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Factors Influencing Teacher Satisfaction at an Online Charter School

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As K-12 online programs mature, it is increasingly important that they work to retain their effective teachers. However, there is little research that has examined teacher satisfaction in K-12 online learning environments. Our analysis of 22 interviews with 11 teachers at an online charter school identified three primary factors that influenced teacher satisfaction. First, teachers enjoyed having flexibility in when, where, and how they taught. The use of open educational resources was especially important because it enabled teachers to make modifications to meet student needs. Second, teachers were most satisfied when they were provided with time to interact individually with students. Third, teachers appeared most satisfied when their efforts positively impacted student performance. Similarly, teachers appreciated administrative support that increased teachers' capacity to impact student performance. We also discuss possible tensions that school administrators may experience as they attempt to balance these factors with other—sometimes competing—forces.

FACTORS INFLUENCING TEACHER SATISFACTION AT AN ONLINE CHARTER SCHOOL

The K-12 educational landscape is rapidly changing as online course enrollments grow and the demand for quality online teachers is especially high (Gemin, Pape, Vashaw, & Watson, 2015). However, teacher education programs have maintained their focus almost entirely on preparing teachers for traditional brick and mortar classrooms (Kennedy & Archambault, 2012). As a result, K-12 online programs are required to provide their teachers with on-the-job professional development regarding the unique challenges of teaching online (Rice & Dawley, 2009). This makes it especially important that programs retain the teachers in whom they have invested considerable time and resources. Huerta, Rice, and Shafer (2013) summarized that teacher retention is "critical to the development and success of the nascent virtual schooling industry" (p. 49).

As expected with a relatively new instructional model, researchers have focused primarily on online teacher preparation, but, as K-12 online learning becomes more established, it is increasingly important that researchers broaden their focus to include issues of teacher retention (Bolliger & Waslilk, 2009). Although teachers' reasons for leaving the profession are complex, researchers have found that it is highly influenced by teachers' level of satisfaction (Brownell & Smith, 1993; Chapman, 1983). Furthermore, teacher satisfaction can impact course quality. The Sloan Consortium (Moore, 2005) included teacher satisfaction as one of the five pillars of quality online courses because teachers are "central to quality learning" (p. 9). As a result, by failing to understanding K-12 online teacher satisfaction, we risk higher teacher attrition and lower learning outcomes.

Unfortunately, research examining online teacher satisfaction has focused largely on higher education settings. Although this research can be insightful to those examining K-12 online teacher satisfaction, differences in the environment, teaching responsibilities, and student and teacher characteristics prevent generalizations to be made. In this case study, we addressed this gap in the research by examining teacher satisfaction at a fully-online charter high school.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research examining K-12 online teacher satisfaction is limited, and results have been mixed. For instance, in an early study Kozma, Zucker, Espinoza, Young, and Yaldes (1998) found that 26 of 28 online teachers at a new virtual high school were either very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with teaching online. More recently, Hawkins, Barbour, and Graham (2012) conducted and analyzed teacher interviews at a more established state-run

virtual high school and found teachers to be generally unsatisfied teaching online. A national study conducted by Archambault and Crippen (2009) found that teacher satisfaction was somewhere in between these two extremes. Of the 482 K-12 online teachers who responded to the statement "My experience with online teaching can be described as..." (p. 376), 63% were positive, 8% were negative, and 29% were mixed.

Although research examining K-12 online teacher satisfaction is lacking, our review of the existing literature identified three primary influencers to teacher satisfaction: (1) flexibility, (2) communication and community, (3) success and support.

Teacher Flexibility

Research has indicated that teachers are most likely to be satisfied when they are provided with flexibility in what, how, when, and where they teach (Archambault & Crippen, 2009; Bolliger & Wasilik, 2009; Hawkins et al., 2012; Kozma et al., 1998; Murphy & Rodríguez-Manzanares, 2008; Smith, 2000; Velasquez, Graham, & Osguthorpe, 2013).

Flexibility in What and How They Teach

Perie and Baker (1997) found a positive correlation between face-to-face teachers' ability to design learning activities and their career satisfaction. However, in established online programs, teaching and design responsibilities are commonly performed by different individuals (Ferdig, Cavanaugh, DiPietro, Black, & Dawson, 2009; Harms, Niederhauser, Davis, Roblyer, & Gilbert, 2006). This type of division of labor can potentially make online learning more cost effective (Peters, 2007). However, Hawkins et al. (2012) found that when teachers at a large state-run virtual high school were asked to teach using pre-designed courses, they felt "fragmented and at a loss, playing just the teacher or course facilitator role as opposed to the additional roles they played in a brick-and-mortar classroom" (p.136). Kennedy, Cavanaugh, and Dawson's (2013) qualitative research examined teacher candidates' perceptions of a virtual school field placement and found that they were surprised that teachers did not design learning activities and thought that they would have more "opportunity to be creative" (p. 60).

Flexibility in When and Where They Teach

Although teachers' physical separation from students can make some aspects of teaching more time consuming, it also provides teachers with flexibility in when and where they work, which can positively impact their levels of satisfaction (Murphy & Rodríguez-Manzanarez, 2008). For instance, 18 teachers in Smith's (2000) case study reported a high degree of satisfaction with their online teaching experience due to their *anytime/anyplace*

instructional model. Archambault and Crippen (2009) also found that some teachers were drawn to the online environment because it allowed them to earn an income while still being able to "walk the dogs" and travel (p. 382). Additionally, teachers reported that their physical separation from students removed some undesirable responsibilities such as maintaining classroom discipline (Archambault & Crippen, 2009). Teachers' flexibility in space and time can also indirectly impact teachers' satisfaction because it can enable them to teach advanced or specialized courses that they have not had the opportunity to teach locally (Bolliger & Wasilik, 2009; Kozma et al., 1998). However, Velasquez et al. (2013) also described one teacher who explained that the added flexibility made it difficult to disconnect from work and find a "healthy balance in her personal life" (p. 111). As a result, *anytime/anywhere* instructional models can also decrease teacher satisfaction if teachers fail to establish boundaries between their personal and professional lives (Velasquez et al., 2013).

Communication and Community

Online teachers' ability to communicate with students and create a sense of community can impact their perceived satisfaction. Graham (2006) explained that online asynchronous communication enables higher levels of interaction than are possible in a face-to-face environment where there is limited class time for comments. Borup, Graham, and Davies (2013) found a high variance in the quantity of time online students reported interacting with their teacher and concluded that the variance was a reflection of the highly flexible learning environment that afforded teachers the ability to spend more time responding to individual students who had greater needs than more autonomous learners. Similarly, Velasquez et al. (2013) found teachers at a full-time online high school spent most of their instructional time in one-to-one interactions, which allowed them to build close caring relationships with some students. Teachers in their study also "expressed a sense of joy and satisfaction when students reacted favorably to their caring actions" (Velasquez et al., 2013. p. 110). Similarly, Archambault and Crippen (2009) also shared the following survey response: "My experience with online teaching can be described as wonderful! I love teaching online. I am able to work with students on an individual level" (p. 377).

Although there are benefits to interacting online, Murphy and Rodríguez-Manzanares (2008) found that face-to-face interactions allowed teachers to more quickly build rapport with their students than online teachers who tended to be "unaware of personal aspects of students' lives" (p. 1068). The majority of online communication is also text-based (Parsad & Lewis, 2009) and can leave participants feeling disconnected (Palloff & Pratt,

2007). Teachers at an online charter high school believed that the visual and verbal cues present in synchronous video communication allowed them to more quickly develop close relationships but found that students tended to reject their invitations to communicate via video, preferring instead to communicate via text (Valesquez et al., 2013). Synchronous communication also removes some of the flexibility that appears to be an important contributor to teacher satisfaction. Some research in higher education has indicated that asynchronous video communication can quickly foster learning communities while still maintaining the flexibility that students and teachers desire (Borup, West, & Graham, 2012; Borup, West, Thomas, & Graham, 2014). However, this phenomenon has yet to be examined in K-12 settings.

Teachers' ability to create relationships with students also appears to be somewhat dependent on their context and the instructional model used by their school. Archambault and Crippen (2009) explained that because "there are no physical constraints, such as the number of desks that would fit in a typical classroom, online teachers are being asked to take on larger numbers of students" (p. 375). For instance, Hawkins et al. (2012) examined teacher-student communication at a large virtual high school where the teacher-student ratio averaged 1:233 and found that the high student loads made it difficult for teachers to create relationships with students—resulting in a sense of teacher disconnection and dissatisfaction.

Success and Support

To have a fulfilling experience, teachers must have a sense of personal achievement on the aspects of their job that they value (Evans, 1997). This may help to explain why teacher satisfaction is related to students' final grades (Hung, Hsu, & Rice, 2012) and the professional development teachers receive (Hendriks, Luyten, Scheerens, Sleegers, & Steen, 2010; Pape, Adams, & Ribeiro, 2005). Currently few teacher education programs are working to prepare teachers for the online environment, making it difficult for them to succeed online (Kennedy & Archambault, 2012). As a result, teachers who are new to the online environment have a high need for professional development (Rice, Dawley, Gasell, & Florez, 2008). A national survey of 830 online teachers found that 87% of teachers reported receiving some sort of professional development (Dawley, Rice, & Hinck, 2010). Existing research has also found online teachers to be satisfied with the professional development that they receive (Bale, 2005; Kozma et al., 1998) and feel that it has improved their effectiveness as online teachers (Kozma et al., 1998).

However, not all teachers appear to be receiving the level of professional development they require. Archambault and Crippen (2009) noted that some teachers perceived a lack of administrator support, making their experience

with teaching online "overwhelming" (p. 378). Unfortunately, school administrators can be reluctant to provide professional development because they view online learning as a cost-saving measure (Lewis, 2011).

In summary, researchers have reported that teachers are most satisfied when provided with adequate support, time to engage in high levels of student communication, and flexibility in when, where, and how they teach. Although insightful, these conclusions are based on a limited amount of research—especially in K-12 settings—and additional research is needed in a variety of contexts to confirm or contradict our current understanding of online teacher satisfaction. This study attempted to address this research need by examining teacher satisfaction at an online charter high school.

METHODS

Setting

Research was conducted at Mountain Heights Academy (MHA), a full-time online charter high school. At the time of this research, the school was in its third year of operation with 381 students enrolled in grades 9-12 and 21 part- and full-time teachers. The majority of students (86%) took all or most of their coursework through MHA, and most of the teachers worked full-time for the school with the exception of four part-time and two adjunct teachers. Of the students enrolled at the school at the time of this research, 21% were formerly homeschooled, 15% were economically disadvantaged, and 12% were receiving special education services.

Most MHA courses were designed in-house using open educational resources (OER)—often by teachers at the school—and offered to students asynchronously with weekly assignment due dates (Tonks, Weston, Wiley, & Barbour, 2013). This allowed teachers to facilitate student collaboration and communication within their courses. In addition to their other responsibilities, MHA teachers provided students with four office hours per day where students could contact teachers and receive tutoring as needed. Teachers were encouraged to proactively contact students who needed extra attention. Each academic year began with a mandatory orientation meeting where teachers met face-to-face with students and parents. MHA then held optional monthly face-to-face academic, service, and social activities.

Data Collection and Analysis

The purpose of this case study was to understand the contributing factors to teacher satisfaction at a single online high school. Merriam (1998) explained that case studies can provide researchers with "an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved" (Merriam, 1998,

p. 19). The aim of case studies is not to achieve generalizability but to understand the case well (Patton, 1990; Stake, 2010). As a result, researchers need to set clear boundaries around the case that they are researching (Merriam, 1998).

When conducting case studies, it is important that researchers set appropriate sample sizes. Wolcott (1994) recommended that researchers resist the temptation to use their limited resources to increase the scale of their research beyond what is needed:

> I note a tendency to increase the scale, rather than the depth, whenever the question of sample size is raised among qualitative researchers. Seasoned researchers are as vulnerable as newcomers to such temptation, sometimes proposing huge multisite, multiobserver studies based on seemingly blind adherence to the maxim that more is better...a legacy from quantitative research, where a small number of cases can seriously undermine the press for generalization.

Researchers in K-12 educational environments need to balance the need to achieve saturation, or the point at which researchers identify all the major themes during the analysis, and the need to minimize the disruption their research has on the learning environment. Unfortunately, researchers have provided little research-based guidance as to how many interviews are needed before saturation occurs. One exception is Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) who conducted 60 in-depth interviews but found that the basic metathemes were identified within six interviews, and that saturation occurred after only 12 interviews. However, Bonde (2013) added, "The number of interviews it takes to reach data saturation depends on a variety of factors," and there is not a single sample size that works universally. Based on the recommendations discussed above and considerations regarding the learning environment, we conducted 22 interviews with 11 teachers —over half of the teachers at MHA.

Prior to the interviews all 21 MHA teachers were asked to use an 8-point scale (1=extremely unsatisfied and 8=extremely satisfied) to indicate their general satisfaction levels with teaching at MHA, their students, and their students' parents/guardians. Of the 21 MHA teachers, 15 completed the survey (see Table 1). It was originally our intention to use the survey responses to sample teachers with varying levels of satisfaction. However, only two participants indicated that they were unsatisfied teaching at MHA (one being "Very Unsatisfied" and the other being "Unsatisfied"). The same two teachers were also dissatisfied with their students (one being "Very Unsatisfied" and the other being "Somewhat Unsatisfied") and one was "Very

Unsatisfied" with parents. Interestingly, teachers' level of satisfaction with students and parents tended to be less than their satisfaction with teaching at MHA, indicating that teachers' satisfaction with teaching online was in part based on factors unrelated to working with students and parents.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics of Teachers' Level of Satisfaction Regarding Teaching at MHA, MHA Students, and MHA Parents

Satisfaction Target	Extremely Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Median	Mean	SD
Teaching at MHA	10	2	8	7	1.93
MHA Students	0	5	6	5.87	1.36
MHA Parents	0	4	6	5.93	1.22

Note: Using an eight-point scale (1 = extremely unsatisfied and 8 = extremely satisfied) teachers (n=15) responded to three times regarding their levels of satisfaction with teaching at MHA, their MHA students, and MHA students' parents/guardians.

Both teachers who reported that they were unsatisfied with teaching at MHA were sampled to participate in interviews. We also used purposeful sampling techniques to ensure a maximum variation of teacher experiences and perspectives (Patton, 1980). The eleven teachers sampled for interviews taught in all content areas: a special education teacher, two elective teachers, and two teachers from each of the four core content areas (English, social studies, math, and science). Of the 11 sampled teachers, nine had previous K-12 teaching experience in brick-and-mortar schools, averaging 5.8 years. Although one teacher had taught 8 years online at a community college, none had previously taught in a K-12 online setting before they started teaching at MHA. One teacher had taught online at MHA for three years, six teachers for two years, and four teachers for one year. All were certified teachers and four had earned master's degrees.

Each teacher participated in two 45-60 minute phone interviews. The interviews were conducted on different days and scheduled as close together as possible based on teacher availability. Although some of the interview questions focused specifically on teachers' satisfaction, most of the questions asked participants' to describe their experiences and feelings they had as they fulfilled their perceived roles and responsibilities. When describing their experiences, teachers naturally discussed events that positively or negatively impacted their levels of satisfaction. Interview transcripts were returned to teachers so they could be checked for accuracy. Following Glaser's (1965) recommendation, the primary author coded interview tran-

scripts into as many categories of analysis as possible while also comparing each code with the previous coding categories. These coding categories were then combined into larger themes guided by the variables previously identified in the literature while also being sensitive to new previously unidentified themes. The coauthors met following the coding of two to three teachers' interviews to review the coding, discuss the emerging themes, and resolve disagreements with the coding. Pseudonyms were used when reporting findings from the interview analysis.

FINDINGS

Despite teachers reporting a high level of overall satisfaction on the survey used to sample participants, the qualitative analysis of teacher interviews identified both positive and negative influences to teacher satisfaction. Teacher comments were organized into three themes: (1) flexibility, (2) support and success, and (3) communication and community.

Flexibility

Teacher flexibility appeared to be a major contributor to their job satisfaction. More specifically, our analysis identified two types of flexibility: flexibility in (1) when and where and (2) what and how they taught.

Flexibility in When and Where They Taught

Teachers commonly stated that teaching online and teaching face-to-face required the same amount of time but that teaching online provided them with more flexibility in when and where they worked. In fact, the desire to work in a more flexible environment appeared to be a major consideration when deciding to teach online and was an important contributor to their satisfaction. For instance, Samantha enjoyed teaching at a face-to-face school but disliked her 40-minute commute to work and found that teaching online "fit [her] better." Seven teachers were also parents of young children, and six stated that they wanted to teach online because it would allow them "to keep teaching full-time and still be at home with [their] kids." Perhaps it was not surprising that Christine, a mother of several children, stated that her "favorite part of teaching online is the flexibility" because it allowed her to balance family and work. Julia, who also had children at home, summarized this sentiment, "I love every minute of it. It's nice to be home."

Flexibility in space and time also removed some of the less desirable responsibilities that they had in face-to-face settings. For instance, Samantha remembered that when she taught in a brick-and-mortar school she had to "say the same thing until [she was] blue in the face" but online she could develop her "lessons and record them once." Teachers most commonly stat-

ed that they enjoyed no longer having to maintain classroom discipline. For instance, Lisa said that she began teaching online partly because she "was frustrated with the behavioral aspect [of teaching face-to-face] and just feeling like [she] was a glorified babysitter." Similarly when asked if there was anything that she missed about teaching face-to-face, Angela stated:

> When people ask me about teaching online, I tell them that they're going to have to either fire me or pry the computer out of my cold dead fingers before I go back to the regular classroom. I love it so much. As an online teacher I can focus on what's important. In the classroom, so much of your time is taken up with the classroom management aspect…but teaching online I can focus on what my students need and when they need help. I can focus on my curriculum, my lessons, make sure that they're the best that they can be....I don't know that I'd ever want to go back to the traditional classroom.

It is important to note that while reduced, not all aspects of behavior management were removed. For instance, Julia remembered that they "had a bit of cyberbulling that had to be squashed." MHA teachers were also asked to ensure that students were spending sufficient time on task. Rachel added that her "biggest frustration" was when students have "taken advantage of" the flexibility that is provided to them. Rachel also recognized that the same flexibility that allowed her "to be home with [her] son" made it difficult for her to hold "students accountable for certain things."

There were some costs to this flexibility and finding a good balance between work and family proved difficult for some teachers. Rachel had a baby while working at MHA and found it difficult to maintain a predictable work schedule because she was "trying to juggle" being a mom and a teacher. When asked to describe a typical day she stated:

> Basically whenever my little girl sleeps I'm at the computer emailing and tutoring and helping students and then when she's awake, I just have my phone with me during my office hours and if a student buzzes in I run to the computer and help them.

John who had older children at home also found it difficult initially to find a balance between work and family but explained that his children began "to understand better and better that when [his] headphones are on, [he is] not paying attention to them."

The flexible work schedule also made it difficult for teachers to set appropriate limitations on how much they worked. Julia explained that when you teach online "it's almost like you're available 24/7." Teachers found that they were happier once they "learned to decompress and shutdown." This required teachers to establish clear boundaries between their work and

personal lives. For instance, Angela no longer responded to text messages or emails in the evening because she found that it was "easy to let [work] soak into everything" if she did not partition off personal time. Samantha added that she did not extend her office hours even if she was in the middle of working with students because some of her students would "want to stay online with [her] all day" if she let them.

Flexibility in What and How They Taught

Although courses were designed prior to the school year using OER, teachers maintained the course content and made modifications to meet student needs. Some teachers found maintaining the course content difficult and time consuming because they had to ensure that hyperlinks and embedded videos worked properly. Despite the time costs, the flexibility to design learning activities appeared to be a major factor in teachers' satisfaction. Christine explained that "it's been really nice" to teach an online course because she could easily modify the course content, unlike the textbooks that she used in traditional settings. In fact, teachers found that MHA had developed a culture of innovation that was empowering and exciting. Rachel found that MHA was "small enough and new enough" that she was allowed to try "new things" to benefit students. John stated that developing learning activities was "one of [his] favorite parts" of his job because it was "stimulating and exciting."

Although most of the MHA courses were developed in house using OER, three teachers taught using material that was purchased by external vendors. All three teachers found that the courses were not easily modified and expressed frustration that they were unable to adapt courses to meet their students' needs. Rebecca explained, "It's frustrating because I get all of these great ideas from conferences or other teachers or whatever but I can't really implement them." Similarly, John, who taught multiple courses, stated that his "least favorite part of the day is tweaking the AP History course" because it used content that "you can't really change." Lastly, Christine stated that she was not "that thrilled" with her course because it did not meet the needs of her students, and she "didn't have a lot of control" to change it.

Communication and Community

Several teachers stated that they enjoyed teaching online because it allowed them to have more personalized communication with students than they experienced in face-to-face learning environments. The majority of these interactions occurred during teachers' four daily office hours. Teachers used their office hours to respond to student inquires and contact students who were under performing. Teachers also initiated communication with students as a way to develop relationships and trust. Although teachers commonly interacted with students using phone or video calls, the majority of their interactions occurred via instant messaging or email.

When asked what her favorite part of teaching online was, Megan stated,

"My favorite? That I get to do more one-on-one with kids. That is the reason that I like teaching in the first place." Megan explained that she was initially unsure how much she would enjoy teaching online but found that she "was pleasantly surprised" because she "didn't factor in that [she] would be able to work with kids one on one." Angela added, "I teach because I love working with high school kids, not because I love grading." Although John enjoyed grading and designing assignments, he described his "perfect day" as one where all of his grading and designing responsibilities were finished, allowing him to "interact with the students online and talk about their assignments or see how they're doing."

Stefanie especially enjoyed being able to work with students "as individuals...rather than a collective group of students in one classroom" and she was unsure if she "could ever return to teaching in a [face-to-face] classroom again." Teachers also found that they were more likely to see their students as individuals when they communicated with them regarding non-course related topics. For instance, Rebecca found that her two favorite parts of teaching online were tutoring students and "just chatting with the students just to hear what's going on."

Teachers identified drawbacks to interacting with students at a distance. Emily, a self-described "people person," disliked having to "call people cold" and wished that online interactions were "more natural." Other teachers missed "the energy" and "the synergy" of whole-class instruction. As a result, Alex attempted to use synchronous video class sessions using Adobe Connect but found that it did not "completely replicate that [face-to-face] experience." Similarly, Megan missed "the thrill" of teaching in front of a classroom but disliked having to present the same material multiple times because presenting something for "the seventh time is not so thrilling." Rachel also missed the "classroom interaction" in a face-to-face school but found that her time was better utilized at MHA, and she could "spend a lot more time communicating with students and with the parents."

Teachers also expressed frustration when students would not respond to their emails or chat requests. Christine explained, "It can be frustrating if I can just never get a hold of anybody." Angela added that in a face-to-face setting she would have students who disengaged but "in a traditional school you can at least see the kid every day." Angela further summarized the highs and lows of student communication when she said, "My favorite thing is the one-on-one interactions [with students]...The thing I like the least is trying to track down my students who do nothing."

Support and Success

Teachers found that the nature of teaching online required them to develop new skills. Although difficult, the opportunity to develop professionally appeared to increase teachers' satisfaction. Angela felt like she was "a better teacher online" than she was in a face-to-face school, and Rachel stated that if she were to return to a face-to-face school, she would be "a much better teacher and much more well-rounded." Samantha added that at MHA she was "seeing an entirely different way of teaching and seeing the success that it can have and also the struggles that come with it." As a result, she stated, "I just feel more successful now than I have in the last couple of years of classroom teaching so I'm pretty happy with it...and I'm pretty excited to be part of it." Stephanie expressed a similar sentiment, "I love this school so much. Honestly, I have never been so proud to be part of a school as I am this one."

Much of this pride and satisfaction stemmed from seeing student success. For instance, when asked how she recognizes her personal success as a teacher, Lisa stated, "By seeing how well my students are doing." Samantha also shared an experience when she felt successful.

> We just did 4-5 problems together and she wrote back and said, "I feel silly that I didn't understand this! It totally makes sense now. Thanks so much for spending time." I was like, "Cool! Success. I had success! Yay!"

John enjoyed grading student work because, "It's really neat to see the kids start to get really passionate about [their work]." The inverse was also true and teachers became frustrated when students failed. Megan stated that "the hardest thing with online teaching" is seeing a student fail. Similarly, when asked what she liked the least about teaching online Samantha said, "I would say having to confront parents or students when there is just no way that they are going to pass. I kind of put it on par with a manager having to fire an employee."

While teachers enjoyed working in an innovative environment, it was not easy. Alex summarized this sentiment when she said, "It is really exciting even through it is excruciatingly difficult." For some teachers the most challenging part was learning the technology. Christine stated that she "didn't go to school to become a computer teacher" and that her "least favorite part [of her job] is the ever-changing technology" because just when she would "figure out something . . . they change it." However, Christine also found that the school administrators recognized teachers' need to learn technology and were "really good about trying to help [teachers] with in-service [training]."

Administrators also tried to support teachers by using a 24-hour technological support system. Speaking for the MHA teachers, Rachel explained that the technological support "has made our lives much easier and much better."

DISCUSSION

In this section, we discuss the implications for research followed by implications for practice.

Research Implications

Teacher survey respondents tended to be highly satisfied with teaching online, with the exception of two of the 15 survey respondents. This supports Kozma et al.'s (1998) earlier survey research that found teachers to also be highly satisfied. However, it is important to note that both case studies were conducted in relatively new programs, and teacher satisfaction may change over time. Similar to Archambault and Crippen's (2009) survey research, our analysis of teacher interviews identified several contributors and detractors to online teacher satisfaction. When comparing teaching online to teaching face-to-face, one teacher summarized, "There are pros and cons I think for both situations."

By transitioning from face-to-face to online teaching, those with young children enjoyed more time with their family. Other teachers appreciated that they did not have to commute to work and had flexibility on the times of day that they worked. This confirms previous research indicating that flexibility in when and where they teach can be a determining factor in teachers' decision to teach online (Smith, 2000; Archambault & Crippen, 2009).

Teachers also commonly stated that their favorite part of teaching online was their ability to have more one-on-one communication with students than was possible in face-to-face classrooms. Inversely, teachers became frustrated when students rejected their attempts to communicate with them. Noddings (1998, 2005) explained that when teachers provide students with caring interactions and those actions are received and acknowledged by students, the natural byproduct is joy. It may also be true that frustration is the natural byproduct when students ignore or reject teachers' attempts to provide them with caring interactions. This is supported by Litke (1998) who found that unresponsive students caused "intense frustration" for teachers. Parents have expressed similar frustrations when students are unresponsive to their efforts (Borup, Stevens, & Hasler Waters, 2015; Sorensen, 2012), and greater outcomes may be achieved when teachers and parents support each other in their efforts (Borup, West, Graham, & Davies, 2014; Hasler Waters, Menchaca, & Borup, 2014).

Teachers' satisfaction also appeared to increase when they received administrative support. Similar to Archambault and Crippen (2009), we found that MHA teachers were more confident in their knowledge of the course content than in their technological knowledge. Hillman, Willis, and Gunawardena (1994) stated that when students lacked the required technological skills, they could not fully participate in online courses. Our research suggests that the same could be said for teachers—teachers who lack technological skills may not be able to effectively teach online, making it difficult for them to have a fulfilling experience. As a result, administrators should take care to provide the technological support teachers and students require.

Although these results should be understood within the research context and are not generalizable, "insights gleaned from case studies can directly influence policy, practice, and future research" (Merriam, 1998, p. 19). We also agree with the editors of *Educational Technology Research and Development* who recently argued for more replication studies (Spector, Johnson, & Young, 2015), and we recommend that future researchers work to replicate this research in varying settings. Researchers should also work to move beyond replication studies by triangulating these findings with additional types of data from varying stakeholders such as students and administrators. Furthermore, important insights could be obtained from those who have left the online teaching profession. Lastly, there does not exist a validated instrument to measure K-12 online teacher satisfaction similar to those developed in higher education environments (Bolliger & Wasilik, 2009). These qualitative findings may help to inform those who seek to create one.

Implications for Practice

We anticipate that administrators and policy makers will experience tensions as they attempt to balance teacher satisfaction with other—sometimes competing—forces. For instance, Harms et al. (2006) described one potentially cost-saving model of online learning where a designer creates the course, a teacher then tutors and assesses students' skills and understanding, and a facilitator manages motivational, procedural, and social issues. This model can be especially cost effective because teachers can spend a larger portion of their time tutoring and assessing students, and part-time employees can fulfill the designing and facilitating roles (Staker, 2011). However, this model can also negatively impact teacher satisfaction because it reduces teachers' personal contact with students and their ability to modify the content to meet student needs. For instance, Hawkins et al. (2012) examined one virtual high school that implemented a model similar to that proposed by Harms et al. (2006) and found that interviewed teachers

were generally dissatisfied and "viewed themselves primarily as graders" (p. 135). Researchers should work with administrators to develop cost-effective instructional models that still allow teachers a satisfying level of personal interaction with students.

Administrators may also experience tension between allowing teachers to modify course content and maintaining course quality and standardization. The majority of teachers we interviewed had the flexibility to modify their course content, which appeared to positively impact their satisfaction. In part, this flexibility appeared to be a result of the schools' dedication to developing courses using OER that could then be revised, remixed, reused, and redistributed by others (Tonks et al., 2013). Tonks et al. (2013) explained that when courses are built using OER it empowers teachers and staff to quickly act when they identify redundant or irrelevant information. However, when teachers are provided the ability to modify their course, administrators lose some control over their ability to standardize course activities and content. Lee, Dickerson, and Winslow (2012) added that a fully autonomous design approach can be popular with teachers but can confuse students who are exposed to several different designs. This approach reduces administrators' ability to ensure course quality, possibly raising issues during external reviews and audits (Lee et al., 2012). Administrators may choose to disable editing to some aspects of the course while also providing teachers the ability to modify or create lower-stakes assessments and learning activities.

Lastly, administrators may perceive a tension between providing teachers with flexibility in when and where they teach and also ensuring that teachers maintain a regular work schedule. For instance, one teacher who had a newborn found that her family responsibilities encroached on her work schedule. Although administrators may worry about the productivity of teachers who work from home, previous research has indicated that the benefits outweigh the risks. For instance, Tustin's (2014) survey research at a university reported that, while administrators agreed that "not all academics are suitable for telecommuting" (p. 204), they believed that in general telecommuting resulted in more dedicated employees. This perception was supported by Meyer (2012) who found that teaching online could increase faculty productivity. In fact, teachers more often expressed that teaching online proved challenging because they felt as if they were "available 24/7" and that it took them time to establish boundaries to protect their personal lives. As a result, administrators should work to provide teachers with guidelines to help ensure that teachers maintain appropriate balance between a productive teaching schedule and healthy family life.

CONCLUSION

K-12 online student populations have grown dramatically in the last decade and programs have struggled to prepare qualified online teachers at a pace that matches the growing demand (Kennedy & Archambault, 2012). Although there is a growing body of research focusing on preparing quality K-12 online teachers, additional research is needed focusing on factors related to retaining online teachers once they have been prepared. This case study examined factors that impacted teacher satisfaction at an online charter high school. Our analysis of teacher interviews identified three primary factors that influenced teacher satisfaction: (1) flexibility in when, where, and how they teach, (2) personal communication with students, and (3) receiving adequate administrative support and feeling as if they were successful. These findings should be understood within this research context and should not be generalized. However, this research provides insights that may prove helpful to administrators and researchers.

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