



## **Pursuing Happiness and Fulfillment at Work**

### **The Lived Experiences of Teacher Educators in the United States and India**

**Shelley Fairbairn & Catherine Wilson Gillespie**

#### **Abstract**

This international comparative qualitative study builds on prior research into the lived experiences of teacher educators in the United States and India. This study focuses on the ways in which faculty in both contexts engage in Feed My Soul activities. Ten participants from each country were interviewed to better understand what kinds of activities enhanced their happiness with and fulfillment in their work. Data revealed two themes for both sets of participants: being true to yourself and making an impact. A third theme emerged only for Indian participants: connection with students. The common themes across participants in both settings are captured in a quadrant model, using being true to yourself and making an impact as the two axes. Teacher educators tended to be satisfied, happy, and/or fulfilled when they were practicing both being true to yourself and making an impact.

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## **Introduction**

Research has revealed that some teacher educators<sup>1</sup> who are university faculty members perceive that they are “second-class citizens” on college and university campuses in the United States (Olsen & Buchanan, 2017). This would be less of a concern if teacher educators experienced high levels of job satisfaction or if they reported that they were very happy and fulfilled in their work. However, the profession of teacher education is ill defined, both within and across contexts (Lunenberg & Hamilton, 2008), which may contribute to lower levels of job satisfaction among teacher educators. The current study focuses on the positive side of teacher educators’ job satisfaction by exploring what feeds teacher educators’ souls.

The following review of related literature starts broadly with research in happiness and fulfillment in higher education and then segues to job satisfaction among school teachers (the field in which university-level teacher educators started) and also job satisfaction among university faculty generally. In addition, literature on identity development, which is one specific but particularly complicated component of teacher educators’ happiness, is reviewed.

## **Happiness and Fulfillment in Higher Education**

Happiness is an understudied but important area in higher education. As a construct, happiness includes job satisfaction and overlaps in a variety of ways with flourishing, contentment, and well-being (Elwick & Cannizzaro, 2017). Conducting research in these areas and promoting a happiness agenda in higher education would benefit faculty and staff (Lee, 2011), as well as university students (Bourner & Rospigliosi, 2014), as is the focus of the present study.

University faculty are notoriously unhappy, possibly because they do not always experience Pink’s (2009) three intrinsic motivation criteria of autonomy, mastery, and purpose, or possibly because they do not have consistent opportunities for fully absorbing creative flow experiences as described by Csikszentmihalyi (1996). Supporting this line of thinking, Duncan et al. (2015) found among Australian university faculty members “a strong positive relationship between the proportion of their days spent on research and the happiness of these academics and a strong, negative relationship between the fragmentation of an academic’s day and their happiness” (p. 10). When these Australian academics were happiest, they were able to concentrate on creative work and were not pulled away from that work by other faculty responsibilities. An entire book has been written regarding university faculty achievement and fulfillment in the area of medicine (Roberts, 2013), but this topic has not been addressed for university faculty in the area of teacher education as of this writing, a gap that the present study aims to fill.

## **Job Satisfaction Among Schoolteachers**

Although teaching at any level can be a rewarding career, teaching children can be particularly stressful, which can lead to burnout, and burnout has a negative relationship with job satisfaction. Defining *burnout* as emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment at work, Yorulmaz et al. (2017) conducted a meta-analysis of 29 studies of schoolteachers in Turkey. Results indicate a medium negative relationship between job satisfaction and emotional exhaustion and also a medium negative relationship between job satisfaction and reduced personal accomplishment. Depersonalization yielded a low negative relationship with job satisfaction. Interestingly, the strength of these relationships was most pronounced when teachers were assigned to younger children, with the strongest negative relationships found among preschool teachers.

In another study of schoolteacher job satisfaction, Perera et al. (2018) categorized teachers into the personality types of (a) vulnerable-rigid, (b) ordinary, (c) well adjusted, and (d) excitable to determine which personality type was more likely to experience job satisfaction. The researchers found that although self-efficacy did not fluctuate by personality type, job satisfaction did vary, with excitable teachers experiencing the lowest levels of job satisfaction, followed by ordinary teachers, rigid teachers, and well-adjusted teachers. Counterintuitively, the personality profiles of the excitable and well-adjusted teachers were very similar, with the major differences being that the excitable teachers had higher levels of neuroticism (sensitivity and nervousness, according to the Big Five personality assessment used in the Perera et al., 2018, study) and lower levels of extraversion than the well-adjusted teachers. The teachers who appeared to have very different personalities were the vulnerable-rigid teachers, but they did not report especially low job satisfaction. How teachers enhance their own job satisfaction, happiness, or fulfillment was not fully addressed by either of these studies. However, it can be concluded that lower levels of emotional exhaustion and higher levels of personal accomplishment at work (Yorulmaz et al., 2017), as well as a more well-adjusted personality style, particularly including less neuroticism and more extraversion (Perera et al., 2018), would likely contribute to higher levels of job satisfaction among schoolteachers.

## **Job Satisfaction Among University Faculty**

Teaching at the university level is probably less stressful than teaching younger children, and job satisfaction among university faculty is higher than it is among PK–12 teachers, owing in part to the higher degree of autonomy and professional identity many university faculty members enjoy (Mudrak et al., 2018). Gender differences have not been found regarding job satisfaction among university faculty in the two contexts for the present study: the United States (Webber & Rogers, 2018) and India (Qazi & Kaur, 2017).

To understand contributors to university faculty members' relatively high levels

of job satisfaction, reference to Hagedorn's (2000) conceptual framework of faculty job satisfaction is useful. The Job Satisfaction Continuum ranges from disengagement at the low end to acceptance/tolerance at the middle and culminates in appreciation of the job and active engagement in work at the high end. Motivators for faculty identified in Hagedorn's model included achievement, recognition, work itself, responsibility, advancement, and salary, which are all external in nature. Identified environmental conditions, obviously external, consisted of collegial relationships, student quality or relationships, administration, and institutional climate or culture. Another useful framework is the Job Demands-Resources model, employed by Mudrak et al. (2018) to explain more than 60% of the variance in job satisfaction among university faculty through the dual and primarily external pathways of (a) job resources/stress, including influence over work and support from a supervisor (which explained 46% of the variance in job satisfaction), and (b) job demands/work engagement, including quantitative demands, work-family conflicts, and job insecurity (which explained 20% of the variance in job satisfaction), among a sample of 2,071 Czech university faculty, 40% of whom were women.

When Webber and Rogers (2018) surveyed 3,000 tenured and tenure-track university faculty members (38% of whom were women) from 100 U.S. colleges and universities, they found that the largest percentage of both men and women university faculty expressed that they were satisfied with their jobs, their departments, and their institutions. Gender differences were apparent regarding lower salaries, lower rates of tenure, and less participation in STEM-related disciplines among women but not regarding overall job satisfaction levels. Qazi and Kaur (2017) surveyed 368 university faculty members at public and private universities in India, more than half of whom (52%) were women. No gender differences were found in the relationship between organizational culture and job satisfaction, although university faculty at private institutions reported higher job satisfaction than those at public (government) universities, as did those who had earned PhDs compared to those who had not earned PhDs.

Different from the literature reviewed regarding schoolteachers, it seems clear why university faculty have relatively higher levels of job satisfaction, happiness, or fulfillment. Hagedorn's (2000) motivators of achievement, recognition, work itself, and responsibility are all external factors that are readily available to university faculty, even though advancement and salary are sometimes harder to achieve. Teacher educators, however, are a small subset of university faculty, and they experience very particular backgrounds and challenges. Their job satisfaction is important to study from the perspective of external provision of resources but also from an internal experience perspective. To fill the gap in the literature regarding internal factors that influence the happiness and fulfillment of teacher educators, the current study focuses on internal aspects of their job satisfaction.

## **Identity Development**

The identity development of schoolteachers starts early, sometimes at a very young age, but at least by the time they begin their teacher education preparation programs (Friesen & Besley, 2013). Teacher education students' personal and professional identity development can happen in a parallel and overlapping manner, as teacher education students are often in late adolescence or early adulthood and are therefore still solidifying their personal identities. Sometimes the process of professional identity development means letting go of mistaken childhood notions of what it means to be a teacher, as one begins to experience what it is like to take on the teacher role. Different from PK–12 teachers, almost nobody sets their sights at a very young age on becoming a teacher educator, as this profession only becomes visible to most people when they enroll in teacher education coursework.

As university faculty members, teacher educators are in a special position because they have usually already had one career and identity as a schoolteacher and are now teaching others to teach in PK–12 schools. Teacher educators model their profession in a way that is remarkably similar to field experience, even though it is in the university classroom. They also frequently supervise their students in PK–12 fieldwork and engage in their own scholarship, which may also be conducted in PK–12 schools. This unusual situation brought about a research focus in the area of teacher educator identity development (Ducharme, 1993; Ducharme & Ducharme, 1996; Lunenberg & Hamilton, 2008). The *two-worlds paradox* describes how the world of the university and the world of PK–12 schools pull in different directions for the loyalty of teacher educators (Olsen & Buchanan, 2017):

That first pull—toward schools and communities—satisfies teacher educators' desire to effect tangible change for students yet lowers their status in the eyes of the university. That second pull—for acceptance, promotion, and resources in the university—offers them status and job security but nudges them away from a focus on local schools. (pp. 11–12)

Olsen and Buchanan (2017) reframed the two-worlds paradox into one holistic contextual system of its own they named the *world of the teacher educator*. Nonetheless, this world was “marked by a kind of low-grade constant tug-of-war in which competing epistemologies, educational goals, and roles often pulled teacher educators in noncomplementary directions” (p. 24), so the challenge remained the same despite their reframing.

The tensions that teacher educators experience regarding their professional identities can impact their job satisfaction. Although external measures, such as resources and environmental conditions, can improve job satisfaction, the internal experience of job satisfaction includes both internal and external inputs. The current study focuses on the internal experiences of job satisfaction, which we call Feeding One's Soul, based on a previous research study by the authors, described later. These inputs combine to help teacher educators feel satisfied, fed, or well-fed.

Satisfied teacher educators are more likely to be engaged in their work, both excited to contribute to the field of teacher education and more intrinsically motivated to teach, research, and give service to their universities and their students. This establishes the importance of this study.

In a recent international comparative study, Gillespie and Fairbairn (2019) interviewed seven teacher education faculty members in the United States and another seven teacher educators in India regarding how they negotiated policy changes. One of their findings was a strategy employed by their participants that the researchers named Feed My Soul, which was “more related to personal identity that underlay or paralleled professional identity and collaborative and organizational strategies” (p. 9) and included yoga, meditation, painting, and music among the participants in India and making time for family, exercise, and vacations away from work for the U.S. participants. Feed My Soul fit under the category of how faculty members sought to maintain work–life balance and emotional well-being and reflected an internal locus of control.

Feeding one’s soul can be thought of as a type of self-care. The notion of self-care has been addressed by bringing yoga into schools (Hyde, 2012), wherein professional development for teachers was reconceived as professional empowerment. Self-care is also starting to be addressed among university faculty, with arguments for radical self-care in the academy among faculty women of color (Nicol & Yee, 2017):

“Radical self-care” involves embracing practices that keep us physically and psychologically healthy and fit, making time to reflect on what matters to us, challenging ourselves to grow, and checking ourselves to ensure that what we are doing aligns with what matters to us. We consider this self-care “radical” because it fundamentally alters how we make choices about allocating time, money, and energy for ourselves personally, at home, and at work and seeks to revolutionize our workplace practices. (p. 132)

The combination of these research findings across national boundaries and time begs the following question: How do teacher educators in the 2020s find satisfaction, or, even better, happiness and fulfillment, in their work, despite all the challenges? More specifically, how do teacher educators feed their souls? The present study aims to partly fill this gap in the research literature by investigating the construct of feeding one’s soul among teacher educators.

## **Method**

This study focuses on one primary research question: How do teacher educators in the United States and India feed their souls?

### ***Comparative Case Study***

To answer the research question, teacher educators in Iowa, United States, and Delhi, India, were interviewed using a comparative case study approach (Crossley

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& Vulliamy, 1984). Most interviews of Iowa participants were conducted before the participants from India were interviewed, using purposive sampling (Maxwell, 2013); those who participated in the Gillespie and Fairbairn (2019) study were the first invited to participate in the current study in both Iowa and India. Additional participants were recruited from the same institutions as the previous participants via email from the researchers in Iowa and via invitation from previous study participants in India. Some of the original participants were more detailed in their responses, possibly because they were more comfortable with the researchers. However, the responses of the original participants and those who only participated in the present study were not substantively different. All interested participants were included. After signing institutional review board–approved consent forms, teacher educators in both settings participated in semistructured interviews (Wengraf, 2001). Data were coded following guidance by Strauss and Corbin (1990).

### **Researcher Positionality**

Both researchers are white female tenured teacher educators who were born in the United States, neither of whom are of Indian descent. The first author had been to India decades previously, while the second author’s initial experience in India was during the data collection for the study on which the present study is built. They were interested in participants’ answers in both settings, engaging in the interviews without expectations for or judgment of their responses.

### **Participants and Settings**

The researchers are most familiar with the educational system in the United States and were interested in an international comparative study from a different culture. India offers a historically British educational system and culturally different context with the convenience of being English speaking. Furthermore, both sites were used in the previous study. Participants in both settings were varied in age and amount of experience in higher education. Specific questions regarding tenure status were not asked.

**Iowa.** Ten teacher educators were recruited from the state of Iowa in the United States. Three female teacher educators were from small, private institutions of higher education, whereas five women and two men were from a state university. All these participants were full-time, tenure-track, or clinical faculty at their respective institutions. All these faculty were engaged in teaching, with three (Walter, Angela, and Colleen) also serving in administrative roles. These study participants were interviewed in the location of their choice (their office building or a local coffee shop), with one interviewed virtually due to the constraints of COVID-19.

**Delhi.** Ten teacher educators were also recruited from a single public institution of higher education in Delhi, India. Nine of these participants were female, and one was male. Four were professors in graduate programs, with the remaining

6 teaching in undergraduate teacher education programs, and all 10 were full-time faculty whose primary responsibility was teaching, as opposed to administration. These participants were interviewed either in their offices or in a staff room.

### **Procedure**

Participants were asked a series of 12 interview questions (see the Appendix) in single interviews that were designed to reveal their Feed My Soul practices and were facilitated by both researchers. All interviews in Iowa, except one, and all interviews in India were conducted in face-to-face format, and the faculty interviewed were from institutions of higher education different from the researchers. One researcher asked the questions, while the other took notes on participants' responses. Furthermore, interviews were recorded and later transcribed using the Temi.com website. The transcriptions were corrected by the two researchers and a student research assistant from their institution prior to analysis. Both researchers participated fully in both the procedures and the analysis process.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis began informally as interviews were conducted, when the researchers discussed the notes taken during each semistructured interview. The formal data analysis began after the initial set of nine Iowa interviews was conducted, using NVivo software. The two researchers analyzed each transcript collaboratively, engaging in an iterative process of open, axial coding. Through constant comparative analysis, 20 codes were developed: advocacy, balance, being fascinated/interested, being true to yourself, collaboration, connection with students, credit appreciation, field participation, health, impact/making a difference, lifelong learning, luxury of choice/privilege, meaning/purpose, modeling teaching, passion, prioritization, reflection, self-care, take a break/get away, and being supportive/helpful. Data from within these codes were then reviewed, and the six codes that encapsulated the largest proportion of the data (by case) were then developed for further review (see Table 1). The data within each of these six codes (being true to yourself [19 participants]; impact/making a difference [17 participants]; passion [14 participants]; and collaboration, connection to students, and self-care [each with 11 participants]) were then analyzed further to determine themes within the codes. This analysis revealed the interrelationships among the data, ultimately resulting in three major themes (impact, being true to yourself, and connection with students), with several subthemes.

### **Results**

Two themes emerged from the interviews of the 10 U.S. participants, and three themes emerged from the 10 Indian participants (see Table 2).

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**Being True to Yourself**

Nineteen of the 20 participants stated that being true to yourself is a crucial aspect of feeding your soul. For all these participants, being true to yourself included

**Table 1**  
**Details of Coding to Intermediate Categories Process**

<i>Intermediate category</i>	<i>Original codes</i>
Being True to Yourself	Being true to yourself Credit appreciation Meaning/purpose Prioritization Reflection
Impact/Making a Difference	Advocacy Impact/making a difference Supportive/helpful
Passion	Being fascinated/interested Field participation Lifelong learning Modeling teaching Passion
Connection to Students	Connection to students
Self-Care	Balance Health Self-care Take a break/get away
Collaboration	Collaboration

**Table 2**  
**Summary of Feed My Soul Themes and Subthemes**

<i>Theme</i>	<i>U.S. Subthemes</i>	<i>Indian Subthemes</i>
Being true to yourself	Alignment/congruence Self-care pursuits outside of work	Alignment/congruence Self-care pursuits outside of work Autonomy <sup>a</sup>
Making an impact	Making a difference Passion for preparing effective and balanced teachers	Making a difference Passion for preparing effective and balanced teachers
Connection to students	–	Connections within class Connections outside of class

<sup>a</sup>India only.

the subthemes of alignment/congruence and self-care pursuits outside work. Additionally, for participants in India, this theme included the subtheme of autonomy.

**Alignment/Congruence.** For some study participants, being true to yourself meant alignment/congruence with doing what they loved. Mita declared, “I feel lucky I can reach the people and what I want to convey, like my research area is the metacognition in which we are talking about thinking about thinking. So, it’s self-fulfilling.” Similarly, Eleanor found their work to be self-fulfilling, going so far as to argue, “If you don’t love doing this particular work, then you shouldn’t be doing it.”

For Cyndi and Tamaana, reflecting on their professional identities spoke to alignment/congruence. Cyndi disclosed that “so much of my identity is wrapped up in teaching,” while Tamaana expounded from a more reflective perspective. They explained:

When I stand in front of the mirror, it’s not about what I’m showing to the world, but when I reflect and I see myself, I should be able to be honest to myself and not regret having lived the kind of life that I’ve lived. So, I feel that if I’m able to achieve that, my professional life becomes automatically a little better. . . . It’s like a consequence, if I’m at ease, then I’m also at ease professionally, but it’s more inside than with engaging with others.

Tamaana captured the complexities of protecting one’s own professional identity.

Colleen and Yogi both emphasized the internal aspects of alignment/congruence as more important than external acknowledgment or reward. Yogi articulated, “Those internal factors of happiness are much more important than these external factors. So, when you write an article, even if you don’t get any appreciation from anybody . . . you get that satisfaction.”

Colleen took this concept a step further by asserting the value of pushing back on externally defined expectations like tenure and promotion expectations. They stated, “I think we live in institutions where structures are created and value is defined for us and we must, to remain vital, try to push back on the values people and institutions impose on us.” This statement illuminates the direct conflicts between Colleen’s desire to serve marginalized communities and external research expectations for promotion.

**Self-Care Pursuits Outside of Work.** Participants described a variety of self-care pursuits outside work. For instance, Francine talked about spending time in nature, while Paula always had several things to read. Penny enjoyed a variety of activities and commented that “diversify[ing] my investment in my own life is an important part of what I do.” Walter and Tamaana spoke about the impact of self-care practices on their work as teacher educators. Walter stated, “I think that when I’m feeling better, I’m working better,” while Tamaana reflected that “if you’re not at peace with yourself, invariably you end up not being at peace with others.” Mita and Falguni specifically addressed the positive impact of meditation on their lives. Mita expressed, “I do meditation and . . . I listen to music also,” while Falguni talked

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about the need to focus on a daily basis. They wondered how their teaching can be of value to their students, going on to state that meditating helped them answer this question.

**Autonomy.** As part of being true to yourself, the subtheme of autonomy emerged among the participants in India, but not among the U.S. participants until member checking. Freedom within their roles as teacher educators was mentioned several times. For instance, Jiva noted, “This course has given me a lot of freedom to validate my beliefs and practices.” They added that “there’s a lot of scope to innovate [and] to experiment.” Meena provided the example of starting a newsletter as something that they were given the autonomy to undertake. Ramya valued the effects of autonomy in their teaching, stating,

Every year you can’t do the same things, I feel. And for that I feel that my own thoughts with myself are very, very precious to me because it helps me make some changes in whatever I am doing. And that brings freshness and gives me more challenges on how to do and what to do in my teaching.

Ganika continued, “I love this whole idea of being in your own profession and being able to carve out, as I said, that you can have your own courses to design anything, have your own approach to what you want to do.”

To summarize, this first larger theme of being true to yourself was represented across both contexts with two subthemes: alignment/congruence and self-care pursuits outside work, while the subtheme of autonomy arose only among the participants from India. Being true to yourself captures the internal aspect of Feeding My Soul, whereas the second major theme, making an impact, is more externally focused.

### ***Making an Impact***

Among all participants, the theme of making an impact included the two subthemes of making a difference and passion for preparing effective and balanced teachers.

**Making a Difference.** Making a difference was viewed as a cliché that reflected reality among participants from the United States, whereas those from India spoke about the same concept in different terms. Walter summarized this view, asserting, “I think feeding my soul means, you know, finding fulfillment and satisfaction from the work that I’m doing. Like, to be cliché, the work is making a difference.” Penny discussed the value of seeing growth in students: “We do get some students who come into our program who are not ready, for the classroom and, you know what? I actually feel OK when they leave the program.” Colleen emphasized that internal rewards are more important than external ones; “I feel like I’m making a difference, which is what keeps me going [to a community education site], even if I don’t get the recognition.”

From the Indian perspective, making a difference was viewed in a variety of

ways, including bringing value to one's students, giving back to society, and engaging with other scholars. Shanta pointed out that "you have to stay happy because if you're not happy doing whatever you're doing, eventually all the efforts that you're putting in goes [to] waste. So . . . it really makes no impact."

***Passion for Preparing Effective and Balanced Teachers.*** The U.S. participants had a strong focus on preparing effective teachers, in part so that those teachers could positively impact their students. Paula asserted, "I would hope at least that the impact is that I'm becoming a better teacher as I go, that I'm becoming a better person as I go along, and that I'm more responsive to my students' needs."

The teacher educators from India offered a more holistic perspective on teacher preparation to include other aspects of their personal and professional lives. Mita believed that "working on the academic things like a one-to-one talk if they are finding some difficulties in their learning process or understanding the things around them" was beneficial, going on to say, "I'm really happy, and my impact, I can say it's high that way." In terms of professional significance, Jiva remarked that seeing "students leading in various organizations and [taking on] these different roles" served as a mechanism to feed their soul.

### **Connection to Students**

This theme emerged among the participants in India, though not among the participants in the United States. Virendra was particularly focused on this connection, with reference to the work of Martin Buber, stating, "It's relational, so if those decisions and those choices of . . . my scholars . . . got better, it gives me happiness." Virendra's view of the essential nature of dialogue informed this position. Virendra and others referred more specifically to connections within class, as well as connections outside class.

***Connections Within Classrooms.*** Indian participants viewed rapport within the classroom as an important aspect of the classroom experience. Jiva offered, "Feed[ing] my soul for me as a teacher is my level of satisfaction in terms of how effectively I'm able to connect with my students." Meena explained, "It's always working for students and also working with students." Shanta explicitly referenced feedback from students in stating that "feed my soul would be the happiness that I get when I see that my students are relating to something or when you see their eyes, you know, when they lit up [and] actually understood something and I think, 'wow, this is fantastic.'"

***Connections Outside Classrooms.*** The Indian participants also discussed the value of interaction with students outside of class. For example, Virendra created a volleyball team for residential students to engage in during the evenings. Shanta shared their positive experiences of connection, stating that "they will be our stu-

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dents, then they get married and we get involved, their families also. So, the amount of emotional connection that we have with our learners, I don't think there is any other job like it." However, Tamaana pointed out the burden of these connections:

I think in terms of engagement with students, we automatically become semi-mentors, counselors. And I think it is part of our role profile, particularly with the kind of setup that we are living in. . . . I'm not sure if it was another country or another context, I may not be required to do it as much, but I tend to know a great detail about what's happening in my student's family. Like for instance, so I know whose grandmother was hospitalized.

This sort of connection was a burden for Tamaana, and possibly others, owing in part to the large number of students in some classes. Furthermore, for Tamaana, the attempt to make connections to so many students led to exhaustion, because of Tamaana's inability to "switch off." However, for some Indian participants, these connections were more positive.

#### ***What Happens If Faculty Do Not Feed Their Souls***

Teacher education faculty members in the United States and India answered the interview question about the impact of not feeding their souls with passion and a wide range of responses. Participants shared a mixture of anger and sadness that revealed that when they do not feed their souls, they are unable to bring their whole selves to work. For instance, mentioned were the varying challenges of stress, frustration, resentment, burnout, cynicism, lack of fulfillment, negative health impacts, feeling drained, boredom, disaster, sense of impoverishment, lethargy, and restlessness. Jiva captured the negative impacts of not feeding one's soul when they asserted, "It kills you. It kills you. It makes me very, very, very depressed."

#### ***Summary of Results***

Two main themes emerged for all participants: being true to yourself and making an impact. Each of these was broken into subthemes: alignment/congruence and self-care pursuits outside of work for being true to yourself and making a difference and passion for preparing effective and balanced teachers for making an impact. Within being true to yourself, one subtheme developed only for Indian participants: autonomy. A third main theme arose in the data for the participants from India, connection to students, with subthemes related to connections within class and outside of class. Participants from both contexts spoke in strong negative terms about the impact of not feeding one's soul.

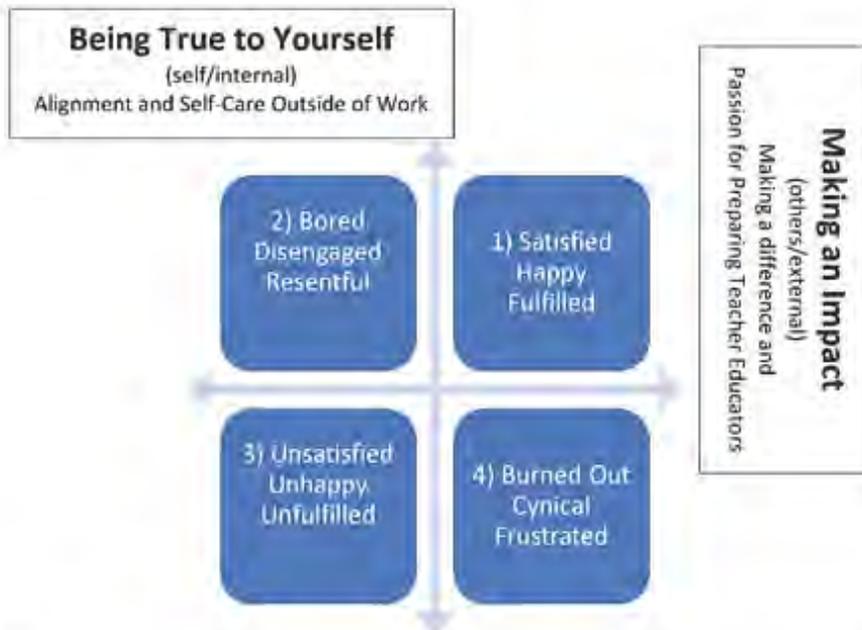
Focusing on the two themes that were revealed in the data from both the American and the Indian participants, Figure 1 depicts the relationship of the intersection of those themes. We utilize research and commonly used language (satisfied/unsatisfied, happy/unhappy, fulfilled/unfulfilled) along with language taken directly from

our participants (bored, disengaged, resentful, burned out, cynical, and frustrated) to flesh out the lived experiences of individuals in four quadrants.

Using this quadrant model, we observe that teacher educators could be high or low on being true to yourself and also high or low on making an impact, resulting in four quadrants where individual teacher education faculty might find themselves. Too much self/internal activity on being true to yourself without enough other/external focus on making an impact risks the results of boredom, disengagement, and resentment. Similarly, too much other/external activity without enough self/internal focus risks the results of burnout, cynicism, and frustration. When teacher education faculty members are low on both being true to yourself and making an impact, they are likely to be unsatisfied, unhappy, and unfulfilled, whereas if they have found a good balance and are being true to themselves as well as feeling like they are making an impact, they are likely to be satisfied, happy, and fulfilled.

Our results show that the experiences of teacher educators fluctuate throughout their careers, as participants reported having been in different quadrants represented in Figure 1 at different times in their lives. The subtheme of alignment/congruence played a dominant role in the theme of being true to yourself, while making a difference was the dominant subtheme in making an impact. The action of being true

**Figure 1**  
**Feeding Teacher Educators' Souls in the United States and India**



to oneself is predominantly internal, whereas making an impact focuses on external activity. They are complementary components of maintaining personal well-being.

## **Discussion**

Despite the rigors of academia and the challenges of job satisfaction and fulfillment among faculty, the participants in this study reported multiple activities that they employed to feed their souls. Furthermore, they clarified that these activities were energizing to them as teacher educators. In addition, feeding their souls enabled these teacher educators to engage with their colleagues and students, preventing stress and burnout.

### ***Ties to Conceptual Research Literature***

The findings of the current study are consistent with and also extend previous findings regarding job satisfaction and well-being of university faculty members (Hagedorn, 2000; Mudrak et al., 2018; Nicol & Yee, 2017). Following is a discussion of how previous research parallels and mirrors the current findings and also how the current findings go beyond previous research findings.

In their autoethnography, Nicol and Yee (2017) discussed their practice of radical self-care in a way that mirrors the current study's theme of being true to yourself, including the two subthemes of alignment/congruence and self-care pursuits outside of work. While not teacher educators, Nicol and Yee are women faculty members of color who asserted that “radical self-care was and is an imperative practice to resist pressures to comply, conform, and, above all, to remain true to our authentic selves” (p. 133). They detailed how their practices of radical self-care helped them to succeed both professionally and personally in all areas of their lives—physically, emotionally, and spiritually. This is consistent with our being true to yourself shared subthemes. Building on the work of Nicol and Yee (2017), the current study is more specifically focused on teacher education faculty and also includes more cross-cultural voices.

Our results extend Mudrak et al.'s (2018) dual process model whereby their health impairment process (stress and work–family conflict) is parallel to what we have named being true to yourself and their motivational process (work engagement and job satisfaction) is parallel to what we have labeled making an impact. While the concepts of Mudrak et al. are parallel with themes in the present study, there are notable differences. First, our approach is entirely positive; Being true to yourself has quite a different tone than health impairment process, although they do address similar issues. Second, our qualitative investigation provides examples in the words of current teacher educators from two very different cultural settings that describe how they are successfully putting into practice these concepts such that they report them as feeding their souls. Finally, the current study reveals and focuses on internal contributors to positive experiences with and views of the work of teacher educators.

It is worth noting that Mudrak et al. (2018) included autonomy as one of the components of job resources that were part of their motivational process. Pink's (2009) three motivational criteria also include autonomy. During member checking, one of the U.S. participants pointed out that autonomy is an aspect of feeding one's soul, though no U.S. participants raised the topic during the interviews, leaving autonomy as one of the subthemes in the current study attributed only to teacher educators in India. However, with respect to Mudrak et al. (2018), we found that it fit better with being true to yourself (parallel to health impairment process) than with making an impact (parallel to motivational process). Mudrak et al. (2018) found that autonomy, or influence over work, was the strongest predictor of work engagement among the 2,071 Czech faculty they surveyed. Given that this theme came out in the data provided by participants from India, it may be that there are more cultural similarities between Indian and Czech faculty than between U.S. and Czech faculty. That is, teacher educators in the more individualistic United States may view autonomy as a "given," whereas those in India, with its more collectivistic culture, viewed autonomy as a professional luxury.

Mudrak et al. (2018) did not address connection to students, which was a third theme that emerged, but only among the teacher educators interviewed in India. Hagedorn (2000), however, noted that faculty are satisfied by a variety of positive relationships, including relationships with administrators and students; when those relationships are positive, faculty members experience higher levels of job satisfaction. This is consistent with our third theme among the Indian participants of connection to students. Our findings are consistent with and extend Hagedorn's model, which does not actually measure student relationships but rather measures faculty members' satisfaction with student quality under the category of student quality/relationships as part of environmental working conditions. The current study extends Hagedorn's model by documenting the importance of connections with students among participants in India. Nicol and Yee (2017) described their personal need to choose radical self-care as an important way to connect with their students, thus touching on the concept of connection with students through the lens of being true to yourself.

Mudrak et al. (2018) concluded, "As long as the academics have available sufficient job resources (e.g., perceive their social environment as supportive and retain high influence over their work), they may be predominantly satisfied with the academic job regardless of the growing work demands" (p. 341). Our study goes one step further to illuminate what internal components must be present for faculty who are teacher educators to feel that their souls are fed. Put another way, these data demonstrate how teacher education faculty can go beyond mere satisfaction to deeper levels of happiness by focusing on internal factors.

Without prompting, Lisa and Colleen illuminated the impact of the "world of the teacher educator" (Olsen & Buchanan, 2017), with its tension between the academy and the K-12 setting. Though no other participants addressed this issue, this tension among teacher educators is worthy of further investigation.

### ***Impact of Not Feeding One's Soul***

Both being true to yourself and making an impact represent continua; participants' realities can be at the lower, middle, or higher end of each of these themes. When interviewed, participants reported general professional and life satisfaction, but they could recall times when they had been less happy and fulfilled because their experience in being true to yourself and/or making an impact was lower on the continuum. It is also possible, according to the data, that one can be unhappy or unfulfilled because of too great a focus on being true to yourself or making an impact, or neither. Furthermore, the benefits accrued by the promotion of a happiness agenda in higher education for faculty, staff, and students (Bourner & Rospigliosi, 2014; Lee, 2011) are lost if this critical practice is ignored.

### ***Limitations and Strengths***

Participants in a previous study (Gillespie & Fairbairn, 2019) were invited to be interviewed for the present study, though only four of those participants from the United States and two from India reengaged in this study. Additional limitations included the fact that participants were from only one state in each country and from one institution in India.

A strength of this follow-up study is that 10 participants were interviewed in each setting, as opposed to only 7 in the original study. Another strength is that, despite the difficulty of conducting international comparative research, this work benefited from the previously established relationships with participants in both settings.

### ***Implications***

Findings can be summarized into two notable endeavors that support teacher educator happiness and fulfillment: Being True to Yourself and Making an Impact. These implications span teacher educators, administrators, and students in teacher education programs.

For teacher educators, this study reveals the importance of maintaining a focus on these complementary concepts. As such, teacher educators may want to consider ways to integrate mechanisms for being true to themselves with those designed to make an impact. As the study participants shared, both of these themes can be present in teaching. In another aspect of teacher education, scholarly projects can combine aspects of both of these themes. Specifically, we recognize that the present study incorporates both being true to yourself and making an impact and encourages other teacher educators to design studies that Feed Their Souls. Furthermore, service is an area where making an impact while being true to yourself can, with careful attention, be merged.

Administrators should work to establish a culture and climate that honor and reward both of these critical priorities to support teacher educators in feeding their

souls so that they are happy and fulfilled in their professional lives. These leaders can use Figure 1 as a tool to aid faculty members in the process of clarifying what being true to yourself and making a difference mean on an individual level.

Students in teacher education programs will benefit from the positive role modeling their professors provide as a result of integrating the two themes into their work. Happiness and fulfillment lead to higher engagement and, potentially, to more effective teaching.

### **Future Research**

Next steps for this line of research could include conducting quantitative research on teacher educators' lived experiences in the United States and India and beyond. The quadrant model depicted in Figure 1 could also be examined in other contexts. Furthermore, specific to the context in India, the subtheme of autonomy and the theme Connection to Students bear investigation in teacher education or other learning contexts. In addition, the tension between the PK–12 setting and the higher education context experienced by teacher educators could be investigated. Finally, teaching approaches in the United States and India, respectively, could be explored for their applicability in the other setting.

### **Note**

<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this article, the term *teacher educator* is used to describe any college or university employee who spends much of their time preparing college or university students to become PK-12 teachers. Teacher educators can be scholars, or they can hold a more clinical, field-based role; the term is used inclusively.

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## **Appendix**

### **Interview Questions**

1. Why did you become a teacher educator?\
2. How did you become a teacher educator?
3. Describe your current role/work as a teacher educator. To what extent does that work align with your view of what you should be doing as a teacher educator?
4. Our previous study looked at how teacher educators negotiate or deal with policy changes. The study revealed an interesting theme: “Feed My Soul.” We want to explore the role of that “Feed My Soul” theme on your happiness with and fulfillment in your work as a teacher educator. What does Feed My Soul mean to you?
5. How important is feeding your soul to you? Why?
6. Are there barriers to feeding your soul? If so, what are they?
7. How do you feed your soul? What does it look like? Do you feed your soul individually or in community or both? Why?
8. To what extent does feeding your soul contribute to how *happy* you feel about your work as a teacher educator? To what extent does feeding your soul contribute to how *fulfilled* you feel about your work as a teacher educator?
9. How do you bring the notion of feeding your soul into your work as a teacher educator?
10. What is the impact of feeding your soul on your happiness with your work? What is its impact on your fulfillment with your work?
11. What is the impact of *not* feeding your soul?
12. What, if anything, would you like to change about your Feed My Soul practices/activities? Why?