

Why Do They Teach? A Study of Job Satisfaction among Long-Term High School Teachers

By Gerald J. Brunetti

Introduction

California's public school teachers have had to contend with difficult working conditions for more than two decades. These conditions include large class sizes, a highly diverse student population (more than a quarter of whom, in recent years, have been English-language learners), deteriorating or inadequate facilities, a shortage of supplies and equipment, and a paucity of other resources needed to support sound classroom instruction. Proposition 13 (approved by California voters in 1978) and Proposition 4 (passed in 1979) have prevented many local school districts from raising the additional revenues needed to ameliorate some of these problems.¹ Like their counterparts in other states, California's teachers have received lower salaries than other professionals and have often had to endure criticism from a demanding and dissatisfied public, who, along with some of the media and politicians, seem ready to blame teachers for the failings of the public schools.

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One might assume that, in the face of such conditions, many California public school teachers would feel demoralized and discouraged, perhaps burnt-out. Such malaise would be especially pronounced among those who had been in the classroom for many years and had fewer options for other employment. Worn out with the long struggle, these teachers could be simply going through the motions of teaching,

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biding their time until retirement. Having accepted the likelihood of such pervasive discontent among experienced teachers, I was surprised to discover a different picture in a survey conducted by students in my research course several years ago. The survey indicated that a high percentage of teachers, including some with many years of experience, were in fact very satisfied with their work. Though the survey was small (an N of approximately 30) and involved only elementary teachers, it suggested that common beliefs about teacher dissatisfaction and burnout might well be exaggerated.

Armed with this insight, I undertook the present study to explore the matter further. Specifically, I sought to determine the extent to which experienced teachers were satisfied with their work and to identify the principal motivators—i.e., sources of satisfaction—that induced them to remain in the classroom. Because my experience as a teacher and teacher educator has been primarily in secondary education, I chose to focus my study on high school teachers.

Related Research

Teacher Attrition and Burnout

In the United States, considerable research in recent years has examined the high attrition rate among beginning teachers (see for example Kirby & Grissmer, 1993; Konanc, 1996; Marso & Pigge, 1997). Other research has focused on the phenomenon of burnout (e.g., Friedman, 1995; Byrne, 1994; LeCompte & Dworkin, 1991), which leaves teachers feeling trapped in jobs they no longer like, if they ever did, or results in teachers quitting the classroom before retirement age. Neither of these areas of research, however, addresses the situation of large numbers of experienced public school teachers who are fundamentally satisfied with their jobs, who maintain a strong professional orientation, a continuing commitment to their students, and often a high degree of enthusiasm for their work.

Teacher Job Satisfaction

In a large-scale study of job satisfaction among American teachers, Perie and Baker (1997) reported several findings that have import for the present study. Using composite criteria to identify teachers as low, moderate, or high in job satisfaction, they found that only 26.3 percent of public high-school teachers fit in the high category. They also found that the percentage of highly satisfied secondary teachers dropped consistently over their years of experience: 36.1 percent of teachers with three years of experience or less rated themselves as highly satisfied, while just under 23 percent of teachers with 20 years of experience rated themselves thus. Other studies (Newman, 1979; Kim & Loadman, 1994; Ulriksen, 1996; Klecker & Loadman, 1997) identified some of the correlates of job satisfaction, including those involving intrinsic rewards (e.g., professional autonomy, interactions with students and colleagues) and extrinsic rewards (e.g., salary, opportunities for

advancement). These quantitative studies did not, however, indicate teachers' overall level of satisfaction with their jobs. Little research appears to have focused specifically on the attitudes of satisfied teachers.

Life History; Huberman's Study

Life history studies, which examine the lives of teachers from their own perspective (*emic*) and in the context of their own experiences and beliefs, have some bearing on the present study (See, for example, Ball & Goodson, 1985; Sikes, Measor, & Woods, 1985; Goodson, 1992; Knowles & Holt-Reynolds, 1994; Goodson & Hargreaves, 1996). Such studies are usually based on extended interviews. Michael Huberman (1993) made effective use of life history approaches in his seminal study, *The Lives of Teachers*. Attempting to identify the professional life cycles of secondary teachers, he conducted extensive interviews with each of his teacher subjects (N=160). He also used quantitative approaches. Like other European researchers who studied the life cycles of teachers (Sikes, 1985; Prick, 1985; Grounauer, 1993), Huberman depicted the later phases of teaching (ages 40-50 and 50-60) as periods of serenity and disengagement, but sometimes too of bitterness and conservatism. While Huberman's study is confined to secondary teachers in French-speaking Geneva and a nearby canton, it provides rich methodological approaches to studying teachers' lives. Moreover, the insights it offers into the life cycles of a teaching career and into the attitudes and perspectives of experienced teachers seem to transcend national boundaries.

Like life history research, the present study uses in-depth interviews to explore teachers' stories; and like Huberman's research, the study combines qualitative and quantitative methods.

Research Questions

The present study was designed to shed light on the following research questions:

1. To what extent are experienced high school teachers satisfied with their work?
2. Among those who are satisfied, what are the principal motivators—i.e., sources of satisfaction—underlying their decision to remain in the classroom?

The study provided the opportunity to explore additional research questions, including the following:

3. What is the nature of the teachers' commitment to their subject fields?
4. What are the goals that teachers have for their students?

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5. To what extent do teachers regard teaching as a true profession?

6. How do teachers value their relationships with students? With teacher colleagues? With administrators?

The findings that follow relate primarily to the first three questions—i.e., to teachers' job satisfaction, motivations for remaining in the classroom, and commitment to their subject field. In a subsequent article I will take up their attitudes towards other aspects of their work.

Setting and Subjects

I carried out the study in a large Northern California school district that serves a predominantly middle-class population, but with a range of neighborhoods from economically depressed to affluent. The district's school population was 67.8 percent Caucasian, with significant numbers of Asian (10.7 percent), Hispanic (15.6 percent), and African-American (4.7 percent) students. *Subjects* were selected from teachers who taught in the district's six comprehensive high schools (size=1200-1800 students), the continuation school (400 students), and a small alternative school (60 students). Although the area was suburban, one of the comprehensive high schools and the two smaller schools resemble typical urban schools in ethnic diversity, family income, drop-out rate, and curriculum. Another school serves mostly college-bound students from upper-middle-class families. The remaining five schools fall somewhere in between these extremes.

Method

The study was conducted in two phases. In the first phase, I collected data through a survey sent to all high school teachers in the school district; in the second, I carried out interviews with select teachers from the larger group.

Phase I: Experienced Teacher Survey

The Experienced Teacher Survey (see Appendix A) was specifically designed for this study. The survey had two purposes: (1) to identify a group of teachers from whom an interview sample could be drawn; and (2) to provide information about teachers' satisfaction and their motivations for remaining in the classroom. The data produced would enable triangulation of interview data and reveal also the extent to which findings about the interviewed teachers might apply to the larger group. The data would also allow statistical analyses (t-tests of means, multiple correlation and regression, factor analysis, etc.). I piloted the survey on a group of retired high school teachers from the school district, who provided suggestions that were incorporated into the final version. Based on data collected in this study, the Experienced Teacher Survey had a split-half reliability of 0.86.

I disseminated the *Experienced Teacher Survey*, through the cooperation of

school principals, to all 426 regular teachers working in the district's high schools. Teachers were asked to return the surveys directly to me using a stamped, pre-addressed envelope. Anonymity was assured. Besides collecting personal information about the teachers (sex, age, school, subject, years of experience), the survey was designed to elicit teachers' responses, via 4-point likert scales, in three areas: (1) overall job satisfaction (4 items), (2) motives for remaining in the classroom (18 items), and (3) beliefs about teacher and personal efficacy (2 items) (Berman & McLaughlin, 1976; Gibson & Dembo, 1984). Of the 426 surveys distributed, 169 (40%) were returned. Two thirds (66 percent) of the returns came from teachers with 15 or more years of experience, reflecting the fact that the survey and accompanying letter focused on experienced teachers.

The four job satisfaction items on the survey are explained in more detail below. The 18 items or motivations for remaining in the classroom fall into three broad areas (supported by factor analysis): Professional Satisfaction Factors (1-9), e.g., satisfaction in serving society, in seeing students learn and grow, in teaching one's subject; Practical Factors (10-15), e.g., job security, salary and benefits, holidays; and Social Factors (16-18), relationships with colleagues, principal, parents. Many of these items were explored in more depth in the interviews. The two items on teacher efficacy are not addressed in this article. Mean scores and standard deviations for each item on the survey are included in Appendix A. At the end of the survey, I asked teachers if they were willing to be interviewed. Those who indicated *yes* or *possibly* were asked to include their name and telephone number.

Phase 2: The Interviews

More than 60 percent of the teachers who returned a survey indicated that they were willing to be interviewed (N=106). From this group, I selected 28 teachers for in-depth interviews. All had Agreed or Strongly Agreed that they were satisfied with their job. The 28 teachers were broadly representative of the district's high school teachers in terms of where they taught, their subject field, and their sex (see Table 1). All but two of the teachers I interviewed had 15 years or more of teaching experience—the mean was 28 years—and 23 were between the ages of 50 and 60.

I interviewed most of the teachers in their own classrooms when students were not present. I worked from a protocol of basic questions (Appendix B) and followed up with individual questions, asking teachers about various aspects of their jobs. Teachers were encouraged to respond freely; and they did, often preempting later protocol questions by their responses to earlier ones. The interviews typically lasted 60 to 90 minutes. I recorded them on cassette tape and had them transcribed. In my analysis, I read carefully through the interviews several times, searching for important thematic patterns, then returning to confirm and refine the themes I had identified. In many cases, I was able to triangulate, drawing on responses to the *Experienced Teacher Survey*. As noted above, the present article focuses to a great extent on teachers' motivations for remaining in the classroom. The results

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Table 1
Selected Characteristics of Teachers Interviewed (by School)

<u>School</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Sex</u>	<u>Subjects Taught</u>
H.S. 1	6	4 M, 2 F	Photography, English, Mathematics, Social Studies, Biology, Physical Education
H.S. 2	4	1 M, 3 F	English, Mathematics, Social Studies, Physical Education
H.S. 3	4	0 M, 4 F	English, Mathematics, Chemistry, Home Economics
H.S. 4	4	2 M, 2 F	English, Mathematics, Foreign Language, Art
H.S. 5	4	4 M, 0 F	Biology, Chemistry, Music
H.S. 6	3	0 M, 3 F	Mathematics, Social Studies, Foreign Language
Con. H.S.	1	1 F	English
Alter. H.S.	2	2 M, 0 F	English, Science

presented below include both survey responses and interview responses for the 28 teachers in the sample. In the analysis of interview responses, I attempted to capture as accurately and authentically as possible the meanings that teachers were trying to convey. In many instances, I quoted the teachers' own words, believing that their voices add power to the perspective they are offering. When quoting or paraphrasing teachers, I also included their sex as well as their subject area to provide a more complete picture of the respondent.

Results

Teacher Satisfaction

The *Experienced Teacher Survey* included four questions designed to assess level of teacher satisfaction. Mean scores and standard deviations for the teachers who were interviewed (N=28) and for the entire group of teachers who returned surveys (N=169) are displayed in Table 2 below. Scores from both groups—here and throughout the analysis—were included to show how closely the interviewed teachers, in most cases, resembled the larger group from which they were drawn.

Since the 28 teachers in the interview sample were selected only if they agreed or strongly agreed with item 4, it is to be expected that they would score higher on this item than the other teachers surveyed, though the difference is significant only at $p < .10$. It is interesting that there are no significant differences ($p < .05$) between the two groups on the other indicators of teacher satisfaction. In other words, the interviewed teachers did not stand out in their degree of satisfaction with teaching. Dissatisfied teachers, of course, were probably less likely than satisfied teachers to

Table 2
Teacher Satisfaction with Job

<u>Survey Statements on Satisfaction</u>	Interviewed (N=28)	Returned Survey (N=167)
	<u>Mean (S.D.)</u>	<u>Mean (S.D.)</u>
1. I look forward to coming to work each day	3.30 (0.61)	3.12 (0.68)
2. I would like to still be teaching in 5 years.	2.71 (1.08)	2.70 (1.01)
3. If I had it to do over, I would choose the teaching profession again.	3.52 (0.62)	3.25 (0.77)
4. I am satisfied with my job.	3.43 (0.57)	3.18 (0.76)

return the survey. Thus the “Returned Survey” scores might suggest a higher degree of satisfaction among the population as a whole than was actually the case. The lower scores for both interviewed and non-interviewed teachers on Item 2 can be attributed to the fact that many teachers were at an age (late 50s) where the normal retirement age of 60 fell within five years.

Extent of Satisfaction

Although the teachers selected for interviews had expressed satisfaction with teaching, the nature and extent of their satisfaction seems quite remarkable. In responding to the question, “Have there been times, during your years as a teacher, when you considered leaving the classroom?” many teachers said “No.” One male biology teacher nearing retirement emphatically stated: “Not once have I...thought that I would ever leave teaching for any reason.”

Some teachers had considered other jobs—even tried them out—but returned to teaching, often with renewed commitment. Another male biology teacher took a leave of absence to devote full-time to his financial planning business: “I tried it for a semester...[but] I was back here visiting more often than I should’ve been. And I found that I missed it too much. I missed teaching.” A female social studies teacher who had left teaching to work as an admissions officer for a prestigious liberal arts college returned to the high school classroom after retiring from the other job. She felt that the college job did not seem “strictly significant,” adding “if you really enjoy what you’re teaching and getting a bang out of it, then it’s fun to pass it on.”

A few of the teachers had in fact given serious consideration to leaving the classroom. In most cases, these teachers loved many aspects of the classroom but felt overwhelmed with the amount of work they had to do or were dissatisfied with administrators or with institutional problems that made their jobs difficult. One long-term female English teacher, for instance, felt overburdened with the number of student papers that she had to read:

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The paper load for an English teacher is tremendous.... I 'm looking at two or three hours a night, four or five nights a week grading papers if I continue to do the job that I feel I should do. It's way too much of my personal time that I am putting into it. It's not the salary; it's my family, my life. It's like it's passing me by.

A male social studies teacher had a similar complaint, noting that class preparation and grading papers was consuming his evenings and week-ends and causing him to wake up at night. And another female English teacher reported in dramatic detail how totally consuming teaching can be:

I just work all Saturday afternoon, work all Saturday night, really really late. Those [times] are for papers and grades. And then Sunday, I have set aside for preparation. So my teaching [is a seven-day-a-week proposition].

She went on to describe how her entire summer was devoted to travel and reading that related directly to her teaching. Despite the all-consuming nature of her work, she found most aspects of her work "wonderful."

Several other teachers complained about school administrators whose bureaucratic demands or perceived lack of support for the teachers made their lives more difficult. One annoyed teacher said that she was considering leaving the classroom "today" because of lack of administrative support. A number of teachers expressed dissatisfaction with their faculty colleagues, most often about their classroom competence, especially their inability to control students or provide satisfactory instruction. These complaints, however, did not appear to cause teachers to want to leave the classroom.

In fact, though many of the teachers interviewed found some things to criticize, the majority of them expressed strong and abiding satisfaction with their work. Some teachers were notably passionate in their responses. As one male mathematics teacher expressed it:

Oh, yes, I couldn't have chosen a better profession. I couldn't have chosen a better life.... I just love what I do. It's fun. I was out for long periods of time because I had serious eye problems...drove the doctors crazy because I wanted the operation right away so I could get back to the classroom. And when school is in and I'm not here, I'm nobody; I just feel my life is a waste. I won't take days off because I want to be here.

Comparing her summer job in industry with teaching, a female mathematics teacher said: "You don't get teary-eyed about your job [in industry].... That's the first time I found out what a difference passion makes...[in industry] they don't have passion about what they're doing."

And an art teacher reported: "Sometimes I just look around my room and see all these kids working around the room and making wonderful things and talking to each other, and I say to myself, 'This is what I was born to do. This is the way I just love it.'" One of the survey items touched on this very point: "Satisfaction in being successful at something you enjoy ('born to teach'). This item yielded the highest scores of all

the factors: 3.86 (SD, 0.36) for interviewed teachers; 3.73 (0.49) for other teachers.

Several of the teachers stated unequivocally that they loved coming to work every day (reflected also in the survey response in Table 2 above). As another male science teacher, on the verge of retirement, put it: "I've looked forward to going to work every day.... I've never been late to work in the 37 years I have taught, because I enjoyed getting here."

In summary, the interviews clearly supported survey responses that showed that the teachers were, on the whole, highly satisfied with their jobs. The sources of teachers' satisfaction will be explored below. It is important to note, however, that the high incidence of satisfied teachers among a group that averaged nearly three decades in the classroom seems to run counter to Perie and Baker's finding that only 26.3 percent of high-school teachers fit in their high satisfaction group—and even fewer of those (i.e., 22.8 percent) with more than 20 years of experience. Almost half of the teachers interviewed for this study (46.4 percent) strongly agreed with the statement, "I am satisfied with my job." In addition, 39.3 percent of them strongly agreed that "I look forward to coming to work each day"; and an impressive 57.1 percent of them strongly agreed with the statement, "If I had it to do over I would choose the teaching profession again." The 169 teachers who returned surveys showed a similarly high degree of satisfaction, although their scores (see Table 2) could reflect a bias since dissatisfied teachers were probably less likely to return their surveys. While valid international comparisons are difficult to make, it appears that Huberman's (1993) experienced teachers—despite incomes, working conditions, and societal status somewhat higher than California teachers—were less satisfied (p. 106).

Sources of Satisfaction:

Motivations for Remaining in the Classroom

The survey yielded important information about the teachers' decision to remain in the classroom; the interviews deepened and enriched these insights and revealed the complexity of the decision. Motivations, of course, cannot be easily compartmentalized: categories overlap, idiosyncrasies abound. In analyzing the interviews, I have attempted to group responses into categories that seem to capture most clearly the reasons underlying teachers' decisions to remain in teaching. I have included the categories under two broad headings—*Students* and *Other Motivations*—the first heading reinforcing the fact that teachers' work with students is the single most powerful motivator of their persistence.

Students: The Prime Motivator

Enjoy Working with Young People

Almost every teacher interviewed stated that she or he liked working with

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young people. Often these statements came in response to the question, “What motivated you to stay in the classroom for some...years?” but they emerged elsewhere in the interviews as well. Predictably, the survey question that asked about the importance of “working with young people (including involvement in extracurricular activities)” yielded a high mean score of 3.54 (SD, 0.58) for the teachers who were interviewed, i.e., between *somewhat* and *very important* (3.60, (0.62) for surveyed teachers). As one teacher put it: “You’ve gotta like kids if you’re gonna teach. That’s the absolute bottom line.”

A female social studies teacher, commenting on why she did not want to be an administrator, stated: “I want to spend the rest of my time with the kids until I can’t do it any more,... I really love kids and to connect with them and to be able to talk about what goes on in their lives,... We go to work because it’s a passion.”

And a female math teacher verged on the rapturous:

I love the interaction with students. You know, I feel as though I’m on a steady course here with all these nice young teenagers with all this life in them, and here I am—I have this huge, this wonderful opportunity—I must sound so dramatic—it’s marvelous! And this happens year after year after year. I mean I look forward every fall to meeting my first calculus class. These are kids who come through the top track of math, and here I have the best and the brightest to teach. I feel lucky. I interact with these kids all the time. They bring such life to you. I just absolutely love teaching.

And the interesting thing is, I’ve also taught, and very recently, some of the—how would you say it?—lower level math: students who really have a hard time with math, really struggle. And I love them too. And I find I get something different from them than I get from the other students. I feel this tremendous appreciation from them. They never forget you. They think that you’re wonderful because you have faith in them.

Clearly this teacher feels that working with students keeps her young, a sentiment reflected by several others. As the art teacher expressed it:

People always think I’m younger than I am...I think it’s something about being around kids and their freshness and the fact that they’re always exploring at that level, and they’re opening up to the world to see who they want to be; and I find that exciting.

Seeing Students Learn and Grow

A survey question on the importance of “satisfaction at seeing young people learn and grow” produced a mean score of 3.82 (SD, 0.39) for interviewed teachers (3.77 (0.50) for surveyed teachers), an impressively high score by any measure. More than 80 percent of the interviewed teachers rated this factor as a “very important” influence in their decision to remain in the classroom. Interview responses strongly supported this survey finding.

The photography teacher, for example, recalled with great pride how his journalism class, by their own choice, working under a tight deadline, put together

an extraordinary issue of the school paper, reporting on the San Francisco earthquake of 1989: “And I said, ‘Hey, I taught these guys!’”

The music teacher reported how gratifying it was, after preparing his band students for a competition, to have them win and see what their hard work produced: “And the kids were [saying], you know, ‘You pushed us and pushed us, and now we see why.’”

A male physical education teacher pointed out how much more important students’ success was than the teaching awards he had received. “The most rewarding [experience] is seeing kids do what they think they can’t do.... It just seems that the things students do make things very worthwhile.”

Most Rewarding Experiences

One of the interview questions — “What were your most rewarding experiences as a teacher and, conversely, what experiences have been the most depressing or discouraging?” — was particularly potent in capturing the delight that teachers felt when their students succeeded. As the art teacher reported: “I [recalled] that time...[when] that girl peeled the back off her stained glass and said, ‘Oh, my God! I can’t believe I did something I’m really proud of.’ That is so rewarding to me...I love that, I just love it!”

Several teachers noted how satisfying it was to see former students who had succeeded. The continuation school (English) teacher stated: “The most rewarding [experience]...is to see the personal growth of the kids and their development into caring young men and young women. And also, it’s very gratifying when they stay in touch. They come back, say ‘Hi,’ and there are hugs; and the rest of the kids look,... That’s rewarding.”

A number of the teachers explicitly mentioned students “coming back,” meaning visiting the school some years after they graduated and after they had attained a degree of success — apparently an important touchstone for the teachers. One of the male biology teachers identified his most rewarding experiences as “having students come back [who] are successful as people — not necessarily as science people; just successful as people.” The teacher observed that his own physician and his veterinarian were former students.

Unexpected Success of Problem Students

Often teachers seemed to take the most satisfaction with the surprising success of students who had seemed doomed to failure. It was fascinating to me that many of the success stories teachers recounted did not involve outstanding achievements, academic or otherwise, but rather students whose survival as productive members of society had been in doubt, and whose simple success along these lines was hailed as deeply satisfying.

A female English cited the case of a student who almost dropped out of school because he couldn’t complete his senior presentation speech. She had encouraged

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and prodded him, and his speech was ultimately a success. The boy's parents were so pleased that they sent her a great bouquet of flowers, which arrived during class. The teacher's students were amazed: "You got flowers because a student's graduating?" they asked. "It's hard to explain," said the teacher.

The alternative school science teacher stated that his most rewarding experience was

...grabbing one of these kids [from] two years ago and watching him graduate. These kids were going nowhere; they weren't even going to school. We couldn't get 'em to spend two days in class together in a row, and now they're graduating. And they're graduating because of me. That's the most rewarding of all.

This teacher was unusual in the extent to which he took credit—probably rightfully so—for his students' getting turned around and succeeding. Most of the teachers, in what seemed like genuine humility, appeared to view themselves primarily as witnesses to students' development, rather than the cause of it, or at most, as concerned participants in a process that extended far beyond their own efforts.

Disappointment with Student Failure

A corollary of teachers' feelings of satisfaction with their students' growth and long-term success was their often-powerful feelings of disappointment when their students or former students failed. As one science teacher expressed it:

Now the other side of that: losing the kids that you thought you had a chance [with], you know. You saw the hooks go in. You knew you had 'em; they were interested.... And I think the hard part, the depressing part, is losing the ones that you thought you had your hooks in, but you didn't, yeah.

A male social studies teacher reported how discouraging it was to have nearly a third of his senior classes earning a failing grade, which would prevent them from graduating. The male PE teacher, similarly, identified as most disappointing watching students "going downhill." Even though the teacher knew that they were making their own choices, it was nevertheless discouraging. The social studies/English teacher said that the most depressing thing was "when you see kids that have so much potential, and then you can't help them guide [their way] through the miserable mess that they often have very little control over."

Reflecting a similar sense of discouragement, one of the biology teachers quoted earlier said:

I just saw one of my former students. He's not going to graduate. And he just sits out on bench; and he doesn't know what he's going to do.... That really is sad to me and the most discouraging parts of education.... I guess I'm too much of an optimist. I'd like to save every kid. After 35 years of teaching...[I realize that] we can't save everybody, and I'd like to.

Like this teacher, most of the others seemed reluctantly able to put things in

perspective and not take personal responsibility for their students' failures. One of the female social studies teachers observed how she had changed over the years: "I don't feel so responsible [now].... Some kids are just never going to get motivated... [but] I still get a little bit of this thing: it's *my* responsibility, it's *my* fault."

Summary

Clearly, the teachers' sense of their own success was intimately connected to the growth and well being of their students. Their belief that they have had a positive impact in the lives of their students, particularly of their problem students, generated a genuine sense of satisfaction among teachers that might lie at the heart of their decision to remain in the classroom. Teachers were also deeply affected by former students who wrote letters or returned to the school to acknowledge the teachers' contributions to their—the students'—success. Again, the power of these kinds of psychic rewards cannot be underestimated as a factor in the teachers' lives.

To sum up, there is little question that the experienced teachers' satisfaction in working with adolescent students was the single most-powerful motivator underlying their decision to remain in the classroom. This is not a surprising finding—common sense and other studies (e.g., Huberman, 1993; Stanford, 2001) suggest that this would be the case. Nevertheless, this study provides new insights into the reasons that teachers get satisfaction from working with students and into the importance of students' ultimate success to the teacher.

Let us now look to some of the other factors that induced teachers to remain in the high school classroom.

Other Motivators for Remaining in the Classroom

The teachers who returned the *Experienced Teacher Survey* identified a wide range of factors that influenced their decision to continue working as classroom teachers. As explained above, these factors fall into three groups: Professional Satisfaction Factors, Practical Factors, and Social Factors. An examination of mean scores from the survey show that teachers generally rated the Professional Satisfaction Factors highest (mean scores ranged from 3.37 to 3.77) and Practical Factors lowest (with mean scores from 1.76 to 3.10).

For the most part, the interviewed teachers were similar to the surveyed teachers as a whole in their ratings. They scored slightly higher on the Professional Satisfaction Factors, and they scored lower on Practical Factors. But there were no significant statistical differences between the two groups.

While the interview questions did not derive directly from the survey, there were many areas where interview responses reaffirmed or extended insights suggested in the survey responses.

In addition to enjoying their work with students, the interviewed teachers identified passion for their subject field, the excitement of the classroom, their

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autonomy, collegiality, and the holidays they enjoyed, especially summer vacations, as important factors in their decision to remain in teaching.

Passion for Subject

In their survey responses, the experienced teachers identified “joy in teaching...subject matter” as an important motivator in their decision to remain in the classroom. This factor received a mean rating of 3.70 (SD, 0.60) from interviewed teachers (3.68 (0.5) from surveyed teachers). This finding is consistent with the generally-held belief that secondary teachers enter teaching primarily because of love of their subject, in contrast to elementary teachers—at least according to the general belief—who enter teaching primarily because they want to work with children.

In the interviews, I asked teachers a question that was rooted in this bipolar stereotype: “How important is your subject area to your work as a teacher? Is it, for instance, your passion for [name of subject] that energizes your teaching and continues to motivate you? Or is the subject area primarily a vehicle for working with young people in the school setting?” When I began doing the interviews, I was struck by the extent to which secondary teachers seemed to be motivated more by the opportunity to work with young people than by their passion for their subject field. As one female social studies teacher expressed it: “I don’t think the subject is so important.... I’m not trained in math and science, but I could do the kinds of things that I want to do in any subject. I think the subject is irrelevant to my main reason for being here.”

A male foreign language teacher commented similarly: “I could teach history or something in the social sciences or psychology or something like that and be as happy teaching those subjects.”

And a mathematics and sometime home economics teacher stated:

I think it’s the young people. It doesn’t really matter what subject area. Just working with young people to try to make them see that there are reasons to be curious and knowledgeable and to seek out information. I’ve done it through Home Ec and math and science, now. I have never really been too concerned where they stick me.

Only one of the teachers—a long-time English teacher—responded that she was primarily motivated by her subject matter: “To be honest, I think it’s the subject matter. I really *love* the subject. Yeah I do. Especially Shakespeare.” But even for this teacher, it wasn’t *just* the subject matter: clearly her interest involved transmitting her passion to her students:

I guess, I think I see myself almost as a kind of [long pause] religious figure in this tradition of passing on the great inheritance. I remember one time a former student of mine met a man who had taught me Shakespeare. And she said to him, “Thank you.” She wanted to thank him for teaching me Shakespeare, because I had [in turn] taught her to love Shakespeare. And he said it was like laying on hands, passing on the word. Yeah, it was wonderful.

In fact, many of the teachers, while acknowledging the primacy of the student, did express strong passion for their subject. The art teacher observed that she always loved teaching subjects that she was learning at the same time (a point made by the photography teacher and several others):

I think ceramics is my material, and I just love it and I love finding new things...it's something I keep myself fresh with, separate from the kids. I can't say one or the other [i.e., students or subject that keeps her in the classroom]; it really is a combination.

For other teachers, too, it was primarily a question of balance between their love and appreciation for their subject and their desire to help their students learn and grow. One of the biology teachers put it this way: "I have a passion for biology myself. I *love* science. I take all sorts of medical magazines at home—*Wellness Newsletter*, *Harvard Newsletter*—and I like to keep current on science. And I think it's also a vehicle to motivate kids."

Or, as one female math teacher expressed it:

It's really something in-between for me. Because I have a fantastic passion for math. I just love teaching it. And people ask me, "How can you teach the same thing over and over again?" It's *never* the same for me.... And, the other thing is that I love my students. I adore them. I really think they're marvelous. So when you have two things going for you [the subject and the students], everything's great!

In many cases, teachers found similar difficulty separating the two—subject and student—believing that their subject had a great deal to offer to their students and seeing themselves as the instrument for this transaction. As one female English teacher observed:

I'm passionate about English, about literature, about ideas. I can't bear to think of my students never reading a book again when they don't have to.... I'm even passionate about language usage and punctuation, because I want them to think it's important. So I teach it passionately. I think it's a balance for me.

Perhaps the clearest insight on the importance of the subject field to secondary teachers emerges in the responses to the interview question provided by the two teachers in the small alternative school. The teachers shared the same classroom and students and were responsible for teaching all of the core subjects—English, social studies, mathematics, science. One might think that such teachers would see their primary subjects—i.e., English and science—as far less central than the growth and development of the academically-troubled students in their classes. However, both teachers provided a ringing endorsement of their subject specialties. The English teacher, drawing on battlefield imagery, put it this way:

I think I would find it very hard to remain a teacher if I weren't an English teacher.... It's like the only arsenal with weapons I really command.... There's a war going on out there and in here, and in fact there really always has been. And I don't favor going into a fight unarmed; and I'm best armed in English.

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This science teacher responded similarly: “The subject matter is very important. I have to understand it, find it exciting, if I’m going to impart it to the kids. I wouldn’t try to teach something I didn’t have that feeling about.”

Overall, the interview responses strongly suggest that the teachers survived and flourished in schools as long as they did because they loved both working with their students and teaching their subject.

Excitement of the Classroom

Many of the interviewed teachers commented on the emotional and intellectual stimulation they garnered from their day-to-day work in the classroom. A female social studies and humanities teacher remarked how excited she would get passing on to students “beautiful stuff—the mind, the art and music and poetry,” things that she felt lasted and were the key to everything else. And an English teacher noted that she did not like doing administrative work for two periods each day because “I miss the heartbeat, which, for me, is the interaction with the students here [in the classroom].”

One of the biology teachers quoted earlier said that he would not leave the classroom because “it’s so exciting to teach the kids.” And the home economics teacher expressed a similar sense of enjoyment: “I like the challenges that it [the classroom] offers because I love ideas, and every day here we get to try new ideas and different ways of doing them. Sometimes the students have an idea you never thought of. And in teaching, you can take it and [use] it.”

Perhaps the excitement of the classroom was best captured by one of the English teachers, who explained why he was never interested in a different job:

I had a number of different kinds of jobs [in high school and college] and never found one that had the endless capacity to engage me that teaching does. I wouldn’t care if you were, you know, a CEO of a major corporation. There’s going to be some sameness, at some point, to what you do; and there never is here. Not ever. Not from one day to the next, not from one minute to the next, not from one year to the next. It’s really kaleidoscopic, and I like that.

The idea of highly experienced teachers finding the classroom a continuing source of intellectual stimulation provides some insight into these teachers. It seems possible—even likely—that many highly-educated people would not find the classroom so stimulating, especially repeating the same course to the same level of students year after year. So what is it about many experienced teachers that they find excitement in the everyday dynamic of the classroom? Perhaps it is their cultivated ability to appreciate the multifaceted richness of the classroom and to bring together in ever-changing special ways the beauty of the subject and the complexity of personality.

Autonomy

Several teachers mentioned the opportunity teaching afforded them to be

autonomous within their own classroom. The survey question that dealt with this phenomenon (“freedom and flexibility in the classroom”) yielded a score of 3.73 (SD, 0.52) for interviewed teachers (3.68 (0.59) for the others), indicating that this was a highly important factor influencing teachers’ decision to remain in the classroom. A photography teacher (formerly an English teacher) described in some detail how, in following his own intellectual curiosity, he constantly created new courses and experiences for his students, from advanced composition courses to *futures* courses and several new photography courses. “I’ve *always* done what I wanted in my life,” he said.

A female social studies teacher stated: “I feel like I’ve got the power myself to change. I may not be able to change the school district or to change the way the school runs, but I can change what goes on in my classroom.... I have the power there to do that and have it work the way I want...[Interviewer: “Autonomy?”] That’s exactly the word that just crossed my mind.”

Although many of the teachers interviewed did not explicitly mention autonomy, it nevertheless permeated much of what they described about their satisfaction in teaching. They talked about *my* classroom and the interesting things they had done or were planning to do there. While they occasionally mentioned external demands—state or school district standards, standardized tests, college expectations, preferences of their department, etc.—they did not seem to be restricted or inhibited from designing and implementing the classroom activities that they wanted to. Indeed, the strongest force governing what they did in the classroom appeared to be their own standards and expectations of themselves as professionals. They seldom mentioned pressure from colleagues or administrators as having any impact on what they did in the classroom.

Whether directly mentioned or indirectly acknowledged, classroom autonomy was clearly valued by all or almost all of the teachers interviewed. In their latitude to do what they think best in their classroom, these teachers appear to possess the kind of autonomy enjoyed by doctors, lawyers, and other professionals. It is interesting to consider whether California’s recent emphasis on content standards in each subject area and high-stakes testing of students throughout their K-12 years will limit teachers’ ability to make decisions about curriculum and thus have a deleterious affect on their sense of professional autonomy.

Collegiality

Some teachers mentioned collegiality—their work with fellow teachers—as a strong component of their overall satisfaction with teaching. Others did not see it as particularly important; and some were highly critical of their fellow faculty members and preferred not to collaborate much with them. The survey question on this point, i.e., the extent to which “good teacher colleagues (e.g., interesting, supportive, committed to teaching)” contributed to the decision to remain in the classroom, yielded a score of 3.29 (SD, 0.71) for the interviewed teachers and 3.14

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(SD, 0.84) for the other teachers. Though definitely positive, this score was clearly lower than some of the other satisfactions discussed above.

One female mathematics teacher did prize collegiality as a motivator for remaining in teaching. She referred to the whole faculty as a *team* that she wanted to remain part of. A male physical education teacher explained how important it was to work collaboratively with the other PE teachers in the school, but also to stay in touch with other members of faculty to “know what the tone of the school should be.” A female English teacher remembered how rewarding it had been to collaborate with another teacher whom she had shared a job with for four years. When she switched schools, the two former colleagues would get together every summer to share files that they had developed together.

Another female math teacher explained at some length how important collegiality was to counter the isolation of the classroom and to provide support for teachers implementing new curricula or addressing common problems, such as grade inflation. As a department chairperson, she had staked out a common gathering place for her faculty, complete with refrigerator and microwave oven, because she believed the space would not only support collaboration but also contribute to the teachers’ self-esteem and their effectiveness. The teachers were devastated, she reported, when the principal took away the space and the furnishings the following year, undermining the kind of collaboration that had been developed.

A female social studies teacher admitted that she did not do much collaborating, though she thought it might be a good thing. She had found that whenever she was leading a new project, some teachers did not like it and responded negatively: “We can have a difference of opinion and still respect each other,” she noted, adding: “A professional relationship is important, but we don’t have to be social. Actually, I see very few teachers socially.”

A science teacher was even less positive about his relationships with other teachers. In response to the question, “Are these relationships ‘with fellow teachers’ important to you work as a teacher,” he said:

Frankly, I wish they weren’t. I wish I didn’t have to deal with other teachers. I wish I could just do my job, but you have to. There’s personality, there’s politics, and all of that gets in the way of teaching as far as I’m concerned.... So in dealing with other teachers,... I’d rather not, but I have to and I do the best that I can. So some I will work with and some I won’t.

In analyzing teachers’ comments on collegiality, I did notice a pattern of changing relationships over time. As younger faculty members, many of the teachers had socialized and collaborated a great deal with their colleagues. As older faculty, however, they placed less value on collegial activities and freely admitted it. In this respect they seemed to reflect the disengagement that Huberman (1993) found among many of his older teachers.

Importance to Society

One of the survey questions asked about the importance of “Satisfaction in serving society (e.g., ‘making a difference’ by educating future citizens)” as a motivator for staying in the classroom. Respondents, particularly the teachers interviewed, rated this factor high: 3.68 (SD, 0.55) [surveyed teachers: 3.54 (0.66)]. Several teachers specifically mentioned service to society in their interviews. A male mathematics teacher stated: “When my life is over...I can look back and say, ‘You know, I contributed something to the world. I did some good.’” A male foreign language teacher said almost the same thing. An English teacher, employing a health metaphor, stated: “I think what we do is incredibly important.... I think its importance is desperately crucial to the health of society and to the health of the individuals in it. Whether we’re talking social health, economic health, whatever, the school can play an incredibly important role in a person’s development.”

Although most of the teachers tended to talk about the importance of their work in terms of its effect on their students—on individuals—the idea that they were involved in work that was highly important for society mostly appeared in their responses in subtle, indirect ways. Their failure to mention it more explicitly seemed to reflect a reserve that many teachers had—a sort of modesty that inhibited them from boasting about the importance of their work.

Practical Motivators

In their responses to the *Survey*, teachers gave their lowest ratings to Practical Factors as motivators for their persistence in the classroom. These factors included items such as job security, salary and benefits, vacations, the advantages of a school schedule for someone raising a family, and “nowhere else to go after many years in teaching.” Of the practical motivators, only *vacations* rated a score above 3.00 (somewhat important): 3.14 (SD, 0.80) for interviewed teachers; 3.10 (0.79) for the others. “Nowhere else to go” yielded the lowest score of any factor: 1.61 (0.74) for interviewed teachers; 1.76 (0.90) for the others. In essence, with the exception of vacations, which teachers seemed to value highly, their decision to remain in the classroom appears to be little influenced by practical considerations.

The interviews produced similar results: only a few teachers mentioned practical concerns in discussing their satisfaction with teaching. Some did, however, talk about their summer vacations, particularly in terms of the opportunities these offered for travel and for recovering from the intensity of the school year. One female social studies teacher admitted: “I do enjoy the summers. The kids ask me if I teach summer school, and I say, ‘Never! Never! Never!’” A male math teacher indicated a similar motivation: “I wasn’t sure I wanted to become a teacher. Then I thought, ‘Well, you know, summers off would really be nice. I like the outdoors, and I could spend a lot of time outside.’” A foreign language teacher talked about summer travel as a way to enhance her teaching.

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Discussing why he turned down a \$75,000 a year job in an automotive dealership, the male math teacher stated: “Hey, I’d rather work here for \$45,000 or whatever the salary was at the time and have my summers off.” This teacher also commented that it was easier staying with the status quo than changing jobs. He noted that a next-door neighbor was just terminated at Chevron after 30 years, implying that it was comforting to know that could not happen to him.

One of the male biology teachers, whose parents were also teachers, reflected: “For my entire childhood, I understood the lifestyle of a teacher.... I had these wonderful summers that nobody I knew did; two weeks at Christmas, a week at Easter, and so on.” His own family enjoyed a similar lifestyle: “Because I’m a teacher, I’ve had the time to be with my kids.... I’ve traveled all over the world. My wife’s a teacher. We have this wonderful life, you know. “

The teachers seemed not to have been deeply troubled with their relatively modest salaries, though their annoyance did emerge in their responses to the question of how to make teaching a stronger profession (not addressed in this article). Aside from summer vacations and a little about job security, the teachers I interviewed seemed remarkably unaffected by practical considerations that might have been important factors for people in other lines of work: salary, benefits, social prestige, etc. The teachers’ casual, almost uninterested attitude towards such considerations reinforce the notion that they were primarily moved by professional factors—a desire to work with young people, to see them grow, to teach subjects that they loved, to have autonomy in their work.

Conclusions

The present study examined teacher satisfaction in a group of high school teachers from a large school district in Northern California. The study was based on survey responses and on interviews with a select group of satisfied experienced teachers. In response to the first research question—“To what extent are experienced classroom teachers satisfied with their work?”—the study found that the teachers were highly satisfied with their jobs. The second research question asked: “Among those who are satisfied, what are the principal motivators—i.e., sources of satisfaction—underlying their decision to remain in the classroom?” The study identified as principal motivators, working with young people and seeing them learn and grow. Other important motivators included “Professional Satisfaction Factors” such as teaching one’s subject, serving society, and having autonomy in the classroom. Of less importance were “Practical Satisfaction Factors” such as salary and benefits and job security.

The overall picture that emerges from my interviews is of a group of experienced teachers that have, by and large, achieved serenity in their work. They appeared confident in their ability to teach and to handle the melange of tasks that the work requires. Although this topic was not discussed extensively in the present article,

these teachers were comfortable in their relationships with students—saw themselves as more flexible and accepting of students' failings than they had been as younger teachers—and they were open to working collaboratively with fellow teachers and administrators. In many respects these teachers seem to have reached self-actualization, the top stage in Maslow's hierarchy of basic needs (Goble, 1970). It would be useful, in further research, to ascertain if there is a pattern of development for teachers—to see, for instance, if the teachers that persist actually pass through Maslovian stages.

Other Theoretical Considerations

I have placed this study in the tradition of Michael Huberman's seminal study, the *Lives of Teachers* (1993), though my study made no attempt to group teachers according to their years in the classroom in order to explore the professional life cycle. Clearly, the experienced teachers interviewed in the present study differ in many ways from the French-Swiss secondary teachers that Huberman studied. Nevertheless, some similarities do emerge between the groups, including the value placed on work with students, the sense of engagement with an activity valued by society, and the importance given to subject fields. Surprisingly, as I noted earlier, despite the clearly more-difficult working conditions in California public high schools, and despite the lower salaries and lower prestige that California teachers endure, the experienced teachers I interviewed seemed to be more satisfied with their work than their Swiss counterparts. They also appeared to be distinctly more satisfied than the teachers in the Perie and Baker study. Why? It is difficult to pinpoint the reason. The explanation that teachers from this school district are just a more satisfied group than other teachers seems simplistic, since they must contend with the same set of difficulties that many other California face.

Future Research and Article

Further research in this area is needed. It would be useful to know the extent to which teachers in urban school districts feel a similar level of job satisfaction. Such a group would presumably offer more racial diversity, too, than the present group, which was almost entirely Caucasian. Extending the study to teachers from elementary and middle schools would also help complete the picture.

In a future article based on the same interviews, I plan to examine the teachers' goals for students and relationships with them, as well as the teachers' views on the role of administrators, on teaching as a profession, on changes they have experienced over the years, and on the relationship between their personal and professional lives.

Note

1. Proposition 13 rolled back assessed evaluation of local property and restricted the annual growth rate of assessments (and therefore of taxes) to 2 percent. The actual tax rate that

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could be levied was 1 percent. Local taxes could be raised only with a two thirds vote of the citizens. Proposition 4, the Gann Initiative, set appropriations limits for all levels of government to the previous year's level adjusted for inflation and population change.

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Appendix A

Experienced Teacher Survey (includes results)

Gender: __ (M or F)

Age: __under 40 __40-49 __50-59 __over 60

Ethnic group (optional)_____

School_____

What subject(s) do you teach?_____

How many years have you been at your present school?_____

How many years *total* have you been teaching?_____

Have you taught in other schools in the _____ School District?_____

If Yes, which schools and what years?_____

	Not <u>Important</u>	Of Little <u>Importance</u>	Somewhat <u>Important</u>	Very <u>Important</u>
Overall, how important is it to you to be satisfied in your career? (Circle one)	1	2	3	4

To what extent has your decision to continue working as a classroom teacher been influenced by the following factors, some intrinsic to your work, others extrinsic? (For each factor, circle the number indicating how important it is for you.)

					Returned Survey (N=169) <u>Mean (SD)</u>	Interviewed (N=28) <u>Mean (SD)</u>
1. Satisfaction in fulfilling a professional commitment.	1	2	3	4	3.50 (0.70)	3.69 (0.46)
2. Satisfaction in serving society (e.g., 'making a difference' by educating future citizens).	1	2	3	4	3.54 (0.66)	3.68 (0.55)

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3. Satisfaction in working with young people (including involvement in extracurricular activities).	1	2	3	4	3.60 (0.62)	3.54 (0.58)
4. Satisfaction in being successful at something you enjoy ('born to teach').	1	2	3	4	3.73 (0.49)	3.86 (0.36)
5. Satisfaction at seeing young people learn and grow.	1	2	3	4	3.77 (0.71)	3.82 (0.39)
6. Joy in teaching your subject.	1	2	3	4	3.68 (0.50)	3.70 (0.60)
7. The intellectual challenges involved in teaching.	1	2	3	4	3.37 (0.71)	3.39 (0.74)
8. Freedom and flexibility in the classroom.	1	2	3	4	3.68 (0.59)	3.73 (0.52)
9. The opportunity to be creative (e.g., in designing curriculum and lessons)	1	2	3	4	3.57 (0.60)	3.39 (0.74)
10. Nowhere else to go (after many years in teaching).	1	2	3	4	1.76 (0.90)	1.61 (0.74)
11. The holidays: summer vacation, Christmas, and spring breaks, etc.	1	2	3	4	3.10 (0.79)	3.14 (0.80)
12. Job security (tenure).	1	2	3	4	2.92 (0.91)	2.88 (0.83)
13. Salary and benefits.	1	2	3	4	2.85 (0.91)	2.80 (0.72)
14. Enjoyment of school as an institution.	1	2	3	4	2.70 (1.01)	2.63 (1.06)
15. Advantages of a teaching schedule for someone raising a family.	1	2	3	4	2.75 (1.11)	2.59 (1.06)
16. Good teacher colleagues (e.g., interesting, supportive, committed to teaching).	1	2	3	4	3.14 (0.84)	3.29 (0.71)
17. A good principal (e.g., able, open, supportive, good manager).	1	2	3	4	3.01 (0.95)	3.04 (0.89)
18. Supportive parents, community.	1	2	3	4	2.94 (0.87)	2.77 (0.81)
For each statement below, please circle the pertinent number: (1) Strongly Disagree; (2) Disagree; (3) Agree; (4) Strongly Agree						
1. I look forward to coming to work each day.	1	2	3	4	3.12 (0.68)	3.30 (0.61)
2. I would like to still be teaching in 5 years.	1	2	3	4	2.70 (1.01)	2.71 (1.08)

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3. If I had it to do over I would choose the teaching profession again.	1	2	3	4	3.25 (0.77)	3.52 (0.62)
4. I am satisfied with my job.	1	2	3	4	3.18 (0.76)	3.43 (0.57)
5. Students' motivation and performance depend on their home environment; a teacher cannot do much to overcome this.	1	2	3	4	2.66 (0.83)	2.38 (0.85)
6. With hard work, I can get through to even the most difficult students.	1	2	3	4	2.70 (0.66)	2.95 (0.64)

If you have further explanations or comments, please write them below or on a separate piece of paper.

I would like to conduct individual interviews with some of you to explore further your experiences in teaching and your motivations for remaining in the high school classroom. I anticipate that each interview, scheduled at your convenience, will run approximately one to one and a half hours. Would you be willing to be interviewed?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Possibly. Please call me.

If you answered Yes or Possibly, please include your name and telephone number so that I can call you.

Name _____ Phone Number: _____

Additional explanations or comments (use an additional sheet if needed).

Appendix B

Experienced Teacher Study Interview Protocol

Please tell me a little about your career as a teacher. You may want to mention how you got interested in teaching, when you began teaching and where, what schools you taught at (if more than one), what subjects and kinds of students you have taught, what the highlights of your career have been, etc.

As you know, in this study I am principally interested in exploring with teachers their motivation for remaining in the classroom. Can you tell me what has influenced your decision to continue as a classroom teacher for _____ years?

Have there been times, during your years as a teacher, when you considered leaving the classroom? Can you tell me what your thoughts were at the time and what ultimately happened to change your mind?

What are the principal things you are trying to accomplish as a teacher?

What do you see as your most important responsibilities as a teacher?

Did you have any role models or mentors that influenced your becoming a teacher or the way you work as a teacher?

How important is your subject area to your work as a teacher? Is it, for instance, your passion for English (history, mathematics, biology) that energizes your teaching and continues to motivate you? Or is the subject matter primarily a vehicle for working with young people in a school setting?

How would you describe your relationship with students, and how important is this relationship to you?

How about your relationships with fellow teachers? Are these relationships important to your work as a teacher?

And what about administrators? How would you describe your relationship with administrators and how has this affected your work as a teacher?

Finally, how important has your relationship with parents and the broader community been to your work as a teacher?

How has your life outside school (e.g., as a family person, a community member, a private citizen) influenced and been influenced by your work as a teacher?

In looking back at your career as a teacher, how have you changed since your earliest years in the classroom?

What have been your most rewarding experiences as a teacher? And conversely, what experiences have been the most depressing or discouraging?

Do you consider teaching a true profession? [If so] Why? What would make it a stronger profession? [If not] What would make it a profession?

Are there any other comments or observations you would like to make about your work as a teacher?

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