-workers: “relationships with other members of the school community emerged as important sources of support” (p. 3).

Beck-Frazier’s (2005) interviews and observations of three new teachers in North Carolina noted that low pay was a primary reason these three teachers would leave the profession. Those interviews validate the feelings of two teachers in this study, both in their first three years of teaching. One is considering leaving altogether; the other is preparing for National Board Certification with ambitions of becoming an administrator.

Teachers who are National Board Certified Teachers (NBCT) said they wanted larger roles in decision-making within their schools. They stated they desired to expand their knowledge with additional study, research, and the reading of professional materials. The middle school teachers in the Petty, Dagenhart, and O’Connor 2002-2003 study expressed the same thoughts as NBCTs. They want to be heard, pursue additional professional growth, and service in leadership positions.

Already Available Avenues or Needed Avenues to Improve and Support Middle School Teachers

Research Question #3: What avenues are or should be available to improve and support those middle school teachers who are dissatisfied so that they will remain in the profession?

Findings

Teachers do not end their day when students leave the building. Many spend the hours after school in their classrooms planning and preparing for the classes they will teach during the week. They spend time reflecting on the success or lack of success of students and the quality of lessons taught during the day. Papers and
projects need quick turn-around time for students, and teachers finish those before they go home or take them home with them. Only one of the teachers interviewed left school “on time,” and did so only to protect personal stress levels. Most remain until 4:00 and some until 5:00 or later. The afternoons of mandated meetings create conflict for teachers who want to remain in their classrooms and be fully prepared for the next day and arrive home in time to spend time with their family. When asked what avenues are/were in place or needed to be in place to improve and support teachers, a wealth of needed avenues were provided. With the exception of a teacher assistant at one school in County A, no other avenues were documented to be in place by the participants.

Teachers want to be able to end their job at school within a reasonable amount of time each day. They noted the symptoms of burnout and wanted to guard themselves and their students against that condition with fewer hours of work each day, smaller class sizes, supervising fewer activities, and lessening the workload, especially in County B where the middle school teachers also carry the majority of the exploratory classes as part of their teaching load each day. They stated that those classes were a waste of their time and as non-productive for their students. Increasing expectations from state and local levels make further demands upon teachers, and many commented that site-based management is in “name only” with systems experiencing too much top-down management.

Homogenous grouping of middle school students was suggested as an avenue for better use of teacher and student time as well as student learning. Differentiation tasks within heterogeneous groupings means greater time spent in planning and assessing for these teachers.
Participants agreed that they need more planning time for themselves. A duty-free lunch period was suggested as one way of recognizing teachers as professionals while giving them time to take care of their own needs during that time. Teacher assistants in middle school have been a valuable addition in County A.

Smaller class sizes were suggested as one avenue to improve and support middle school teachers. Students in the middle grades often have more issues to untangle, and parents need more time from individual and teaching teams than in earlier grades. Smaller class sizes were one way to better meet the needs of this changing group of students.

Teachers want the support of their administrators. They need administrators who will enforce the established policies with students and establish expectations for high student accountability. Discipline plans for students were a concern; teachers want discipline that is more effective for middle school students. They also want to see principals and administrators in their classrooms, not always to remind students of authority figures, but many times to have a knowledge of what good things are happening within the classroom. That leads to their need for administrators and others to recognize and show appreciation for the time and effort they give.

Clear and consistent communication from administrators was identified as a need to be addressed along with conflict resolution for faculties experiencing severe conflicts within the school. Continuity of leadership was emphasized from schools that had experienced high levels of principal turnover.

The stresses of testing were another point of needed improvement for these participants. They would like to see the pressure related to testing decreased, and the vast responsibility of tested subjects spread more equally among teachers, especially those who teach more than one grade level within their middle school setting.
Team meetings are important to these middle school teachers. Collaboration of academics and special events, student concerns, and building relationship among team members were part of the communication and time spent in meetings. The daily team meetings in one school were considered vital to the functioning of the team.

There is no doubt that teachers experience stress in their jobs. Teachers identify those stressors, but many times are unable to make changes to overcome the stress. They, like employees in other jobs, want a “life.” The passion they have for their work creates a true dilemma for these professionals. They are ethically challenged to do the best possible job, many times meaning long hours at school and home, while feeling the same need to be available to the needs of family and self.

*Professional Literature Connection*

Ingersoll’s 2001 study identified factors contributing to job dissatisfaction. He noted “low salaries, inadequate support from the school administration, student discipline problems, and limited faculty input into school-decision making” (p. 3). The work of Shann (1998) found concerns related to “large class sizes, lack of resources, and educational policies and procedures” (par 5). Her research indicated, too, that teachers needed “satisfaction with principal leadership and support, salary, mentors’ emotional support, and satisfaction in general” (par 3). The research of Thornton (2004) found teachers frustrations related to “lack of materials and resources, lack of parental support, lack of administrative support, student misbehavior, time pressures, limited input in decisions, and low salaries” (p. 6).

Beck-Frazier’s 2005 research found that teachers also experience frustration with “administrative support, student motivation/parent involvement, and low pay” (p. 32).
National Board Certified Teachers described their needs in affiliation with leadership roles according to Petty, Dagenhart, and O’Connor. Middle school teachers in that same study wanted to be heard. They wanted to serve in leadership roles and pursue additional professional growth. Teachers in North Carolina high schools wanted recognition for their accomplishments. They wanted larger roles in decision-making and desired to further expand their knowledge through more study. Lack of opportunities to participate in decision-making was also reported by Shann (1998).

Ingersoll found that low salaries, lack of administrative support, “concerns about student motivation and discipline, school safety, and a feeling that faculty members had little influence on what went on in their schools” (Ingersoll, 2001 as cited by Viadero, p. 7).

**Personal Dispositions**

Research Question #4: What personal dispositions seem to be important for teachers to remain in a middle school setting?

**Findings**

Teachers interviewed were highly cognizant of their strengths. Whether the vocabulary used in their descriptions was identical to that of the vocabulary terms for dispositions, the answers remain synonymous.

A good sense of humor is critical for surviving the middle school environment. Being “thick-skinned” is also an important trait for middle school teachers.

The people who love this age group with all of its complexities enjoy teaching in the middle school classroom. Teachers insist that those who teach these young adolescents or contemplate teaching this age group must believe in these children,
desire to help them transition from their childhood into older adolescence, relate to them and connect with them, and build positive relationships with the age group. Teachers repeatedly stated that this group demands a vast amount of energy from adults. Being flexible, organized, and enthusiastic about the work is a must. Teacher of early adolescents must also be consistent and firm while remaining tolerant and patient with their students. Communication is considered important and should flow both horizontally and vertically with all who deal with middle school students.

Perhaps the most important disposition, and the one that brought the greatest amount of laughter and twinkling of the eyes, was the understanding that teachers of young adolescents must be “just a little on the wild side” (Teacher N-3).

**Professional Literature Connection**

*The Disposition To Teach* by Taylor and Wasicsko (2000) discussed dispositions “as the personal qualities or characteristics that are possessed by individuals, including attitudes, beliefs, interest, appreciations, values, and modes of adjustment” (p. 2).

Collinson (1996) described the ethics and dispositions of teachers with concentration on the human elements of caring and compassion, a strong work ethic of doing one’s best, and the need for lifelong learning (p. 7).

Relationships between students and teachers were discussed by Wubbels et al. (1997) and a list of 22 desirable dispositions were recorded by Kellough and Kellough (1999).
**Recommendations for Practice**

Based on this study the following recommendations for practice in the areas of administration, collaboration, and time are made.

**Administrators**

Teachers in this study made recommendations for administrators based on their experiences and what they desire in a school leader.

1. Lowering class sizes will allow teachers to be better able to communicate with parents and children whose needs are greater.

2. Administrators should plan for verbal and written recognition, brief, personal notes, and classroom visits as simple but highly effective ways to recognize the efforts of teachers and staff members.

3. Fulfilling the need of middle school teachers to be heard and have an active voice in decision-making should be implemented by administrators on both the local and district levels.

4. Local support through increased supplements is needed to enhance teacher salaries, especially the salaries of beginning teachers.

5. Administrators should schedule daily team meeting time and make appropriate efforts to protect that time for each team.

6. Administrators should attend or be in close communication with each team leader on a consistent basis.

7. The attainment of National Board Certification should be encouraged and supported for those who desire to attempt that process.

8. When possible, the district level administration should seek to maintain continuity of principal leadership for as long as possible without endangering the mission of the school.
9. Testing pressures should be divided as equally as possible among middle school teachers.

10. Provision of a duty-free lunch for middle school teachers in County B is strongly recommended.

_Collaboration and Time_

Teachers recognized the importance of regular team meetings for planning, integration of curriculum, and student needs. The following recommendations come from their perspective.

1. Administrators should schedule daily team meeting time and make appropriate efforts to protect that time for each team.

2. Planning time for middle school teachers needs to be increased.

3. Relieving middle school teachers of superfluous duties, such as non-academic exploratory classes, beyond their realm of expertise should be avoided.

4. Teacher assistants for middle grades teachers are needed to assist in a number of duties including individual and small group tutoring. The emphasis on higher test scores and individual achievement of students justify the need for additional, trained personnel.

_Recommendations for Research_

Data provided through this study provides the impetus for future research. These recommendations include

1. County B should research what “true” middle schools can offer to its student base.

2. County B should meet with middle school teachers, survey them, and identify the needs of both teachers and students in the appropriate educational setting (K-8 versus 6-8).
3. Schools and school systems should research current practices for teacher/school involvement in communities as well as how schools can open their doors for middle school families after the traditional school day.

4. Research the benefits of lower class sizes in grades 6-8 in order to determine if this will benefit students academically, behaviorally, and socially.

5. County B should research what the employment preferences are for students completing middle school teaching preparatory programs.

6. Research how additional personnel in middle school, particularly teacher assistants, can be funded.

7. The academic groupings of students (homogenous vs heterogeneous) needs additional research related to small rural communities in order to locate methods to eliminate or reduce the stigma attached to exceptional children, both gifted and learning disabled.

8. A quantitative study allowing a larger population to be studied is recommended to further substantiate this study.

9. On a broader scope, studies of teachers in grades K-3, 4-6, and 9-12 may be applicable to determine if their job satisfaction factors are in line with the findings of this study.

10. Another area of research can apply to those who leave the classroom and their reasons for seeking the responsibilities of administration.

11. Teacher salaries, while improving in North Carolina, need continued increases to enable teachers to focus on their work and the success of their students without the burden of additional employment.
Analysis of the literature and to the data provided by the participants leads to the following recommendations and thoughts of the author.

Although their dedication to and love for young adolescents were addressed during the interviews, only a former middle school teacher specifically addressed the academic abilities of students through the topic of homogeneous groupings. While high school curriculum necessitates the issue of tracking and ability levels for many of its courses and diploma areas, students in middle grades can continue to thrive in heterogeneous groupings. This author strongly recommends that middle school settings have the advantages of teacher assistants (experienced or who will be trained in middle school philosophy), lower class sizes, and additional specialists for those children who are academically challenged or gifted. Adding the components of strong collaboration based on professional development for integration of curriculum and the planning time critical to the success of both teachers and students can create a maximum learning environment for students and a highly productive, collegial environment for teachers.

With the understanding that many teachers come to middle school from avenues other than a middle school preparatory program, it is wise and prudent for school systems to arrange for non-middle school certified teachers to receive that training at no cost to the teachers. The benefits in relationships with students and colleagues, the mastery of middle school pedagogy, and the knowledge of the characteristics of young adolescents will help ensure a better environment for all members of a middle school setting. It follows, too, that administrators involved with early adolescents should have the same training as middle school teachers.
Additional inferences or direct suggestions from this research are applicable to those considering a career as a middle school teacher. Teacher preparatory programs for middle school teachers should provide a semester of classroom management training prior to or during internships and any student teaching experiences for middle school teacher candidates. Individuals who consider teaching in middle school should take every opportunity to visit, volunteer, and observe in those classrooms. Potential teachers of middle school students should become involved in community groups in which middle school students are present. Potential middle school teachers should consider choosing a teacher preparatory program in which student teaching includes an entire year.

The involvement of teachers in the school community is valuable for all stakeholders. With the understanding of the time issues noted in this research, schools and school districts should make deliberate plans for involving the faculty and staff in the community.

For teachers who are seeking recognition and additional responsibility, they may wish to take on the added roles of those who develop and execute professional development noted as needed by their co-workers.

In schools with the type of stress and division of personnel noted by one current middle school teacher, the need for conflict resolution is apparent. School systems, as a part of their safe schools initiatives, need trained personnel or available experts in the area of conflict management.

Mentoring programs can be strengthened by ensuring the new teacher and the mentor are in close proximity. Adjoining classrooms or a few doors away is far preferable to another location in the building or in another school. Time for the
mentor to be supportive must be included in the schedule of the teacher assuming that role.

New, first year teachers in North Carolina have the safeguard of fewer duties assigned to them. In conjunction with that consideration, their classrooms and student rosters should provide them with opportunities for success. They should not have the disadvantage of being placed in poorly equipped classrooms, and they should not receive most of the discipline problems or academically challenged students during their first year of teaching.

As a final thought, the human element of teaching must not be ignored. School systems should give consideration for personnel who are experiencing overwhelming personal and professional concerns to receive additional visits within Employment Assistance Programs. As an additional help for many of those stresses and the concerns for employee health and well-being, the opportunity to pursue wellness programs at school sites is another consideration.

**Summary**

Factors leading to long-term tenure and job satisfaction for teachers of early adolescents were a focus of this study. It can be said that teachers who love their work, who enjoy and establish good relationships with young adolescents, and who have good relationships with their co-workers tend to experience job satisfaction and remain in the middle school teaching environment. Teachers in this study who become dissatisfied with middle school teaching did not leave teaching but moved to grade levels above or below grades 6-8. The most frequent reason for those moves was primarily the need for a different work environment.

An additional focus was the comparison of Herzberg, Mausner and Snyderman’s Two-Factor Motivation Theory (1959). The engineers in his study
found job satisfaction to be increased through achievement and salaries. Teachers, however, thrive on the work itself and their relationships with co-workers.

The dispositions of teachers provided the final focus of this study. The dispositions found were closely aligned with those in established literature.

Recommendations for practice along with recommendations for further research center on the middle school environment and how teachers can best meet the needs of their students. A perspective from the author finalizes the chapter.
REFERENCES


APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Middle School Teacher Demographic Survey

Teacher # ________     County ________  Current _________  Former _________

1. What is your gender?
   ○ Male
   ○ Female

2. What is your age? _______
   ○ 21-25
   ○ 26-30
   ○ 31-35
   ○ 36-40
   ○ 41-45
   ○ 46-50
   ○ 51-55
   ○ above 55

3. In what areas are you certified?

4. How many total years of experience do you have as an educator?

5. How many years have you been (were you) employed as a middle school teacher? (Please be as specific as possible.)

6. How many years have you taught in this middle school (did you teach in middle school)?

7. Have you taught middle school students in any other school? If so, what prompted you to come to this school?

8. What is your most advanced degree?
   ○ BS/BA
   ○ MS/MA
   ○ Specialist
   ○ Doctorate

9. Are you considered “highly qualified” for the area in which you teach as defined by No Child Left Behind standards?
   ○ Yes
   ○ No
   ○ Unknown

10. Are you a Nationally Board Certified teacher?
    ○ Yes
11. What grade(s) do you currently teach? (Check all that apply.)
   ○ 6
   ○ 7
   ○ 8

12. What grades have you previously taught? (Check all that apply.)
   ○ PreK
   ○ K
   ○ 1
   ○ 2
   ○ 3
   ○ 4
   ○ 5
   ○ 9
   ○ 10
   ○ 11
   ○ 12

13. What subject areas do you currently teach? (Check all that apply.)
   ○ Reading/Language Arts
   ○ Social Studies
   ○ Math
   ○ Science
   ○ Band/Orchestra
   ○ Chorus
   ○ Foreign Language
   ○ Other _______________________________
APPENDIX B

Current Middle School Teacher Interview Questions

Teacher # ___________    County ___________

Good afternoon; my name is Karen Farthing, and I want to thank you for taking your time to participate in this study of middle school teachers and their motivations for continuing to teach in a middle school environment. I am conducting this study as a part of my doctoral dissertation at East Tennessee State University.

Motivation

1. How would you rank the following areas as they contribute to your level of job satisfaction and why:
   
   _____ responsibility  
   _____ recognition  
   _____ promotion  
   _____ achievement  
   _____ the work itself  
   _____ professional/personal growth

2. What activities do you choose within the areas of responsibility, promotion, achievement, the work itself, and professional/personal growth in order to maintain a higher level of job satisfaction?

Hygienes

3. How would you rank the following areas as they contribute to your level of job satisfaction and why:
   
   _____ supervision  
   _____ salary  
   _____ work environment  
   _____ district/individual school policies  
   _____ relationships with co-workers

4. What steps do you take in order to increase your level of satisfaction in the highest and lowest ranked areas?

   Highest:

   Lowest:

5. What avenues are already in place or should be addressed to improve your level of job satisfaction?

6. What personal dispositions do you have that keep you in a middle school setting?
7. Are there other personal characteristics you can identify that you believe are important for middle school teachers to have in order to teach and remain in a middle school environment?

8. What factors contribute to your remaining in your current teaching assignment at __________________________ School?

9. How does working with a team impact your decision to remain in the middle school environment?

10. What recommendations would you make to district and school level administrators to aid in attracting and retaining quality middle school teachers?

11. What advice would you give to those contemplating a career as a middle school teacher?
Good afternoon. My name is Karen Farthing. I am a doctoral student at East Tennessee State University. Thank you for taking your time to participate in this study of middle school teachers and their motivations for remaining in the middle school environment or choosing to leave it.

**Motivation**

1. How would you rank the following areas as they contribute to your level of job satisfaction and why:

   - responsibility
   - recognition
   - promotion
   - achievement
   - the work itself
   - professional/personal growth

2. What activities did you choose within the areas of responsibility, promotion, achievement, the work itself, and professional/personal growth in order to maintain a higher level of job satisfaction?

**Hygienes**

3. How would you rank the following areas as they contributed to your level of job satisfaction and why:

   - supervision
   - salary
   - work environment
   - district/individual school policies
   - relationships with co-workers

4. What steps did you take in order to increase your level of satisfaction in the highest and lowest ranked areas?

   Highest:

   Lowest:

5. What avenues were in place or should have been addressed to improve your level of job satisfaction?
6. What personal dispositions do you have that kept you in a middle school setting until you chose to leave?

7. What factors contributed to your remaining in your current teaching assignment at ________________ School?

8. Did working with a team impact your decision to remain in the middle school environment? (Please elaborate on your answer.)

9. What recommendations would you make to district and school level administrators to aid in attracting and retaining quality middle school teachers?

10. What advice would you give to those contemplating a career as a middle school teacher?
Dear Teacher,

As a part of my doctoral dissertation, I am interviewing both current and former middle school teachers. One focus of the interviews will relate to the levels of job satisfaction you experienced as a middle school teacher. A second focus will be the dispositions middle school teachers need in order to be successful in the middle school environment.

This letter is to request your assistance with this qualitative research which I am hopeful will be of interest to legislators, administrators, staff development coordinators, and universities with teacher preparation programs. Your participation will be in the form of a face to face interview lasting approximately 45-60 minutes.

As a teacher of middle school students, I recognize your time is valuable, but I believe your input into this research is valuable and will be beneficial to current and future middle school teachers as well as those mentioned above.

If you agree to be a part of this study, please read carefully and sign the informed consent document. Your responses will be considered confidential. If you have questions or concerns, please contact me at 828-297-6867. Thank you for participating in this research study.

Sincerely,

Karen W. Farthing
Valle Crucis School
2998 Broadstone Road
Sugar Grove, NC 29679
(828) 963-4712

May 25, 2006

Karen W. Farthing
2998 Broadstone Road
Sugar Grove, NC 28679

To Whom It May Concern,

I served as a peer reviewer for Karen W. Farthing during her work on her dissertation “Perceived Job Satisfaction Factors Impacting the Retention of Middle School Teachers in Northwest North Carolina.” Throughout her research, we discussed the work she was doing.

During the process, she explained to me her work and I provided feedback and reaction to her procedure. She has shared with me her process for the collection of data. I provided direction from the perspective of a teacher of middle school students and a colleague.

I am confident that Karen’s treatment of the data is satisfactory as she now nears the completion of her dissertation. Her conclusions are based upon the data and can be traced back to the data. I am happy to have been able to participate in Karen’s research project. It has been a pleasure to have been a part of her endeavor.

Sincerely,

Karen D. Farthing
Teacher, Watauga County Schools
June 21, 2006

Dear Ms. Farthing:

It was an honor and a pleasure to have a chance to review your dissertation titled, *Perceived Job Satisfaction Factors Impacting the Retention of Middle School Teachers in Northwest North Carolina*. As a fellow qualitative researcher, I found your methodology to be appropriate for the research question posed. The tools for data collection and the techniques for the analysis of these data ensured a reliable description of the middle school teachers who informed your study.

This study will be a quality contribution to the field of education and I am confident that it will serve as a valuable resource for other researcher interested in teacher retention. As a former secondary teacher, media coordinator, and administrator, I am very much aware of how important it is to identify methods for retaining teachers in our profession.

Sincerely,

Robert L. Sanders, Ed.D.
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KAREN W. FARTHING

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Date of Birth: March 26, 1952
Place of Birth: Hickory, North Carolina
Marital Status: Married

Education:
Public Schools, Caldwell County, North Carolina
LaGrange College, LaGrange, Georgia
    Elementary Education, BA
    1974
Appalachian State University, Boone, North Carolina
    Master of Library Science
    1998
East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee
    Educational Leadership & Policy Analysis, Ed.D.
    2006

Certification:
National Board for Professional Teaching Standards
    2002

Professional Experience:
Teacher, Troup County Schools
    LaGrange, Georgia
    1974-1976
Teacher, Gaston County Schools
    Gastonia, North Carolina
    1985-1996
Media Specialist, Gaston County Schools
    Gastonia, North Carolina
    1996-1998
Teacher, Watauga County Schools
    Boone, North Carolina
    1998-1999
Media Specialist, Watauga County Schools
    Boone, North Carolina
    1999-2001
Teacher, Watauga County Schools
    Boone, North Carolina
    2001-present