The Relationship Between Providing Teachers With A Supportive Environment and Teacher

Satisfaction

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Master of Education

July 2014

Graduate Programs in Education

Goucher College

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of providing teachers in a special

education department in the high school setting with a supportive environment on teacher

satisfaction. The study was conducted from January 2014 to June 2014 during which time a

supportive environment was implemented via the department chair. The results indicate that

providing a supportive environment had no significant effect on teacher satisfaction. All teachers

reported an increased number of interactions and level of satisfaction with the Department Chair,

but that did not change the level of satisfaction with teaching overall. Therefore, it is reasonable

to conclude that teacher satisfaction is not solely impacted by the provision of a supportive

environment.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Overview

Teacher satisfaction is an ongoing concern in the field of education. "Job satisfaction is defined as 'a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences' (Locke, 1976, p. 1300) or the degree to which people have positive emotions toward their work (Currivan, 2000)" ("The Emotional Side of School Improvement", 2007, p. 3). One factor that influences teacher satisfaction has been identified as leadership style toward those under one's supervision (Turner, 2007). The approach a leader takes with the teachers under their supervision has much research indicating techniques and style impact teacher satisfaction. Teacher retention is a constant issue in the United States. Researchers are trying to glean an understanding of this epidemic by attempting to understand teacher job satisfaction (Tillman & Tillman, 2008).

The lack of job satisfaction leading to decreased teacher retention is a serious concern in the educational field. According to the National Education Association in a publication in 2008 entitled "Why They Leave, Lack of respect, NCLB, and underfunding—in a topsy-turvy profession, what can make today's teachers stay?", the average national teacher turnover rate for all teachers is seventeen percent. When looking at urban areas, the percent of turnover rises to twenty percent. The same study revealed that an estimated one-third of all new teachers leave within the first three years of teaching and forty-six percent of that population will resign within 5 years. This epidemic known as the revolving door has increased exponentially over the past 15 years costing school districts and states billions of dollars per year in the effort to hire and retain

qualified teachers. There is a theory that recruitment alone will not solve this problem, when in fact it is the retention that is the imperative. Teachers that work in an atmosphere where they feel satisfied and supported are more likely to remain in the profession (Kopkowski, 2008).

With the recent appointment to the position of Special Education Department Chair at a high school where there has been a lack of strong leadership there is a serious concern for the satisfaction among those teachers. Historically, there has been much hand holding of the teachers in this department and little accountability. These teachers lack a unified department and significant leadership. In order to move this department forward and make positive change in the school, this group of teachers need to become a solid team with trust of one another and the department chairs. Hopefully, addressing this lack of teacher satisfaction by providing a supportive environment there will be greater teacher contentment, retention and increased student achievement.

Statement of Problem

This study examined the impact of leadership influences on teacher satisfaction. The study was designed to determine if an increased amount of leadership support of special education teachers will influence teacher morale and satisfaction.

Hypothesis

There will be no significant improvement in the morale or satisfaction of the group despite the strategies implemented by the leader to encourage optimism.

Operational Definition

The dependent variable was teacher satisfaction which was measured by an initial and post survey of satisfaction scale at the conclusion of the time span for the implemented strategies. The intent is to see a change in the rating scale results. The independent variable was

the supportive practices of leadership. This was implemented through the time spent in the

classroom and individual meetings with teachers implemented by the department chair.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The longevity of one's career is rooted in the extent to which one is contentedly and gainfully employed. While the leader of a group is not always able to control the compensation of an employee, he may have influence over the job satisfaction of those under their supervision. There are research findings that demonstrate a relationship between teachers possessing positive attitudes toward their job and teacher retention. Research also shows that there is a variety of strategies that a school leader can utilize with the intent of improving the job satisfaction of teachers (Leithwood, 2007). This review will focus on the contributing factors of teacher job satisfaction, the role of a leader in that satisfaction, the causes of dissatisfaction and stressors for teachers in general as well as specifically for the special education teacher, and finally interventions to improve individual and group morale and to circumvent special education teacher burn-out.

Factors Contributing to Teacher Job Satisfaction

There are two main categories in which to divide teacher satisfaction: intrinsic and extrinsic. The intrinsic factors are those factors such as the desire and satisfaction in working with students. Teachers identify this factor to be the most motivating. As one interviewed teacher stated, "You've gotta like kids if you're gonna teach. That's the bottom line" (Brunetti, 2001). Part of that intrinsic satisfaction comes from seeing students learn and grow. It is the look on the students' faces when a teacher knows that they have finally grasped a concept, especially one the teacher has been struggling to teach and the students have been working to comprehend. These are the unforgettable moments for any teacher. Teachers also noted a feeling of satisfaction when former students have been successful in life and career. When these

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students return and report their personal growth and development into contributing members of society, a teacher's satisfaction and desire to remain in the profession are reinforced. Teachers also identified another area of great satisfaction: when the student, who is viewed as the one doomed to fail, is one that the teacher has helped to pull out of the trenches. Inversely, there is the disappointment the teacher feels when they are unable to guide a student to make the best choices in a world that makes the worst choices attractive (Brunetti, 2001). Often the impact of this disappointment is to motivate the teacher to continue on and work toward reaching the next student. The mere love of the subject matter taught is often a contributing factor to a teacher's intrinsic motivation. While this is not always the case, it does play a significant role in the secondary teacher's drive to remain in the teaching profession. Many of these intrinsic rewards lead to high levels of teacher satisfaction.

Some of the extrinsic motivators identified were salary, job security, benefits, vacations and collegiality. Of these, the only factors that were identified as having statistical significance were vacation and collegiality. The other practical motivators of salary, job security, and benefits seem to have a low level of significance in the inspiration of teachers. Studies have shown that there is not a positive correlation between salary and job satisfaction (Tillman & Tillman, 2008). Vacations were deemed important because the summers allowed a reprieve from the intensity of the school year. They also provided opportunities to travel and spend time outdoors, a rarity during the school year. Teachers also value collegiality and to working as a team. When teachers work collaboratively it provides the camaraderie that develops a positive working environment for all. Isolation, that is a natural occurrence for an individual teacher in a classroom, is reduced. While the aforementioned were motivators to remain in the profession of teaching, neither were statistically significant indicators for job satisfaction (Brunetti, 2001).

These extrinsic motivators were supporting reasons to remain in the teaching profession but did not outweigh the intrinsic motivators.

Another factor that plays a predominant role in teacher satisfaction is the allotment of adequate planning time for teachers, as well as, time to work and plan with colleagues. This time to plan reduces stress factors and increases teacher self-efficacy in their teaching responsibilities. Self-efficacy is the extent to which a teacher feels he can improve student learning (Leithwood, 2007). Research also shows a positive correlation between teacher satisfaction and participation in meaningful professional development opportunities. Teachers who feel supported and are presented with worthwhile and meaningful professional development have a sense of satisfaction. The conditions of work facilities and adequate resources for classroom instruction are identified as well as contributing factors to teacher satisfaction. Meaningful involvement and inclusion in school based decisions is an additional avenue leading to teacher happiness. Furthermore, leadership acknowledgements of teacher's decision making abilities inspire teacher contentment. Leadership style that toward those under supervision also impacts teacher satisfaction (Turner, 2007). The approach a leader takes with the teachers under their supervision has much research indicating techniques and style impact teacher satisfaction.

The Role of a Leader in Job Satisfaction

A leader has the capability to encourage and motivate team members to higher levels of both professional and personal goal achievement (Bucic, Robinson, & Ramburuth, 2010). Understanding this role and employing strategies that encourage such motivation is an essential characteristic for any effective leader. One must understand the individual needs of the team member while establishing essential standards that they must meet to ensure success (Bucic, et al., 2010). Such support can be manifested in a variety of ways such as emotional support,

instrumental support, informational support and appraisal support.   If a leader identifies those unmotivated teachers, research has shown that various supports may delay teachers' decisions to leave the profession (McCarthy, Lambert, Crowe, & McCarthy, 2010).

Emotional support is when the leader shows teachers how much they value them by conveying their importance as a professional.   Leaders develop people by treating them with collegiality, consideration and support. They listen to teachers and minister to their general welfare. Emotional support also acknowledges and rewards high-quality work (Leithwood, 2007). Emotional support has been identified as the most effective type of supports as perceived by teachers with its recognition of accomplishments and attention to teacher needs (McCarthy, et al. 2010).

Informational support provided to teachers has been identified as leading to increased teacher satisfaction. Such support offers teachers ways to improve their professional practices in the classroom (McCarthy, et al. 2010). On-the-job training provides the most effective professional development. Very often teachers feel that imposed professional development is a waste of time leading to reluctance to attendance and attention. When teachers walk away with a sense of accomplishment and practical application, they feel that the information provided was supportive of their practices. Such types of professional development include groups, coaching and mentoring arrangements, and networks linking teachers together with a common goal or curriculum (Leithwood, 2007). There are increased perceptions of practicality and reduced time consumption with job embedded professional development. Effective professional development also leads to an increased sense of self-efficacy.

Instrumental support provides the teacher with the necessary materials to implement lessons that produce enduring learning (McCarthy, et al. 2010). Research shows that the

allocation of such resources as perceived by teachers has a direct impact on teacher satisfaction.

When there is a perception of balanced resources, there is reduced teacher stress. This, in turn,

leads to reduced burn-out and an increased resolve to remain in the profession (McCarthy, et al.,

2010). Teachers who have ample resources to implement curriculum tend to have an increased

sense of self-efficacy resulting in improved job satisfaction.

Appraisal support is the feedback provided by instructional leaders on teacher

progression including suggestions for improvement. Providing instructional guidance, both

formally and informally, affords teachers various strategies to implement with the goal of

improving curricular implementation and ultimately student learning (Leithwood, 2007). While

teachers often fear appraisal process, it is the duty of the leader to ensure that every appraisal

opportunity is perceived and presented as a learning process and not just a series of check marks

on a form. When teachers perceive the appraisal support in such a manner, it increases teacher

satisfaction.

The use of humor by leaders in the academic setting is seen to have a positive impact on

teacher satisfaction. The use of humor in both the formal and informal meeting settings has the

potential to reduce teacher stress and increase their effectiveness. When teachers are less

stressed they are more productive thus leading to increased teacher satisfaction. Humor has been

identified as one of the top three integral qualities of an effective leader (Recepoglu, 2008). The

research shows that the use of humor in the school setting on a regular basis has a correlation to

teacher satisfaction and increased teacher production.

Causes of Teacher Dissatisfaction

Teacher retention is a constant issue in the United States. Researchers are trying to glean an understanding of this epidemic by attempting to understand teacher job satisfaction (Tillman & Tillman, 2008). The flip side of satisfaction is readily available when doing such research. One factor that leads to teacher dissatisfaction is low student achievement. Research has shown that there is a relationship between teacher satisfaction and student achievement in reading and math (Turner, 2007). Teacher salaries do not correlate to those in other current job markets. Therefore, the salary discrepancy creates competition for those who are seeking to enter the profession or attempting to maintain their financial status while remaining in the teaching profession. Salary also has a substantial impact on teacher dissatisfaction especially when neighboring districts have significantly higher salaries (Leithwood, 2007). "Due to the increase in pressure from school leaders, federal guidelines, and society, teachers are experiencing burnout. This increased level of stress contributes to teacher attrition. In addition, teachers also have more paperwork, larger class sizes, and demands to ensure that special-education students meet rigorous state testing standards." (France, 2008, p. 30).

Teacher Stressors

Adding to these sources of dissatisfaction are stressors that come with teaching. While many teachers thoroughly enjoy various aspects of the classroom, it is the stress imposed by poor leadership that makes the job difficult (Brunetti, 2001). Lack of support, as well as an intrusive, increase emotional exhaustion and can negatively influence a teacher's sense of achievement (Plash & Piotrowski, 2006). Another stressor is the lack of support that is felt not only from administration but also from colleagues in general. In addition, an increase in class size has significantly added to the stress felt by teachers. This increase in class size has led to an

increased amount of work to be handled daily. Teachers complain about the time spent in the evenings as well as weekends. It also causes sleepless nights due to the increased worry, which has the potential to impact essential planning time necessary (Brunetti, 2001).

Special Education Teacher Dissatisfaction

Special education teachers have concerns and stressors that are directly equivalent to those of the general educator but have additional areas of concern. Some areas of dissatisfaction that are directly related to special educators are focused in the areas of role conflict, role ambiguity, perceived workload and perceived principal support.

The role of the special educator has changed drastically over the past 30 years. Special educators no longer focus only on small group instruction. They are responsible for collaborating with general education teachers in various content areas to modify and adapt curriculum, teaching their own content areas, working with para-educators and other service providers, maintaining compliant case management and attending meetings. This vast amount of responsibility leads to role conflict and ambiguity placing contradictory demands on one individual (Martin, 2010). Without strong leadership to provide support and better define that role, special education teacher quickly become dissatisfied.

The perceived workload of the special education teacher is a direct result of the increased responsibility of the position. Currently, special educators have various responsibilities that go beyond the average classroom teacher, as mentioned previously. This workload includes the general classroom responsibilities compounded with numerous parent meetings, planning specifically for special education purposes, additional special education paperwork, and participations in extracurricular activities (Plash & Piotrowski, 2006). This reality is one that few have first-hand experience with including those in leadership positions.

The responsibilities of an administrator are copious and to many special education is foreign. For some, this creates a disconnect between the teacher and the administration producing the perception of lack of support from the perspective of the teacher. Those in this leadership role are sometimes unable to provide the necessary psychological or instruction support that the special educator craves in order to feel successful (Martin, 2010). While some teachers report receiving support, it is often not the type that was significant or useful to special educators.

Special Education Teacher Stressors

In addition to the classroom responsibilities, special education teachers are required to implement Special Education Laws and Regulations, per the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. There are many added demands of paperwork and requirements for this specialized position. Special educators must understand formalized educational assessments, their administration, implications, and how to incorporate student needs in an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Special Educators, in addition to general classroom paperwork, have to prepare the lengthy IEP document for each student at minimum once each year. Annual IEP reviews require either an informal or formal evaluation process in order to ascertain the level of student progress. A formal re-evaluation is conducted at least every three years. Along with the regular report card, special education teachers are required to report quarterly progress on each goal found on a student's IEP. This work entails the collection and reporting of additional data. As these requirements are met, there are the corresponding meetings that are mandatory to attend in order to present proposed plans to parent and team members. The increased requirements on special educators also increases the stress on those teachers (Plash & Piotrowski, 2006).

Research has shown that special education teachers leave the profession at higher rates than their general education counterparts. These teachers either leave the profession all together or migrate to a general education type position. The attrition rate for special education teachers has been found to be almost double that of general educators (McLeskey, Tyler, & Susan, 2004). The aforementioned stressors added to the general teaching responsibilities impact the special educator and increase dissatisfaction. Special education departments can be disjointed units of individuals that perceive themselves as overworked and underappreciated individuals. There is research that shows that a strong leader can have an impact on a group of individuals by implementing strategies to improve the morale.

Intervention Themes

It is essential for a leader to continuously and consciously work to ensure that those under their supervision are all in the same boat and rowing in the same direction. Working to improve not only individual but group morale is a step toward that ultimate goal. Implementing specific leadership strategies will aid in increasing morale thus reducing teacher burn-out.

Improving Individual Morale

It is often stated that the interactions with one's administration have the most significant impact on teacher retention (Schwartz, 2012). When administration is supportive of teachers, their needs, hard work and expertise in their field, teachers are more satisfied and have higher motivation. When teachers feel supported, morale is high which ultimately leads to student achievement. For the special education teacher, when the leader intentionally minds their welfare and attempts to manage caseloads, they feel supported, thus leading to improved morale in the department.

Research shows that leaders of special education teachers can play a significant role in their satisfaction and motivation by being personally supportive. This support can be in the areas of discipline, behavior management, and interfacing with difficult parents. Personal support can also be viewed as the providing of resources and can be in the form of materials and technology for the classroom, or as clerical support or teacher coverage assisting with paperwork or meeting requirement (Wasburn-Moses, 2005). This support can be supplemented by special education funds such as those from Medical Assistance Funds provided by the state. Special education teachers have reported that the high levels of recognition by their leaders increased morale. Another way to build the special education teacher's emotional well-being is to incorporate time for special education teachers to collaborate with their general education counterparts. This collaboration gives them an opportunity to discuss how to incorporate special education students learning and behavioral needs in the inclusive setting. This collaboration instills a sense of optimism and camaraderie among teachers and leaders. A leader taking a genuine interest in the special education teacher's work and showing support and concern for their students also provides teachers with an appreciation that their administration is focused on their personal welfare as a special educator (Wasburn-Moses, 2005). When a special education department is supported, the entire school culture is impacted positively.

The supports, while focused on special education teacher, can equally support any department within a school. An area that specifically targets special education teachers is the demand of their caseload. A caseload is the students with Individual Education Programs (IEP) for which a special education teacher is responsible. That responsibility is related to tracking the students' progress on his/her IEP goals and objectives, developing at minimum yearly IEP's, performing both formal and informal assessments, reporting quarterly on student progress,

attending meetings regarding students' progress, maintaining home communications as well as dealing with student behavioral issues. All of this must be done with the student's general education teacher in order to ensure that the classroom teacher understands the student's disability and can implement accommodations and modifications. The special educator also assists with those accommodations and modifications. The case manager is also responsible for maintaining communication with any other service provider the student may be in contact with such as a Physical, Occupational or Speech Therapist, Social Worker, Hearing Specialist, etc. When the number of students becomes excessive, the task seems overwhelming and may be deemed insurmountable by the special educator. While caseload size is not addressed in Federal Law, some states attempt to develop regulations on its size. This number can range from 1:15 up to 1:20. This inconsistency and increased number can influence the quality of service provided to the neediest students by case managers. While there is a national focus on the reduction of general education class sizes, research shows that special education teacher caseloads are increasing (McLeskey, et al., 2004). A reduction in special education caseloads may diminish special education teacher's stress and, as a result, increase morale. Such strategies might be to increase the population of teachers certified in special education throughout a schoolhouse. Special education teachers, in many instances, are expected to work with general education students, this responsibility could easily splinter in both directions by assigning general education teachers a special education caseload.

Strategies to Improve Group Morale

      Increasing an individual's spirits is only one piece of the puzzle. Special education teachers have unique responsibilities. With this comes the group morale. Within a large department, there are many that influence the group but the overarching goal is for everyone to be on the same path. This is especially crucial when teachers are working with the neediest student population. While leadership can be very principle-directed, it is the emphasis on "moving ahead together" that a teacher-leader must instill (Hayes, Christie, Mills & Lingard, 2004). The leader must be the facilitator molding the vision, but the pieces cannot solely come from that person. Individuals must be perceived as an essential stakeholder in the development and support of the vision. Without this cohesiveness, there will be the ultimate demise of the group. Where there is one disgruntled teacher, there is the potential for many. When the leader embodies as sense of organization, the members of a team should be valued for their unique skills and abilities. This, in turn, fosters an environment of "intellectual stimulation." A team vision provides for individual execution of that vision and creates a sense of group morale (Bucic, et al., 2010). This shared direction-setting flows into the concept of shared leadership. In building a common vision and purpose, an effective leader also is committed to leadership dispersal, supporting the spread of leadership practices and collaborative decision-making (Hayes, et al., 2004).

      It is should be the goal of any effective leader to want to develop the next generation of leaders. This process of developing individuals within the department leads to teachers being active participants in the team's advancement instead of just being a passive bystander. Each teacher is now seen as an expert in his field, increasing individual morale, as well as group

morale (Woods & Weasmer, 2004). The result of increasing different individuals in leadership

roles enhances job satisfaction. It is the role of the leader to identify individual strengths and

have the teacher put those talents on display to emphasize shared capacity. Shared leadership not

only develops the potential of the individual but of the group. As individuals perceive

themselves as invaluable and worthwhile, their colleagues, in turn, feel the same about them.

Not only are the team members exuding confidence, they are experiencing the capabilities of

those on their team. This development of collegiality can prove to be invaluable in-group morale

(Woods & Weasmer, 2004). For special educators, the ability to lead a team meeting or attend a

county wide meeting with the intent of top down training, gives individuals a sense of

significance within the department and builds individual capacity.

Strategies to Reduce Special Education Teacher Burn-out

Special education teachers leave the profession more often than do their general

education counterparts. Special education teachers have responsibilities unique to their

certification area. Very often, the professional development they experience are the same as

general educators. Studies show that special education teachers desire specific professional

development. The four areas that are in top demand are: working with paraprofessionals, the

process of special education, special education technology, general curriculum content, and

training for specified disabilities they encounter (Berry, Petrin, Gravelle, & Farmer, 2011).

Providing these specific types of trainings to support them with their unique responsibilities and

challenges might be a way to reduce special education teacher burnout. Research has shown that

when this training is embedded in day-to-day teaching, it is more effective than as a stand-alone

event, which also appeals to the teacher's receptiveness, thus increasing job satisfaction

(Wasburn-Moses, 2005). Teachers perceive the leadership as being responsive to their personal

and professional needs (Hayes, et al., 2004). This support has the potential of having a significant impact on teacher morale.

Leader Influences on Group Morale

Leadership is about working together collectively and collaboratively. There is a difference between headship and leadership. Headship is an organizational position; leadership is focused on influence. Some strong leadership characteristics include being supportive of colleague and student relationships, having hands knowledge of current educational theory, spotlighting pedagogy, a desire to develop a culture of care to promote teacher risk taking and implementation of structures and strategies that lead to an orderly school environment (Hayes, et al., 2004). These characteristics are essential to a school-based leader. Working with teachers, especially special education teachers, and their unique job responsibilities, such qualities are indispensable. With the demands of the special educators' job, having a supportive shoulder to lean on has the potential to motivate and possibly discourage leaving the profession. While the leader need be versed in the qualities above, there are other ways to support and motivate those under one's supervision. Research identifies that the use of humor with teachers increases morale as well as time spent with department administration.

One body of research looked at the use of humor in 30 minute private, small and large group settings. It also focused on the number of humorous episodes per meeting. While the size of the group and number of funny out-takes were not of significance, the general use of humor by the leader did have a positive impact. Teaching is an extremely stressful profession and leaders can either compound or divert the perception of that stress. Teacher leaders play a central role in determining teacher satisfaction. The use of tactful humor has been shown to have a positive relationship in teacher satisfaction, and from satisfaction comes motivation. Teachers'

stress can be reduced using appropriate humor and witty approaches to demanding situations (Recepoglu, 2008). Humor has the potential to have a positive impact on overwhelmed teachers when spending time with their chairperson.

Research has shown that there is a statistically significant relationship between the amount of time teachers spend both formally and informally with their site administration. A vital factor in teacher satisfaction is influenced by the establishment of a trusting relationship with the administration. Both qualitative and quantitative data supported the relationship between the amount of time spent with an administrator and teacher satisfaction. Formal interactions held more significance for teachers, but increasing either interaction might be beneficial. They provide the administrator with opportunities to implement such strategies as teacher recognition. The high rate of teacher turn-over causes time spent with between teachers and leaders to be more formal than informal in nature (Schwartz, 2012). "[This] greater understanding of the relationship between teacher satisfaction and frequency of interactions with the school administrator will inform administrative practices, improve teacher satisfaction, increase teacher retention, add to the experience level of the teaching force, and improve student achievement" (Schwartz, 2012, p. 67).

Leadership has the potential to inspire or cause distress to those around them. It is evident that with strong leadership qualities, practical uses of time and humor, one can lead those in their charge to be inspired.

Summary

A review of the literature indicates that teacher satisfaction stems from both external and internal influences. Both have a significant impact on overall teacher satisfaction. This level of satisfaction can be directly impacted by leadership strategies and styles. Providing teachers with

the types of supports they desire increases satisfaction. Leaders that strive for positive individual

and group morale create an environment of support with the overall goal of teacher satisfaction.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

The identified purpose of this study was to determine the impact of leadership influences on teacher satisfaction. It was designed to determine if an increased amount of leadership support of special education teachers would influence teacher morale and satisfaction.

Design

This study consisted of a quasi-experimental pre/post-test design.   The dependent variable was teacher morale. A survey was used to measure morale via level of satisfaction with the school, their career choice and the department chairperson. It will also identify the amount of time spent with the department chair. The independent variable was to provide teachers with a supportive environment. This will be provided by the department chair with the institution of brief, weekly meeting with each teacher to informally discuss any topics the teachers choosing, either professional or personal. The department chair will also be spending time in the classroom with teachers on a weekly basis in an attempt to develop rapport with teachers. The study was conducted during the second semester of the school year from February through May.

Participants

The participants in this study were eight, high school, special education teachers. There are four males and four females. The age ranges of the individuals are from early thirties to mid-sixties. The years taught at the school ranged from one to sixteen. All of those involved in the study are certified in special education as well as an academic content area. This sample was both purposeful and convenient. They teach in both the inclusion and self-contained settings. The types of support the school offers are inclusion and self-contained for academic support, behavioral support and functional learning support.   The academic courses they are responsible

for are departmentalized by area of certification. Teaching in the inclusion setting is a new

assignment for them as of the 2012-2013 academic year.

Instrument

The instrument used in the study is an online survey. The survey that was implemented

was found in a dissertation by Schwartz (2012) with the intention of determining the relationship

between teacher satisfaction and the frequency of interactions with site administration. "The

Satisfaction and Administrative Interaction questionnaire (SAIq) (Appendix A) uses level of

agreement responses (strongly agree, agree, etc.) and frequency responses (e.g., 2 to 3 times per

month) to measure a teacher's level of satisfaction and their frequency of interaction with site

leadership" (Schwartz, 2012). Within the SAIq there were 25 Likert scaled items and 1

qualifying question to identify the number of years at the present teaching location.   The SAIq

Likert survey was reviewed by a panel of expert practitioners for face validity and was deemed a

valid instrument. The experts considered it comprehensive, well-balanced and stated that it

allowed for drawing valid conclusions regarding correlation between frequency of teacher

interaction and level of satisfaction (Schwartz, 2012).

Procedure

The SAIq online survey was provided to each teacher at the beginning of the semester to

determine their level of satisfaction with the school, their career choice and the department

chairperson. An email correspondence was sent requesting that they complete the online survey

which was both anonymous and confidential. They were informed that the data collected would

be used solely for the purpose of the action research being conducted by the researcher. Their

candor and honesty was solicited to ensure accuracy of their responses. Within this

correspondence it was also communicated that there would be a brief, informal, 5-10 minute

meeting weekly with each individual to discuss their current emotional and professional status. This meeting would occur in an area desirable to the teacher. This discussion would be based on the teacher's directive and not scripted. The intention of this meeting was simply to develop rapport between the Department Chair and the teacher. During the initial meeting, a regular period for the researcher to spend in each classroom weekly providing support was established. This support was driven by the teacher's need. It could also vary from week to week. The support could be instructional where the Department Chair takes small groups to work with, in the form of observation and feedback, providing coverage so the teacher could complete special education paperwork or in any other form that would be directed by the teacher. The duration of the time in the classroom was an entire period of forty-five minutes. They were also informed that they would be requested to complete the same survey at the end of the school year for comparison purposes.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this research study was to determine the impact of the provision of a supportive environment for teachers in the high school setting on teacher satisfaction. A survey was given pre and post intervention to determine if increased teacher and department chair interactions would improve teacher satisfaction. Seven teachers within a high school special education department were identified to participate in the study. The breakdown of the amount of years spent in the current teaching assignment were as follows: 28.6% of the individuals have served ten to fifteen years, 14.3% of the individuals had served seven to nine years, 28.6% of the individuals had served three to five years and 28.6% of the individuals had served one to two years (Figure 1). The results of the analysis discussed and displayed below indicate that there was no significant impact on teacher satisfaction from the pre to the post survey results.

Figure 1: Number of Years in Current Teaching Assignment
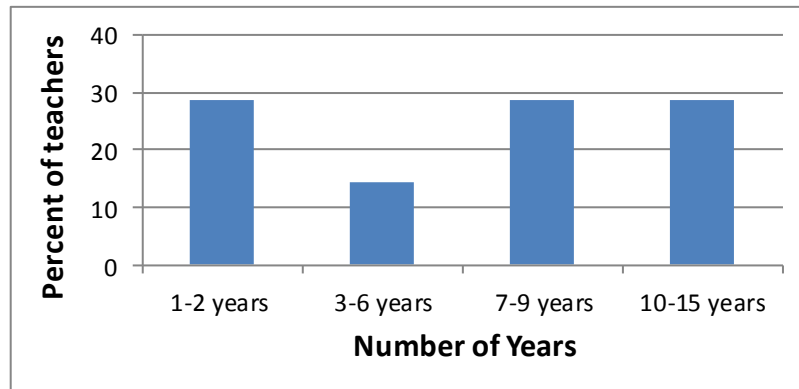
The survey began by gauging an individual's current level of satisfaction with the career of teaching and while one person's response changed from the pre to post survey the overall change was minimal. Teachers did not change their perspective on attitudes toward teaching as a career.

Teachers maintained these same opinions when given the possibility of changing careers from teaching. From pre to post survey 71.5% of the teachers continued to report that if provided the opportunity of leaving the teaching profession for another equally paying profession they would continue to teach. There was a marginal increase in the number of teachers planning to remain in the teaching field from 71.4% to 85.7%. A slightly higher percentage of teachers plan to stay at their current school after the implementation of the supportive environment from 42.9% to 71.5%. Teachers planning to remain (85.7%) and those who plan to leave the teaching profession (14.3%) did not waver in those choices. The number of teachers describing themselves as a satisfied department shifted positively from 0.0% in agreement to 71.4%. One less teacher disagreed with the way things were run at the school post intervention, shifting from 28.6% being satisfied to 42.9%. A majority of the teachers surveyed maintained the opinion that they would leave the teaching profession for a higher paying job (85.7%). While all teachers who began the study considered transferring to another school, 57.1% shifted their opinions and stated they preferred to stay at the current teaching location. Four of seven individuals surveyed continued to be dissatisfied with the curriculum and those that were satisfied, continued to be satisfied. The same ratio of satisfaction with the level of student safety and security at the school and communication with parents and students (57.2% disagreeing and 42.9% agreeing) was reported. All seven teachers (100%) agreed that they were satisfied with the level of communication, frequency of interactions and the enjoyment of those interactions with the Department Chair both before and after the intervention of supportive activities.

The second section of the survey focused on the number of interactions that teachers had with the Department Chair. All totals exhibited a significant increase. Some of the teachers (43%) reported that the Department Chair visited their classrooms less than eight times prior to

the intervention. The visits increased to more than eight times post intervention (100%). The number of times the Department Chair formally evaluated teachers was reported to increase from once to two to five times (71.5%) during the research period. Five individuals indicated that they met with the Department Chair in the office less than eight times prior to the intervention and post intervention all seven reported that they met with her more than eight times. All teachers stated that they interacted with the Department Chair at events outside of school less than three times prior to the interventions, by the end of the year survey theses interactions increased with three individuals, 42.9%, reporting such interactions happening from two to seven times. A majority (71.4%) of those surveyed interacted with the Department Chair less than once at a non-school event. These interactions increased with 71.5% responding that they interacted at non-school events from two to seven times. Interactions regarding job related topics increased from 42.9% (less than five) to 100% reporting such interactions occurring more than eight times. Interactions related to non-job related conversations varied from 71.5% of teachers indicating such interactions happening less than five times to 85.7% reporting such interactions occurred more than six times during the research period.

When comparing the results of the overall job satisfaction of the teachers from the survey prior to the intervention of a supportive environment to the post survey a marginally significant relationship exists in the teacher's perceptions of their teaching career (x^2 (1,7)=3.73, p=.05). The marginally significant relationship occurred due to a single individual's shift from unsatisfied to becoming satisfied after the research implementation period (Table 1).

Table 1: I am satisfied with my current job as a teacher.

		POST		Overall
		Disagree	Agree	
Pre	Disagree	80%	20%	100%
	Agree	0.0%	100%	100%
Overall		57.1%	42.9%	100%

In the analysis of the data as related to frequency of interactions with the department chair and overall satisfaction with the department chair the results were significant. Prior to the intervention 71.5% of teachers reported such interactions occurring less than six to seven times. Post intervention data changed to 100% of individuals reporting interactions occurring more than eight times. When cross referencing the time spent with the department chair in her office and the satisfaction with the overall communication with the Department Chair the pre-intervention survey results indicated that while all teachers were at a level of satisfaction with the interactions, as the interactions increased, 71.4% of the individuals were highly satisfied with the level of communication. The same statistics held true for the increased amount of interactions that occurred in the Department Chair's office. The frequency of the interactions with Department Chair encouraged the increased level of satisfaction. Again, with the increased number of interactions with the Department Chair, the enjoyment level of the interactions increased to 28.6% agreeing that they enjoy the interactions and 71.4% of the individuals strongly agreeing that they appreciate the interactions.

Table 2: Frequency of Interactions on Pre and Post Survey

How often do you interact with your Department Chair in her office?		
	PRE	POST
2-3 times	42.9%	0%
4-5 times	14.3%	0%
6-7 times	14.3%	0%
More than 8 times	28.6%	100%

The number of years that an individual was in the same position at the same school did not have a significant impact on the level of overall satisfaction. The two individuals in the first two years of teaching were generally satisfied both before and after the intervention. The two teachers in the three to six year range maintained their level of dissatisfaction regardless of the implementation of a more supportive environment. This was also true for the one individual in the seven to nine year range. The only area of impact was on one of the two individuals in the ten to fifteen year range. One individual indicated prior to the intervention that they were dissatisfied with teaching and after the intervention shifted to a level of satisfaction.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This study was designed to determine if supportive practices implemented by the Department Chair would have an impact on teacher satisfaction. The data supported the null hypothesis that there would be no significant relationship between a supportive environment and teacher satisfaction.

Implications of Results

The survey results suggested that there was not a significant relationship between the supportive practices implemented and overall teacher satisfaction. The majority of the individuals continued to maintain their level of satisfaction both prior to and after the interventions. While the number of times the Department Chair met with individual teachers consistently increased, there was no impact on the overall feelings of the teachers. While the data demonstrated that teachers were satisfied with the level and type of support provided, these interactions did not have a significant impact on their overall level of satisfaction in teaching. Generally, the number of years the individual had been teaching resulted in similar levels of satisfaction. Those who had taught in the one to two year range were still satisfied with teaching; those in the three to nine year range were not satisfied; and the one teacher in the ten to fifteen year range changed to satisfied after the supportive interventions.

Theoretical Consequences

Research shows that there are a variety of strategies a school leader can utilize with the intent of improving job satisfaction in teachers (Leithwood, 2007). Job satisfaction is defined as the positive emotions and experiences at work. Strategies for support can be manifested in various ways. First, emotional support has been identified as an effective type of support by

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attending to teacher needs. Informational support offers teachers ways to improve their

professional practices in the classroom and has been identified as leading to increased teacher

satisfaction. Instrumental assist by providing material to support instruction is identified as

another strategy for increased satisfaction. Appraisal support, in the form of both formal and

informal feedback when framed in a way that teachers view as supportive, is can also increase

satisfaction (McCarthy, et al. 2010). Finally, the use of humor by leaders in the work setting has

been found to have a positive impact on satisfaction. While the aforementioned strategies were

implemented throughout the study, the overall impact of the strategies did not have a significant

influence on the teachers' current level of satisfaction.

Threats to Validity

There are several threats to validity in this study. First, the sample group was both

purposeful and convenient. Therefore, the subject group was not randomly selected and scarce

in number. Because this study included only seven teachers the ability to generalize was

compromised. One member of the group refused to participate and the researcher had no

influence over this decision. Several areas of the survey dealt with situations over which the

researcher had no control such as curriculum, the overall way the school was run, safety and

security at the school, and communication with parents. Another threat to validity involved the

number of years the participants had been in their current teaching positions. While most had

been in the school for at least three to five years, only two were new to the school. The

Department Chair was also new to the school and to the current level of supervision in a high

school. Finally, a confounding variable that was a threat to validity was two of the individuals

participating in the study were removed from their positions and were informed of this fact half

way through the study. Such threats to validity may have had a significant impact on the findings.

Connections to Previous Studies

The results of this study demonstrated a marginal relationship between a supportive environment and teacher satisfaction. In a recent study conducted by Schwartz (2012), a strong relationship was found between providing teacher with a supportive environment and teacher satisfaction. The goal of the study was to identify and implement a strategy that administrators had direct control over. The frequency and type of interactions were in the direct control of the administrator. "The data collected revealed a significant correlation between teacher satisfaction and frequency of interaction with administration" (Schwartz, 2012, p. 75). Both quantitative and qualitative data provided the support for this significant relationship.

McCarthy et al. (2010) identified the areas of support teachers viewed as supportive as emotional, informational, instrumental, and appraisal. All of these types of interventions support Swartz (2012) in that all require increased administrative time spent with teachers. When this time and support is provided to teachers the anticipated outcome is increased satisfaction.

Research indicates that leaders of special education teachers can play a significant role in teacher satisfaction and motivation by being personally supportive. The same types of supports as mentioned above hold true for such a department. Such supports can be in the areas of materials and technology for the classroom, clerical support or teacher coverage assisting with paperwork (Wasburn-Moses, 2005). Special education teachers have reported that higher levels of interaction increased satisfaction. A supportive environment instills a sense of optimism and camaraderie among teachers and leaders. A leader taking a genuine interest in the special education teacher's work and showing support and concern for the students also provides

teachers with an appreciation that their administration is focused on their personal welfare as a special educator (Wasburn-Moses, 2005). While support practices such as those mentioned in the research were implemented, this study did not demonstrate a significant impact on overall teacher satisfaction.

Implications for Future Research

Suggestions for future research might be to expand the subject group to a larger population. While it was not done in this study, the collaboration with other department chairs to implement such strategies within their departments might allow a broader research base. One recommendation might be to expand the study to different levels of schooling such as elementary and middle schools to determine if such strategies have an impact on the satisfaction at those levels. The survey could also be altered to focus only on areas within the Department Chairs direct control. Those survey questions that were not under administrative control should be eliminated for ease of focusing and analyzing the data. The time span of the study could be lengthened to an entire school year or more in order to allow for the connection of more comprehensive data and time spent with teachers. Another recommendation might be to schedule times and/or alternate plans in order to address situations that occur that take the Department Chair away from time with teachers. When these situations occur a teacher feels unsupported. It might also be beneficial to have teachers keep anecdotal records of interactions with the Department Chair and reactions on those contacts. This information would allow the teacher to respond to the post survey in a more accurate manner without having to rely on memory alone. Such strategies could improve the efficacy and validity of this study.

Conclusions/Summary

The data from this research demonstrated that there was not a relationship correlation between the number or type of interactions with the Department Chair and teacher satisfaction. While the number of interaction increased and all teachers reported they were satisfied with the types of interactions, it did not impact the teachers' overall level of satisfaction. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that teacher satisfaction is not solely impacted by the provision of a supportive environment.

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APPENDIX A

SATISFACTION AND DEPARTMENT CHAIR INTERACTION SURVEY

SATISFACTION AND DEPARTMENT CHAIR INTERACTION SURVEY

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I am satisfied with my current job as a teacher				
I consider teaching to be my ideal career				
If I had the opportunity to start over in a new career, I would choose to become a teacher				
If the opportunity arose I would leave teaching for another occupation (equal pay).				
I plan to remain a teacher				
I plan to remain at this school				
I plan to remain in the education profession.				
The teachers at this school like being here; I would describe us as a satisfied group				
I like the way things are run at this school				
I would leave the teaching profession for a higher paying job				
I think about transferring to another school.				
I am satisfied with the curriculum at my school.				
I am satisfied with the level of student safety and security at my school.				
I am satisfied with my communication with parents.				
I am satisfied with my communication with students.				
I am satisfied with my communication with Department Chair				
I frequently interact with the Department Chair				
I enjoy my interactions with my Department Chair				

	≤1	2-3	4-5	6-7	≥8
How often does your Department Chair visit your classroom?					
How often does your Department Chair formally evaluate your teaching?					
How often do you interact with your Department Chair in her office					

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How often do you interact with your Department Chair at a school event outside of the normal work day?					
How often do you interact with your Department Chair at a non-school event					
During work, how often do you interact with your Department Chair regarding something job related					
During work, how often do you interact with your Department Chair regarding something NOT job related?					

	1-2	3-5	7-9	10-15	15-20+
How many years have you worked at Franklin HS?					