

School Climate & Teacher Well-Being, A Cause & Effect Relationship

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Abstract

Current research surrounding teacher well-being and its effects on classroom climate paints a disconcerting picture. Now, more than ever, record numbers of teachers are leaving the profession, especially in the first five years of teaching. The loss of highly effective teachers is felt by both students and co-workers, thereby negatively affecting school climate. The need for a solution is clear. This study aims to define the leading factors contributing to teacher well-being, as well as identify existing programs administrators can access to help mitigate the rise in teacher burnout. Given the highly interpersonal nature of the teaching profession, the theoretical lenses used in this research project were that of the pragmatic and post-positivism paradigms. These paradigms support an ever-changing reality while maintaining change as the underlying aim of the researcher, a true compliment to the nature of this study. Self-determination theory was also used to analyze the data and determine the effect of differentiating types of motivation found in individual teachers. The data was analysed using a feminist lens as research shows that 84% of educators in elementary and 59% of educators in middle and high school are female. The research method used was an in-depth critical literature review. The intent of this literature review was to discover the most common negative influences on teacher well-being, as well as possible positive approaches to maintaining or developing teacher well-being. The findings offer possible solutions for administrators to help address existing negative factors as well as ways administrators can help teachers improve their own well-being and teacher resiliency.

Keywords: well-being, school climate, burnout, pragmatic paradigm, ethical limitations.

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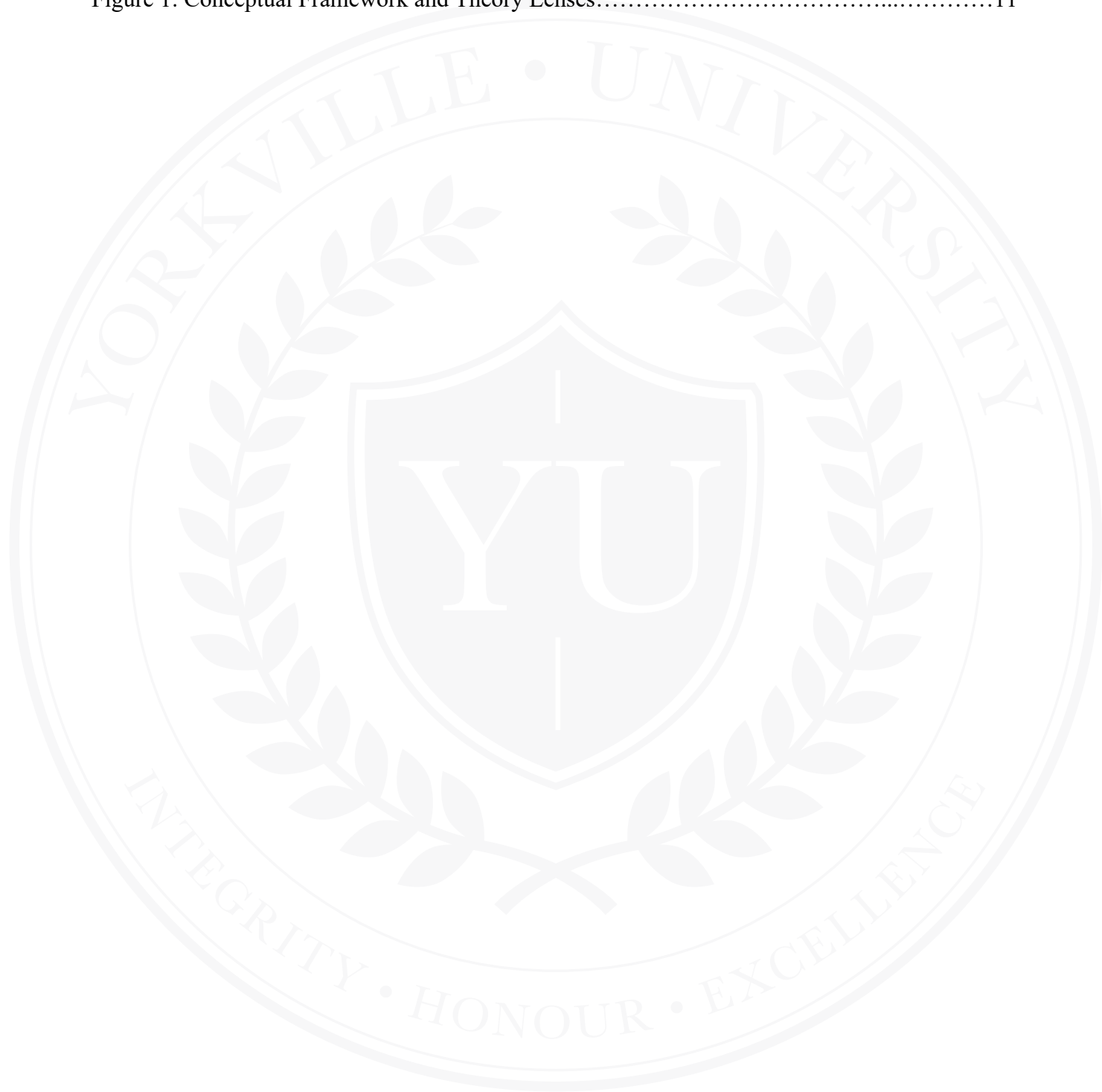
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School Climate and Teacher Well-Being: A Cause-and-Effect Relationship

Teaching is known for being one of the top 20 high stress jobs in the world (Zambas, 2018) and, given the current global pandemic, the stress is mounting. More than ever before teachers who are exhausted and have grown cynical about their own profession are described as suffering from teacher burnout (Dickie et al., 2018; Gray et al., 2017). The most troubling aspect of teacher burnout is that rather than looking to identify the source of this discontent or exhaustion, in my experience, teachers are often offered band-aid solutions. This implies that teacher burnout lies within the teachers themselves and fails to identify extraneous factors as possible reasons teachers are leaving the profession (Santoro, 2019). As an educator currently employed in the province of New Brunswick, I am close to the impacted group being studied. My first school was centrally located in the province's largest city and most of the city's wealthy and influential population live in the area. Due to this, most of my environmental stress came from the high demands and expectations of parents. My second and current school is one of the more rural schools in our area and most of my students are from farming families who respect old fashioned values and are grateful for, and appreciative of, everything. Having only seven teachers on staff, duty minutes are higher than I had ever experienced and there are not as many teachers to cover the various committees necessary to run the school. In this case most of the environment stress I experience is from the physical demands of trying to do it all.

Fortunately, I am one of the teachers who made it through their first five years of teaching without thoughts of leaving the profession. However, I must admit that when my children were younger, around eight years into my career as a teacher, I dreamed of jobs that were less interpersonal and much slower paced. I remember sitting at the hospital, pregnant with my son, and noticing an advertisement for ultra-sound technicians. I imagined myself working in

a dark room, having superficial interactions with my patients as I worked away at quietly capturing the images of these unborn babies. I wondered if I had made a mistake. As my daughter grew older and started to think about possible careers, I remember her excitedly announcing that she wanted to be a teacher like her mother. Without hesitating I found myself mentioning a variety of other professions that might also interest her. Now, at thirteen years old, she has decided that she would like to be an orthodontist and I remember feeling relieved for her upon hearing this news. I realized that I wanted more for her than the stress that comes with teaching and this realization saddened me.

Being the mother of two young children currently going through our education system, recognizing the importance of retaining strong teachers is more obvious than ever. Strong, happy, and healthy educators are the key to the successful development of our youth. (Basson-Wood, 2021; Faridi, 2014; Nhat & Weare, 2017). Professionally, my goal is to one day become an administrator and although administrators have a shallow reach in to the home life and personal characteristic development of staff, they certainly do have the ability to influence their work enjoyment. Faridi (2014) determined the success of the Finnish school system was due to the importance leaders put on the connection between happy teaching and happy learning, something Canadian administrators are certainly capable of. One of the prevalent challenges I anticipate as a future administrator is supporting the mental well-being of teachers while balancing teacher workload and still accomplishing school/provincial initiatives and directives. Data collected from this research will help my fellow future administrators and I address these concerns.

Problem Statement

The data on Canadian teacher attrition rates suggested that up to 30% of teachers leave the profession (Kutsyuruba et al., 2013). The most current data showed that only 6 out of 10 of

the 1995 graduates from both elementary and secondary teacher education programs ended up employed as full-time teachers 5 years after graduation, and as of 2004, the estimated teacher turnover rate in the first 5 years of teaching in Canada was 30% (CTF, 2003, 2004; Kutsyuruba et al., 2013). Despite the limited data on specific provincial teacher attrition in Canada (Karsenti & Collin, 2013), a growing problem within the Canadian education system is that overworked teachers are leaving the profession at an alarming rate (Maynes & Hatt, 2015; Reichel, 2016). Therefore, the problems or topics being addressed in my research include the underlying causes of teacher burnout, the intrinsic characteristics of teachers who stay, and how administrators can work to mitigate external factors that cause stress while promoting positive well-being among staff. The main research question of this study is “What are the leading workplace factors attributing to teacher stress?” Additional sub-questions include:

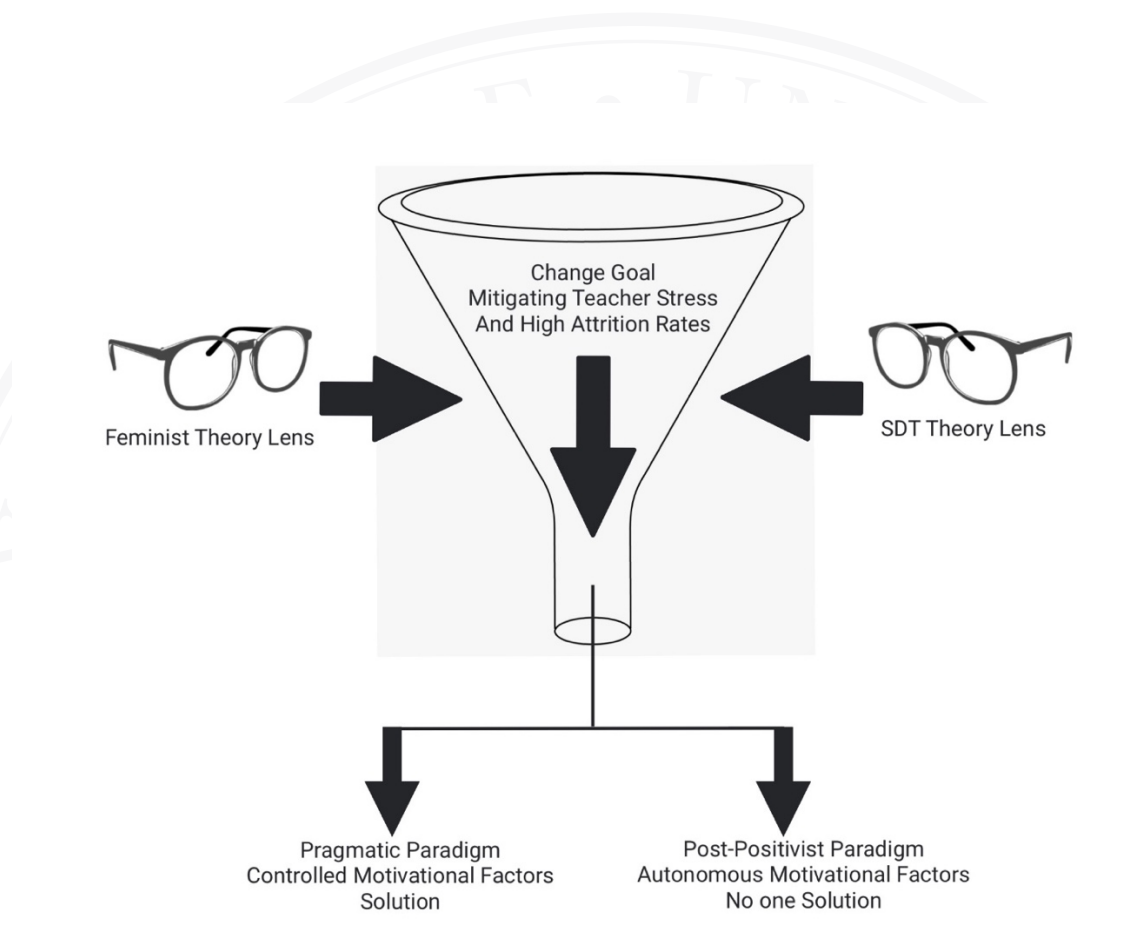
- What can administrators do to mitigate teacher attrition?
- What are the most common reasons teachers are leaving the profession?
- What existing programs aim to promote teacher well-being?

Conceptual Framework

Reid et al., (2017) discussed researcher positionality as being central to the development of the research context, allowing the research to result in appropriate and meaningful social action. The key concept of this study was to determine what factors contribute to teacher stress and understanding how administrative teams can help to mitigate them. Admittedly, I find myself personally drawn to the positivist, or realist, paradigm as I often aim to keep things simple. In my everyday life I find solace in the belief that there is one single reality or truth that can be easily measured (Patel, 2015). But having taught in two demographically opposite schools over the past fourteen years, I can attest that the factors that contribute to teacher stress in each of these

schools differed. Given the differing personal experiences of each teacher, the realist paradigm is an unrealistic approach for this qualitative study that aims to capture the complexities of human social interactions and the personal meanings derived from them (Reid et al., 2017). Dewey, one of the most influential philosophers and educationists of the 20th century, initiated the most wide-spread educational reform based on the importance of social interactions and personal meanings by highlighting the important connection between the life experiences of a child and the learning process. Without effectively linking the two, education is rendered useless (Sikandar, 2015). Teaching is a fast-paced profession with perpetual social interactions and a variety of derived personal meanings on the part of the teacher, parents, students, coworkers, supervisors, and the public. As such, I believe the conceptual framework best suited for research on the contributing factors of teacher stress is the pragmatic paradigm, a paradigm where reality can be renegotiated or debated depending on the evolving situation. This includes, the post-positivism paradigm which explores a phenomena while maintaining that there is no absolute truth. (Panhwar et al., 2017; Patel, 2015).

Figure 1.

Conceptual Framework and Theory Lenses

Note. Visual representation of the conceptual framework used and the lenses that complimented it.

The teaching profession is constantly changing, and perceived realities will differ for teachers in different classes, schools, cities and even provinces. Change is not an isolated event *happening to* the education system, but rather, a continuous, on-going and unpredictable process *surrounding* the education system (Hodges & Gill, 2015). As a researcher, being pragmatic is being open to change and working within that change to the benefit of all. The world is constantly changing and, therefore, change is necessary in education as well, as we work to move

the education system away from the idea of knowing and toward the constant act of learning (Kelley, 2020). The pragmatic paradigm still aims to solve a problem; finding out is the means but change is the goal (Patel, 2015).

This concept of moving and growing with change in the educational setting has never been more prevalent than now, teaching through a global pandemic. Teachers across the globe have had to shift from a face-to-face platform for education to variations of hybrid online learning platforms. Teachers moved through a three-stage adaptive model to this change beginning with the disruption stage then moving to the transitioning stage and finally reaching the reimagining stage (McQuirter, 2020). Change in this instance was necessary and unavoidable and teachers moved through these stages differently. Some teachers adapted quickly and thrived early in the reimagining stage, while others resisted and struggled in either the disruption or transitioning stage. Change for the sake of change is detrimental to the educational system and to the well-being of teachers. Change that leads to improving the educational process is beneficial to both and it is important for districts and administration to be able to discern between the two.

According to Deci and Ryan (2008), self-determination (SDT) theory distinguishes between autonomous and controlled motivation. Autonomous motivation uses both intrinsic and external motivators to reach levels of success and happiness in the pursuit of self-endorsement, while controlled motivation focuses more on external motivators such as reward or punishment as indicators of well-being. While there is vast research done on the external factors that lead to teacher burnout (Friesen & Sarros, 1989; Stauffer & Mason, 2013), research shows that the personal characteristics of teachers also contribute to occupational well-being (Brouskeli et al., 2018; Poon et al., 2019; Stoeber & Rennert, 2008). One must then ask themselves, can external factors be satisfactorily modified to help teachers whose personal characteristics continue to be

detrimental to their well-being? SDT emphasizes the motivational propensities for learning and growing in people which is different from traditional behavioristic approaches that attempt to control motivation from the outside (Ryan & Deci, 2020). This two-folded theory, SDT, was used as a tool by which to analyze the literature reviewed. Teacher burnout is both a personal and systemic issue and neither proponent can be ignored.

Another perspective that needs to be accounted for is that of the feminist. Many people fall victim to role conflict that arises from assuming two or more roles at one time (Erdamar & Demirel, 2014) but the research showed that female teachers are especially at risk of stressors attributed to work-family or family-work conflict. Teaching has long been thought of as an appealing profession for women as it allowed them the liberty to balance their family roles while working. What we now know is that workload pressures in the education system have, and continue to, increase which compromises the delicate balance needed for work-family balance (Atteh et al., 2020; Kara et al., 2021; Thomas et al., 2003). In summary, the following research project determined the leading causes of teacher burnout using both a pragmatic and post-positivist research paradigm and the findings were analyzed from a practitioner-researcher perspective and through a feminist lens as demonstrated in Figure 1.

Research Methodology

Occupations where employees engage in high levels of social interaction are also linked to high levels of employee turn-around (Gray et al., 2017). Teaching is a highly interpersonal vocation, but these levels of interaction are more than the superficial interactions that other professions may experience. Teacher/student interactions are often deeply meaningful and sometimes the information teachers get from their students come with a heavy emotional pull. Qualitative research lends itself to understanding complex social interactions and can provided

valuable data about emotions and personality characteristics (Bell & Waters, 2018; Reid et al., 2017). As such, qualitative research methods are the best fit when studying the social and interpersonal aspects of education. Keeping the pragmatic and post-positivist research paradigms in mind, the document analysis methodological approach utilizing existing research on the personal experiences of teachers to create new knowledge and make positive changes (Reid et al., 2017), is the most fitting compliment to determining the most common factors attributing to teacher stress and learning how administrators can mitigate them.

Although there are many benefits to literature reviews, or document analysis, Atilano (2013) highlighted four key reasons as to why literature reviews are a valuable methodology. The first of these four reasons, and arguably the most valuable, is that literature reviews allow the researcher to assess what research has already been done on the topic. Secondly, literature reviews give the researcher the opportunity to identify leading researchers, who are likely to be most knowledgeable on the topic. Furthermore, literature reviews are valued as a methodology because they synthesize multiple studies that address the problem and provide important evidence to researchers (Cowell, 2015). Given the personal and individualized nature of the workplace factors that contribute to teacher stress and the personal characteristics that determine a person's ability to cope and persevere, I have chosen to focus on the following external factors leading to teacher stress: school climate, high workload, constant change, student behaviour, increased accountability and paperwork, and relationships with administration. The literature review also highlighted the importance of existing personal characteristics that contribute to teacher well-being and as such, will be discussed in my findings.

Methods

Due to the time-sensitive nature of this project, coupled with the ethical limitations brought about by the current global pandemic, a deep analysis of the literature using secondary data was used as the primary methodological approach to my research. I chose to do a document analysis of the literature to ensure that I avoided selection bias (Reid et al., 2017). Document analysis examines information collected through a variety of methods and from a variety of sources. The goal of document analysis is to corroborate findings reducing the potential for any biases one may find in a single document or study. There are many advantages to document analysis as a research method, the main advantage being that document analysis is typically less time-consuming. Other advantages are: (a) the availability of documents; (b) cost-effectiveness, and (c) the non-reactive nature of documents. While there are some limitations to document analysis such as, low retrievability and incomplete collections of documents, the advantages outweigh the limitations (Bowen, 2009).

The analysis of the literature was done through the lens of a practitioner-researcher. Straub (2007) described practitioners as a group who want research to solve a problem or justify an action. Alternatively, Straub also described researchers as a group looking to educate without bias. As a current educator, my researcher positionality puts me in a position to not only understand why teachers are leaving and how administrators can mitigate this, but I understand that working to find solutions to this problem is also an integral piece of the research analysis. Given the large female presence in this profession, the research questions were analyzed through the feminist-researcher lens. Feminist research is defined by three principles, the first of which is that it aims to construct new knowledge and produce social change. The second guiding principle

is that it focuses on the meanings that women give to their world and thirdly, it is known for its diversity (Ollivier & Tremblay, 2000).

The data analysis of this literature review was also done with a holistic approach. It is vital that all parts of the literature are not only studied in and of themselves, but by how they relate to one another and the bigger context of the research problem. Another crucial element to holistic data analysis is ensuring the data is considered from diverse perspectives to gain a better understanding of each document (Gorichanaz & Latham, 2016). When considering the systematic approach used for this document analysis, value was placed on highlighting common themes through the feminist lens of both researcher and practitioner perspectives while maintaining a holistic approach to the analysis. The choice of method made was based on the time frame given and the fact that document analysis allows the researcher to consolidate multiple existing studies. I gravitate toward solving problems and implementing beneficial change; thus, the pragmatic and post-positivist approaches of analyzing data on the causes of teacher burnout and using this data to implement school wide change was most beneficial.

Data Collection

In defining the parameters of my research, I realized I was interested in a broad range of sources and therefore, the bulk of the research was collected from across Canada, with a focus on the Atlantic provinces. Given the constantly changing nature of the education system, a key element of my search criteria was that articles be as recent as 5 to 10 years old, unless the article provided necessary background knowledge. This allowed for a better understanding of the current issue's teachers face and complimented the pragmatic lens used to analyze the literature. It also enabled me to gain a better understanding of the leading causes of teacher burnout by using up to date data. In online research platforms such as EBSCO Academic, EBSCO

professional, ProQuest, COPAC, Google Scholar, Google Books, Sagepub, and ResearchGate, I used the following descriptors in the selection process of the research documents: teacher burnout, teacher stress, teacher resilience, administrator role, teacher sleep quality, teacher job demands, educational reform, social emotional demands on female teachers, and teachers leaving the profession.

Ethical Considerations

I understand that it is my ethical duty to ensure that I am honest, fair, and respectful in presenting my research. As a teacher, it is my duty to be aware that my own position in the education system will impact the research process and the data collected, as well as the data I chose to ignore (Reid et al., 2017). As suggested by Reid et al. (2017), I need to be steadfast in my goal to “not resolve power plays; but to deliberately increase the complexity of the research process by employing an analytical approach that doubles back on itself” (p. 50). My personal interests and how they are woven throughout the research process must be declared to ensure a clear picture of the social aspects researched.

Traditionally used and pioneered by women, care ethics were also considered. Care ethics is the understanding that experiences are derived from the relationships between people rather than abstract rules. Personal relationships have a value that is often overlooked by other theories. Starratt (2005) described the five domains of ethical responsibility in education as being mutually influenced by one another. As explained in Starratt’s (2005) fourth and fifth domains of ethical responsibility in education, leaders need to be able to inspire teachers to reach beyond self-interest or self-serving actions and promote a higher ideal. Throughout the literature review, Starratt’s five domains of ethical educational responsibility were carefully considered by

highlighting ways administrators can do this by building authentic relationships with staff rather than through top-down, abstract rules.

Literature Review

At one point in New Brunswick, Canada, the Department of Education implemented a province-wide program called the Beginning Teacher Induction Program (BTIP). This program was touted as being highly successful and generated interest nationally (Kutsyruba et al., 2013; Scott, 1997). Unfortunately, in 2009 the program was cancelled due to budget cuts and new teachers found themselves back in a “lost at sea” or “sink or swim” experience in an occupation known for “cannibalizing its young” (Ingersoll, 2012, p. 47). Understanding the importance and success of such programs, the New Brunswick Teacher’s Association attempted to fill this void with a program called the Professional Orientation and Induction of New Teachers, or POINT program (Kutsyruba et al., 2013). The main difference between the two programs was that the BTIP was available to new teachers automatically upon hiring, while the POINT program was a program that needed to be accessed, or applied for, through the New Brunswick Teacher’s Association. Given the isolation associated with the teaching profession, this program was less accessible to new teachers who were just trying to keep their head above water (Ingersoll, 2012). It is relevant to consider the effectiveness of these types of programs as the research showed a strong link between effective teacher induction programs and the retention of beginning teachers.

The following literature review aimed to determine the leading causes of teachers’ stress, as well as identify existing programs used to promote teachers’ well-being. In the preliminary literature review four common themes emerged: (a) existing job demands that lead to teacher stress; (b) leading reasons teachers leave the profession; (c) existing programs to actively promote teacher well-being; and (d) individual character traits as indicators of future well-being.

Teacher Stress

Teachers are experiencing high levels of stress and many are, in fact, choosing to leave the profession within the first five years of teaching. *Teacher burnout* is a term often used to describe teachers who appear unhappy in their jobs (Santoro, 2020). Growing teacher cynicism is thought to be a better way to describe teacher burnout as most teachers want to engage in work that benefits students, communities, and the profession but systemic barriers make it difficult to do so (Gray et al., 2017; Santoro, 2020).

Calling this current phenomenon “teacher burnout” does a disservice to the profession as it indicates that the problem lies with individual teachers instead of the system itself (Santoro, 2020). Many researchers have theorized that external factors such as negative school climate, high workload, low supports, constant educational reform, student-to-teacher violence, and the under-supported implementation of inclusion are just a few of the reasons for teacher dissatisfaction (Dickie et al., 2018; Dzuka & Dalbert, 2007; Gray et al., 2017; Wagner et al., 2016). Others feel as though more research needs to be done to identify the characteristics of resilient teachers with positive well-being to identify how they manage to persevere while faced with the same teaching challenges as others (Renshaw et al., 2015, Turner & Theilking, 2019). Santoro (2020) believed that:

Many teachers become dissatisfied not because they are exhausted and worn down, but because they care deeply about students and the profession and they realize that school policies and conditions make it impossible for them to do what is good, right, and just. (p. 28).

Conclusions as to why teachers leave the profession are diverse and individualized, but Santoro (2020) wondered if teachers enter the profession for moral and altruistic reasons why could it not be reasoned they leave for the same reasons.

Teacher well-being and teacher burnout appear to be divided into two distinct categories: (a) the perceived negative workplace factors that lead to high levels of stress; and (b) positive aspects of teacher's successful and healthy functioning in the workplace, which will be discussed later in the review (Renshaw et al., 2015). Many researchers blame the rise of teacher stress to the current demanding nature of the job (Dickie et al., 2018; Dzuka & Dalbert, 2007; Friesen & Sarros, 1989; Gray et al., 2017; Nakou et al., 1999; Wagner et al., 2015). Some of these external workplace factors are: negative school climate (Dussault et al., 1999; Gray et al., 2017; Stauffer & Mason, 2013;), unrealistic workload (Dickie et al., 2018; Kyriacou, 2001; Stauffer & Mason, 2013; Thomas et al., 2003; Wagner et al., 2015), constant educational reform (Kyriacou, 2001; Joseph & Reigeluth, 2010; Jucker, 2011; Renshaw et al., 2015), high social emotional demands (Gray et al., 2017; Wagner et al., 2015), student-to-teacher violence (Dzuka & Dalbert 2007; Kyriacou, 2001; Stauffer & Mason, 2013; Thomas et al., 2003), and poor relationships with, and trust in, administrative teams (Kyriacou, 2001; Stauffer & Mason, 2013; Thomas et al., 2003).

School Climate

School climate appears in the research as a major contributor to teacher well-being. When educators feel connected to and have a positive view of their school, they are more engaged and committed. Therefore, school climate is a predictor of job satisfaction (Bradley & Cordaro, 2020; Collie et al., 2011; Gray et al., 2017). Positive school climate is broken into six inter-related categories: (a) academic achievement; (b) positive relationships between teachers and students; (c) mutual respect for everyone within the school community; (d) fair and consistent

discipline policies; (e) a safe environment; and (f) healthy community involvement (Gray et al., 2017). Dussault et al. (1999) discussed professional isolation as a major trigger to occupation stress in the educational field. In fact, professional isolation was a common theme throughout the research when evaluating the key components of developing a positive school climate. Despite the highly interpersonal aspect of teaching, being isolated from co-workers for a large portion of the day negatively impacts school climate and, thus, teacher well-being. While some teachers seem to prefer working in isolation because of the privacy it gives them and the reduced pressure from administrators, many find that professional isolation leads to both boredom and instructional hesitation (Dufor & Eaker, 1998).

Another key relationship that must be considered is that of the administration and its teachers. Stauffer and Mason (2013) found teachers who worked for administrators that were unsupportive, unfriendly, or failed to provide positive feedback, had higher levels of stress than those who had healthy interpersonal relationships with their administrative teams. This research further supports the idea that positive collegial relationships are key to building a healthy school climate.

High Workload and Unrealistic Demands

High workload, or unrealistic demands, are a symptom of negative school climate and can have a domino effect on other domains of teacher well-being. Not only do teachers have to develop and deliver lessons for all the unique learners in their classes, but there is also a copious amount of paperwork and marking to complete each day. Add the time pressure for reporting periods and the social-psychological aspects of the job such as, managing student behavior, student-teacher relationships, and parent demands (Dickie et al., 2018; Wagner et al., 2015), it is predictable that teachers are burning out at these rates. Although the research consistently

highlighted unrealistic demands and high workload as a leading cause of teacher stress, little was suggested as to how administrators or teachers themselves could address this. The few suggestions found were small and manageable and fell primarily on the shoulders of the administration.

One such suggestion was that administrators had a responsibility to ensure that any additional duties such as committees, coaching and clubs, are matched to the teachers existing skill sets (Kyriacou, 2001). This would allow teachers to focus on existing strengths instead of asking them to learn and refine new skills outside of work hours. Stauffer and Mason (2013) offered another administrative task that would help alleviate teacher stress: protecting time for lesson planning. Administrators in this scenario are encouraged to find unique ways to disseminate information that does not require regular, unnecessary in person meetings, or to carve out time during the instructional day for teachers to meet in grade level teams to plan and collaborate. This helps take some of the pressure off teachers to figure out all the answers on their own.

One way that teachers can help control personal levels of stress is to recognize their own limitations and feel comfortable saying no (Kyriacou, 2001). My lived experience tells me this is often easier said than done. In my experience, new teachers are silently encouraged or expected to take on big roles or challenges, such as coaching, challenging classrooms, and extra duty to prove themselves as capable educators. This silent epidemic is especially detrimental to new teachers who are looking to secure contracts or teaching positions within certain schools and could be a potential reason why most teachers who leave the profession do so in the first five years (Perrone et al., 2019).

Constant Educational Reform

Constant educational reform is yet another systemic issue currently plaguing teachers. As indicated by Renshaw et al. (2015), teachers are already delicately balancing a full plate when government, or district initiatives, threaten to throw off that balance with constant policy and program changes. The current public education system met the academic needs of our students in the Industrial Age, but is, at the core, inadequate at meeting the needs of students in the current Information Age (Josphe & Reigeluth, 2010; Jucker, 2011). Systemic change allows for the incorporation of the educational stakeholder to move from just educators, parents, and students of a given school to other members of the community such as businesses and community groups. This type of change is viewed as helpful and meaningful to teachers while piecemeal change, or change which entails minor adjustments to current programs within education, is not. This is the type of constant educational reform that exhausts teachers and leads to higher levels of stress.

Administrational Teams

A more overt stressor affecting teachers today is poor relationships with, or trust in, administrational teams. Studies showed that the working relationships with administration and even front office working staff were of utmost importance to not only developing a positive school climate but to reducing work stressors for teachers (Friesen & Sarros, 1989; Kyriacou, 2001, Perrone et al., 2019; Stauffer & Mason, 2013). Failure to communicate with staff, projecting an unwelcoming persona and being unable to recognize different work required at the different levels of schooling are ways administrators may unwittingly be adding stress to their teachers. By setting realistic targets for teachers, highlighting what their teachers are doing well, and building up staff morale, administrators can mitigate stress among staff members (Kyriacou, 2001; Thomas et al., 2003; Stauffer & Mason, 2013).

Student-to-Teacher Violence

The final factor negatively affecting teacher well-being is student-to-teacher violence. Student-to-teacher violence has been on the rise in New Brunswick since the implementation of the controversial under-funded and under-supported inclusion program (Fraser, 2020). While the fundamental underpinnings of inclusion are well intentioned and just, the implementation fell mostly on the shoulders of teachers with little to no training provided (Dzuka & Dalbert, 2007; Gray et al., 2017). In addition to their existing duties, teachers are now expected to motivate students to complete work as well as instill qualities such as respect, initiative, and kindness (Kyriacou, 2001; Thomas et al., 2003; Stauffer & Mason, 2013).

What is especially damaging about the external workplace factors leading to high levels of teacher stress, is that many of these negative workplace factors are out of the control of the teacher, which inevitably makes the task of teachers taking care of themselves much more difficult (Santoro, 2020). Teachers only have a partial role in building a positive school climate, creating a positive working relationship with administration teams, and their own self-efficacy, and almost no control in the unrealistic workload expected of them, the constant change from absent stakeholders, and the role conflict and ambiguity they experience when their skill set does not match their position (Papastylianou, 2009). With the plethora of challenges in front of them, one wonders: In a profession known for its isolation, how do teachers begin to set themselves up for success?

Why Teachers Leave the Profession

While the factors leading to teacher stress are clear and well researched, the specific reasons teachers leave the profession are not. From the research, three main reasons emerged as the more prominent reasons teachers leave the profession: (a) the pressures of increased

accountability (Benham & O'Brien, 2002; Dixon-Ross, 2020; Hardy, 2018; Moran, 2017; Tusting, 2009); (b) increased paperwork (Benham & O'Brien, 2002; Mackenzie, 2007; Morgan & Rhode, 1983); and (c) administration (Benham & O'Brien, 2002; Boyd et al., 2011; Hentges, 2012). It is important to note that although these three themes appeared most often in the research, there is a myriad of reasons as to why teachers leave the profession some of which are directly related to common teacher stressors highlighted previously. They are student attitudes (Benham & O'Brien, 2002), isolation (Flinders, 1988), demoralization (Frank, 2015; Mackenzie, 2007; Santoro, 2018), and then there are those who leave because of their own perceived low self-efficacy (Crain, 2017; Santoro, 2020; Taylor, 2017; Renshaw, 2015). For this literature review analysis, focus was put on the top three emergent reasons teachers leave the profession.

Pressures of Increased Accountability

Teacher evaluation and teacher accountability can become an unmanageable requirement for many (Benham & O'Brien, 2002; Dixon-Ross, 2020; Hardy, 2018; Moran, 2017). Most, if not all countries, provinces and districts use some form of teacher evaluation to help teachers improve upon existing skills. In many instances, this can be a useful and welcomed tool while, in other instances, it merely becomes one more menial task teachers are asked to complete that often yields no real professional or instructional benefits (Moran, 2017). Teachers have also reported that with the implementation of curriculum-based testing, standardized testing, and district mandated teaching materials, the working and school environments have become less student-focused and more results-based (Benham & O'Brien, 2002). In their study, Benham and O'Brien (2002) wanted to get an accurate picture of why teachers consider leaving the profession, and although they only received responses from 12.6% of their sample group, the

data was still clear. The number one reason teachers from their sample had left the teaching profession was pressures related to increased accountability.

Increased Paperwork

Teachers today understand the value in building meaningful relationships with students and doing away with the hierarchical teacher–student relationships of the past. To be effective, teachers must be willing to be responsive to students and their needs. This requires the ability to be flexible and change course in the moment, which can be derailed by the expectations of paperwork and the mandated inefficient documentation that teachers felt often measured the wrong thing (Tusting, 2002). Benham and O’Brien (2002) highlighted the concept that those who do not work in the education system might assume that the paperwork is just part of the job, but what the public fails to understand is that the nature of teaching has changed over the past several decades. Teachers expect to, and often enjoy spending their extra time planning lessons that they know will be beneficial to their students. However, it is quite another thing to expect them to be equally excited about endless hours of paperwork that has little to no direct effect on student learning or development.

Administration

The third most researched reason teachers leave the profession is perceived administrator insufficiencies. Research has shown that teachers who feel supported by their administration are less likely to leave than those with negative views of, or relationships with, their administration (Benham & O’Brien, 2002; Boyd et al., 2011; Hentges, 2012). Benham and O’Brien (2002) found that the most important influence on school climate is administration. Given the large amount of research that cites school climate as a major determining factor of teacher stress, positive relationships with administration are paramount to teacher retention (Hentges, 2012).

Administrators need to see the importance of building these interpersonal relationships much in the same way teachers do with their students.

Existing Programs to Promote Teacher Well-Being

Another factor affecting teacher well-being that cannot be classified as an external factor, but appeared regularly in the research is, teacher perceived low self-efficacy. As ways to promote teacher well-being are considered, it is important to first note the intrinsic characteristics of teachers that, when not nurtured, lead to perceived low self-efficacy: (a) effective classroom management; (b) role conflict or ambiguity; (c) perfectionism; and (d) induction programs (Jones, 2016; Kutsyuruba et al., 2013; Papastylianou, 2009; Stauffer & Mason, 2013).

Effective classroom management is vital to developing a positive classroom environment. It creates an environment with less classroom disturbances as well as boosted morale and engagement for both students and teachers (Dickie et al., 2018; Wong, 2009). Role ambiguity occurs when a person does not know what is required of them or when they are unsure of how they are expected to behave at work. The teaching profession is multifaceted in terms of the roles within. Upon graduating with an educational degree, most graduates emerge with an educational major in either early years or secondary education, but what many new educators fail to recognize is the myriad of roles within each. Beginning a new career in education, teachers often accept whatever job is offered to them to “break in” and begin building their career. It is quite rare to have that initial role, or second or third role for that matter, fit nicely within the new teacher’s area of expertise, it can take years to acquire that (Papastylianou & Kaila, 2008).

Another way a person may experience role conflict is with role overload. Role overload happens when a teaching professional is superimposed with multiple tasks or jobs and the expectation is that they are addressed or done simultaneously (Papastylianou & Kaila, 2008).

Both role conflict and role ambiguity are often experienced by teachers, especially those new to the profession. Interestingly, a personality trait that plays an important part in teacher stress is perfectionism (Jones, 2016; Stoeber & Rennert, 2008). The research discussed the difference between perfectionistic strivings and perfectionistic concerns. Perfectionistic striving is described as normal and healthy and associated with positive characteristics. Perfectionistic concern is linked to negative characteristics and is made up of those elements of perfectionism that are considered neurotic or unhealthy. From their study of 118 secondary school teachers in Germany, Stoeber and Rennert (2008) found teachers who displayed characteristics of perfectionistic concern were more likely to experience work related stress or burnout than those with characteristics of perfectionistic strivings.

Finally, the fourth quadrant that can determine if teachers have perceived low self-efficacy is proper induction and professional development programs for new teachers (Gaikhorst et al., 2015; Kelley, 2004). As mentioned earlier, quality induction programs for new teachers are inconsistent. Historically the education profession has ignored the needs of its novice teachers but should be an important solution to consider.

While many of the research studies focused in on negative influencers of teacher stress, alternatively, some researchers chose to approach teacher well-being from a more positive perspective. This positive perspective assessed the personal qualities of teachers who are healthy and happy in their profession (Crain et al., 2017; Lu, 2019; Santoro, 2020; Taylor, 2017; Turner & Theilking, 2019), as well as highlighted existing programs used to help develop well-being among staff (Bradley & Cordaro, 2020; Turner & Theilking 2019). Limited research has been done on the specific characteristics of teachers with existing high intrinsic resiliency but Turner and Theilking (2019) and Renshaw et al. (2015) have found that certain character traits may be

linked to professional happiness in teachers. Teachers with higher levels of self-efficacy and the natural ability to develop pro-social relationships with students and co-workers also enjoy improved well-being. It is also noted that teachers who report having regular, quality sleep, often have lower levels of stress (Crain, et al., 2017; Yui-Sum Poon et al., 2019). Sleep is an important recovery mechanism and fundamental to health and wellness.

The literature review also revealed a variety of programs designed to support teacher wellness such as the four pillars of well-being curriculum, the PERMA model, and the WMT model (Bradly & Cordaro, 2020; Crain, et al., 2017; Turner & Theilking, 2019). Bradly and Cordaro (2020) described the four pillars of well-being curriculum as a curriculum designed to be implemented school-wide. The idea of the program is that the four pillars of well-being, mindfulness, community, self-curiosity, and contentment are taught to the general student population. For teachers to be able to implement this program properly, they must first develop these competencies on an individual level. This internalization on the part of the teacher would then lead to a cohesive sense of well-being felt throughout the school.

The PERMA model is based on the theory that human flourishing occurs when five elements of well-being are met, positive emotion, positive engagement, positive relationships, positive meaning, and positive accomplishments (Turner & Theilking, 2019). When all five of these categories are met, human well-being is optimal.

The third program discussed in the research was the workplace mindfulness training program (WMT). The idea of this type of program is that specific training can help teachers develop and apply stress management skills to both to their classrooms and everyday lives (Crain et al., 2017).

Another teacher support approach researched was the arrangement and development of mentor relationships (Hudson, 2013; Kipps-Vaughan et al., 2012; Reitman & Karge, 2019; Pitton, 2006). When all individuals involved in the mentoring process understand their roles, mentoring can be a valuable tool in teacher retention (Pitton, 2006). There are many ways a mentor can be beneficial in the induction process. They help build best practices, develop a collaborative community that extends beyond the mentor and mentee relationship, instill a process of continued self-reflection (Reitman & Karge, 2019) and provide timely and constructive feedback (Hudson, 2013). Although beneficial in practice, the ideals of these programs are altruistic in nature and do not attempt to address the real issues within the education system. It reverts to the idea of Santoro (2020) that teacher burnout lies within the individuals themselves and external factors have little to do with teacher well-being.

Findings

Canadian teachers are faced with many challenges in their classrooms today. They are working with increasingly larger class sizes, longer work hours, larger workload and greater accountability, unmanageable demands from administrators, parents and districts to meet or exceed curriculum demands. All the while, they are expected to adapt their existing practices to meet the needs of a growing, diverse student population (McCrimmon, 2015; Mojsa-Kaja et al., 2015; Stauffer & Mason, 2013).

An aspect of teaching that often goes unnoticed by those not in the classroom is the strong social interactions that occur. Although burnout syndrome can occur in any profession, it is more likely to occur in those with strong social interactions, such as teaching (Mojsa-Kaja et al., 2015). Furthermore, the commitment of educators to improve their practice at their own personal expense (e.g., self-funding classroom materials or furthering their education) and not

receiving appropriate compensation or recognition, leads to the exploitation of the educational workforce. Fighting against the current challenges within the education system today, the relentless commitment of teachers to ensure the best outcomes for their students could ultimately, negatively impact their own well-being (Cumming, 2017).

Most Common Reasons Teachers Leave the Profession

While research on the current stressors faced by educators today is staggering, the following questions must be considered: Given that the external factors contributing to teacher stress are similar across districts, provinces and countries, why do some teachers crack and others thrive? Is teacher attrition caused merely by the afore-mentioned external factors or is there more? While the research has shown that some teachers leave the profession because of their own perceived shortcomings derived from low self-efficacy, role ambiguity or role conflict, and perfectionistic concern (Jones, 2016; Papastyliaou & Kaila, 2008; Stoeber & Rennert, 2008), Mills (2003) suggested that teachers who are thought to be the most successful share similar qualities by being open and flexible, objective and logical. The standardized nature of teacher accountability and blanket processes are in direct opposition to these characteristics.

This supports Santoro's (2020) claim that if effective teachers are entering the profession for morally inflected reasons such as fostering the development of students, seeking justice, or liberating minds through academic study, why then do we not assume they could also be exiting the profession for the same moral reasons? Teachers who are open, flexible, objective, and analytical would naturally feel stifled by the rigid standardization and processed nature of the current system. If this is the case, then the system is doing itself a disservice by the implementation of what is perceived to be beneficial standard processes if it, in fact, drives their most qualified teachers away. The validity of these concepts depends on whether a particular

teacher is best motivated by controlled factors (external) or autonomous factors (internal) as described by self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2008). The concept of teacher morality and how it relates to teacher attrition needs further research.

The aim of this research was to determine what external factors lead to teacher stress and what causes them to leave the profession. Five workplace factors that lead to teacher stress were identified:

1. Student-to-teacher violence
2. Unrealistic workload
3. Constant educational reform
4. Poor relationships with, and trust in, administrative teams
5. School climate.

Not surprisingly, the top three reasons teachers leave the profession are directly linked to one or more of these factors. The top reason teachers leave the profession was the pressure of increased accountability, followed by unmanageable paper-work, and low support from administration.

Existing Programs to Promote Teacher Well-being

The following programs designed to support teacher well-being: (a) the Four Pillars of Well-being Curriculum (Bradley & Cordaro, 2020); (b) the PERMA model (Turner & Theilking, 2019); and (c) the Workplace Mindfulness Training Program (Crain et al., 2017) attempt to build and enhance resiliency characteristics within teachers to help them become more open and flexible, objective and logical in their professional practice. The implementation of mentor relationships at the onset of beginning teacher careers was also found to be a valuable program to develop capacity within novice teachers (Hudson, 2013; Kipps-Vaughan et al., 2012; Reitman & Karge, 2019; Pitton, 2006).

Unfortunately, these existing programs that promote teacher well-being do not provide solutions to the top reasons why teachers leave the profession. In fact, the above-mentioned reasons teachers leave the profession, are, for the most part, beyond the control of the teacher. This could explain why the delicate balance of a work–life dynamic is especially important to female teachers. When the work side of the scale dips too far, throwing the work–life balance into conflict, female educators may opt to leave the profession to better meet the needs of their family, or morally perceived more important role. The programs highlighted in the research focus mainly on intrinsic development strategies teachers can use to combat the workplace stressor rather than programs to help eliminate them. While helpful, these programs do not aim to help teachers who already demonstrate these characteristics but whose teaching qualities are in direct opposition to the current standardized nature of the profession.

What Administrators Can do to Mitigate Teacher Attrition

As an aspiring future administrator, a personal focus throughout my research has been to formulate a plan that administrators could use to help mitigate teachers' attrition among their staff. One of the simplest, yet most effective strategies that emerged from the research was the implementation of mentor relationships between experienced staff and new teachers. The benefits of this program could be two-fold as these relationships would allow the development of not only new teachers but experienced staff as well. While new staff members would build their self-efficacy through the modeling of (and advice from) their experienced counterparts, the experienced staff members would be able to utilize this role to build their leadership capacity. Weaving teacher well-being programs such as the Four Pillars of Well-being Curriculum, the PERMA model, and the WMT model into the fibers of the school climate would benefit not only experienced and new teachers, but students as well.

Administrators looking to mitigate attrition within their schools would also benefit from ensuring new teachers have access to any induction programs offered in their region. In a study done by Ingersoll (2012), there did appear to be a link between beginning teachers' participation in induction programs and their retention. However, it depended on the type and number of programs each teacher participated in. The induction program that had the strongest effect on teacher retention was having a mentor teacher with whom common planning time was built into the schedule. Even in regions where districts are unable to properly fund beginning teacher induction programs, principals have the capacity to create a school-wide structure that supports the induction process. Administrators willing to support and promote the retention of new teachers through effective mentoring programs ensure successful teacher induction within their schools (Karsenti & Collin, 2013; Ingersoll, 2012; Kutsyuruba et al., 2013).

Significance of the Study

It is no surprise that the bulk of the research done on teacher burnout attempted to identify external factors causing stress. Most of the above-mentioned external factors impede teacher well-being and are unique to the profession, especially when considering they often happen simultaneously. The most poignant aspect of the research was that most teachers want to engage in meaningful work that benefits students, the school, and the community but these teachers are regularly demoralized by the red tape and bureaucracy of the system. Work then becomes less about the moral work they hoped to do and more about successfully navigating the system (Santoro, 2020).

Regarding the potential implications of my research findings, the individual experiences of each teacher must be considered as contributing factors to attrition. Although the three most common reasons teachers leave the profession were well researched, it is important to note that

each teacher who decides to leave the profession also has unique personal reasons for doing so that cannot be accounted for. There may be life factors unrelated to teaching, experiences unique to an individual school or district, or personal convictions that led to their decisions. MacBeth (2001) described reflexivity as a “deconstructed exercise for locating the intersections of author, other, text, and world, and for penetrating the representational exercise itself” (p. 35). As researcher it was important for me to ensure an understanding that despite the findings depicting specific reasons teachers leave the profession, the life experiences all teachers studied cannot be fully accounted for.

Throughout the research I challenged myself to understand my own positionality within the teaching profession while recognizing that each article or experience researched would be uniquely different. The results of this study not only benefited my current understandings of and interactions with staff as a teacher leader within my school but allowed me to build capacity for future leadership roles. I also believe that the results of this study brought forth personal recommendations on how to positively navigate the emotional and personal constructs of teacher well-being through a servant-based leadership approach.

The guiding principle of servant leadership is the understanding that by listening first, a leader should put aside their own self-interests for the higher purpose of improving and building up followers, leading to the improvement of the whole organization (Greenleaf, 2002; Greenleaf; 2014; Shaw & Newton, 2014). Servant-based leadership is grounded in focusing on followers as opposed to the leader or the organization, a perspective I believe to be necessary in the education sector. Recent literature has highlighted the need for a new approach to educational leadership, one that is less about command-and control and more about enhancing relationships and connections between leaders and followers (Cerit, 2009; Gocen & Sen, 2020; Lapointe-Terosky

& Reitano, 2016; Nahavandi, 2015). Teaching is a helping profession most teachers choose because of their passion for aiding and developing others. True educational leaders understand that the focus does not need to be on the organization itself, if administrators take care of teachers, teachers will take care of the rest.

Conclusion

Having taught in the education system for the past 16 years, I have seen many systemic changes along the way. Some have been beneficial and have helped shape the way I teach today, but there have been many changes for the sake of change and a lot of documentation for the sake of documentation. Some of the external factors researched will always be part of the profession. Change, student behavior, workload, and accountability are aspects of the job to be expected. If administrators can work to limit the amount of controlled motivational factors and build autonomous motivational factors into their school climate and culture, teachers may find their roles more fulfilling, thereby mitigating teacher attrition. Thankfully, I have always been able to say the word “no” and strongly believe in the importance of self-care, aspects that have helped me navigate the stressors of working in the field of education, but I have seen many friends and co-workers navigate this profession without the same success. I have learned that although certain personal characteristics are valuable in the development of happy, effective teachers, there is more we can do.

Administrators play a key role in ensuring teachers are healthy, happy and maintain a solid work-life, life-work balance. Some ways administrators can assist are: (a) limiting expectations when it comes to accountability; (b) eliminating unnecessary paperwork; (c) listening to and understanding the strengths and needs of each teacher; and (d) be an ally for teachers dealing with student behaviors. Implementing an effective school wide induction

program by pairing up new teachers with their seasoned counterparts and building a positive school climate are ways administrators can help ensure their teachers develop the successful characteristics needed.

Nurturing the development of openness, flexibility, objectivity, and logical thinking allows effective teachers to help foster the same characteristics in their co-workers and students, ultimately creating a successful and innovative learning organization. As Sarder (2015) eluded, “If you are not learning, you are not moving forward, and you can’t be competitive. You can’t even see what’s coming toward you.” (p. xxi). Students need their teachers to be happy, healthy, and moving forward so they can help their students become competitive for a world they cannot see coming toward them, tomorrow’s world.

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