Exploring Work Perceptions in High Poverty Schools:
Middle School Teachers' Thriving, Vitality, and Learning at Work

by

Nicholas Orlowski

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Doctoral Committee:

      Associate Professor Robert Bain, Chair
      Professor Kim Cameron
      Professor Pamela Moss
      Associate Professor Donald Peurach

Nicholas Orlowski

nsorlo@umich.edu

ORCID iD: 0000-0002-0222-3027

DEDICATION

To my mom and my wife, for being my biggest fans and sources of support.

To all teachers, past, present, and future:

> "The practice of a healer, therapist, teacher or any helping professional should be directed toward his or herself first, because if the helper is unhappy, he or she cannot help many people."
>
> *-Thich Nhat Hanh*

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PREFACE

When I left my middle school teaching position to attend graduate school, my colleagues told me, "don't forget what it is like" to be in the classroom day in and day out. I carried this reminder with me as I began to explore themes for my dissertation. Later, in conversations with teachers as a field instructor, I developed a sense of growing discontentment with where the profession was seemingly heading. These teachers hosting my university interns spoke with deference of the "good old days" and lamented how their jobs are not the same as they used to be.

It was not until my own wife started expressing similar feelings about her life as a teacher that I realized teachers work perceptions needed to become my avenue for research. For the first part of her career, my wife loved her job and seemed content with making a career out of it. However, when we moved for graduate school, she had a hard time finding a position, forcing her to take jobs at schools because she had to, not because she wanted to. Her experiences in charter schools with questionable financial practices and under-staffed faculties turned a once satisfied teacher into someone considering a new line of work. As I began to explore job satisfaction research, I wondered if perhaps the solution to teacher turnover is understanding what causes positive and negative work perceptions to emerge in teachers. This study is my way of saying none of us should forget what it is like in the classroom; for if we truly honor the profession of teaching, we need to ensure school leaders and policy makers are providing conditions conducive to teachers' success.

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ABSTRACT

The teaching profession has both retention and recruitment problems. High teacher turnover, paired with teacher shortages, has and will prove costly for all schools, particularly those in high poverty areas. Research in other professions suggests that attitudes and perceptions of work matter in both performance and in retention, yet, too often, school leaders and policy makers ignore teachers' perceptions of their working environment. This study uses "thriving" – experiencing a sense of both learning and vitality at work – to investigate the work perceptions of middle school teachers in the high poverty setting to understand what contributes to the positive and negative experiences teachers face. The study employed an empirically tested survey tool to measure thriving, administering the instrument to 101 teachers, working in the high poverty (Title I) setting at five middle schools, in the same district, in the southern United States. I conducted follow-up interviews with ten high and eight low scoring participants to add teachers' descriptions of what contributed to their thriving, learning, and vitality in schools. Correlated as well to factors from research on effective schools, the study suggests that teachers are less likely to thrive because of a lack of vitality, in part because of student interactions, and those scoring low on thriving are less likely to see teaching in their future. Learning varied less than vitality across the sample, but interviews revealed that thriving corresponds to more experiential views of learning as opposed to more episodic ones. I conclude with proposing a thriving teaching model to situate this study's findings in the broader teacher retention context by providing implications of the model and proposed next steps to guide future research.

CHAPTER I

Introduction

Teachers' perceptions *of* and experiences *at* their jobs matter. However, teachers feel leaders and policymakers too often ignore their perceptions and experiences on teaching and student learning (Rentner, Kober, Frizzell, & Ferguson, 2016; Riggs, 2013). While researchers, such as Lortie (1975) and Jackson (1990), explored how teachers think about their work, and its impact on the dynamics of schooling, far too often, at all levels, people in positions of power in education discount the perceptions and experiences of teachers. This stands in contrast to the business community's approach as shown by their robust literature and practices on creating positive organizations designed to increase satisfaction, performance, and retention through, among other things, employee engagement, relationships, and positive leadership (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2011). This study seeks to contribute to the existing literature on positive organizations by examining middle school teachers' work perceptions, specifically in high poverty schools.

Examining teacher perceptions and their related experiences is beneficial for three reasons. First, in other organizations, there is strong correlation among positive work perceptions, job performance, and employee retention. The existing literature suggests employees who enjoy their work and view their job as stimulating, challenging, *and* supportive are far more likely to be effective and remain on the job (Spreitzer, Lam, & Fritz, 2010; Spreitzer

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& Porath, 2012). Although most of this literature comes from outside the teaching profession, there are enough studies to suggest this holds true for teaching.

Second, teacher retention is a growing concern nationally and therefore exploring ways to improve retention is critical. Research and policy studies show that 40-50% of new teachers leave the profession within five years (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2014; Ingersoll, 2012). Such turnover has a detrimental effect on school climate (Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2012; Loeb, Darling-Hammond, & Luczak, 2005) and negatively impacts student learning (Allensworth, Ponisciak, & Mazzeo, 2009; Loeb et al., 2005; Simon & Johnson, 2013). Teacher turnover corresponds with low student achievement (Podolsky, Kini, Bishop, & Darling-Hammond, 2016), which causes more turnover, and puts students at turnover heavy schools at a distinct disadvantage (Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013). The retention problem is also an expensive one with projections of it costing the system $8.5 billion each year in finding teacher replacements (Podolsky et al., 2016). It seems increasing teacher retention could positively influence school budgets and student achievement. Since there are fiscal and performance-based implications, this study is about much more than just understanding teachers' feelings.

Third, schools in the United States face a teacher shortage (Bruni, 2015; Rich, 2015). There are several reasons including the baby boom generation's retirement (Aaronson & Meckel, 2008); low enrollment in teacher preparation programs (Freedberg, 2014; Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016); the aforementioned retention problem (Sutcher et al., 2016); and larger class sizes (Sutcher et al., 2016).

Recruiting new members to the profession is vital, as is keeping those already serving in classrooms from leaving the teaching field. However, this is a task made all the more difficult given how teacher turnover is linked to perceptions of poor working conditions (Allensworth et

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al., 2009; Johnson et al., 2012; Simon & Johnson, 2013). Further, the lack of positive models and poor impressions of the working life of teachers discourages new individuals from entering into and subsequently remaining in the profession (Cavazos, 2015). Perceptions of teachers and the public at-large appear to have an effect on shortage and retention.

This study emerged from wanting to understand why some teachers choose to stay and others leave. To that end, a powerful and useful construct in workplace research is thriving, "the psychological state in which individuals experience both a sense of vitality and a sense of learning at work" (Spreitzer, Sutcliffe, Dutton, Sonenshein, & Grant, 2005, p. 538). Thriving and its two key components – vitality and learning – are central to my investigation of teachers' perceptions of their work experiences. Vitality at work refers to the positive feelings that impact performance due to focused energy and aliveness (Nix, Ryan, Manly, & Deci, 1999). The learning aspect of thriving encompasses the ability to acquire and apply new knowledge and skills through one's job (Dweck, 1986). Previous studies on thriving suggest that those who experience thriving in the workplace are more likely to be satisfied, perform better, and remain in the profession (Spreitzer & Porath, 2012). Therefore, studying the work perceptions of both teachers who do and do not appear to thrive could provide valuable insight into how to leaders and policy makers structure work conditions for teachers.

Moreover, teachers, whether they thrive or not, likely have perceptions of their schools as organizations, including ideas about organizational factors identified in research on effective schools (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010; Lezotte 1991; 2007). Unpacking teachers' perceptions about these factors and connecting these to their scores on a thriving instrument might offer additional understanding towards shaping work environments in a manner conducive to thriving.

Three questions guide this study: First, how well can a thriving instrument identify teachers with varying levels of thriving and what patterns emerge? Second, what perceptions do teachers with different thriving levels have of their work experiences, especially those related to learning, vitality, and factors related to effective schools research? And third, what features of the work environment emerge as critical to these teachers' perceptions of their work experiences? Studying the perceptions that stem from both positive and negative work experiences is important. Previous research suggests that separate and distinct factors contribute to their respective presence (Hart, 1994). Positive and negative perceptions are related, but are not mirror opposites; in other words, negative work experiences are not explained by the absence of factors that correspond to positive ones.

To surface teachers' perceptions, I used a mix of a survey instrument and interviews with middle school teachers in the high poverty setting. The middle school is an important context since middle school teachers are more likely than teachers at other grade levels to experience job dissatisfaction by 32% (Moore, 2012). Further, middle school teachers are also more prone to turnover than teachers at other levels (Reio & Segredo, 2012). High poverty schools add another crucial variable because teachers in these settings are more susceptible to turnover than their peers teaching in more affluent settings (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Ingersoll, 2001). By focusing on particularly demanding contexts, this study seeks to contribute to the existing literature on teachers' perceptions to inform the ways in which schools can provide work environments that retain teachers.

The next chapter makes a case for the value of thriving by first exploring related and existing literature on work perceptions. Though some of the research focuses on occupations outside of the school setting, this literature suggests the importance that positive perceptions

have on retention and performance and situates my study of schools in broader context. Then, I explore the affordances and constraints that exist from different theoretical explanations of work perceptions to make a case for why I am using *thriving* as my theoretical and conceptual center.

In chapter three, I explain the methods and data analysis used to study thriving in the high poverty, middle school context that produces the findings documented in subsequent chapters.

Overall, there are five findings chapters. The first presents the results of the survey data used to identify thriving and non-thriving teachers. The next two findings chapters each focus on one-half of the thriving concept by examining teacher vitality and learning, respectively. I then present a chapter that explores teachers' perceptions on factors identified in the research on effective schools. The last findings chapter presents a brief synopsis of the findings related to teachers' perceived future plans. The concluding chapter of the study sums up the findings and proposes a model for tending to teacher work perceptions for future use.

The goal of this study is to unpack the work perceptions of teachers towards understanding what contributes to and limits their ability to thrive. The presumption is that when teachers thrive, that is, they learn on the job and feel vitalized from their work, they are more likely to remain in the profession. Therefore, documenting the personal and organizational factors that may associate with thriving, and how they interact, could provide valuable insight to school leaders and policy makers interested in retaining teachers and creating positive work environments.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

Why Thriving?

Thriving is a robust and rich concept widely used and studied in other professions, but rarely in schools. Investigating thriving in teachers can inform existing research on teacher retention due to thriving's connection with building sustainability at work (Spreitzer, Porath, & Gibson, 2012). Thriving is an ideal state of performance because the presence of learning and vitality ensures that work promotes growth and is regenerative. Accordingly, thriving becomes a viable proxy to identify teachers more (or less) likely to hold positive work perceptions because those who experience thriving tend to be more satisfied, while those that do not, are more susceptible to stress and burnout (Spreitzer & Porath, 2012).

However, before turning to thriving, I begin by explaining the importance of work perceptions in general and how work perceptions, like job satisfaction, correspond with retention and performance. I then turn to describing the different theories behind work perceptions to ultimately argue why thriving makes the most sense as a proxy to identify teachers who likely hold positive work perceptions.

The Importance of Work Perceptions

My research for this study began with a hypothesis that teachers' work perceptions factor into whether or not they remain in the profession. If teachers hold positive perceptions of their

school and the profession, they should be less vulnerable to turnover. To explore this claim, I begin with literature showing the significance of positive work perceptions in general.

Research on positive work perceptions stems from positive psychology. Positive psychologists emphasize the importance of subjective, positive experiences because such experiences correspond to factors like well-being, contentment, engagement, satisfaction, interpersonal skills, originality, and perseverance. Positive perceptions also combat the potentially debilitating personal conditions that can stem from negative experiences (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). To improve perceptions, employers and policy makers should adjust work conditions (Diener & Seligman, 2004) in an attempt to bolster retention, particularly for those early in their career (Meyer & Allen, 1988). There is also a growing body of research that argues focusing on perceptions like happiness at work is a viable approach to fostering organizational success (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005). Understanding how people perceive their work environment could help inform leaders and policy makers who seek to improve teachers' work conditions, increase their retention, and positively influence performance.

A contrarian viewpoint to the importance of positive work perceptions would suggest that management hires an employee to do a job and other measures, like profitability or results, are more important than work perceptions. In the case of teachers, this would mean focusing on student learning and not letting teachers' thoughts or attitudes about school policies or procedures get in the way. Still, as the literature argues, teachers' work perceptions correlate positively with higher retention and performance.

Teachers' perceptions of work conditions shape whether or not satisfaction occurs and, in turn, influences important factors like retention (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Podolsky et al., 2016;

Sutcher et al., 2016) and performance (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Steca, & Malone, 2006; Karabenick & Conley, 2011). That is, there is literature that has found positive correlations among retention, performance, and satisfaction.

Even so, the research on teachers' perceptions and their connection to other outcomes – such as retention or performance – is modest when compared with the research from other professions. Research from other helping professions (Cohen, 2005), like teaching, show improvement in worker and organizational outcomes, as I argue in the next section.

The Relationship between Perceptions and Retention in Other Professions

This section documents how exploring work perceptions is not unique to teaching to help further justify this study. For instance, nursing, like teaching, is plagued by high turnover (Blegen, 1993), where dissatisfied nurses are sixty-five percent more likely to leave the profession due to negative work perceptions (Shields and Ward, 2001). A meta-analysis of nursing literature identified thirteen distinct variables that shape nurses' work perceptions and influence retention rates: stress, organizational commitment, communication with supervisor, autonomy, recognition, routinization, communication with peers, fairness, locus of control, age, education, tenure, and professionalization (Blegen, 1993). Of these thirteen variables, absence of stress and organizational commitment had the highest correlations with satisfaction and retention, while perceived lack of autonomy and high reported stress were most prevalent in the negative perceptions that led to turnover (Blegen, 1993).

Similarly, a doctor's likelihood of remaining in the profession is also connected to their work perceptions. A survey of nearly 2,000 doctors across the United States (Pathman et al., 2002) found a different relationship than nurses between the impact of work perceptions and turnover. Researchers reported that twenty-seven percent of doctors surveyed said they would

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likely leave the profession within two years because of dissatisfaction, with the number somewhat higher among older doctors than younger ones (Pathman et al., 2002). These doctors cited poor community relations and low pay as the primary causes of their negative perceptions of the profession.

Nurses and doctors are not the only helping professionals whose work perceptions correspond with turnover. Research on child welfare professionals reported that a supportive work environment enhanced satisfaction and heightened the chance of retention. Conversely, child welfare professionals dissatisfied with their current position reported staying on the job primarily due to the lack of other professional opportunities (Smith, 2005). Interestingly, these professionals also reported that dissatisfaction increased as colleagues sought other opportunities, leading to constant changes among their own staff. Therefore, high or frequent turnover in a field might generate additional negative perceptions and increase turnover, making it sort of a self-generating cycle.

The research on nurses, doctors, and child welfare workers suggests that the relationship between satisfaction and retention is not as simple as whether or not someone "likes" her/his job. Rather, work perceptions result from multiple factors and appear to be context specific. For example, nurses' perceptions alone were influenced by thirteen distinct factors related to satisfaction and retention, none of which coincided with the two primary causes of turnover found among doctors. This suggests that even professionals in the same field, albeit with different responsibilities, can hold negative work perceptions for different reasons.

The addition of child welfare workers to this review shows how an entirely different set of experiences can produce even further differences in work perceptions. The child welfare research highlights the influence of other professional opportunities and the self-generative

nature of turnover; neither of which were present in the literature on nurses and doctors. Despite differences in why turnover persists, these professions show that in order to improve retention rates, tending to perceptions like satisfaction, while combatting dissatisfaction appears to be a viable solution. Therefore, to better understand the teacher retention issue, it is important to dive into teachers' work perceptions to document retention's relationship with satisfaction.

The Relationship between Perceptions and Retention in Teaching

There is also a long research tradition of studying teacher work perceptions, showing that teachers who report lower levels of satisfaction are more likely to leave the profession (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1979; Litt & Turk, 1985; Stempien & Loeb, 2002; Wangberg, 1982; 1984). In fact, several societal, organizational, and personal factors shape these work perceptions and their corresponding lower levels of satisfaction (Wangberg, 1984; Dinham & Scott, 1998; 2000).

Societal factors. First, society at-large can influence teachers' work perceptions and their retention plans. Societal influences differ from organizational factors because they persist outside of the control of an individual school building or district. For instance, low professional status affects teachers due to their sensitivity to negative public perception (Dinham & Scott 1998, 2000; Litt & Turk, 1985), which can lead to teachers wanting to search for more viable career options (Spencer-Hall, 1982). This negative public perception can take a few different forms. For instance, one pervasive societal belief is that a teacher's job is "easy" and therefore, satisfaction is assumed due to the low difficulty of the work (Dinham & Scott, 1998). Also, media stories of teachers that focus on bad apples further discourage any sympathy from the public for any negative work perceptions teachers may have. In turn, these negative societal views of the work

of teaching contribute to an overall poor opinion of teaching in many communities (Dinham & Scott, 1998).

Increasing governmental oversight and mandates are additional examples of societal factors that negatively impact teacher work perceptions. For example, teachers perceive mandated curricular reforms as limiting to their creativity and autonomy (Dinham & Scott, 1998; Zembylas & Papanastasiou, 2006). Moreover, the increasing role of mandated accountability and assessment measures is another source contributing to the dissatisfaction of teachers (Podolsky et al., 2016).

Organizational Factors. Factors more within the scope and influence of a given school or district are the organizational factors that influence work perceptions, which include lack of input in decision-making, low salary, and subpar working conditions (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Dinham & Scott, 1998, 2000; Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1979; Litt & Turk, 1985). Poor working conditions like the lack of necessary instructional resources, substandard facilities, large class sizes, and lack of administrative support represent some of the leading causes of negative perceptions, especially among teachers in high poverty schools (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Johnson et. al., 2012; Shann, 1998).

Personal factors. Teachers also develop negative work perceptions because of personal factors like poor access to coping resources, which includes the presence of helpful colleagues and the ability to express one's feelings (Litt & Turk, 1985). Conversely, when teachers have access to more coping resources, it correlates positively with both satisfaction and retention (Stempien & Loeb, 2002).

In addition, as was the case with organizational factors, teachers in high poverty schools face personal factors unique to their situation. For example, these teachers are more prone to

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stress due to low job security stemming from funding issues or strict performance measures (Shann, 1998). Furthermore, teachers in high poverty schools face dissatisfaction when they personally feel unable to manage student behaviors or help students learn (Shann, 1998).

Additionally, teachers value self-growth; in other words, research shows that teachers want to improve and their positive work perceptions increase when they see such improvement, while it decreases when such opportunities are absent (Dinham & Scott, 1998, 2000). Research also suggests that teachers' relationships with their students and teachers' ability to contribute to student achievement are key contributors to teachers' favorable work perceptions (Dinham & Scott, 1998; Shann, 1998; Zembylas & Papanastasiou, 2006). This suggests that personal factors can directly influence the work perceptions of teachers, both positively and negatively.

As this section suggests, teachers develop negative perceptions from three different sources: societal, organizational, and personal. Thus, increasing retention among teachers will take more than increasing positive work perceptions; it will also take active measures to lessen the factors that generate negative work perceptions. Taken together with the research on helping professions, previous research provides enough evidence to suggest perceptions, like satisfaction, correspond with retention. In fact, the satisfaction studies on teaching and other professions show that both the person and the organization influence work perceptions. Therefore, to study such perceptions, theoretical approaches should consider both personal and organizational factors.

A fair criticism at this point would argue that perhaps it is a good thing that dissatisfied teachers leave the profession. After all, who would want their child taught by a malcontent? Along these same lines, critics could argue that the current system effectively weeds out individuals unfit for the job and that though the costs for recruitment and training are high, it is a necessary evil in order to find the right teachers for the right school. However, positive

organizational research connects increases in positive work perceptions to increased performance (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003), meaning tending to satisfaction (and similar sentiments) in the workplace does more than just make people happier, it can benefit the organization from a performance standpoint.

The Relationship between Perceptions and Performance in Other Professions

There is also research that links perceptions, like satisfaction, to performance in both teaching and other professions. Tying perceptions to performance measures provides an additional justification for the importance of studying and ultimately tending to work perceptions.

Perhaps the strongest support for the connection between satisfaction and performance comes from a meta-analysis of 312 quantitative and qualitative studies that examined this relationship (Judge, Thoresen, Bono, & Patton, 2001). The researchers' meta-analysis calculated a positive correlation (.30) between satisfaction and performance in the workplace. Judge et al.'s study dispels the contrarian view that satisfaction is unrelated to performance and warrants the continued examination of this connection (Judge et al., 2001). The meta-analysis also suggests that to improve teaching performance, a viable solution is to focus on producing positive work perceptions that instill feelings like satisfaction. These findings encouraged me to further investigate the relationship between satisfaction and performance, leading to additional research documenting how both personal and organization factors can help contribute.

Personal factors. Additional studies from professions outside of teaching help support the claim that the positive work perceptions correlate with performance. One way this is achieved is through attending to personal factors – specific characteristics of individuals that seem to correspond to increased levels of satisfaction and performance. In other words, certain

people bring certain traits to the work environment, making positive perceptions more likely (Spreitzer et al., 2012).

For example, there is a positive correlation between satisfaction and citizenship factors exhibited by employees (Bateman & Organ, 1983). Citizenship factors refer to employee behaviors like compliance, dependability, cooperation, and response to criticism. The relationship found suggests that if satisfaction improves performance in terms of citizenship factors, then employers should promote these factors for reasons far beyond combating absenteeism and turnover (Bateman & Organ, 1983). It also proposes that satisfaction does more than correspond to the presence of happy workers; it also corresponds with the likelihood employees will work together, follow protocols, and seek improvement.

Similar to citizenship factors, job motivation is another mitigating factor in the connection between work perceptions and performance. Job motivation refers to an employee's willingness to complete tasks based on the perceived, corresponding consequences (Springer, 2011). In one study, the researcher analyzed survey responses to detect any correlation among motivation, satisfaction, and performance, ultimately finding a positive correlation existed between job performance and job satisfaction (Springer, 2011). Moreover, job motivation proved to be a key factor as well when assessing positive work perceptions. These findings suggest leaders who seek to increase performance should consider the potential influences that motivation, satisfaction, and performance have on one another.

Like job motivation, an employee's personal disposition also tends to have an influence on whether or not satisfaction corresponds with performance. For example, researchers examined affective-cognitive consistency (ACC) to study the link between satisfaction and performance (Schleicher, Watt, & Greguras, 2004). ACC looks at how much a person's attitude matches

her/his thoughts and actions. When attitudes and thoughts are misaligned, the person with ACC will adjust her/his attitudes and actions accordingly to obtain consistency. The researchers found that employees with higher ACC tended to be more content and were more likely to show strong performance. This suggests that attending to both the affective and cognitive aspects of work benefits both perceptions and performance.

In sum, personal factors can explain some of the relationship found between perceptions and performance, as was the case with the apparent relationship between perceptions and retention. This section provides further support to including personal factors in studying work perceptions. However, this next section shows that like the relationship with retention, organizational factors also contribute to the connection between perceptions and performance, suggesting that neither the individual nor the organization seems more influential.

Organizational factors. The influence of organizational factors means workers' perceptions are more than the result of personal dispositions; the work environment can positively or negatively affect the perceptions workers hold.

For example, in one study, surveys asked workers about their satisfaction, perceptions of the work environment, and their performance relative to others (Babin & Boles, 1996). The results showed that the climate of work environment influenced employee work perceptions, most notably from the involvement of their co-workers and the support of their supervisors. As a result, the extent to which these perceptions were positive or negative correlated with satisfaction, stress, and was indicative of how individual employees compared their performance to others. Therefore, it is in leaders' best interest to provide positive work environments to ensure that not only their employees encounter more positive experiences, but also so that they can optimally perform.

Perceptions also appear to connect to performance at the organizational level when leaders deliberately alter working conditions. One method of altering work conditions is job design (Hackman and Oldham, 1976), which refers to a deliberate attempt on the behalf of the organization to set-up working conditions and experiences to produce a desired result. One such study implemented five aspects of work that correlate with positive experiences: skill variety, task identity, task significance, job autonomy, and feedback, ultimately finding that these five aspects corresponded with increases in satisfaction and performance (Ali & Zia-ur-Rehman, 2014). Findings like this suggest that when organizations alter their conditions to increase the likelihood of positive work experiences, it also leads to increases in positive perception and performance.

This claim is further supported by research on another leadership intervention: implementing a caring climate (Fu & Deshpande, 2014). Caring climate refers to leadership's deliberate structuring of values and beliefs in an organization on the basis of what is best for everyone involved. In one study, the presence of a caring climate produced increases in positive work perceptions, performance and organizational commitment, which, like retention, refers to the likelihood an employee will stay with a given organization (Fu & Deshpande, 2014). This further suggests that leaders can produce desired changes by attending to the structure of the work environment, which in this particular study included training on ethical practices to ensure fair treatment of customers. Plus, the increase in organizational commitment, a concept similar to retention, shows how that higher satisfaction and performance stemming from changes to the work environment can also reduce turnover.

Authentic leadership is another organizational approach that shows the structure of the organization can positively influence perceptions and performance. Authentic leadership is a

philosophy of management that privileges building positive relationships by valuing employee input. In one study, the addition of authentic leadership increased positive perceptions and performance by providing more opportunities for employee empowerment (Wong & Laschinger, 2012).

The fact that performance increased under different organizational models – job design, caring climate, and authentic leadership – further substantiates the claim that organizations can make deliberate changes to the work environment to positively improve both perceptions and performance.

In sum, research, from professions outside of teaching, shows that perceptions correspond to performance through both personal and organizational factors. Personal factors like citizenship factors, cognitive consistency, and job motivation help increase satisfaction and, in turn, positively correlate with performance. At the same time, organizational factors like leadership style and job design can also positively influence both satisfaction and performance. These findings are consistent with the previous section documenting the relationship between satisfaction and retention in that both personal and organizational factors emerged. Taken together, the literature from other professions suggests that the experiences employees encounter at work are important to their perceptions, which in turn correspond to their satisfaction, retention, and performance. The next section seeks to document similar connections in educational research between perceptions and performance.

The Relationship between Perceptions and Performance in Teaching

Like other professions, recent studies of teaching show an increase in the examination of the relationship between perceptions and performance (Bennell & Akyeampong, 2007; Caprara, et al., 2006; Klassen & Chiu, 2010). Some argue the increase in attention is due to more

comprehensive teacher evaluation, which itself emerged from a heightened interest in improving teacher quality because of its positive correlation with student achievement (Hallinger, Heck, & Murphy, 2014). In other words, as research continues to document the importance of good teaching on student achievement, different lines of scholarship emerge, including a limited body on teacher work perceptions. For example, one study found that teachers' negative work perceptions, stemming from teaching in a difficult environment, had an adverse effect on both satisfaction and student learning (Bennell & Akyeampong, 2007).

Additionally, teacher self-efficacy is another variable researchers use to examine the relationship between satisfaction and performance (Caprara et al., 2006; Klassen & Chiu, 2010). Self-efficacy refers to teachers' beliefs that they can succeed at the tasks they must accomplish, which would include helping students learn. Research suggests self-efficacy has a positive impact on teachers' performance as seen through an increase in student achievement (Caprara et al., 2006; Karabenick & Conley, 2011).

Teachers who perceive that they possess the ability to teach effectively tend to be more professionally satisfied, see their experiences as more positive, and as a result tend to teach better than their counterparts with lower self-efficacy (Shann, 1998). Moreover, teachers with high self-efficacy are more likely to seek the training and professional development necessary to improve their practice (Karabenick & Conley, 2011). It stands to reason that self-efficacy is a potential attribute worth tracking in teachers if it influences positive work perceptions, and performance.

The limited, but emerging, research on the relationship between performance and satisfaction in teaching also produced examples of both personal and organizational factors. The presence of self-efficacy appears to be a personal trait that corresponds positively with

perceptions and performance. Additionally, working in a challenging environment decreased the likelihood of satisfaction and appeared to correspond with lower levels of student achievement. Therefore, like the research on other professions, the relationships between satisfaction, performance, and retention in teaching is influenced by a combination of personal and organizational factors. Since perceptions, like satisfaction, seemingly connect with both retention and performance, the question becomes, do retention and performance show any relationship?

The limited research on satisfaction and performance in teaching is mitigated, in part, by recent research connecting retention and perceptions of performance. Here, performance is perceived as a reflection of student achievement. For instance, a study of public schools in Texas concluded that lower performing teachers (based on student test scores) are more likely to leave than their better performing teacher peers (Hanushek, Kain, O'Brien, & Rivkin, 2005). In fact, low performing teachers are most likely to leave after a particularly poor year, meaning their performance was markedly low in that final year. This suggests that poor performance corresponds with retention because teachers will leave the profession when their performance is perceived as insufficient.

Other research suggests the opposite – teachers will stay, not only in the profession, but also in their school because of perceived success. A study out of New York suggests student test scores (in this instance, math) can have an impact on the likelihood a first-year teacher remains in the profession (Boyd, Lankford, Loeb, Ronfeldt, & Wyckoff, 2011). Moreover, the same study suggests teachers who experience success in helping their students grow on achievement tests are also less likely to seek a transfer, even to a more appealing, higher performing school. Thus, not only can high performance keep a teacher in the field, it can also keep that teacher in her/his building, regardless of the school's relative performance. This has important implications for low

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performing schools that struggle to retain teachers because if improving upon individual performances causes teachers to stay, then that too suggests they will also likely possess positive perceptions related to their performance. These recent studies from Texas and New York show how performance and retention appear to correspond with one another.

However, other research warns that retention drops among high performing teachers when they hold negative perceptions of the organization (Jacob, Vidyarthi, & Carroll, 2012). For instance, this occurs when high performing teachers feel underappreciated and when leadership makes little to no effort to retain them. At the same time, high performers also become discouraged when they feel leadership is too tolerant of the poor performance of others and in turn, make an effort to retain low performers. This creates an environment of indifference of who stays and who goes, as if everyone is equally replaceable in the eyes of leadership. This in fact is not the case; this same study suggests it can take up to eleven hiring cycles before a low-performing school can replace a high performing teacher with a similarly abled replacement (Jacob et al., 2012).

This emerging research on the connection between retention and perceptions of performance in teaching also shows how personal and organizational factors influence perceptions. For instance, in the case of poor performers, their personal dissatisfaction and desire to leave the classroom appears to correspond to their performance. Similarly, high performers appear to want to stay because of their success. This changes the narrative from a problem of having to "weed out" the bad teachers to one that argues struggling teachers need the right circumstances to succeed. If early career success is generative, and causes teachers to want to stay in their own building, then the focus should be on providing conditions to make such success more likely. Those that do experience early and continued success appear to be the type

of teachers this study seeks to explore and understand. The question becomes, how do we find these teachers? How has previous research theorized work perceptions?

Theories of Work Perceptions

The literature strongly articulates a relationship between satisfaction, retention, and performance in the workplace. Moreover, the connections among these phenomena produced both personal and organizational factors that explain their presence. What then explains growth or decline in work perceptions like satisfaction? In studying these concepts and their relationship, I documented different theories that explain what influences work perceptions. Accordingly, this section begins by showing how both personal and organizational factors explain work perceptions. So too does their interaction and these interactive theories (see Figure 2.1) of work perceptions appear the most convincing. Therefore, the latter part of this section argues for the use of an interactive theory and justifies why thriving emerged as the theoretical center for this study.
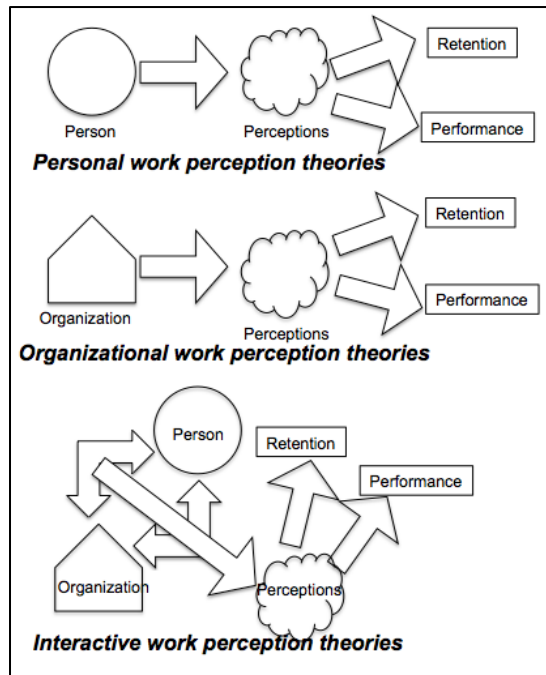
Figure 2.1. Work Perception Theories

Personal work perception theories. Personal work perception theories emphasize the psychological and/or physiological factors that influence one's view of their work environment by focusing on characteristics like an individual's cognition, values, beliefs, or abilities. Such personal factors, also called motivation factors (Herzberg, 1959), refer to factors that tend to make individuals want to do the work. In researching the connection between satisfaction, retention, and performance, four different theories emerged that explain how the person influences the perceptions they develop at work. These distinct theories argue (1) genetics, (2) affective predispositions, (3) intelligence, or (4) needs account for the differences in individual perceptions at work.

One personal theory suggests there is a genetic influence (responsible for approximately thirty percent of the variance) on work perceptions (Arvey, Bouchard, Segal, & Abraham, 1989; Arvey, McCall, Bouchard, Taubman, & Cavanaugh, 1994; Bouchard, Arvey, Keller, & Segal, 1992; Judge, Ilies, & Zhang, 2012). In other words, according to this theory, an individual's genetic predispositions may prevent the extent to which an organization's efforts at increasing positive perceptions, like job satisfaction, take hold:

> Although job enrichment efforts, quality circles, and other environmental changes might be made to enhance intrinsic job satisfaction, the data suggest certain "boundaries" for each individual with regard to satisfaction. Individuals appear to bring important predispositions to the job that may be more difficult to modify than heretofore acknowledged (Arvey et al., 1998, p. 191).

This theory emphasizes the importance of employers knowing an individual's predispositions before investing in work enrichment. Moreover, it suggests understanding the individual has a predictive value because current perceptions could inform the likelihood of an increase in favorable ones going forward. Thus, if genetic predispositions can inform the extent

to which an individual will respond to a change in an organization, then it stands to reason it might also provide a trajectory for desired perceptions.

A related theory suggests an individual's specific affective predispositions are an important factor to attend to for building desired work perceptions (Connolly & Viswesvaran, 2000; Judge & Larsen, 2001). Attending to affective predispositions means focusing on traits like extraversion and neuroticism as important markers for perceptions, like job satisfaction. This theory argues employers should have employees recognize their own perceptions of work as well as the role their personalities play. In turn, understanding one's emotional response to work experiences could lead to more favorable work perceptions than efforts that focus more on organizational factors. This theory suggests positive perceptions of work stem from the choices workers choose to make more so than how the organization is structured.

Intelligence is another factor used to theorize work perceptions, like job satisfaction, and explain how employee perceptions develop (Ganzach, 1998, 2003; Lounsbury, Gibson, Steel, Sundstrom, & Loveland, 2004). An intelligence-based theory argues intelligent people tend to desire and obtain more interesting and engaging work. Hence, the intelligent individual seeks employment in places where job satisfaction is possible and at the same time is also likely to become dissatisfied when work fails to meet expectations. This particular theory shows how some researchers emphasize the importance of personal factors while still recognizing the role organizational factors play. However, like the other personal theories described, intelligence theories place individual traits at the forefront of how perceptions emerge in the workplace.

Since its initial publishing, Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs has become another example of a personal theory used to explain people's perceptions and attitudes towards their job (Porter, 1962; Stum, 2001; Wolf, 1970). According to Maslow's theory, fulfillment is a staged

process where one must meet the requirements of a given need before she/he is able to move on to the next. For example, the most basic needs are physiological ones: food, water, shelter, etc. From there, a person must have her/his safety needs met, which means security in a literal sense as well as other forms of security like finances and insurance. Once physical and safety needs are met, a person must feel love/belonging in her/his social (or work) relationships before esteem needs are met. Only then, after the four previous needs are met, can a person reach self-actualization, which refers to maximizing one's potential.

This idea of self-actualization has been pursued in workplace research out of the belief that if someone perceives all of her/his lesser needs fulfilled by the work environment then that person can reach full potential. The problem with using Maslow's theory for work perception research is that Maslow himself believed only two percent of the population could become self-actualized, making it unappealing to organizations seeking to find a way to improve upon the perceptions of all of their employees (Spreitzer et al., 2005).

The value of personal factor theories is their recognition of the uniqueness of the individual employee by stressing ways genetics, personality, intelligence, and needs influence work perceptions. However, these theories undervalue systemic or organizational factors by overemphasizing the relative intelligence or personality of an employee. Such theories underestimate important organizational factors that cause negative work perceptions. Further, downplaying the role of work environments creates a view of worker perceptions as personal problems rather than reflective of the organization, in a sense making management policies infallible.

Organizational work perception theories. A second line of research sees the features and structure of the organization as more important than the relative personality or disposition of

workers. Also referred to as hygiene factors (Herzberg, 1959), these are features of the work environment beyond the control of a given employee. This line of scholarship holds concepts like (1) situational leadership, (2) affective events, (3) specific job characteristics, and (4) market forces as the critical factors that influence work perceptions.

For example, some theories focus on the role of leaders in influencing work perceptions (Chen & Silverthorne, 2005, Hersey & Blanchard, 1969; Tietjen & Myers, 1999). One such theory, situational leadership (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969), suggests the role of managers is integral in creating positive work perceptions because effective leaders are able to match their leadership style to meet the needs of their employees. Situational leadership promotes adjusting the environment in a manner conducive for both job satisfaction and performance. Accordingly, researchers who promote this view of leadership argue that leaders must know their employees in terms of readiness, ability, and willingness to work in order to shape experiences and build positive work perceptions. The heavy emphasis on leadership makes this theory organizational in nature despite references to personal needs of employees. It suggests that leaders are the drivers of fostering desired work perceptions.

Other researchers argue it is not so much leaders, but the affective events at work that are a key determinant of work perceptions (Ashton-James & Ashkanasy, 2005; Wegge, Dick, Fisher, West, & Dawson, 2006; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). To this theory, understanding emotional experiences is key because the examination of their causes and consequences is critical to understanding how employees perceive their jobs. Here, affective event theorists acknowledge the influence of personal factors, but focus primarily on the events produced by organizational factors because they surface an individual's perceptions of work. Understanding the affect the

work environment's events have on employees allows management to better realize the impact organizational factors and corresponding events have on work perceptions.

Other researchers argue organizations should implement five specific job characteristics – (1) skill variety, (2) task identity, (3) task significance, (4) autonomy, and (5) feedback – in order influence workers' perceptions (Boonzaier, Ficker, & Rust, 2001; Evans, Kiggundu, & House, 1979; Hackman and Oldham, 1976; Renn & Vandenberg, 1995). The job characteristics model, or work design theory, suggests when these five characteristics are present, work is perceived as more meaningful and fulfilling.

Skill variety refers to the number of different tasks and skills a job asks of its employees, in turn making the work less monotonous. Task identity refers to the extent to which work produces visible outcomes for employee, while task significance occurs when those same tasks have a positive effect on others. Autonomy means a job provides some agency to the employee and feedback is then provided to help develop and improve performance. The job characteristics model argues it is the presence or absence of these factors that shape work perceptions. Similar to the affective events theory, the job characteristics model does not ignore the importance of personal factors in constructing work perceptions, but instead recognizes the organization's role in shaping work experiences as the primary source of the feelings and moods that comprise work perceptions.

Some theorists argue that worker perceptions are influenced by forces largely outside any one organization and are instead influenced by the larger job market (Belfield & Harris, 2002; Johnson & Johnson. 2002; Vieira, 2005). Job market theorists argue it is not so much the experiences or events at a particular job, but the perception of the job relative to what is available in the larger market. Hence, work perceptions result from an individual's ability to find work that

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is representative of her/his experience and credentials. Therefore, if the job market possesses enough vacancies and mobility, it increases the chances an individual will encounter satisfying work experiences. Further, market information must be available to individuals because the market is only as good as the collective understanding that such vacancies and opportunities for mobility exist. Market-based theories also recognize the influence the peer group has on perceptions, meaning one's satisfaction is determined by her/his perception of success relative to peers with similar experience and credentials. Thus, a good job could be less appealing to an individual if the perception that peers with similar credentials are better off in their jobs. In other words, job market theories tend to downplay the importance of work experiences given the larger influence of the market.

In sum, organizational factor theories examine job perceptions at several different grain sizes. At the largest ambit, market theories argue that the job market determines perception through providing individuals with work experiences representative of their credentials. At a smaller grain size, job characteristics theories contend the presence of certain factors provided by the organization are essential to positive perceptions. Even smaller in scope, situational leadership and events-based theories focus on factors in specific work experiences, unique to a given job, to promote desired work perceptions.

Despite the level of analysis, organizational theories, like personal theories, are somewhat problematic because they tend to downplay one set of potentially viable factors when studying work perceptions. The prominence of both personal and organizational factor theories suggests work perceptions in teaching are likely generated by an amalgamation of the two. The next section provides an overview of interactive work perception theories to explore how researchers

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conceptualize the emergence of perceptions when tending to the relationship between personal and organizational factors.

Interactive work perception theories. To account for the complexity that emerges in determining what causes work perceptions, some theorists study the interaction of personal and organizational factors in work experiences. Accordingly, this section reviews job satisfaction-based theories, effective schools research, flow, and thriving to justify taking an interactive approach when examining work perceptions. The two job satisfaction theories – the motivation-hygiene and cognitive-based – represent interactive perception theories that take into the account the characteristics and interactions of the individual and the organization when conceptualizing satisfaction. Additionally, effective schools research provides guidance on the organizational factors that best support teachers and foster interactions. Lastly, flow and thriving represent work perception theories that offer insight into the psychological experiences that may drive perceptions like job satisfaction.

Perhaps the most influential interactive theory of job satisfaction is the motivation-hygiene theory (Dinham & Scott, 1998, 2000; Herzberg, 1959, 1966; Sergiovanni, 1967; Schmidt, 1976); the first of its kind to suggest job satisfaction is a two-factor construct. It does so by supposing the factors that contribute to job satisfaction are different than those that contribute to dissatisfaction in work experiences. This implies that removing the dissatisfying elements of work experiences (organizational factors) will not in turn make employees satisfied or engaged; instead, it will merely make employees not dissatisfied or at best will allow them to develop a neutral stance towards their work. At the same time, this also means that the absence of satisfying factors in work experiences (personal factors) will not make employees dissatisfied; rather, they will experience no satisfaction.

The motivation-hygiene theory stresses the importance of attending to the motivators in work experiences (personal factors such as, achievement, recognition, the work itself, responsibility, and advancement), while simultaneously managing the hygiene factors (organizational factors such as, company policy and administration, supervision, salary, interpersonal relations, and working conditions) in work experiences. Motivators are important because they possess the potential to change the work perceptions of employees, increasing performance, engagement, and effort. Hygiene factors, on the other hand, refer to environmental or organizational factors in the workplace. Hygiene is analogous to the term used in the medical field where it means "preventative and environmental" (Herzberg, 1966). Another way of looking at hygiene factors is to think of them as maintenance factors, where organizations need to ensure certain factors are attended to in order to prevent work experiences that contribute to employee disengagement from occurring.

The initial conception of the motivation-hygiene theory sparked controversy among scholars (Bockman, 1971) who questioned the methodology and struggled to produce similar results in subsequent follow-up studies. Regardless, scholars continue to cite the theory in reference to teacher job satisfaction, showing its relevance remains (Bogler, 2001; Dinham & Scott 1998, 2000; Zembylas & Papanastasiou, 2006; Marzano, Heflebower, Hoegh, Warrick, & Grift, 2016). Education literature continues to provide support to the original theory that different factors from different sources influence satisfaction and dissatisfaction. However, the lack of consensus from the broader research community generated too much doubt in using this theory as the conceptual center of this study.

Similarly, cognitive-based interactive theories suggest job satisfaction results from individuals weighing their work experiences against personal and preexisting values (Clark,

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1996; Cranny, Smith, & Stone, 1992; Locke, 1969; Locke & Latham, 1990). Values and experiences are important when studying job satisfaction because "the causes of job satisfaction are not in the job nor solely in the man but lie in the relationship between" (Locke, 1969, p. 319). This relationship means that jobs and their subsequent work experiences are not fixed entities; instead, jobs are abstractions, suggesting that job satisfaction is a complex, emotional reaction to one's job based on the interaction of personal and organizational influences. Locke's conception of job satisfaction receives less criticism from Herzberg's, but the critiques of the motivation-hygiene caused investigation into concepts beyond job satisfaction.

Effective Schools Research. To situate this study within other educational research, I consulted the research on effective schools (schools outperforming their counterparts serving similar demographics) to identify features of successful schools worth investigating with teachers. Reviewing this literature surfaced interactive features of the school environment that ultimately ended up informing questions in my semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix B). Teachers (personal factor) and leadership (organizational factor) emerged as the two factors with the largest influence on student achievement (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Walstrom, 2004). Further, since schools are complex social organizations, the interactions among teachers are key to cooperation and problem solving (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). Thus, because certain qualitative features of effective schools are interactive in nature, they likely shape teacher perceptions. These interactive features of effective schools emerged as both structure and process factors (Purkey & Smith, 1983, 1985). Structural factors refer to the "what" – identifiable features of the organization and configuration of the school, while process factors refer to the "how," the drivers and mechanisms behind how a school forms its climate and culture (Purkey & Smith, 1983, 1985).

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One of the most ubiquitous structural factors identified in the literature is leadership's ability to initiate and maintain its reforms and programs (Bryk et al. , 2010; Leithwood et al., 2004; Leithwood & Riehl, 2005; Lezotte, 1991; 2007; Purkey & Smith, 1983, 1985). A given school is unlikely to function should its leadership and teachers struggle with initiating and maintaining its reforms and programs. If reforms and programs falter, it is hard to imagine work perceptions remaining positive. Such reforms are interactive in nature because they rely on uptake from the teacher as well as support from the larger organization.

Additionally, successful school organizations also need an articulated and organized curriculum in order to provide teachers with instructional guidance (Bryk et al., 2010; Purkey & Smith, 1983, 1985). The content of courses needs to be coherent and defined to ensure student learning is in alignment with standards. For the teacher, curriculum can work both ways; some could see it as critical to their success, while others could see it as coercive and restrictive of their creativity. Therefore, the extent to which a school provides and prescribes a curriculum is likely to affect teachers' work perceptions. This factor is also interactive in nature because the curriculum provided by the organization is only as good as how it is used in a given classroom by a given teacher.

An individual school is also more likely to be successful when there is strong parent involvement and support in what the teachers and leadership try to accomplish (Bryk et al., 2010; Lezotte, 1991; 2007; Purkey & Smith, 1983, 1985). Parental involvement is worth considering in terms of teacher work perceptions because positive or negative interactions with parents are likely to influence how teachers perceive their work. Parental involvement is especially pertinent given this study's focus on high poverty schools; effective schools research notes parents in high poverty areas may need support in understanding how to provide learning opportunities at home

if they too struggled in school (Bryk et al., 2010). Granted, teachers could conceivably succeed absent parent involvement, but the presence of strong parental interactions would likely influence perceptions.

Another interactive, structural feature worth considering is how teachers perceive the use of instructional time in their classroom. School organization research suggests that successful schools are better able to maximize the learning time of their students (Purkey & Smith, 1983, 1985, Lezotte, 1991; 2007). Therefore, the time provided by the organization combined with teachers' use of that time makes this an additional interactive factor worth noting. If teachers feel leadership routinely impedes upon or fails to protect instructional time, it is conceivable this factor would also affect perceptions.

When schools successfully implement essential structural variables, they tend to correspond with the presence of process variables, which reflect the modus operandi or culture of a school. Structural variables lend themselves to direct implementation and manipulation, but schools indirectly generate process variables based upon the structures and personnel in place. Thus, process variables are interactive in nature and as such also warrant inclusion in this part of the review.

One process variable documented in the literature on effective schools is a sense of community. (Purkey & Smith, 1983, 1985). In such a community, there must be relational trust, which develops when each stakeholder not only understands her/his obligations in helping the school meet its goals, but also holds expectations of others to fulfill their responsibilities (Byrk & Schneider, 2002). In schools with relational trust, teachers have a vested interest in the success of their peers and openly seek their feedback. Relational trust becomes the bonding agent of the community and as such, influences the perceptions of teachers. Specifically, when teachers

perceive the intentions of their leaders positively, teachers are more likely to feel efficacious (Bryk & Schneider, 2002).

Relational trust is realized, in part, through another interactive, process variable – the perception of clear goals and shared high expectations (Bryk et al., 2010; Lezotte, 1991; 2007; Purkey & Smith, 1983, 1985). A climate of clear goals and high expectations ensures that each teacher in each classroom is providing students an environment in which they can grow; it is also a sign that leadership has set a direction and focus for its staff (Leithwood et al., 2004; Leithwood & Riehl, 2005). Such a climate is produced through the interactions that take place among stakeholders in a school, making it important to note when documenting what could influence teacher perceptions.

Effective schools research also insists that for a building to improve, another important process variable is the perception of order and discipline in the school environment (Purkey & Smith, 1983, 1985; Lezotte, 1991; 2007). The school must first and foremost have a climate of learning (Bryk et al., 2010), where the safety and orderliness of the school is a concern for all teachers. When teachers do not consistently maintain the monitoring of a school, students are quick to find areas where structure is not present. The presence of such spaces in schools can spill over into the classroom, impacting the teaching and learning. In turn, the extent to which orderliness and discipline is maintained in a building is likely to influence teacher perceptions.

Last, and perhaps most important, in terms of process variables is the way people, particularly teachers, are developed in the school building (Leithwood et al., 2004; Leithwood & Riehl, 2005). Development primarily takes the shape of the professional development opportunities afforded to teachers; effective schools research is especially interested in examining the quality and frequency such opportunities take place (Bryk et al., 2010). Purkey

and Smith (1983, 1985) classify professional development as a structural factor of schools; however because more contemporary research emphasizes the formal and informal approaches to development, it seemed more process in nature.

In sum, the effective schools literature provides guidance to the structure and process factors that represent key interactions between teachers and their organization. This research informed the creation of the semi-structured interview guide that complemented the thriving screener (see Chapter 3). I used thriving because the multiple interactive factors did not necessarily operationalize what produces positive perceptions in the workplace in a manner conducive for a screener. Instead, I determined these interactive factors of effective schools lent themselves better to explore in the interview setting where teachers could better articulate their related experiences and corresponding perceptions.

Moreover, while job satisfaction emerged as a viable, singular construct to identify teachers with positive and negative work perceptions, other constructs emerged that promote different and more compelling psychological phenomena when examining work. These constructs go beyond the posterior nature of job satisfaction to explain what occurs psychologically during the work experiences that generate positive perceptions (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Spreitzer et al., 2005). In a sense, these theories best operationalize positive perceptions because they attempt to capture what an individual routinely experiences while interacting with their environment that causes such perceptions. In other words, what might occur during work that produces perceptions like job satisfaction?

Flow. The application of Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) "flow" to the study of the work environment represents a more dynamic, interactive approach to studying work perceptions. Flow refers to a state of being where a person is fully immersed and engaged in an activity.

What's more, flow is seen as an ideal state because it is marked by concentration, intrinsic motivation, loss of awareness of self and time, willingness to take on challenges, as well as producing feelings of competency and freedom (Basom & Frase, 2004; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

Thus, I found flow more appealing than job satisfaction because some scholars contend it is an antecedent to positive work perceptions (Basom & Frase, 2004). It is potentially more constructive to study a phenomenon that generates positive perceptions instead of examining a reactionary stance to one's job after the fact, like job satisfaction. However, a criticism of flow is that menial tasks (like driving) are associated with it, and thus, in order to better capture the generative benefits of becoming immersed in a task, perceptions worth examining must also contribute to learning or growth (Spreitzer et al., 2005). Teachers want to learn on the job and help their students achieve, meaning a constructive approach to examining work perceptions would also include considerations about teacher learning.

Thriving. Thriving is a concept that combines the energy and immersive state of flow, but also includes learning to account for how work must not only engage, but also improve the capacity of workers. Thriving also differs from self-actualization because researchers argue it can occur absent of other needs being met (Spreitzer et al., 2005). Researchers initially pursued thriving out of an interest in determining how high performing and sustainable workforces exist within certain organizations (Spreitzer & Porath, 2012) given that people were spending increasingly more time at work (Schor, 1993) and work-life becoming increasingly more appealing than home-life (Hochschild, 1997).

Thriving's emphasis on sustainability and avoiding burnout, makes it an ideal proxy to help identify teachers who hold either positive or negative work perceptions. Therefore, I chose to use thriving as the identifying trait to find teachers who likely possess positive or negative

perceptions about teaching. Other measures, like job satisfaction, may adequately gauge work perceptions posteriori, but what makes thriving a better identifier is its likely, active role (or absence) in the work experiences that help to shape work perceptions. Moreover, educational research, dated from more than a half-century ago, exists examining job satisfaction and why teachers quit (Nelson & Thompson, 1963) and yet, the retention problem persists. Perhaps it is time to approach the retention problem differently by attempting to see how positive experiences emerge and how they become reflected in work perceptions. The remainder of this chapter seeks to document the affordances of using thriving to do just that.

As mentioned earlier, thriving is defined as "the psychological state in which individuals experience both a sense of vitality and a sense of learning at work" (Spreitzer et al., 2005, p. 538). Vitality encompasses the positive perceptions experienced on the job that impact performance through the focused energy and aliveness available to the employee (Nix et al., 1999). Thriving individuals feel not only engaged in their work, but they also develop feelings of passion and enthusiasm, which positively influences performance.

The learning aspect of thriving refers to the ability to acquire and apply new knowledge and skills through one's job (Dweck, 1986). This is important because thriving implies individuals innovate and experiment, which provides the inspiration needed for creative and new approaches to emerge in the workplace. Learning in this manner also better prepares employees to handle failure because such setbacks become framed as part of the learning process, rather than a negative reflection of one's ability or performance. In sum, thriving's ability to foster sustainable performance through vitality and learning makes it a viable marker to identify teachers to explore their varying work perceptions.

In addition, organizational researchers argue that there are four resources (relational, knowledge, positive meaning, and positive affect) produced when thriving individuals are present in a work environment (Spreitzer et al., 2005). In terms of relational resources, there is a residual or collateral effect as "thrivers" positively influence others in the workplace, including both peers and clients. Said another way, "A vital person is someone whose aliveness and spirit are expressed not only in personal productivity and activity—such individuals often infectiously energize those with whom they come into contact" (Bernstein, 2004). Vitality not only impacts the performance of the person experiencing it, but it also serves as a contagion able to influence the work of others. This influence, in turn, has a positive effect on learning and knowledge creation within an organization due to the socially embedded nature of thriving. In a sense, this effect of thriving corresponds with social learning theorists (Wenger, 1998), who argue the importance of interactions in an environment because of the role they play in one's ability to learn. In other words, the research on thriving suggests that the presence of "thrivers" is bound to produce more thriving individuals and more knowledge in the workplace, which provides further support for using thriving to identify teachers about their positive work perceptions.

In terms of positive meaning and positive affect, the presence of thriving also has an impact on how individuals perceive their work and their role in the work environment. An increase in positive meaning suggests individuals are more likely to engage in their work and have higher levels of motivation and well-being. In terms of positive affect, thriving generates positive emotions in employees, which helps individuals cope with setbacks while increasing their readiness to perform tasks. Further, both positive meaning and positive affect foster relationships in the workplace, where colleagues are more likely to attend to each other's needs and share a sense of interdependence. The presence of positive meaning and positive affect

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suggests that using thriving as a proxy to identify teachers about positive work perceptions is warranted. At the same time, teachers who are not thriving seem more apt to describe negative work perceptions.

The emergence of tools to measure thriving (see Chapter 3) has produced additional empirical work that further supports thriving as a useful screener to gauge work perceptions, especially in the interaction between the person and the organization in which she/he works (Liu & Bern-Klug, 2013). For example, studies show that workers in thriving environments are 46% more satisfied with their jobs (Spreitzer & Porath, 2012). In addition to increased job satisfaction, managers of thriving employees also report 16% higher performance in thriving employees over non-thriving employees; in turn, these thriving employees are 125% less likely to experience burnout and show 32% higher organizational commitment (Spreitzer & Porath, 2012). Thus, for this study, thriving will serve as a proxy to help identify teachers who can describe their positive and/or negative work perceptions. Given the findings on thriving workers, it stands to reason that those who thrive will routinely experience positivity in the workplace; in contrast, those who do not appear to thrive will likely possess work perceptions more negative in nature.

Further, using thriving to assist in the exploration of teacher work perceptions is worthwhile because…

> ...teaching activates, colors, and expresses the feelings and actions of teachers and those they influence. Teachers can enthuse their students or bore them, be approachable to or stand-offish with parents, trust their colleagues or be suspicious of them. All teaching is therefore inextricably emotional---by design or default" (Hargreaves, 2001, p. 1057).

Teaching is an emotional practice and as such, seemingly aligns with the resources produced through the generative nature of thriving. Schools should be places where teachers' work reinforces positive emotions, rather than works against them. Thriving tends to place workers in

a positive, psychological state, the kind of state that produces engagement and the positive perceptions of interest in this study. Given the troubling statistics associated with teacher retention and an impending shortage, studying thriving teachers could provide valuable insight towards understanding more about teacher job satisfaction, retention, and performance, as will studying the perceptions of those not thriving will provide additional insight into teacher disengagement.

At the time of this writing, I could find not find any published research that describes what thriving teaching (or the lack thereof) looks like. One study did look into thriving and teaching, but its focus was on expatriates adjusting to life in the United States and was not descriptive in nature (Ren, Yunlu, Shaffer, & Fodchuk, 2015). However, Ren et al.'s (2015) data showed that international teachers' retention was higher when thriving was present. This promising finding warranted further exploration into the work experiences of thriving and non-thriving teachers alike. Moreover, Niessen, Sonnentag, and Sach (2012) argue that despite the promising findings on thriving individuals, more antecedent research is needed to better understand how to provide work environments conducive to thriving. This study attempts to take up Niessen et al.'s (2012) recommendation and explore what experiences correspond to the perceived presence or absence of thriving.

By diving into teacher perceptions, I anticipate factors will emerge from both a positive and negative standpoint that will inform existing research on school work environments as well as provide a springboard for future research. Unearthing these perceptions is critical to addressing issues afflicting the teaching profession like turnover and the teacher shortage. Teachers are leaving the profession at higher rates than schools are able to replace them and feel their voices all too often go ignored (Rentner et al., 2016). This study attempts to provide an

outlet to that voice to understand what allows teachers to thrive and what does not. Recognizing what teachers need to learn and experience vitality at work could help provide work environments that are more sustainable and appealing. Thriving's correspondence with satisfaction, retention, and performance also makes it an ideal proxy for a work perception study. The lack of studies of thriving in teaching coupled with thriving's growing presence in organizational research provides justification for this work.

CHAPTER III

Methods

To examine thriving in teaching, I used a survey instrument to identify high and low thriving teachers and then used interviews to capture vivid descriptions of work perceptions. I compared these participant descriptions to produce emergent themes associated within and across positive and negative work perceptions of teachers in the high poverty, middle school setting. Three related lines of questioning shaped this study of teachers' work perceptions:

- How well does the survey instrument identify varying levels of thriving among teachers? What patterns emerge?
- How might the perceptions of teachers' work experiences differ among teachers scoring in the top and bottom quartiles on the thriving instrument? How do teachers in the top and bottom quartile compare in their perceptions of learning, vitality, and effective school factors?
- What features of the work environment emerge as critical to teachers' perceptions of their work experiences? How do teachers in the top and bottom quartile on the thriving instrument compare in identifying critical features of their work experiences?

Site and participant selection

Education in the United States is home to a diverse array of traditional public, private, and charter schools. Given this diversity, I narrowed the scope of this exploration to traditional public, middle school teachers, in high poverty settings, to limit some of the variables involved, especially pertaining to school context. First, the middle school context is important as research suggests middle school teachers are more likely to experience job dissatisfaction than their

elementary and high school teaching colleagues (Moore, 2012). Turnover is also higher among teachers in middle schools than teachers of different grade levels (Reio & Segredo, 2012).

Second, I also focused on high poverty schools because they tend to suffer more turnover than schools in more affluent settings (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Ingersoll, 2001). An additional way to control for variability among schools is to examine schools within the same district; therefore, districts with multiple high poverty middle schools were priority. This decision ultimately excluded charter schools because an individual building can constitute a single district, meaning what follows is a case study of one district's high poverty middle schools.

For this study, I define high poverty schools using the federal Title I guideline, meaning at least 40% of a school's students are on free or reduced lunch (United States Department of Education, 2016). I situated this research in middle schools, in the high poverty context, in hopes of yielding rich data as well as to contribute to understanding for assisting schools most in need.

To unpack the school context further, I also asked questions based on the correlates of effective schools (Lezotte 1991; 2007) and relational trust (Bryk et al., 2010) during the interview portion in an attempt to connect thriving and non-thriving teachers' perceptions with previous research on successful schools in challenging contexts. The goal here was to understand what teachers perceive to be in place (or not) at individual schools to guide future research should thriving emerge as a viable concept in studying teachers' work perceptions.

To obtain and maintain at least 100 useable surveys (a figure agreed upon with my committee), I used district websites to target school districts employing 150 or more middle school teachers in Title I schools. Therefore, I employed convenience sampling (Salkind, 2012), to ensure any potential research site could provide an adequate number of teachers. Proximity to my location was the initial criterion used to contact school districts. To entice participation, I

offered teachers gift cards for completing the survey and interview portions of the study. Teachers received $10 for completing the survey portion and $50 for completing the interview portion as a way of honoring their time.

The hope was that districts would be interested in participating because potential findings based on the thriving and the work perceptions of their teachers could inform their own efforts to increase teacher satisfaction, retention, and performance. Upon receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I contacted prospective districts using their websites' demographic data to identify potential sites that could produce a sizeable sample. To assist in securing sites, I consulted the Dean for Research and Community Engagement, the School of Education's own research institute, and proper district channels to ensure I took proper measures and necessary protections were in place.

One local district expressed interest, but the school leaders of each individual building decided to pass upon the opportunity. When it became clear that this district (or any other local ones for that matter) would not yield a sufficient number of participants, large districts (including those out of state) with several high poverty middle schools became the focus. A Google Alert for articles related to teacher retention helped identify districts that may be interested in examining thriving and the work perceptions that relate.

Ultimately, Barry County Public Schools in the southeastern United States agreed to participate in the study. I contacted Barry County when a local newspaper article documenting the new superintendent's interest in building teacher retention came up via my Google Alert. Barry County was an ideal out-of-state candidate because in 2016, ten of its twenty-one middle schools carried the federal Title I distinction. Upon receiving approval using the district's research application, five middle schools – Bayside, Dillon, Morgan, Robinson, and Stewart

(pseudonyms) – employing 302 teachers, agreed to have their faculty surveyed and potentially interviewed. With the exception of Bayside, who earned a B in 2016, the other four schools earned a grade of C or lower from their state's ranking system, placing them in the bottom half of performance for middle schools in Barry County. Given the potential sample size provided by Barry County, I did not contact any other schools or districts for additional participation.

In what follows, I describe how I collected data to conduct a case study of teachers in five Barry County, Title I middle schools.

Data Collection

Data collection for this study took part in two phases: (1) administering and then analyzing a survey designed and tested by Porath, Spreitzer, Gibson, and Garnett (2012) with slight modifications to fit the teaching context, and (2) interviews (Erickson, 1986) with high and low thriving teachers. Data collection began in May of 2016 and the timing was advantageous for a number of reasons. First, teachers' schedules were more flexible in providing time for survey completion and interviews due to it being the end of the school year. Second, first year teachers had nearly a full year of experience to reflect upon when completing their surveys and participating in interviews. Third, conducting the interviews at the end of the school year left ample time over the summer to check and/or ask follow-up questions of the participants should clarifications or updates on their professional status be necessary.

Surveys. To best identify thriving teachers, I relied on a previously empirically tested tool when creating my teacher survey. Porath et al. (2012) designed and tested a survey used to measure thriving, finding through factor analyses that the tool reliably measures both learning and vitality. In using this instrument, I aimed to build on the work of several other research studies that employed the tool successfully (Cullen, Gerbasi, & Chrobot-Mason, 2015; Gkorezis,

Kalampouka, Petridou, 2013; Paterson, Luthans, Jeung, 2014; Ren et al., 2015; Wallace, Butts, Johnson, Stevens, & Smith, 2013). Thus, the confirmatory findings of Porath et al.'s (2012) empirical tests combined with the survey's use by additional researchers suggested it was an appropriate instrument for measuring thriving.

Since the theory on thriving stresses the importance of learning and vitality, Porath et al.'s (2012) tool evenly splits the ten questions into these two categories: five questions apply to learning and five to vitality. The survey items can be administered using a five-point, Likert scale to identify respondents' sentiments on statements such as, "At work, I find myself learning often." or "At work, I am looking forward to each new day" (Porath et al., 2012). This means that with this scale, the highest attainable score on the survey is a 50 (thriving) and the lowest score attainable is a 10 (not thriving) (see Appendix A).

To establish high and low thriving cut scores, I conducted a meta-analysis (Salkind, 2012) of studies that utilized the Porath et al. (2012) survey and met four additional criteria to ensure consistency: (1) studies were published in peer-review journals; (2) studies had sample sizes close to or greater than this study; (3) the studies needed to publish a mean and standard deviation for their thriving measures; and (4) studies needed a Cronbach alpha score of greater than 0.80 to ensure they reliably measured thriving (Salkind, 2012). For the meta-analysis, I pooled the mean and standard deviations (Weisberg, 1992) based on a five-point Likert scale using six thriving studies across various professions (Cullen et al., 2015; Gkorezis et al., 2013; Paterson et al., 2014; Porath et al., 2012; Ren et al., 2015; Wallace et al., 2013).

The combined sample in the meta-analysis included 1480 participants with a pooled mean of 38 and standard deviation of 7, suggesting a teacher with a score of 45 or higher on the thriving survey would be among the top 15.9% of thrivers documented in previous research. At

the same time, a score of 31 or lower would place a teacher among the 15.9% lowest thrivers from previous studies. In sum, these results suggest that a score of 45-50 would identify a high thriving teacher and a score below 31 would signal a low thriver.

Logically, these cut scores also make sense. A score of 30 suggests the average response to the survey items is "neither agree or disagree," meaning the participant does not experience the sentiments expressed in the survey items or simply put, are not thriving. Further, a score of 45 means a participant could only give a rating of lower than four on at most two items (with the other eight items rated five), meaning they are likely thriving. Thus, my plan was to approach teachers with the highest (45 or higher) and lowest total scores (31 or less) across the ten, five-point Likert items to participate in follow-up interviews to further explore their positive and negative work perceptions.

In addition to the Porath et al. (2012) survey items, I included additional questions regarding teachers' future plans (see Appendix A) because as teachers gain more experience, not only does their perception of the work of teaching change, but so too does their view of career (Burden, 1982). The thriving items provide ample insight into work perceptions, but the survey does not cover how work may affect perceptions of the future. Given the scope of this study, I cannot make claims about retention, but collecting data on future plans is relevant given the study's focus on work perceptions. In other words, the goal for these survey questions was to help produce interviews with high thriving teachers who planned on remaining in their school as well as low thrivers who may consider leaving. Understanding how teachers perceived their future plans would provide an interesting point of comparison with their work perceptions.

To ensure consistency with the format of the thriving questions, the two future plans questions also featured the same five-point Likert scale, asking: "I see myself remaining in the

teaching profession for the foreseeable future." and "I see myself teaching in my current school for the foreseeable future." Foreseeable future is part of the phrasing so the items emphasized the here and now feelings of each teacher. Conversely, asking, "How likely are you to remain in teaching?" seemed more absolute and could skew responses. Similarly, asking, "How likely are you to return next year?" could put the focus too narrow in scope and generate positive retention responses from teachers otherwise thinking about leaving in the next few years. There are inherent limitations with making claims off of future plans survey data because of the uncertainty of whether or not any participant will stay or leave, but the hope was that these responses would generate additional, interesting data.

The survey also collected demographic data in order to report on the characteristics of the sample, including teaching experience. On the survey, I phrased the experience question, "How many full years of professional teaching experience do you have?" to ensure teachers do not count their pre-service or any substitute teaching experience. It also emphasized complete years of teaching to help better identify teachers in their first year of teaching.

Additional demographic questions asked respondents to report their gender, age, race, subject taught, and highest level of schooling. I did this because comparing survey results across gender, race, age, subject taught, and schooling could provide additional insight that may warrant further investigation in future studies. Age may seem redundant given the question pertaining to teaching experience, but it left open the possibility of analyzing teachers of different ages with similar experience. For instance, it could help identify and assess how novice teachers in their twenties compare to novice career-changers in their thirties or forties. I also asked teachers to identify which school they worked at and to provide an email address to be considered for the interview portion of the study (this was voluntary).

Administering surveys online, using Qualtrics, ensured I stored results remotely and securely, fulfilling my university's safe computing guidelines. Additionally, prior to beginning the survey, teachers had to provide electronic consent. Were they to decline, teachers could not continue, ensuring the only responses stored were of those of consenting participants.

In total, sending survey requests to teachers at the participating middle schools produced 101 useable surveys. I decided against including a few, additional surveys for data analysis because participants omitted too many thriving and/or demographic questions. Analyzing completed surveys provided a way to identify high thrivers and low thrivers with the goal of interviewing twelve matching each distinction (24 total) for the next phase of the study (participant numbers decided upon with my committee). Tallying each participant's responses to the ten thriving items could produce an overall thriving score anywhere from 10 to 50.

Based on the meta-analysis, a high thriver should score at least a 45 and a low thriver should score a 31 or lower. Of the 101 respondents, 24 participants scored a 45 or higher, but only eight teachers scored a 31 or lower, making it clear that not enough low thrivers, as defined by the meta-analysis, were available to fulfill twelve interviews. However, because high thrivers constituted nearly a quartile of the sample (24%), I decided to include all participants in the bottom quartile to secure enough participants for interviews. Thus, I determined a cutoff score of 36 for the bottom quartile, which ultimately included 23 participants[1].

I sent initial invitations to interview to those teachers with the twelve highest and twelve lowest scores. As teachers either declined or ignored requests, it became clear that I should contact all members of each quartile to get as close to twelve participants in each group as possible. This was more difficult for some of the bottom quartile participants because a few of

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[1] Raising the cutoff an additional point to 37 would have included an additional seven participants making this subsample noticeably larger (30) than the high thriving subsample (24).

them refrained from providing their email address for a follow-up interview. In the end, I secured and conducted interviews with eighteen participants - ten teachers from the top quartile (scores 45 or greater) and eight teachers from the bottom quartile (scores 36 or lower). Going forward, I refer to high thrivers as the top quartile and low thrivers as the bottom quartile to reflect their relative location in the distribution of thriving scores in the sample. It would be inaccurate to refer to teachers in the bottom quartile as low thrivers because not all of their scores met the threshold established in the meta-analysis.

Interviews. I conducted interviews along with the surveys to better surface and analyze the local meaning of the concepts under examination (see Table 3.1). I found it important to let teachers' describe the work perceptions that exemplify the items from the survey to produce a more informed understanding of the constructs under investigation. Further, the interviews helped ensure research was shaped by both inductive and deductive methods. For instance, from a deductive standpoint, the interview questions (see Appendix B) required teachers to respond to certain statements, meaning the perceptions they described are responses to feelings associated with thriving as introduced by the interviewer. But, at the same time, from an inductive standpoint, the thriving-related sentiments explored in these interviews generated varying responses because of the different experiences and perceptions of the participants. Thus, this required further analysis on my part to determine what patterns emerged across the interviews. For example, some of the questions asked participants to recall specific experiences associated with an aspect of thriving, like energy, meaning additional themes could inductively emerge based on how participants answered.

Name of data	How collected?	When collected?	Why collected?	How analyzed?	Challenges?
Demographic items	Survey	May/June 2016	Allows for analysis by gender, race, age, and level of schooling; also important for placing teachers in career stages	Items totaled to report on sample's characteristics and also used to disaggregate thriving and future plan items	Participants may not want to disclose personal information as potential identifiers
Thriving items	Survey, 10 Likert items	May/June 2016	Assesses the extent to which a given teacher is thriving; assists in selecting follow-up interview participants	Items calculated based on frequency and mean; compare results from different groups based on demographic characteristics and career stage	Thriving survey depends on all 10 questions answered, complete surveys will be imperative; references of satisfaction/happiness at work could surface concerns over privacy
Future plans items	Survey, 2 Likert items	May/June 2016	Provides insight into how teachers view their future plans at the moment; allows for correlative analysis with thriving items in future study	Items calculated based on frequency and mean; compare results from different groups based on demographic characteristics and career stage	Questions are personal in nature by asking participants to disclose future plans, again privacy concerns emerge
Low scoring thriver accounts	8 follow-up interviews with teachers in the bottom quartile	June 2016	Potential to produce emergent themes about work experiences that contribute to low thriving	Open coded to identify emergent themes followed by closed coding with identified themes from first coding	Coordinating the scheduling of interviews; convincing people to participate; reluctance to share negative experiences;
High scoring thriver accounts	10 follow-up interviews with teachers in the top quartile	June 2016	Potential to produce emergent themes about work experiences that contribute to high thriving	Open coded to identify emergent themes followed by closed coding with identified themes from first coding	Coordinating the scheduling of interviews; convincing people to participate

Table 3.1 – Data Analysis Chart

In addition to responding to items associated with thriving, I included other interview questions to further understand teachers' perceptions of their schools as organizations. To accomplish this, I consulted research on the features of effective schools (Bryk et al., 2010; Lezotte, 1991; 2007) to see how teachers perceived specific factors in their respective Barry

County schools. I did not include these questions to make any conclusions about these Barry County schools; rather, it was done so to see if any factors of effective schools corresponded with the perceived presence (or absence) of thriving. Lastly, as was the case with the surveys, I also asked teachers at the end to respond to questions regarding their future plans to see if their responses would produce any possible insight towards their perceived retention plans.

Before heading to Barry County, I piloted the semi-structured interview guide with local teachers near my university to ensure the guide extracted the type of data intended and to gauge the time commitment each interview would require. Then, I interviewed the eighteen participants (See Table 3.2 and Table 3.3) in Barry County using the same semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix B) and audio recorded to assist in transcription. Interviews asked teachers to provide specific work experiences that corresponded to the thriving survey items, effective schools research, and their future plans. I emphasized specific events to encourage participants to speak beyond general terms and to extract meaning from participant-selected work experiences (Herzberg, 1959). Also, in order to maintain the focus on current work perceptions, I encouraged participants to recall recent experiences. The interviews took between thirty and ninety minutes, ultimately varying on how each teacher described her/his positive and negative work experiences and the need for necessary clarifying questions.

Data Analysis

 Surveys. I first analyzed the survey data using a standard, quantitative descriptive statistics approach (Agresti & Finlay, 2009; Weisberg, 1992), which included calculating the sum of each participant's thriving items (questions 8 through 17) to rank order potential interviewees. Further, averaging the two future plans questions also provided a sense of how the sample as a whole perceived their future in teaching and their current placements.

Teacher	Age	Experience	Subject	School	Learning score	Vitality Score
Tess	26	2nd year	Math	Dillon	25	21
Britney	33	1st year	Math	Dillon	23	24
Juliette	47	2nd year	ELL	Bayside	25	24
Laura	26	3rd year	English	Bayside	22	25
Ashley	45	8th year	English	Bayside	25	25
Andrea	56	14th year	Science	Bayside	25	25
Joan	59	9th year	Speech	Robinson	25	25
Brenda	41	17th year	Math	Robinson	25	25
Debbie	27	1st year	Counseling	Dillon	25	25
Tim	40	1st year	English	Dillon	25	25

Table 3.2 Interviewed teachers in the top quartile ranked by vitality score

Teacher	Age	Experience	Subject	School	Learning score	Vitality Score
Mary	64	27th year	Reading	Bayside	23	12
Susan	50	4th year	Reading	Stewart	21	13
Walter	63	17th year	Leadership	Bayside	20	13
Avery	23	1st year	Special Ed	Robinson	21	14
Maureen	45	15th year	English	Dillon	20	14
Darlene	63	17th year	Special Ed	Dillon	21	15
Greg	49	10th year	English	Robinson	19	16
Bobby	32	10th year	Math	Bayside	19	17

Table 3.3. Interviewed teachers in the bottom quartile ranked by vitality score

In addition to thriving totals and future plans responses, I tallied each participant's individual learning and vitality score to explore whether learning or vitality was more influential in impacting total scores. Calculating these sums also allowed for the creation of histograms to observe trends in thriving, learning, vitality, and future plans across the entire sample (see Findings chapters). These visual representations of the sample provided a sense of the extent to which thriving occurs among these teachers and how they perceive their future.

Calculating and analyzing demographic data helped describe the sample of teachers surveyed. Similar to the thriving items, I employed a standard, quantitative, descriptive statistics approach to report on percentages regarding teachers' race, gender, school, degrees earned, and subject taught. Additionally, averaging age and teaching experience provided the opportunity to compare the relative age and experience of an individual participant to the sample group.

Then, I further disaggregated data to examine subsamples of participants. For example, as referenced earlier, I placed teachers in quartiles upon discovering that nearly one-quarter of the participants qualified as high thrivers and that the sample did not contain the desired number of low thriving scores[2]. The determination of quartiles (see Table 3.4) also afforded the ability to calculate the inter-quartile range of the sample, which in turn assisted in identifying outliers among the 101 participants partaking in the survey portion of the study.

True quartiles were not possible for two reasons: first, 101 is not a multiple of four and second, quartiles of 25, 25, 25, and 26 participants were made difficult when sorting teachers by thriving score. For instance, a score of 37 was the actual value marking the first quartile, but several teachers had a score of 37, making it difficult to find a way to fairly decide which teacher with a 37 would go to the bottom quartile versus the second quartile. Therefore, I used thriving

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[2] Thriving score of 31 or lower is considered low. Original proposal called for twelve low thriver interviews.

(N=101)	Overall	Bottom Quartile (Thriving ≤ 36)	Quartile Two (Thriving 37 to 40)	Quartile Three (Thriving 41 to 44)	Top Quartile (Thriving ≥45)
Gender N (%)					
Female	83 (83)	15 (65)	27 (93)	21 (84)	20 (83)
Male	17 (17)	7 (30)	2 (7)	4 (16)	4 (17)
Other	1 (1)	1 (4)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Latino origin N (%)					
No	87 (87)	21 (91)	25 (86)	22 (88)	19 (79)
Yes	11 (11)	1 (4)	4 (14)	2 (8)	4 (17)
…Other	3 (3)	1 (4)	0 (0)	1 (4)	1 (4)
Race/ethnicity N (%)	6 (6)	3 (13)	1 (3)	0 (0)	2 (8)
African-America	2 (2)	2 (9)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Asian/Pacific Islander	80 (80)	16 (70)	24 (83)	20 (80)	20 (83)
White	13 (13)	2 (9)	4 (14)	5 (20)	2 (8)
Other/Prefer not to Respond					
Avg. Age	40	43	40	38	39
Highest level of schooling N (%)					
Bachelor's	46 (46)	10 (43)	14 (48)	12 (48)	10 (42)
Some graduate	18 (18)	3 (13)	5 (17)	5 (20)	5 (21)
Master's	34 (34)	10 (43)	8 (28)	7 (35)	9 (38)
Doctorate	3 (3)	0 (0)	2 (7)	1 (5)	0 (0)
Avg. years teaching	9	10	11	9	6
School N (%)					
Bayside	25(25)	6 (26)	8 (28)	4 (16)	7 (29)
Dillon	26(26)	4 (17)	3 (10)	7 (28)	12 (50)
Morgan	23(23)	4 (17)	9 (31)	8 (32)	2 (8)
Robinson	15(15)	3 (13)	6 (21)	3 (12)	3 (13)
Stewart	11(11)	5 (22)	3 (10)	3 (12)	0 (0)
…No response	1(1)	1 (4)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Subject taught N (%)	31 (31)	6 (26)	9 (31)	11 (44)	5 (21)
English/Language Arts	2 (2)	1 (4)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (4)
Foreign Language	18 (18)	4 (17)	6 (21)	3 (12)	5 (21)
Mathematics	9 (9)	2 (9)	3 (10)	3 (12)	1 (4)
Related Arts	12 (12)	1 (5)	3 (10)	3 (12)	5 (21)
Science	8(8)	2 (9)	1 (3)	3 (12)	2 (8)
Social Studies	21(21)	7 (30)	7 (24)	2 (8)	5 (21)
Other					

Table 3.4. Demographics of sample of teachers.

scores of 36, 40, and 44 as cutoffs, which in turn produced near "quartiles" of 23, 29, 25, and 24.

Demographically speaking, participants, in this case, were overwhelmingly white (80%) and female (83%). In terms of age and experience, the typical participant was 40 years old with 9 years of teaching experience. Most of the teachers' highest form of schooling was a bachelor's degree (46%), but the inclusion of "some graduate work" as an option (18%) meant 54% of teachers in this sample pursued some graduate courses.

For national context, women represent 76% of teachers, 44% of teachers are under 40 years old, and 56% hold master degrees or higher (Snyder, de Brey, & Dillow, 2016). Thus, the percentage of women was higher and the typical teacher was older in this case, but less likely to have a graduate degree when compared to the national average. In terms of Barry County at-large, the overall population of teachers is 73% white and 74% women, so the sample average was also higher than some of the local averages. Beyond gender and ethnicity data, finding demographic data on Barry County's teachers was difficult to secure. Nonetheless, since this is a case study, I include the national and local averages merely for context.

This sample of teachers also taught a rather wide range of subjects at the middle school level: 31% of teachers taught some form of ELA, which was the highest, followed by participants selecting "other" 21%, mathematics 18%, and science 12%; all other subjects accounted for less than 10% of the sample. In terms of the schools they worked at, Bayside (25%), Dillon (26%), and Morgan (23%) were pretty evenly represented in the sample, while the approximate remaining quarter of the sample worked at either Robinson (15%) or Stewart (11%).

In addition to measures of central tendency, data analysis included other classical, quantitative test measures to make further sense of the participants' survey responses. For example, I calculated correlations between survey items to assess the extent to which consistency

occurred amongst the different sentiments. Learning, vitality, and future plans items displayed

moderate to strong correlation (Cohen, 1992) with items expressing similar sentiments. The

correlation results (see Table 3.5) showed enough internal consistency to warrant additional

factor analysis.

	Q#8	Q#9	Q#10	Q#11	Q#12	Q#13	Q#14	Q#15	Q#16	Q#17	Q#18	Q#19
Q#8	1.000											
Q#9	0.860	1.000										
Q#10	0.742	0.810	1.000									
Q#11	0.664	0.602	0.467	1.000								
Q#12	0.345	0.265	0.289	0.343	1.000							
Q#13	0.500	0.392	0.410	0.363	0.452	1.000						
Q#14	0.308	0.161	0.323	0.128	0.377	0.702	1.000					
Q#15	0.219	0.148	0.130	0.229	0.257	0.677	0.619	1.000				
Q#16	0.374	0.264	0.263	0.242	0.423	0.641	0.650	0.510	1.000			
Q#17	0.428	0.330	0.342	0.330	0.419	0.713	0.574	0.562	0.562	1.000		
Q#18	0.249	0.220	0.111	0.243	0.362	0.386	0.342	0.382	0.477	0.422	1.000	
Q#19	0.417	0.344	0.310	0.244	0.288	0.499	0.234	0.220	0.408	0.467	0.525	1.000

Table 3.5. Correlation coefficients among survey items; see Appendix A for item descriptions

In turn, like Porath et al. (2012), I conducted a factor analysis (see Table 3.6) to attempt

to strengthen the findings of the correlation analysis. I began by conducting an exploratory factor

analysis (EFA) to the 12-survey questions (ten thriving and two future plans items) that used the

five-point Likert scale to analyze the underlying configuration of the survey items. This analysis

also helped to identify whether the corresponding survey items actually measured the constructs

of learning, vitality, and future plans, respectively. In fact, the analysis showed that these survey

items loaded together with a high level of internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.89).

Further, the use of a scree plot and the Kaiser criterion both provided additional evidence to suggest all three factors exist as separate phenomena worth retaining and treating as such in subsequent analysis. This is because all three eigenvalues were greater than one: Factor 1 (vitality) = 5.50, Factor 2 (learning) = 2.06, Factor 3 (future plans) = 1.02. To assist in the interpretation of these extracted factors, I also employed a promax rotation because it allows the factors to better correlate with each other. Table 3.6 summarizes these factors both before and after rotation. The rotated factors loaded most strongly on the following sets of items:

- *Learning*: Items loading on this factor focused on the frequency of learning, learning more as time goes by, continuous improvement, and rejecting the phrase, "At work, I am not learning." Unlike previous thriving studies, the sentiment, "At work, I am developing a lot as a person," did not load onto the learning factor, suggesting feelings on this particular item were unrepresentative of those expressed with the other learning items among this sample of teachers (see Appendix A, items 8-12 for exact wording of all sentiments).

- *Vitality:* Variables loading most strongly on this factor included feeling alive and vital; having energy and spirit; rejecting the phrase "At work, I do not feel very energetic;" feeling alert and awake; and looking forward to each new day at work. Like other thriving studies, all five vitality items loaded together on the same factor (Appendix A, items 13-17).

- *Future Plans:* Items loading on this factor included a teacher's view of both remaining in the profession and their current school for the foreseeable future (Appendix A, items 18 and 19).

Variable	Rotated (Promax)			Un-Rotated		
	Factor 1 Vitality	Factor 2 Learning	Factor 3 Future plans	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
8. At work, I find myself learning often.	0.0459	0.9020*	0.0364	0.7572	0.5487	-0.0492
9. At work, I continue to learn more as time goes by.	-0.0932	0.9689*	0.0023	0.6653	0.6611	-0.0398
10. At work, I see myself as continually improving.	0.0929	0.9115*	-0.1826	0.6435	0.5706	-0.2058
11. At work, I am not learning	-0.0429	0.7272*	0.0943	0.5903	0.4679	0.0238
12. At work, I am developing a lot as a person.	0.2573	0.1500	0.3427	0.5853	-0.0809	0.1478
13. At work, I feel alive and vital.	0.7766*	0.1773	0.0715	0.8480	-0.2555	-0.1673
14. At work, I have energy and spirit.	0.9827*	-0.0352	-0.1699	0.6828	-0.4445	-0.3651
15. At work, I do not feel very energetic.	0.9120*	-0.1212	-0.0859	0.6186	-0.4813	-0.2857
16. At work, I feel alert and awake.	0.6585*	-0.0201	0.2491	0.7269	-0.3577	-0.0067
17. At work, I am looking forward to each new day.	0.6321*	0.1085	0.2075	0.7725	-0.2564	-0.0358
18. I see myself remaining in the teaching profession for the foreseeable future.	0.0403	-0.1705	0.9017*	0.5661	-0.2815	0.5930
19. I see myself teaching in my current school for the foreseeable future.	-0.1260	0.1001	0.8661*	0.6061	-0.0263	0.5946

Table 3.6. Factor analysis of learning and vitality items, *strong factor score

Factor analysis' identification of three separate phenomena: learning, vitality, and future plans meant interview analysis could also assume similar concepts would emerge in teachers' responses given that interview questions were based off of the survey items.

Interviews. Analysis began immediately following the completion of the final interview. I postponed any formal analysis to the end so that preliminary findings from initial interviews did not influence the completion of subsequent interviews or coded transcripts. Upon completion of the interviews, I open coded the transcribed interviews to identify emergent themes (Charmaz, 2006; Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). Each time I read, listened to, and coded an interview, I wrote an informal memo to record initial impressions of each participant and potential themes worth noting (Charmaz, 2006). In turn, these memos became an important point of reference upon completion of open coding, especially when it began to be time to compare and contrast participant responses.

Next, analysis turned to focused coding and a review of the open coding memos (Charmaz, 2006; Emerson et al., 2011) to identify common codes across all of the interview transcripts. Focused coding (see Appendix C) afforded the opportunity to draw out any patterns emerging in the different interviews. I accomplished this by tracking all of the interview responses on a spreadsheet with participants listed vertically and the questions horizontally; from there, shorthand versions of the open codes comprised the spreadsheet. After the sheet contained all seventeen interview questions for the eighteen participants, I reviewed the columns, question by question to begin naming focused codes and identify emergent themes. Due to the nature of the interview questions, responses tended to follow a yes /no duality or a positive/negative one. Therefore, to help name focused codes, I sorted the open codes based on whether they seemed affirmative or dissenting in nature on a separate document. I then drafted additional informal

memos for each interview question to record my thoughts and observations following the focused coding process.

After calculating survey results and coding the interviews, the mixed methods approach to this study also provided an opportunity to compare the story emerging from the survey with that of the interviews. Initially, I anticipated writing a top quartile and bottom quartile chapter to document the results of the survey and interview data. However, upon comparing survey responses to the themes from the interviews, it became clear that the better story lie in the differences in learning and vitality among the top and bottom quartile (see Chapter 4 for more detail).

Therefore, instead of having two findings chapters as originally anticipated (high thriving in one, low in the other), I ended up with five. The first findings chapter focuses solely on the thriving survey data to make a case for organizing the interview findings by vitality and learning. Constructing findings chapters by learning and vitality provided an opportunity to compare the top and bottom quartile's responses side by side, allowing for a more complete picture of learning and vitality. It also meant that findings related to the questions informed by the effective schools research and future plans items warranted their own chapters because they did not fit under vitality or learning.

Risks and Benefits.

As is the case with all empirical work, there were associated benefits and risks for the participants involved. To mitigate the risks and promote the rewards, it was important to document ahead of time how such benefits outweighed the risks in order to secure Barry County as a site and teachers as survey and interview participants. For this study to take place, I made it a priority to compensate the district and its teachers. For the district, I will share the final report

of the findings to help them inform their own efforts to improve their own teachers' work perceptions and experiences. Additionally, I also made available the preliminary research that informed this study to not only document the importance of my work, but to also show the district the empirical support for this research. I also offered to attend any district-level or building-level meetings to help clarify questions, address concerns, or discuss results, but as of the time of writing, Barry County made no such request.

For the teachers involved, I compensated them for their participation in both the survey and interview portion of the study. I secured a generous grant through my university, which made travel to Barry County and compensation for this study possible. For taking the time to complete the survey, teachers received a $10 Amazon gift card; I used Amazon cards because I could send them to teachers electronically, which helped with the logistics of compensating over one hundred participants, across several schools, located in another state. For those that wished to participate in the interview portion of the study, they received a $50 Visa gift card immediately upon completion of the interview. The reason for the disparity in the amounts between survey and interview compensation was based on the time commitment. The survey is relatively short, only twenty-one questions, and it should not have taken the participants more than ten minutes to complete. However, when it came to the interviews, I requested much more of the teachers' time in terms of scheduling, administering, and member checking.

I made the decision to compensate the participants for two reasons. First, offering an incentive to complete the survey and take part in the interview likely increased the chances of teacher participation. I know from my own personal experience that the promise of, or potential for, compensation makes me more likely to participate in a survey. At the same time, and more importantly, I compensated teachers out of respect and appreciation in order to show sensitivity

and mindfulness of their time. This study was far from the most important thing on the teachers' calendars and I wanted to acknowledge that the teachers were helping me more than I was helping them. To that end, the modest compensation offered was a way of saying thank you.

I designed this study in a way that managed risk as much as possible, which the IRB office at my university helped ensure. For example, in terms of a time risk, survey participants needed to only set aside ten to fifteen minutes of their time. Further, by administering the survey online, participants could complete it during a time of day that was convenient and in a place where they felt comfortable. Those that volunteered for interviews, at most, needed to set aside an additional hour or two of their time. Therefore, I could assure Barry County that their teachers' participation in this study in no way would take away from their responsibilities as teachers. Moreover, interviews took place during either the last couple days of school or the first days of summer vacation, meaning teachers finished their major work for the year.

 Despite lessening time-related risk, some other, small and unlikely, risks did exist for participants in this study. Breach of confidentiality was one potential risk for participants and one that I heavily guarded against. Teachers did need to sign receipts acknowledging that they received their compensation for the study. For receipts submitted electronically, I deleted the files immediately upon their printing and submission to the university's research funding office. I turned in any hard copy receipts directly into the university's research funding office where they have protocols to ensure secure safe storage and disposal.

In terms of the surveys, the only potential identifier was the email address teachers provided in order to receive the gift card and for contact about a follow-up interview. However, I did not jeopardize anonymity because upon distribution of the gift cards, I deleted the teachers' email addresses from the file containing the survey results. Also, I ascribed all survey

participants, schools, and districts their own pseudonyms. In order to inform participants of these risks associated with the survey, I mentioned them in the welcome email and then reiterated via informed consent at the onset of the electronic survey. Teachers could not access the survey and submit any responses unless they first provided consent to partake in the study.

Furthermore, the use of Qualtrics to administer and distribute came at the request of my university because of its reputation for securely recording and storing survey data. Plus, the use of an online survey limited the risks associated with a paper trail, which could have made it obvious which teachers participated and it also avoided misplacing responses containing sensitive data. Only my advisor and I had access to the online survey database.

In terms of interviews, I first informed participants by email of their eligibility for the interview portion of the study. In this email, I once again disclosed the risks associated with the interview. I also allowed the participant to choose the location of the interview to help with proximity and to provide a place where she/he felt comfortable discussing work perceptions. Before the interviews began, but at the outset of the recording, I read participants a consent statement, which once again informed them of potential risks involved with their participation. Before submitting their oral consent, the participants could ask me any questions to ensure their comfort with proceeding. I secured oral consent on the audio file, which also helped with eliminating the paper trail of consent documents that if misplaced could have breached the confidentiality of the participant.

The audio files did possess identifiers in the form of faculty member, student, school, and district names; so, it was of the utmost importance that I stored these files in a manner that reflected my university's safe computing standards. As such, only my advisor and I could access

the audio files as they were stored on a secured, remote server that was password protected. Upon completion of the transcripts, I destroyed the audio files.

Only pseudonyms appear in the transcripts to ensure that the files contain no identifiers should members of the committee review these transcripts. I also made the transcripts available to all respective interview participants in order for them to review what they said and to give them an opportunity to either clarify or request omissions. Interviews took place in June 2016 and I shared the transcripts in late July, early August of that year – no participant decided to remove themselves or any part of their interview from the study. Only one document containing the teacher's actual name and their pseudonym exists and that too was stored in accordance with the university's safe computing.

Another specific risk associated with confidentiality is the private nature of the work perception data. Teachers may not have wanted their colleagues, or superiors for that matter, privy to their perceptions of their work environment or their future plans. This added all the more importance on my behalf to ensure I both stored data safely and guaranteed anonymity.

In the end, the positive connotation of this study showed participants and their superiors that the focus of this study was to better understand the work perceptions of teachers. Granted, unearthing negative work perceptions was also a part of this study, but it was not meant to be an indictment of schools or their teachers. Therefore, I reminded all parties involved, on several occasions, that I generated this study with the best of intentions. I made it clear that my goal was to explore work perceptions in schools to determine the validity of thriving as a construct in teaching and to contribute to the existing literature on teacher job satisfaction, retention, and performance.

CHAPTER IV

Findings – Survey Results

As mentioned in Chapter 3, I employed convenience sampling (Salkind, 2012) to find participants for this study. Therefore, the proceeding findings refer exclusively to this group of teachers involved in this case study of Barry County. Any claims based on trend data refer solely to the teachers that decided to participate. Such claims are not generalizable for Barry County or teaching at-large due to the absence of randomization in data collection. I compare the sample's averages to the meta-analysis for context, seeing how previous research produced my cut scores.

Of the 101 participants who submitted a useable survey, 24% met the high thriving threshold[3] and an additional 47% of participants scored at or above the thriving average calculated in the meta-analysis (see Chapter 3). The thriving average for this sample exceeded that of the meta-analysis by averaging 40, compared to 38 in previous studies. Further, only 8% of the sample population met the low thriving threshold[4] and 30% of teachers scored below the pooled mean. 25% of those scoring below the low thriving threshold (2% overall) proved to be the only outliers, in terms of thriving, for this sample[5]. Due to the number of teachers scoring above the high thriving threshold, an outlier on the high end, in this case, would need to score beyond a 50 (a 58.5 to be exact), which is not possible given the structure of the survey.

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[3] High thriving was set at a 45 or higher based on a mean of 38 and standard deviation of 7 from the meta-analysis
[4] Low thriving mark was set at a 31 based on the meta-analysis
[5] Based on IQR x 1.5 metric: Q3 (45) – Q1 (36) = 9 x 1.5 = 13.5; 36 – 13.5 = 22.5; Outlier < 22.5
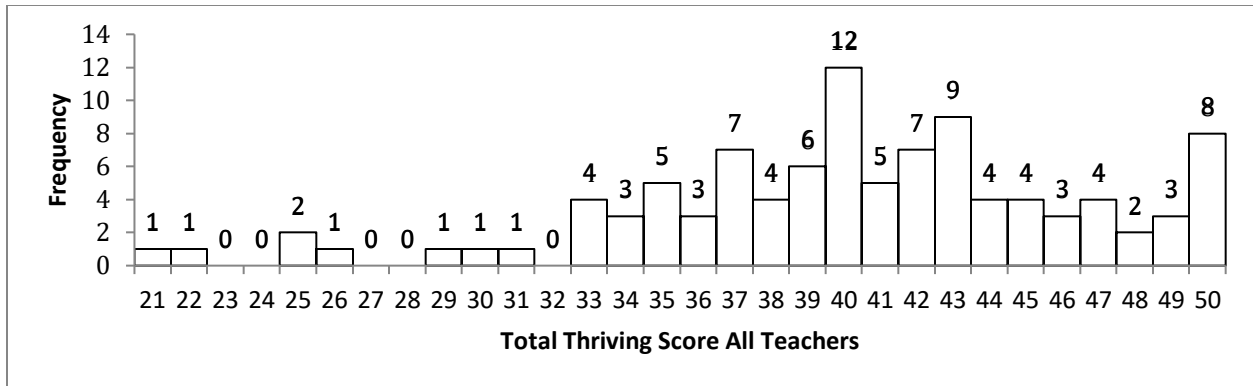
Figure 4.1. Distribution of thriving scores for the entire sample.

Teachers that met the high thriving threshold (see Table 3.4) were representative of the

larger sample in terms of gender, race, age, and highest level of schooling. However, there were

differences between the top quartile on the thriving survey and the rest of the participants: the top

quartile featured the lowest percentage of ELA teachers (21%)[6], but the highest percentage of

science teachers (21%)[7]. As noted, teachers in the top quartile were close to the sample in age

(39 to 40, respectively), but their experience, on average, was the lowest (6 years). Teachers in

the top quartile also differed from the sample as a whole based on where they worked; 50% of

the teachers in this quartile worked at Dillon[8] (46% of Dillon's participants), while none of the

eleven teachers working at Stewart scored in the top quartile.

In terms of their thriving scores (see Figure 4.2), a majority (54%) of the top quartile had

scores in the upper half of the high thriving range (> 47), meaning they strongly responded to all

or nearly all of the sentiments presented in the survey. Of those interviewed, seven of the ten

participants scored in the upper half of the top quartile. Their high overall thriving scores

indicate that they strongly perceived their opportunities to learn and experience vitality;

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[6] 31% of the sample reported to teach ELA

[7] Compared to just 12% for the entire sample

[8] Participants by school: Dillon - 26, Bayside - 25, Morgan - 23, Robinson - 15, Stewart - 11, No Response - 1

therefore, their insights on each aspect of thriving are likely representative of high learning and

high vitality in this sample.
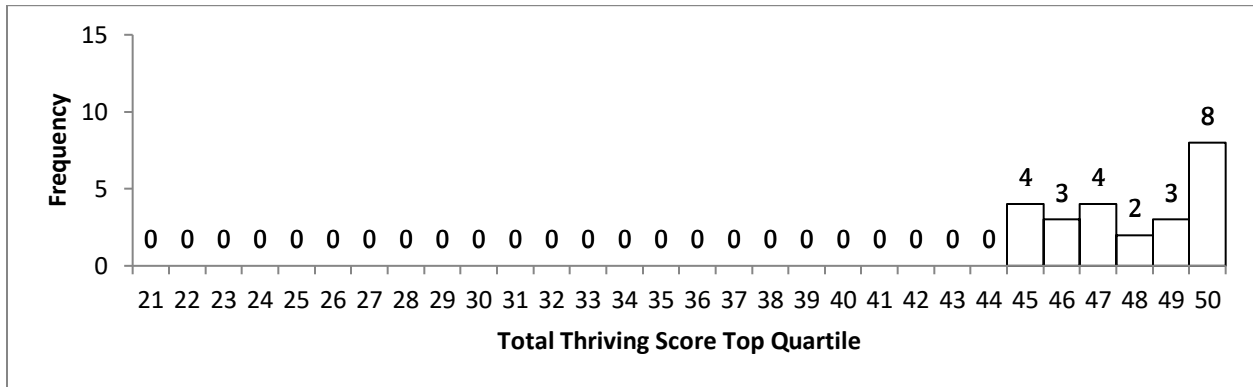
Figure 4.2. Distribution of thriving scores for the top quartile.

On the opposite end of the distribution, teachers in the bottom quartile (see Figure 4.3)

represented the sample in terms of race, teaching experience, and schooling. However, this

subsample was more likely to be male and older on average than the sample at-large.
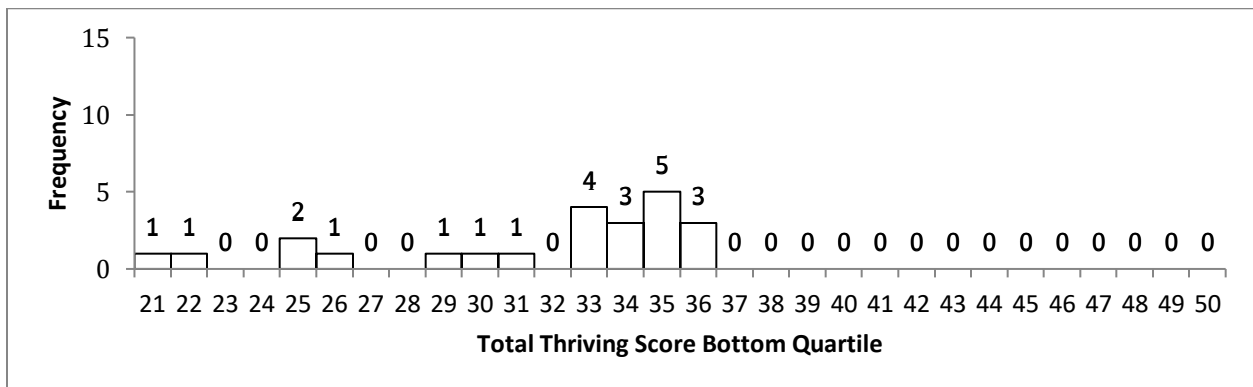
Figure 4.3. Distribution of thriving scores for the bottom quartile.

Additionally, only one science teacher scored low enough to be in the bottom quartile,

while a third of the teachers who selected "other" for subject matter scored in this group. In

terms of where the typical teacher in the bottom quartile worked, Stewart Middle, which placed

none of its eleven teachers in the top quartile, had nearly half (45%) of its participants in this

quartile. At the same time, Dillon Middle, which had the most and highest percentage of its teachers in the top quartile, also had the lowest share of its sample (15%) in the bottom quartile.

Overall Perceptions of Learning

In terms of learning, 78% of the 101 participants scored 20 or higher on the survey (see Figure 4.4), meaning these respondents averaged an agree response on each of the five learning items with 20% of all participants selecting the maximum Likert value for each. Only 8% of the sample population had markedly low learning scores (< 15). In fact, due to the clustering of learning scores on the high end, all of these low learning scores were outliers for this sample[9]. The high number of participants with learning scores of 25 also precluded any top learning scores from qualifying as outliers.
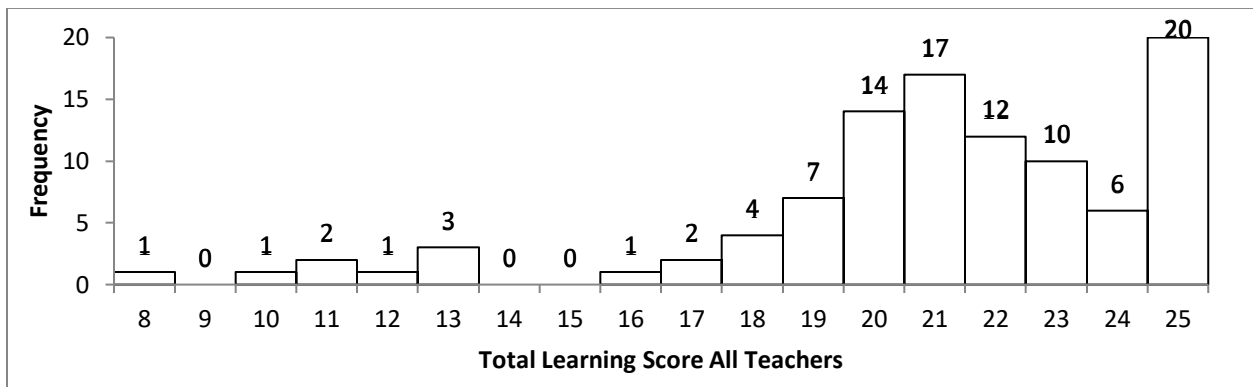
Figure 4.4. Distribution of learning scores for the entire sample.

Since I placed participants into quartiles based on their overall thriving score, and not their learning score, not all of the highest scoring teachers on the learning items are in the top overall thriving quartile (see Figure 4.5). Some participants with high learning had vitality scores low enough to place them outside the top quartile in terms of thriving.

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[9] Based on IQR x 1.5 metric: Q3 (24) – Q1 (20) = 4 x 1.5 = 6; 20 – 6 =14; Outlier < 14

Still, those that did end up in the top quartile likely represent teachers who strongly agreed about their learning at work. Of the 20% of teachers surveyed who scored a perfect 25 on the learning portion, 85% ended up in the top quartile, constituting 71% of the top quartile. The remaining 29% of the top quartile still had learning scores that placed them in the upper half of the distribution. In other words, no one qualified for the top quartile due to a thriving score with high vitality and moderate learning.
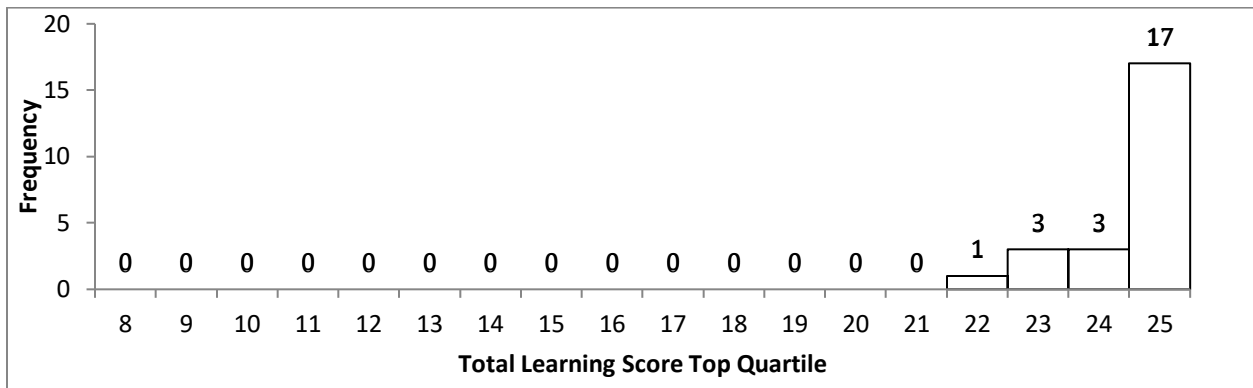
Figure 4.5. Distribution of learning scores for the top quartile.

For the bottom quartile (see Figure 4.6), with the exception of one participant with a score of 23, the rest of their learning scores (21 or lower) were low enough to place in the bottom half of the learning distribution. However, the participant who did score a 23 had one of the lowest vitality scores in the sample (12). Nonetheless, some of the lower learning scoring participants did not qualify for the bottom quartile because their vitality scores were comparatively high. Those excluded due to high vitality scores had learning scores ranging from 16 to 19, meaning none of the lowest scoring learners from the sample at-large were removed from the bottom quartile. The overall trend for the bottom quartile was to score higher on learning than vitality.
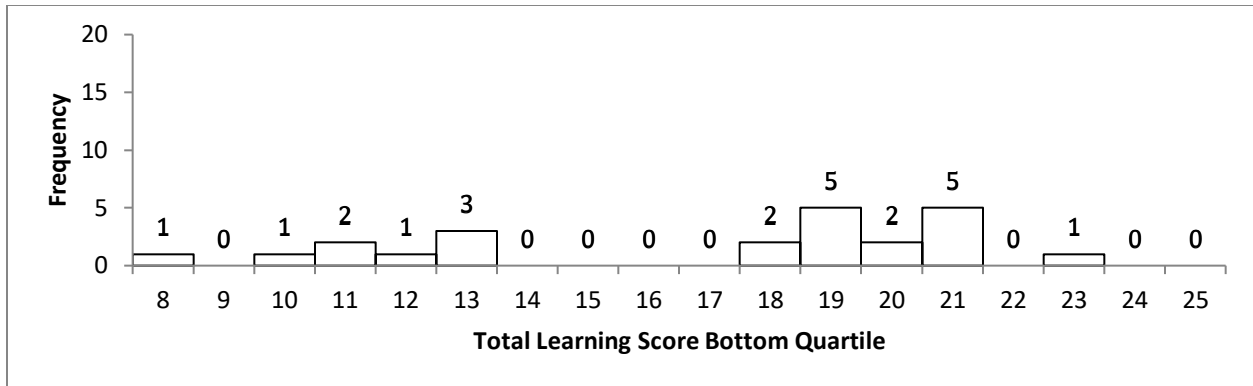
Figure 4.6. Distribution of learning scores for the bottom quartile.

Overall Perceptions of Vitality

55% of all teachers surveyed scored 20 or higher on the vitality portion (see Figure 4.7), meaning the participants averaged an agree response across the five vitality-related sentiments. 10% of the sample population selected the maximum Likert for all vitality items, while 12% scored markedly low on the survey (< 15). Of the low vitality scores, just one qualified as an outlier[10]. None of the vitality scores on the high end qualified as outliers.
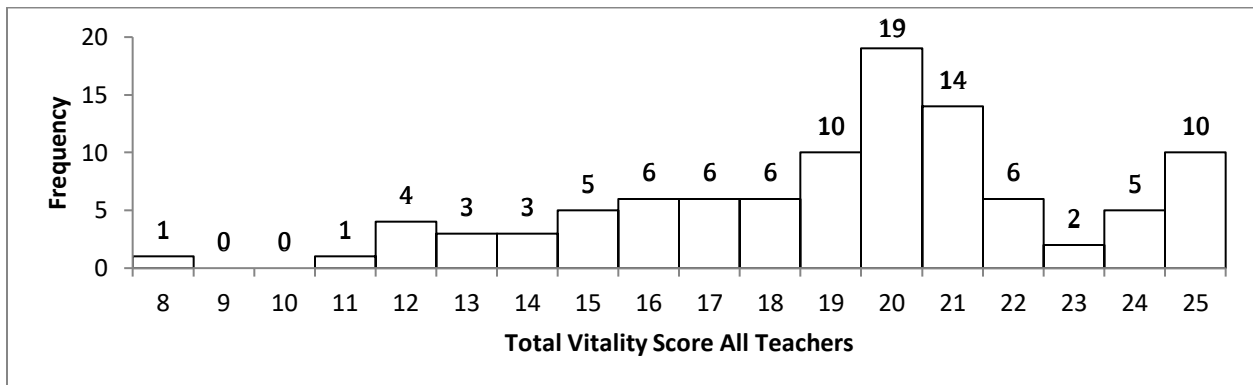
Figure 4.7. Distribution of vitality scores for the entire sample.

For the top quartile (see Figure 4.8), 38% scored a perfect 25 on the vitality portion. Only one participant with a perfect vitality score did not qualify for the top quartile. The rest of the top

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[10] Based on IQR x 1.5 metric: Q3 (21) – Q1 (17) = 4 x 1.5 = 6; 17 – 6 =11; Outlier < 11

quartile scored 20 or higher, meaning each teacher in this group averaged at least an agree

response on the vitality items.
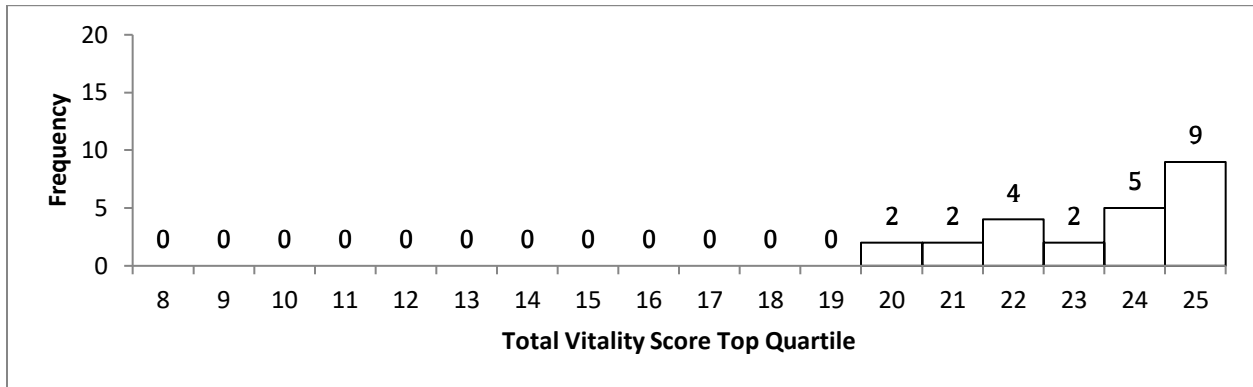
Figure 4.8. Distribution of vitality scores for the top quartile.

For the bottom quartile (see Figure 4.9), 13% of the participants averaged an agree

response on the vitality items, placing them in the upper half of the overall distribution.

However, the remaining 87% of participants scored 17 or lower, meaning they were among the

lowest 25% in terms of both vitality and thriving.
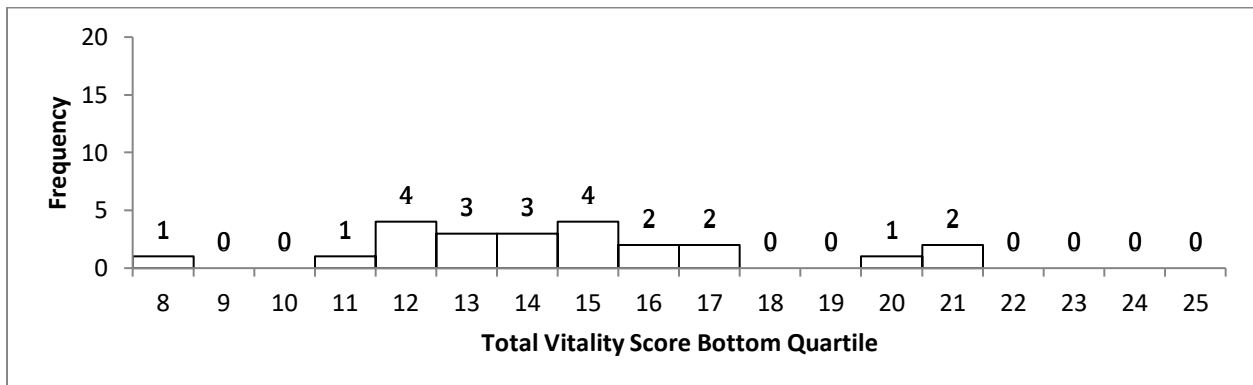
Figure 4.9. Distribution of vitality scores for the bottom quartile.

Perceptions of Different Aspects of Learning

Based on overall scores, most of the teachers surveyed agreed strongly about the presence

of learning at work. However, not all individual learning questions garnered the same level of

agreement. Therefore, despite the apparent pervasiveness of learning at work among this group

of teachers, individual item analysis provides additional understanding about why such a feeling might exist. It also helps to explain why a small group of teachers did not seem to share similar perceptions as their peers. The following section reports on the results of individual learning items to further explore the perceptions of learning held among this sample.

"At work, I find myself learning often." The first survey item (see Figure 4.10), "At work, I find myself learning often," received a response of agree or strongly agree from 88% of all respondents. This is higher than the 78% that averaged agree or strongly agree with all learning items, suggesting that if a teacher perceived that they were learning, they perceived it occurring often. In the factor analysis, this variable had a factor score of 0.9020, suggesting that learning often strongly reflected the overall concept of learning.
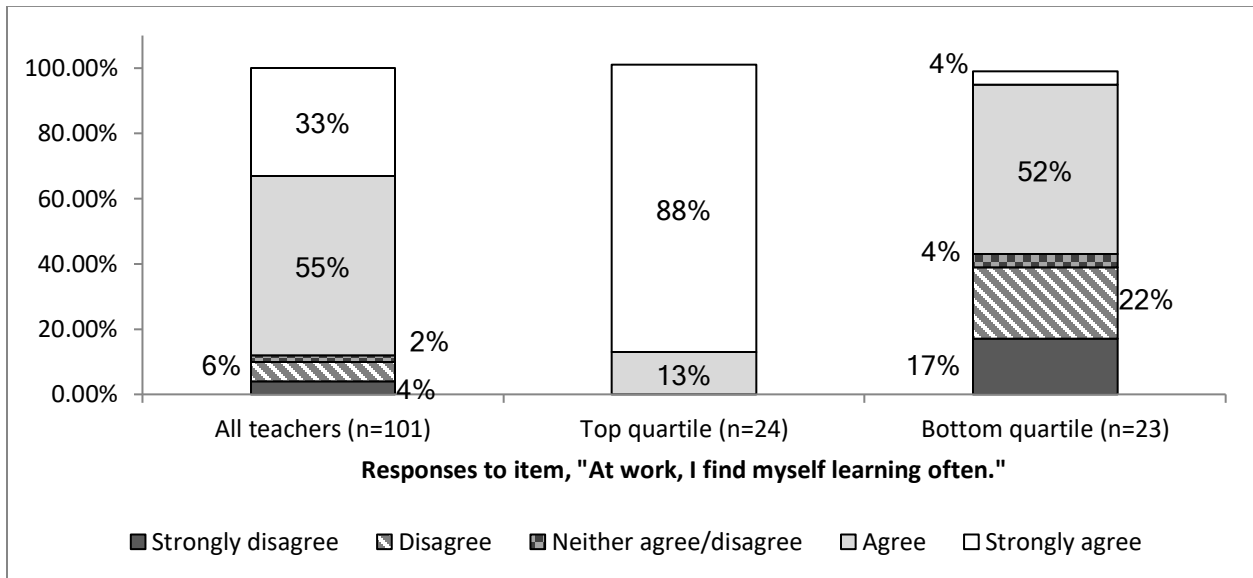
Figure 4.10. Comparison of responses to "At work, I find myself learning often," among all participants, the top quartile, and the bottom quartile by percentage.

The top quartile surpassed the level of agreement of the entire sample with each person choosing an agree statement on this item with 88% strongly agreeing. The percentage of those who felt strongly among this group matched the percentage of combined agree responses for the

entire sample. This high level of agreement for learning often suggests that teachers in the top quartile not only feel that they are learning at work, but that it is a regular occurrence.

For the bottom quartile, the majority also agreed that they learned often at work, but 39% of the teachers in this subsample did reply with a disagree response. This group's responses show that some teachers, albeit a small portion, do not perceive their learning as occurring often. However, more in this group agreed with the response than disagreed, meaning that any lack of perceived learning among the bottom quartile did not likely come from this item.

"At work, I continue to learn more as time goes by." Responses to the first item (on learning often) mostly matched the responses to a similar survey item that also referenced frequency: "At work, I continue to learn more as time goes by." Across the entire sample (see Figure 4.11), 89% of all respondents chose an agree response. In fact, this item generated the strongest score in the factor analysis for learning (0.9689), suggesting responses to this item best exemplified this sample's experience with learning. What is more, this item and the learning often item showed a correlation of 0.8598 together, providing further evidence to the claim that these two sentiments showed consistency among respondents.

Further support for the relationship between the first two survey items is apparent in the responses among the top quartile. Like the first item, the entire top quartile selected an agree response, with 92% of the subsample choosing strongly agree. Thus, this quartile not only feels like they are learning often, but also that learning compiles over time. Granted, the first two questions are similar, but do suppose something different: the learning often item is phrased in a way that references the current moment, while the inclusion of "as time goes by" in the second item considers the extent to which learning continues to occur. Therefore, teachers in the quartile seem to perceive the presence of learning both in the moment and across time.

The bottom quartile also showed agreement for learning more as time goes by. In fact, 65% of teachers in the bottom quartile chose an agree response to this item, the second highest agree percentage for any survey item for this group. It is also worth mentioning that 30% of the teachers in this group held disagreeable perceptions with this sentiment, which is slightly lower than how this group responded to the first survey item on learning often.
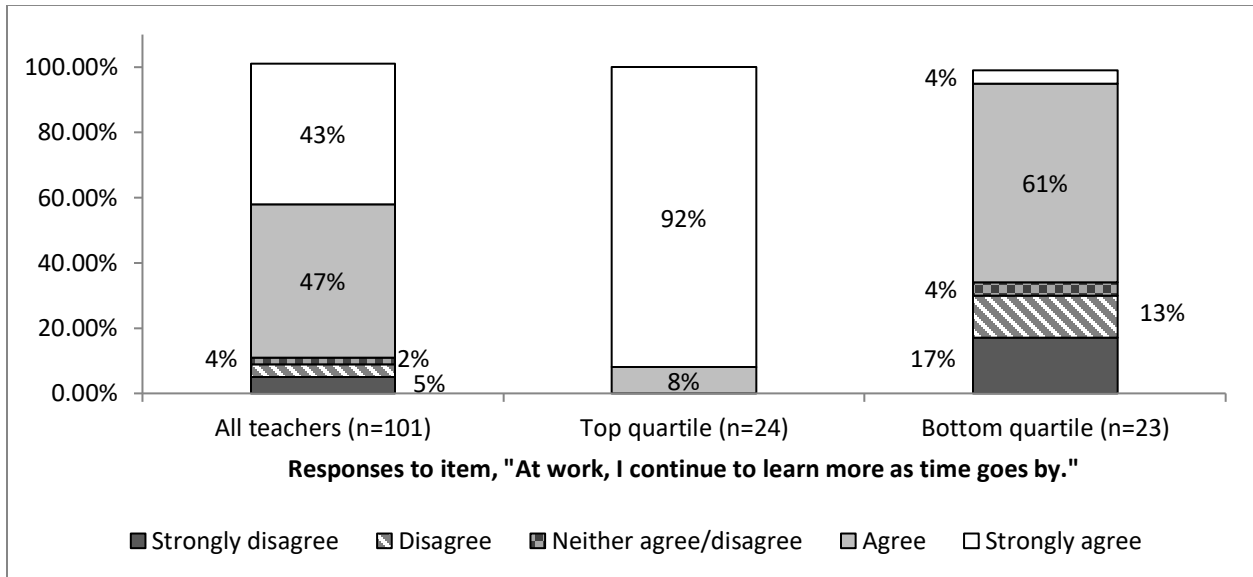
Figure 4.11. Comparison of responses to "At work, I continue to learn more as time goes by," among all participants, the top quartile, and the bottom quartile by percentage.

"At work, I am not learning." Additional evidence for the strong presence of perceived learning among this sample of teachers comes from the survey item that posed to them a negative sentiment: "At work, I am not learning." Here, a score of five on the Likert scale meant respondents strongly disagreed with the feelings expressed in the sentiment. 93% of teachers (see Figure 4.12) across the entire sample population refuted this statement, meaning nearly every teacher acknowledged they were learning to some extent. This item also strongly correlated with the learning latent factor (0.7272) and moderately with the items that asked about how often learning occurred (0.6637) and its continuity (0.6022).

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Every teacher in the top quartile disagreed with "I am not learning" and, as a group, they were nearly unanimous in their strong refutation of it with 96% strongly denying the sentiment. This was the second strongest response to a learning item for this group, providing further support to suggest that they represented participants with strong perceptions of their learning.
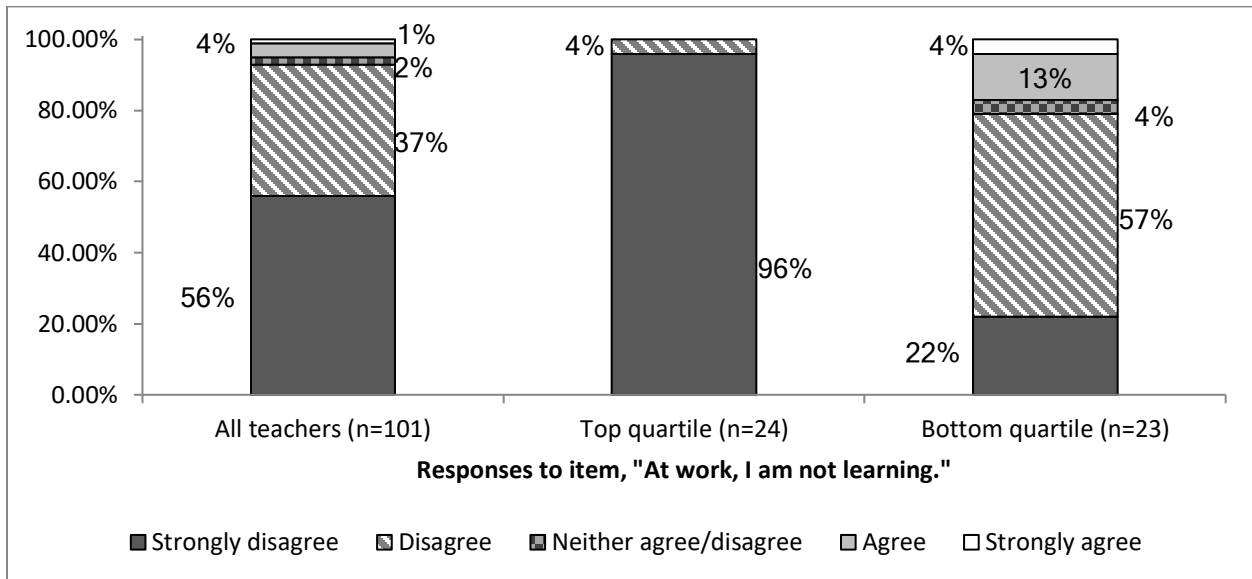
Figure 4.12. Comparison of responses to "At work, I am not learning," among all participants, the top quartile, and the bottom quartile by percentage.

For the bottom quartile, only 17% of the subsample selected a response of one or two on the Likert scale – the lowest percentage for all learning items among this group. On the other hand, 79% of this subsample refuted or strongly refuted the sentiment, suggesting most teachers in the bottom quartile could not agree with the premise of learning not occurring.

"At work, I see myself as continually improving." If it is clear that most of the sample held perceptions of learning at work, the next question becomes – did they perceive themselves as improving? Another learning-related survey item proposed, "At work, I see myself as continually improving;" one of two items related to learning that did not employ a form of the verb *to learn*. Once again, the sample as a whole (see Figure 4.13) was nearly unanimous in their belief that they were improving at work; 89% of all participants agreed or strongly agreed with

the statement. What is more, this item correlated strongly via factor analysis with the learning latent factor (0.9115) and showed strong internal consistency with the survey items about how often these participants learned (0.7421) and the continuity of their learning (0.8069). The high agreement toward continuous improvement, when paired with the revelations from items that directly referenced learning, suggests this sample of teachers conflate learning with improvement.

The top quartile provided further support to the claim that this sample viewed learning and improvement in concert. 100% of top quartile strongly agreed that they see themselves as continually improving. This is something they did not do for any other item on the survey, be it learning, vitality, or future plans. This means that the few teachers who were more reserved in responding to the statements directly referencing learning expressed more confidence when it came to the topic of improvement. While the number who did so is small, it does suggest that some viewed improvement possible absent high levels of perceived learning.

Figure 4.13. Comparison of responses to "At work, I see myself as continually improving," among all participants, the top quartile, and the bottom quartile by percentage.

However, when it came to the bottom quartile, there was less correspondence between their views on learning and improvement. As noted above, some of the lowest scoring learners still could not deny that they were not learning at all. Yet, when the language on the survey shifted to improvement, there was a slight dip towards the lower end of scores again. The number of refuting responses increased when the topic shifted from not learning to improvement (17% to 22%), suggesting that a small portion of this subsample did not see a connection between their learning and their improvement. Granted, at least 89% of all teachers surveyed saw a connection between learning and improvement, but the few who did not are noticeable enough to warrant some pause when equating learning with improvement for these teachers.

"At work, I'm developing a lot as a person." On the learning portion of the survey, teachers showed the least agreement when it came to their perceived personal development. The last item of the learning section states, "At work, I am developing a lot as a person" and like the improvement question, learning is not directly referenced. Similar to all items in the learning section, this item garnered a positive response among the entire sample with 84% of all teachers agreeing with the sentiment (see Figure 4.14). The number of agree responses is once again quite high, but it did also generate the most neutral and disagree responses of all learning items. This suggests that for a small percentage of teachers learning is not perceived as synonymous with personal development. This small percentage shift registered in the factor analysis, too; this sentiment showed minimal correlation (0.15) with the learning latent factor, making it the only such learning item to show less than strong correlation. Moreover, in terms of correlation with the other four learning survey items, personal development did not show strong correlation with any other item. In fact, only two learning items showed moderate correlation with personal development: learning often (0.3449) and the refuting of "I am not learning" (0.3432).

Figure 4.14. Comparison of responses to "At work, I'm developing a lot as a person," among all participants, the top quartile, and the bottom quartile by percentage.

The relative lack of agreement was also noticeable among the top quartile– only 79% strongly agreed with the item, which made it the only learning item to generate fewer than 80% strongly agree responses. 96% of the top quartile still selected an agree response, so the group seemed to perceive that they were personally developing. Nonetheless, the lower agreement, when compared to other survey items like the continuous improvement one, suggests that even for the top quartile, their learning as teachers is not as in line with their perceptions of personal development.

"At work, I'm developing a lot as a person," was unique for the bottom quartile in that it was the only learning item that generated zero strong refutations. Also, many of the refuting responses showed up as neutral responses, making this item the most neutral of the learning section for teachers in the bottom quartile. This is worth noting because this same group was more disagreeable on learning items, which means they too did not conflate learning and personal development.

In sum, the high overall learning scores produced high scores on each of the five learning items. The sample population and the top quartile tended to score highly (fours or fives) on all of the items with the top quartile choosing the strongest sentiment at a higher rate. The bottom quartile still tended to agree on learning items more often than not. Further, factor analysis revealed that "At work, I am developing a lot as a person," did not map onto learning as a latent factor nor did it correlate strongly with any of the other four learning items.

Perceptions of Different Aspects of Vitality

In order to unpack why vitality tended to score lower than learning among the entire sample, it is worth examining each vitality question individually. As was the case for learning items, I will report on all five vitality items to identify trends within the vitality data. Upon completing the item analysis on vitality, the chapter closes with a discussion of key findings from survey analysis.

"At work, I feel alive and vital." The first vitality item on the survey (see Figure 4.15) asked teachers to respond to the sentiment, "At work, I feel alive and vital." 10% of the sample population chose a negative response on this item, while 24% chose neutral. Granted, nearly two-thirds of teachers chose an agree response, but in comparison to the learning portion of the survey, no learning item generated more than a combined 16% on neutral or disagree responses. Plus, this item generated a factor of score of 0.7766, meaning it was strongly indicative of vitality as a larger phenomenon.

The top quartile showed a high level of agreement in responding to this item with 75% choosing strongly agree and the rest of the subsample choosing agree. This suggests the quartile routinely feels alive and vital at work. In fact, this group was responsible for 78% of the strongly agree responses. To put that in perspective, the highest share of strongly agree responses the top

quartile had of any learning item was 63%. This is pointed out to show how unique this group's strong agreement was, just five other participants (or 6%) across the entire sample chose strongly agree.
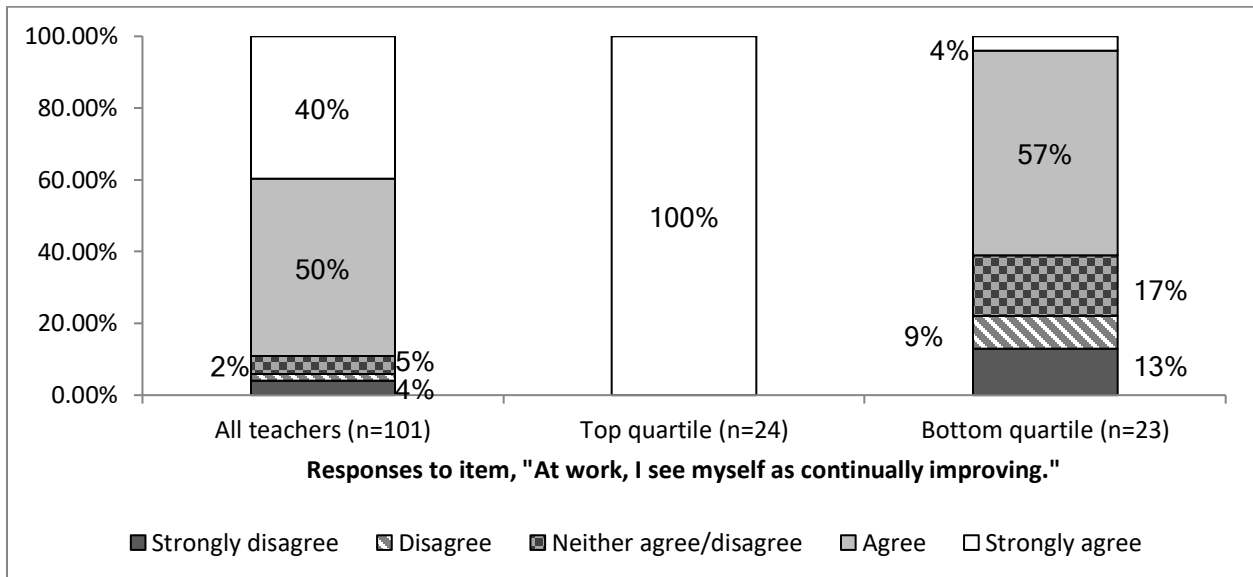

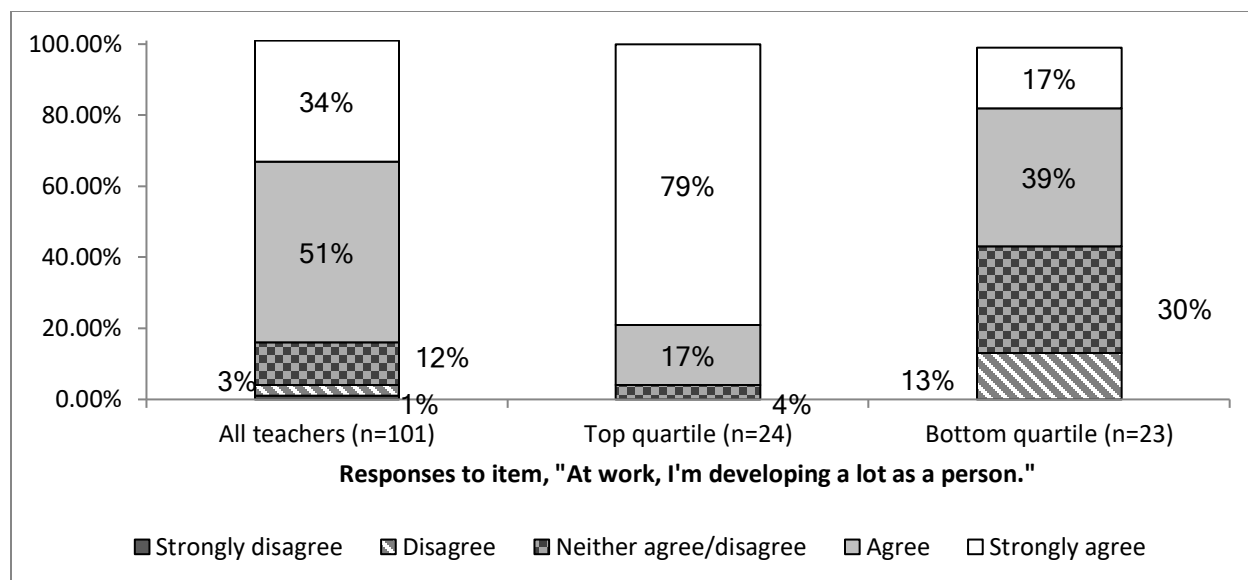*Figure 4.15.* Comparison of responses to "At work, I feel alive and vital," among all participants, the top quartile, and the bottom quartile by percentage.

The bottom quartile answered much differently with 91% of the subsample choosing a neutral or disagree response, which is noteworthy given the fact that no learning item generated more than a combined 43% of neutral and disagree responses from this group. Further, if you take out the neutral responses, 44% chose a disagree response, showing a sizeable amount of participants in this subsample did not feel alive and vital at work. Further, all of the disagree responses came from the bottom quartile, meaning the perceived absence of aliveness and vitality was unique to the bottom quartile.

"At work, I have energy and spirit." The second vitality item, "At work, I have energy and spirit," also saw more than a quarter of all participants (26%) choose a neutral or disagree response (see Figure 4.16). Only 6% disagreed with this item, but the increased neutrality means it generated less agreement than the typical learning item. This item correlated strongly (0.7018)

with the previous item on feeling alive and vital. It also generated the highest factor score of all

five vitality items (0.9827), meaning responses to this statement correlated strongest with vitality

as a latent factor. In a sense, responses to this item mapped nearly identical to overall feelings of

vitality; said another way, "I have energy and spirit," was more or less synonymous with vitality.

Figure 4.16. Comparison of responses to "At work, I have energy and spirit," among all
participants, the top quartile, and the bottom quartile by percentage.

For the top quartile, 71% responded strongly in agreement to the statement with the rest

of the subsample once again agreeing. These numbers may be slightly lower than those

generated by the learning items, but the lack of neutral or disagree responses makes it hard to

suggest the top quartile's perceptions of vitality were markedly lower when compared to any

single learning item. Once more, this group accounted for most of the strongly agree responses

with 71% of all strongly agrees coming from this group.

For the bottom quartile, once again, a large majority chose a disagree or neutral response

(74%). There were fewer disagree responses for this item when compared to the alive and vital

item (26% to 44%), but the distribution of scores here shows a larger shift away from agree

responses than any one learning item. All disagree responses and over half of the neutral

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responses, across the entire sample, came from this group, suggesting their feelings on vitality differed from the typical participant in this study.

"At work, I do not feel very energetic." Similar to the learning item that stated, "At work, I am not learning," one vitality item asked participants to respond to a negative sentiment: "At I work, I do not feel very energetic." Whereas the negative learning item generated a strong rebuke from participants (93% disagreed), here just 75% disagreed to not feeling energetic (see Figure 4.17). Also, 57% of all participants selected strongly disagree to "I am not learning," but only 29% did so in their rejection of not feeling energetic at work. This marked difference in strength of response suggests that these teachers were much more likely to openly admit a lack of energy at work than they are a presence of learning. The item also correlated strongly (0.9120) with vitality as a latent factor and it showed moderate correlation with the two previously discussed vitality items on feeling "alive and vital" and having "energy and spirit." This evidence suggests that teachers in the sample willing to agree to a lack of energy were also admitting to a lack of vitality at work.
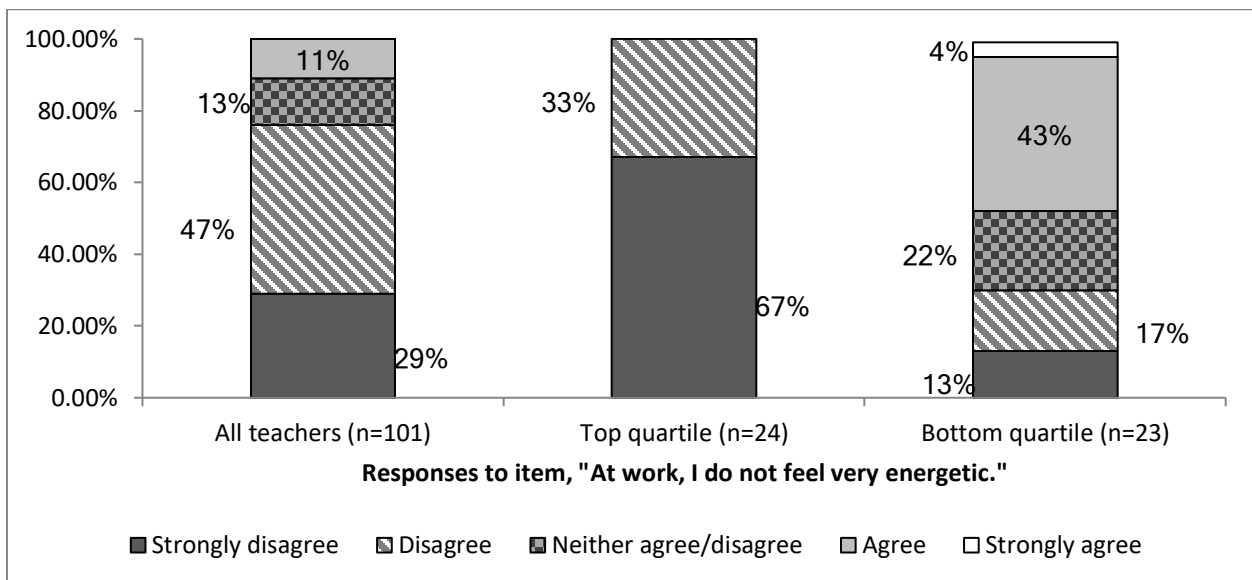
Figure 4.17. Comparison of responses to "At work, I do not feel very energetic," among all participants, the top quartile, and the bottom quartile by percentage.

For the top quartile, two-thirds strongly disagreed with this item and the rest disagreed, so once again this group of teachers showed consistency in their responses to the other learning and vitality items. However, it is worth noting that this is the first item to generate under 70% strong responses from the top quartile. This in no way implies a lack of energy, but it does point to a noticeable shift in responses, not yet seen in other items.

On this item, the bottom quartile continued their trend of responses skewed towards the lower end of the Likert scale. As was the case with the other two vitality items, more than two-thirds of teachers in the bottom quartile selected a response scoring three or lower on the Likert scale, which is something that did not occur on a single learning item for this subsample. In fact, 48% of the bottom quartile selected an agree response to this item, suggesting energy at work is an issue for some teachers in this group.

"At work, I feel alert and awake." The next item, "At work, I feel alert and awake," generated the highest scores of all vitality items with 82% of the entire sample selecting an agree statement in response (see Figure 4.18). It also showed lower correlation both with vitality as a latent factor (0.6585) as well as with the other three vitality items discussed up until this point. Regardless, despite its relative higher agreement, this item still tracked enough with the other vitality items to warrant its inclusion in discussing vitality as a phenomenon for this group.

The top quartile's responses to this item were similar to the other vitality items with 71% strongly agreeing and the rest agreeing. Their similar agreeability for this item suggests that any differences seen in correlation between this item and the other vitality sentiments likely came from other quartiles.

To that point, the bottom quartile reflected that increased agreement on this item shown across the sample. Nearly half of the bottom quartile (47%) selected a favorable response to this item, making it the most positively responded to item in terms of vitality for this group.
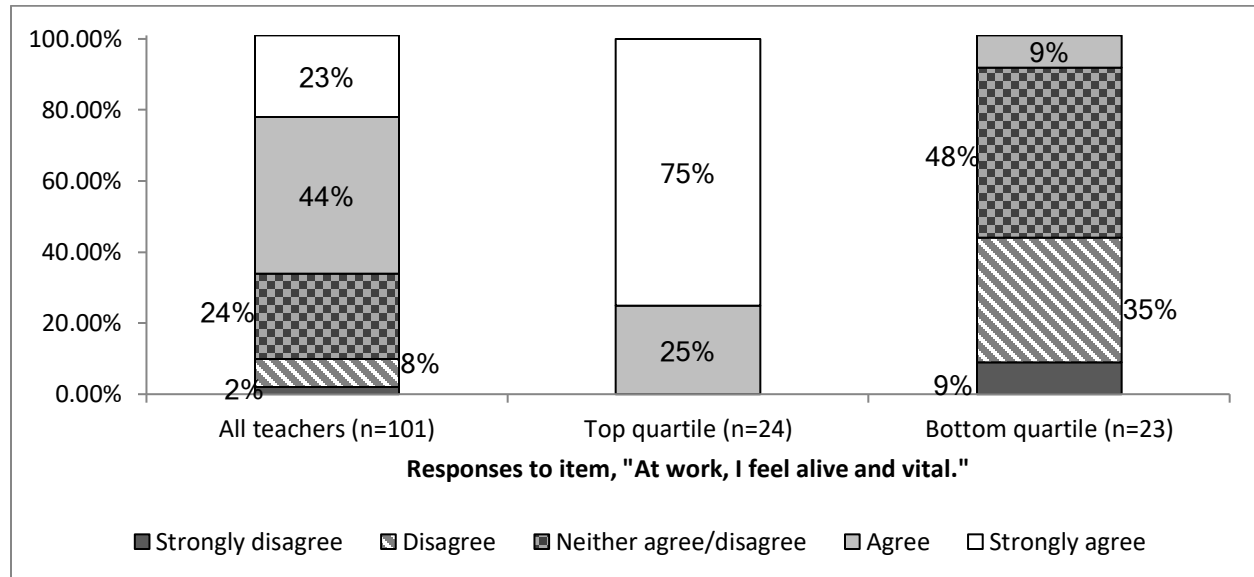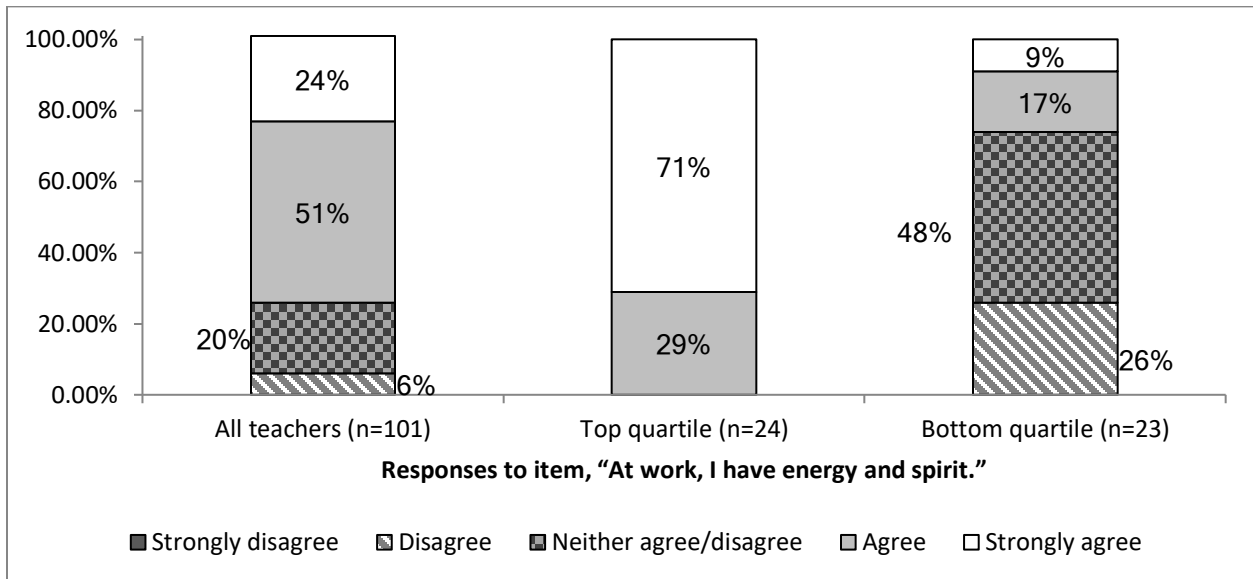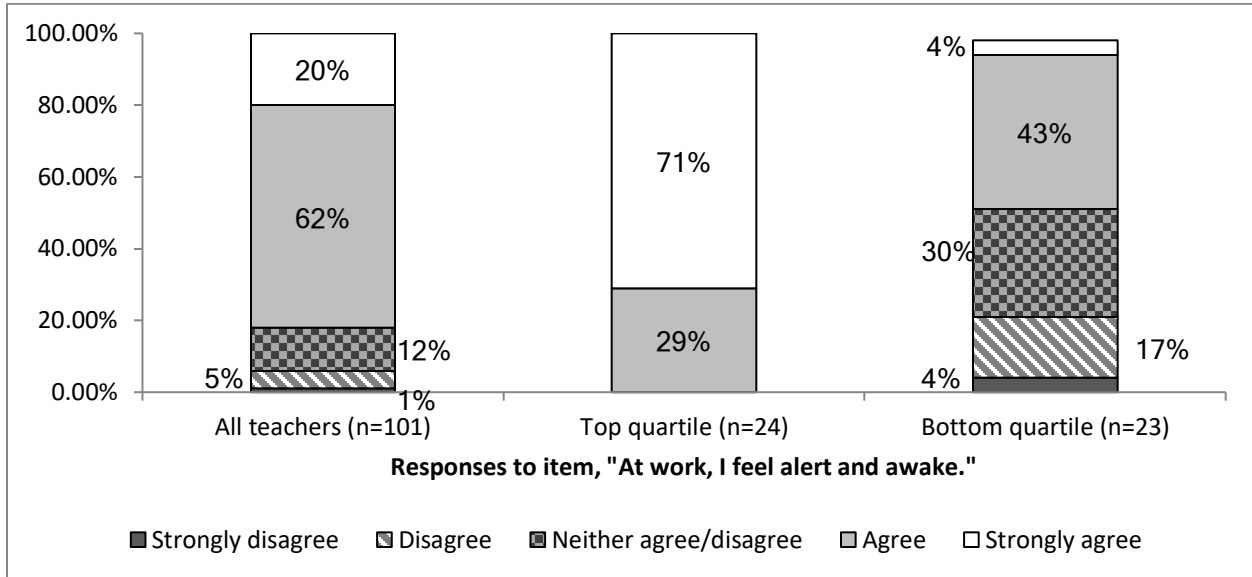

Figure 4.18. Comparison of responses to "At work, I feel alert and awake," among all participants, the top quartile, and the bottom quartile by percentage.

"At work, I am looking forward to each new day." The increased agreement present in the item about feeling alert and awake disappeared when the survey shifted to the final vitality survey item: "At work, I am looking forward to each new day." Of all ten thriving items, this sentiment generated the fewest amount of fives on the Likert scale – just 14% of the sample strongly agreed with looking forward to each new day. This item also generated the least amount of total agree responses among participants with 65% of the teachers in the sample doing so (see Figure 4.19) and it also tracked the weakest with vitality as a latent factor (0.6321). However, it did correlate with the energy and alert items; plus, it correlated strongly with the first vitality item – "At work, I feel alive and vital." Therefore, the dip in agreement was not strong enough to suggest it did not represent overall perceptions of vitality for this group of teachers.
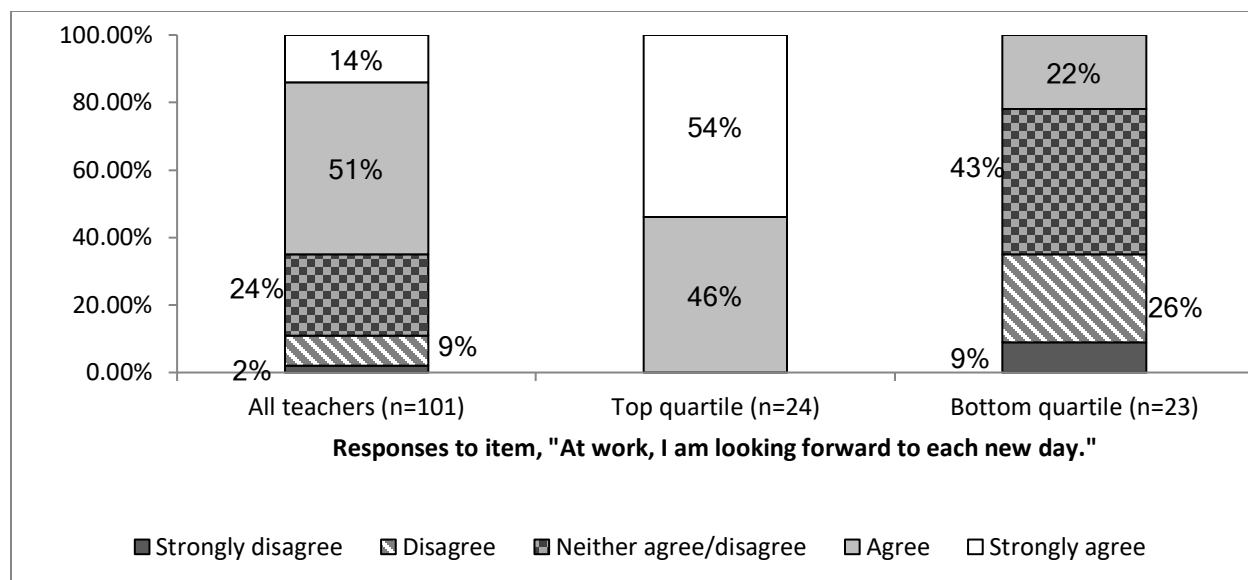
Figure 4.19. Comparison of responses to "At work, I am looking forward to each new day," among all participants, the top quartile, and the bottom quartile by percentage.

This item also produced the most split response among the top quartile. Just 54% chose strongly agree on this item, making it the only item on the survey to get anything less than two-thirds of teachers in the top quartile to select a response of five. Granted, the entire quartile chose either agree or strongly agree, but if the learning items were any indication, this group did not shy away from expressing strong sentiments on the thriving survey. Nonetheless, they were still responsible for 93% of all strongly agree responses, meaning if someone expressed enthusiasm about each new day of work, they were likely a teacher in the top quartile.

Conversely, 35% of teachers in the bottom quartile chose a disagree response and 43% were neutral to this item, showing that their lack of enthusiasm for a new day at work corresponded with their placement in the lowest quartile. However, they only accounted for 51% of the neutral and disagree responses, suggesting that a lack of enthusiasm for each new day at work was not exclusive to this one group of teachers.

In sum, "looking forward to each new day" and feeling "alive and vital" proved to be the two items that generated the least amount of agreement across the five vitality items, suggesting

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a lack of vitality goes beyond just notions of energy. If energy were the main problem with vitality, the items directly referencing energy would have generated similar responses.

Despite relatively high thriving scores for the sample, individual item analysis showed that not all learning and vitality items correlated strongly with one another. The next section discusses what this could mean for thriving, learning, and vitality among this group of teachers.

Discussion

Survey analysis generated interesting trends that provide insight towards who comprised this sample of teachers from Barry County as well as their perceptions of thriving. Therefore, in what follows, I discuss what the demographic findings could mean for who thrives as a teacher. Additionally, I synthesize the results across learning and vitality items to highlight significant findings from administering the thriving survey to a group of teachers.

Demographics

The demographic data (see Table 3.4) collected via the survey provides some insight towards the types of teachers in this sample that comprised the top and bottom quartiles. In particular, gender, age, subject matter, and school produced some of the more compelling findings for this group.

Men made up 17% of the sample, which is slightly under the national average of 24% (Snyder et al., 2016) and the actual Barry County average of 26%, but 41% of male teachers surveyed ended up in the bottom quartile. As this is a case study, I cannot generalize for the profession or the district, but the high percentage of male teachers in the bottom quartile is worth noting. Their distribution among the top quartile and the next highest quartile was reflective of the sample as a whole, meaning any male teachers in the bottom half of the distribution skewed towards the lower end of thriving scores.

In addition to gender differences, age also showed some variance between the top and bottom quartile. The top quartile had fewer years of experience, on average, despite a similar age to the rest of the sample. This could suggest that teachers in the top quartile were more likely to feature career changers given the consistency in average age, yet the fewer years of teaching experience. If the average age of teachers in the top quartile was 39 years old with six years of teaching experience, it is plausible to assume the typical participant from this group entered the profession in their thirties. Granted, this assumes the teaching experience is continuous, but even if it is not, given that the median age of beginning teachers is 26 (Kaiser, 2011), it is fair to suggest these teachers likely had other professional experiences outside of the classroom. Therefore, their views of teaching may be more positive given their ability to compare to other professional experiences.

However, the bottom quartile had an average age of 43 years old with ten years of experience, which is consistent with the age and experience pattern of the top quartile. Said another way, the typical teacher in the bottom quartile was four years older with four more years of experience than those in the top group, making it equally plausible they had career changers among their subsample, as well. Yet, it is possible the additional years of experience teaching influenced perceptions of thriving for teachers in this group.

Beyond gender and age, the subject teachers teach could have affected thriving for this sample. For example, ELA teachers constituted a significant portion of the sample (31%), but just 16% of them qualified for the top quartile. On the other hand, 42% of all science teachers qualified for the top quartile. For the bottom quartile, the most represented subject matter was from teachers who selected "other (30%)." It is unclear from the survey data what these teachers teach, but given there were six other options to choose from in describing their subject, it could

mean they are one of a kind in their building, meaning they may lack access to peers who teach something similar.

One last demographic characteristic that potentially influenced thriving among the sample was the schools where these teachers work. Granted, participation was self-selected, but the fact that nearly one in two teachers at Dillon thrived, while none did so at Stewart suggests some schools could provide conditions more conducive to thriving. Furthermore, just fifteen teachers from Robinson and eleven from Stewart agreed to participate, while the other three schools each had more than 20 teachers contribute, despite similar staff sizes. In terms of interviews, no teachers from Robinson, and just one from Stewart agreed to participate. It is possible that teachers were less enthusiastic to participate given how they perceive their current school.

Due to the non-randomized nature of this study, additional research is needed to corroborate the findings that emerged from examining gender, age, subject matter, and schools in this sample. However, the differences that emerged among this sample warrants further investigation to see if thriving is less likely among older, male teachers, teachers of certain subjects, and at certain schools.

Comparing Learning and Vitality

In addition to the demographic items, item-by-item analysis also generated some interesting findings, which suggests examining vitality and learning separately may provide a better framework for the interview data than structuring those chapters on the top and bottom quartile, respectively. To make this case, I review data from the overall learning and vitality scores as well as individual item analysis.

At first glance, the vitality results (see Figure 4.7) appear somewhat similar to the results of the learning items (see Figure 4.4) – the average vitality score was 19 (learning was 21) and the median vitality score was 20 (learning was 21). However, 55% of the sample population agreed (score of 20 or higher) with the sentiments expressed across the five vitality items, compared to 78% who did so on learning. This amounts to nearly one quarter of the sample population shifting out of the agree portion towards neutral/disagree when comparing vitality to learning.

Figure 4.4 and Figure 4.7 show the overall learning and vitality scores of the sample, respectively, and how their distributions skew differently. In the learning scores, overall totals skewed towards an average response of strongly agree, so much so that the mode of this data was a score of 25, meaning the most common learning survey featured all strongly agree responses. As for vitality scores, combined responses clustered around an average response of agree, evidenced by the mode of 20. Granted, both learning and vitality landed in the agreeable range, but the learning items generated stronger agreement than the vitality items. This is noteworthy given how relatively short the survey was; the same teachers who were quick to strongly agree about their learning tempered their responses when it came to vitality.

A majority of the sample may have perceived vitality, but at the same time, it is important to remember that the thriving construct supposes both learning and vitality are present at relatively high levels in order to thrive (Spreitzer & Porath, 2012). For instance, I defined a high thriving score via meta-analysis (see Chapter 3) as 45 or higher. For a participant to reach that score, assuming learning and vitality rise and fall in tandem, they would need vitality and learning scores of around 22 or more. For learning, 48% of the sample population met that score, but for vitality, just 23% hit that threshold on the vitality items.

The meta-analysis also set the low thriving score at 31 or lower, meaning a participant would need to score around 16 or lower on both learning and vitality to land in this range. On learning items, 9% of the sample population scored 16 or lower, whereas on vitality items, 23% of the sample scored in the low range. While it may be true that only 8% of the sample population scored low overall on thriving, the fact that 23% did so on vitality suggests nearly one quarter of the sample does not routinely experience one-half of the construct. By definition, this means these teachers are potentially prone to the adverse effects that surface in the absence of vitality, including the likelihood of burnout (Spreitzer and Porath, 2012).

Further, a few participants in the top quartile scored a 20 or 21 on vitality, which if their learning scores matched, means these participants would not have scored in the high thriving range. This differs from the distribution of their learning scores where all of the teachers in the top quartile had a learning score of 22 or higher. Also, more teachers in the top quartile scored a perfect 25 on the learning portion (71%) than vitality (38%). Even if you include vitality scores of 23 and 24, there were still more teachers in the top quartile with perfect learning scores, suggesting that strong perceptions of learning were more consistent among this subsample.

For the bottom quartile (see Figure 4.9), their distribution of vitality scores differed from their learning scores, as well. As mentioned, the eight lowest learning scores could be classified as outliers when compared to the rest of the sample. However, when it came to vitality scores, only one participant could be classified as an outlier, meaning low vitality scores were less atypical for the sample. What's more, the vast majority (78%) of the bottom quartile scored low (16 or less) on the vitality portion, compared to just 35% of the subsample who scored similarly on the learning portion.

In addition, factor analysis confirmed the presence of two different latent factors among the thriving items, suggesting the survey measured only two phenomena across these ten items. Moreover, the five vitality items had the highest factor score[11] among survey items, meaning the participants' responses had strong internal consistency, especially when compared to the learning items' lower score[12] on the same analysis.

Thus, the higher learning scores on the survey, paired with the strength of vitality items in the factor analysis, warrant examination of these two phenomena independently. There is also support for this approach from previous research studies that examined vitality independently from the larger thriving phenomenon (Kark & Carmeli, 2009; Tummers, Steijn, Nevicka, & Heerema, 2016). Further, results from additional studies showed that learning and vitality scores varied enough to suggest workers do not experience both phenomena at equal levels when studying thriving (Porath et al., 2012; Prem, Ohly, Kubicek, & Korunka, 2017). This is not meant to suggest learning and vitality are not related; rather, correlations between the two are not so strong that both concepts require analysis exclusively in tandem.

Comparing distributions on specific learning and vitality items shows further differences between these two factors and their apparent lack of correlation for this sample. For instance, comparing "At work, I find myself learning often," and "At work, I feel alive and vital," exhibits the lower agreement in perceptions of vitality. These two items are interesting to compare because both name the phenomena in which they are inquiring about – learning and vitality. Not all learning and vitality survey items directly name either phenomenon, so these two items are unique because these are not merely related sentiments, but the actual concepts under investigation.

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[11] Eigenvalue of 5.50
[12] Eigenvalue of 2.06

On Figures 4.10 and 4.15, the bars on the left, signifying the entire sample population, show how these teachers perceive their learning as more present than their vitality. Just over 10% of respondents chose a neutral or disagree response to the learning item, while over 30% of respondents chose a neutral or disagree response to the vitality item. A strong majority of teachers may still perceive vitality, but when compared to a similar item on learning, it is interesting to see one-fifth of the sample show more disagreement. This helps to suggest that most of the variance in thriving among this group has more to do with vitality than learning.

Responses from the top and bottom quartile also show a shift when comparing the items depicted on Figures 4.10 and 4.15. All teachers in the top quartile agreed or strongly agreed on both of these items, but an additional 13% strongly agreed on the learning item. As for the bottom quartile, the shift is more pronounced – for the learning item, 56% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed, while only 9% did so on the vitality item. In other words, teachers in the bottom quartile were more likely to break from the sample as a whole on vitality items than learning items.

Variance within the concepts of vitality and learning provides additional evidence for examining the two constructs separately. For vitality, the difference in responses between the two energy items, among the bottom quartile, could point to a reason why these teachers may lack vitality. Just 26% of teachers in the bottom quartile disagreed with the "energy and spirit" item, but 48% agreed that they "do not feel very energetic." The fact that nearly twice as many teachers in the bottom quartile admitted to a lack of energy with notions of spirit removed suggests that energy may be more of an issue than spirit is for this subsample. It could mean that they approach work with the right attitude, but it is a matter of having the necessary energy to get through the day that affects their perceptions of vitality. Further, teachers in the bottom quartile

were more likely to admit that they are alert and awake at work, so any lack of energy did not correspond with notions of alertness or feeling awake. Therefore, this shifts blame from the individual teacher, because if they feel alert and awake, it could be argued that they feel they are coming to work with the necessary energy to get through the day. In turn, it is what occurs at work that causes their energy levels to fluctuate.

For variance within learning, the lacking of factor loading from the personal development question stands out not only among these survey items, but also when compared to other thriving studies. One study with published factor analyses showed all five learning items mapped onto learning as a concept (Porath et al., 2012). Additional studies employed the ten item thriving questionnaire with no mention of confirming learning and vitality with factor analysis (Cullen et al., 2015; Gkorezis et al., 2013; Paterson et al., 2014; Ren et al., 2015; Wallace et al., 2013), meaning it is unclear if all five learning items map consistently across studies. However, in this case, the personal development item did not correlate strongly, suggesting that this sample of teachers did not find it synonymous with their perceptions of learning. This could provide evidence of how learning is conceived differently in teaching than other professions, at least among this group. It could also provide evidence to warrant additional factor analyses with thriving and teaching to ensure in fact the personal development question more often than not maps onto learning as a factor. Among this sample, the personal development item showed more correlation with both vitality and future plans as factors than learning (see Table 3.6).

In sum, the differences between learning and vitality in the survey data suggested I reconsider presenting the interview findings in terms of the top and bottom quartiles from the thriving survey. Presenting the top quartile's views on learning and vitality in the same chapter would fairly represent those in the sample with strong perceptions on both. However, to do so

with the bottom quartile would be misleading, given their learning was not significantly lower than those in the top. This is not to suggest differences from learning cannot emerge between the two groups; if anything, the lack of mapping from the personal development item on the learning factor shows perceptions of learning lacked consistency across the sample. Nonetheless, vitality appears to be the thing that caused differences across the sample, so investigating interview responses in this manner will allow for richer comparisons. Therefore, presenting the interview data separately is not meant to challenge the conception of thriving, but instead is meant to better understand why some teachers scored lower or higher on the survey. Thus, chapters five and six examine the teacher interview data based on vitality and learning, respectively.

CHAPTER V

Findings – Teacher Vitality

Based on survey analysis, vitality emerged as the key variable in determining differences in thriving among teachers in the sample. That is, differences between the top and bottom quartile's thriving were more likely because of low vitality scores than a disparity in learning scores. For this reason, vitality leads the interview analysis portion of this study.

In what follows, I present the top and bottom quartile's perceptions separate and distinct in the vitality and learning interview analysis to help identify additional differences. These findings chapters are organized to first present the top quartile's sentiments on an interview question, followed by those from the bottom quartile. After both groups' perceptions are documented, the chapters close by discussing similarities and differences in the responses.

Teachers' Perceptions Towards Vitality at Work

Vitality-based interview questions (derived from the sentiments on the thriving survey) asked teachers to discuss feelings associated with aliveness, vitality, and energy. Interviewed teachers from the top quartile on the thriving survey (see Table 3.2), with the exception of one interviewee, had vitality and learning scores that either matched or were within one point of each other[13]. Interviewed teachers from the bottom quartile (see Table 3.3) all had lower vitality

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[13] Average difference among all participants was 1.78, the median difference was 2

scores than learning scores. The median difference in these scores among teachers in the bottom quartile was 6.5 points, meaning, on each survey item, learning responses were more than a point higher than their vitality responses. The markedly lower vitality scores for these interviewees makes their responses to interview items more indicative of low vitality teachers in this sample than their responses to the learning questions.

Perceptions of Aliveness and Vitality: Top Quartile

Interviews began by asking teachers to explain their feelings regarding aliveness and vitality at work. Four themes emerged upon examination of the top quartile's responses – engaging students, making a difference, receiving recognition, and comparative experiences.

Engaging students. Interviewees from the top quartile described their opportunity to teach students in referencing their perceptions of vitality with some focusing on engaging lessons as the moments that define what aliveness and vitality means to them. For example, Tess, a second-year math teacher, mentioned using the video game *Dance Dance Revolution* as an introduction to her unit on translations and transformations as a memorable because not only did students have fun, but most importantly the learning carried over when it came time for assessment. Tess used successful lessons like this to contrast with other less successful lessons that fell flat because the students seemed disinterested to define her vitality.

Similarly, Tim, a first-year language arts teacher, discussed his use of the popular game show *Family Feud* as a format to review material with students. This lesson stood out because students were enthusiastic to display what they learned in a fun and competitive environment. Tim believed the best lessons were those that could connect to real life for students and as such, it motivated him to try to make those connections as often as possible.

For both Tess and Tim, engaging instruction was something palpable; they could feel the energy coming from the students, which in turn influenced how they teach and affected their feelings of aliveness and vitality.

Making a difference. In addition to engaging lessons, top thriving teachers also described the importance of making a difference in students' lives when describing their vitality. This went beyond an ability to teach their content effectively; making a difference had more to do with helping struggling students either grasp a concept for the first time or better manage their behavior in school.

For example, Tess described her work with a student struggling to master systems of equations; the student tried and tried in class, but still could not quite grasp the concept. Tess invited him to after-school tutoring and it was through one-on-one work that the light bulb suddenly clicked and the student was able to master systems of equations problems. Here, it was less about providing this student with an engaging lesson and more about providing him with the support needed until he understood the content.

Tim discussed his work with a particular middle school student who was having a difficult time getting along with both her peers and her teachers. It was not until a unit on tone in writing when Tim was able to have a break through with this student. Tim caught her in an exchange where she was raising her voice and drawing attention to herself. Tim calmly went up to her and used the opportunity to connect the incident to what they learned in language arts class that day regarding tone. He claims from that moment forward a noticeable difference occurred in the student's behavior; she finally understood the way she asks and responds to questions was having an adverse effect on how others treated her.

Tim used this story to show this job "makes it worth getting up every morning." He went on to discuss the importance of focusing on the students in helping teachers remember why they show up every day. He found this particularly important when working with students in poverty, who he feels deal with enough adversity as it is at home. Thus, he sees his job as one that can have positive short and long-term effects on his students; short term in the sense he can help them have a better day and long term by hopefully impacting their view on school going forward.

Debbie, a first-year counselor, used this vitality question to describe how she entered the profession out of a desire to help kids. She also expressed vindication in her career choice because of the experiences she encountered during the school year, her first. She discussed how her day-to-day interactions with students allowed her to live the passion she only once realized. These interactions produce a sense of aliveness that she feeds off of to conduct her work daily.

Perhaps the most poignant example of making a difference came from Juliette, a second year English as Second Language (ESL) teacher. Juliette came to the United States as a teenager, like many of her students, knowing limited English and finding herself immersed in a new culture. She accepted her ESL position out of a desire to help students facing a new life in a foreign land. She described how much she values establishing relationships with each one of her students to help ensure they transition productively into their new school and country. She discussed how many of the students live in extreme poverty, often separated from members of their family, so she wants her classroom to be a safe place for them as they adjust. She even joked that she has too much of an influence because students began to dress like her and some of the girls started wearing their hair in a similar style. This perceived influence served as a continued source of vitality for Juliette.

Receiving recognition. A similar way teachers in the top quartile experienced aliveness and vitality was through direct recognition from their students. Britney, a first-year math teacher, described aliveness and vitality whenever her students took the time to thank her for the work she does, especially around the holiday season and the end of the school year. This stood out to Britney who recently left her higher paying management position at a nationwide retail chain to enter teaching. Britney was overwhelmed with the sincerity and thought that went into her students' gestures of recognition. She explained how it was unlike recognition she experienced in her previous employment and gave her confidence that the switch to teaching was the right move for her.

Recognition also surfaced as a theme among veteran, top thriving teachers. For instance, Ashley, a language arts teacher, claimed she routinely experienced vitality through reading her students' writing submissions. She recently had a student proclaim in her writing that Ashley "changed her life," thanking Ashley for teaching her and helping her grow as a student. It is recognition like this that reinforces the passion Ashley feels for teaching.

Joan, a veteran speech pathologist, also had a student proclaim that she changed his life. Joan described how her work can be especially difficult given students' sensitivity to their speech-related issues. Therefore, by the time they get to middle school, some of their behaviors are quite entrenched and manifest as disruptions in the classroom. She discussed her work with one boy, Marcel, who was having a difficult time getting along with all of his teachers, particularly, Mr. Washington. Joan reminded him that Mr. Washington had recently experienced a loss in his life and perhaps he deserved a little reprieve. She made a deal with Marcel to try and behave in Mr. Washington's class for one week to see if that made a difference in their relationship. After one week, Marcel came up to Joan and exclaimed, "(Joan), you've changed

my life; (Mr. Washington and I) are now best friends." She said hearing that from Marcel nearly brought her to tears and from then on, he turned his behavior and academic performance around. She looks back fondly on that exchange not just because of what Marcel said to her, but because she helped him avoid future conflicts.

These feelings of recognition not only provided a temporary boost of aliveness and vitality, but they seemed to make a more lasting impression on Ashley, Britney, and Joan as a reminder of why they teach. For Britney, it served as a sort of reassurance that she made the right move to teaching. Ashley described it as evidence that teaching is her calling; she revealed that she comes from a family of teachers and believed it was in her "blood." Joan too perceived student recognition as one of the reasons she remains in teaching. Given the nature of her training and experience, Joan could make more in the private sector, but remains dedicated to her students in part because of the recognition received.

Comparative experiences. Other teachers in the top quartile referenced looking forward to each new day of work because of how it compares to previous professional experiences. Unlike the survey, I did not ask teachers if they "looked forward to each new day," so some teachers in the top quartile volunteered this sentiment when describing their aliveness and vitality.

For example, Brenda stated, "I just feel great coming to work every day. I actually work too much at home (on teaching) because it makes me happy." She went on to describe how her combined role as coach and teacher provided her the potential to reach each one of the 1100 students at her school, causing her to ask rhetorically, "What could be better than that?" Brenda should know because later in the interview she disclosed that at one point she was asked to

resign from a teaching position due to an incident with a student, something that she did not want to go into detail about.

As for Tim, his perception of his role is all the more impressive when one considers how he came to be a teacher. Tim was appalled by the experience his daughter had with a long-term substitute teacher at her Barry County school, so he decided to become a substitute when he was not touring as an entertainer. When he went to apply at Barry County's district offices, it was through his conversation with a district administrator that he became aware of the district's upcoming hiring fair. He was encouraged to apply as a candidate seeking alternative certification and decided to give teaching a try based on the inspired conversation he had at the district office. In other words, Tim has another career that he enjoys and continues to pursue when his teaching schedule allows it. However, he now primarily sees himself as a teacher, which in part stems from the vitality he experiences at work. Tim still tours, but the fact that he privileges his teaching over another passion speaks to the extent to which he perceives vitality at work.

Other teachers in the top quartile also referenced other jobs and experiences to describe the increased vitality that comes from teaching at their current school. Tess described how her life as a doctoral student did not provide her with the type of fulfillment that teaching has during her first two years. Further, Tess described her first teaching job at a charter school as particularly difficult, but still provided her with more vitality than graduate studies. Her positive experience during her first year in Barry County provided further reassurance that Tess made the right decision to enter teaching.

As noted, Britney left a higher paying job in the retail industry to pursue teaching. She admitted that part of it was pragmatic – the hours were better for her own school-aged children.

Nonetheless, after just one year, Britney feels confident that the cut in pay was worth it because of the feelings she gets teaching students.

Ashley also described previous teaching positions that did not offer the kind of positive feelings that her current role as an instructional coach provides. She described working with school leaders that were less supportive, especially when it came to issues with parents.

The top quartile experienced aliveness and vitality primarily through three sources: engaging lessons, perceptions of making a difference, and comparative work experiences. Delivering a lesson that piqued student interest seemingly invigorated these teachers. Similarly, working with troubled students provided vitality when teachers could see their influence have a positive impact on student behavior. Lastly, these teachers justified their perceptions by citing previous work experiences that were less than ideal given their current situation.

Perceptions of Aliveness and Vitality: Bottom Quartile

The bottom quartile was more likely to claim that vitality and aliveness varied depending on the day than their peers in the top quartile. Three themes emerged in their perceptions of causes for this: a perceived lack of support, interference with instruction, and issues with students.

Lack of support. The variance in vitality occurred, in part, due to a perceived lack of consistent support from other staff members, like the paraprofessionals assigned to teachers' rooms. For instance, Avery, a first year special education teacher, described inconsistent paraprofessional support as a factor in her perceived lack of vitality. At her school, paraprofessionals rotate, which Avery wishes was not the case because some of her students have severe behavioral disorders and respond better to certain adults in the classroom. Therefore,

Avery's day largely depends on who is in the room with her, something out of her control. This makes it hard to manage her students when she also feels compelled to manage another adult.

Mary, a veteran reading teacher, also named paraprofessionals as part of her issue; she claimed she used to receive daily support for her special education students from certified special education teachers. Now, she claims that because of budget cuts, her school can only provide paraprofessionals for in-class assistance. This frustrates Mary because paraprofessionals lack the knowledge and training of certified personnel, stating that both her and her students' performance has suffered. Mary values the input she receives from the few licensed special education teachers in her building, but longs for the days when they were routinely in her room providing support.

Bobby, a veteran math teacher, did receive push-in support from a certified special education teacher, but she was a first-year teacher, so in some ways, he believed her presence caused him more work. Bobby went on to describe how the differences in their schedules did not allow for time to commonly plan lessons. Therefore, he had to dedicate part of his instructional time with students to getting her up to speed with what was going on in the classroom that day, making her presence in the room more work for him than the help it provided.

Instructional interference. In-class support from other adults was not the only working relationship that affected teachers in the bottom quartile's aliveness and vitality. Greg, a veteran English teacher, grew frustrated with his leadership team and their lack of focus on instruction that he believes corresponds with student achievement. Greg feels part of this stemmed from the frequent leadership turnover at his school, noting that the current year's eighth grade class had three different principals in their three years. This affected Greg because he refers to himself as a "high performing teacher" and suggests his happiness corresponds to the level of support he feels

administration provides with increasing the quality of instruction. Here, Greg made it seem like he valued instructional leadership from his administration, but found it lacking at his school. Moreover, Greg conflated happiness with aliveness and vitality, showing that he personally sees the interconnection of some of the feelings associated with thriving.

Walter, a veteran teacher leader, was similarly frustrated, but from the other side of the desk, so to speak. In response to the aliveness and vitality question, Walter quipped, "Adults tend to suck the energy out of portions of the day." To illustrate his point, he focused on teacher evaluation and how all too often people at his school are more concerned with being nice instead of being honest. Walter is passionate about improving the quality of teaching at his school, but feels restrained in his ability to affect change. In turn, he believes his school suffers from "organizational inertia" because the slightest criticism equates to meanness in his building and as such, he feels the quality of instruction and student learning suffers.

Other members of the bottom quartile blamed state officials in their criticism of instruction. Maureen expressed frustration over the emphasis on mandatory assessments because "testing sucks the energy out of everyone." She described how both her and her students feel the pressure around state testing time, making the job far less enjoyable. However, she did suggest that when students show engagement with the content, the collective energy in the room is much higher and the work is more vitalizing. Maureen had a difficult time, however, seeing how to make learning fun, while preparing the students for state exams.

Mary also bemoaned the reality of teaching in the era of standardized assessment; she admitted that feels more like a test prep facilitator than an actual teacher. She misses the day when she spent her time teaching novels and encouraging students to read what they want. Now,

she feels obligated to focus on teaching about small passages paired with multiple-choice questions.

Issues with students. Some teachers did name students as a detriment to their aliveness and vitality, but were hesitant to place the blame solely on them. For instance, Susan, a veteran reading teacher, began by describing how she feels some students care and other students do not. However, she then qualified that claim to suggest that part of the problem was overall student apathy for reading as a class at her school. She discussed how part of the problem was that students knew reading was not a required course, so there was a pervasive belief in the school that the course "didn't matter." She said that was a tough attitude to combat with struggling readers, which made engagement a challenge, but she did admit that when students showed engagement with the material, she was more likely to experience aliveness and vitality.

Darlene, a veteran special education teacher, admitted the job can be "mentally draining" because of the tough backgrounds that many of her students come from, but she too feels that when she experiences success with her students, she "feels alive."

Bobby likes the challenge of connecting with students from difficult backgrounds, but he too confessed that some students miss too much school, which makes it hard to have an impact. Even when they return, the students lack either the resources or the support at home to catch up on the necessary work.

In sum, teachers in the bottom quartile explained that the waxing and waning of student interest during instruction corresponded to how their own vitality varied. Additionally, a perceived lack of support and interference with instruction also affected the extent to which they experience vitality.

Perceptions of Energy at Work: Top Quartile

The vitality items on the survey referred to sentiments that went beyond aliveness and vitality. Another key concept featured in the vitality items was energy at work. As such, I included an interview question asking teachers to describe their typical energy level at work. This was done to see if teachers would hold different perceptions or describe different experiences when specifically asked about their energy level at work versus aliveness and vitality. For the top quartile, their energy sources were their students, their passion for teaching, and the desire to overcome challenges. However, unlike the vitality and aliveness question, some teachers in this group were more likely to admit they struggled with their energy than their aliveness and vitality.

Energy for students. Like aliveness and vitality, teachers in the top quartile once again referenced students when discussing their energy. Here, they described how students serve as a generative force that helps keep them going within and across days. For example, Tim, who worked in the entertainment industry before teaching said, "I'm just trying not to get booed." He sees teaching as a performance and feeds off the energy of the crowd (his students), much like he does on stage performing for an audience. As such, in his first year, he realized the importance of his own energy level in order to successfully teach; he knew his kids were counting on him, so even on his worst of days he focused on them to find the energy he needed to perform.

Similarly, Andrea, a veteran science teacher, knows she needs high energy to teach, so she uses her mornings to make sure she is ready to deliver for her students. She described how she listens to loud dance music each morning to help her get to where she needs to be for her students. Tim and Andrea's view of energy suggests that some top thriving teachers recognize they need a certain level of energy to perform and as such, prepare accordingly.

Energy from passion. Other teachers described their energy as tandem with their passion for teaching students. As noted, Ashley sees her job as a calling, something she was born to do; thus, she could not separate her energy from her work because she cannot imagine doing anything else with her life.

Brenda, a veteran math teacher, echoed Ashley's sentiments; she was convinced that teaching is what she was meant to do. Brenda realizes she could make more money by leaving the classroom and working in leadership or heading into the business world, but she knows that nothing would match the feeling she gets from teaching. Therefore, the presence of her energy to deliver instruction each day is evidence to her that she is where she needs to be.

Energy from challenges. Brenda and Ashley also cited their work with adults as part of what energizes them in the workplace. They admitted that their roles as instructional coaches provided both of them with new challenges this year. In addition to teaching students, part of their schedule included observing and coaching teachers, some of whom were reluctant to accept assistance. Yet, their wanting to improve the teaching in their respective buildings energizes them to find new ways to inspire other adults to pursue best practices in their own classrooms.

Struggles with energy. The top quartile was not unanimous when it came to their depictions of their energy levels at work. Laura and Tess admitted that at times they struggled with their energy, especially when lessons were not going well and students seemed disinterested. At the same time, they both described how a successful lesson, with engaged students, could also provide an energy boost.

Juliette, the second year ESL teacher, admitted that this year pushed her beyond her limits because of a constant flurry of emails, directives, and interruptions. She also struggled with balancing how to teach her students English, while also providing grade-level content.

However, she would be remiss to ignore the positive energy that working with her students provided her to keep her going.

Joan, the veteran speech pathologist, disclosed that she had her own energy struggles this year due to her health that at times made the job difficult. Nonetheless, she described how working with young people every day got her to see beyond her own physical ailments and inspired her to deliver for her students.

The top quartile recognized more challenges when discussing their energy, especially when lessons did not go well either through lack of student engagement or unscheduled interruptions. Additionally, Joan mentioned personal health as a variable that affects her energy. However, teachers in the top quartile were mainly positive in describing their energy because they knew they needed it to optimally perform for students. In turn, this allowed them to draw on their passion to help them work through challenges.

Perceptions of Energy at Work: Bottom Quartile

Similar to some of their peers in the top quartile, many of the interviewed teachers in the bottom quartile also disclosed that they struggled with energy at work. Once more, struggles with students were referenced to describe why energy varied, as did a perceived of a lack of autonomy. However, a portion of the bottom quartile's interviewees were positive about their energy, but unlike their colleagues in the top group, these bottom quartile teachers attributed their sources of energy more to their lifestyle than anything present at their particular school.

Energy from self-care. While most teachers in the bottom quartile openly struggled with their energy, Greg and Bobby were confident regarding their energy at work. Out of the eighteen interviewees, Greg was the only one to reference the self-care measures he takes to ensure his

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energy level is where it needs to be. Greg prides himself on his diet, exercise regimen, and sleep in order to keep his energy up throughout the day.

Bobby joked that he used to chalk his energy level up to his age, but now that he is in his early thirties, he is not sure how much longer he can use that as the reason. Bobby mentioned he also teaches an extra course of physical education (PE) in lieu of taking a planning period. He used to teach physical education full-time, so getting the opportunity to teach one class of PE in addition to his full math schedule is something he enjoys. Bobby expressed frustrations with other parts of his job, especially the lack of time to meet with support staff. However, he only referred to his opportunity to teach PE with deference; he did not conflate his lack of time with the extra class on his teaching load.

Struggles with energy. Bobby and Greg's positive perceptions of their energy were the exceptions among the bottom quartile. Many admitted that their students played a role in their inability to maintain the energy necessary to get through the day. For example, Avery conceded that for much of her first year in the classroom she was "not really energetic." Sometimes energy was low based on the time of the day, but she admitted it could also stretch over multiple days. She described how her students were prone to loud and at times violent outbursts, which affected her ability to keep her energy up. At one point during the interview, Avery described an incident where a student bit her when he got frustrated, leaving a visible scar on her forearm. Further, as a self-contained teacher, Avery was also responsible for lesson planning all subjects for her students, which when combined with the paperwork required to document her students' progress, wore on her throughout the year.

Maureen, a veteran reading teacher, also asserted that the students she served had an influence on her energy levels. She described herself as "even keel" for the most part, but

disclosed there were times in the year that were difficult for her because she almost cares too much. She named abuse and extreme poverty as two particular challenges her students face that wear on her.

Mary expressed something similar to Maureen in discussing her energy at work; she talked about how frustrating it can be to see a lack of progress from her students. She desperately wants to help them get on grade-level as readers, but with some as far back as five grade-levels, it makes it hard for meaningful progress. In turn, Mary divulged she feels overwhelmed to the point where she does not know how many more years she can teach.

Darlene also struggled with her energy during the day, especially from what she perceived as a lack of autonomy provided to her. She said during this particular school year the office politics, mandates from the district, and her lack of decision-making affected her ability to enter each day with the energy needed. She mentioned how mornings were particularly difficult; she found herself lacking energy entering her first period with students. However, she credited her students with the ability to make her snap out of her malaise, finding that she often experienced revitalization through her interactions with them.

Teachers in the bottom quartile who cited having the necessary energy did so by referring to themselves rather than anything the school provided. Those that did struggle with energy disclosed personal factors that influenced their levels as well as factors stemming from working with students with academic or behavioral issues.

Discussion

Comparing the Top and Bottom Quartile on Perceptions of Thriving at Work

The interviews showed two general patterns: (1) there were differences among the top and bottom quartile's explanations for what provided them vitality, or what seemed to be sapping

their energy, and (2) interviewees explained that a combination of factors, rather than single factors, shaped their experiences with vitality. For example, the top quartile placed their work with students as paramount; it defined what they did and generated enough positive feelings to help them combat aspects of their job that they found less than desirable. Thus, even when teachers in the top quartile admitted to struggling at times with engaging students, their primary takeaway was that it was worth it because of the eventual rewards. These teachers also experienced aliveness and vitality from the recognition they received and tended to validate their perceptions by comparing their current experiences to those from their professional pasts. Their ability to see their influence on students clearly instilled in them a sense of aliveness and vitality that stayed with them throughout the year. This suggests that seeing one's role in the school, beyond teaching students content, provides an opportunity for teachers to experience vitality.

Teachers like Ashley and Brenda described similar experiences working with adults; they described how the challenge of being tasked with coaching teachers provided energy. This lends credence to the claim that thriving is a generative force that can influence others in the workplace (Spreitzer & Porath, 2012). It also potentially extends that claim by suggesting that some thrivers seem to acknowledge that they have something worth sharing and thus, need to use their influence to ensure others experience similar positivity and seek improvement. Hence, thrivers may do more than just attract others; they may also actively seek out those that need assistance when provided the means and proper authority to do so. This also maps well onto what Tim and Andrea described; Tim and Andrea wanted to bring energy to their kids and seemingly Brenda and Ashley want to do the same for the teachers in their schools.

While teachers in the bottom quartile also discussed their work with students with similar passion and affection, they explained that other negative factors in the workplace define their

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relative lack of vitality at work. That is, they explained that, as they saw it, the lack of adequate instructional support, poor school culture, and an emphasis on testing, combined to define their perceptions of their job more than their work with students.

Further, Greg and Bobby's relative high energy compared to others is a sign that one can feel energetic, while still admitting to a lack of aliveness and vitality in one's work. Their depictions of energy at work provide further insight to the findings from the survey portion of the study. As noted, the items referencing feeling "alive and vital" and "looking forward to each new day" received the most neutral and disagree responses on the thriving survey. Moreover, "At work, I feel alert and awake," scored the highest among vitality items, suggesting that something happens at work, causing other aspects of vitality to drop. Said another way, based on these interviews, the work of teaching does not seem to influence energy levels from a physical sense by making these teachers bored or drowsy; instead, other parts of their day, like interactions with others, appears draining from an attitudinal standpoint.

The interviews suggested that the top quartile had strategies or attitudes to see past their frustrations and maintaining a focus on their experiences with their students seemed central. For example, Juliette and Joan, from the top quartile, explained they struggled at times with their keeping their energy up, but they were still positive about their job *because* of their interest in their students. On the other hand, Susan and Mary, from the bottom quartile, with vitality scores half those of Juliette and Joan, described their perceived lack of support as outweighing fulfillment from their students.

Of course, some theorists could argue that these interviews revealed psychological characteristics – a disposition toward pessimism or optimism – and not a reflection of specific interactions among individuals and the organization. Perhaps when studying thriving, additional

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constructs like affective cognitive consistency (ACC), the extent to which one's attitude matches one's actions (Schleicher et al., 2004), could have corresponding items included on the survey to connect thriving with disposition.

The interviews also suggested that the top quartile had a disposition to build relationships with students as well as teach content, a stance I did not see as fully among those at the bottom end of the thriving spectrum. That is, the top quartile seemed more excited by developing positive relationships with students as they were with teaching content. They saw making a difference as moving beyond increasing student test scores to helping young people develop. Teachers in the top quartile told stories about wanting to help students become successful, especially students others had given up on. These teachers seemed more able or willing than the bottom quartile to embrace or explain their role as extending beyond standards, textbooks, and tests, offering them a way to place the factors that drain energy in context.

On the contrary, it could be less about disposition and more situational when it comes to vitality. Survey analysis suggested Dillon appeared to be a school more conducive to thriving than a place like Stewart. Moreover, teachers like Ashley, Brenda, and Tess referred to other schools to justify their positive perceptions of vitality at work. This acknowledgement of less fulfilling, previous teaching jobs provides evidence to suggest that thriving is situational and varies across time for individuals (Niessen et al., 2012). It also suggests that thriving is not just something perceived by optimistic novice teachers; rather, people with decades of experience can feel increases in aliveness and vitality when placed in a new role or new building.

It is important to keep in mind, however, that neither the surveys nor interviews moved my study beyond teachers' perceptions of their own jobs and their own performance. While much of the literature discussed in Chapter 2 found a relationship between job satisfaction and

performance, I cannot make such a claim from this data. None of my interviewees offered any indication that they were not doing a good job or that they were bad or ineffective teachers. All the teachers had stories of reaching students and producing pleasing results, outcomes that generated pride in these teachers. As noted above, the struggle of engaging students defined experiences reported by the top and bottom quartile alike. Nothing, therefore, in this, the previous chapter, or the subsequent ones is an indication of teachers' actual performance in the classroom with their students.

However, the interviews did reveal more self-identified angst and anxiety about their jobs among teachers in the bottom quartile of the thriving survey than those in top quartile. They possessed more negative perceptions of their life, job, school, and perceptions of their future plans (see Chapter 8). Whether that is a sign of a more pessimistic disposition or a reflection of their current work environment remains to be seen. In some sense, the teacher could face blame for failing to adjust to a new environment or struggling to keep personal life from affecting work life. However, such a stance removes any blame from the organization, which likely played some role based on how teachers described the presence and absence of factors of effective schools (see Chapter 7).

Further, there is something to be said for the cliché, "perception is reality;" how people feel about their surroundings is real, so organizations ignoring their role in the relative happiness (or in this case vitality) of their employees do so at their own risk. Nonetheless, the thriving survey and interviews showed that a sizeable amount of teachers working in Barry County's high poverty middle schools displayed a lack of vitality. Based on previous studies, their lack of vitality means a lack of thriving, which could lead to negative effects like burnout. Additional studies are needed to see if in fact these teachers burnout, but given the teacher retention issue

facing American public education, it is not a stretch to suggest a lack of vitality is a plausible precursor to burnout.

To address this, Chapter 6 looks at perceptions of learning to see if additional thriving-related factors emerge, while Chapter 7 examines perceptions of specific school factors. Then, Chapter 8 unpacks teachers' perceptions of their future plans to understand how their current situation does or does not influence their view of the future.

CHAPTER VI

Findings – Teacher Learning

A surprising finding from the thriving survey was the relative similarity regarding the *learning* construct between the top and bottom quartile of the participating teachers. Like the previous chapter on vitality, I hold up teachers' perceptions of when, where, how, and in what ways their work experiences contribute to their learning and growth using the interview data to contrast the answers of the top and bottom quartile. In turn, this chapter offers further insight into how teachers see their learning-related experiences on the job and the degree to which their perceptions vary from those who the instrument indicates are thriving at work and those less likely to be doing so.

Perceptions of Learning at Work: Top Quartile

In general, teachers in the top quartile on the thriving survey said they were learning frequently and continuously at work. They spoke in terms of learning in and from their experiences in five areas: work with students, work with peers, professional development, self-framed inquiry, and work with new technology.

Learning from students. Most teachers in the top quartile discussed their learning in terms of the continuous experiences, interactions, and observations they have with their students. They reported that such learning from students is ongoing and constant throughout the day and school year. In short, these teachers claim to learn all the time.

For example, Tim, a first-year language arts teacher, went as far to suggest that he potentially learns at work from "every sentence" he utters in his classroom. He explained how he values students' reactions, both good and bad, so he catalogs their responses as a reminder of how to best (and not) reach his students. Hence, as a first-year teacher, he claims to learn from daily interactions with his students, finding it a very valuable approach going forward in his career.

Tess, a second-year math teacher, also expressed the constancy of her learning along similar lines. She described how each lesson during the school year provided her with a learning opportunity. For that reason, she kept a teaching journal where she recorded her thoughts and observations after each lesson she taught. Tess also discussed how her teaching schedule is conducive to learning because she can use her planning period in the middle of the day to adjust her lessons in the afternoon after reflecting upon the relative successes and failures of a given lesson.

Similarly, Debbie, a first-year counselor, described her daily learning as critical to her development at a new school. Her previous experience included working with autistic children, so shifting to the Title I context in a new state provided her with plenty of opportunities to learn from her new students. She described crisis situations as particularly impactful because "You can't learn that from a textbook, you have to do it," meaning the only way to learn how to help students through crisis is to work with students in crisis. Fittingly, Debbie expressed more confidence heading into her second year based on what she learned in working with her students this first year.

Other high thriving teachers described their experiences learning from students as more relational learning about their students as people, and less as honing their pedagogical approach.

While what they learned from students was a bit different, what was similar among all the top quartile was the frequency at which they said such learning occurred.

For example, Brenda, a veteran math teacher and instructional coach, explained in the interview that the relational aspect of her job, getting to know her students and their interests, was crucial to her work and a central feature of what she wanted and needed to learn on the job. Similarly, Britney, a first-year math teacher, described how she learned about her students' personalities each day and the role that played in building productive relationships.

Many of the teachers in the top quartile, then, discussed how much and how frequently they learned from working with students, though some explained they used what they learned to improve their instruction and others saw this learning as central to developing positive relationships with students.

Learning from peers. Some members of the top quartile also described their learning in more episodic terms by learning through interactions with their teaching peers. Among those who referenced learning with and from peers, most spoke of colleagues in similar content areas or with similar teaching assignments. Tess and Britney both described the importance of being able to discuss math lesson ideas with their veteran teaching peers and the influence it had on their professional learning. For Tess, it was her second-year teaching, but her first in Barry County, so in some ways she had to start all over again. She had to learn a new curriculum and become familiar with a different set of resources. Given this, she saw her math department as an incredibly valuable resource in her learning.

Laura, a third-year language arts teacher, also referenced the ability to connect with her colleagues, especially in their Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) as important for her because she likes to "bounce ideas" off her colleagues. Teachers meet in PLCs to discuss

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common expectations for student learning and share ideas about best practices to help students acquire new knowledge and skills. Teachers also use PLCs to reflect on student work and assessment data to help them identify areas to improve or change their practice. Thus, this forum provided Laura with access to her teaching peers on a regular basis for her to learn and reflect on her practice. More informally, she appreciated having veteran teachers to approach before she tried a new lesson or an issue arose.

Teachers in the top quartile explained that learning with their peers and from their students happened outside mandatory professional development, which I discuss below. They described learning as something they experience in their interactions with students and peers and not something solely confined to professional development. The fact that Britney, Laura, and Tess named their peers as sources they seek to learn from shows how important access to mentors can be for newer teachers.

Learning from professional development. As explained in Chapter 2, the effective school literature influenced the way I constructed my interviews to better situate the study of thriving in the context of schooling than the general survey on thriving does. Given the role that professional development plays in literature on successful schools (Bryk et al., 2010), I included questions about teachers' perceptions about professional development into my interview protocols. This gave teachers the chance to describe their experiences in and attitude towards professional development provided, and often required, in their schools. Since many teachers brought up professional development unprompted in describing their learning, the findings are included here.

Top quartile interviewees were unanimously pleased with the amount and frequency of professional development provided. They explained how the district provided professional

development before the school year, online, in the evenings, during the school day, and over the summer. Most expressed a belief that when available, all teachers should seek professional development. Helpful professional development topics mentioned by the top quartile included subject-specific assistance, general pedagogical approaches, new teacher induction, and classroom management.

Some teachers in the top quartile expressed frustration with the number of interesting and desirable professional development opportunities in the district. This was particularly true for those seeking professional license or for newer teachers who, as Britney explained, already had a "full plate." Andrea and Juliette, for example, explained they could not pursue all the training they wanted, in part, because of the district requirements for their own certifications. Andrea's leader encouraged her to get her Gifted Endorsement and Julliette needed to take additional ESL courses to be qualified for her assignment. Conversely, had either teacher selected a general education position in their endorsed subject matter, neither one of them would have needed to take on additional coursework. Despite the increased workload, these teachers were able to still report that they thrived, but admitted that this was not always the case.

Most teachers in the top quartile were pleased with the quality of the professional development sessions. The primary reason for their satisfaction was that they described the presenters as knowledgeable, passionate about teaching, and tried to provide them with new strategies to try in the classroom. Further, they described how the district was good about communicating to teachers which trainings were available and when. These teachers appreciated the choice provided to them and perceived that they had a say in what areas of their practice they wanted to improve.

Specifically, Brenda and Tess found professional development at its best when it was content specific, which for them meant opportunities to explore new approaches and ideas in math instruction. As a career changer, Tim also found the professional development as important to his growth; if anything, like Brenda and Tess, he wanted more subject-specific help on some practical tips for teaching language arts. Tim admits that he would have benefited from sample lesson plans and consultation on room design prior to beginning the year. Such things may seem unnecessary for new teachers fresh out of teacher education programs, but for career changers far removed from their own schooling like Tim, it would have helped.

Learning from self-framed inquiry. Many teachers in the top quartile also described the importance of inquiry in their learning. Curiosities and interests drove the learning of these teachers, both novice and veteran alike. For example, Tim realized in his first year that knowledge of pop culture offered him a considerable advantage in the classroom. He noticed early on that when he could connect the books students were reading to movies, television, and music, students were much more engaged in their learning. As such, Tim took it upon himself to learn more about his students' interests to incorporate it into his teaching. He believed all teachers could benefit from taking the time to understand what students enjoy and think about how to bring it into the classroom. His observation is hardly new, but his willingness to consume pop culture outside of his own interests for the sake of his students stood out as a unique avenue for inquiry. Tim went as far to describe how he might work on a pop culture newsletter for teachers, a sort of primer to help them stay up to date.

Debbie's pursuit was most like Tim's in that she understood that in order to know her students she has to know their backgrounds. Thus, she used her free time to volunteer in the local community to get to know more about where her students live and what they are like outside of

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school. In her work as a counselor, making personal connections with students is important, so for her, learning needed to be deliberate. In turn, she proclaimed, "I run toward anything new," because she sees the importance of keeping up to date with her students and her content.

Other forms of inquiry were more reflective of what one would expect from a group of passionate teachers. Teachers in this group enthusiastically described their pursuit of new ideas and strategies, related to their subject matter, that they could implement into their classrooms. Andrea mentioned that she is always on the lookout for new approaches to teaching science, especially opportunities for her students to make connections to science in the real world. She described a project she participated in that allowed her to learn from the US Navy over the summer about how science plays a role in their study of oceans. This provided Andrea with a new approach to teaching earth science that she still utilizes in her classroom.

Similarly, Brenda described how she is always on the lookout for new approaches to teaching math. She still gets excited in her second decade of teaching about new and promising research in her field. For instance, she divulged how Jo Boaler's work on mathematic mindsets recently made an impact on not only how she teaches, but also the way she coaches her fellow math teachers.

Along those same lines, Joan continues to look for ways to improve her students' abilities to read. As a speech pathologist, she believes strongly in the link between reading and speech, so she feels compelled to assist her students beyond their oral language skills.

Ashley too discussed how she sought news approaches to building reading and writing in her students. Her reason for such inquiry was interesting in that she described how she sought learning in order to avoid being "that teacher." In this sense, "that teacher" referred to those that insist on teaching the same way, year after year. Ashley knew there was always room for

improvement, so she made a point to seek new approaches to instruction. These teachers did not pursue new approaches for their own entertainment or to keep things fresh; instead, there seemed to be purpose behind their inquiry.

Learning from technology. A few high thriving teachers also referenced the importance of technology as a source of their continuous learning. Andrea and Ashley both cited the presence of technology as a tool for their students to use as well as a resource to search for new instructional approaches. Andrea's students all received Chromebooks during the last school year, which provided her with a steep learning curve from an instructional standpoint. She had to learn how to manage student assignments virtually for the first time, but once she got the hang of it she described how it made her job more efficient. For example, students' assessment data would go directly to the grade book and could be used to help Andrea differentiate lessons online.

For Ashley, she too cited the arrival of Chromebooks and how they at first presented her with a challenge before learning how to best utilize them in her class. She described how the use of Google applications provided her students with an opportunity to virtually analyze text. She believed technology generated more excitement in her room and she enjoyed learning all of the ways to leverage the new tools available to her and her students.

In sum, teachers in the top quartile saw their learning as constant, frequent and coming from multiple sources over the school day and year. They explained that they learned from a combination of their students, their teaching peers, professional development, inquiry, and technology. Their learning was not limited in a common time or place, but rather teachers described learning as also occurring in conversations with students and teachers, personal reflection, or self-directed research. Learning also happened in fixed spaces, such as mandatory

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professional development, as well as more flexibly and unscheduled spaces, like the hallway or office. Despite the different sources of learning, some teachers in the top quartile admitted they did not seek as many opportunities as they should for learning. Yet, these same teachers also described how they were constantly learning from their students. This suggests that some members of the top quartile are able to recognize learning that is sometimes deliberate (i.e. researching a problem, taking a course, or reading a book) and other times unintentional (i.e. learning from an experience).

Perceptions of Learning at Work: Bottom Quartile

Similar to the top quartile interviewees, all of the bottom quartile positively expressed the presence of learning on the job. In the interviews with the bottom quartile, four themes emerged in their discussions of learning: learning with peers, learning with and from students, through professional development, and self-framed inquiry. In what follows, I present the sources of learning in a similar order as the top quartile, but lead with learning from and with peers, instead of students, because the bottom quartile referenced peers more often than students. In fact, six of the eight teachers in the bottom quartile mentioned their peers, whereas only three of the ten interviewees in the top quartile did so when describing their learning.

Learning from peers. Only Greg and Walter failed to mention their appreciation for the time to either meet with or observe members of their departments or teams when discussing learning. For example, as a first-year teacher, Avery was thankful for her mentor who also taught a group of students in the self-contained, special education setting. Avery relied heavily on her mentor for lesson planning and classroom management assistance. The ability to share lesson plans and observe instruction helped Avery learn and grow as a first-year teacher.

Additionally, all three reading teachers in this group – Mary, Maureen, and Susan – mentioned common planning or department meetings as opportunities where they could learn continually and often. Mary, a veteran teacher, described the frequency in which she learns as weekly because of the presence of regularly scheduled reading meetings that she finds helpful. Also, like Avery, she mentioned the benefit of being close in proximity to a teaching peer, which in her case was the reading coach. This was a benefit because it allowed them to share resources and ideas with one another. Further, she grew frustrated over the lack of push-in support from certified special education teachers in her classroom, so she used every opportunity she could to track down and discuss her students with the few special educators still on staff.

Maureen, a veteran teacher, enjoyed the role her reading PLC played in her learning because it gave her an opportunity to discuss specific lesson topics with her peers, which helped her find the best way to approach certain standards. Plus, the fact that the team taught similar lessons gave them a common frame of reference to draw from in their discussions. Maureen also applauded her school's investment in peer observation. She explained how the school pays for substitute teachers to cover her class, so she can observe how her colleagues teach. In fact, Maureen found this program so successful, she said it relinquished the need for her to invest in or find other opportunities to learn. She perceived the shared knowledge among her team provided enough ideas and strategies for her.

Similarly, Susan, a veteran teacher, but new to middle school, said she appreciated the encouragement from leadership to teach similar lessons on a similar pace as her fellow eighth grade reading teachers. Susan described how this allowed for easier collaboration and a sharing of ideas, making this part of her transition from elementary to middle school less daunting. However, she also used the opportunity to stress that the school's leadership did not play a role

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in her learning. She claimed leadership observed her teach plenty, but the frequency of classroom visits did not produce for her the kind of learning that her team did. Susan was also troubled by the inability to seek instructional help from her leadership; she could confide in her colleagues, but feared admitting areas of need with her administration out of worry it would be labeled a weakness, costing her on her evaluation.

Bobby, a veteran math teacher, also listed his teaching peers as a learning opportunity he seeks, but only after he began his response with "I don't know" and a long pause. Bobby's answer to this question was unique because it was the only answer, to any learning question, across the eighteen interviews that generated such a response. Granted, a few teachers asked for clarifications or paused to think of a good example, but Bobby's first inclination was seemingly an admission that he does not seek opportunities to learn because there were "not a lot of workshops" at his school. Ultimately, Bobby mentioned his "teacher friends" as something he seeks in order to learn and the role his student can play.

Learning from students. In terms of students, half of the bottom quartile mentioned their students when discussing the extent and frequency of their learning. Greg and Bobby both referred to students as sources of inquiry that influence their learning about teaching going forward. Greg, a veteran language arts teacher, used an example of how he became concerned with the preponderance of smartphone usage among his students during class. He became determined to find a way to increase their focus in his class, while decreasing their phone usage. Greg researched ways in which to incorporate smartphones into his language arts instruction, which he found beneficial because it allowed him to level with the students and set ground rules for fair usage. Now, because the students routinely get to use their phones in class, Greg claimed it was less of a struggle to get them to put them away. As such, Greg sees learning as best

occurring through observing a need of students in his classroom and consulting research for a solution.

Bobby provided a description of learning that like Greg was also inquiry-based, but much more in a trial-and-error sense. Bobby cited first period as a key part to his learning because the relative success or failure of a lesson with that group of students influences how he teaches the rest of the day. Bobby also discussed how he is researching and experimenting with the use of technology in his classroom to help students build the knowledge needed for success in middle school math. He is becoming more adept at using resources like ALEKS, which allows him to customize learning paths for students, making differentiation much easier from a planning standpoint.

Two other veteran teachers, Walter, a teacher leader, and Darlene, a special educator, also expressed that they learned from students, but their depictions differed slightly from Greg and Bobby's. Walter and Darlene described how learning from students serves them going forward, almost as if they are building a repository of knowledge for future use. Walter stated that most learning for him is "experiential" in nature. He is confident that he knows enough about the rules and procedures to fulfill his role on the leadership team. However, he still learns through experience about additional possibilities or motives that influence student behavior. To illustrate, he described how recently two girls were unaccounted for in their classes, but the staff knew they were in school that day. Walter first went through all the possible scenarios of where each of them might be or what they may be up to. It did not dawn on him at the time that the two girls would be together necessarily, so when he found them in a compromising position, he was surprised. He joked that going forward he now can add another possibility to his list of what two students missing may be doing.

Darlene spoke more generally, quoting the *King and I* where the character, Anna, tells the children, "I'm looking forward to learning from you every day." Darlene used this quote to acknowledge the cultural differences between her and her students to show how she needs to learn constantly to inform her work going forward.

While all four of them referred to students, Greg and Bobby's use of students as a source of learning seemed more purposeful and deliberate than Walter and Darlene's. They said that they used their observations of student behavior as a driver to find solutions to pedagogical problems. Walter and Darlene, on the other hand, couched their learning more in terms of expanding their own knowledge, without reference to specific target or purpose.

Learning from professional development. Another learning opportunity teachers in the bottom quartile referenced was professional development. Greg referenced professional development as a source for learning he pursues to support his own personal growth. However, he also made the point to mention what he sees as the "flavor of the year" issue with trainings and initiatives in Barry County. Greg's experience in Barry County has led him to believe that all too often professional development opportunities represent initiatives that will not last long. Therefore, Greg seems to privilege professional development he sees as beneficial to his work as a language arts teacher. He also believed part of the problem with the fleeting nature of professional development directly connects to low morale among teachers. He explained how pay affects teachers in Barry County to the point that some of them cannot justify investing additional time into professional development; instead, they choose to work second jobs. In turn, he surmised the effect size of the professional development is lost when only a few teachers in the building attempt to implement any new knowledge or practices in the classroom. Greg argued that if Barry County wants to move the needle on instruction and achievement through

professional development, the first thing they need to attend to is teacher morale because without it, such measures are futile.

Darlene and Mary were also critical of the professional development opportunities afforded to them by Barry County. For Darlene, she repeated Greg's accusation of "flavor of the year," suggesting flavors could change as often as monthly in Barry County. She said there was a moment this school year where she found herself looking at her bookshelf and marveled at all the programs that have come and gone during her time with the district. She explained that Barry County does not take the time to allow things to develop, which influences her perception of the provided professional development and the role in plays in her learning.

For Mary, her issue with professional development is the repetitive nature of it; she is nearing retirement, so she feels like after 26 years it is hard to find something new for her in professional development. Moreover, she described how too much of the training in her school's reading PLCs focused on teaching the teachers the standards. This bothered her because she knows the standards and her concerns lie elsewhere like how to differentiate effectively for her blended classes that included sixth, seventh, and eighth graders in the same room, at the same time.

Some in the bottom quartile were positive in their perceptions of professional development. Avery appreciated the availability of professional development, especially when it was training specific to her work in special education. She found content-specific professional development much more fulfilling than when she had to attend sessions like those on standardized assessment that did not really apply to her or her students. Nonetheless, her experience with professional development in Barry County was positive enough that she planned to pursue additional opportunities over the summer.

Bobby preferred the training in Barry County to his old district, neighboring Ventura County, because in Barry there seemed to be a larger emphasis on providing teachers with resources they can implement in their classroom immediately. He believed the sessions in Ventura were all too often detached from the daily work of teaching. Therefore, he appreciates training sessions that are hands on and keep teachers active, as opposed to trainings where the focus tends to be on the trainer.

Maureen called the training "amazing" and appreciated the follow-through that took place throughout the year during PLCs and common planning. Like Bobby, she said professional development is at its best when it shows teachers new strategies, so being able to collaborate with her peers weekly helped complement the training. Susan also admitted her trainings at her school were well done. She too mentioned how her team utilized common planning time to look at student data and find ways to differentiate for struggling learners.

Bobby, Maureen, and Susan all work at different middle schools and all had favorable things to say about both Barry County and their school when it came to professional development. Moreover, Maureen and Susan saw their weekly work with their teams as professional development, which suggests their schools are defining professional development beyond the trainings teachers attend before the school year or when students have a day off. Thus, frequent and quality professional development seems to be a factor in how teachers positively perceive their learning experiences.

Not all teachers were glowing in their descriptions of professional development like PLCs and common planning. Greg described his frustrations of being the only teacher on his team with more than one full year of experience teaching eighth grade language arts. Here, the common planning concept worked the opposite because Greg refused to teach the way the other

three teachers were proposing because, to him, their lessons focused too much on basic skills and not enough on the critical thinking necessary for students to meet grade-level standards. Greg's refusal to cooperate with the teachers on his team caused him to disagree with administration, which he claims cost him on his evaluation. He ultimately got the district involved to convince leadership that he did not have to teach the same lessons as the other members of his team. Greg's experience with common planning shows that the mere presence of it is not enough to ensure learning takes place. Team dynamics play a role in the ability for opportunities like common planning to prove effective.

Learning from self-framed inquiry. Like the top quartile, some members of the bottom quartile also referenced an inquiry-based pursuit of learning. Walter referred to this process as "self-study," something he found necessary because too many of his leadership trainings occurred during the school day. He found it contradictory that Barry County praises staff for attending such trainings when it clearly means they left behind their teachers and students to attend. This is not to suggest that Walter does not see the benefits of such trainings; instead, his concern is that the training schedule is too dictated by the district personnel's schedule. He claimed that their preferred work schedule is the reason more trainings are not provided for leaders at night and over the summer. Left to his own devices, Walter said he read frequently both for his own learning and to help his colleagues. He prides himself on his knowledge of educational law, so he tends to field a lot of questions from staff, admitting he enjoyed researching answers to his colleagues' questions.

Walter's learning opportunities align closely to his interests, which is also the way Darlene described how she approaches learning. For example, she talked about how a friend of hers in the special education department at her school took over as assessment coordinator, so

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Darlene volunteered to help to learn more about mandatory testing in Barry County. Darlene's take away from this experience was that she learned test coordination was not for her; she was overwhelmed by the attention to detail and the amount of materials a schoolwide test can produce. Moreover, she also discussed *Love and Logic* as something else she pursued out of curiosity because she was interested in hearing about a new approach to student discipline. For Darlene, she said it was important for her to act upon her interests because she encourages her own students to pursue new opportunities and experiences to grow as people.

Greg's pursuit of learning was similar to Walter and Darlene's, but his inquiry seemed more targeted in nature. As illustrated by his smartphone example, when Greg sees a problem, he turns it into an inquiry for learning. Greg elaborated on this further by also making a bigger point to the role technology plays in his students' lives. He did not just focus on the fact that they are on their phone; he also wants to know *why* they are on their phone and what it might say about his students' interests. Greg sees his ability to learn about his students' interests and their lives as equally important to his learning about teaching. Labeling Greg's approach as targeted is not to demean the exploratory nature of Walter and Darlene's approaches, but instead it is meant to serve as a point of contrast between the two. All three scored similarly on the survey, so it is difficult to say one approach is more conducive to thriving than the other, but the existence of two different approaches to learning driven by interests in teachers - exploratory versus targeted - is worth documenting.

Perceptions of Growth and Development: Top Quartile

The top quartile's responses to interview questions on their perceptions of growth and development matched the sentiments expressed in the survey items. All of the high thriving teachers expressed satisfaction with how they were improving and developing as educators.

Some did include the caveat that any satisfaction with their improvement was not going to allow them to become complacent about their development going forward. For instance, Ashley referenced how experiencing growth simply drove her to want to find the next area where she can improve, which for her meant instructional coaching. Similarly, Brenda acknowledged her growth, but that alone was not satisfying, she wanted to use her growing expertise to influence others in the county. Accordingly, this section explores two major themes found in top quartile responses: references to growth in others as well as references to increased self-efficacy.

Growth in others as reference. Ashley and Brenda both took on roles as teacher leaders who split their time teaching students and coaching teachers in their respective buildings. At the time of their interviews, both had just completed their first year in the position. They acknowledged the difficulties they experienced in teaching adults, but remained driven to continue to have an influence beyond their own classrooms. Going forward, their influence on others would continue to define their own growth.

Another veteran teacher, Andrea, also credited her growth in part to the team surrounding her. At her school, in addition to content-level departments, teachers are also placed on grade-level teams that share the same group of students. Andrea recognized that her team pushed and challenged one another, allowing her to continue to grow in her second decade of teaching. At the same time, Andrea admitted,

> The job can be very overwhelming. If you're not a teacher who's had success in the past years, you start shutting down. Sometimes it's because they just aren't meant to be teachers, sometimes it's because they were put in a situation that they shouldn't be in. It's not always the teacher.

Andrea seemed in part to be speaking from experience because at one point she confessed that when working in another state her performance suffered in a difficult placement. Like Ashley and Brenda, she mentioned influencing others as a sign of her growth. However, she also

expressed frustration with herself that her students' test scores were not where she would like them to be. In a sense, this is similar to the healthy frustration expressed by Brenda and Ashley because all three of these teachers seem to hold themselves to high standards that rely on seeing progress in others for proof.

In addition to referencing colleagues, some of the teachers from this group mentioned seeing growth in their students as evidence of their improvement. Ashley discussed improved student achievement data as evidence of her growth through others. Andrea too measures her improvement as a teacher through student test data, which she wished was better this past year. Laura and Juliette referenced their improvement in terms of student engagement and classroom management, producing what they saw as better conditions for learning.

` **Self-efficacy as reference.** Three teachers in the top quartile fresh off completing their first-year teaching seemed to draw on notions of self-efficacy to define their improvement. This is important for teaching because self-efficacy is the belief that one can accomplish a particular task (Caprara et al., 2006). For these new teachers that task was teaching and working with students over the course of an entire school year. For example, Britney and Tim looked back at their first year reassured by the fact that they had successfully gone through a whole year. In turn, they expressed confidence in going through the content a second time with a new group of students. Britney thought back to how terrified she was when faced with a room full of teenagers at the beginning of the year and now she feels much more comfortable and confident delivering a lesson.

Confidence also reflects the way Debbie described completing her first year. She recognized that her role as school counselor needed defining, meaning she found herself at times navigating office politics to establish her role and responsibilities. For her, it was the increased

responsibility and recognition from her principal that helped Debbie see the impact and influence she had on her students and her school. The sentiments expressed by Britney, Debbie, and Tim reflect Andrea's observation about teaching: people need to experience success because it can have a positive influence on their development going forward. All three of these first-year educators seemed more determined to improve because of the initial success experienced in their first year.

Joan argued the importance of self-reflection to ensure future success. Joan described how at the end of each year she looks back on what worked and what needed fixing for her to identify what must come next for her. For instance, she wanted to better serve her students as readers so through, "grit, determination, instinct, and research" she continues to seek opportunities to make sure she is doing all she can for her students. Thus, Joan's referencing of her students is also further evidence that the top quartile defines their improvement through their ability to positively influence growth in others.

Perceptions of Growth and Development: Bottom Quartile

Similar to the top quartile, teachers in the bottom quartile were also unanimously positive in their self-assessments regarding their improvement and development. Any differences stemmed from *how* the bottom quartile measured such progress. Like the top group, teachers in the bottom quartile mentioned influencing others as a sign of development, but only in terms of their students. Unlike the top quartile, though, teachers in the low group made more references to self in describing improvement. This section unpacks both themes and discusses potential implications.

Students as reference. Like the top quartile, some teachers in this group, like Avery, used their students as references of their improvement. Avery could look back on how she grew

in her classroom management by describing how she learned via trial-and-error to identify what worked with each of her students. She cited her use of a point system to track student behavior as a specific change to her teaching that yielded positive results and something she will continue to use going forward.

Maureen also referenced trial-and-error as a strategy that helped her improve how she taught her students. She described how she reflects after each lesson and thinks about new approaches when her first attempt does not work with her students. She recalled using this strategy during the school year when her lesson on writing compare and contrast essays fell flat. After teaching the lesson, she decided on her drive home that she needed to try again the next day with a new approach. That night, she mapped out a different lesson and told her students they were starting over. She was much happier with the results the second time around; it showed her she could always improve if she makes the effort.

Similarly, Susan could look back on the year and cite new and engaging reading strategies that she picked up for her students as evidence of her improvement. Again, like Maureen and Avery, Susan judged her ability to develop and improve through employing a new approach and seeing it work with students.

Other teachers like Bobby and Mary also referenced students as their evidence of improvement, but they focused on assessment data rather than anecdotal evidence from trial-and-error experiments. For example, Bobby used this opportunity in the interview to disclose his satisfaction with his students on the recently released state test results. Moreover, he went on to share how he can see marked improvement in student test scores each year he has taught math at his school.

Mary also referenced her student data as evidence that she is improving as a teacher. In some ways, she described being a victim of her own success because she excels at getting low performing students to show growth. She enjoys helping struggling students, but it is those same students who tend to bring the added stress and need for additional support that can be draining. Regardless, Mary took some pride in knowing that year after year she was called on to teach the school's lowest readers. Strong test scores may not have been enough to bring Mary and Bobby out of the bottom quartile, but it is evidence that some teachers in this group do place some value in their assessment data. It also suggests that teachers in the bottom quartile are not necessarily poor performers; taken at their word, Mary and Bobby seem to perform well, but that alone does not allow them to thrive.

Self as reference. Some in the bottom quartile talked about their own growth as professionals absent of any references to students or peers. This differed from others because they did not define improvement based on changes in student behavior, test scores, or their influence on colleagues; they tended to focus exclusively on themselves. For example, Darlene referenced her own teaching, but she emphasized the trainings she attended and the strategies she learned, but what was missing was an attempt to connect this growth to student outcomes, be they anecdotal or reflected in any assessment data. In other words, she wanted to improve as a teacher, but such growth remained defined in terms of her the person. This could be hair-splitting, but others seemed clearer and more up front in that they sought improvement *for* others in their acquiring of any new knowledge or skills.

Similarly, Greg described how he seeks well roundedness through teaching multiple subjects and used this year as further opportunity to showcase that. Greg did not start the year at Robinson; he began the year working as a technology coordinator for one of Barry County's high

schools. At first, Greg thought that moving outside of the classroom would be good for him to help a school in a different role, but he soon realized he missed working with students. Greg transferred to Robinson a few weeks into the school year and despite his misgivings with the school, he looked back positively at his development. Greg seemed to define improvement as overcoming a personal obstacle or a new challenge; he enjoyed teaching new courses rather than sticking to one content area or grade-level. Like Darlene, he referred to his teaching, but any growth remained defined in personal terms, not its influence on others. Said another way, Greg talked about wanting to return to the classroom to teach students, but no connection was made between this switch and their learning.

In some ways, Walter's conception of improvement was similar; he too did not point to student data or improving the teaching in his building as evidence of his growth. Instead, he talked about how he likes to reflect on his experiences to define his development, so that when placed in a similar situation in the future, he can use that experience to guide him. In a sense, Walter views his development as an increase in professional competency. Granted, similar to Darlene and Greg, others will likely benefit from any growth he experiences, but it is curious that he too did not reference others as a marker of his development.

Like the top quartile, all of the teachers in this group said they were improving. This was interesting to see for teachers scoring lower, relative to their peers, on the thriving survey. \ Therefore, it is possible for teachers in the bottom quartile to feel strongly about their improvement, but still score low enough on the vitality portion of the survey to land in the low of end of the distribution. If anything, this question shows that opportunities for self-improvement are not enough; other factors, like those related to vitality, also need attending to provide conditions for thriving.

Discussion

Comparing the Top and Bottom Quartile on Perceptions of Learning at Work

As noted in discussion of the survey data, the differences regarding the learning variable were surprisingly modest among top and bottom quartile teachers on the thriving instrument. The interview data revealed similarities among teachers describing the sources, constancy, and frequency of their learning from peers, students, and in professional development and self-directed inquiry. At the same time, differences emerged in how these groups seemed to view the purpose and frequency of learning.

Members of the top and bottom quartile alike referenced their students and peers as integral to their learning. Students provided feedback on lessons that influenced how teachers designed future instructional opportunities. Students also served as a source of inquiry; teachers investigated their interests and behaviors in order to better understand how to reach students. Teachers in the top quartile did tend to come from a positive position whereas the bottom quartile tended to reference behaviors they wanted to stop. The top quartile also spoke in terms of getting to know more about their students' experiences and interests. Despite their differences, the top and bottom quartile seemed to realize how their students serve as a valuable source for their own learning.

In regard to teaching peers, both groups relied on their colleagues to bounce ideas off of and to seek clarification. It is worth noting the bottom quartile did mention their peers at a higher rate than the top group (75% to 30%). Given their relative lower levels of vitality, this could signal a greater need of support and advice from colleagues, especially if they are struggling with aliveness and energy. Teachers in the top quartile were also more likely to express confidence and self-efficacy when discussing their learning, signaling perhaps why they relied on their peers

less. However, given the small pool of interviewees, additional research is needed to confirm that lower scores on the thriving survey equates to less self-efficacy or more reliance on others.

Teachers in the top and bottom quartile expressed similar experiences with professional development and self-framed inquiry. Professional development garnered a mix of praise and criticism from both groups. In terms of praise, teachers appreciated the plethora of options available to them, discussing how the flexibility aided in their learning. This flexibility also supported inquiry because teachers could seemingly pursue learning opportunities of their choosing because of the options provided online, after-school, and over the summer. Criticisms centered on the lack of content-specificity and repetitiveness, suggesting both groups had a grasp on what they expected out of learning experiences.

The interviews did reveal some additional, subtle differences to perceptions about learning. For example, top quartile teachers described being more purposeful or instrumental in what they learned or wanted to learn from their students. The top quartile situated their desire to learn in terms of helping better understand or better teach their students and support their peers. To be fair, some teachers in the bottom quartile referred to their students, but their focus seemed to be more on themselves rather than influencing others. This is interesting because, unlike the survey, interviewees were not directly asked if their improvement as educators directly translated to personal development, so any mention came up organically through their personal reflections. The omission of such connections from the top quartile in the interviews lends some credence to what we saw in the surveys, which suggested this sample of teachers did conflate their learning at work with personal development. Thus, the interviews in some ways confirmed the findings of the factor analysis, which showed the one personal development item did not correlate with the other four learning items. Instead, based on responses from the top quartile, asking about their

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ability to help others develop could better symbolize how these thriving teachers view learning and development.

Similarly, there seemed to be a modestly greater perception among the top quartile teachers that their learning was more constant and more embedded in their daily experiences than the perceptions of the bottom quartile. The top group stated that they learned constantly, some saying it happened during each lesson they taught. While some in the bottom quartile said similar things, more described learning as episodic, centering on a particular an event, such as attending professional development or a meeting at school.

Despite this presence of learning, as a former classroom teacher, it is hard to imagine any former colleague of mine, even some of the more discontent ones, flat out admitting that they do not learn at work. There are simply too many training sessions teachers are asked to attend year after year. Now, it is hardly the only profession to offer such training services, but when considering the scope and range of positions available to adults in the United States economy, how many other fields spend as much time and money on the continuous improvement and growth of their employees?

Further, many districts and states offer incentives for self-study in the form of additional degrees or certifications, making learning incentivized in education in ways more formalized than other industries. This is not to downplay the learning of teachers as any less important because of the routinized nature of it; rather, it is meant to suggest that the learning portion of the thriving survey should be taken with the proverbial grain of salt when examining teaching. Designers of the thriving survey considered all professions, including those where scheduled learning opportunities are more infrequent. Instead, for teaching, perhaps the focus for thriving is less about if the teachers are learning and more about what, when, and how they are learning.

The reporting of professional development and team meetings as opportunities to learn are promising insofar that practices discussed in these sessions are in turn implemented with fidelity and represent good teaching.

Similarly, it is also promising to see so many teachers feel like they constantly learn from their students. There is literature though that points to some of the dangers of teacher learning, especially when it is experiential in nature. Teachers are known for making instructional decisions based on what they perceive as effective for the students, but sometimes such observations are misguided. Teachers can favor activities and approaches to instruction that makes the classroom easier for them to manage and control – however, management and control do not necessarily correspond to students learning (Buchmann, 1993). This is especially pertinent in the high poverty and middle school settings where classroom management can be an issue for some teachers. In other words, teachers could ground their learning in what works for their students, but there is not guarantee such instruction is leading to learning, it may in fact just be learning to exude greater control on the classroom environment.

Hence, it is helpful to use the learning portion of the thriving survey to confirm that a group of teachers feels they are learning because the opposite would be alarming. At the same time, it may be worth further examining how they feel they learn and what in fact they believe to be learning. The prevalence of learning should not lead to presumptions that teachers are thriving because as the previous chapter on vitality showed, these teachers felt strongly about their growth, but at the same time could feel burnt out or overwhelmed.

The question then becomes, what school factors might influence thriving? The next chapter attempts to provide insight towards that question by reporting on teachers' responses to interview questions informed by the research on effective schools.

CHAPTER VII

Findings – Effective Schools Research and Thriving

Given that variance in thriving, particularly vitality, could result from differences in how each individual school operates, a portion of the interviews also asked teachers about other aspects of their job. Specifically, questions were included touching on two separate, but related sets of literature – relational trust (Bryk et al., 2010) and the correlates of effective schools (Lezotte 1991; 2007). This line of questioning not only sought to further unpack factors that may contribute to thriving, but it also provided an opportunity to connect this study with existing literature on effective schools.

Relational Trust

Bryk et al.'s (2010) study on effective school leadership led to the conception of relational trust and the presence of a clear and articulated curriculum as vital components of successful schools in traditionally underperforming areas, a setting similar to the middle schools in this study. Bryk et al.'s (2010) work examined notions of respect, discussing feelings and worries, as well as trusting leadership at their word when classifying relational trust. Thus, interviews explored top and bottom thriving teachers' perceptions of leadership in order to see if thriving corresponds with relational trust and perceptions of curriculum. This section begins by examining responses to one aspect of relational trust: how teachers in the top and bottom quartile, from the thriving survey, perceived respect from leadership.

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Perceptions of Respect from Leadership: Top Quartile

Interviews asked teachers about the extent to which they felt respected by school leadership. Each of the ten top thriving teachers interviewed stated that they felt respected by school leadership to some extent because of recognition received. However, some of the teachers in the top quartile could not say the same for other members of the leadership team.

Disrespect from assistant principals. Three educators, Brenda, Debbie, and Juliette, qualified their response to include only their school's principal because they could not say the same for the assistant principals in their building. For Brenda and Debbie, the issues seemed to stem over power and influence. Brenda was heading a new role as math coach, making her a part of the leadership team and Debbie, as a school counselor, was included in leadership decisions because of her role in assisting with student behavior. Both positions meant they shared tasks with assistant principals, for Brenda, teacher evaluation, and for Debbie, student discipline. Despite the frustrations over disagreements with assistant principals at their schools, both expressed assurance of their role based on the respect they received from their principal.

Juliette's issue with her assistant principal had less to do with power and influence; her issue stemmed from the role of paraprofessionals in her room and the aims of her ESL program. Juliette became frustrated and requested a reprimand for a paraprofessional who kept giving students answers instead of teaching, even after Juliette's requests to stop. This was coupled with the fact that Juliette was vocal about her displeasure with the lack of resources made available to her and her ESL students. In turn, both instances caused her to have run-ins with the assistant principal of curriculum, leaving Juliette with a negative impression of the leadership team at her school. However, Juliette did admit that she appreciated her principal's attempts at reaching out to her.

Respect through recognition. Despite the disrespect from assistant principals, the top quartile described the respect they received from leadership primarily through the recognition they received. Ashley admitted that she only pursued the teacher leader role because of encouragement from her school's principal. She described how her leader's ability to recognize and promote the strengths of others was a sign of respect. Debbie also felt respected by her principal when she asked Debbie to head up organizing the parent night activities for the school. This request helped Debbie feel validated in the work she performs at the school and her role on the leadership team.

Similarly, Tim appreciated that his school's leadership approached him to help them work with some of the school's more troubled students; specifically, students who were not enrolled in any of his classes. Despite being a first-year teacher, Tim felt valued that his school's leadership team was quick to recognize his rapport with students and how his presence in the school could influence all students.

Andrea said from day one she just felt "liked" by her leadership based on her routine interactions with them. Joan also discussed how a simple smile and statements like, "I like what you are doing" from a leader can make a teacher feel respected. Here, even the slightest gestures of recognition from leadership were a sign of respect. To that point, Juliette described how once a hug from her principal brought the two of them to tears and showed her she was respected, notwithstanding her issues with the assistant principal.

However, it is also worth noting that Britney referenced the absence of recognition in her experience with leadership. She admitted that she worked in a large school, which presented logistical issues for her leadership team, but she expressed at times that they could do more to be present in the halls and classrooms. If anything, she just wanted them to check in on teachers,

especially first year ones to see how they were doing. The fact that Britney sought more recognition further substantiates the claims made by Ashley, Debbie and Tim about the positive effects of it.

Perceptions of Respect from Leadership: Bottom Quartile

The majority of teachers in the bottom quartile also felt respected by their leadership through recognition. For this group, recognition tended to manifest itself in one of two ways: there was recognition through gestures as well as recognition through leadership's response to their concerns. At the same time, some teachers in the bottom group experienced disrespect out of a perceived lack of recognition.

Respect through recognition. Teachers in the bottom quartile cited gestures like informal check-ins and other expressions of gratitude as signs of respect from leadership. One way leadership showed this was through "open door" policies where teachers felt they could go into their principal's office to chat about whatever was on their mind. For Maureen, it was incredibly helpful and reassuring to know that she could reach out to leadership when needed. She also liked seeing leadership's presence in the hallway and their use of that opportunity to check in on how teachers were doing. Similarly, other teachers liked how leaders would check in during their classroom walk-throughs. Bobby appreciated that his principal routinely made a point during such a walk-through to ask about how his family was doing.

Perhaps the most elaborate and unexpected showing of respect came from Darlene's leadership team. Darlene appreciated how leadership gave each teacher a plaque at the end of the year that was specific and genuine to that person's strengths. To Darlene, this made it clear that her leadership recognized what each person on the staff contributes and wanted to take the time

to celebrate it. Whether large or small, random acts of appreciation seemed to make a lasting impact on the bottom quartile.

Teachers in this group also referenced other more structured ways leadership showed recognition. Here, the effort seemed less random; rather, it seemed to be a part of the school's operation. For example, Avery cited the presence of an open forum during staff meetings as a sign of leadership's respect for teachers. By providing time for teachers to voice concerns, Avery described leadership's recognition of their needs in a way that showed respect.

Mary also described the use of staff surveys as a sign of respect. Mary serves as a union representative and discussed how part of her regularly scheduled meetings with leadership include looking over survey data to identify problems or concerns among the staff. In turn, leadership attempts to combat the concerns expressed in the survey data before these small problems morph into bigger issues. Avery and Mary's examples show that teachers appreciate and feel respected by routine outlets provided by leadership to voice teacher concerns.

Disrespect through lack of recognition. This is not to suggest that all of the teachers in the bottom quartile felt respected by their leadership team. In fact, when teachers did not feel recognized, it was a sign of disrespect. As noted, Greg struggled to find common ground with his language arts team during their common planning time. However, the issue spilled over to the point where leadership needed to be involved. As Greg tells it, administration encouraged him to follow the plans the other teachers agreed upon, instead of teaching his own plans. Leadership's recommendation upset Greg so much that he filed a complaint with the district. The district clarified that Greg did not have to teach like his team, but he claims the residual effects stayed with him the rest of the year. Going forward, he did not think he received fair treatment from leadership and it upset him that leadership marked him down on his evaluation for "not being a

team player." Greg expressed how his contributions to the language arts team went unrecognized, especially when his students showcased their research papers at the end of the year. According to Greg, the members of his team did not take up the task because they believed it was beyond their students' abilities. Greg sensed that his fellow teachers and leadership were impressed with the students' work on the research papers, but because of bad blood, his students (and him to some extent) did not receive their rightful recognition.

Walter also felt unrecognized and disrespected, but not from his leadership team at his school, but those in charge at Barry County's district offices. Interviewed at the end of his ninth year at Bayside, Walter said he was stuck in his teacher leader position in part because on thirteen different occasions he applied for an opportunity to move up in the leadership ranks. Moreover, Walter claimed his principal went out of her way on more than one occasion to recommend him for a promotion. Walter claims that Barry County not only denied him all thirteen times, but he never had an opportunity to interview. Yet, Walter continues to receive contract renewals for his current position, which leads him to believe it is not a performance-related issue. Walter is left to speculate that it is his personality, one that he says clashes with the "culture of nice" in Barry County. He insisted that he simply wants what is best for the students, so if he sees something in a classroom that he feels does not represent good practice, he will call it out and expect changes. He believes his critical eye instruction keeps him from a promotion. Walter is now at the point where he considers retirement, especially because his current principal accepted a new position.

Thus, Walter and Greg's perceived of lack of recognition was a sign of disrespect and influenced how they reflected upon their work experiences.

Perceptions of Feelings, Worries, and Frustrations: Top Quartile

In addition to notions of respect, interviews asked participants about another aspect of relational trust – their ability to discuss feelings, worries, and frustrations with school leadership. Teachers in the top quartile described their leaders as willing to converse should the need arise. Britney and Laura both expressed comfort in their ability to approach leadership with feelings, worries, and concerns, but they admitted that nothing occurred during the school year requiring they do so.

Brenda did see the need to have such conversations; she described the importance of being able to have a confidential conversation with her principal when teachers or fellow leaders were unresponsive. She described how her new role, as math coach, required such support from leadership in order for others to see her role as legitimate. In turn, her ability to confide in her principal provided her a needed outlet to help her feel comfortable in her role.

Similarly, Debbie perceived her role as counselor as more legitimate because of her principal's willingness to listen to and address her concerns. For instance, Debbie approached her principal about her displeasure with the punitive nature of the school's discipline system. As a result, her principal encouraged her to pursue how they might institute a program focused on restorative justice. Such a program places the emphasis on helping students learn from their mistakes and grow, rather than resort to actions like routinely punishing and suspending students whenever an infraction occurs.

Tess also mentioned her leadership's responsiveness to student discipline as an example of how they listen to teachers' feelings, worries, and frustrations. At her school, leadership explored the *Love and Logic* program: another student behavior approach that emphasizes re-teaching school norms and expectations instead of just doling out punishment. Tess used this

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example to highlight how not only does her leadership team listen, but they also make an effort to act upon teacher concerns.

Tim, who works with Tess, also mentioned *Love and Logic*, but for a different reason: Tim believed *Love and Logic* meetings provided a forum where teachers could discuss how to best approach discipline without facing repercussions for being critical of current policies. For Tess, *Love and Logic* resembled leadership's willingness to adapt, but for Tim, it was more about providing the space for discussion that allowed teachers to express their feelings, worries, and concerns.

Of this top group, only Juliette expressed concern with approaching leadership with her feelings, worries, and frustrations, saying, "Being that it's my first year (at Bayside), it could be construed as a weakness or they won't invite me back. I could lose my job so no, I wouldn't for one second." Juliette's issues with her assistant principal left an impression on the extent to which she could voice concern. She became increasingly frustrated with her curriculum, but decided to keep it to herself out of fear of repercussions for complaining.

Outside of Juliette, teachers in this group acknowledged an ability to approach leadership in either individual or group settings. Some like Britney and Laura qualified their response to mention they did not have to during this particular school year, but still picked up the impression they could from leadership.

Perceptions of Feelings, Worries, and Frustrations: Bottom Quartile

The bottom quartile was more divided over their ability to approach leadership with concerns; some were critical of their ability to discuss feelings, worries, and frustrations with leadership, while others said they were comfortable.

Inability to discuss. Susan had this to say about leadership at her school: "They (leadership) don't want you to complain, if you complain, you get in trouble." Susan claimed leadership fired a teacher during the middle of the year for saying "the wrong things to the wrong people." Susan did not want to go into details, but she alluded to the fact that the teacher disagreed with some school procedures that leadership expected all teachers to follow. Consequently, Susan claimed teachers from then on were more careful about what they said around leadership for fear of similar repercussions.

Greg's aforementioned run in with his leadership came up again during this line of questioning. Greg disclosed that early on he lost the ability to confide in his leadership. He believed this issue with his team affected how he was treated the rest of the year. Both him and Susan experienced instances that led them to realize it was best to refrain from approaching leadership with concerns. In both cases, the issues seemed to stem from conflicts centered on the operations of the school.

Bobby was less critical in his response, saying that teachers in his building were more likely to go to the union representative in the building than go directly to leadership. The presence of a union representative gives teachers a confidant to bring up concerns without fears of facing the consequences that others expressed. Regardless, he did not suggest that approaching leadership with feelings, worries, or frustrations was the norm at his school.

These teachers all described situations where they found that it was best to keep their concerns to themselves or use an intermediary, rather than attempt to approach leadership.

Comfortable in approaching leadership. Some members of the bottom quartile were positive in their description of leadership's response to their worries, frustrations, and concerns, especially with personal problems. For example, Maureen did not want to disclose specifics, but

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she mentioned that she needed to take off more time than usual this year to deal with family issues. She was appreciative of leadership making it clear to her that "family comes first," despite the fact she asked for significant time away from the classroom.

Similarly, Mary had a significant health scare this school year that took her away for her classroom for several months. She too was appreciative of leadership in both helping her students transition to the permanent substitute as well as how leadership checked in on her throughout her recovery. As a result, she described how much easier her transition back into the classroom was because of such support. Maureen and Mary acknowledged that they could discuss worries with their leadership because when personal tragedy struck the two of them, leadership stepped up and showed them the support they needed.

Perceptions of Trusting Leadership at Their Word: Top Quartile

The final interview question about relational trust (Bryk et al., 2010) asked participants to describe the extent to which they could trust leadership at their word. Similar to the previous two questions on relational trust, several teachers in the top quartile gave their principals high praise in this area, especially in their ability to lead by example and follow-through. However, two teachers provided some pause when responding to this line of questioning, while one teacher expressed no trust for leadership.

Leading by example. When describing what trust looks like, the top quartile talked about the importance of leadership setting an example. Debbie admits that as a counselor she cannot help but observe the behavior of others, which is how she came to trust her principal. She mentioned how she was impressed with the way her principal consistently interacted with staff in a positive and respectful manner. Debbie believes that carrying one's self in such a way helps a leader set similar expectations for their staff. The frequency at which she observed genuine

interactions helped Debbie's principal earn her trust. Similarly, Brenda trusted her principal because of the way he models the importance of seeing the best in everyone and giving people the benefit of the doubt. Both of these teachers saw fairness as an important marker of trust.

Follow-through. Another way leaders earn the trust of their staff is their ability to follow through on their promises or as Ashley put it, "I can't think of a time she has let me down. She is a teacher's principal." To illustrate this point, Ashley compared her current principal to the leader at her previous school and the way they handled parent complaints. At her current school, Ashley described how her principal handles parent complaints first by defending the teacher. After the phone call or meeting, the principal then checks in with the teacher to clarify what happened and to help them prevent a similar situation from occurring in the future. This stands in contrast to Ashley's previous school where the principal tended to side with the parents before hearing what the teacher had to say. This lack of follow-through offended Ashley because she argued it undermined teachers by assuming the worst. Her current leadership's ability to support teachers on a consistent basis is how Ashley experiences trust.

Tim also cited follow-through as a marker of trusting leadership at their word and used his hiring story to elaborate. Tim admits his background in entertainment makes him unconventional, even for an alternative certification track teacher. He first decided to help Barry County because of a suboptimal substitute placed in his own daughter's elementary school. Tim knew that his life as a performer provided him the flexibility to substitute teach from time to time. However, when Tim spoke with district personnel about his intentions, they saw something different. Tim was encouraged to attend the new hire fair that spring for Barry County and he decided to do so out of curiosity. Tim secured an interview and hit it off with the leadership team; they offered him a job on the spot. However, Tim worried that accepting a full-time

position might impact his plans to go on the road and perform. The school assured him that they would honor his schedule because they felt that strongly about what he could bring to the school. Tim went on to describe how the hiring experience made an impression on him, so he decided to give it a chance. Looking back on the school year, Tim could honestly say they fulfilled their promise of letting him tour and just as importantly, they did not show him any less respect due to his lack of formal experience. Rather, they were open to Tim's ideas about rearranging the library to make it a more appealing environment to students as well as his wanting to bring music production to the school. Tim could look back on his first year and say it was a reflection of his leadership following through on their initial promises.

Measured responses. While no teacher in the top quartile outright failed to trust leadership at their word, Britney and Laura seemed to exercise some caution in their responses. Britney described a situation that she found disappointing after leadership conducted an observation of a teacher at her school that went poorly. Instead of keeping the episode between the leader and the teacher, the leader routinely referenced the episode in front of the staff, much to the chagrin of the teacher who performed poorly. As a former manager, Britney found this singling out of an employee as troubling and it was apparent this episode gave her some reservations about trusting leadership.

Laura said she was uncomfortable disclosing specific instances to substantiate her claims about trust, but she referenced a concern that being too vocal at her school can get someone in her school branded a complainer. What is particularly interesting about both cases is the fact that the questions about trust followed questions about expressing concerns and frustrations.

Juliette was the only teacher in the top quartile to state she could not trust leadership at their word. She used an example of a book drive to illustrate her point. Her church collected

hundreds of books for her ESL students, but instead of showing gratitude, leadership was skeptical of how she was able to collect so many books. Juliette described feeling like they accused her of stealing the books, claiming leadership refused to believe her church did all of that for her. She expected a much different response, which made her wary of trusting leadership going forward.

Despite this, most teachers in the top quartile expressed the utmost trust of their leaders because they led by example and followed through with staff. However, seeing how leadership treated certain staff members made others cautious.

Perceptions of Trusting Leadership at Their Word: Bottom Quartile

Of the three questions about relational trust, teachers in the bottom quartile showed the most pause when asked about trusting leadership at their word. Greg was unable to say he could rely on such trust, but it went beyond the run-in he had with his team over teaching style. Greg claimed that he and his fellow teachers routinely witnessed leadership saying one thing in a meeting only to deny it later. What troubled Greg was the lack of power teachers had to call out leadership when they went against their word. He worried that the lack of tenure for new teachers allows leaders to get away with things that they could not in the past. He tiptoed around accusing leadership of lying as he wondered aloud, "How do you say that to your boss?" In other words, how can you tell a superior you caught them in a lie, especially when certain workplace protections are not in place? He expressed reassurance about having tenure himself, but conveyed concern for new teachers in Barry County who were no longer eligible.

Susan and Mary did not go as far to suggest that their leadership lied, but they did feel they witnessed empty promises and a lack of follow-through. Susan claimed leadership did not provide the amount of funding promised to purchase additional supplies and resources for her

classroom. Susan admitted she was able to make do, but just found it odd that leadership said they would give a different amount than the teachers ultimately received. Further, leadership told Susan she would receive new classroom furniture, which also never panned out. In both instances, leadership did not explain why plans changed.

Mary's concern was less about lack of follow-through on material promises and more to do with leadership's inability to maintain focus on initiatives. Mary applauded her principal for always thinking and looking for something that can make their school better, but she worries that all too often the ideas do not receive the proper follow-through. As a result, she said it is hard to trust that anything her leader says will stick around, which in turn can influence how many teachers invest in new ideas.

Perceptions of Curriculum: Top Quartile

Though outside the relational trust framework, Bryk et al. (2010) also found that successful schools possessed a clear and articulated curriculum. The presence of which is important because it helps ensure alignment within and across subject matters and grades. Such a curriculum also supposes that teachers have the resources and materials needed to teach their students. In interviews, teachers in the top quartile had mixed feelings about curriculum, where some were highly critical, while others were pleased with the flexibility afforded to them.

Critical of curriculum. The primary source of teacher ire was textbooks and other provided print materials. Brenda called the math textbooks "lousy," admitting she was on the adoption committee who ultimately decided on her current textbook. However, she insisted that she advocated for a different series that she believed better represented the type of problem-based, conceptual math she prefers. Ultimately, leadership made her decide from the more traditional lot of options, which disappointed her.

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Britney and Tess's criticisms of the math textbook dealt with misalignment; they struggled in their first year to line up their book, standards, and pacing guide. This was not a problem for Brenda who used her compilation of resources from over the years to be less reliant on the textbook.

However, Andrea, a veteran teacher, admitted she had the same difficulty, but with her science textbook. Her issue was that the science textbook had too much content and a lack of reference to the state standards, making it difficult to identify what was worth using. She explained how her department was getting a handle on it, but it seemed like it was the result of the strength of her team, as opposed to anything supplied to them by the school or the district.

Language arts teachers were equally critical of the print materials provided by the district. These teachers did not refer to textbooks because their courses tend to be supplemented by book series that take students through a progression of different text. For instance, Laura was frustrated by the lack of novels provided by her school. What's more, she claimed to be openly discouraged against using novels to help teach students; instead, she was asked to use a curriculum that emphasized short passages much like those students see on standardized assessments. Tim also had issues with the readings available to his students, but his criticisms were more focused on the lack of topical readings that reflected student interests. He hoped to convince the school to invest in and find reading materials that students will be drawn to in hopes that better books will make students more likely to want to read.

However, some teachers went further, denying the existence of curriculum altogether. For example, Joan, a speech coach, claimed that neither her school nor the district provided her with a curriculum specific to the work she conducts with students. Instead, she has to use the materials from the students' core classes and adapt it to have resources for her pull out sessions. Joan said

she does not mind working this way, so long as her peers share resources with her, which is something that does not always occur. Left to her own devices, she said she was compelled to purchase materials when they were not readily accessible.

Juliette expressed similar frustrations because she too claimed leadership did not provide her with appropriate materials to help students both learn the English language and the necessary grade-level content. She did admit to having access to Rosetta Stone, but she struggled with learning how to use the program, claiming she was not properly trained. Moreover, she described her obligations to teach to the grade-level standards for her students, despite the fact that they could not speak English. As an immigrant turned citizen, Juliette acknowledged her experience as a language learner could inform her teaching, but the materials she remembered benefiting from as a student were not available to her as a teacher. Joan and Juliette seemed jaded to the fact that their schools seemingly provided regular education teachers with resources specific to their subject matter and student grade-level, but that was a luxury not afforded to them.

Appreciative of flexibility. Despite the criticisms of access to quality textbooks and print materials, teachers in this group were appreciative of the flexibility in their curricula afforded by their schools and the district. Some expressed empowerment to find supplemental resources online as long as they corresponded with the standards in place. Brenda and Ashley both commented on their ability to supplement their existing curriculum with what they saw fit, so long as it aligned with the standards. This flexibility allowed Ashley to eventually recommend and implement a writing program she used in her previous district to add to the curriculum at her school.

Newer teachers like Britney, Tim, and Tess appreciated the structures in place like common planning or PLCs, which provided them an opportunity to collaborate with their veteran

peers about the additional resources at their disposal. Therefore, their concerns with the curriculum were mitigated by their ability to regularly meet with their peers to discuss any issues they were having. This layer of support helped them understand the content of their curriculum as teachers new to their buildings.

Perceptions of Curriculum: Bottom Quartile

The bottom quartile also held mixed views of curriculum – some were critical, while others found it favorable because of flexibility.

Critical of curriculum. Avery came out and claimed she had "no curriculum," giving all the credit to her mentor for helping her piece together the resources needed to get her through the year. Avery acknowledged the difficulty in providing curriculum for special education, but she still hoped for at least a set of guidelines to assist her.

Susan had a curriculum, but stated it was outdated and misaligned. This caused concern because she argued it failed to prepare students adequately for the state assessment. She found the provided readings and their corresponding questions too low given the rigor students were set to face in the spring.

Mary too was disappointed in the reading curriculum because she said the topics of books made available were for a high school audience. She hoped future purchases would be standards-based and on topics middle school students find interesting and relatable. Otherwise, her only other option is to turn to elementary books, which lack both the challenge her students need and topics they can relate to as teenagers. Mary knew what she wanted out of the curriculum, but it was unavailable at her school.

Appreciative of flexibility. Some teachers, like Bobby and Greg, appreciated the flexibility in their curriculum. Neither Greg nor Bobby particularly liked the print materials made

available to them. However, they were able to find supplemental resources on the Internet to complement what the school provided. Bobby admitted that he enjoyed finding his own resources, while acknowledging some of his fellow math teachers did not. Greg kept pace using the standards as his guide and confessed he can be difficult to work with because he will change plans at the last minute if he finds what he thinks will be a better approach for his students.

Correlates of Effective Schools

In addition to relational trust and curriculum, the interviews also asked participants about five other identified correlates of effective schools: (1) setting goals and expectations; (2) orderliness and discipline; (3) maximizing instructional time; (4) an ability to initiate and maintain reforms; and (5) strong parent-school relationships (Lezotte 1991; 2007). Of these five correlates, two presented a divide between the top and bottom quartile: setting goals and expectations and orderliness and discipline. For that reason, they lead this section on the correlates of effective schools.

Perceptions of Goals and Expectations: Top Quartile

One of the five correlates the top and bottom quartile tended to disagree on were the presence of goals and expectations at their school. The top quartile was unanimous in seeing the presence of such goals and expectations in their schools. To this group, goal setting took place in both the behavioral and academic sense.

For example, Tess commented that it was easy switching to a new school because of the clear expectations for student behavior established by leadership. She alluded to her experience at a different school where such expectations were lacking. Joan also praised her leadership for assisting in the establishment of behavioral goals and recognized that it helped the kids

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understand expectations. These teachers appreciated such goals because it provided clarity and support to their work.

Teachers in the top quartile also expressed appreciation for academic goals. For instance, Tim talked about how Dillon Middle has expectations for data walls and encourages their use to help students set and track their own progress. Debbie and Britney also mentioned the plethora of data at Dillon and described how it helped make academic goals clear to staff and students. Britney described how goals were clearly set at the beginning of the year using student assessment results and how teachers collected additional data throughout the year to share in meetings to track these goals. For all three teachers in their first year at Dillon, data stood out as something clearly communicated to the staff and built into how Dillon operated as a school.

Perceptions of Goals and Expectations: Bottom Quartile

Teachers in the bottom quartile were also in general agreement that their leaders set goals for the school, but were critical of other stakeholders involved who influenced said goals. For example, Greg acknowledged that there were goals, but was frustrated that such goals were set on a "moving target" because of the state's constant tweaking of standards, benchmarks, and assessments. He failed to understand how student work samples, like the research papers his students wrote in his class, were not a part of how students or his school were evaluated. His frustration about goals had to do more with the state than the leadership at his school.

Walter also pivoted away from his administration at Bayside to talk about how much of the goal setting was top-fed from Barry County's district offices, which suffered from their own turnover in recent years. Walter described how each year Bayside's leadership brings in its teachers to discuss how to appease the district's new goals and expectations. To Walter, Bayside is sensitive about teacher morale, so leadership makes a concerted effort to be frank about what

the district expects, even when it is hard for him to make sense of it. For instance, Walter mentioned a language program that the school and district invested a lot of money into via training and resources to see it discarded a few years later when someone else took charge in Barry County. Walter argued this lack of consistency at the district level made it hard to focus on the same goals year after year.

Bobby also backed up these claims about Bayside by adding that the problem also lies in his fellow teaching peers. For example, he acknowledged that administration clearly set goals and expectations for the students' dress code; however, Bobby claimed he routinely saw several different members of the teaching staff blatantly ignore students out of code. Bobby described how leadership made continued efforts to remind staff of the dress code through department and staff meetings. Even after that, he said it did not fix the issue; he argued that too many teachers, especially the newer ones, never bought into the dress code and the need for enforcing it while assisting in the halls.

The bottom quartile did not necessarily think their principals failed to set goals and expectations, but instead focused their criticisms on other groups that influence goal setting like the state, the district, and fellow teachers.

Perceptions of Orderliness and Discipline: Top Quartile

The only other correlate that mostly differed in terms of top quartile versus bottom quartile was teachers' perceptions of the orderliness and discipline of their schools. However, this is not to suggest that teachers in the top quartile were all positive and those in the bottom group were all negative. Instead, the top quartile hedged their depictions of schoolwide discipline by mentioning how it was a "work in progress," or how it was "rough" at times before improving. Despite the lack of glowing reviews of any school's policy, no one in the top quartile

unequivocally demeaned their school's approach or leadership's role in it. Instead, they recognized the efforts underway and seemed to appreciate attempts made by leadership to improve upon the system.

For example, Dillon Middle introduced *Love and Logic* as a framework to revamp their existing discipline structure. *Love and Logic* places a larger emphasis on understanding the reasons behind student misbehavior in order to help teach students about the consequences of their actions and how to change. Debbie, Tess, and Tim all admitted that there were growing pains in adjusting to the new framework, but seemed confident about using it going forward. Tess mentioned how part of the disconnect started when *Love and Logic* switched from being an optional meeting to a mandatory one; consequently, Tim thought teacher buy-in was the issue. Debbie's philosophy in the counseling office seemed to align with the tenets of *Love and Logic*, so she welcomed the shift. However, her concern dealt with the scale of such an undertaking in a school of about 1200 students and 80 staff members; the emphasis on relationships and connections is made all the more difficult to monitor and adjust given the size of both the student and staff populations. All of this helps explain how the rollout of this program caused pushback, but not to the point where anyone interviewed from Dillon disparaged the disciplinary environment.

Teachers at other schools expressed similar feelings about leadership's role in discipline. Veteran teachers like Brenda, Andrea, and Ashley acknowledged that the expectations and processes are there, but a little more consistency and follow-through would help improve the system. Furthermore, all of them expressed confidence in their own ability to manage their own classrooms.

Perceptions of Orderliness and Discipline: Bottom Quartile

One Positive View. As for the bottom quartile, Walter was the only person who remained positive when describing discipline in his school and it is worth noting his leadership position influences discipline policy. Walter did acknowledge that some teachers are critical, but he claims it is because he follows the Barry County guide closely and refuses to punish students on the whims of a teacher. He described how some teachers want some students (especially those who tend to get in more trouble than others) more harshly punished for minor infractions. For example, if a student committed an infraction that typically earned a lunch detention that student would get a lunch detention, regardless of past issues, whereas some teachers would want a suspension. Walter does not think that it sends the right message to students to punish them more harshly because of who they are or their past transgressions.

Criticism of Discipline. The other teachers at Bayside did not share Walter's depiction of leadership's consistency. Bobby's primary concern was the state of in-school suspension (ISS) at the school. He claimed in prior years that ISS was a real deterrent and helped keep students from repeating their mistakes. Yet, this year he thinks something changed; he found students dreading ISS less to the point that he suggested some preferred to go there to get out of class. What frustrated him most was that he claims more than one teacher at Bayside brought this concern to leadership and they assured the staff that this was not the case.

Mary went beyond just criticism of ISS, saying, "I think something happened (to discipline) and it went downhill; it got really bad." She noticed a general disregard for expectations, especially in reference to Bayside's dress code. Mary did defend leadership by saying they were aware of the issues, but despite reiterated expectations, she argued the presence of large numbers of new staff might have made it difficult to generate buy-in. She believes that

students need to see consistency in expectations from staff and that students need to understand that they cannot slide on the little things because that causes students to challenge everything.

Similarly, Avery described how she heard about other teachers in her building struggling with discipline, leading her to believe that part of the issue lies in an individual's ability to manage her/his own class. Darlene noticed something similar in her building with *Love and Logic* saying that because not all of the teachers were on the same page, she could not say that the program was effective. Maureen, who works with Darlene, acknowledged the atmosphere was conducive to learning, but the problem became that certain students started receiving preferential treatment, suggesting that one's reputation influenced the extent of one's punishment.

Susan and Greg's responses focused more on the policy itself. To Greg, it was clear to him early on that the students knew the ins and outs of the system and played it accordingly. For instance, he claimed the school told students how many warnings they were to receive and he found this problematic because it led to an abuse of the system. He described how students would come tardy to class so long as they had warnings left to burn. Greg argued this sent the wrong message and in turn, the school was playing catch up the rest of the year trying to get students to refrain from abusing warnings.

Susan described something similar in that her students were incredibly "street smart" to the point that they knew the system as well as the teachers. What's more, she claimed writing too many behavioral infractions caused teachers to get in trouble with leadership, which Susan stated kept teachers from enforcing school policies. It got to the point where she let several things go and did her best to achieve "structured chaos." She also suggested that leadership wanted to downplay discipline issues to the point that some zero-tolerance infractions went ignored.

With the exception of one participant, teachers in the bottom quartile were highly critical of their schools' policies. Some teachers perceived students abusing the system, while others questioned their peers' role in supporting behavior management.

Perceptions of Instructional Time: Top Quartile

Unlike goal setting and student discipline, both the top and bottom quartile were unanimous in commending leadership for protecting instructional time. In fact, of all the effective schools correlates, this one was the only one to generate a consistent positive response from both groups. Most commonly, the top quartile found instructional time "protected" and teachers were encouraged to go "bell to bell," meaning this correlate was a clear expectation in these teachers' schools. Moreover, Andrea, one of the more experienced teachers in the study, said she never worked in a building where her time was this protected. Ashley, who works in the same school as Andrea, stated something similar by describing how part of her role as language arts coach was to help "push" that expectation.

This is not to suggest that these teachers were without criticism of time altogether. Joan and Debbie mentioned how around testing time it can be hard for them to pull students on their caseloads. They claimed other teachers become protective of their own time to maximize their work with students before the state assessment. Juliette expressed some frustrations with interruptions like phone calls or visitors, but not to the point where she would say the school did not respect instructional time.

One interesting finding was that teachers' criticisms were just as likely to be self-reflective in nature. Among the top quartile, Tess confessed she needed to adjust to teaching on a block schedule with longer lessons than she was accustomed to at her old school. Britney mentioned her personal struggle with transitioning between activities in her lessons at beginning

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of the year before ultimately getting the hang of it. Even still, these top thriving teachers were overall positive in their assessment of leadership's ability to maximize instructional time.

Perceptions of Instructional Time: Bottom Quartile

Like the top quartile, teachers in the bottom quartile all admitted their schools provided and protected the necessary instructional time. However, some teachers in the bottom quartile also mentioned personal struggles with maximizing instructional time.

Avery reiterated her struggles with keeping her students' behaviors under control in special education, saying it ultimately depended on the day regarding how much she could accomplish academically. However, she did feel by year's end that she became more in tuned to what triggered behaviors in her students, making managing the classroom a little more efficient.

Similarly, Maureen admitted that her own energy level affected her ability to best use time in her classroom. She understood the importance of going "bell to bell," but she disclosed that she struggled with consistently performing in a way that was conducive to getting students to work from start to finish. Any criticism of instructional time from this group was self-reflective in nature and not in reference to their schools.

Perceptions of Initiating and Maintaining Programs and Reforms: Top Quartile

Whereas goal setting, student discipline, and instructional time either generated a clear divide or consensus among the interviewees, the two remaining correlates – initiating and maintaining programs and reforms and parent relationships – produced a mix of positive and negative responses from both the top and bottom quartile. Some teachers in the top quartile were critical of a lack of follow-through on programs, but a few mentioned the AVID program as an exemplar because of its slow and steady rollout.

Lack of follow-through. For the top quartile, the primary issue with programs and reforms did not lie in their launch, but rather, criticism focused on the subsequent follow-through. For example, *The Leader in Me* training was a program mentioned by teachers, at more than one school, which could have benefited from better follow-through. *Leader in Me* is based off of *the 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* and is meant to serve as character education for students. Tess's issue with the training was not the message or the launch of the program; instead, her concerns arose as the year wore on and it became unclear how teachers were supposed to continue with the program. *Leader in Me* goes beyond merely trying to change teachers' mindsets through professional development; there are also curricular materials that complement the initial training, which teachers were expected to routinely teach. Therefore, Tess was aware she should take her students through some of the lessons and activities, but it was unclear to her, which should be privileged and when.

A perceived exemplar. Ashley, Brenda, and Tim named the AVID program used at their three schools as an example of a program properly initiated and maintained in their schools. AVID is an organization that trains teachers to help instill in students the skills and knowledge necessary to be college and career ready, especially students in traditionally underperforming schools. AVID provides curriculum for an elective course that targets students with potential for academic achievement and a desire to pursue college upon graduating high school.

Teachers liked AVID not only because of the quantity and the quality of the training, but they said it also fulfilled a need in their schools by providing a service previous unavailable to students. Brenda said AVID succeeded because school leadership did a slow roll out that built momentum for the program. Initially, only a few teachers were a part of the pilot to see if AVID could work at their school. Brenda went on to say that as teachers started to see success with the

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program, word spread about its potential, which brought in more teachers. Thus, when new teachers, like Tim, arrive at a school, they see a program already in place with the support of leadership and staff. Moreover, several teachers in this study planned to attend an AVID conference after school was out for additional training and programmatic updates.

The success of the AVID program leads Brenda to believe that for programs to work in Barry County, slow is the way to go because,

> When you force something down everybody's throats all at once, a lot of times there's a significant portion of any initiative that will not like it and will fight it. When you can start it small and then bring it, people go "Hey, that's cool. I want in on that." Then that circle gets a little bigger. There's still people here that won't catch on. You replace those people, or they see that the tide is swelling, and they go, "Okay, I guess I'll get on the bandwagon." If you just shove it down everybody's throat, they're not going to like it.

Here, Brenda alludes to the fact that not all programs and reforms have successful rollouts at either her school or in Barry County. Yet, she remains optimistic because she believes enough people in the district learned their lesson about instituting programs. For instance, she mentioned a push for standards-based grading that she sees following the AVID model for implementation, which in her view, gives it a higher chance of succeeding.

The top quartile seemed able to differentiate between programs that they perceived as implemented effectively or ineffectively. Ineffective programs lacked the necessary follow-through to complement the launch, while successful programs started small and built momentum.

Perceptions of Initiating and Maintaining Programs and Reforms: Bottom Quartile

Teachers in the bottom quartile also described programs that started off strong, but were not maintained. Both Darlene and Susan worked at schools that invested in *Leader in Me* training. Darlene liked the program initially, but argued that it lost momentum as the school year progressed. She claimed that as state testing approached, the program went away. Similarly, Susan also described a strong launch followed by a lack of consistency and follow-through.

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Bobby expressed similar concern with the Positive Behavior Support (PBS) at his school. PBS is a school-wide system that awards students for good behavior (usually with tokens or play money) and sets common expectations. During the previous school year, Bobby claimed there was better staff buy-in and more events for students to spend their PBS rewards. However, during this school year, Bobby stated that there were fewer events and the person chosen by leadership to lead the program struggled. As a result, Bobby argued the program was less effective because there was nothing tangible for students.

Greg cited leadership turnover at both the building and district level in Barry County as part of the issue. Mary also referenced the fact that Barry County was on their third superintendent in four years, which she said undermined the district's ability to put forth a coherent reading program. Mary seemed pleased with how the district approached reading prior to the recent string of turnover in the superintendent's office. However, it was clear that the constant change was taking a toll on her, so all she could do was remain hopeful that the new superintendent would stick around for a while and bring some stability.

Other teachers in this group were more positive in their view of programs and reforms at their schools. Maureen described how leadership made a concerted effort to communicate forthcoming change to teachers the previous school year. During the 2014-2015 school year, Maureen discussed how her school had certain teachers teach reading, while others taught language arts. Starting in 2015-2016, the two subjects were merged, meaning content would change for all reading and language arts teachers. Maureen praised leadership for communicating this change to staff well in advance and for their continued support throughout the year.

Despite his criticisms stemming for leadership turnover, Greg complimented the district's choice of training middle school teachers on Kagan strategies. Kagan trains teachers on how to

implement more student interaction and engagement across all content-levels. If anything, Greg wanted the whole district to implement Kagan strategies, so that when elementary school students arrived at the middle school, there would be familiarity.

Mary too complimented her school on the presence of the AVID program, citing it as an example of a program and reform that was successful. Avery also mentioned AVID as an exemplar program at her school.

Therefore, the bottom quartile was split on their perceptions of how programs and reforms are initiated and maintained at their school. Some teachers, like Greg and Mary, were split themselves – they could cite both strong and weak programs. Others like Avery and Maureen were positive in their depiction of leadership's approach to programs and reforms, while others like Bobby and Susan focused on shortcomings.

Perceptions of Parent-School Relationships: Top Quartile

Similar to new programs and reforms, there was also a lack of consensus across the interviewees regarding parent-school relationships. Most of the top quartile admitted that the constraints placed on parents like poverty, the language barrier, transportation, and inflexible work schedules made it difficult for them to attend school meetings and functions. Despite the apparent constraints, a number of teachers in the top quartile were still critical of parents.

Criticisms of parents. For example, veteran teachers like Brenda and Andrea argued that the parents do not care once the students reach a certain age; so, expecting parents to intervene to alleviate any problem is unlikely. Instead, they both described how they decided it was best to directly try to work with the student and bypass parents altogether.

Other teachers in this group, like Tim and Juliette, had an issue with parents' mixed messages. For instance, Tim described a parent meeting where he left thinking he made progress

with a parent regarding what behaviors needed to change for a student. Tim's optimism was short-lived when soon after the meeting the student was back to his old ways, fashioned with a brand-new pair of expensive sneakers. Tim is a father of school-aged children himself, so he admitted he is critical of other parenting styles, especially those that appear to reward poor behavior. Tim joked about taking pride in removing privileges when his own children act up at school.

For Juliette, her frustrations stemmed from parents initially showing an effort in how they could help their students learn the language, but then not following through. Juliette described detailing homework practice for students to complete with their parents at home, only to find out such practice sessions did not occur. She went as far to say that some parents discouraged too much homework, claiming some held unproductive stereotypes like studying too much makes a child nerdy.

Laura and Ashley held criticisms too, but they were of the belief that the type of student tended to correspond with the level of parent engagement. In other words, successful students had involved parents and the struggling ones did not. Both teachers were responsible for teaching identified gifted students and mentioned how involved their parents were and how easy it was to collaborate. On the other hand, they found it much more difficult to bring in parents of their low achieving or poorly behaved students, the very students who perhaps needed the most assistance.

Praise of parents. This is not to suggest that all teachers were critical of parents. Parents at Britney's school flattered her by how they helped students recognize teachers at the holidays and the end of the year; she also acknowledged that she could get a hold of parents whenever she needed.

Debbie and Joan reiterated that parents cared, but recognized the challenges they faced living in poverty and struggling with the language. If anything, they were believers in the power of making positive phone calls and wished they could find more time to do so.

As a factor, parent-school relationships represented another split among the top quartile. Some believed parents either did not care because their students were of a certain age or ability level. Others argued parents sent mixed messages or held unproductive stereotypes of working hard in school. Not all teachers in the top quartile were critical; some were empathetic of the difficult lives parents in their communities lead, so they adhered from being overly critical.

Perceptions of Parent-School Relationships: Bottom Quartile

The bottom quartile was also split when it came to parent relationships; some were openly critical of the parents, while others spoke with deference about their students' parents.

Criticisms of parents. Some teachers in the bottom quartile also admitted they struggled with parent relationships. Maureen described her relationships as non-existent because parents cannot speak the language nor can they find the time to come to school. She expressed disappointment that when the office finally schedules a meeting with parents, they frequently no-show. Bobby also found his relationships were "not great" because at his school teachers are encouraged to use an automated communication system that he thinks makes it hard to connect with parents.

Avery had mixed feelings about her connections with parents because the positive relationships she did manage to foster were helpful, which made the missing relationships stand out even more. In other words, it seems that when teachers focused on what was missing or difficult in working with parents, it had a negative effect on their conception of home-school relationships.

Praise of parents. Slightly more teachers in this group acknowledged a positive relationship with their parents. At first, Greg was incredibly critical of absentee parents to the point he wishes schools could find a way to tax parents for failing to be accountable for student performance. Yet, when he described his relationship with his parents, he said they were "very good" and he prides himself on extending the rapport he builds with students to the eventual relationships he forms with parents.

Similarly, Darlene expressed frustration with parents in IEP meetings who turn down services that their students need because sometimes she feels they do not know any better. Nonetheless, she made a point to acknowledge such occurrences do not represent her overall views of parents because the positive interactions she has with them is like "getting paid."

Susan admitted that she broke protocol from using district communication channels and instead, texted with parents directly. She found that using a translation app on her smartphone with her Spanish-speaking parents allowed her to make stronger connections than the existing parent contact system could. As a result, she described her relationships with parents in a positive light, stating parents care.

Mary also did not let language and communication issues paint how she depicted her relationships with parents. In her career, she found parents want what is best for their students and try to help; she mentioned open house as one way that she connects with parents.

Walter was perhaps the most glowing of parents saying he looks forward to an opportunity to "make a new friend," stating that in his nine years in his current position he can only think of two parents he failed to establish a strong relationship with at Bayside.

Members of the bottom quartile holding positive appraisals of their parent relationships tended to focus on how parents could serve as an ally and a source of positive interaction.

Discussion

Comparing Top and Bottom Quartile Perceptions on Relational Trust and Curriculum

Responses to interview questions that dealt with relational trust were generally positive for most top and bottom quartile teachers. However, some themes emerged within each line of questioning that are worth noting to assess any correspondence between relational trust factors and thriving regarding this sample. This section discusses themes related to dealing with respect, approaching leadership with worries, trust, and curriculum.

Respect from leadership. While most teachers felt respected, teachers in the bottom quartile were more likely to respond negatively to this question than those in the top group. Moreover, two teachers in the bottom quartile, Greg and Walter, cited disrespect from leadership with greater fervor. Brenda, Debbie, and Juliette may have felt disrespected by assistant principals, but they took solace in knowing their principals respected them. In contrast, Greg described a situation where no one at the building-level supported him, meaning he needed to bring in district leadership to intervene. As for Walter, he spoke highly of his fellow administrators, but could not do the same for district-level leadership. He argued his inability to earn a promotion was because of how they perceived him. During the interviews, Greg and Walter seemed bothered by this perceived mistreatment and as Chapter 8 will show, it influenced how they view their future plans.

Obviously, an atmosphere of constant disrespect would seemingly be difficult to thrive in, so some basic level of respect should exist. Based on the responses from both the top and bottom quartile, this can be as simple as checking in with teachers or expressing appreciation. Therefore, respect alone does not seem to produce thriving for this group, but a lack of it could contribute to its absence. If anything, the ability to confide in the principal when feeling slighted

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by assistant principals lends further support to another aspect of relation trust – the ability to discuss feelings, worries, and frustrations.

Feelings, worries, and frustrations. The vast majority of interview participants said they could discuss feelings, worries, and frustrations with their leadership team. The exceptions, more likely to come from the bottom quartile, seemed to surface over disagreements with school policy, which unsurprisingly left a negative impression on some teachers in this group. At the same time, the feelings, worries, and frustrations that bottom quartile teachers recognized their leadership did respond to, did not directly challenge the principal. For example, Maureen and Mary had personal problems and felt they received the requisite support from administration.

On the other hand, Susan and Greg's stories seem to describe situations where teachers directly challenged or questioned principals. Greg refused to teach common lessons developed by members of his team and Susan claimed a teacher was let go for critiquing school operations. Without hearing from leadership, it is difficult to know exactly what happened and it is equally difficult to assess the accuracy of these claims. Nonetheless, taking them at their word suggests an inability to discuss concerns influenced work perceptions. Greg realized he could not approach leadership with concerns and Susan found it better to keep quiet.

Ultimately, it is unclear from this case if higher thriving teachers are more prone to respecting authority or if lower scorers are more likely to challenge it. Another possibility is that Greg and Susan did work for leaders who were less open to hearing feelings, worries, and frustrations. Regardless, when paired with the responses from the respect question, it is clear that the ability to discuss these types of concerns with leadership likely only helps contribute to thriving based on the higher frequency of negativity found in the bottom quartile.

Trusting leadership at their word. Once again, the top quartile was more likely to be positive when discussing a component of relational trust, making it possible that thriving benefits from settings where relational trust is present. There were some in the top group, like Britney and Laura, who measured responses to some of the trust items, suggesting one can thrive without it. It was surprising to see both Britney and Laura say they could approach leadership if they wanted to with a concern, worry, or frustration, but when the topic shifted to trust, they seemed much more guarded and less complimentary of the leadership team.

Some in the bottom quartile, like Greg and Susan, were less measured and basically accused their administration teams of lying to staff. Greg referenced staff meetings where new initiatives seemed to directly contradict what was presented in a previous meeting. For Susan, it was not just about broken promises regarding funding and supplies, but also the lack of contrition when assurances went unfulfilled. This additional presence of increased skepticism among the bottom quartile provides evidence to warrant further investigation into the relationship between thriving and relational trust.

Curriculum. Based on the presence of criticisms from both the top and bottom quartile, it is difficult to say that curriculum plays a vital role in the presence or absence of thriving. Clearly, all teachers would seemingly benefit from access to a clear and articulated curriculum, as previous research argues. If anything, the curriculum question may have revealed more about the importance of teaching experience than thriving. Teachers in this sample who struggled with their curriculum tended to be new teachers in terms of experience or placement. While veteran teachers were also critical, they made it clear they found ways to supplement whatever they may have found lacking.

It is beyond the scope of this analysis to verify if in fact Barry County provides quality curriculum across each subject and grade taught by the interviewees. Going forward, studies with larger groups of teachers with equal representation by subject matter, using a defined curriculum, could better inform if thriving and curriculum relate to one another. For example, a study looking at one group of teachers using the same prescriptive reading program compared to another group of teachers using a more flexible reading curriculum could help better determine if curriculum or experience plays a larger role in thriving.

In sum, the components of relational trust and curriculum did appear to produce more positive perceptions from the top quartile than the bottom quartile. The results were not unanimous, but the increased presence of negative perceptions held by those in the bottom quartile suggests there is some correspondence between thriving and Bryk et al.'s (2012) research. Bryk et al.'s research did include a survey component, so adding relational trust and curriculum questions to the thriving survey in future research would provide additional points of comparison to corroborate these initial observations.

Comparing Top and Bottom Quartile Perceptions on the Correlates of Effective Schools

Similar to relational trust, certain correlates of effective schools (Lezotte 1991; 2007) seemed to correspond with the presence (or lack thereof) of thriving. As noted above, perceptions of goals and expectations and orderliness and discipline differed between the two groups interviewed in that the top quartile was more likely to hold positive perceptions. The additional correlates examined: instructional time, programs and reforms, and parent relationships may not have differed between group to group as much as the other two, but still revealed some noteworthy findings. This section discusses what participants revealed about these correlates and what it could mean going forward in studying thriving and teaching.

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Goals and expectations. Teachers in the top quartile described their schools as places with clear academic goals and behavioral expectations. While some in the bottom quartile depicted something similar, there were enough exceptions to suggest that a perceived lack of clear goals and expectations could influence one's capacity to thrive.

Greg expressed frustration with what he perceived as a moving target on behalf of the state and their annual assessment. He discussed how he wished some of the products his students create, like their lengthy research papers, would receive consideration when it came to how the state measured his students' and the school's performance. Walter's frustration was also outside the confines of his school; he felt the district too often changed its goals and focus, which made it harder for his leadership team to maintain any momentum. What both describe here reflects how societal factors, beyond the person or the organization, likely influence work perceptions (Dinham & Scott, 1998, 2000). Unfortunately for school leaders, such factors are outside of their control, but could provide a common ground with teachers to address at the policy level.

At the same time, Bobby's frustration with his colleagues taking up the school's goals and expectations appeared to be very much within the scope of his organization. Bobby's example of teachers failing to monitor student dress raises an interesting question of professional responsibility. On the one hand, dress code issues are a possible failure of leadership by not cultivating the conditions for teacher buy-in; however, it is equally possible to demand that, as professionals, teachers follow simple requests like enforcing the school's uniform policy. Regardless of where the blame lies, others ignoring their professional responsibility and seemingly getting away with it, without consequence, served as a point of frustration. In fact, one reason teachers will leave a school is the perception that staff members can get away with such transgressions without consequence (Jacob et al., 2012). Therefore, part of what appeared to

cause Bobby's low thriving score was the apparent lack of professional responsibility taken up by and expected of his coworkers. Thus, it may be worth pursuing in future studies to see how thrivers and non-thrivers specifically perceive the extent to which people are held accountable in working towards goals and reinforcing expectations.

Orderliness and discipline. The top quartile did not exactly produce glowing reviews of their schools' orderliness and approach to discipline. However, where the bottom quartile's perceptions differed was their emphasis and focus on the negative, whereas the top group admitted the flaws, but came back to the positive. These discrepancies in perceptions could further suggest dispositional differences in the top and bottom quartile; teachers in the bottom quartile could possess a more critical or pessimistic personality, while those in the top group could be more positive and optimistic. This disagreement could also represent a philosophical divide between seeing student discipline as needing to control students versus that of focusing on building relationships. Some teachers in the top quartile did mention helping troubled students as a sign of vitality, so perhaps these teachers fixate less on behaviors and instead, try to establish positive connections with their students.

While further studies will help substantiate such claims, the shared concerns of the bottom quartile regarding discipline suggests management of student behavior is an area of potential focus for providing conditions conducive for thriving. From an organizational standpoint, schools should have clear and fair policies that teachers buy into and understand. From a personal standpoint, providing training and support in classroom management would help individual teachers manage their classrooms. Providing support at the organizational and personal level could improve teachers' perceptions of orderliness and discipline in their schools.

Moreover, given the student behavior concerns that surfaced when the bottom quartile discussed vitality, perhaps increased capacity to manage one's classroom could help improve thriving.

Instructional time. Teachers in both the top and bottom quartile agreed that their schools protected instructional time. The fact that the top and bottom quartile agreed about the protection of instructional time at the school-level should not preclude it from future studies of thriving and teaching. If anything, the general appreciation these teachers showed for its protection suggests that the absence of this correlate could deter thriving. Teachers in the bottom quartile that disclosed struggles with their own time management show that some teachers experience guilt when they do not use their instructional time wisely. Therefore, one can only imagine what responses might look like should teachers feel they work in a school where constant interruptions and a lack of protection of time are the norm.

Programs and reforms. The ability to initiate and maintain reforms produced mixed responses from both the top and bottom quartile, making it difficult to determine its relationship with thriving. If anything, it seemed like certain programs and reforms were initiated and maintained better than others. For example, frustrations stemming from *Leader in Me* are similar to the dress code issue at Bobby's school in terms of where the blame should lie. For instance, a fair criticism is that teachers should have figured out how to best use the *Leader in Me* materials in their own way regardless of leadership's role. In fact, veteran teachers like Brenda were able to pick up the program and run with it. At the same time, teachers are learners themselves, so it is also fair for them to expect some continued guidance with a new program.

Nonetheless, an example like *Leader in Me* is perhaps representative of a larger phenomenon some teachers perceive when it comes to programs and reforms. Teachers in the top and bottom quartile, either alluded to, or directly used the phrase "flavor of the year" when

describing programs and reforms. Perhaps most notably was that this came from teachers working in different schools, many of who have taught in this district for less than three years at the time of the interviews. For example, Debbie, new to the district, provided insight into the issue,

> From what I've heard is that things don't stick around in this county. They just bounce from thing, to thing, to thing, and they don't see anything through...Some stuff that they implemented for this year, they're already saying they're not doing it next year. I don't know if I can speak as much to that topic, but from the sounds of it, there's not a lot of stability.

Apparently, enough members of this sample hold the "flavor of the year" view that both veteran and novice teachers are aware of the skepticism. If true, such a reputation could undermine the efforts of any leader at the school or district level tasked with instituting a new program or initiative, no matter its potential for change. This finding suggests that managing the perceptions of the rollout of an initiative might be as important as the initiative itself.

Parent relationships. Despite lack of consensus, it appears some teachers in the top and bottom quartile viewed parents as valuable allies, so this correlate of effective schools may need further investigating to unpack its relationship with thriving. What's interesting is that other correlates produced more pessimism among the bottom quartile, but with parents this was not the case. It is possible that because parent relationships were more directly within these teachers' control that they assumed more responsibility for forming such partnerships.

At the same time, the parent question provides a counterexample to the claim that the top quartile is more optimistic by nature. These teachers were just as critical, if not more so, than those in the bottom quartile. A possible explanation for this goes back to the idea that teachers in the top quartile may take greater pride in helping students change their behavior (see Chapter 5). Couple this with the thriving literature that supposes these individuals are high performing, and

perhaps these teachers prefer independence when it comes to working with difficult students. Said another way, teachers who thrive could hold high opinions of themselves and the impact they can have individually, so perhaps they are less reliant on others, including parents for support. Conversely, those who score lower on thriving could depend more on the support of others, which might explain why they approach parents differently. In other words, teachers in the bottom quartile may not have blamed parents because they may need them as an ally, whereas those in the top group may feel confident in their abilities with or without the presence of parents.

In sum, across these five correlates, the top and bottom quartile held indistinguishable perceptions regarding three correlates: instructional time, parent relationships, and initiating programs and reforms. For the most part, everyone agreed they were provided an opportunity to maximize their instructional time. When it came to parent relationships and programs, some teachers in the top and bottom quartile were critical, while others were positive. The variance in responses made it difficult to make any potential conclusions specific to thriving; therefore, future studies would benefit from returning to these factors to see if clearer divisions emerge.

Disagreements among the top and bottom quartile about goals and student discipline suggest some organizational factors could influence thriving. Teachers in the top quartile recognized the effort that goes into setting goals and managing student discipline in their schools. Teachers in the bottom quartile, on the other hand, were critical and skeptical of some of the goal setting and approaches to student discipline taking place. It is as if the top quartile could recognize the inherent challenges behind goal setting and student discipline, whereas those in the bottom quartile fixated on the system's shortcomings.

It could also reflect how those in the different quartiles see their role in a school. Teachers in the top group seemed to keep the focus on what occurs in their room, realizing their agency in producing desired outcomes. Conversely, teachers in the bottom quartile seemed to focus on the support they needed from others to accomplish their goals. Thus, when their peers do not follow through on goals and discipline, it registers as something affecting their own performance. These disparate responses to goal setting and student discipline warrant further investigation to see if in fact they continue to correspond to thriving.

Given some of the discrepant information provided in interviews, it may be worth pursuing survey questions regarding these correlates and the relational trust factors to further substantiate any connections found between the effective schools research and thriving. Nonetheless, the inclusion of these factors in the interview portion of the study produced additional insight into teachers' work perceptions that helped to understand the types of experiences that leave an impression on teachers. While it is unclear if these experiences will affect retention, the next chapter looks at how teachers perceive their future to explore how thriving might correspond to teachers' future in their schools and the profession.

CHAPTER VIII

Findings – Teachers' Future Plans

This study does not allow me to correlate thriving and future teacher retention since I did not continue to connect with my participants after the interviews. However, the surveys and interviews did include items that explored how teachers thought about their future in the profession and at their current school; items on the survey stated: (1) I see myself remaining in the teaching profession for the foreseeable future and (2) I see myself remaining at my current school for the foreseeable future. Perceptions of the future may not lead to future actions, but they do enable me to discuss how these teachers thought about their future at this point in time and to determine if there is any connection to these perceptions and their scores on the thriving instrument or in their interviews.

Teachers' Plans for the Foreseeable Future

This section reviews the survey results for the two items on future plans. Factor analysis confirmed that these two items correlated with one another, suggesting they measured the same phenomenon. The following breakdown of these items includes references to trends among all teachers in the sample as well as those in the top and bottom quartiles from the thriving portion of the survey, including the extent to which the future plans questions correlated with thriving items.

"I See Myself Remaining in the Teaching Profession for the Foreseeable Future."

The first survey item sought to gauge whether or not teachers saw themselves remaining in the field of education. As Figure 8.1 shows, most of the teachers (78%) in the study either agreed or strongly agreed that they perceive themselves as staying in the profession for the foreseeable future with only 9% disagreeing in any capacity.

However, there is some variation in the aggregated data by those in the top and bottom quartile of the thriving survey. No one in the top quartile said that they were considering leaving the educational profession in the immediate future with 96% either agreeing or strongly agreeing that they were staying in the profession.

Figure 8.1. Comparison of responses to "I see myself remaining in the teaching profession for the foreseeable future," among all participants, the top quartile, and the bottom quartile by percentage.

There was a noticeable difference when I aggregated the bottom quartile. Just 69% of this group either strongly agreed or agreed that they were planning on remaining in education for the foreseeable future and 22% could see themselves leaving the profession. Further, 56% of all teachers choosing a disagree response on this item ended up in the bottom quartile.

In terms of the thriving items, remaining in the teaching profession showed at least a positive, weak correlation with all ten thriving sentiments (see Table 3.5). The learning item referring to personal development showed the strongest correlation (0.362) with perceptions of remaining in the profession, but four vitality items displayed a stronger correlation. For vitality, plans of remaining in the profession showed the strongest correlation with feeling alert and awake (0.477) and looking forward to each new day (0.422). This suggests plans of remaining in the profession had more to do with vitality than learning on the job for this sample of teachers.

"I See Myself Teaching in my Current School for the Foreseeable Future."

In thinking about their future in their current schools, 66% of teachers chose an agree response (see Figure 7.2), which is slightly lower than the 78% who agreed about remaining in the profession. Likewise, 18% of the total sample chose a disagree response about staying in their current school compared to the 9% who disagreed in response to their likelihood of remaining in the profession.
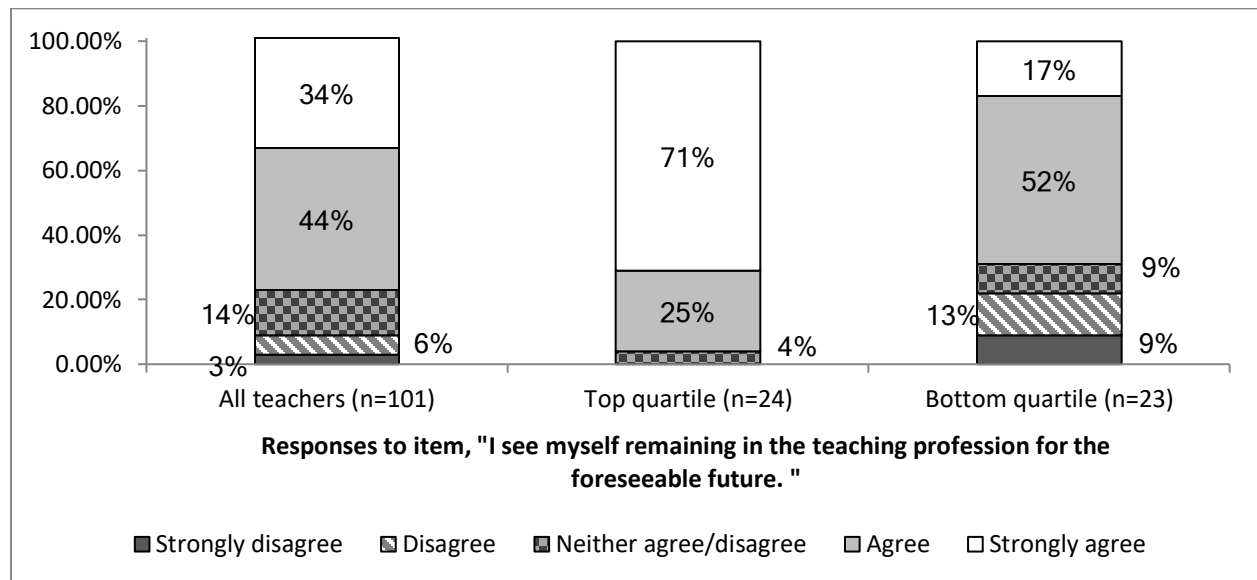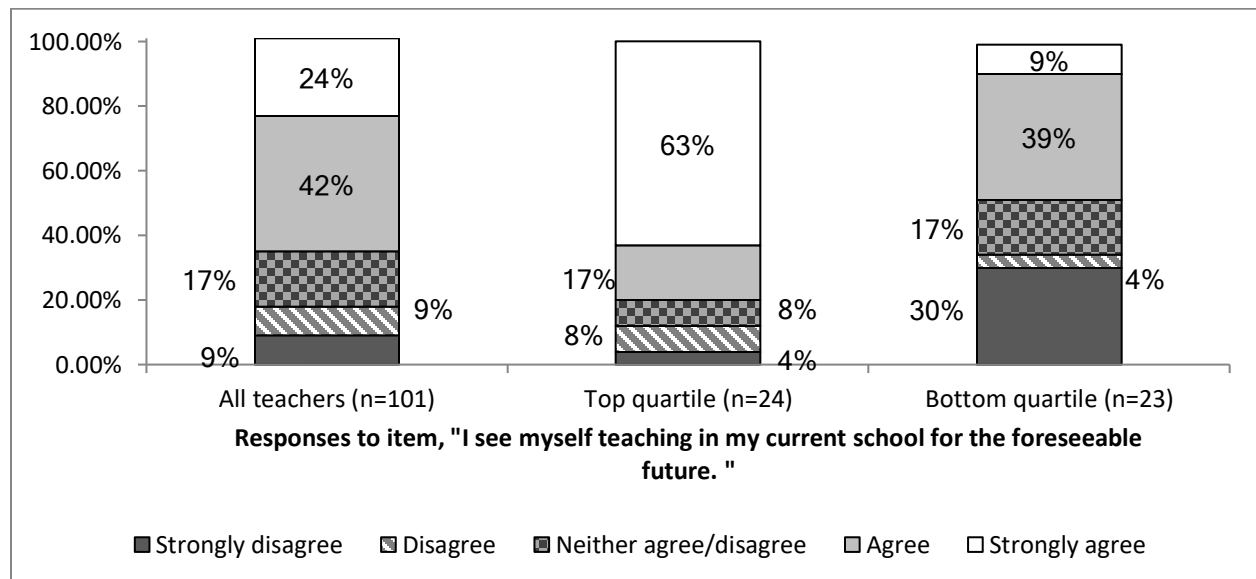

Figure 8.2. Comparison of responses to "I see myself teaching in my current school for the foreseeable future," among all participants, the top quartile, and the bottom quartile by percentage.

Grouping the responses by the top and bottom quartiles yielded a different picture of teachers' perceptions toward remaining in their current schools. Among the top quartile, 80% agreed that they were likely to return to their current school in the foreseeable future, while 12% disagreed with that statement. Recall that 96% of the top quartile said they planned to remain in the profession and none chose a response that indicated they were leaving. This suggests a difference between their perceptions of the profession and their perceptions of their school exists. In fact, this item was the only one on the entire survey to generate any disagree responses from teachers in the top quartile.

Once again, teachers in the bottom quartile showed more disagreement on this item than all participants. Over a third of teachers in this group (34%) chose a disagree response with 30% choosing strongly disagree. However, as a quartile, they constituted just 44% of those wanting to leave their school, suggesting disagree responses were more distributed across the sample on this item compared to others.

Wanting to stay in your school did correlate fairly strong (0.525) with wanting to stay in the profession. It also showed at least a positive, weak correlation with all of the items on the thriving portion of the survey. However, unlike the previous item on staying in the profession, a desire to stay in the school showed moderate correlation with three learning items: learning often (0.417), learning more as time passes (0.344), and continuous improvement (0.310). Additionally, this item showed moderate correlation with three vitality items: feeling alive and vital (0.499), feeling alert and awake (0.408), and looking forward to each new day (0.467). Moderate correlation with both learning and vitality items suggests this item holds some positive relationship with thriving.

Teachers' Perceptions of the Future

The interviews enabled teachers to express in more detail and provide more explanation regarding perceptions of their future plans. Interviews also provided qualitative data to compare to some of the findings that emerged from the survey analysis. As was the case with learning and vitality, I first present the responses from the top quartile before turning to those of the bottom quartile on the thriving survey. The chapter closes with a discussion of key findings from the survey and interview data.

Perceptions of Future Plans: Top Quartile

Of the ten members of the top quartile interviewed, the majority expressed an interest to stay in their buildings for the upcoming school year. Others discussed the possibility of moving within the district, while one teacher had already decided to move on from teaching.

Content to stay. Six teachers in the top quartile (Debbie, Tess, Brenda, Britney, Joan, and Andrea) had no immediate plans to leave their school to pursue other options. They wanted to stay out of a desire to continue to work with their students and the difference they believed they were making. Further, these teachers described how they enjoy the subject they teach and the people they work with in their building. Some, like Britney and Brenda, were pragmatic and discussed that teaching complemented their family lives and their interests outside of school. This is not to suggest that these teachers held no concerns with the profession going forward. Brenda and Joan both brought up pay as an issue, especially considering they have been in teaching for a while and feel their salaries have not increased the way they hoped.

Keeping options open. Three of the other four members of the top quartile (Ashley, Tim, and Laura) wanted to stay in the profession, but could see themselves changing roles. Ashley's experience as an instructional coach makes her want to perhaps try her hand at assistant principal

of curriculum for a middle school someday. Tim and Laura were intrigued by the prospects of teaching in a high school. Tim thought he could have more of an impact with at-risk students that were a bit older in age. His experience with middle schoolers led him to believe that they were too far away from the real world to see the need to change their ways. He was confident that he could help high schoolers because he could better assist them in seeing the immediate and real consequences from not taking school seriously enough.

By the time of the interview, Laura accepted a position at a high school in Barry County, where she hoped to be less micromanaged than she was at Bayside. What's interesting is Laura's first job was at a high school and she admitted that Bayside was a much better fit for her. However, she was guided by something she read while studying teaching, "if you're an elementary school teacher you're like a parent, middle school you're like a cop, and high school you're more like a teacher." Despite the more professionally fulfilling experience she encountered at Bayside, Laura was willing to give high school another try in hopes of finding a better fit.

Wanting to leave the profession: "The lone thriver": Juliette explained that she planned on leaving her school *and* leaving teaching altogether. Juliette is a particularly interesting case for this study because she scored 50 out of 50 on the thriving survey. That is, she strongly with agreed with *all* learning and vitality items, yet she was neutral on the two added questions about future plans. Thus, at the time of the survey, it appeared she was not certain if she would stay or leave the profession or her school.

Juliette seemed to be a sort of "lone thriver," who experienced joy and fulfillment with her students, but lacked the connection to the greater school community necessary to experience the generative qualities of thriving. Juliette described her isolation in her interview, talking about

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how she was the only teacher of her kind in the building. She was responsible for upwards of

thirty ESL students, one of whom spoke Japanese, not Spanish like the others. She was tasked to

improve not only their ability to learn to read and speak English, but also master the other

required core content. Her depiction of department-level PLCs captures her isolation,

> The vice principal of curriculum is pushing me to hang out with the English
> Department... I'm doing my best stay close to the leader (of the department). The leader
> gets offended and says (to me) "You shouldn't be here." Three or four times she pretty
> much shooed me off (because) it was offensive to her to have an ESL teacher with her. I
> was just like, "Okay, this is messed up." On the one hand, (the vice principal) is telling
> me to go with them and then the leader of that (department) is telling me don't. It's
> confusing. In the end...they don't want to have anything to do with me, so I was the only
> one sitting at the table…while everybody had a department. That's not cool, at all.

Even when people from other departments reached out, she did not think her students

were always treated as equals due to their inability to speak the language and their relative

newness to the country. For example, she was grateful that the head of the special education

department reached out to her to have some of her students read to Juliette's ESL students.

Juliette agreed to it twice, but she had to bring it to a stop because she could tell it was further

marginalizing and stigmatizing her students.

The next question becomes: what kept her going, let alone allowed her to thrive? Juliette

mentioned an exchange she had with another teacher that summed up her year:

> The one time I did feel I was respected was when I told one of the leader teachers... "I'm
> the new ESL teacher (and) she sort of went like this, "Oh my gosh, God bless you." I
> swear with that one action that she did, it fed me for the whole year.

That response from a teacher leader likely "fed" her for the whole year because it represented the

reason Juliette likely thrived: her students,

> Some of them are illegal. The way they came (to the United States) was very traumatic. I
> became more than a teacher to them, and more than a role model. I became more like a
> family member ... Maybe even mom, if Mom is absent – that person they can look up to
> and mimic her behavior. Some kids even cut their hair like mine or they ask me questions

about the way I dressed and things like that. I just thought that that's pretty cool. It made me feel fulfilled.

It's worth mentioning again that Juliette did not have her ESL certification; she applied to work at Bayside as a regular education English teacher, but when her principal heard her backstory of coming to the United States during childhood, she encouraged her to take the ESL self-contained position. Juliette left her job in Ventura County teaching English because her husband took a new job in Barry County, making Bayside a more reasonable commute. Juliette loved working with her ESL students, but the stress that came from what she saw as a lack of materials, untrained paraprofessionals, and an overly isolated environment became too much. On top of all of that, because she was not certified to teach ESL, she had to take additional coursework along with the onboarding courses that all new teachers to Barry County are expected to complete. Her home life suffered because she was constantly juggling her own school-aged children, her master's degree in counseling, her required coursework for Barry County, her required coursework for her ESL endorsement, and lesson planning for her students. By the time of the interview, she decided to leave Bayside and focus on finishing her master's in counseling, while still wondering how things might have shaken out if she accepted a regular education language arts position in Barry County.

Teachers in top quartile, with the exception of one, appear to want to stay in the profession and most in their current school. The next section looks at the bottom quartile's responses to the interview questions to get a sense of their perceptions of their future plans.

Perceptions of Future Plans: Bottom Quartile

Unlike their top quartile peers, the teachers in the bottom quartile were more likely to acknowledge the possibility of switching buildings or leaving the profession altogether in the interviews.

Switching buildings. Maureen was happy at Dillon, but confessed that the prospects of teaching high school are appealing because the hours would allow her to spend more time with her husband. Maureen admitted that she had a difficult year because of family issues, so the switch to high school would help her connect more with him.

 During the interview, Bobby hoped to shift to a high school some day because he said there is more going on for students to keep them active and engaged in their schooling. Bobby used to work at a high school in neighboring Ventura County and said he preferred the atmosphere to that of middle school. In fact, Bobby reached out early in the fall of 2017 informing me that he took a role at Valley High in Barry County.

At the time of the interview, Susan hoped to go the other way towards elementary school and eventually did; she emailed me during the summer of 2016, letting me know she accepted an offer to return to the elementary setting. In the interview, Susan discussed a string of disconnected teaching experiences that influenced her wanting to find a better fit. In the past three years, she went from teaching fifth grade to Kindergarten to eighth grade. She claims her previous administrator wanted her gone, so she deliberately moved Susan to Kindergarten to have a better chance of giving her lower scores on her evaluation. Susan believes that is why she was dismissed at her previous building, so she took the eighth-grade position at Stewart out of fears of facing unemployment. She was honest in the interview that she hoped to return to an elementary setting and in her email, she seemed ecstatic about her new position in the elementary setting, which could mean she found the fit she was looking for.

Greg's disagreements with leadership are well documented and he too informed me during the summer of 2016 that he left his middle school to go back to the high school setting. During the interview, Greg was cognizant of the frequency in which he switches schools; he has

taught in both middle and high schools in Barry County in subjects ranging from language arts to science, and technology. Greg admits he is hard to work with, but insists that it comes from a good place in that he wants to deliver quality instruction and set high expectations for his students.

Not all teachers in the bottom quartile saw their future in Barry County. Avery has her eyes set north; she admitted that she does not like living in Barry County, but will remain in the district for the next few years to fulfill the requirements of her loan repayment program. She eventually plans to move back home to the Midwest and work her way into a school system near her hometown.

Retirement. Members of the bottom quartile that expressed a desire to leave the profession did so because of the possibility of retirement. Walter hoped to become the assistant principal at an alternative school because he was passionate about helping troubled students and expressed comfort with the principal there. Walter wants to be a school principal and has a sense of where he fits, but sees the writing on the wall that it may not happen. He hoped to get one chance at being a principal in Barry County, but he watched his former teachers join leadership teams only to then become principals before him, leading him to believe his time might have come and gone. Walter expressed no interest in returning to Bayside for another leadership change, saying he has been through too many of those to do it all over again; he would rather retire.

Mary too is looking at retirement as her only option because, "I don't feel like a teacher anymore; I feel like I'm a prep test facilitator. That's not very rewarding." She said she would teach one more year and that would be it for her because she is tired of teaching tiny reading passages for the purpose of getting multiple-choice questions correct. She longs for the days of

getting students into reading novels and developing a passion for reading. Mary also acknowledged an extended medical leave during this school year played a role in how she sees her future in teaching.

Darlene admitted that she was also a few years away from retirement, so she would likely leave teaching when she qualified. Darlene described how an experience at a previous school drove her to depression and nearly caused her to leave the profession. It was not until a colleague at Dillon reached out to her, encouraging her to apply that she gave teaching another chance. She called this past year her best year yet, in part because it restored her faith in her career choice. She admits she may not be all the way back, but there is a sense that continued success at Dillon will get her there. Darlene described the past school year as an opportunity for her to bounce back after a few rough years teaching in a different school that had her question if it was worth making it to retirement. Now, she does not rule out working with students after retirement; she discussed the possibility of continuing to work as an assistant or paraprofessional upon retiring.

Thus, for most of the bottom quartile, if anything, they wanted to continue to teach in a new setting, but the early retirements of a few coupled with the lack of enthusiasm from a first-year teacher, does suggest thriving and future plans were linked for this group of teachers.

Discussion – Teachers' Future Plans and Thriving

The survey portion of the study showed that 96% of teachers in the top quartile on the thriving survey agreed to the likelihood of staying the profession, compared to just 69% in the bottom quartile. Moreover, 80% of the top quartile agreed with the likelihood of remaining in their building, compared to just 48% in the bottom quartile. This suggests that those with higher thriving scores were more likely to perceive their current school in their future. Moreover, the moderate correlation observed between the wanting to stay in your school item with three

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learning and three vitality items on the survey provides additional evidence to claim a relationship exists between thriving and perceptions of the future. The strongest of those six items was, "At work, I feel alive and vital," which fell just short of meeting the strong correlation threshold (0.499) (Cohen, 1992).

The findings from the interviews support those of the survey. For instance, not a single teacher in the bottom quartile responded with the same assurance or positivity as did the six teachers in the top quartile who could not see themselves working anywhere else. That is, when these teachers said they were coming back, there was no hesitation; it was as if they could not imagine teaching in another school. Some in the bottom quartile said they would come back, but all of them qualified it with a comment about retirement or being open to switching buildings.

Here, the interviews reflect other research on thriving that suggests those that thrive have a higher propensity for retention (Spreitzer & Porath, 2012). While I cannot say for sure that all of teachers in the top quartile continue to teach in their same schools, at the very least, there appeared to be an attitudinal difference in viewing the future between the top and bottom quartile. This is potentially good news for administrators: the teachers with high perceptions of learning and vitality in this study tended to want to stay in their buildings, not just the profession. Moreover, their perceived thriving was not solely attributable to themselves as individuals; rather, they acknowledged the roll their school played in their professional satisfaction.

If it appears from this study that teachers in the top quartile want to stay at their schools, what did we learn about those in the bottom quartile? Given teachers in the bottom quartile's propensity to learn, it provides evidence to suggest that lower vitality influenced these teachers' perceptions of their immediate plans, but how might vitality have such an effect? It is possible that some teachers in the bottom quartile lacked vitality because of issues of *fit* or issues of

fitness. In terms of fit, this subsample was simply in the wrong subject area, grade level, or building. Thus, ensuring and encouraging the placement of people in positions where they can thrive may help generate stronger perceptions of vitality and in turn, thriving. Fitness, on the other hand, suggests that the personal lives of teachers – their physical, emotional, or social well-being – could be the cause of their lack of vitality and correspondingly, thriving. Whereas finding the right fit may immediately turnaround a non-thriver, teachers struggling with their lives outside of school may be beyond the scope of any leader.

For example, Bobby, Greg, Susan, and Walter's lack of vitality could stem from the extent to which they fit well in their building, grade-level, or subject matter. Their stories make it clear that a passion for the work still exists, but the influence of outside forces be it from building leadership, the district office, or the state are undoubtedly taking a toll. Thus, teachers may be learning, but the lack of vitality could be a reason some do not see teaching or their current school in their future plans.

For instance, Bobby's initial certification was out-of-state and in physical education; he earned his math certification in his current state because it helped make him more marketable. This past school year, he eschewed a planning period in order to get to teach one period of physical education. In the interview, he depicted this extra period as the highlight of his day, something that made sacrificing a planning period worth it. At the same time, Bobby also has experience teaching high school in nearby Ventura County and looks back on it favorably. It is safe to assume Bobby continues to be placed in math classrooms because in general it is harder to staff math positions than physical education ones. Bobby also seems to be quite involved at Bayside and is committed to raising his family in Barry County. Therefore, it may be the case that a change in subject matter, or grade-level, could be enough to shift Bobby towards the

higher end of the vitality spectrum, which it appears his new position at Valley High may provide.

Greg is similar to Bobby in that both have a clear passion for working with young people and see the public schools in Barry County as the right place. However, Greg appears to recognize his need for fit, while Bobby took more of a wait and see approach. Given the right team that challenges him and appreciates his passion, it could provide Greg a fit that boosts his vitality and keeps him in the same school in Barry County for the foreseeable future.

As for Walter, it sounds as if he may have experienced aliveness and vitality at one point in his current position, but the lack of professional mobility in Barry County, coupled with his struggles in providing teachers with constructive criticism, appeared to cause his lack of vitality and his wanting to leave the profession. If given the chance at the alternative high school under a leader he knows, there is a chance Walter could experience high levels of vitality once more. Nonetheless, he made it clear that with a change in leadership coming to Bayside, he had no interest returning.

Support for this idea of attending to fit came from a teacher in the top quartile, Andrea, who has experience teaching in both the midwestern and southern parts of the United States. When talking about trust and how a leader earns it, she inadvertently foreshadowed the importance of fit, saying this,

> Every failure (does not mean) that the teacher is incompetent. Sometimes a change in the way things that are presented to the teacher, or a change in position within the school can save a teacher. (A leader) going in and just pointing fingers is an awful way to teach, an awful way to work. You're under attack all the time. I've seen that (from leaders) and it just destroys everyone around them.

For Avery, Darlene, Maureen, and Mary it could be less about finding the right fit and more about dealing with emotional, physical, or social issues outside of school that in turn

impacted their vitality and perceptions of the future. Thus, their fitness for teaching might be beyond the scope of the school setting for this given school year. This is not to suggest that an opportunity to feel alive and vital will not return because we know from previous research that thriving varies across time (Niessen et al., 2012), meaning the best leadership may be able to do is wait and see.

Avery seems to have one foot out the door even after a year in Barry County. Socially, it appears Avery prefers the Midwest to the South because that is where most of her family and friends are. This is not to say that things cannot happen that keep Avery in Barry County, but it was almost as if her needs were beyond the job. Perhaps more support with curriculum and consistency with paraprofessionals could have made the year more successful, but it is difficult to say if that would change her long-term plans.

Both Darlene and Maureen seem to be turning a corner from personal issues that they admit impacted their job performance and work perceptions. Maureen's personal trauma was much more recent than Darlene's. Maureen did not want to go into it, but she described family problems that kept her out of the building for, at one point, weeks at a time. She admitted her energy suffered, but like Darlene, you could see the potential for her to experience increased vitality once things slowly return to normal. Even still, when discussing their future plans, both teachers expressed less certainty than their top thriving peers about returning to their buildings.

Lastly, when it comes to Mary, it is hard to ignore the extended medical leave she had to take this year when considering why she openly admits to being "overwhelmed." These interviews took place at the end of the school year, so there is a chance that after the year she had, imagining doing any more than the one school year needed for retirement would seem like

too much. However, as she continues to recover and regain strength, Mary still tells stories of her

students in a way that makes it hard to believe she does not still have a passion for teaching:

> (Carl's) disability is such that he can't read and he's probably never going to read, but he has average intelligence. That's a real challenge. When he came into my classroom he was so disengaged and he was very disruptive because he'd not ever been successful. I was doing some research as to what kind of reading materials could I find for these kids. We already had Bluford books. I had gone to the website for Bluford and discovered that they had a whole different page where they have provided free the audio for the Bluford books. He took one of those Bluford books, did the audio and passed the AR test for it. The day that he took the test, I had to help him with the test because he couldn't read the questions, but he made a hundred on it. He was so excited. I started crying. I'm going to cry now thinking of it. He was so excited. He jumped up out of his desk and he threw himself on the floor like he had dropped dead out of shock. He said, "That's the first time I ever made my (reading) goal." Other kids started getting up and kind of going, "Way to go Carl, way to go." It just so happened that my assistant principal had come in to do a walk through and got to see that. She had some really nice comments about letting him have that moment, but he went on from there and made his (reading) goal every quarter. Other kids would ask for help on the test and I started "Don't ask me. I haven't read the book. Go ask, Carl." He got to be a helper, which he'd never gotten to do before because he couldn't read. That was probably the high point of my year, was that kid.

Mary still finds joy in the work of teaching students, but struggles with some of the larger

organizational or societal factors (Dinham & Scott, 1997, 2000) that influence work perceptions.

Mary expressed concerns about decreased special education support, standardized assessment,

and enforcement of school policies during her interview. Throw in her medical concerns and it is

perhaps no surprise Mary scored low on the vitality portion of the survey and lacked enthusiasm

for remaining in the profession.

A fair criticism would suggest it is out of the school's control if teachers' emotional,

physical, or social issues from their personal lives affect their work lives. However, such a stance

supposes that what happens at work does not impact what happens at home. The concept of

thriving stands in opposition, suggesting positive experiences are generative and influence the

happiness and well-being of individuals. In other words, having a good day at work can produce

feelings that extend beyond the workday. Therefore, making schools places where teachers routinely have positive experiences could go a long way towards helping individuals overcome personal issues that may influence their ability to thrive at work.

To that end, the next chapter concludes this study by presenting a model for teacher thriving to provide guidance on how to increase thriving and positive perceptions in schools.

CHAPTER IX

Fostering Thriving in Teaching

Teachers' perceptions of and experiences at work matter. Therefore, school leaders and policy makers should pay attention to how and what teachers perceive of their work. Given thriving's promising findings in other professions (Spreitzer and Porath, 2012), this study demonstrated how thriving might be a useful construct to identify and examine teachers' work perceptions. This study demonstrated the construct's value by using an empirically tested and verified thriving survey to assess the extent to which thriving occurred among a sample of teachers in the high poverty middle school setting. The follow-up interviews of those with some of the highest and lowest thriving scores unpacked factors that influenced their scores. Documenting these factors offered insight towards what may predispose a teacher to thrive in the high poverty setting as well as the features of the school that promote it.

This chapter concludes my study by first reviewing how the survey and subsequent interviews captured teachers' perceptions of thriving, learning, and vitality. It also reviews findings from the literature on effective schools to situate this study in a broader context. I then use these findings and related research to propose a model for teacher thriving (see below) to guide further investigation of teachers' perceptions of working in schools and possible ways to positively influence these perceptions and work environments. Lastly, I offer suggestions for future research and recognize the limitations inherent to this dissertation.

Thriving and Teaching

The results of the survey in this study suggest that the instrument designed by Porath et al. (2012) is a useful tool to understand the work perceptions of teachers and that thriving is a productive construct for examining those same perceptions. Survey analysis showed clear differences in the perceptions held between teachers placed in the top and bottom quartiles, especially on the vitality component. The corresponding interviews provided additional data to suggest differences existed between the two quartiles, meaning the perceptions and experiences of the top and bottom quartile were unique enough to warrant their thriving classifications. Said another way, no interviewee from the top quartile came across as someone who did not thrive in some capacity and no member of the bottom quartile appeared to be learning and experiencing vitality in a way that suggested the survey results were inaccurate.

I examined thriving in its constituent parts – vitality and learning – to understand why the teachers in this study's lowest quartile on the thriving instrument did not experience vitality at an equal level as teachers in the top quartile, despite having somewhat similar learning scores. That is, lower vitality totals seemed to explain why most teachers landed in the bottom quartile. Granted, many teachers in the sample experienced vitality, but there were more low vitality scores than learning scores among participants, suggesting that any absence of thriving was more likely because of vitality than learning.

Teacher interviews helped confirm the differences between vitality and learning present in the survey data. Unlike learning, teachers in the bottom quartile openly admitted to the absence of vitality at work during their interviews. Further, there was enough of a difference on learning scores between these two groups that it is surprising no teacher in the bottom quartile was openly negative about learning like they were vitality.

Survey results for learning suggest that the average participant, in this study, felt quite confident that they learn on the job. Interviews confirmed survey responses since all eighteen interview participants (ten from the top quartile, eight from the bottom quartile), admitted to learning on the job and cited different sources of their learning. However, there were differences in how teachers in the top and bottom quartiles described their learning during interviews. The top quartile was more likely to describe their learning as more experiential, fluid, and ongoing, while more members of the bottom quartile tended to describe learning in more episodic terms. Further, teachers in the bottom quartile viewed learning in terms of their own personal growth, whereas the top quartile was more likely to view their learning in terms of what it did for others.

In addition to factors related to thriving, this study also used interviews to surface work perceptions related to effective schools, as described in the research literature (Bryk et al., 2010; Lezotte, 1991; 2007). The data from the interviews suggest teachers with lower thriving scores tend to be more likely to hold negative perceptions related to these factors. Teachers in the top quartile, on the other hand, expressed more positive perceptions when it came to feeling respected and trusted, and in discussing goals and student discipline. Both groups showed similar, positive perceptions when discussing their ability to maximize instructional time, although some admitted to struggling with their own personal time management. However, this was not the case for all school-related factors, like implementing and maintaining programs/reforms and parent-school relationships, as both teachers in the top and bottom quartile described a mix of positive and negative perceptions, making their correspondence with thriving less conclusive.

In sum, the use of the thriving survey developed by Porath et al. (2012) is a valuable tool in identifying teachers with positive or negative work perceptions and these, in turn, correspond

to factors related to the effective schools research. For this group of teachers, learning seemed ubiquitous, but it did not emerge as a sufficiently differentiating variable among teachers in the highest and lowest quartiles of this study. On the other hand, vitality was the thriving variable that showed more variation among the teachers scoring in the top and bottom quartiles on the survey instrument. The presence of positive work perceptions also seemed to influence whether a teacher working in a high poverty school said they wanted to remain in the profession or at the school.

A Model for Teacher Thriving

Teachers in this study who scored in the top quartile on the thriving survey were most likely to express a wanting to stay in the profession and their building, while those in the bottom quartile more frequently expressed an interest in either leaving the profession or their school. Granted, the population surveyed and data drawn does not warrant a causal claim or a statistical correlation between thriving scores and the desire to remain teaching in high poverty schools. There is also no way of gauging the accuracy of teachers' surveyed or interviewed descriptions of themselves, their organization, or the relationship between the organization and themselves. However, because perceptions do seem to matter, this study enabled me to theorize about what work-related factors may correspond to teachers' perceptions of thriving in the workplace.

In reviewing the literature related to work perceptions, like job satisfaction, I created Figure 2.1 – presented below as Figure 9.1 – to conceptualize three extant theories of work perceptions, defined here as personal, organizational, or interactive theories. As noted in Chapter 2, work experience researchers have also pursued more dynamic, interactive, and psychological lines of inquiry using concepts like "flow" and "thriving" to unpack what kinds of experiences generate positive work perceptions. In terms of thriving, research defines the construct as "the

psychological state in which individuals experience both a sense of vitality and a sense of learning at work" (Spreitzer et al., 2005, p. 538). This conception offers two analytic categories – vitality and learning – to understand more fully workers' perceptions of their organization or their personal characteristics that contribute to positive or less positive feelings of work. This makes the construct arguably more robust than flow because it insists learning or growth must accompany feelings of aliveness or vitality (Spreitzer et al., 2005). In short, adding thriving to the aforementioned models of work perceptions, particularly the interactive model, moves us nearer to understanding the meanings that teachers give to their work and extends all the existing theories in productive ways. In particular, the thriving constructs of vitality and learning, as perceived by teachers, enables me to move beyond seeing work perceptions, like job satisfaction, as a byproduct of external or internal factors or their interaction as shown in Figure 9.1, meaning none of the models I derived from the literature accurately depict my findings.
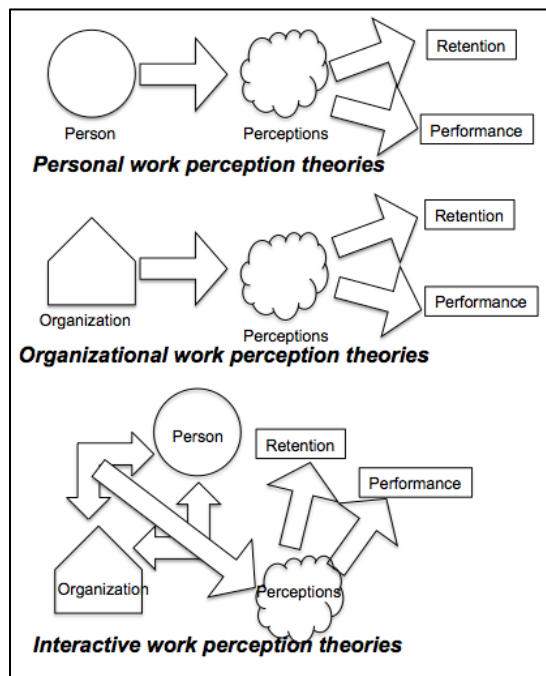
Figure 9.1. Work Perception Theories

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For example, personal work perception theories suppose that perceptions stem from the individual and she/he is responsible for her/his perceptions more so than the organization. What I discovered suggested something different: teachers could cite specific features of their work environment that either contributed positively or negatively to their perceptions. Further, no one teacher was entirely positive or negative, so it is tough to argue that disposition guides perceptions. This ability to identify the positive and negative aspects of the work environment provides evidence to suggest work perceptions are more than just a reflection of the person.

Organizational work perception theories are also problematic because they argue that the organization produces the perceptions that individuals hold. Again, my findings suggest something different; those interviewed from the bottom quartile were clearly affected by personal factors outside the school that influenced their work perceptions. Other participants spoke highly of their current situation alluding to other experiences where they personally held more negative perceptions of work. Simply put, teachers recognized when they played a role in their work perceptions, suggesting the organization alone cannot be held accountable for producing work perceptions.

Placing thriving at the center of this case study illuminated ways teachers perceived the interactions between themselves as people, as teachers, and their school as an organization. Using thriving in this way sought to examine those who "are not just satisfied and productive but also engaged in creating the future—the company's and their own" (Spreitzer & Porath, 2012, p. 4). Below, in Figure 9.2, I add thriving, emphasizing learning and vitality, to the interactive model to offer a more dynamic model of teacher work perceptions (and possibly other helping professions), while identifying areas in which school leaders could sustain interest in teaching.

In what follows, I describe a model for teacher thriving (Figure 9.2) based on the findings of this study, relying on grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to construct this model and draw from epistemological constructivism, where, "Every theory, model, or conclusion...is necessarily a simplified and incomplete attempt to grasp something about a complex reality" (Maxwell, 2012, p. 43). Mentioning this is meant to acknowledge that teacher work perceptions are inherently biased and this study represents just one set of such perceptions. Acknowledging this does not mean we discount perceptions because of their innate fallacies; instead, it is important to recognize their ability to be shaped by the environment as all the more reason to understand what perceptions people hold, the implications for holding them, and in turn, how internal and external forces can influence perceptions both positively and negatively. Since the focus of this case was on a group of teachers, the description and implications of this model for teachers thriving will center on what I learned from examining teacher perceptions in this particular case study of teachers working in the high poverty context at the middle school level.

Teacher Perceptions of Learning and Vitality

At the center of Figure 9.2 lie teacher perceptions, emphasizing learning and vitality, while perceptions of the organization and the self lay on opposite sides of the vertical axis. In placing perceptions in the center, I am arguing that, for teachers, thriving at work lies in the perceptions held by teachers. Thriving is then represented by its constituent parts to denote this study's finding that examining learning and vitality separately provides a sharper picture of factors related to work perceptions. The "perceptions of" arrows emerging from the center of the model capture features of the organization and the self that teachers in both the top and bottom quartile discussed in describing their school or themselves, which also aligned with teachers' relative levels of thriving.
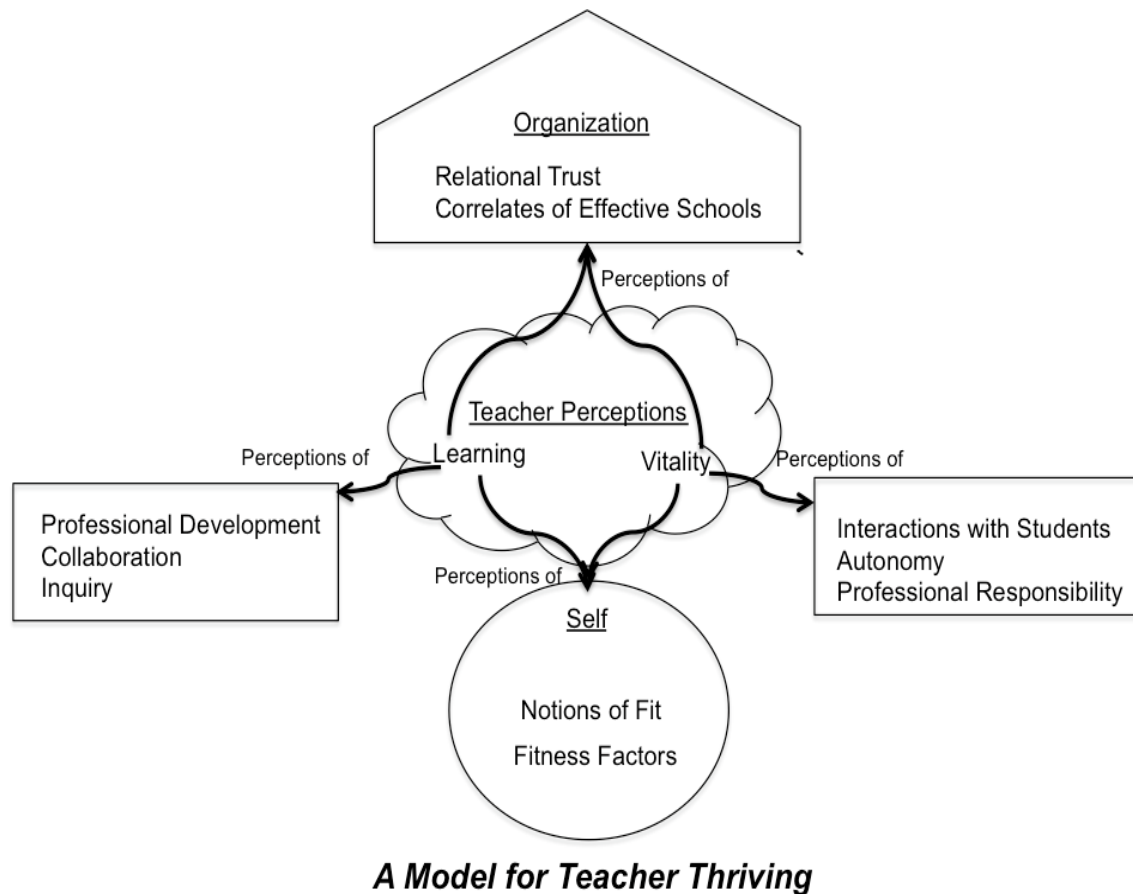
Figure 9.2. A Model for Teacher Thriving

The arrows *do not* represent causal claims that teachers' perceptions alone created or determined their actual learning or vitality experiences because of my limited data regarding their actual work lives. The arrows, therefore, only indicate that teachers in the top and bottom quartile *had* strong perceptions of factors related to learning, vitality, their personal fit and fitness, and certain features of the school organization. On the horizontal axis, I placed factors related to the work of teaching that participants in this study identified as affecting their learning and their vitality, using additional "perceptions of" arrows emerging from the center of the figure to connect perceptions to these learning and vitality factors.

In terms of learning factors, teachers, in this study, spoke positively when it came to professional development, collaboration, and inquiry. Professional development overlapped with collaboration in some instances, but they remain separate to suggest professional development refers to formal attempts to produce teacher learning, whereas collaborative learning can occur in more informal spaces like the teachers' lounge or a visit to a colleague's classroom. "Inquiry" was also informal as teachers described identifying problems or curiosities that emerge in their room to then research for and experiment with possible solutions.

In terms of vitality, three key factors emerged from teachers' perceptions in this study: autonomy, interactions with students, and professional responsibility. Teachers in this study valued their autonomy; that is, they appreciated flexibility in their curriculum and approaches to instruction, but were also skeptical of mandated testing and limitations placed on teaching practices. Teachers' vitality also fluctuated based on their perceptions of their interactions with students, as those with higher vitality scores expressed a greater desire to make a difference in students' lives, especially when it came to helping them modify their behavior. Teachers in the bottom quartile also spoke highly of their students, but they seemed less passionate about dealing with challenging behaviors. Professional responsibility is the other factor that heavily influenced vitality. Teachers expressed frustration with peers who either did not follow protocols or hindered their ability to teach, such as inadequate push-in support provided by other teachers or paraprofessionals. A perceived lack of shared professional responsibility means workloads appear unbalanced, likely undermining collegiality.

Despite their location on the horizontal axis, these two sets of factors are not exclusive to learning or vitality. Rather, based on participant accounts, the identified vitality factors came up in specific reference to the bottom quartile's perceptions of vitality. Positive references to

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students, autonomy, and professional responsibility came up when discussing learning, but because a perceived lack of these factors impacted vitality, they are classified as such. Similarly, professional development, inquiry, and collaboration likely increase vitality, but because they came up more so in references to learning, they too are placed accordingly. Simply put, to thrive as a teacher, both learning and vitality need to be in place; so, another way of looking at the model is that all six sub-factors are thriving factors.

Thriving did more than just provide factors that reflect teachers' perceptions of learning and vitality; investigating thriving also provided access to how teachers perceive themselves and their building. Therefore, this model for teacher thriving also includes aspects of the organization and the self along with the perceptions generated by thriving, which the next section describes.

The Self

In Figure 9.1, the construct of the person is now reclassified as "the self" in Figure 9.2, which denotes it more as a product of work perceptions. I chose to view the teacher in the diagram through the lens of self to reflect that exploring work perceptions provides a portrayal of the teacher, by the teacher. The self's placement opposite that of the organization is to recognize its equal role in forming work perceptions and reiterate the importance of their interaction. Within this image of self are two personal factors that emerged as influential on thriving: fit and fitness.

In this study, teachers spoke in terms of fit; that is, they thrive in the right subject and the right grade-level. Person-organization fit (Cable & Judge, 1996) is a concept well explored in organizational literature and one that played a role in teachers' perceptions. Here, fit appears outside of the organization because perceptions of fit appear to be reflections of self. Teachers seemingly viewed fit as what is desired out of a school and the profession; absent a perceived,

solid fit, they expressed a desire to pursue a different setting or a different line of work. This proved true for teachers in both the top and bottom quartile on the thriving survey. For those scoring low, a relative lack of thriving did not mean teachers wanted to leave because of their particular school; rather, it is that they saw a different school or opportunity better suiting them. For higher scoring teachers, any perceived lack of fit seemed more like a curiosity of taking their talents elsewhere. In sum, both groups seemed to focus on themselves when describing the desire for this change, more so than anything their school was doing wrong.

Whereas fit influenced both groups of teachers, fitness became a personal factor primarily because of teachers in the bottom quartile. Fitness, defined here, means the social, physical, or emotional capacity to do the work. For this group of teachers, it did not mean feeling stressed out or overwhelmed by all the work their school expected of them. Fitness factors do not appear to cause someone to consider another line of work or a new building because it is more appealing; instead, a personal affliction, largely outside the organization's control, factors into work perceptions. Half of those interviewed from the bottom quartile confessed to some physical, emotional, or social issue outside of school that played a role in their work perceptions. Here, it is hard to blame the work environment given the nature of the challenges these individuals experienced. It is possible that some low vitality scores are temporary, meaning, in some instances, teachers might face personal challenges that affect their aliveness and energy for a short period.

In sum, for this model, the self is realized through fit and fitness factors that influence the work perceptions associated with thriving. These factors emerge outside of direct influence from the organization, but leaders can still lend support to influence teachers' perceptions. I will

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explore such supports in more detail later on in this section when the discussion shifts to implications of this model.

The Organization

This study did not thoroughly examine the five middle schools these teachers worked at in a way that allows me to reach definitive conclusions about these schools as organizations. Instead, what I have is the perception of these organizations through the interpretation of the teachers that work at them. Thus, this model for teacher thriving contends the school, as an organization, is, in part, derived through the perceptions of those who teach in it. I conceptualize the school in this manner to highlight the importance of realizing some extent of the success of an organization lies in the perception of those that staff it and its ability to manage/influence those perceptions. For all we know, each school examined in this case study is led by inspiring leaders, well versed in instructional leadership, and managing personnel. However, none of that matters if the teachers employed at the school do not "see it."

Situating the school as a product of perceptions also speaks to the interactive nature of the relationship between self and organization as showcased in this study. The school did not appear to be a static entity inflexible to the wants and needs of these teachers. On the contrary, teachers spoke of their schools in terms that suggest they see the changes their building goes through for better and worse. This suggests that as teachers' work perceptions change, it is possible their views of the organization will, too. Moreover, it is then possible the organization could change teachers' views of themselves. On the model, I place the self and the organization opposite one another to reflect their relationship's potential effect on perceptions.

I include relational trust (Bryk et al., 2010) and the correlates of effective schools (Lezotte, 1991; 2007) embedded in the image of the organization to suggest that teachers hold

perceptions of these factors and the organization influences perceptions of learning and vitality by the relative absence or presence of said factors. There is no way of knowing if these school leaders in Barry County could cite Tony Bryk or modeled their schools after Larry Lezotte, but their teachers' work perceptions seemingly aligned with the factors produced by that literature. Therefore, teachers can hold perceptions of these factors in their school regardless of leadership's current efforts underway to manage them.

Taken together, the findings of this study suggest perceptions related to learning and vitality, the self, and the organization need accounting for in order to produce a thriving work environment for teachers. Examining thriving as learning and vitality produced unique factors that influence how teachers perceive their work. Also, additional factors unique to the self and the organization mean certain organizational features and individual characteristics have an effect on the extent to which someone thrives.

Implications

There is a benefit of emphasizing work perceptions using thriving, and its dual constructs of learning and vitality. First, it offers a way to frame the on-the-job experiences of teachers that has warrant in research literature. Second, it offers teachers and leadership plausible interventions to enhance more positive work perceptions in the specific context within which teachers are working. This study focused on teachers in high poverty middle schools because of the inherent challenges teachers face in these environments, suggesting that if this model helps understand thriving in a challenging context, so too will it in other, less demanding ones.

Additionally, references to teacher retention and performance on this model of teacher thriving need reconsideration based on the scope of and conclusions reached in this study. I cannot say for certain how many teachers remained nor can I begin to assess their performance.

However, teachers' perceptions revealed their ability to comment on their future plans and their relative performance, so folded into this model is the assumption that thriving potentially yields increased performance and retention, based on previous examinations of thriving (Spreitzer & Porath, 2012). More research needs conducting to confirm such assumptions, but previous research on thriving suggests an increase in performance and retention is likely true for teaching, too. Until such confirmatory findings emerge, I decided not to include references to performance and retention on this model for teacher thriving. Nonetheless, thriving remains viable proxy for identifying teachers with positive work perceptions.

The next section examines what this might mean for stakeholders in the teaching profession and what other questions emerge from this study by looking at implications at the policy, school, and teacher level to argue for this model's application going forward.

Implications at the policy level. One policy area where leaders at the state, district, or building level could influence thriving is the structure of the typical teacher workday. Friedman's (2013) examination of Shanghai schools in China and their impressive turnaround argues "there is no secret" to their success; rather, their school system just does everything right. I found that conclusion slightly problematic for American public education because it could preclude some from meaningfully examining their practices if they believe they are already doing everything right. Granted, there are model districts in the United States; Union City, NJ comes to mind as one high poverty district defying the odds (Kirp, 2015). However, it is no secret that the majority of high poverty schools underperform in the United States.

Therefore, a deeper dive into an urban system like Shanghai becomes necessary to understand how they achieve success should we hope to replicate it. Friedman (2013) unearths a potential secret for American education, but he fails to realize it; he describes the work day of

"Teng Jiao, 26, an English teacher here, (who) said school begins at 8:35 a.m. and runs to 4:30 p.m., during which he typically teaches three 35-minute lessons." Catch the secret? *Three 35-minute lessons.* With all due respect to the esteemed columnist, *there is a secret;* Shanghai's approach could be more conducive to thriving, whereas, American teachers tend to spend more time in front of students than their international peers (OECD, 2014), possibly making it more difficult to thrive. A system like Shanghai's provides a structure for teacher learning that balances their work in front of students with their work behind the scenes, like pursuing their inquiries and collaborating with peers. Thus, this type of structure potentially provides better conditions for professional learning and vitality.

At the state and federal level, funding could ensure that schools can afford enough personnel to provide planning and collaborative time during the school day like the Shanghai system does. Such funding could come through either an increase or reallocation. Reimagining the funding structure would allow schools to hire more staff to provide time for teachers to meet during the school day. This might sound counterintuitive in a shortage, but knowing that teaching jobs are available because of an emphasis on increased planning and collaborative time could bring new members to the profession and possibly some departures back.

At the district or building level, policy guidance can provide school leaders with support on how to structure the school day. Embracing and promoting creative approaches to scheduling and course offerings could open up time during the day for teachers. From a competitive standpoint, districts providing more favorable teacher work schedules could insulate themselves from the shortage by making it a professional destination for teachers. There is a possibly this would help high poverty districts where the work is perceived as more challenging because designing a work environment conducive to thriving could attract and retain more teachers.

Implications for school leaders. In addition to looking at the structure of the teacher workday, this study revealed other areas of influence school leaders could have on teacher perceptions. This study showed that teachers in the same building hold different perceptions of leadership and their schools as organizations. Given this, a potential focus becomes not only understanding, but also managing these perceptions to ensure the work environment provides opportunities for all teachers to thrive. Figure 9.3 (see below) presents a modified version of my model for teacher thriving to show the potential influencers that exist in the school work environment, which I now mark on the modified model using dashed arrows. The use of dashed arrows is meant to signify such connections are merely speculative given the preliminary findings generated from this case study. Dashed arrows connect all parts of the model to one another showing the plausibility of these factors influencing one another given the interactive nature of work perceptions. What follows explores some of these connections, primarily those informed by the findings of this particular case.

First, in terms of learning, teachers in this study, whether high or low scoring on thriving, valued opportunities to pursue the types of learning they found valuable, like inquiry-based pursuits. Leaders could encourage this type of learning informally, but also through more formalized means to provide meaningful professional development. Opportunities like learning walks, instructional rounds, critical friends groups, and professional learning communities provide teachers with structured protocols to inquire about and improve upon their own practice. This approach to instructional improvement provides learning grounded in teachers' experiences and could foster collaboration among a staff (City, Elmore, Fiarman, & Teitel, 2009; Marzano et al., 2016).

Second, in terms of vitality, opportunities to pursue such inquiries could also help build autonomy and professional responsibility. If teachers follow their own curiosities and interests, it seemingly puts them in control of their professional learning, which could yield perceptions of autonomy. Further, the collaborative potential of such inquiry-based pursuits could have an influence on shared professional responsibility. Leaders can ask groups to present on their inquiry activities as a way of instilling accountability (Nelson & Slavit, 2008). Moreover, leadership can use such inquiry-based professional development to create a shared vision of teaching and learning in a school (Nelson & Slavit, 2008), possibly increasing a sense of shared responsibility.

Implications of a Model for Teacher Thriving
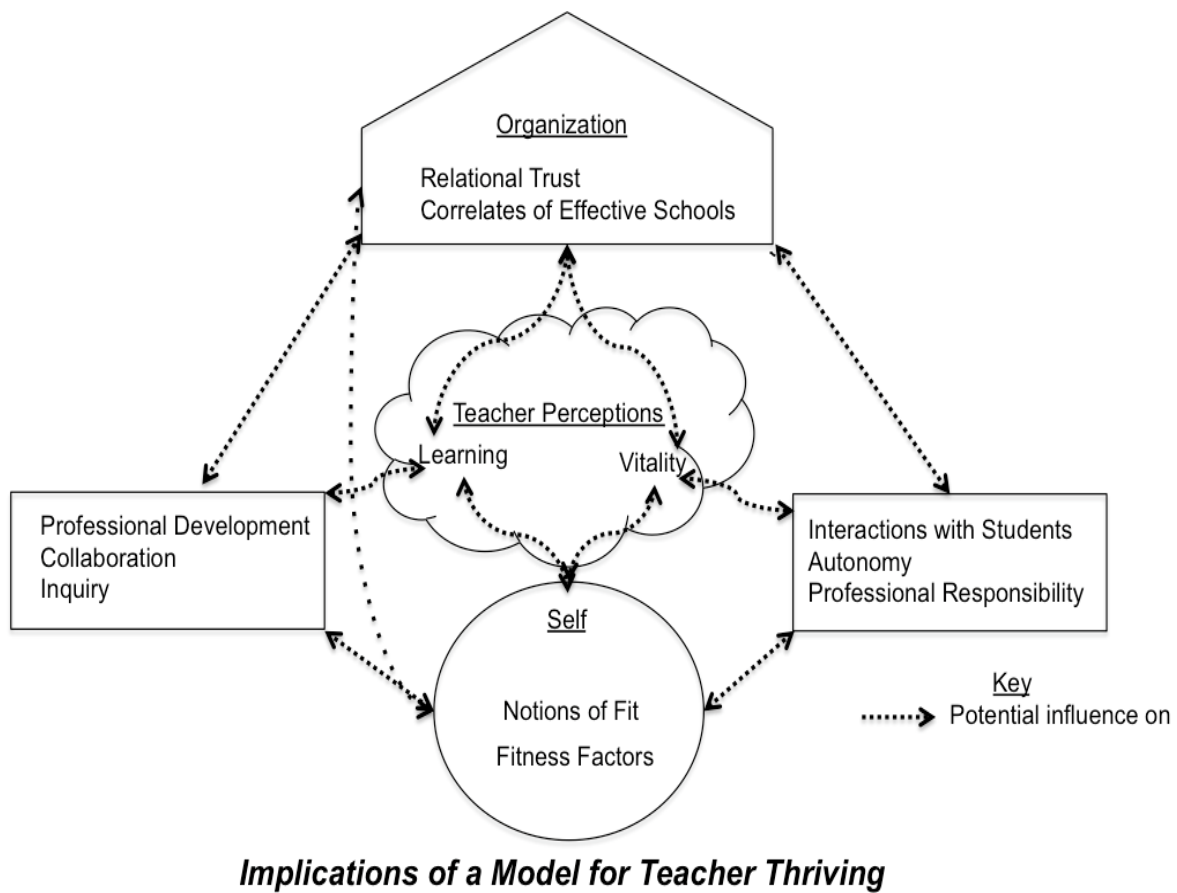
Figure 9.3. Implications of a Model for Teacher Thriving

Moreover, leadership could positively influence perceptions related to vitality by supporting teachers in their interactions with students. For example, a desire to control behavior, rather than inspire learning, appeared to be a sign that a teacher's' vitality was low in this study. Therefore, some teachers may need support in managing their classroom in order to feel confident in their ability to deliver instruction. School leaders can accomplish this by taking a learning-centered approach to observations to help teachers identify areas to improve student outcomes (DuFour, 2002). Participants who struggled with management could also reference engaging lessons, so using inquiry and other professional learning opportunities to reflect on engaging lessons could help produce additional positive interactions with students.

A dashed line on Figure 9.3 also connects the organization to the self because leaders could attempt to manage teachers' perceptions of self, or at the very least, be cognizant of the effects of fit and fitness. Some teachers may express a desire to switch buildings, like moving to the high school, because of a perceived poor fit. Rather than conceding such a point, leaders could discuss the assumptions teachers have of those settings to show how their current school possibly provides the same or even better opportunities. In turn, such conversations would contribute to an aspect of relational trust: discussing feelings, worries, and frustrations (Bryk et al., 2010).

Some issues of self are likely outside leaders' control, as teachers admitted to personal issues stemming from emotional, physical, and social factors that influenced their work perceptions. However, they were highly complimentary of support from leadership when faced with these issues, indicating perceptions of relational trust (Bryk et. Al, 2010). It is possible that given this support their likelihood of staying in the school increases as their personal well-being improves. Likewise, a perceived lack of opportunity to express one's feelings corresponds to

dissatisfaction and turnover (Litt & Turk, 1985). Thus, leadership lending support is one possible way to positively encourage teachers' attitudes in difficult situations.

Further, this study did not address the thriving of school leaders. A suggestive line of inquiry, though well beyond the scope of the study, is the degree to which there is a relationship between how administrators or school leaders perceive themselves as thriving in their work situation and teachers' perception of thriving. Indeed, such a line of inquiry could further inform the theoretical model presented.

Teacher implications. In addition to the policy and organizational level, exploring the work perceptions of teachers also produced potential implications for individual teachers, primarily in terms of fitness and fit.

One's fitness for teaching – their social, emotional, or physical well-being – influenced perceptions of thriving and the future for this group of teachers. Teachers in this study were appreciative of supportive staff and leadership who provided assistance when personal issues started to affect them professionally. Thus, support systems may already be in place for teachers and finding them might help teachers navigate personal issues. When teachers perceive to have access to coping resources, like supportive colleagues, their chances of satisfaction and retention improve (Stempien & Loeb, 2002). To that point, relationships are vital to success in teaching, which this study showed. Teachers thrived when they relished their relationships with students and learned alongside their colleagues.

Teachers in this study also viewed their likelihood of staying in their school or the profession in terms of fit. Teachers could benefit from realizing that if a given placement is unfulfilling or provides a lack of access to thriving, it does not mean that all teaching positions will be the same. Therefore, before quitting on the profession, it might be worth trying a different

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grade-level or building to see if there is a better fit. Research suggests that person-organization fit is predictive of job attitudes (Cable & Judge, 1996). Thus, if teachers secure placements at schools where they think they fit, it is possible their perceptions will improve. Moreover, high thriving teachers, in this study, who saw themselves as successful, admitted that there were times in their career where they questioned their future. This suggests doubt is normal, but its presence alone does not mean the profession is necessarily worth quitting. Approaching leadership about concerns could give a teacher a sense if leadership is willing to help find a better fit in the school.

To that end, this model also provides a picture of what some of the minimum expectations an organization might provide to ensure learning and vitality are possible and thriving occurs. Should they not, teachers could consider seeking other professional opportunities that produce such perceptions. Teaching can be a fulfilling career, so it might not be the teacher's fault when perceptions related to thriving are absent; it might be the school. I realize that suggesting a transfer works against my call for leaders to keep their teams together. However, this advice stems from a talk I attended with Dr. Charles Payne, which centered on his examination of the constant reform and yet persistent failure in high poverty, urban education (Payne, 2008). He contended that part of this issue lays in the poor leadership and structures in place in some high poverty schools, making them nearly impossible to teach in effectively. This suggests that many high poverty work environments are unlikely conducive to thriving. At the time, I knew a few teachers struggling in their schools, so I asked Dr. Payne what his advice to those teachers would be. His answer surprised me, and the room: "Transfer." He went on to qualify his response to say that the worst thing that could happen to a teacher in such a situation is to lose their passion for teaching due to forces outside of their control.

Therefore, teachers could use this model to insist upon what is known in the medical realm as a "minimum standard of care" or, in this case, *a minimum standard for thriving*. Dr. Payne's comment that teachers should transfer alluded to the situation in many schools where thriving may be more difficult for some teachers than in other settings. Of course, teacher transfer does not help school climate or the students in a given school (Johnson et al., 2012), but Payne was also arguing that at times, and in some situations, it might be important for teachers to be selfish and insist on a work environment to enable a minimum standard of thriving. If they do not perceive changes that enable them to meet such a minimum, then transferring is a credible, personal option. The value of such minimums for individuals is also evidenced in this case study.

One important caveat regarding this study, however, is the absence of information regarding teachers' thriving perceptions and evidence of student learning. Considering the positive relational effects thrivers have on others (Spreitzer et al., 2005), it might make sense to assume that students benefit, but this study has no evidence of how or if students were helped or hindered by the extent to which their teachers did or did not thrive. Continued study of thriving would benefit from attempting to measure its presence on student outcomes, like if students thrive in the presence of a thriving teacher. Some teachers could perceive their instruction as effective based on how well they feel they control or manage their classrooms, despite the fact that compliance alone does not guarantee learning (Buchmann, 1993). Thus, this study may have provided some evidence to suggest the presence of thriving corresponds with positive perceptions of the future, but the more important relationship lies in thriving and student outcomes.

In short, this study makes no claims about any relationship between student performance or learning and the teachers in the top or bottom quartile on the survey instrument. It is possible

teachers could thrive despite having a significant impact on student learning because they feel they control their classroom, but as noted above, control does not always correspond with learning. At the same time, it is also plausible that some teachers may not thrive, but may still positively affect student learning. Previous research on teachers using scripted curricula found that teachers' perceptions of such programs did not always positively correspond with student outcomes. That is, teachers could express dissatisfaction with a program despite its positive impact on student learning in their classroom (Cohen, Peurach, Glazer, Gates, & Goldin, 2013).

In sum, this model for teacher thriving is meant to provide a holistic picture of how teachers form work perceptions of self and the organization around thriving's co-constructs of learning and vitality. I created the model to provide an understanding of how teachers' work perceptions emerge, the factors that contribute, and possible implications to guide future studies. Given the status of teacher retention and recruitment in this country, something needs to be done to ensure those in the profession stay in the profession and those considering new careers see teaching as one worth pursuing. This model provides one possible blueprint for generating the type of positive perceptions conducive for retaining and potentially attracting teachers.

In the next section, in order to build upon this model and further realize its implications, I recommend future research investigate other promising concepts to further understand what might keep teachers thriving and in the classroom.

Future Research

My proposed model for teacher thriving provides a lens to conduct subsequent research on teachers' work perceptions towards improving teacher retention. As a psychological state, thriving likely runs up against or works in concert with other psychological factors or traits beyond those explored in this study. Therefore, the first part of this section proposes some

possible extensions for this study that bring in other personal factors to study alongside thriving. Second, future studies could also consider examining other factors of the organization to see if thriving coincides with specific aspects of the work environment. This study unpacked enough about teacher learning and vitality to suggest thriving is a useful concept in examining the work perceptions of teachers, but thriving should correspond to student outcomes to show its value, which is why I close this section by discussing teacher performance.

Personal Factors

Perceptions of thriving emerge through the interaction of the person (or self) and the organization and therefore it is worthwhile to examine additional factors that might maximize or make more productive this relationship. In terms of personal factors, grit and growth mindsets represent two concepts worth pursuing in future thriving studies.

Grit. In interviews, the responses to the vitality and student discipline questions suggest that teachers in the top quartile feel more passionate about helping students with behavioral issues. The topic of passion for teaching is worth exploring in future research on thriving because of its correspondence with the popular psychological concept of grit (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007). Grit refers to one's ability to draw on perseverance and passion to achieve long-term goals and success. Grit also explains how certain individuals can better take setbacks or challenges in stride (Duckworth et al., 2007). The development of a grit scale (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009) provides an empirical tool to employ in conjunction with the thriving survey in order to look for correlation between the two.

It seems feasible that the "grittier" the teacher, the more prone to thriving, but the key element may be passion, especially when considering the challenges presented teaching in the high poverty setting. Passion is an indicator of grit, and in this study, teachers with more passion

for working with discipline and behavior issues seemed more prone to thrive. Therefore, it stands to reason that absent such a passion for teaching, it might be harder to thrive, something adding the grit scale could confirm.

Growth mindsets. Another current and popular psychological phenomenon that may map well with thriving is the possession of a growth mindset (Dweck, 2008; Yeager & Dweck, 2012). Teachers with a growth mindset believe intelligence is not a fixed trait; rather, knowledge and expertise in a subject is something all students can achieve. When instilled in students, growth mindsets can help raise achievement and resilience (Yeager & Dweck, 2012). In terms of thriving, teachers with a growth mindset could be more likely to relish in helping all students, especially those that pose the most behavioral problems. This could prove particularly important for teachers working with students in traditionally under-performing schools and provide one way to begin to link thriving to student outcomes.

Grit and growth mindsets represent additional personal traits of teachers that could inform what we know about teachers and thriving. Without the passion for teaching (grit) and the belief in the abilities of all students (growth mindset), it is conceivable why some teachers may struggle to view their learning as constant and experience vitality. Therefore, employing one or both concepts into future surveys and interviews might reveal additional findings about the types of people that thrive as well as what they need from an organization to thrive.

Organizational and Leadership Factors

While the individual may play a role in thriving, it is also important for future research to continue to examine the influence of the organization. One implication of this study, for school leaders, is that part of their work is managing perceptions in their building. For instance, participants' responses to the relational trust questions in interviews made it appear plausible that

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leadership's ability to instill perceptions of trust and respect influences thriving. Bryk et al.'s (2010) study incorporated surveys to measure relational trust, meaning a follow-up to this study could also include relational trust items to substantiate further claims about the correspondence between these two concepts.

In addition to further examination of relational trust and thriving, future studies could also study other leadership factors that show promising results in organizations. Thriving as a concept developed out of the positive organizational scholarship (POS) tradition (Cameron et al., 2003). POS seeks to understand the positive psychological states people experience at work and the corresponding contributions organizations can make in leveraging and producing them. POS does not represent a singular theory, but a series of potentially interrelated phenomena, including concepts like thriving (Cameron et al., 2003). Therefore, when studying thriving in teaching, it may make sense going forward to look for other POS-related attributes that make a school environment more conducive to thriving like high quality connections and higher purpose.

High quality connections. High quality connections (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003) refer to the some of the very same gestures teachers in the top and bottom quartile named when describing how their leaders show respect at work. Specifically, high quality connections occur through social interaction when co-workers experience a bonding moment. This positive response has generative effects on people's vitality (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003). Thus, the presence of high quality connections may indicate a potential antecedent or complementary force to thriving, particularly vitality. High quality connections offer possible experimental opportunities in research to see if leaders trained in and encouraged to make high quality connections with their staff generate more positive responses on thriving items than those who do not.

Higher purpose. Another possible feature of an organization more conducive to thriving would be one that fosters a higher purpose (Quinn & Thakor, 2014) in their teachers. Some of the interviewed teachers in the top quartile described how teaching was a calling, something almost inseparable from who they are as people. One could argue these teachers have a personal higher purpose. However, when organizations attempt to infuse a higher purpose in their employees, it can provide a stronger connection with their work (Quinn & Thakor, 2014). Therefore, it makes sense to examine the extent to which teachers feel their leaders try to frame the work of the school in terms of a higher purpose. In today's high-stake testing and teacher evaluation environment, there is a possibility some schools' purpose might come across muddled to their teachers, which in turn might lessen the likelihood of thriving. It represents yet another way leaders can manage perceptions because imbuing a sense of higher purpose could positively influence teachers' perceptions of the organization.

Teacher Performance

Beyond examining additional personal and organizational factors, future investigations into thriving could compare it to performance measures in teaching to show its effect on student outcomes. The thriving literature supposes that those experiencing learning and vitality are high performers (Spreitzer and Porath, 2012); therefore, future studies would benefit from tracking thriving with performance measures in teaching to connect thriving with performance, something this study did not do.

To maintain confidentiality, one way to document performance is to ask teachers, on a survey, what their most recent rating on their annual review was. Moreover, teachers could select how they think they should have been rated to produce additional data on perceived

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performance. Asking both questions would potentially produce perceptions of performance from both the organization and the self.

Evaluators derive such annual ratings of teachers from a mix of value-added measures (VAMs) (Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005) and observational data of teaching (Grossman, Loeb, Cohen, & Wyckoff, 2013). Studies comparing VAMs and observational data find that teachers with higher VAM scores display different instructional behaviors than lower scoring teachers (Grossman et al., 2013). Said another way, observational data based on classroom performance corresponds to value-added data from assessments. Obtaining actual VAM scores and observational scores would be too difficult to navigate and maintain teacher privacy, so asking teachers to self-report is perhaps the best method to attempt to connect thriving and performance in teaching. Connecting positive perceptions to performance that influences student learning would provide additional support for attending to teacher thriving.

Another possible way to measure teacher performance is through the use of student perception surveys (Cantrell & Kane, 2013). Directly asking students about their perceptions and experiences with a given teacher could provide key data in connecting thriving to student outcomes. Thriving's apparent positive relationship with perceptions of the future in this study is promising, but it would be even more so if there were positive effects on students.

For thriving to gain traction in teaching and in schools, understanding the relationship between teachers' thriving and student performance and perceptions seems critical. The profession would benefit from future research exploring the connections between thriving and student performance and engagement with and in schools. Such correlation could be key at the policy level in making the case to state and district leaders to realize the importance of designing work environments that are conducive to thriving for teachers.

Teachers who learn and experience vitality are likely the ones worth holding onto, but given the current status of many high poverty schools, it may take additional links to student performance to generate more enthusiasm for insisting upon thriving work environments. For as long as teachers are seen as replaceable, or lucky to have a job with summers off, naysayers will continue to scoff at a wanting to attend to initiatives like teacher well-being and happiness absent proof of increased student achievement. On the other hand, showing how much students benefit from thriving teachers could be "the secret" that drives education reform in this country.

Limitations

As is the case with all research, there are some limitations worth documenting to balance the claims made in the findings of this study. Primarily, limitations arose in terms of the sample of teachers studied, as well as the time of the year for surveying and interviewing.

Sample

Additional studies examining thriving teachers will help substantiate the claims made in this analysis because I derived my claims from a case study of five schools in one district. A randomized study would confirm whether any of these findings are reflective of the profession at-large or just these particular schools, in this particular district.

Moreover, only one-third of teachers at the five schools in this case participated in the survey and fewer agreed to interviews. It is possible that the true low thrivers did not complete the survey to begin with, which is possible given how some of the lowest scorers turned down interviews or neglected to provide contact information. At the same time, such surveys tend to bring out the loudest voices on both ends of the spectrum, so perhaps those that chose not to participate represent more of those that would have fallen into the middle of the distribution.

The size of the case also meant there was limited access to low scoring teachers for interviews. The sample as a whole scored higher than expected on thriving items, producing very few participants who averaged neutral to disagree responses across the ten items. A larger study, with more participants to elicit interviews from, would conceivably produce additional lower scoring teachers to contact. It would also increase the chances of securing interviews with teachers who scored markedly low on the learning section. This would provide a better sense of what might contribute to perceptions of an absence of learning in schools.

This study also did not address the middle two quartiles on the thriving scale, which for this sample meant those scoring between a 37 and 44 on the survey. Therefore, it is unclear what their work experiences and perceptions are like. For instance, would they view learning as more episodic like the bottom quartile or experiential as the top quartile? How would they respond to the vitality items? Are these people on the verge of thriving or on the verge of boredom or burnout? If the goal is to get more people to thrive, it might be worth considering what it looks like when someone's perception of the work environment is neither high nor low compared to their peers.

Further, this study only examined teachers in high poverty middle schools, so it is likely that another setting would produce different results. For instance, examining teachers in more affluent schools, with parents that are more involved, and higher student achievement might produce a different brand of high and low scoring teachers. Also, these middle schools may not possess some of the challenges present in other high poverty middle schools. According to state accountability, these five Barry County middle schools scored in the B, C, and D[14] range, so what might thriving and work perceptions look like at an F school in this state?

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[14] Bayside earned a B; Dillon, Robinson, and Stewart earned Cs; Morgan earned a D in 2016.

Additionally, elementary and high school teachers may view both their work and their students differently. A few teachers in this study held more romantic views of teaching in a high school, so it would be interesting to see if issues of fit are present at different grade-levels. One teacher referenced a stereotype of elementary teachers as parents, middle school teachers as cops, and high school being the place where a teacher truly teaches. If such perceptions have any merit, elementary teachers would speak in rosier terms about their students and high school teachers would glorify their content more; it might also explain why so many middle school teachers in this study were fixated on classroom management. Regardless, more teachers from different settings could only further substantiate any conclusions reached in this analysis.

Time of Year

In addition to limitations from the sample, the timing of the study could have also influenced results. I sent out surveys in May 2016 and conducted interviews in June 2016 during the last week of school for Barry County. It is possible the bottom quartile was more positive because the stressors of the school year were behind them. At the same time, it is equally plausible that teachers were more drained after working all year.

Previous research on thriving documents its fluctuation (Niessen et al., 2012), so future studies could examine teachers throughout the course of the year at times of high and low stress. For instance, the start of the school year or coming off a long break might influence slightly higher thriving scores, while state testing or the weeks leading up to a break might find levels particularly low. Tracking thriving over the course of the year would make identifications of a true top and bottom quartile more valid. It would also provide an opportunity to look at fit versus fitness; conceivably those in a poor fit would score low on the thriving survey, so long as they

continue to teach in the same setting. If it is a matter of fitness affecting thriving, then one would expect fluctuations depending on how a teacher's overall well-being improved.

Lastly, timing constraints meant I conducted interviews before completing survey analysis. In hindsight, given the interesting findings from items like, looking forward to each new day and personal development, I wish I had included direct questions about those sentiments to gain further insight about how teachers feel about these particular aspects of thriving.

In subsequent studies, I plan to keep these limitations in mind in order to provide continued support and substantiation for thriving as a key variable to consider when attempting to keep teachers not only in the profession, but also in their current schools.

In the end, while acknowledging these limitations, I am encouraged by what the study revealed. The survey instrument identified teachers at varying levels of thriving, suggesting it is a viable proxy for gauging teachers' work perceptions. Interviews also confirmed that teachers with higher scores on the survey instrument tended to express more positive perceptions of learning, vitality, and factors related to effective schools research. Moreover, vitality emerged as the aspect of thriving that best explained variation among teachers, particularly in one's ability to successfully interact with students. While learning was quite pervasive across the sample, interviews showed that higher scoring teachers on the survey tended to view their learning as more experiential, while lower scoring teachers were more likely to view learning as episodic. Perceptions of thriving also tended to correspond with teachers' future plans, suggesting those who perceive themselves as thriving are more likely to see themselves staying in the profession and in their building. This connection between thriving and perceptions of the future warrants continued examination of the thriving construct in the context of teaching.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Survey

Disclaimer (to be shown on screen prior to Question #1): Thank you for agreeing to take part in the survey portion of this research project on the work experiences of teachers. All data collected is to help inform the understanding of the research team and in no way will be used to evaluate the teaching of any individual involved. To that end, your responses will remain anonymous and school names will be changed to pseudonyms in order to ensure individual identifiers are removed. The researchers will maintain your confidentiality to the degree permitted by the technology used. Your participation in this online survey involves risks similar to a person's everyday use of the Internet. Please acknowledge that you have read this statement by clicking "I agree" below.

1. What is your gender identity?

    Female   Male

2. To which racial or ethnic group(s) do you *most* identify?

African-American (non-Hispanic)   Asian/Pacific Islanders

Caucasian (non-Hispanic)   Latino or Hispanic

Native American or Aleut   Other

3. How old are you?

    (Respondents will choose from drop down menu)

4. What is your highest level of schooling?

Bachelor's   Some graduate work
Master's   Doctorate

5. How many full years of professional teaching experience do you have?

    (Respondents will choose from drop down menu)

6. At which school do you currently work?

    (Respondents will choose from drop down menu)

7. Which subject do you primarily teach?

English/Language Arts   Foreign Language

Mathematics   Related Arts (Music, Art, PE)

Science   Social Studies

For the following items, please rate your response on a scale from 1 to 5 with 1 being "strongly disagree" and 5 being "strongly agree"

8. At work, I find myself learning often.
(Respondents will select from drop down menu)

9. At work, I continue to learn more as time goes by.
(Respondents will select from drop down menu)

10. At work, I see myself as continually improving.
(Respondents will select from drop down menu)

11. At work, I am not learning.
(Respondents will select from drop down menu)

12. At work, I am developing a lot as a person.
(Respondents will select from drop down menu)

13. At work, I feel alive and vital.
(Respondents will select from drop down menu)

14. At work, I have energy and spirit.
(Respondents will select from drop down menu)

15. At work, I do not feel very energetic.
(Respondents will select from drop down menu)

16. At work, I feel alert and awake.
 (Respondents will select from drop down menu)

17. At work, I am looking forward to each new day.
(Respondents will select from drop down menu)

18. I see myself remaining in the teaching profession for the foreseeable future.
(Respondents will select from drop down menu)

19. I see myself teaching in my current school for the foreseeable future.
(Respondents will select from drop down menu)

20. Please submit any questions or concerns you may have below.

(Respondents will be given a text box)

21. Please submit your email address in order to receive your $10 Amazon Gift Card upon completion of this survey.
(Respondents will be given a text box).

Semi-structured Interview Guide

Interviewer says: Work experiences, both positive and negative, are worth exploring because they can inform our understanding of work environments. Similar to the statements on the survey you filled out, I am going to ask you respond to specific questions about your work experiences. These questions are meant to jog your memory in hopes that you will be able to match specific and recent work episodes to the sentiments expressed in each question. Rest assured that any names will be changed to pseudonyms to remove all potential identifiers and everything you say will remain confidential. If at any point you decide you do not want to continue with the interview, you are allowed to remove yourself. Do you have any questions before we begin?

 (Interviewer pauses for and responds to any questions)

Interviewer says: Let's begin*;* to what extent do you feel your job fills you with feelings of aliveness and vitality? (Wait for response then ask) Can you recall a recent experience that reflects how you answered about aliveness?

(Interviewer asks pertinent follow-up questions before moving on)

Interviewer asks: How would you describe your typical energy level at work? (Wait for response then ask) Can you describe an experience that matches how you responded about your energy level?

(Interviewer asks pertinent follow-up questions before moving on)

Interviewer asks: What kinds of opportunities do you seek in order to learn as a teacher?

(Interviewer asks pertinent follow-up questions before moving on)

Interviewer asks: How would you describe the extent to which learning occurs on the job and how often does it occur? (Wait for response then ask) Can you recall a recent experience that reflects your answer?

(Interviewer asks pertinent follow-up questions before moving on)

Interviewer asks: To what extent do you feel you are improving at your job? Are you pleased with your development? (Wait for response then ask) Can you recall a recent experience that reflects how you feel about your improvement?

(Interviewer asks pertinent follow-up questions before moving on)

Interviewer asks: How would you describe the frequency and quality of the professional opportunities afforded to you?"

(Interviewer asks pertinent follow-up questions before moving on)

Interviewer asks: How does your building-level leadership initiate and maintain reforms and programs in your school? What about district-level leadership?

(Interviewer asks pertinent follow-up questions before moving on)

Interviewer asks: To what extent do you feel respected by school leadership?

(Interviewer asks pertinent follow-up questions before moving on)

Interviewer asks: Are you able to discuss feelings, worries, and frustrations with your school's leadership?

(Interviewer asks pertinent follow-up questions before moving on)

Interviewer asks: Do you trust your school's leadership at their word?

(Interviewer asks pertinent follow-up questions before moving on)

Interview asks: How would describe how goals and expectations are set and followed through in your school?

(Interviewer asks pertinent follow-up questions before moving on)

Interviewer asks: How would you describe your experiences with the curriculum provided to you by your school?

(Interviewer asks pertinent follow-up questions before moving on)

Interviewer asks: How would you describe your ability to maximize your instructional time with your students?

(Interviewer asks pertinent follow-up questions before moving on)

Interviewer asks: How would you describe the orderliness and approach to discipline in your school?"

(Interviewer asks pertinent follow-up questions before moving on)

Interviewer asks: How do you view your relationships with your students' parents? Do these interactions impact your work experiences?

(Interviewer asks pertinent follow-up questions before moving on)

Interviewer asks: What are your plans, career-wise, for the future? How would you say recent work experiences influence those plans? (Wait for response then ask) Can you think of a specific experience that has most impacted your plans?

Interviewer says: Those are all of the questions I have, thank you for your time.

APPENDIX C

Focus Code Tables

Top Quartile	Aliveness and Vitality	Energy
Andrea	Making a difference Recognition	High Students (+) Paperwork (-)
Ashley	High Passion Recognition Working with students	High Challenges (+) Passion
Brenda	High Challenges (+) Comparative Experience Making a difference Working with students	High Challenges (+) Passion
Britney	High Recognition Co-workers (+) Comparative experience Making a difference Working with students (+)	High Passion
Debbie	High Freedom Making a difference Working with students	High Paperwork (-) Passion Student interactions (+)
Joan	Recognition Pay (-) Lack of student progress	Varies Physical problems Student interactions (+)
Juliette	Varies Making a difference	Varies Paperwork (-) Student interactions (+) Testing (-)
Laura	High Comparative experience Engaging lessons Working with students	Varies Lessons (-) Student interactions (+)
Tess	High Engaging lessons Comparative experience Working with students	Varies Lessons (-) Student interactions (+)
Tim	High Comparative experience Engaging lessons Working with students	Varies Student interactions (+)

Table AC.1. Top Quartile Vitality Focused Codes

Bottom Quartile	Aliveness and Vitality	Energy
Avery	Varies Lack of Support Student behavior (-) Paperwork (-)	Low Workload Student behavior (-)
Bobby	Varies Lack of support Student backgrounds (-) Working with students (+)	High Self-care Student behavior (-)
Darlene	Varies Co-workers (+) Learning (+) Experience success (+) Student backgrounds (-)	Low Lack of autonomy Parents (-) Politics (-)
Greg	Varies Instructional interference Poor leadership Turnover Working with students (+)	High Self-care
Mary	Varies Instructional interference Lack of support	Low Lack of student progress
Maureen	Varies Instructional interference Testing (-) Student behavior (-) Engaging lessons (+)	Varies Student backgrounds (-) Empathy
Susan	Varies Student behavior (-) Engaging lessons (+)	Low Comparative experience Student behavior (-) Testing (-)
Walter	Varies Instructional interference	High Politics (-) Student interactions (+)

Table AC.2. Bottom Quartile Vitality Focus Codes

Top Quartile	Learning	Professional Development	Growth and Development
Andrea	Inquiry New strategies Technology (+)	Frequency (+) Too busy Quality (+) New strategies Uptake of others (-)	Improving Never satisfied Helping peers Student growth
Ashley	Inquiry New strategies From students Technology (+)	Frequency (+) Quality (+)	Improving Never satisfied Helping peers Student growth
Brenda	Constantly From students Inquiry New strategies	Frequency (+) Subject-specific (+) Quality (+/-)	Improving Never satisfied Helping peers Increased responsibility
Britney	Constantly From students From peers	Frequency (+) Too busy Quality (+)	Improving Self-efficacy
Debbie	Constantly From students Inquiry	Frequency (+) Repetitive (-) Quality (-)	Improving Self-efficacy
Joan	Episodic Inquiry New strategies	Frequency (+) Quality (+/-) New strategies	Improving Self-efficacy New strategies
Juliette	Constantly From students	Frequency (+) Too busy Quality (+)	Improving Student growth New strategies
Laura	Episodic From peers	Frequency (+) Too busy Quality (+/-)	Improving Student growth New strategies
Tess	Constantly From students From peers	Frequency (+) Subject-specific (+) Quality (+)	Improving Technology
Tim	Constantly From students Inquiry	Frequency (+) Subject-specific (+) Quality (+)	Improving Never satisfied Self-efficacy

Table AC.3. Top Quartile Learning Focus Codes

Bottom Quartile	Learning	Professional Development	Growth and Development
Avery	Constantly From peers	Frequency (+) Quality (+)	Improving Student growth
Bobby	Episodic From peers From students Technology (+)	Frequency (-) Quality (+)	Improving Student growth
Darlene	Constantly From peers From students Inquiry	Frequency (+) "Flavor of…"	Improving Never satisfied Increased competency
Greg	Constantly From students Inquiry Technology (+)	Frequency (+) "Flavor of…" Quality (+/-) Uptake of others (-)	Improving Never satisfied Increased competency
Mary	Episodic From peers	Frequency (+) Repetitive (-)	Improving Student growth
Maureen	Episodic From peers	Frequency (+) Quality (+) New strategies	Improving Never satisfied Student growth
Susan	Episodic From peers	Frequency (+) Quality (+) New strategies	Improving Student growth
Walter	Constantly From students Inquiry	Frequency (+) Quality (+) Too busy	Improving Increased competency

Table AC.4. Bottom Quartile Learning Focus Codes

Top Quartile	Respect	Feelings, Worries, Frustrations	Trusting Leadership at their Word
Andrea	Principal (+) Recognition	Yes Supportive	Yes Supportive
Ashley	Principal (+) Recognition	Yes Supportive	Yes Follow-through Supportive
Brenda	Principal (+) Assistant Principal (-) Trust	Yes Confidentiality Responsive Comparative experience	Yes Lead by example
Britney	Principal (+) Recognition (+/-)	Yes - no need Comfortable	Yes/no Experiences of others
Debbie	Principal (+) Assistant Principal (-) Recognition Seek input	Yes Responsive	Yes Lead by example
Joan	Principal (+) Recognition (+)	Yes Comparative experience Supportive	Yes Follow-through
Juliette	Principal (+) Assistant Principal (-) Recognition Disagreements	No Sign of weakness	No Confrontational
Laura	Principal (+) Recognition	Yes - no need Comfortable	Yes/no Experiences of others
Tess	Principal (+) Responsive Seek input	Yes Responsive Supportive	Yes Approachable
Tim	Principal (+) Recognition	Yes Listen Honest	Yes Follow-through Leads by example

Table AC.5. Top Quartile Effective Schools Focus Codes 1

Bottom Quartile	Respect	Feelings, Worries, Frustrations	Trusting Leadership at their Word
Avery	Principal (+) Recognition Seek input	Yes Supportive	Yes Follow-through
Bobby	Principal (+) Recognition	No Union rep (+)	Yes Consistency
Darlene	Principal (+) Recognition	Yes Supportive	Yes Supportive
Greg	Disrespected Recognition (-) Disagreements	No Unresponsive	No Empty promises Lie
Mary	Principal (+) Recognition Seek input	Yes Supportive	Yes/no Inconsistent
Maureen	Principal (+) Recognition Approachable	Yes Supportive	Yes Leads by example
Susan	Principal (+) Fairness	No Sign of weakness	No Empty promises
Walter	Principal (+) District (-) Recognition (+/-)	Yes Confidentiality	Yes Sincerity

Table AC.6. Bottom Quartile Effective Schools Focus Codes 1

Top Quartile	Curriculum	Goals and Expectations	Discipline
Andrea	Alignment (+) Resources (+) Textbook (-)	Clear Alignment (+) Consistency (-)	Work in progress (+) Staff turnover (-)
Ashley	Flexible Input (+)	Clear Follow-through (+)	Work in progress (+) Mutual respect
Brenda	Flexible Alignment (+) Textbook (-)	Clear Inconsistency	Work in progress (+) Inconsistent
Britney	Alignment (-) Textbook (-) Support from peers (+) Learning curve (-)	Clear Academic goals (+)	Critical Inconsistent
Debbie	Resources (+)	Clear Academic goals (+) Follow-through (+)	Work in progress (+) Too punitive (-)
Joan	None provided	Clear Behavior goals (+)	Coherent (+) Some struggle Mutual respect
Juliette	None provided	Clear Staff goals	Coherent (+) Environment (+)
Laura	Inflexible	Clear Top-down (-)	Coherent (+) ISS (-)
Tess	Flexible Alignment (+) Textbook (-) Support from peers (+) Learning curve (-)	Clear Behavior goals (+)	Work in progress (+) Improved
Tim	Flexible Student Accessibility (-) Support from peers (+) Learning curve (-)	Clear Academic goals (+) Follow-through	Work in progress (+) Mutual respect

Table AC.7. Top Quartile Effective Schools Focus Codes 2

Bottom Quartile	Curriculum	Goals and Expectations	Discipline
Avery	None provided	Unaware (-)	Critical Others struggled
Bobby	Alignment (+) Flexible Textbook (-)	Clear Follow-through (-)	Critical Ineffective ISS (-)
Darlene	Flexible Instructional time (+)	Clear Follow-through (+)	Critical Inconsistent
Greg	Flexible	Moving target (-) Teach to test (-)	Critical Ineffective Staff turnover (-)
Mary	Student Accessibility (-)	Clear Follow-through (+)	Critical Expectations (-) Staff turnover (-)
Maureen	Alignment (+) Quality	Clear Follow-through (-)	Critical Inconsistent
Susan	Student Accessibility (-) Alignment (-)	Clear Punitive (-)	Critical Ineffective Inconsistent
Walter	Resources (+) Instructional time (+)	Clear Moving target (-) Top-down (-)	Consistent (+) Fair (+)

Table AC.8. Bottom Quartile Effective Schools Focus Codes 2

Top Quartile	Instructional Time	Programs and Reforms	Parent Relationships
Andrea	Bell to Bell	Flavor of… Communication (+) Expectations (+)	Lacking Student age matters
Ashley	Bell to Bell	Exemplar Follow-through (-) Leadership turnover (-) Expectations (+)	Depends Student type matters
Brenda	Bell to Bell Routines (+)	Exemplar Slow rollout (+)	Lacking Student age matters
Britney	Protected Personal struggles	Follow-through (-) Delegation (+) Teacher buy-in (-)	Good Recognition
Debbie	Protected Testing (-)	Flavor of… Continuity (+)	Good Parents try
Joan	Protected Testing (-)	Delegation (+) Continuity (+)	Good Parents try
Juliette	Protected Some interruptions	Communication (+) Expectations (-)	Lacking Mixed messages
Laura	Protected Routines (+) Testing (-)	Follow-through (-) Communication (+) Expectations (+)	Depends Student type matters
Tess	Protected Personal struggle	Follow-through (-) Inconsistent (+/-)	Good Helpful
Tim	Bell to Bell Chunking (+)	Exemplar Teacher buy-in (-)	Lacking Mixed messages

Table AC.9. Top Quartile Effective Schools Focus Codes 3

Bottom Quartile	Instructional Time	Programs and Reforms	Parent Relationships
Avery	Varies Personal struggle	Exemplar Leadership turnover (-)	Depends Helpful
Bobby	Protected	Strong launch Inconsistent Follow-through (-)	Lacking Communication (-)
Darlene	Protected	Strong launch Follow-through (-) Expectations (-)	Depends Helpful Mixed messages (-)
Greg	Protected	Inconsistent (+/-) Leadership turnover Flavor of...	Good Helpful
Mary	Bell to Bell	Inconsistent (+/-) Leadership turnover (-) Exemplar Communication (+)	Good Helpful
Maureen	Bell to Bell Personal struggles	Communication (+) Expectations (+)	Lacking Communication (-)
Susan	Expectations	Strong launch Follow-through (-) Expectations (+)	Depends Communication (-)
Walter	Protected Limited Interruptions	Expectations (+) Follow-through (+)	Good Helpful

Table AC.10. Bottom Quartile Effective Schools Focus Codes 3

Top Quartile	Profession	School
Andrea	Yes	Content
Ashley	Yes	Interested in leadership
Brenda	Yes	Content
Britney	Yes	Content
Debbie	Yes	Content
Joan	Yes	Content
Juliette	No	Leaving
Laura	Yes	Moving to HS
Tess	Yes	Content
Tim	Yes	Interested in HS

Table AC.11. Top Quartile Future Plans Focus Codes

Bottom Quartile	Profession	School
Avery	Yes	Move back home
Bobby	Yes	Interested in HS
Darlene	No Considering retirement	Until retirement
Greg	Yes	Leaving
Mary	No Considering retirement	Until retirement
Maureen	Yes	Interested in HS
Susan	Yes	Leaving
Walter	No Considering retirement	Leaving

Table AC.12. Bottom Quartile Future Plans Focus Codes

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