

Running head: QUALITIES OF TEACHERS

Qualities of Teachers that Impact Retention in the Teaching Profession: Why do They Stay?

By

Jan M. Zuehlke

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

Doctor of Education

Education Department

School of Sciences and Education

Milligan College, TN

2019

Doctoral Committee:

Major Professor

Dr. Lyn Howell

Dr. Angela Hilton-Prillhart

Dr. Anne Kariuki

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Abstract

Being able to identify and retain quality teachers is an issue faced by many school districts. There are some who possess innate personal characteristics inspiring their passion to remain dedicated to the teaching profession. The purpose of this research is to explore the qualities of teachers who are committed to the profession. The study explored personality traits from novice and experienced educators to understand their commitment to the profession from their own experiences. An embedded design was used to collect data from a personality assessment and in-person interviews. The personality assessment was analyzed to compare personality traits and years of teaching experience. The interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes in order to answer the research questions that guided this study. The population sample was seven teachers ranging from one year all the way to more than 16 years of teaching experience. The findings of this research provided information on how teacher's self-identity evolved with more years of experience. The results identified four qualities of teachers that chose to remain in the profession.

Keywords: Personal Qualities, Retention, Characteristics, Self-Efficacy, Self-Identity

Committee Signature Page

Milligan College Dissertation Defense Approval Form

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| <u>Jan C. Crowell</u> | 30 April 2019 |
| Dissertation Chair Signature | Date |
| <u>Angela Wilton Pritchard</u> | 05/08/19 |
| Dissertation Committee Member Signature | Date |
| <u>Janet ...</u> | 05/09/19 |
| Dissertation Committee Member Signature | Date |

| Other Required Signatures | |
|-------------------------------------|----------|
| <u>Patricia M. Karavakis</u> | 5/09/19 |
| F.D. Research Director Signature | Date |
| <u>Angela Wilton Pritchard</u> | 05/08/19 |
| Assoc. Chair of Education Signature | Date |

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Dedication

I dedicate my dissertation work to my family and friends. My loving husband, Jonathan, has encouraged me and endured the long hours of study time. My amazing boys, Zachary and Emory understood my dedication to the doctoral program and I love all the questions they asked me about being a graduate student. My parents, Sharon and Larry Thompson provided unconditional support with the boys and anything else I needed to focus on my studies.

I am thankful for all my friends who supported me through this process but especially my study partners JoDee Dotson and Tammy Markland. Our countless Sunday study sessions pulled me through the stressful moments and the friendship bond we created is a cherished gift in my life. God does everything for a reason and I'm certain He put all of us in this program to find each other and embark on this amazing journey together.

I am blessed and thankful for all the remarkable individuals that helped me achieve this personal goal in my life.

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Acknowledgements

I wish to thank my committee members who were more than generous with their expertise and precious time. My committee chair, Dr. Howell, thank you for the guidance and meetings to help me start this whole process. Your patience and positive outlook gave me the encouragement I needed throughout this program. The knowledge possessed by Dr. Hilton-Prillhart to help me organize details and figure out the best way to present my research was enlightening and helpful. Your diligence in analyzing all the small details helped bring it all together. And, Dr. A. Kariuki, you taught me to explore and dig deeper to truly understand things from another's perspective. I appreciate all of my committee members supporting me and sending me feedback to develop this research project. Your knowledge and wisdom throughout this process was remarkable.

I am thankful for all the professors at Milligan College who helped prepare me for this final research project. The courses have been challenging but full of inspirational moments. Being part of Milligan College has ignited a passion in me to explore the teaching profession and see what new adventures await.

I thank the participants in this study for being open to share their personal experiences with me. It was a pleasure to work with all of you and I enjoyed understanding your passion for teaching from your own perspective.

And last but not least, my husband Jonathan. In my times of stress you kept me calm and many times told me to hang in there. I had an amazing support system from family, friends, colleagues, and professors to help me succeed in this doctoral program.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Teacher quality is frequently defined by credentials and experience when in reality these two areas determine a teacher's salary (Winters, 2012). As discussed by Winters (2012), it is almost impossible to identify the innate personal characteristics one possesses, creating a highly effective teacher committed to the profession. As stated by Stronge (2007), there is a perception from students, administrators, and teachers of what defines "good teaching" (p. 22). Many areas of the teaching profession that have been linked to effective teachers are classroom management, differentiation, instructional strategies, and academic achievement. However, Stronge (2007) explored the affective characteristics of educators to gain insight about teachers dedicated to the profession. The most important affective characteristic identified was caring (Stronge, 2007). The study by Stronge (2007) defines caring as "an act of bringing out the best in students through affirmation and encouragement" (p. 23). This affective characteristic of caring can be seen throughout an individual educator's interactions with students in and out of the classroom. Educators demonstrate this characteristic of caring by forming positive relationships with students regardless of socioeconomic status, race, or cultural background. These teachers know the value in creating a supportive learning environment and believe all students can learn (Stronge, 2007). These individuals improve students learning experiences by creating a desirable environment of fairness and respect. This affective characteristic of caring that is embedded in certain teachers drives them to the belief that it is their personal responsibility to ensure students master the content provided (Stronge, 2007).

Another study by McDermott and Rothenberg (2000) presented evidence from parents and students about effective teachers. The parents stated kindness, positive relationships, and

communication were the most important teacher characteristics. The parents from this focus group discussed the importance of a teacher being kind to their child, which helps build a trusting relationship between the child, teacher, and parent. The parents mentioned the need to hear positive details about their child, not just the negative issues. They discussed the importance of having regular communication with teachers to have a clear idea of how their child is performing academically and socially throughout the school day. The student focus group summarized an effective teacher by trust and respect (McDermott & Rothenberg, 2000). This student focus group wanted to feel that the teacher cared about them as a person and made an effort to build a positive relationship with them. The studies by Stronge (2007), McDermott and Rothenberg (2000), offer evidence that students and parents value key qualities of a teacher such as kindness, caring, trustworthy, and building positive relationships. McDermott and Rothenberg (2000) point out there are many teacher preparation programs however, teaching instructional strategies are learned in education programs whereas an individual's innate personal qualities cannot be acquired through textbooks. These studies identify there is a mixture of effective and ineffective educators and a solution is needed to identify and retain the highest quality individuals.

The inability to retain effective teachers is an issue faced across the state of Tennessee (Pratt & Booker, 2014). The Tennessee Department of Education reported in their policy brief that 60% of teachers within their first three years of teaching were more likely to move to other school districts (Pratt & Booker, 2014). The policy brief also stated 70-80% of teachers with overall effectiveness scores based on the Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model (TEAM), of level one, two, or three were more likely to leave the school district; whereas 80% of teachers at

level four and five were retained. In the 2011-2012 academic school year, Tennessee lost more than 1,200 level five educators (Pratt & Booker, 2014).

The TEAM evaluation system, adopted in 2011 by the state of Tennessee provides a rubric for teachers and administrators to follow as a guide for teacher observations. The intent of this evaluation system is for administrators to observe teachers during instructional time and give constructive feedback. This allows educators and administrators to have continuous support and input to improve teaching practices (TEAM Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model, n.d.).

As defined by the state of Tennessee, there are five levels of educator effectiveness. A teacher who receives a level 5 is performing “significantly above expectations” (Educator Effectiveness Descriptors, para. 1). This means this individual has solid instructional skills and uses data to drive the implementation of strategies ensuring students master curriculum goals. The next is level 4 where a teacher is performing “above expectations” (Educator Effectiveness Descriptors, para. 2). At this rating, a teacher comprehends instructional skills and implements them consistently. This individual is skilled at using data to increase student achievement. An educator with a level 3 is “at expectations” which means this individual understands and tries to implement appropriate instructional skills for student mastery of the content (Educator Effectiveness Descriptors, para. 3). A level 2 educator is “below expectations” meaning he/she demonstrates limited knowledge of instructional skills and struggles to use data to drive student achievement (Educator Effectiveness Descriptors, para. 4). The final is level 1 which is “significantly below expectations” (Educator Effectiveness Descriptors, para. 5). An educator who receives this rating struggles to implement appropriate instructional skills and does not understand how to use data to drive teaching and learning goals and objectives (TEAM

Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model, n.d.). This evaluation model is designed to support educators by growing them in the profession which will benefit students in content mastery.

Historically teacher shortages in schools have been attributed to teacher retirements and an increase in student populations (Watlington, Shockley, Guglielmino, & Felsher, 2010). This is a misconception since new data sheds light on the teaching profession by determining that about 50% of new teachers leave the profession within the first five years (Watlington et al., 2010). With such high turnover in public schools, administrators are forced to choose an educator who might have a lesser skill set than the original one. This negatively impacts student achievement particularly the at-risk student populations (Watlington et al., 2010). Schools that have higher populations of at-risk students and low-performance scores tend to have a higher turnover which means the most vulnerable students are being taught by novice teachers (Watlington et al., 2010).

Background of the Problem

When teachers are compared by postsecondary educational degrees earned, similarities are seen across teacher licensure programs (Winters, 2012). However, as discussed by Winters (2012), this is not enough to determine an individual's commitment to the profession. There are personal characteristics of quality teachers that are not easily observed prior to entering a classroom (Winters, 2012). According to Rice (2014) a few factors that lead to teacher retention from the teacher's perspective, include extended planning time, professional development, promotions, and a change in school leadership. In contrast, the article describes aspects that relate to a teacher's decision to leave a school which includes poor academic standards, poor student behavior, school facilities, and inadequate leadership (Rice, 2014).

It is clear that teacher attrition is a significant problem. This research study examines the qualities of teachers who are dedicated to the profession. Identifying specific personality traits and personal qualities gives insight to school administrators for consideration during the hiring process. Combining this study with existing literature adds to the knowledge base by bringing in a new element on how to retain the most qualified and effective teachers in public high schools.

Conceptual Framework

There is a gap in the literature that focuses on the qualities of teachers related to novice and experienced teachers who choose to remain in the profession. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) discuss the importance of understanding the meaning of a phenomenon through another's experience. The intent of this research study is to discover the qualities of teachers who choose to remain in the profession (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To understand why teachers are committed to the teaching profession, there needs to be an emphasis placed on understanding the profession from a teacher's perspective.

There are three areas of teacher quality identified by Day (2017) that school leaders influence. These areas include professional autonomy, professional capital, and teacher commitment including well-being and expertise. Teacher autonomy is influenced by culture, traditions, and school administration. Professional capital refers to the experiences gained enabling teachers to make wise decisions in a variety of circumstances. Teacher commitment relates to teachers being lifelong learners with a passion for teaching. Their expertise, wisdom, and decision capital have evolved over time with experience. The study concludes that teacher qualities are not innate or fixed but evolve over time on an individual level and are influenced by school leaders (Day, 2017).

The findings in each of these articles contribute to this research study by providing details related to teacher retention on a variety of topics such as traits, leadership, and areas that influence teacher quality. These studies, with the researcher's findings, provide a holistic view of teachers by defining qualities of teachers who are dedicated to the profession.

Statement of the Problem

As mentioned, teacher attrition poses a significant problem for the schools. It's the students who suffer when underprepared teachers fill positions, when class sizes are increased, and when courses get canceled. In addition, underqualified and underprepared teachers in these positions result in a negative impact on student learning. The purpose of this research is to explore the qualities of teachers who are committed to the profession. The research design is an embedded study that permits the researcher to dig deeper into teachers' experiences and perceptions about the teaching profession and understand their commitment to remaining in the profession.

Definition of Terms

The following is a list of terminology defined by the researcher that will be utilized throughout the study. To ensure words are interpreted correctly, the following definitions apply:

- 1) Novice teacher – a teacher with less than five years of teaching experience.
- 2) Experienced teacher – a teacher with more than five years of teaching experience.
- 3) Qualities of teachers – distinctive characteristics or traits of an individual's personality who are committed to the teaching profession (Kennedy, 2008).
- 4) Teacher retention – a teacher who remains in the profession until retirement.

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to explore the qualities of teachers who are committed to the profession. The study explored personality traits from novice and experienced educators to understand their commitment to the profession from their own experiences. This study brings new details to add to the existing knowledge base on defining qualities of teachers.

Research Questions

The research questions to be addressed in this study are:

1. What positive attributes are identified by teachers currently in the profession?
2. What challenges are identified by teachers currently in the profession?
3. How realistic are teachers' expectations upon entering the profession?
4. What trends emerge when comparing years of experience to self-identified personality traits?

Limitations

The present study had potential limitations. First, the study was limited to participants who voluntarily agreed to participate. Another potential limitation was novice and experienced teachers not permitting the interviews to be recorded. Next was a lack of novice teachers to interview. There was also the possibility that experienced teachers were concerned about job security; therefore, did not provide truthful responses during the study.

Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 has presented the introduction, background of the problem, conceptual framework, statement of the problem, research questions, significance of the study, definition of terms, and limitations of the study. Chapter 2 is a review of relevant literature pertaining to educators on the following topics: Positive attributes, challenges in the profession, self-efficacy

and personality traits, and teacher expectations. Prior to the examination of these topics, a conceptual framework was presented to shape the literature review. The methodology and the procedures used to gather data are presented in Chapter 3. The results of analyses and findings to emerge from the study are contained in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 presents the discussion and analysis of the results, culminating in conclusions and recommendations for further study.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

There is a wealth of knowledge and collaboration that exists in schools. As mentioned by Mello (2011), there was a need to identify high-potential employees and further develop their skills. Many teachers continue seeking opportunities to develop in their profession while inspiring and supporting their colleagues for the betterment of their school (Margolis & Huggins, 2012). By developing teachers within the profession, administrators created a school climate that nurtured the teaching staff (Dufour & Marzano, 2011). In doing this they began to create an environment that supports teacher growth with the goal of retaining these teachers within the school and profession (Martin, Buelow, & Hoffman, 2015).

Positive Attributes

Creating committed teachers requires more than just providing them with a teacher toolbox filled with research-based instructional strategies (Benedetti, 2016). Arming teachers with resources provided them support in the first year of teaching. However, the main goal was to drive them towards a life-long commitment to the profession which comes from one's beliefs and creativity (Benedetti, 2016). Educators who felt supported to learn and grow in the profession had positive morale and job satisfaction which led to a higher chance of teacher retention (Scherer, M., & Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2003). Benedetti (2016) indicated that individuals who chose to teach as a profession had an innate desire to help others. They needed to be equipped with strategies while utilizing their passion and creativity to develop and fine-tune their teaching skills. This nurtured a sense of joy throughout their teaching career and contributed to their commitment to the profession (Benedetti, 2016).

There were three areas that drove teacher commitment: envision, engage, and execute (Benedetti, 2016). As teachers entered the profession they needed to develop their personal vision. They envisioned what they wanted for students, themselves, and the profession. This vision guided their instruction and helped them overcome obstacles. The next area explained by Benedetti (2016), was to be engaged with the curriculum. This allowed teachers to critically think and examine curriculum providing critical connections with instruction and student needs. The last area was to execute, which provided teachers the chance to understand strategies but have the confidence to modify strategies to ensure the focus was on the student learner. An instructional strategy was not meant to be memorized because there was no “one-size-fits-all” approach in education (Benedetti, 2016, p.80).

Being committed to the profession required an educator to continue to improve throughout their careers. As Nieto (2003) described, committed teachers possessed qualities of love and respect for the profession. Individuals who possessed these traits were truly committed to staying in the profession for the love of students. As life-long learners, successfully committed educators seek a leadership team to provide guidance throughout their career while striving to improve student achievement. Fostering teacher leadership provided an avenue to retain quality educators within the profession (Dufour & Marzano, 2011).

Teacher leaders were assets to schools. The human element was one of the most critical elements in any organization (Mello, 2015). These individuals served as mentors, influenced policy changes, improved instructional practices, and promoted teacher retention. Teacher leaders created a collaborative and supportive environment with their colleagues. These individuals tried new ideas and shared with their colleagues to improve teaching strategies in their own classrooms (Cooper et al., 2016).

According to a study by Devos, Tuytens, and Hulpia (2014), teachers desired a collaborative approach with school leadership teams guided by clear goals and initiatives. The school leadership teams were defined as the principal, assistant principal, and teacher leaders. School's offering a supportive environment, clear vision, and instructional support nurtured an organization's commitment within the teaching staff (Devos et al., 2014).

School leaders who shared a vision and provided guidance were more likely to have a committed staff (Devos et al., 2014). Enabling the staff to be part of the decision making process empowered them by creating a sense of worth for the organization. Their voice mattered and was heard by school leaders. These were the individuals who were committed to the organization as a whole, not just the teaching profession (Devos et al., 2014).

Quality teachers were life-long learners who sought opportunities to improve teaching practices (Day, 2017). These individuals were committed to the teaching profession and maintained high expectations for student achievement regardless of state-mandated policies. Innovative teachers had a willingness to learn new strategies and apply them in the classroom (Day, 2017). They were not deterred if a new technique did not work out. They used their knowledge and expertise to adapt the technique to work within the desired setting (Day, 2017). These were the individuals who seek opportunities for improvement (Dotson & Santos, 2016).

Teachers had many responsibilities throughout the school day. These responsibilities went beyond classroom instruction (Kotter, 2012). There were teachers who looked for opportunities to be more involved in schoolwide initiatives. Many teachers desired new ways to be involved in the school and district; if they saw a gap they took the initiative to implement changes (Margolis & Huggins, 2012). Each teacher leader became a resource that could be used in schools to help others meet curriculum goals improving student achievement. School

leadership provided a forum to support educators in the teaching profession. This strengthened a teacher's commitment to the profession and their school of employment (Dufour & Marzano, 2011).

The implementation of a teacher leadership team provided support as teachers grew in the profession to strengthen their self-efficacy and commitment to the profession (Dufour & Marzano, 2011). Schools and districts that had teacher leadership teams supporting initiatives such as professional learning communities, mentors, and professional development created a desirable environment to retain highly qualified educators (Dufour & Marzano, 2011).

Challenges in the Profession

There were two types of teacher turnover - attrition and migration. Attrition was teachers leaving the profession; migration was when teachers moved to a different school (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). According to research conducted during the 2011-2012 school year by the Tennessee Department of Education (Pratt & Booker, 2014), 92% of Tennessee teachers continued to teach in Tennessee; however, about 10% of these teachers moved to a different school district. Nationally, less than 85% of educators were retained in the same school district. Research conducted by Pratt and Booker (2014) identified areas school leaders could strengthen to retain highly effective quality teachers. The first was providing teachers with time to prepare instructional lessons with minimal interruptions. The next area was creating a collaborative and productive work environment which increased a teacher's desire to remain in a particular school. These results demonstrated the severity of attrition and migration across the teaching profession which was a relatively large occupation (Pratt & Booker, 2014).

The teaching profession represented four percent of the workforce meaning there were more teachers than nurses or lawyers. According to the National Center for Education Statistics

(2018), there were 56.6 million students enrolled in elementary and secondary schools. This number was comprised of 50.7 million students in the public education sector and 5.9 million in private schools. The public schools employed about 3.2 million full-time teachers totaling about \$654 billion in salaries for the 2018-2019 school years.

Ingersoll and Smith (2003) explained that employee turnover was a significant problem among organizations and industries because of the skills lost when employees left. This was also detrimental in the teaching profession because it affected student performance. A study by Young (2018) indicated that when a school had high teacher turnover it affected student test scores by a decrease of 7-9% in math courses and 6-8% lower in the English curriculum. However, it implied other factors may cause poor student performance such as high poverty rates, higher crime, and poor school leadership (Young, 2018). There was a need to find and retain quality teachers within the profession and it began with the new teachers entering the profession (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003).

The largest group to leave the teaching profession was first-year teachers (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). Many first-year teachers came out of their educational preparation programs but needed additional support as they entered the profession (Martin, Buelow, & Hoffman, 2015). The schools that offered an induction program for first-year students had higher retention rates. First-year teachers needed guidance and support to navigate the curriculum, classroom management, and collaborate with veteran teachers. Without an induction program, first-year teachers often felt overwhelmed, unsupported by administrators, and unprepared to meet student needs. There were also external factors affecting first-year teacher's decision to leave the profession such as new job opportunities and personal reasons (Martin, Buelow, & Hoffman, 2015).

When teachers left the profession there was more at stake than just another position to fill (Watlington et al., 2010). The position may be filled but the skills and knowledge lost from a teacher exiting the profession could not be quantified by numbers alone. There was a decrease in academic student achievement if a lesser qualified individual was the replacement. However, it was estimated that teacher attrition cost was about \$2.2 billion nationwide (Watlington et al., 2010).

Teachers were not only leaving schools but leaving the profession altogether (Watlington et al., 2010). The most common age range of those who left teaching for other careers included educators aged 25-34 years. Over the past three years, the number of educators transferring to careers outside of teaching was greater than the numbers who stayed in the profession (Grundy, 2018). The loss of high-quality educators affected the ability of schools to provide high-quality instruction in the classrooms because of the skills and knowledge base lost when these educators left (Watlington et al., 2010). Teacher turnover was highest in high-minority, low-performing student populations due to poor working conditions, increased student behavior problems and lack of administrative support. This caused an at-risk school to spend more time replacing teachers versus improving the curriculum and resources available for student growth and achievement (Watlington et al., 2010).

It was imperative for school administrators to determine how to attract and retain the most highly qualified educators in their schools. Teachers were required to earn an education degree by completing specific coursework related to being a highly effective teacher (Winters, 2012). Credentials and experience were the two primary areas that determined a teacher's salary (Winters, 2012). If teachers were compared by education degrees earned, they would all be very similar. However, the qualities of teachers could not be defined by credentials and experience

(Winters, 2012). There were several other innate traits to focus on when recruiting, hiring, and retaining a highly qualified educator (Winters, 2012).

Self-Efficacy and Personality Traits

Research about teacher efficacy began in the late 1970s by Bandura and stemmed from his social cognitive theory (as cited in Mosoge, Challens & Xaba, 2018). It discussed human nature's belief that one influences a situation to obtain the desired result. Related to teacher efficacy, the belief was that one can influence the school and students as a whole by one's actions (Mosoge et al., 2018). The meaning of efficacy as determined by Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, and Hoy (1998) was a belief in one's own ability which contributes to the teacher's self-perception of teaching competencies. It was a belief in one's capability to pursue and accomplish a specific teaching task. Teachers who had high efficacy tend to feel competent and capable of handling difficult situations within the teaching profession. This feeling of confidence and determination provided them with a wealth of experiences to learn from in order to fine-tune their teaching practices as they progressed in their teaching career (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998).

Self-efficacy was a motivator for teachers in the profession. As teachers gained more experience, they began to develop their professional identity. This identity was a product of their self-efficacy (Canrinus, Helms-Lorenz, Beijaar, Buitink, & Hofman, 2012). As stated by Ergün and Avici (2018), self-efficacy was defined by an individual's perception of his/her own skills needed to complete tasks present in their work environment. It was a "self-evaluation" to determine which skills they possessed to problem solve "when faced with obstacles" (Ergün & Avci, 2018, p. 62).

The teaching profession was known to bring a heavy workload and stress to individuals (Klassen et al., 2013). Teachers were managing curriculum, classroom instruction, and a multitude of student behavior on a daily basis. Individuals with high self-efficacy developed the ability to resolve issues early on in a teaching career (Klassen et al., 2013). These individuals recognized the problems and found solutions. These problem-solving skills served them well as they continued to grow in the profession and it strengthened their commitment to the profession. However, individuals with low self-efficacy became frustrated with stress and student behavior and tended to leave the profession (Klassen et al., 2013). By strengthening an educator's self-efficacy in the first few years of teaching, it increased the chances of an individual remaining in the profession (Kelleher, 2016).

Kelleher (2016) has identified four areas to strengthen an individual's self-efficacy. The first was mastery experiences which lays the foundation that if an individual completed a task successfully he or she will expect the same outcome when faced with the task in the future. The second was vicarious experiences providing a frame of reference comparing oneself to another of equal abilities. The third was verbal persuasion which provided positive feedback and encouragement from a respected individual pushing one to achieve a specific result. Lastly, emotions such as stress or tension bolstered self-efficacy or lowered it (Kelleher, 2016). Being aware of these four areas identified by Kelleher (2016) provided educators the opportunity to develop themselves in each area strengthening their abilities in the education profession. Teachers with high self-efficacy demonstrated qualities of being problem solvers and handling stressful situations which increased their confidence in the profession (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998).

It was the innate personal characteristics of an individual that made one teacher stand above the rest. These characteristics included patience, enthusiasm and being able to adapt to student needs (Winters, 2012). These characteristics were not easily observed prior to the teacher entering a classroom (Winters, 2012). No two teachers were the same as they planned and taught lessons. However, the goal remained the same which was to educate children and increase academic student achievement. Teachers possessed some similar characteristics such as being reflective and perceptive (Wilshaw, 2012). Being reflective required the teacher to determine if the material being taught was mastered by students or not. This reflection enabled the teacher to adapt and change at the moment to meet the instructional needs of the students. The characteristic of being perceptive was being aware of what was happening in the classroom while teaching. Being perceptive included managing classroom behavior and gauging student's comprehension of instructional material presented (Wilshaw, 2012). Kennedy (2008) argues that one needed to explore whether being reflective and perceptive were characteristics of teacher quality or teacher effectiveness.

In defining teacher quality it was essential to distinguish qualities of teachers. According to Kennedy (2008), there were three levels to explore, personality traits, performance, and effectiveness. Personality traits referred to a teacher's personal values and beliefs that typically drove them into the education field. They had a desire to educate students. The second level, performance, referred to the daily classroom activities and instructional practices. The last one, effectiveness was test score driven. An educator who received high student test scores or improved school growth was considered to be an effective educator (Kennedy, 2008). Wilshaw (2012) and Kennedy (2008) both made distinctions between teacher characteristics. Their studies shed light on the subject that some individuals had innate characteristics and qualities that

made them well suited for the teaching profession. The difficulty in distinguishing qualities of teachers was determining which area to focus on during the hiring process (Kennedy, 2008).

Scherer and the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (2003) created a list of qualities of teachers. This list began to define the most important qualities teachers dedicated to the profession possessed. The first quality defined was “willingness to put in the necessary time” (p. 219) which required time beyond the regular school hours. Meeting with students during planning time or after school was embedded in the day (Scherer & ASCD, 2003). The second quality was “love for the age group they teach” (p. 220), meaning many teachers had a particular age group they preferred to teach. It’s vital to match the teacher’s skills and interests with the student ages to be taught; therefore, school administrators should consider this when placing teachers throughout their schools (Scherer & ASCD, 2003). The third quality was “an effective classroom management style” (p. 221) where teachers developed their own style of classroom management, however; there were some commonalities such as few behavior problems and a culture of respect (Scherer & ASCD, 2003). The fourth quality was “positive relationships with other adults” (Scherer & ASCD, 2003, p. 221). These individuals established positive relationships with colleagues, administrators, parents, and students. They became partners with families to implement the best education program for their children. The fifth quality was “consistent excellence” (p. 22) which explained teachers had struggles; however, they consistently integrated new practices strengthening their knowledge and skills in the profession (Scherer & ASCD, 2003). The sixth quality was “expert use of instructional methods” (p. 223) which was becoming proficient in a variety of researched-based instructional strategies (Scherer & ASCD, 2003). The seventh quality on the list by Scherer and the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (2003) was “in-depth content

knowledge” (p. 223) which acknowledged preparations for teaching the content took time and teachers spent as much time as required to ensure they were prepared for the lesson. The seventh quality was “capacity for growth” (p. 223) describing how outstanding teachers continued to grow professionally by furthering their education, professional development, and serving on committees (Scherer & ASCD, 2003). The final quality discussed by Scherer and the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (2003) was “steadiness of purpose and teaching personality” (p. 224), meaning teachers were not performers. They held students interest by crafting interesting lessons. The qualities listed above gave insight into the teaching profession and its complexity.

By understanding a teacher’s personal values and beliefs administrators gained insight related to their commitment to remaining in the teaching profession. This provided a platform for administrators to identify the qualities of exceptional educators to hire, develop, and retain in the profession (Scherer & ASCD, 2003). The fundamental element was to recognize the individual that sees teaching as a personal mission, not just a job (Steele, 2009).

Teacher Expectations

Many individuals who decided to become educators taught within a 20-mile radius of their former high school. Some teacher candidates were disillusioned about the scope of skills needed when deciding to enter the teaching profession (Brown, 2016). Their expectations upon entering the classroom were to teach the standards and objectives (Ambrosetti, 2010). However, they soon learned that some of the core values in teaching went beyond the daily lesson plan. They involved building relationships with students, becoming an expert in content knowledge, having solid organizational and planning skills to meet student’s diverse needs, executing

research-based instructional strategies to improve student learning, and data-driven reflective practices to increase student achievement (Brown, 2016).

When hiring a new teacher candidate principals had an expectation that these individuals had solid content knowledge expertise and a passion for teaching and working with students (Bigham, Hively, & Toole, 2014). Novice teacher candidates possessed a basic foundation of these skills but there was a need to develop them as they entered the profession. Classroom management was one of the main areas identified as a gap for new teachers. Principals understood that strengthening this area comes through experience of being in the classroom; however, there was a need to ensure proper supports were in place to guide the novice teachers (Bigham, Hively, & Toole, 2014).

Early on in teaching careers novice teachers began to realize the challenge of teaching state standards, being held accountable for standardized testing and managing classroom behavior. A novice teacher entered the profession with creative ideas and an eagerness to educate students but soon discovered the overwhelming pressure of accountability (Everitt, 2018). Many of the novice teachers concluded that student behavior and diverse abilities hindered student achievement. Often times, a student came to school with no desire to learn. The teachers had a duty to teach all students but there were some that did not want to be reached. The teachers felt a sense of frustration and failure with these students (Everitt, 2018). However, more experienced educators have learned that they are not only there to teach academic content but were invested in students social and emotional needs as well. Some teachers were quick to disregard the daily lesson if a student needed to talk about a private matter (Everitt, 2018). This teacher values students' personal well-being over meeting the academic standards and objectives. The novice teachers had the expectation to teach the lesson but when other issues arose they

expressed frustration and anxiety due to the high levels of accountability in student achievement. Whereas, the experienced educators learned over the years that if a lesson was not completed during a particular day it would be finished tomorrow (Everitt, 2018). Through numerous years of teaching the educators learned that more often than not the daily routine of the class would have to be altered whether it involved personal student issues or school-wide interruptions. They had flexibility and knew how to adapt. The novice educators were unprepared for this aspect within the teaching career (Everitt, 2018).

Teacher candidates expressed frustration when they did not finish an intended lesson due to factors out of their control such as an assembly, fire drill, testing day, or discipline issues. They felt a sense of failure because the academic standards were not accomplished for that day (Everitt, 2018). However, as they progressed into a more experienced educator they began to understand how to adapt. Teachers had autonomy in their classroom and when numerous interruptions occurred during a day they determined what the best option for the class was such as continuing the lesson or modifying it (Everitt, 2018). Teachers looked forward to being in their classroom because they had control over how to proceed. This autonomy provided a sense of security for them to be flexible but productive simultaneously. They were able to adapt their plans based on administrative interruptions beyond their control (Everitt, 2018).

The expectations of teachers as they entered the profession evolved over time as they gained more experience. Steele (2009) explained that teachers moved through several stages as they entered the profession. These stages were unaware, aware, capable, and ultimately to inspired (Steele, 2009). One of the main differences in these teacher stages was experience. The unaware stage was typically a novice teacher just entering the profession who had content knowledge but lacked student knowledge (Steele, 2009). The aware teacher as mentioned by

Steele (2009) had more experience and began to notice instructional practices while becoming proficient in identifying student needs. Whereas, the capable teacher had a high command of instructional practices and was able to read students to determine how to adjust lessons on the spot ensuring students achieved mastery of the content presented (Steele, 2009). Lastly, the inspired teacher had a plethora of pedagogy knowledge, knew the needs of all students and adapted while nurturing a positive learning environment (Steele, 2009). The goal was to create an environment that encouraged teachers to grow by experience, encouragement, and support moving from an unaware stage into the aware and capable stage emerging into inspired educators.

Misconceptions about the teaching profession existed that it was a job or role instead of a life-long learning process to become an educator. Being an educator was a profession that requires resources and support to continually learn and practice specific skills related to education (Olsen & Buchanan, 2017). In order to create inspired teachers, schools created an environment that nurtured the path from unaware or novice teachers to the master and inspired level teachers. Teacher expectations changed with experience. It was impossible to account for every variable upon entering a classroom (Futernick, 2010). Novice teachers had an image of what teaching was and soon learned there were many areas of uncertainty for them. However, with support and resources teachers understood the importance of flexibility and being adaptable in the classroom (Everitt, 2018).

Summary

In conclusion, teachers exhibited positive attributes such as being committed to the profession and being life-long learners. They possessed a love for the profession to educate students (Nieto, 2003). There were challenges in the profession that caused first-year teachers to

migrate to other schools or leave the teaching field altogether (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003).

However, as teachers gained more experience in the profession they developed their self-identity which led to improved instructional practices and the ability to handle a variety of issues that arose throughout the school day (Klassen et al., 2013). Novice teachers entered the profession with expectations of what the day to day activities were but soon discovered they had a learning curve to truly understand the demands of the classroom and accountability pressures (Everitt, 2018).

Finally, although the literature indicated there were various factors impacting teacher turnover, this study explored teacher retention from a new perspective to add to the existing knowledge base. The intent was to explore the qualities of teachers to identify who remained in the profession not to focus on the environmental factors of a school.

CHAPTER 3

Methods

The purpose of this research study was to identify the qualities of teachers who were committed to the teaching profession using a sample of novice and experienced educators. This chapter details the design, methods, and procedures used to answer the research questions that guide this study. This chapter presents details related to the participant selections, data instrumentation, data collection procedures, and data analysis.

Research Questions

The research questions addressed in this study were:

1. What positive attributes are identified by teachers currently in the profession?
2. What challenges are identified by teachers currently in the profession?
3. How realistic are teachers' expectations upon entering the profession?
4. What trends emerge when comparing years of experience to self-identified personality traits?

Prior to initiating the study, the research proposal was approved by Milligan College's Institutional Review Board (IRB) (Appendix A). The research proposal identified five high schools in different districts in Upper East Tennessee as targets for the research study. The schools were a combination of city and county districts. In order to initiate the study, permission had to be obtained from each school district. The directors of schools were contacted to begin the process of approval. Each school district required a review of the research proposal and a copy of the IRB approval form from Milligan College. Upon approval, at the district level, the principals at each school were contacted with a letter and consent form to begin the research study in their high school (Appendix B).

To most effectively facilitate the research on identifying the qualities of teachers who remained in the profession, an embedded study was designed and conducted. This research method provided an in-depth understanding of an individual's self-awareness as an educator as well as understanding their reasons to remain in the profession (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The rationale in using an embedded design approach was to ensure the research problem was fully explored providing a complete understanding of the findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). As mentioned by Creswell and Plano Clark (2011), using an embedded design enhanced the study by combining both quantitative and qualitative elements. The quantitative element provided details about specific personality traits the participants possessed and how these changed with years of experience. The qualitative data enhanced the integrity of the findings by analyzing the phenomenon from the participant's perspective. This study encompassed a variety of methods for research focusing on gathering non-numerical data. The nature of this research study was to gather data from teachers and look for emerging trends and patterns to answer the research questions that guided this study.

Data Collection Method

This study used mixed survey instruments. The instruments included a Google form to gather basic demographic data, a personality survey, and interviews. The researcher used a Google form to collect demographic data from various school districts to aid in identifying participants for the study (See Appendix D). The participants were selected by sending an email requesting their participation in the research study. A variety of participants were emailed based on teaching years of experience to ensure a wide range would be covered from the novice level of 1-2 years teaching experience all the way up to ones with more than 15 years of experience (Appendix C). Once participants were selected they were sent a personality survey designed by

the company Talegent (See Appendix E). The personality survey was administered through an electronic platform via Talegent's website. The final element was the in-person interviews. The interview questions were open-ended semi-structured (See Appendix F).

Participants

The target populations for this research study were high school teachers in Upper East Tennessee. The participants were educators from county and city schools with varying levels of teaching experience and advanced degrees. The candidates were males and females with various levels of teaching experience as well as advanced teaching credentials. The researcher targeted a variety of individuals to understand the qualities of teachers at various stages in their teaching career. Participants included a male and female with a bachelor's degree and 1-3 years of teaching experience. The next participants were male and female with 5-10 years of teaching experience and who possessed an advanced degree. The final level of participants had 15+ years of teaching experience with or without advanced degrees. The total number of participants was seven.

Mixed Instrumentation

There were several mixed instruments utilized throughout the research study. The first was the email with a Google form to gather demographic details (See Appendix D). The researcher designed a Google form to gather demographic details on potential participants. This form gathered information about gender, educational credentials, years of teaching experience, and desire to remain or leave the profession. Next was the Talegent personality assessment (See Appendix E) which was administered to selected participants for the study. The final instrument was the interview questions (See Appendix F).

The first data instrument utilized was the researcher made Google form. This form consisted of 12 questions and was intended to gather demographic details, educational levels, teaching experiences, and an individual's desire to remain in the profession or leave. Upon district approval the survey was sent to high school principals to forward to their teaching staff. The survey took approximately 5-10 minutes for educators to complete. The responses provided a baseline of demographic data.

The next data instrument was the personality assessment provided by a company called Talegent. The *Mental Measurements Yearbook* was utilized to determine which personality test provided the most critical attributes in defining qualities of teachers (Carlson, Geisinger, & Jonson, 2017). This book provided a wealth of standardized tests widely used in various industries such as psychology, business, law, health care, counseling, management, and education. The standardized tests mentioned throughout the publication have been reviewed by various professionals providing details about the test such as purpose, target audience, how to administer, and scoring (Carlson, Geisinger, & Jonson, 2017). The company Talegent was in *The Mental Measurements Yearbook* offering a personality assessment to identify traits of employees.

Talegent was located in Auckland, New Zealand. The company focused on providing predictive analytics to corporations. The Path Personality Assessment was chosen to provide insight into the motivation and internal drive that teachers possessed. This assessment took about 30 minutes to complete and consisted of a series of Likert item questions. The Talegent report presented results in six sections: Interpersonal, temperament, thinking, execution, drive, and self-presentation. These main sections were divided into subcategories to give an in-depth report of each participant. The table below details the subcategories for each section.

Table 1

Talegent Personality Assessment

| Main Category | Subcategories |
|-------------------|---|
| Interpersonal | Influential, Directing, Motivating, Amiable, Empathetic, Collaborative, Sociable, Socially Aware, Trusting, Accepting |
| Temperament | Self-Confident, Adaptable, Composed, Optimistic |
| Thinking | Data Driven, intuitive, Analytical, Strategic, Theoretical, Innovative, Learning Focused |
| Execution | Compliant, Risk Tolerant, Work Focused, Meticulous, Reliable |
| Drive | Energetic, Competitive, Driven, Decisive |
| Self-Presentation | Receptive, Self-Aware |

The Likert items were rated one through ten. Each subcategory had two perspectives, for example in subcategory learning focused a one represented satisfied with current knowledge and ten represented driven to develop skills and knowledge. The numbers were representative of each category to determine where each participant scored in the subcategories. This was a self-report questionnaire meaning the results represented how an individual perceives himself/herself and his/her behavior (Talegent, 2017).

Talegent provided extensive research about the reliability and validity of their Path survey's (Talegent Whitepaper, 2014). The research for the reliability of the personality

questionnaire completed by Talegent revealed the questionnaires had a median Cronbach's Alpha of 0.81. This number was considered an acceptable range for research related to science education (Taber, 2018). The Cronbach's Alpha was an indication that the cognitive questions asked on the Talegent personality survey identified the personality traits of individuals linked to specific careers (Taber, 2018). This demonstrated there was internal consistency throughout the questionnaire (Talegent Whitepaper, 2014). The reviewers of the Talegent Path survey's deemed it valid due to an extensive technical manual that covered all aspects of the creation of the Path surveys including the theoretical perspective, literature review, sampling, best practices, fairness and more. The reviewer noted this survey tool was a valuable resource to identify candidates who were well suited for hiring as well as matching roles and skills for current employees (Carlson, Geisinger, & Johnson, 2017).

The final data collection was through personal interviews. The interview consisted of 15 semi-structured questions. The semi-structured format provided flexibility during the interview and allowed the researcher to capture the unique perspectives of each participant (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The interview questions were provided ahead of time to the participants to allow him/her time to prepare his/her thoughts. The researcher recorded the interviews. There were a variety of transcriptions software programs to use however, the researcher preferred to transcribe by herself. By choosing to transcribe the interview, the researcher had the opportunity to become more familiar with the data and had the opportunity to make notes while transcribing each individual interview (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Data Analysis Method

Using mixed survey instruments provided the researcher with unique methods to analyze the data. For the Talegent personality survey, a summary was provided for each category for

participants based on their responses to the questions. The report generated from Talegent was analyzed to plot individual scores with regard to years of teaching in order to identify trends. The trends that emerged were compared with data from the interviews enabling the researcher to create a more holistic perspective of the qualities of teachers.

The interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. A thematic analysis was classified as a qualitative descriptive design. The key characteristics include coding data, examining the meaning, and creating themes. The thematic analysis provided flexibility in data analysis because it provided rich descriptive details, however, it went a step further by searching for and identifying common patterns that spanned across an individual interview or a group of interviews related to a particular topic (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013).

Thematic analysis was defined by Braun and Clarke (2006), as a qualitative method used to identify and report themes within a data set such as interviews. Utilizing this method allowed the researcher to organize and describe the details gathered through the interviews. All participants read and signed the consent forms, were interviewed and audio recorded for between 30-45 minutes. Open-ended semi-structured format questions were used to provide the researcher with the opportunity to adapt or elaborate on questions that provided a two-way dialogue for exploring themes related to the research questions. Once all the data had been collected the analysis phase had several parts that were outlined by Braun & Clark (as cited in Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013). Table 2 provides a detailed explanation of the thematic data analysis process.

Table 2

Thematic Data Analysis Process

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| Familiarizing with data | Transcribing data, reading and rereading the data, noting down initial ideas. |
|-------------------------|---|

| | |
|----------------------------|--|
| Generating initial codes | Coding interesting features of the data systematically across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code. |
| Searching for themes | Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme. |
| Reviewing themes | Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set, generating a thematic map. |
| Defining and naming themes | Ongoing analysis for refining the specifics of each theme and the overall story that the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme. |
| Producing the report | The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, the final analysis of selected extracts, relating back to the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a report of the analysis. |

Coding

The coding process began during the transcription of the interviews. Common terminology used among participants was identified in the transcriptions. The terms were then used to begin interpretation and formal organization of the data. This process involved creating a spreadsheet to organize the data using open coding which consisted of basic words and then moved to categories with supporting details which led to emerging themes. Due to the vast amount of data from the interviews a strategy of labeling passages that aligned with the research questions was implemented (Belotto, 2018).

The researcher identified common words used among the participants to begin the coding process by writing notes in the margins of the interview transcriptions. Once this was completed a spreadsheet was developed to categorize the words based on similarities. From these

categories began the process of reviewing and identifying the emerging themes. As themes were identified the words and phrases that supported the themes were categorized into a spreadsheet to assist in the reporting phase. This strategy assisted with discovering answers to the research questions that guided this study.

Trustworthiness

In order to increase the trustworthiness and credibility of this research study's findings, triangulation and member checks were utilized (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Data was collected from the participants using a personality assessment and in-person interviews. The personality assessment provided details about innate personality traits; whereas, the interviews gave the researcher the opportunity to understand being committed to the teaching profession from the participants perspective.

Another strategy applied to the study was member checks (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This strategy was employed to increase the internal validity of the research. The interview component required the researcher to interpret the words spoken by the participants. By engaging the member checks, it provided a chance to review the preliminary findings of the data collected during the interview with the participants. This provided the opportunity for the participants to ensure their perspective was captured accurately (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Summary

This chapter explained the methodology used in this research study. The chapter contained the purpose of the study, research questions, research study design, and data analysis techniques employed. The context of the study was presented which included the data collection methods as well as analytical strategies performed. The final part of this chapter discussed the

trustworthiness and credibility of the research study by executing the triangulation process to strengthen the quality of the findings.

CHAPTER 4

Findings and Results

The following chapter provides a description and explanation of the findings for this research study. The personality assessment results are presented first followed by the interview analysis. The findings compared the different perspectives and identified common themes from the participants in the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The purpose of this research was to identify the qualities of teachers who chose to remain in the teaching profession. The study targeted teachers with varying years of teaching experience. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What positive attributes are identified by teachers currently in the profession?
2. What challenges are identified by teachers currently in the profession?
3. How realistic are teachers’ expectations upon entering the profession?
4. What trends emerge when comparing years of experience to self-identified personality traits?

Personality Assessment Findings and Results

Seven participants were purposefully selected for this study. Four females and three males agreed to participate. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym in accordance with IRB protocol to protect confidentiality. The table below represents the general demographics of teachers selected.

Table 3

Summary of Interview Participants

| Participant | Gender | Credentials | Years Taught | Content Area |
|-------------|--------|-----------------|-------------------------------|--------------|
| Vicki | Female | Bachelor Degree | 1 st -year teacher | Math |

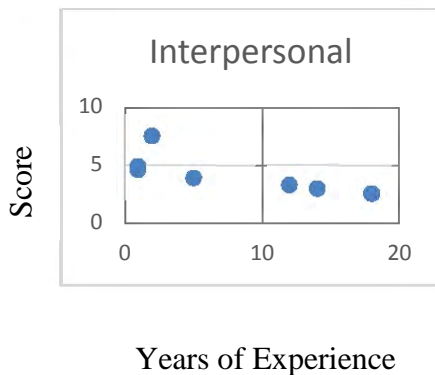
| | | | | |
|-------|--------|------------------------|-------------------------------|---------|
| Mark | Male | Bachelor Degree | 1 st -year teacher | History |
| Lynne | Female | Bachelor Degree | 2 years | English |
| Rick | Male | Bachelor Degree | 5 years | History |
| Annie | Female | Master Degree | 12 years | English |
| Angie | Female | Master Degree | 14 years | Spanish |
| Dave | Male | Educational Specialist | 18 years | History |

The Talegent Path Personality assessment was administered to gather details pertaining to individual personalities as they perceive themselves. The personality characteristics measured by this instrument were interpersonal, temperament, thinking, execution, drive, and self-presentation. A composite score for each category was compared with years of teaching experience for each category. The results of the personality assessment align to answer the research question: What trends emerge when comparing years of experience to self-identified personality traits?

Interpersonal

A visible trend started to emerge for the interpersonal trait was over time an individual was slightly less likely to assume a leadership role outside of the classroom. No clear trends were visible for the other categories associated with interpersonal.

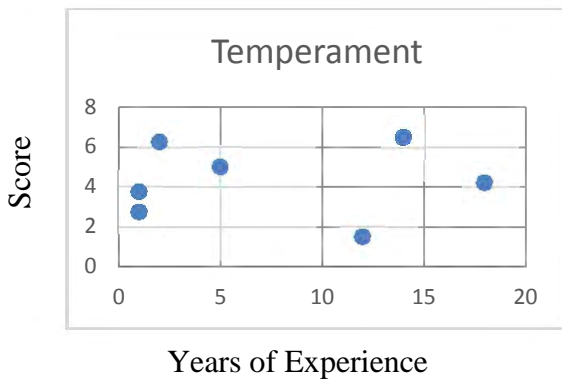
Figure 1



Temperament

The results from the temperament category indicated in Figure 2, the more years an individual has in the teaching profession the more self-confident, adaptable, composed and optimistic one became. The first-year teachers had a lower composite score which indicated they were uncertain of their abilities to perform well in the profession. However, with more experience, this area was strengthened.

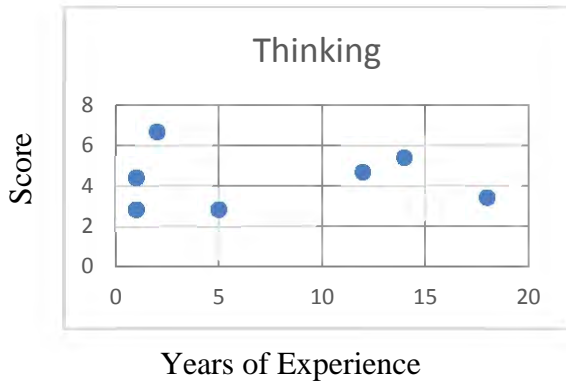
Figure 2



Thinking

The results of thinking characteristics are related to intuition versus empirical data used for the decision-making process. The results demonstrated that experienced teachers rely on their intuition in the decision making process whereas novice teachers analyze data to inform their decisions. Figure 3 illustrates the thinking process between novice and experienced teachers.

Figure 3



Execution

As figure 4 illustrated there were some commonalities among novice and experienced teachers related to execution. The data indicated that novice and experienced teachers were compliant with rules but cautious about taking risk. They were engaged in work tasks and their organization skills led to being detailed focused.

Figure 4



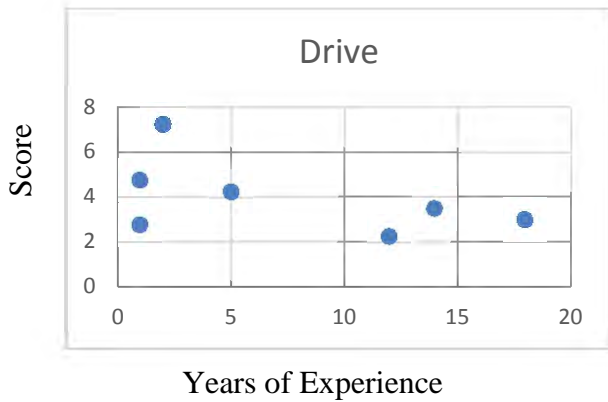
Drive

The results from Figure 5 demonstrated that the novice teachers were energetic and highly motivated whereas with more years of experience these traits go down. The experienced

teachers prefer a relaxed work environment with minimum pressure to complete tasks.

However, novice teachers preferred a competitive environment.

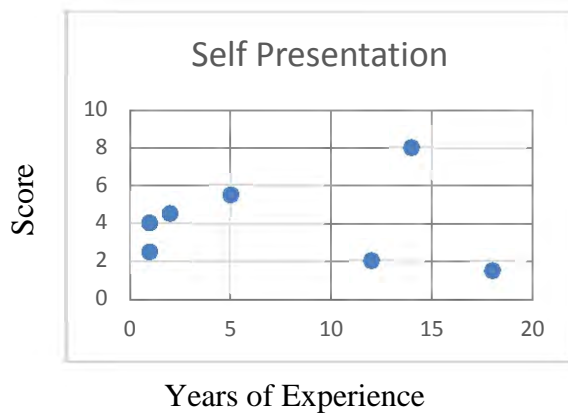
Figure 5



Self-Presentation

The results in this category indicated that the novice teachers were defensive about feedback and unaware of their limitations. Educators with 11-15 years of experience were open to feedback and understood their strengths and weaknesses. However, the educator with 18 years of experience was more aligned with the novice teachers is being defensive about feedback and unaware of limitations.

Figure 6



Interview Findings and Results

No more than two interviews took place in a week. The interviews took place in the participant’s classroom or an off-site location. The teachers at the county school preferred to schedule the interview during their planning time or after school. The interviews for the city school teachers took place at a coffee shop. All participants agreed to allow the researcher to record the interview. The interview questions were provided ahead of time to allow teachers time to review.

Thematic analysis was used to identify major themes that emerged from the interviews. The table below represents the initial analysis of organizing the data.

Table 4

Organization of Interview Data

| Research Focus | Basic Themes | Organizing Themes | Global Theme |
|--------------------------|--|--|----------------------|
| Positive Attributes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Care for students • Build Relationships • Compassion • Patience • Knowledgeable | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caring Relationships • Patience | Compassion |
| Challenges in Profession | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Behavior • Clear expectations • Meticulous | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Behavior • Effective Communicator • Organization | Classroom Management |
| Realistic Expectations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students want to learn • Students work hard • All students can learn • Students are like me | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Novice Teacher Expectations • Experienced Teacher Expectations | Teacher Reality |

| | | | |
|-----------------------|--|--|------------------------|
| Committed to teaching | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student success • Making a difference • Impact student's lives | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influence • Educate | Dedication to Students |
|-----------------------|--|--|------------------------|

Positive Attributes Identified by Teachers

The positive attributes of teachers in the profession were all related to compassion. The participants explained the importance of building caring relationships and patience. These traits were prevalent across all seven participants in the study.

Compassion

Caring Relationships

All of these teachers mentioned, “caring” numerous times throughout the interview. They emphasized how important it was for students to know they mattered to them as a person.

Vicki: “In the classroom, they care more about students than themselves. They take time to get to know students on a personal level and this forms an impression with students to feel comfortable in their class.”

Mark: “One of the most important things to do is form relationships with student’s so that’s one thing I focus on. Some kids aren’t going to be able to work at all unless you have a relationship with them.”

Dave: “I hope to leave this place better than it was when I came here. “

These teachers explained that when a student feels like a teacher cares for them as a person they are more willing to do the work.

The teachers felt that establishing relationships with students provides a “safe and trusting environment”. Students need to feel “valued” when they enter the classroom. Most participants acknowledged that a high level of compassion was needed.

Vicki: “They all need to be cared for but some will actually work when they know you are on their side.”

As mentioned by one participant, “life happens” and there are circumstances students have no control over. Many students come from difficult home situations and these teachers want to be the person that matters to those students. Creating a good rapport with students creates a positive learning environment.

Patience

A common theme among the participants was patience. The participants explained each day is unique in the classroom. One never knows what is happening in the lives of these students and they may need an adult figure to listen to them. This requires patience because maybe the lesson does not start on time because a particular student needed someone to listen for a minute. These teachers indicated being patient to listen to a student is more important sometimes than starting the lesson on time.

Another element related to patience is being flexible. As Annie stated,

“A lot of teachers come to the profession thinking things will go a certain way but school is crazy and you never know what is going to happen.”

This provided a glimpse of the patience and flexibility needed in their teaching careers. Angie commented,

“You are working with a population that is immature, so that’s a big toll on you because you always have to be the adult, it’s stressful sometimes.”

Her statement gives a clear picture of the importance of patience on a daily basis. Teachers manage student behavior, lesson plans, rules, grading, and other tasks as needed on a daily basis.

As stated by Vicki,

“A teacher definitely has to be patient because we work with adolescents and they are very frustrating.”

According to the participants, patience is required to eliminate frustrations that might arise when the daily lesson has to be altered for a variety of unforeseen reasons.

Challenges Identified by Teachers Currently in the Profession

The challenges in the profession identified from the participants were related to classroom management. The participants explained the importance of managing student behavior or it created an impossible learning environment. Being an effective communicator was required to ensure students knew the expectations and provided organization throughout the daily instruction.

Classroom Management

Student Behavior

A common theme among the teachers with less than five years of teaching experience was the amount of time it took to manage student behavior. The new teachers understood the subject matter and standards to teach. However, they felt underprepared once they entered the classroom and realized that the students added another element into the flow of the classroom. Vicki stated,

“I didn’t expect the behavior to inhibit the teaching,”

She felt this was a difficult challenge. Lynne mentioned that she was “shocked” by students who didn’t care if they passed or failed. Mark realized that organizing chaos is a daily struggle. These three teachers are new to the profession but have already noticed the value in being organized not only in their lessons but with student behavior as well. As many stated, it’s impossible to teach a lesson if students are not engaged in the material or displaying behavior issues.

Angie: “Without classroom management I learned the hard way that I can have the most beautiful lesson plan in place, perfect on paper, and I can have all the resources, but without controlling discipline I go nowhere.”

Rick: “You have to control the kids.”

Effective Communicator

The more experienced teachers, Rick, Angie, Annie, and Dave had similar perspectives about classroom management. Their top areas were being an excellent communicator, establishing expectations, and organization. Annie stated,

“It’s chaos but its organized chaos.”

These four teachers all acknowledged their first year teaching was difficult due to the level of classroom management that was needed. During their interview, they all referenced the importance of communicating well.

Rick: “You have to be a storyteller at some point.”

Angie: “You have to be a clear excellent communicator because students need to understand where you are going and how are you going to reach a goal.”

One of the recurring comments from the experienced teachers was communicating expectations to students. Students need to have a clear understanding of the lesson objective and how to achieve it. Angie mentioned a common mistake first-year teachers make is to walk in and start teaching the lesson. She learned that it is more valuable to establish classroom rules and procedures. This sets the tone for the class and students to know what is expected of them.

Organization

All of the teachers agreed being organized was a huge part of classroom management. This refers not only to being prepared to teach but also organizing the students. The classroom needs to be structured and create a safe learning environment. As Annie stated, “there are so many different dynamics,” meaning there are so many personalities within one class that by establishing the expectations it leads to a more productive use of class time.

The first-year teachers discussed how classroom management was a challenge because they did not truly understand the importance of establishing rules, procedures, and expectations.

Mark: "I still need to get my classroom management down. I'm still trying to figure out where you have to draw the line with certain groups of kids."

Vicki: "I have to plan and think of answers to their questions and it challenges me with knowing how to handle things."

They placed more value in teaching the subject matter. Whereas, the more experienced educators had learned through experience that classroom management was a top priority to create a positive and productive learning environment.

Dave: "I want a classroom where they are work oriented and I think for the most part we are able to still have fun and play games but get our work done."

Realistic Teacher Expectations upon Entering Profession

Novice teachers entered the profession feeling energetic to share their knowledge with students. They soon discovered their expectations of teaching were drastically different from reality. This was a sentiment shared by all participants in the study.

Teacher Reality

Novice versus Experienced Teacher Expectations

The participants noted that their expectations upon entering the teaching profession changed during the first year. They entered the profession thinking "students love to learn" and soon found many were "resistant" to learning. The participants entered the classroom and focused on the course content instead of classroom management. They soon became "frustrated" with the level of disruptions and behavior issues to manage.

The participants mentioned there was a misconception about becoming a teacher. Many entered the profession because they wanted long breaks and summers off.

Rick: "My expectation when I came in was, I would come and work and then go home".

Vicki: "I expected it to be challenging but didn't know the level of challenge."

However, within the first year, these individuals realized how demanding the profession was.

The group that struggled in the first couple of years did not take into account the time outside of school they needed to dedicate to grading student work and lesson planning. The summers became a time of reflection on the past year and revamping lessons for the coming school year.

The participants in the study discussed the importance of being organized for daily lesson activities. However, things may not go according to plans. There were many interruptions throughout a school day such as a school-wide assembly, pep rally, fire drill or lockdown. All these affected the way students were able to engage in the lesson and teachers needed to be able to handle altering the daily lesson as needed. There were some things that happened during a school day that were out of the control of the teacher. The participants noted that it was difficult to understand what to expect upon entering the classroom the first year.

Angie: “As a student teacher you don’t really get to set-up and practice classroom management because those kids have already started with a teacher and you kind of jump in the middle of the year after a month and those kids are already trained.”

Dedication to Students

The participants expressed their excitement in remaining in the profession because of the students. Salary was not discussed by any of them. Their focus throughout the interview was on students and the ability to educate them with hopes of influencing them to strive for academic success.

Influential Educators

The survey results revealed that these teachers have always been in a teaching position and plan to remain. One of the interview questions addressed was, “what advice would you give the younger generations who want to pursue a teaching career?” The participants all had similar responses:

Angie: "You are a public servant and you are here because you absolutely love what you do."

Annie: "You need to know you love it before you do it."

Lynne: "Only do it if you love it because if you don't give 100% every day you are letting the kids down."

Vicki: "You have to be 100% sure. Buckle up because it's hard work but rewarding."

Mark: "Be sure it's something you really want to do and you like kids."

Rick: "Know your why. The shining light of it all is making a difference in young people's lives."

Dave: "Have a backup plan just in case."

These teachers had anywhere from one year to more than 16 years of teaching experience and exhibited their passion for teaching because they valued the successful moments with students as much as the struggles. They understood the profession was challenging but felt they chose the right career to influence and educate children. Their responses demonstrated the unique perspective about a teaching career because they were prepared for the class with a structured lesson; however, there was no way to plan for all the other things that happened throughout the day. These teachers chose the profession to make an impact on student's lives not for a salary or summers off. They knew it would be a difficult career but have chosen to remain in the profession for the sake of the students.

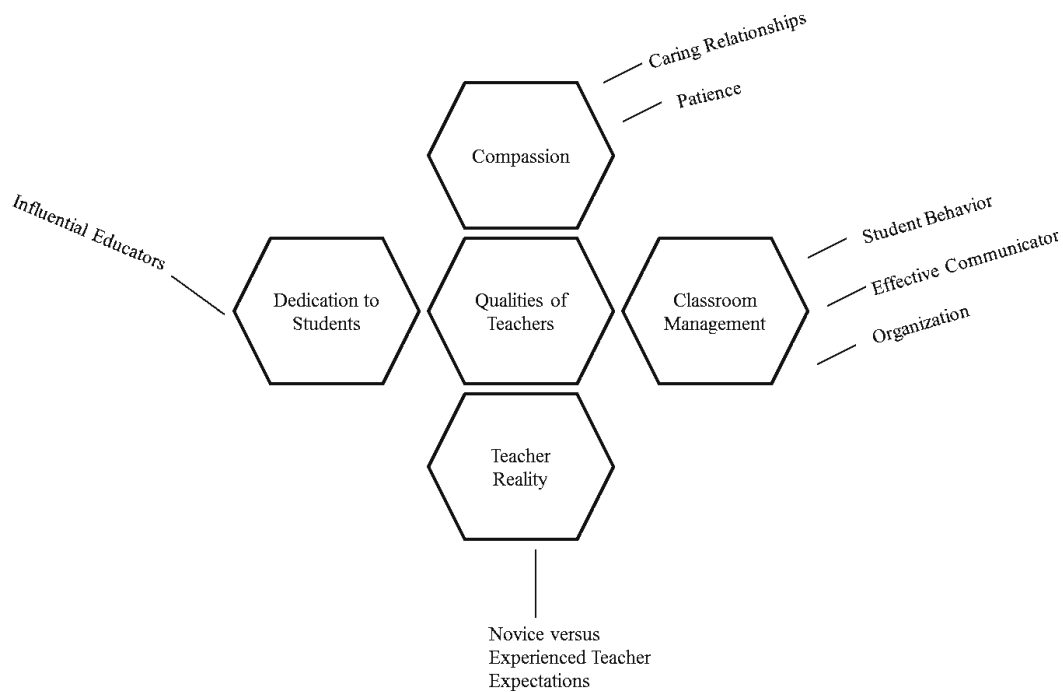
Summary

This chapter provided the findings from the personality assessment and in-person interviews. The personality assessment provided insight into how teachers perceive themselves in the workplace. The in-person interviews enhanced the research study by providing a strong foundation to answer the research questions. Figure 7 illustrates the common themes that

emerged throughout the study. The purpose of this research was to identify the qualities of teachers who chose to remain in the teaching profession. The final chapter provides a summary of findings, discussions, recommendations, and conclusions.

Figure 7

Common Themes



CHAPTER 5

Summary of Findings, Discussions, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Defining teacher qualities goes beyond the definition of an effective teacher. There are certain qualities an individual possesses that makes him/her an ideal candidate for the teaching profession. Teachers bring their content matter expertise to the profession but also possess qualities that identify them as dedicated to the profession (Vari, Jones, & Thomas-El, 2018). References to an effective teacher often include educational credentials, classroom management, and test scores. However, teacher qualities are also important (Winters, 2012). Positive attributes, challenges in the profession, realistic expectations, and personality traits are important elements of effective teaching.

The purpose of this study was to contribute to the existing knowledge base by defining qualities of teachers who were committed to the profession. The research questions addressed in this study were the following:

1. What positive attributes are identified by teachers currently in the profession?
2. What challenges are identified by teachers currently in the profession?
3. How realistic are teachers' expectations upon entering the profession?
4. What trends emerge when comparing years of experience to self-identified personality traits?

The embedded research design provided the researcher with the opportunity to examine the phenomenon of defining qualities of teachers from their perspective. The use of a personality assessment provided insight into the specific personality traits of each participant while looking for trends compared with years of teaching experience. The in-person interviews allowed the

researcher to gain a more holistic picture of the defining qualities of teachers who were dedicated to the profession.

Summary of Findings

Incorporating a personality assessment and interviews provided diverse sources of information to ensure the research questions were fully explored and answered. The personality assessment provided a glimpse into a teacher's self-identity in the profession and how this identity changed with years of experience. The interviews focused on gathering details about positive attributes, challenges, and expectations within the profession. Determining what qualities were apparent in teachers committed to the profession was a valuable resource to strengthen the teaching profession.

The personality assessment was categorized into six areas: Interpersonal, temperament, thinking, execution, drive, and self-presentation. The interpersonal trend showed over time teachers were less likely to assume a leadership role outside the classroom. With regards to the categories of temperament, thinking, execution, drive, and self-presentation, there were no clear visible trends. This indicates there is no connection between years of experience and self-identified personality traits.

There were four major themes that emerged from the findings of the interviews: Compassion, classroom management, teacher reality, and dedication to students. The most common positive attribute for teachers was building caring relationships and patience. The next theme that emerged was classroom management. The participants explained the importance of managing classroom behavior, being an effective communicator, and organization skills were required to create a productive learning environment. The third theme that arose was teacher reality. The trend noted in this category was there was often times a misconception about the

teaching profession as a novice teacher began a career. The expectation of teaching a lesson soon became a reality when the teacher realized there were behavior issues, students resisted learning, and daily interruptions outside of the teacher's control. It took several years of experience to grasp the scope of what being a teacher truly meant. The final theme was the dedication to students. The participants had a passion for teaching because of the successful moments with students. These moments outweighed all the struggles and gave these teachers the drive to be influential educators.

Discussion

The results of this study identified trends and themes from the personality assessment and interviews for defining qualities of teachers. The combination of these two research tools provided key information to add to the existing knowledge base about defining qualities of teachers who were dedicated to the profession. The data analysis gave insight into the teaching profession by digging deeper to understand the phenomenon from the teacher's perspective.

The personality assessment was used to look for trends in personality traits related to years of teaching experience. Out of the six categories there was only one trend that started to emerge. This trend was in the interpersonal category and the results indicated an individual was slightly less likely to assume a leadership role outside of the classroom. There were no clear relationships discovered for the other categories of temperament, thinking, execution, drive, and self-presentation.

The interviews provided the final data to answer the remaining research questions for this study. The first question related to positive attributes was defined by compassion. The participants expressed the importance of building caring relationships and patience as being highly desirable traits for teachers. During the interviews, each participant referenced that a

teacher should care for the students as individuals. Being a teacher goes beyond teaching the required subject matter because one must build relationships with the students. The students want to feel secure and cared for and these relationships become a critical piece in the classroom learning environment.

The next research question focused on challenges in the profession and the theme that emerged was classroom management. The first year teachers discussed how classroom management was a challenge because they did not truly understand the importance of establishing rules, procedures, and expectations. They placed more value in teaching the subject matter. Whereas, the more experienced educators had learned through experience that classroom management was a top priority to create a positive and productive learning environment. The frustrations felt by first-year teachers often times led to higher rates of teacher turnover (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). However, there were areas school leaders can strengthen to retain novice and experienced teachers. Providing teachers planning time and a collaborative work environment increased a teacher's desire to remain in the profession (Pratt & Booker, 2014).

The final research question was defining how teacher expectations changed from entering the profession to gaining more experience. The novice teachers explained how they expected to enter the classroom and teach the lesson. They realized their expectations of the profession and realities were different. Teaching the content was important; however, teaching cannot begin without classroom management. There were behavior issues to deal with and unforeseen daily interruptions. This drove teachers to become adaptable and flexible to the situation. With more experience the novice educators became more adaptable but as the participants pointed out the first year was difficult because of their lack of knowledge about students in general. Teachers entered the profession with a basic foundation of content knowledge skills; however, they needed

support and guidance to navigate the daily pressures such as accountability, classroom behavior, and diverse student abilities (Everitt, 2018).

The top qualities identified by this study were compassion, classroom management, teacher reality, and the final one was the dedication to students. The participants in this study understood the challenges of the profession but were dedicated because of the students. The teachers were inspired daily when they saw the impact they had on a student's life.

Limitations of the Study

One of the main limitations of the study was not observing the teachers in the classroom. This would have strengthened the findings by being able to identify the traits expressed by participants first hand in practice with the students. Another area to strengthen the findings would have been to interview the school principal to gather details about his/her perspective on the qualities of teachers. The next limitation was not being able to include more teachers in the personality assessment due to the cost associated with utilizing this measurement tool. Interviewing more participants and including teachers from the elementary and middle school levels would have provided more data to define qualities of teachers.

Conclusion

Teacher retention is an issue faced by many school districts. There is a trend that the highest number of teachers to leave the profession happens within the first two to three years of teaching (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). There is a focus to employ quality teachers, however; there is a misconception of how to define qualities of teachers. Determining the qualities of teachers goes beyond education credentials (Winters, 2012). Kennedy (2008) defined the qualities of teachers as distinctive characteristics or traits of an individual's personality who are committed

to the teaching profession. The purpose of this research was to identify the qualities of teachers who were committed to the teaching profession.

Being able to identify specific traits of an individual during the hiring process provides school administrators with a unique lens to observe potential candidates for their schools. This research study adds to the existing knowledge base of teacher retention. The purpose of this study was achieved by identifying compassion, classroom management, teacher reality, and dedication as the most important qualities of teachers. With this knowledge, administrators and teacher education programs are able to evaluate potential candidates for the teaching profession and determine if they fit the profile this study has revealed about dedicated quality teachers.

Recommendations

There are some recommendations for future research to strengthen the existing literature base on teacher retention. Further research needs to be conducted at the elementary and middle school teacher level to compare qualities with the high school teachers to identify similarities or differences. This study focused solely on the high school level and it would bring a more holistic perspective of teacher retention to include the elementary school teachers. Another area is career and technical teachers at the high school level. These individuals left a profession to enter teaching and it would be beneficial to add to the research knowledgebase about what motivated them to change careers to teaching. It would be enlightening to investigate what traits or characteristics they possess to start a second career in the teaching profession. The final recommendation is to interview principals to understand what qualities they are looking for during the teacher hiring process. It would be beneficial for administrators to understand how to identify a quality teacher with limited knowledge of the person. They may need to phrase

questions a certain way or provide scenarios and look for keywords and responses used by candidates during an interview.

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Appendices

Appendix A

IRB Approval



Date: 5.22.18

From: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Milligan College

Re: Jan Zuehlke Proposal- Qualities of Teachers that Impact Retention in the Teaching Profession: Will They Stay or Will They Go?

Submission type: Initial Submission

Dear Jan,

On behalf of the Milligan College Institutional Review Board (IRB), we are writing to inform you that your study *'Qualities of Teachers that Impact Retention in the Teaching Profession: Will They Stay or Will They Go?'* has been approved as expedited. This approval also indicates that you have fulfilled the IRB requirements for Milligan College.

All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission, meaning that you will follow the research plan you have outlined here, use approved materials, and follow college policies.

Take special note of the following important aspects of your approval:

- Any changes made to your study require approval from the IRB Committee before they can be implemented as part of your study. Contact the IRB Committee at IRB@milligan.edu with your questions and/or proposed modifications.
- If there are any unanticipated problems or complaints from participants during your data collection, you must notify the Milligan College IRB Office within 24 hours of the data collection problem or complaint.

The Milligan College IRB Committee is pleased to congratulate you on the approval of your research proposal. Best wishes as you conduct your research! If you have any questions about your IRB Approval, please contact the IRB Office and copy your faculty advisor if appropriate on the communication.

Regards,
The IRB Committee

Appendix B

Dear High School Principal,

Your school has been selected to participate in a research study for a dissertation project. Your role involves issuing the attached survey to your faculty. The survey contains items related to a teacher's perspective on the teaching profession. The survey will be sent to you via a Google Form to distribute to your faculty. The results will be confidential.

While participation in this research will provide no direct benefit to you immediately, the knowledge gained will benefit education, society, and overall school policy implementation and change. Results from this research will be available to you upon request.

Each year, you face the challenge of hiring and retaining highly competent teachers. By helping to better understand the predictors of teacher attrition we can assist in the high rates of teacher turnover.

If you have any questions about this study, you may contact me, Jan M. Zuehlke, at (423) 426-7526 or via e-mail jmzuehlke@my.milligan.edu, or my dissertation committee chair, Dr. Lyn Howell lchowell@milligan.edu.

Thank you in advance for your participation.

Best regards,

Mrs. Jan M. Zuehlke

Milligan College, Doctoral Candidate

Appendix C

Consent Form

You are invited to take part in a research study of teacher retention. The researcher is inviting novice and experienced teachers to participate in an embedded study to determine what qualities of teachers support their choosing to remain in the profession. This form is part of a process called “informed consent” to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Jan M. Zuehlke, who is in the doctoral program at Milligan College. You may already know the researcher as a Spanish Instructor at Daniel Boone High School, but this study is separate from that role.

Background Information:

The purpose of this research will be to explore teacher retention from the perspective of novice and experienced teachers currently employed at public schools in Upper East Tennessee.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

1. Complete a personality survey.
2. Allow the researcher to interview you
 - a. Each interview will last 30-45 minutes

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. No one at Milligan College or your current employer will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as fatigue. Being in this study would not pose risk to your safety or well-being. The potential benefit of this study allows the researcher to add to the knowledge base about teacher retention from the teacher’s perspective.

Payment:

There is no payment for this study.

Privacy:

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. Data will be kept secure by password protected files. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by Milligan College.

Contacts and Questions:

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via jmzuehlke@my.milligan.edu. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you contact the Milligan College Institution Review Board at IRB@milligan.edu.

This is an embedded research study.

The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By signing below, “I consent”, I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Printed Name of Participant

Date of consent

Participant’s Signature

Researcher’s Signature

Appendix D

Background Information

1. Name
2. Email
3. School Name
4. Grade Level (s)
5. Education level
6. Years as a teacher
7. What is the range of your evaluation scores?
A) 2-3 B) 3-4 C) 4-5
8. Was teaching your first career?
9. Do you plan to make a career change?
10. If you could change careers would you?
11. Do you hope to move into an administration position?
12. Do you enjoy teaching?

Appendix E

Talegent Path Personality Assessment

Interpersonal

Influential

Doubts ability to persuade others 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Confident in powers of persuasion

Directing

Prefers to follow the lead of others 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Prefers to take charge and lead

Motivating

Less effective at inspiring others 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Confident in ability to motivate others

Amiable

Requires more time to form bonds 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Easily connects with others

Empathetic

Uncomfortable with others' feelings 1 2 3 4 5 6 8 9 10 Deep concern with how others feel

Collaborative

Prefers to work independently 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Enjoys working closely with others

Sociable

Prefers less interaction, seems quiet 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Enjoys speaking & driving Interactions

Socially Aware

Consistent style across situations 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Adapts behavior to suite the situation

Trusting

Skeptical-questions others' intentions 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Believes others are honest

Accepting

Prefers people similar to self 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Appreciates & embraces diversity

Temperament

Self-Confident

Underestimates self & capabilities 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Strongly believes in own capabilities

Adaptable

Resists change-prefers routine 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Embraces change, adapts quickly

Composed

More affected by stress than others 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Calm & relaxed in the face of stress

Optimistic

Critical & focuses on the negatives 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Positive outlook, focuses on upside

Thinking

Data Driven

Dislikes numbers & statistics 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Solves problems using metrics

Intuitive

Needs facts & data to be convinced 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Trusts gut instinct & experience

Analytical

Accepts data at face value 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Evaluates information critically

Strategic

Short-term, immediate focus 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Focus on big picture, long-term

Impact

Theoretical

Prefers dealing with tangible issues 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Enjoys applying abstract concepts

Innovative

Prefers existing, proven solutions 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Seeks new & creative solutions

Learning Focused

Satisfied with current knowledge 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Driven to develop skills & Knowledge

Execution

Compliant

Challenges rules, poses alternative 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Follows rules, guidelines & Consensus

Risk Tolerant

Cautious-seeks safety & certainty 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Takes risks-at ease with uncertainty

Work Focused

Doesn't get engrossed in work tasks 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Highly engaged in work tasks

Meticulous

Holistic approach, avoids details 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Methodical, organized & detail-focused

Reliable

Treats deadlines & promises as flexible 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Makes fulfilling promises a Priority

Drive

Energetic

Prefers a relaxed unpressured pace 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Thrives on fast pace & full workload

Competitive

Avoids comparison with others 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Likes to compete, loves to win

Driven

Sets modest goals for self 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Highly motivated to achieve

Decisive

Uncertain decisions, seeks guidance 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Makes decisions quickly with
confidence

Self Presentation

Receptive

Defensive, not open to development 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Highly open to feedback

Self-Aware

Not aware of own limitations 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Understands strengths & weaknesses

Appendix F

Interview Questions:

1. Describe your teaching philosophy.
2. How would you describe yourself as a teacher?
3. On most days, are you enthusiastic about teaching?
4. What are the qualities of a teacher?
5. Describe your working environment. Are there things you hope to change?
6. Do you feel supported to grow in the teaching profession by school administration?
7. Describe your school culture.
8. What is the environment like in your classroom?
9. What were your expectations when you became a teacher? Have they changed?
10. How many years do you plan to stay in the teaching profession?
11. What are your career aspirations?
12. What are the most positive aspects about being a teacher?
13. If you could change anything about the teaching profession what would it be?
14. What advice would you give the younger generations who want to pursue a teaching career?
15. If you were asked to be part of a hiring committee for new teachers, what qualities would you be looking for in a candidate?