



2018-04-01

# Teacher Experiences in Highly Impacted Schools That Produce Happiness

Brittany Nicole Lund  
*Brigham Young University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd>

 Part of the [Teacher Education and Professional Development Commons](#)

---

## BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Lund, Brittany Nicole, "Teacher Experiences in Highly Impacted Schools That Produce Happiness" (2018). *All Theses and Dissertations*. 6773.

<https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd/6773>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact [scholarsarchive@byu.edu](mailto:scholarsarchive@byu.edu), [ellen\\_amatangelo@byu.edu](mailto:ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu).

Teacher Experiences in Highly Impacted Schools That Produce Happiness

Brittany Nicole Lund

A thesis submitted to the faculty of  
Brigham Young University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Stefinee Pinnegar, Chair  
Ramona M. Cutri  
Erin F. Whiting

Department of Teacher Education

Brigham Young University

Copyright © 2018 Brittany Nicole Lund

All Rights Reserved

## ABSTRACT

### Teacher Experiences in Highly Impacted Schools That Produce Happiness

Brittany Nicole Lund  
Department of Teacher Education, BYU  
Master of Arts

Teachers represent a large percentage of the workforce in the United States, yet there is a high demand for teachers every year due to a large number of teachers exiting the profession (Ingersoll, 2001). Staying beyond the first five years is a feat nearly half of the teachers in the United States do not accomplish which leads to problems within the school community (Ingersoll, 2002; Ingersoll, 2004). Through an exploration of the positive stories of teachers' experiences this study identifies some of the common themes found within those stories that led teachers to greater happiness in their profession. While this study provides important information regarding specific experiences of teacher happiness, it is also a closer look at a lesser-known but powerful tool of narrative inquiry, story cycles.

Keywords: teacher happiness, high poverty schools, Appreciative Inquiry, story cycles

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As a child I told my kindergarten teacher that I wanted to be a teacher just like her some day. Since that kindergarten class I have been blessed with so many influential teachers who guided me along the way. Entering the teaching field was an exciting moment because I finally got to join the ranks of those that I had admired so much throughout my education.

This research project began at a time in my life when teaching no longer seemed to be a long-term option because of how overwhelmed I was by the stress and emotion of it all. It started in some ways as a form of therapy for people that I taught with and cared about as well as for me, as we had all hit a difficult slump. To my three co-researchers, I could not have done this project without you, but I also could not have survived the last few years of teaching without you. Your friendship and support has been a sustaining force in my life and I count myself truly lucky to have ended up at the same school as you. Now that we are all finished with another step in our education, Disneyland awaits!

I thank Dr. Ramona Cutri for getting me started in the right direction, for pushing me to work harder, for believing in me when I was struggling to believe in myself, and for continuing to be my friend as well as my professor. I thank Dr. Erin Whiting for making me think deeper, recognize my own biases, and push my boundaries. And to Dr. Stefinee Pinnegar, thank you for recognizing emotions I was dealing with that I did not even see myself, for letting me cry when I needed to, for suggesting a new research methodology, and for stepping in when I had to change my chair. To all three professors, thank you for helping me see myself as a researcher, even if I do not always own it.

Finally, to my family, thank you for supporting me throughout this whole process, for checking in on me, and not giving up on me when I stopped responding for long periods of time.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iv
LIST OF TABLES.....	vi
LIST OF FIGURES .....	vii
CHAPTER 1 Introduction.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	3
Statement of the Purpose .....	4
Research Question .....	5
Limitations .....	5
Definition of Terms.....	5
CHAPTER 2 Review of Literature.....	7
Happiness.....	7
Job Satisfaction.....	9
Job Satisfaction and Happiness in Teaching.....	10
High-Poverty Schools.....	11
Teacher Attrition.....	12
CHAPTER 3 Methodology.....	14
Context.....	15
Participants.....	17
Data Sources .....	18

Data Collection .....	18
Data Analysis .....	21
CHAPTER 4 Findings .....	25
Student to Teacher Relationships.....	26
Relationships formed through laughter.....	27
Relationships formed through play.....	31
Relationships formed through difficult circumstances. ....	35
Teacher to Teacher Relationships.....	42
Shared laughter. ....	43
Professional support.....	45
Emotional support.....	48
Humor in the Situation.....	55
Joy through Difficulty.....	60
CHAPTER 5 Conclusions.....	65
REFERENCES .....	69
APPENDIX A Consent to be a Research Subject .....	75
APPENDIX B Story Cycle Example.....	77
APPENDIX C Analytic Memo.....	81

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 <i>Participant Information</i> .....	18
Table 2 <i>Themes Shared or Noted by Participants</i> .....	23

LIST OF FIGURES

*Figure 1* Story cycle process..... 19



## CHAPTER 1

### **Introduction**

As I entered my fourth year of teaching, my third year at a Title I school, I found myself in tears multiple nights because of the frustrations of my job. These frustrations were manifesting in difficult classroom behaviors, low student performance, and emotional struggles of working with students in difficult circumstances. Tharp and Gallimore (1988) argued that often in schools like mine students demonstrate competence in their communities but incompetence in school settings. Teachers have a responsibility to provide the opportunities and experiences that enable the competence these students demonstrate in their communities to be visible in schools. Teaching was a desire I had had since I was a young child. I experienced teachers in my own life teaching me life lessons that still stick with me today, and I wanted to have a similar impact on others one day. A lasting impact that helps children recognize that there are multiple adults who love them, and then through that experience of love to be able to more fully understand their rights as human beings through a context of justice (hooks, 2000).

Schools exist within the broad context of society, which impacts schools in numerous ways. My school exists within a societal context of high percentages of free and reduced lunch qualification, high mobility rates, high absenteeism, low student performance, Title I qualification, and high teacher turnover, all common characteristics of high poverty schools. While the systemic forces of society surrounding them impact schools, there are still specific expectations placed upon educators, students, and families within the school community. Expectations, such as student improvement, student proficiency, passing test scores, and adherence to curriculum standards are to be met regardless of the forces surrounding the school and its participants. Although there are outside forces that impact schools and students,

educators must be willing to accept some responsibility regarding success and failure for student outcomes. An unwillingness to take some responsibility for student outcomes, especially racially and ethnically diverse students and low-income students, can lead to a hindrance of changes within the school system (Garcia & Guerra, 2004). As teachers try to take greater personal responsibility for student outcomes, they can be confronted by significant challenges. Research has shown that teaching is full of stressors such as discipline problems and lack of support, and those stressors can lead to exhaustion, loss of self-efficacy, and loss of self-esteem (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015).

Teachers represent 4% of the total civilian workforce in the United States (Ingersoll, 2001). While teachers represent a relatively large percentage of the total workforce, the data provided by Ingersoll (2001) show an increasing demand for teachers, in part due to a higher than average number exiting the profession. Within the first five years of teaching, teachers are leaving the field at an alarming rate of almost 40% cumulatively (Ingersoll, 2002). Ingersoll (2004) describes other problems stemming from teacher turnover, including function and cohesion of the school, quality of school community, and school performance. While a failure to sustain beginning teachers could lead to a shortage of qualified teachers, a lack of cohesion and camaraderie within a school can lead to a lack of social and professional support. According to Helms-Lorenz and Maulana (2016), in order to promote teacher retention, teachers are in need of both social and professional support.

According to Ingersoll (2001), low poverty schools on average lose about 6% of teachers to migration, or moving schools, compared to around 10% in high poverty schools. Teacher attrition rates on average in low poverty schools were about 4%, while the teacher attrition rate at high poverty schools was about 6% (Ingersoll, 2001). Self-reported reasons for moving from

high poverty schools or leaving teaching from a high poverty school included student discipline problems, lack of student motivation, and an unsafe teaching environment (Ingersoll, 2001).

Because happiness levels are heavily dependent upon an individual's personal experience, looking at personal stories provides important insight regarding the reasons that people are happy or unhappy in a situation (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999). Narrative inquiry research methodology allows for a space of belonging for both the researchers and the participants (Clandinin & Caine 2013). Research methods based in this methodology are characterized by an attitude of openness and vulnerability that make these stories more easily shared (Clandinin & Caine 2013). In order to access the stories of teachers who persist in the profession, this study is grounded in methods based in Narrative Inquiry.

This study began as an opportunity for teachers to share positive experiences in their profession, as well as support the fact that there are teachers who stay in spite of the difficulties that they face. For four teachers who want to stay in the profession and continue teaching in a high poverty school, this study evolved as a method of support for each teacher as they came up against struggles and difficulties within their teaching.

### **Statement of the Problem**

According to Ingersoll (2002), 11% of teachers leave the field following the first year of teaching, and after the first five years there is a cumulative rate of 39% leaving the field. Of those teachers leaving the field, approximately half of them state their reason for leaving is either due to job dissatisfaction or to pursue a better job, a different career, or to improve their opportunities in or out of the education field (Ingersoll, 2002). These statistics suggest that while the problems typically associated with high poverty are systemic, the issues of job satisfaction and happiness are individualized. A failure to sustain beginning teachers by helping them find

happiness and satisfaction in teaching in difficult circumstances could result in even higher rates of teacher leaving and fewer qualified teachers to fill empty teaching positions. Without qualified teachers to fill teaching positions, schools may miss a key element of improving student outcomes, which can lead to a greater achievement gap than is already present (Rockoff, 2004).

While some teacher leaving and turnover is necessary and helpful, especially the movement of ineffective teachers, overall teacher turnover and attrition should be a concern as it can be an indicator of further problems (Ingersoll, 2004). Ingersoll (2004) describes other problems that emerge from teacher turnover including function and cohesion of the school, quality of school community, and school performance. According to Jacob (2007), high-poverty schools suffer a greater impact due to teacher turnover and migration than any other group of schools due to insufficient resources, high crime rates in the area, and insufficient funding.

### **Statement of the Purpose**

In analyzing the personal narratives of teachers in a high-poverty school regarding happiness, I intended to illuminate specific experiences that led to teachers' sense of happiness. By looking closely at happiness, I believe that elements of job satisfaction could be attended to as well. Through my analysis I hoped to open a conversation that could lead to the recognition of situations of happiness despite difficult circumstances that may surround teachers.

I believe that schools can retain high quality teachers in the teaching field, specifically in high poverty schools, by increasing teacher happiness as greater happiness may contribute to greater job satisfaction. By exploring the experiences of teacher happiness in high poverty schools, commonalities were found that should lead to a deeper conversation about how teachers feel supported and how they maintain their happiness through difficult circumstances.

**Research Question**

High teacher attrition rates in high poverty schools give rise to a possible problem regarding job satisfaction and happiness of teachers. This study was guided by the following research question: What are the experiences of happiness of teachers in a high poverty school, in their first ten years of teaching that sustain them enough to remain teaching in the context of high poverty schools?

**Limitations**

This study was limited to a small number of teachers teaching at a single school. Therefore, the findings discussed here may not be generalizable to all teachers. Additionally, because of the homogeneous demographics of the group of teachers (white, female, first ten years of teaching) the results of this study may not apply to teachers as a whole group.

Being aware of these limitations, I designed a study based in Narrative Inquiry methodology, which best suited the question this study explores. This design could potentially yield rich descriptions of teaching experiences. Intimate documentation of teacher experiences, though not generalizable, is highly valued because there is a greater potential for intimate scholarship to inform the research conversation (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2015). Furthermore, a focus on intimate scholarship allowed a more in depth attention to “the nuances of meaning and multiplicity of perspectives that are present or possible” (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2015, p. 102).

**Definition of Terms**

Title I schools are defined by the U.S. Department of Education (2015) as schools with high percentages of children from low-income families. Title I schools receive financial assistance to help students meet their state standards (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Title I services are to be used for students who are failing or at risk of failing to meet the state

standards (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). In schools where at least 40% of students enrolled come from low-income families, Title I services can also be used for school-wide programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Title I schools are frequently referred to and connected to high poverty schools because of the high percentages of low-income families that are enrolled.

Turnover of teachers is divided into two categories in the literature. The flow of teachers leaving their occupation is referred to in the literature as teacher attrition (Ingersoll, 2001). The term migration is used to describe teachers leaving one school and moving to another school, but continuing to teach (Ingersoll, 2001). According to Ingersoll (2001), the turnover of teachers can include both teacher attrition and migration, but prior studies frequently emphasized one or the other.

## CHAPTER 2

### Review of Literature

This literature review will begin by first introducing and defining happiness, or well-being, and job satisfaction. Then it will highlight helpful connections between the two, especially in regards to teachers. Next it will provide information regarding high poverty schools and the high rate of teacher attrition in high poverty schools compared to low poverty schools.

#### Happiness

Seligman (2002), while reviewing research conducted on happiness, identifies a disparity between research on happiness compared to research on sadness: “For every one hundred journal articles on sadness there is just one on happiness” (Seligman, 2002, p. 6). This disparity between the amount of literature regarding happiness and sadness can make it difficult to define happiness compared to sadness. Furthermore, it is possible that the imbalance occurs because of a difficulty in defining happiness or well-being as it is also referred to in the literature.

The definition of happiness changes from person to person and is subjective to the disposition and opinions of each person (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999). Because of the nature of happiness and the subjectivity of the emotion, in most cases we must rely on self-reporting to track, measure, and capture an understanding of happiness (Lyumbomirsky & Lepper, 1999). According to Lyumbomirsky and Lepper (1999), this often occurs because other forms of measurement are inadequate and cannot accomplish the necessary task of measuring or defining true or authentic happiness.

Strack, Argyle, and Schwarz (1991), Veenhoven (1997), and Seligman (2002) all assert that happiness is dependent upon each person and their experiences both past and present.

Happiness is different for each person based on his or her personal experiences; therefore, self-reports are the most comprehensive way to define and measure happiness. One must gauge happiness in the present by looking to memories of past events, both good and bad, to compare and contrast with present events (Strack et al., 1991).

One way of studying happiness is through the use of self-report measures. Different measures of happiness can focus on different aspects of happiness. Some may look more closely at joy, while others look at satisfaction, but all involve some kind of self-rating to ask people how they feel on a specific day or over a period of time (Strack et al., 1991). Another way that researchers have looked at happiness is to find common ground regarding what causes joy and happiness across cultures and societies. Strack et al. (1991) put forth seven main causes for happiness including (a) social contact and other close relationships; (b) sexual activity; (c) success and achievement; (d) physical activity; (e) nature, reading and music; (f) food and drink; (g) alcohol. They then added to the list two other causes: using skills and completing valued tasks (Strack et al., 1991). According to Seligman (2002) exercising one's own character strengths is another important aspect of happiness and being able to apply those signature strengths regularly will lead to greater happiness.

Seligman (2002) confirmed that happiness is the individual taking into account all pleasant and unpleasant experiences in the recent past, and that happiness comes from living authentically; it is the sum of pleasures and pains and a lack of desires. Peterson and Seligman (2004) defined a list of character strengths, noting that most people have three to seven strengths that are most frequently used. The most frequently used character strengths, usually three to seven, are known as signature strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Character strengths can also be looked at as dispositions and are separated into six categories: (a) wisdom and



knowledge, (b) courage, (c) humanity, (d) justice, (e) temperance, (f) transcendence (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Wisdom and knowledge is further divided into creativity, curiosity, open-mindedness, love of learning, and perspective, while courage is divided into bravery, persistence, integrity, and vitality (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Humanity includes love, kindness, and social intelligence, and justice is separated into citizenship, fairness, and leadership (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Temperance has the characteristics of forgiveness and mercy, humility and modesty, prudence, and self-regulation, while transcendence includes the appreciation of beauty and excellence, gratitude, hope, humor, and spirituality (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Discovering and using individual signature strengths every day in the major realms of life, such as a profession, can lead to and produce authentic happiness and satisfaction (Seligman, 2002).

For this study, it is important to note that happiness is dependent upon individuals and their experiences; experiences that can best be described through self-report as in a personal narrative of experiences of happiness. It is also important to note that using signature character strengths regularly in a profession can lead to greater happiness in life but can also lead to greater job satisfaction (Harzer & Ruch, 2013).

### **Job Satisfaction**

The frequent use of one's signature strengths can contribute heavily to a good life and to higher satisfaction (Seligman, 2002). Harzer and Ruch (2013) confirmed that there was an increase in the amount of positive experiences at work when the number of one's specific signature strengths applied increased. An increase of positive experiences in the workplace could potentially lead to a higher level of job satisfaction and to a higher level of happiness. If people are satisfied with their position at work, they will be more likely to be happy and less likely to leave their position.

Job satisfaction, as defined by Locke (1969), is an emotional state of pleasure that results from achieving one's job values, while job dissatisfaction is the opposite. This means that one must look at some aspect of his or her job, a value standard, and then make a judgment of the relationship between the two (Locke, 1969). Thus job satisfaction is not determined by looking only at the person or by just looking at the job alone, but in looking at the relationship between the two (Locke, 1969).

### **Job Satisfaction and Happiness in Teaching**

Job well-being or happiness as a teacher can include many factors such as self-efficacy, job satisfaction, personal achievement, student achievement, and support and compliments from superiors (Yildirim, 2015). Just as each of these factors can influence job well-being of teachers, when these factors are not present or when they are only present in a negative way, they can reduce teacher well-being (Yildirim, 2015). In line with the research already done regarding teachers, Seligman's (2002) application of signature strengths is another way that job satisfaction can increase in any profession including teaching.

When teachers are interviewed, many immediately share the aspects of their job that bring the greatest satisfaction, and many regard their job with an emphasis on the high job satisfaction (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015). While self-reporting of teacher satisfaction is frequently high, there is a disconnect between self-reported job satisfaction and actual happiness within the profession. Despite reports of high satisfaction in their chosen careers, many teachers offer examples of their profession that present great challenges or result in high stress, as well as difficult circumstances which can lead to dissatisfaction (Helms-Lorenz & Maulana, 2016; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015). In order to promote teacher retention, teachers are in need of both social and professional support, which can frequently be found within their faculty (Helms-

Lorenz & Maulana, 2016). A lack of cohesion within the school community, which Ingersoll (2004) pointed out as a problematic result of teacher turnover, can make it difficult to form these relationships.

In looking at the happiness of teachers, it is important to look closely at the aspect of job satisfaction. Interviews with teachers in Norway regarding job satisfaction generated a list of four categories of job satisfaction: (a) working with children; (b) variation and unpredictability; (c) cooperation and teamwork; (d) autonomy (Slaavik & Slaavik, 2015). In contrast, stressors of the job as indicated by Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2015), included, but were not limited to, workload, disruptive students in the classroom, lack of autonomy, need for adaptations for students, a lack of status in the community, and teamwork requirements. Although reported job satisfaction was high for these teachers, because of the stressors that accompany the teaching profession, many also suffered exhaustion, loss of self-efficacy, and loss of self-esteem (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015). Sometimes elements of the job that are most exciting and satisfying can become stressors as well. From this it can be inferred that in spite of the reported high job satisfaction in certain aspects of teaching, overall happiness in teaching can sometimes be more difficult to find.

### **High-Poverty Schools**

High-poverty, Title I, and urban schools provide a different challenge to teachers than low-poverty schools, as teachers are required not only to teach students but also to work through the difficult personal issues students face (Tricarico, Jacobs, & Yendol-Hoppey, 2015). These personal issues can be reflected in difficulties with student achievement, differences in behavioral expectations, difficulties for parental involvement, and poor student health due to limited access (Sachs, 2004).

To be successful in an urban school setting, which is frequently a high-poverty, Title I school, teachers must (a) develop personal relationships with students, (b) create a safe space for learning through respect toward students, (c) foster respect among students, (d) establish expectations for behavior and success, (e) hold to those expectations for all students, (f) communicate in culturally responsive ways (Bondy, Ross, Galligane, & Hambacher, 2007). It is important to note that the listed suggestions for success in an urban school setting can and are frequently applied to non-urban teachers. However, because non-urban teachers may not face the same type of personal issues mentioned above, the emotional strain, expended effort, and time dedicated to accomplishing the same tasks can be greater for those in an urban or high-poverty setting.

### **Teacher Attrition**

According to Darling-Hammond and Sykes (2003) the key to solving teacher shortages is not to train brand new teachers, but to stop the exodus of teachers in their early years. Ingersoll (2001) looked at teachers in different teaching situations and the rate they were leaving their current situations. Low-poverty schools were losing teachers at a lower rate than high-poverty schools, and high-poverty schools also showed a larger portion of their teachers migrating to other schools. Ingersoll (2002) showed an attrition rate of 39% of teachers leaving within the first five years, but in high-poverty schools the turnover rate was higher than in low-poverty schools.

Furthermore, Darling-Hammond and Sykes (2003) noted that when we hire teachers who complete an alternative route to licensure they are frequently not properly prepared with knowledge of child development, learning theory, and instructional methods and leave the profession of teaching at almost double the rate of those who were trained properly. Many of

these alternate route teachers are placed in disadvantaged schools, which then further adds to the number of teachers leaving these high-poverty schools and teaching altogether.

The high turnover rate in schools can have a broad organizational influence that disrupts staying teachers and their students, as well as leaving teachers, new teachers, and their students (Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013). The turnover of teachers impacts the school as a community due to a disruption in continuity. For some students, school may be a necessary source of stability, and when that stability is disrupted by high teacher turnover, school may no longer seem as safe for students. By having a greater percentage of attrition in high-poverty schools, educators could be creating an even greater achievement gap between students in poverty and students of privilege. A frustrating aspect of teacher attrition to note is that high quality teachers frequently leave due to reasons that their school could have controlled, and had those issues been addressed, a majority of teachers that chose to leave would have stayed in their position (Jacob, Vidyarthi & Carroll, 2012). According to Jacob et al. (2012), most schools, after highly qualified teachers leave, are not able to replace those teachers with highly qualified teachers which means that these positions are frequently filled with less qualified teachers.

This literature review has operationalized teacher happiness and job satisfaction and the relationship to teacher attrition rates. Using insights gained from the literature the methods most appropriate for facilitating this inquiry into teacher happiness at a high-poverty school are described below.

## CHAPTER 3

### **Methodology**

In this section I introduce my interest in the topic as the researcher. Next, I introduce the participants in my research and provide information regarding their background and connection to the research. I then provide information regarding how teachers will be selected to participate in the study. Next, I provide information regarding the research design of Narrative Inquiry and why it was selected. Then I give an overview of the full procedure used to conduct my research. Finally in this section I explain the process used to analyze the data.

This study was grounded in Appreciative Inquiry. In this study, I examined stories teachers in high-poverty school told about their experiences of happiness. Appreciative Inquiry is the appropriate methodology for this study because it focused only on teachers' positive stories of teaching in schools often characterized as difficult, low-performing, and deficit (Whitney & Cooperrider, 2005). Exploration and analysis of such stories allowed researchers to develop new ideas about how experiences in these schools could be structured to sustain and support teachers in these environments. In addition to Appreciative Inquiry, because I collected narratives, I used a data collection strategy based in Narrative Inquiry because, "Narrative Inquiry is, first and foremost a way of understanding experience" (Clandinin & Caine, 2013, p. 166). This strategy is called *story cycles* and engages participants in sharing stories as well as exploring them for common threads and understandings (Bunting, 2014; Clandinin & Caine, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Pinnegar, Lay, Bingham, & Dulude, 2005). Since I was part of the data collection and analysis process, in addition to Appreciative Inquiry, this study is based in intimate scholarship. In intimate scholarship the researcher embraces subjectivity; therefore, I was part of the data collection process sharing my own stories and interpretation of mine and the

experiences of my participants (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2015). Intimate scholarship also embraces vulnerability as it relies on the changing relationships between action, interpretation, and interaction (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2015). Openness in response and interpretation of the research is another key element of intimate scholarship (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2015). Dialogue is an element of research that must be embraced in intimate scholarship as interactions with others regarding the interpretation and analysis of the research (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2015). Intimate scholarship also has a focus in ontology, as words become the data and an understanding is to be gained (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2015).

### **Context**

I completed my education to become a teacher by doing an internship in a non-Title I school located in an affluent neighborhood where the population was homogenous. At the conclusion of my internship, I found a position as a first year teacher in a Title I school with a diverse student population. The school has a high turnover of students as well as teachers. As I began my fourth year teaching in this Title I school, I began to contemplate changing schools almost on a daily basis due to the stress, exhaustion and frustration I was feeling in my position. At the same time that I desired a change, I was having a difficult time imagining leaving my students and my school behind because of the love I had developed, the relationships I had built, and the fear I had of letting anyone down. Olsen and Anderson (2007) reported that the 15 urban teachers included in their study felt as though teaching no longer served their professional goals and they would likely be pursuing other educational work.

It was then, at the beginning of my fifth year of teaching, because of this constant internal struggle, that part of me considered leaving the position altogether, or at least taking a break from it. Rather than walk, or run away, from a position that I loved for many reasons, I decided

to look into the subject of happiness for teachers and to delve deeper into furthering my education. I chose to research how happiness can be attained and retained in order to remind myself why I became a teacher and more importantly why I stay. I also had a desire to open up a discussion for other teachers to explore and share their own reasons for staying in a profession that can frequently be challenging, disheartening, and frustrating.

Desert View Elementary (a pseudonym) is a K-6 school in a small district in the Rocky Mountains. It is one of the only Title I schools in the district and is one of the only schools to consistently maintain qualifications for receiving Title I status. Within the district it stands out as the most steady high-poverty school. According to the Utah State Office of Education (2016) statistics, there is a student population of 625 students. Of these students, 332 (53.1%) are Caucasian, 197 (31.5%) are Hispanic, 36 (5.8%) are African or African American, 23 (3.7%) are multi-racial, 18 (2.9%) are Asian, 12 (1.9%) are Pacific Islander, and 7 or (1.1%) are American Indian (Start Class, 2016). The population is 329 (53%) male and 296 (43%) female (Start Class, 2016). According to the State Office of Education, in the 2015-2016 school year, 62% of the students at Desert View qualified for free or reduced lunch. This means that households have an annual income below 185 percent of the poverty line (Start Class, 2016; Utah State Office of Education, 2016). English language services are provided for 16% of students and special education services are provided for 17% of students (Start Class, 2016). Desert View also has a high percentage of absenteeism with 40% of students missing 15 or more school days (Start Class, 2016). The mobility rate at Desert View in the 2016-2017 school year was 32%, which means that through that school year almost one-third of the student population changed.

There are 29 teachers employed at Desert View and one administrator as well as one assistant administrator (Start Class, 2016). In looking at teacher experience at Desert View, the



percentage of teachers in their first or second year of teaching is 34%, which is four times higher than the national average of 8% in elementary schools (Start Class, 2016). The four teachers involved in this study are among the teachers who have been at Desert View the longest and all have less than ten years of experience. The longest time one participant has been teaching at Desert View is just five and a half years.

### **Participants**

Participants for this study are teachers at Desert View Elementary School. I am one of the participants in this study, and so live alongside the three other teachers. All teachers are in the first ten years of teaching, and all have spent most or all of those teaching years in a Title I school. This group includes special education as well as grade level teachers who have been in classrooms aged kindergarten to sixth grade. All participants have taught in the same school for four years, three of the four have taught in the same school for five years. While participants signed consent forms to participate in this study, pseudonyms are provided for all participants including me to respect participants and to position stories with equal power (see Appendix A for consent form). See Table 1 for information about participants.

Participants were purposefully selected for this study. They were similar demographically. They were female and Caucasian and had been teaching for a similar number of years. They had similar professional obligations and similar situations of struggle within the same school community. All the participants have worked together for the past four years. They have interacted in both personal and professional aspects of life. This meant there would be a greater likelihood that the dialogue would be honest and open. They would be more likely to reveal their vulnerability and display the other tenets of intimate scholarship (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2015).

Table 1

*Participant Information*

Participant Name	Years of Teacher Experience	Years at current school	Gender	Age	Ethnicity
Emily	9	5	Female	31	Caucasian
Molly	4	4	Female	29	Caucasian
Bethany	6	5	Female	28	Caucasian
Jessica	5.5	5.5	Female	28	Caucasian

**Data Sources**

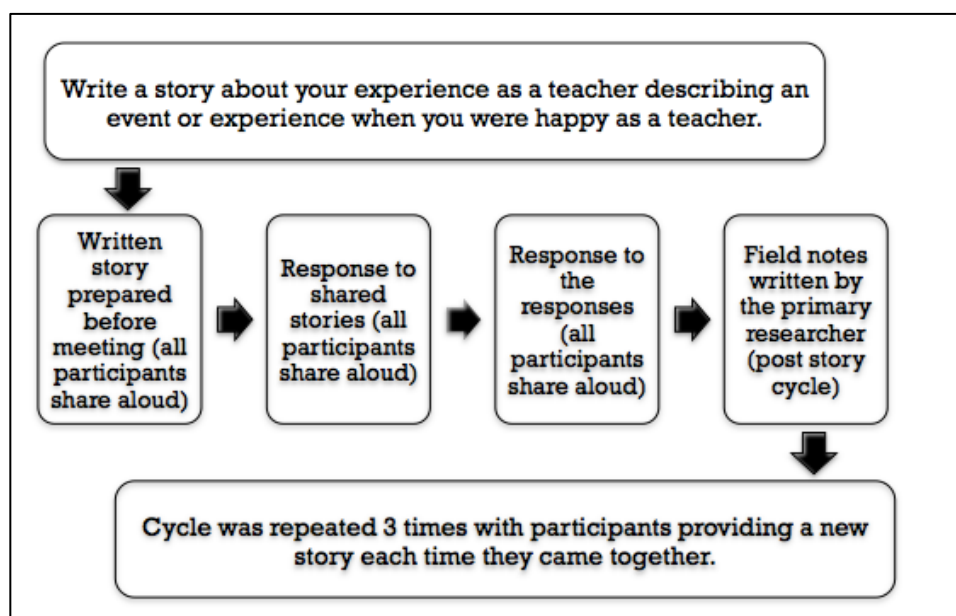
There were 39 data sources for this study which were intended to document and describe our experiences of happiness as teachers in high-poverty schools. We met three times and each time collected the following data points: (a) prompted written narratives, (b) written reflections on prompted narratives (interim text 1), (c) written reflections on the first reflection (interim text 2), (d) field notes composed post interim text 1 and 2. These data points are appropriate for a story cycle method of collecting data that will be described fully below (Bunting, 2014; Clandinin & Caine, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Pinnegar et al., 2005).

These written documents and field notes provided rich explorations of the research question guiding this Appreciative Inquiry: What are the experiences of happiness of teachers in a high-poverty school that sustain them enough to remain teaching in the context of high poverty schools?

**Data Collection**

The data for this study emerged from participants' engagement with me in story cycles. Each story cycle produced four data sources described in the previous section for a total of 39

data points. We met three separate times and participated in the three phases of a story cycle (see Figure 1). The first phase was one of storytelling from which emerged a one to two-page written narrative. The two following phases were forms of analysis and resulted in quick and concise expository and narrative statements in response to the contribution of all participants (see Appendix B for example of story cycle). These were typically only a few paragraphs long (Bunting, 2014; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The three story cycles are described below.



*Figure 1.* Story cycle process.

This study examines teacher happiness at a high-poverty school, so the prompt for the narratives is based on issues raised in the research literature on happiness. We, as the participants in this study, came together to respond to a specific prompt with a written narrative. A single prompt was used across all three cycles, as the focus of the study was to elicit as many clear examples as possible of experiences wherein these teachers experienced happiness in their teaching.

The prompt was based on the assertion by Strack et al. (1991) that in order to gauge happiness in the present, participants must look to good and bad memories of past events and

compare and contrast them with present events. Therefore, before coming together for each cycle, participants were asked to write a story about their experience as a teacher describing an event or experience when they were happy in their teaching. Participants were instructed to capture the experience as a narrative using narrative forms, providing details and examples and using storytelling techniques. When we first came together, each participant read her story aloud to the group.

The second phase of the story cycle began after each participant had shared her story of happiness. Immediately after the stories were shared, each participant did a quick-write of about ten minutes to identify unique themes and similarities among the stories shared. These reflections were one to two paragraphs long each. Participants then read their reflections aloud to the other members of the group.

The third phase of the story cycle began after participants read to each other their response to the initial stories. Following this, participants wrote a response to the responses that had just been read aloud. They were encouraged to draw into their response details from the two earlier phases. In this way, their responses provided an initial analysis of the stories and themes. The result of the second and third phases was the production of a series of interim research texts. These research texts were then used to assist the primary researcher in this collaborative study, to identify common themes among participant texts, stories, and responses as well that reflected those themes (Bunting, 2014; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

From the beginning of our coming together and throughout the three phases of the story cycles, the events were audio recorded using AudioNote on an iPad, which allowed the researcher to mark spots in the conversation that needed to be returned to for analysis because they were not captured in the text documents. The conversation and phases were audio recorded

to capture any “side stories” that teachers told in addition to the ones that they formally wrote and to capture any “side talk” that teachers did in addition to the reflections that they wrote as interim texts. After these writing and reading exercises, the audio recordings and note stops were used to write-up field notes reflecting on the story cycle experience. However these note stops and side stories were sparse because the text documents produced almost completely captured the commentary provided in the audio recordings. These three phases were then repeated for story cycle two and story cycle three.

### **Data Analysis**

In this Appreciative Inquiry we, as participant researchers, analyzed the narratives that we produced. The second and third phases of each story cycle constituted the initial analytic phase. These phases were central to initial analysis since we responded to one another’s initial narratives, and then responded to each other’s responses. We also searched for common threads and dissimilarities. This initial phase of analysis occurred with each participant independently identifying themes in a series of reflections on the shared narratives. This initial phase occurred during each story cycle independent of other cycles. The phases involved in data collection are described above in the data sources section.

The primary researcher used texts, analyses of the texts, and audio recordings of the sessions to compose analytic field notes after each story cycle session. While audio recordings were captured, very little was gathered from the audio recordings as almost all that was shared during each cycle was shared through the writings that were collected. These analytic field notes focused on identifying points of tension and similarities in the meaning making of our narratives that arose through each story cycle session. For example, in story cycle session one, all four narratives produced by participants told of relationships between teacher and student.

Additionally, through written field notes, the researcher reflected upon the themes that were identified by participants in the second and third phases of each story cycle session and looked for examples of those identified themes. For example, in story cycle session one, all narratives shared by participants referenced a relationship or student-teacher relationships which led to happiness. As we went through each phase of the story cycle, additional insights were provided by participants regarding the importance of these relationships according to the stories shared and their own experiences as teachers in a high poverty setting.

After the three story cycles were completed, and each session had been looked at individually, I, as the primary researcher, reviewed all of the data that were produced across all three cycles. In looking across the entire series of narratives and reflections, and focusing heavily on the field notes written about each session. I then examined the data sources more closely. Then additional evidence was identified through quotations provided by the participants during the initial analysis phases across the three story cycles. For example, in looking at all three story cycles, the importance of student relationships could be seen throughout and was referred back to many times and by multiple participants in each cycle, as evidenced in Table 2.

Table 2 indicates the four common themes identified. It then shows which narratives and responses shared in each cycle by each participant connected to or addressed each theme identified in the analysis. In Table 2, the themes are listed in the first column. The subsequent columns show which participants made statements or connections to that theme during each of the three story cycles. Some themes were found to arch across all three of the story cycles, some more heavily than others. This phase of analysis was done using Google Docs to highlight the texts and to make notes regarding what was found. Then I, as the primary researcher, wrote an analytic memo documenting the themes detected across the three cycles. This memo (see

Appendix C) served as a basis for illuminating the most commonly identified themes regarding teacher experiences that lead to happiness according to the participants of this study. It also allowed for a further examination of specific references to certain themes.

Table 2

*Themes Shared or Noted by Participants*

Theme	Story Cycle Session 1	Story Cycle Session 2	Story Cycle Session 3
Relationships with Students	Bethany (Narrative, Response 1) Emily (Narrative, Response 1) Jessica (Narrative, Response 1, Response 2) Molly (Narrative, Response 1, Response 2)	Bethany (Response 1) Emily (Narrative) Response 1, Response 2) Jessica (Response 1, Response 2) Molly (Response 1)	Bethany (Response 1, Response 2) Emily (Narrative, Response 2) Jessica (Narrative, Response 2) Molly (Response 1)
Relationships with Teachers	Emily (Response 2) Jessica (Response 1)	Bethany (Narrative, Response 1, Response 2) Emily (Narrative, Response 1, Response 2) Jessica (Narrative, Response 1, Response 2) Molly (Response 1)	Bethany (Narrative, Response 2) Emily (Narrative, Response 1, Jessica (Response 1, Response 2)
Humor in the Situation	Bethany (Response 1) Molly (Narrative)	Bethany (Response 1, Response 2) Emily (Response 1) Jessica (Narrative, Response 1, Response 2) Molly (Narrative, Response 2)	Bethany (Narrative)
Joy Through Difficulties	Bethany (Narrative, Response 2) Emily (Response 1, Response 2) Jessica (Response 1, Response 2) Molly (Narrative)	Bethany (Response 2) Emily (Narrative, Response 1, Response 2) Jessica (Response 2)	Bethany (Narrative, Response 1) Emily (Narrative, Response 2) Jessica (Narrative, Response 1, Response 2) Molly (Narrative)

This analysis, through the use of field notes and an analytic memo, also provided a closer examination of each story cycle, which then allowed for a greater understanding of themes present in all cycles and mentioned by all participants. Through a winnowing process, particular stories were selected as those that best demonstrated the themes being discussed. These stories are shared below, and used as exemplars for explaining and exploring each theme as well as providing a rich understanding of each theme (Mishler, 1990).

In the next phase, the researcher communicated the findings of her analysis to the other participants. The researcher and the participants reviewed the analysis, the stories, and responses that supported the analysis. Through this meeting the researcher and participants negotiated and reached consensus on the findings. This process enabled the researcher to conduct member checking and add credibility to the interpretation of the data (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

As the researcher conducted the analysis, she constantly sought for disconfirming and confirming evidence seeking to support the presence of these themes in the stories and commentary. This also allowed for confirmation that the themes occurred in the stories and commentary of all participants during at least one story cycle session. In addition, after completing the analysis and commentary on the data collected, the primary researcher reviewed the themes identified with the other participants. This allowed for each participant to provide her confirmation of the researcher's interpretation, analysis, and selected themes. These two things helped increase the trustworthiness of the findings.



## CHAPTER 4

### Findings

Through an analysis of the stories of happiness produced by the teacher participants, four story themes were uncovered. As teacher participants came together, they brought positive stories of experiences that resulted in feelings of happiness within their teaching in a high poverty school. Participants were instructed to capture positive experiences as a narrative using narrative forms, providing details and examples, and using storytelling techniques. These stories were then used to attend to the exploration of teacher experiences that lead to happiness in what is often an emotionally draining school setting due to the demands placed upon students and teachers (Sachs, 2004). In completing the three sessions of the story cycles, four common themes emerged which identified the experiences of teachers that lead to joy or happiness. The participants identified these themes through the second and third phases of each story cycle and exemplars of these stories were found throughout the data. Two of the themes, theme one and two, contain sub-themes as evidenced in the list of themes that follow. The four common themes and their sub-themes follow:

1. Student to teacher relationships
  - a. Relationships formed through laughter
  - b. Relationships formed through play, and
  - c. Relationships formed through difficult circumstances
2. Teacher to teacher relationships
  - a. Shared laughter
  - b. Professional support, and
  - c. Emotional support

3. Humor in the Situation
4. Joy through difficulties

Exploration of these four themes begins with an introduction to each theme or sub-theme, followed by an explanation of its importance, both in terms of research and as evidenced by the words of the participants in this study. Stories of the participants that connected to these themes are then referenced. Following each story, a brief explanation of the story and its connection to the theme is given in the words of the primary researcher as well as the words of the participants shared during analysis phases in the story cycle sessions. Some stories provide evidence of more than one theme and are, as a result, referred to in more than one explanation of the themes. While many stories support each theme, the clearest examples were referenced in order to provide maximum support for each theme (Mishler, 1990). The explanation of each theme concludes with connections made through all the stories shared, again as noted by the primary researcher during her analysis or by the participants during the initial collaborative analysis phases.

### **Student to Teacher Relationships**

The first common theme that emerged in our discussions focused on the power of having strong and meaningful relationships with students as a source of happiness for teachers teaching in high poverty schools. This was the focus or source of at least one story shared by a participant in each story cycle session (see Table 2). This theme was evident from the first story cycle. Each story told in the first story cycle session reported on, or explicated, the development of a relationship between the teacher and students. Since all of the first stories shared reported on the formation of relationships, one participant noted that it seemed “as though these stories were the most poignant and obvious stories in our memories. This makes it seem as if the initial reaction

we each had to the prompt was to connect joys of teaching to our students” (Bethany: Session 3, Response #1, 18 September). This participant asserted that stories of relationship development seemed to be fundamental as a source of happiness in settings like this. Bethany’s assertion demonstrates the claim of Goodlad (1994) that good teachers are not driven by goals of increasing test scores or a nation’s competitiveness, but instead they are driven by a desire to increase students’ excitement about learning and to teach with satisfaction.

Meaningful relationships between students and teacher were formed through different types of experiences. The stories provided evidence that the relationships formed and happiness emerged in the midst of experiences as teachers took time from their schedules and other obligations to be present or “wide awake” with themselves, their students, and their students’ learning (Rodgers & Raider-Roth, 2006, p. 21). Some relationships formed through laughter, some formed through play, and some formed through difficult circumstances, but the key to each relationship was that trust was established between teacher and student. This trust is essential to the development of presence and was an important factor in teacher student relationships leading to teacher happiness (Rodgers & Raider-Roth, 2006).

**Relationships formed through laughter.** One path to a meaningful relationship seen in multiple stories was the path of teacher-student interaction leading to unexpected laughter shared by teacher and student(s). Research supports the idea that laughter can sustain relationships in multiple ways including enhancing trusting interaction and increasing the comfort level in situations through shared experiences (Smidl, 2006). In our stories, teachers provided examples of being able to laugh with students in unexpected moments. These unexpected moments of laughter often led to the whole group laughing together. As teachers and students laughed

together at a situation where the teacher could have easily been upset by something that was happening, bonding occurred and joy emerged.

Molly shared an experience in her classroom where she was trying to lead a serious discussion regarding a problem they were having and laughter emerged. The discussion was regarding the bathroom and how across the school students were making too many visits to the bathroom and not being careful or clean in the bathroom. Molly's solution was to create time for bathroom breaks as a class and have a log for students to sign out for times outside of those breaks when it was an emergency. She was in the midst of explaining this new classroom bathroom system when the following conversation took place:

Me (to the whole class): Please use the sign out sheet when you go to the bathroom during class. You are to go before school, lunch, recess, and after school, so I won't be saying yes very often.

Student 1 (out loud so that the whole class was listening): But what if we really have to go? But if we really have to go pee? What if we can't hold it?

Me: You will have to. You are old enough.

Student 1: But how will that work? If we really have to go pee?

At this statement, the class began to laugh, but I tried to hold it together in order to maintain control of the conversation. This is when another student interrupted.

Student 2 (plugging his ears): We can't talk about this. We are just kids. We aren't old enough to talk about this!

At this comment, none of us could stop ourselves from laughing, and soon the whole classroom had erupted in laughter, including me. (Molly: Session 2, Story, 6 September)

This story shows a moment, which could have caused Molly, as the teacher, to get upset, or respond with a silencing remark. Instead of getting upset, Molly's reaction of laughter helped her students feel more comfortable in their own laughter; it also allowed a moment of connection that would not have happened if she had reacted by getting upset or asserting her authority as the teacher.

Molly told another story of a pretty normal day that involved some funny circumstances and resulted in a greater bond with her students.

The cohesiveness of my classroom made it possible to do some more fun projects such as art projects because we could move through material more quickly. One day we were in the process of doing one such art project when the incident occurred. My students were cheerfully working at their desks trying to use their art skills and creativity while still trying to copy my example on the board. I was walking around listening to the somewhat loud volume level of the class with appreciation as I saw how hard they were still working. I was moving from group to group giving encouragement, tips, and reminders of how to keep their areas clean. I took a step back, toward the back of the classroom to admire how well the classroom was running, when I felt my foot sink into something deep and sticky. A large glue stick had been wound out so the full adhesive column was protruding from the plastic cap, and I had stepped right into it. The entire bottom of my new dress sandal was covered with icky, sticky, wasn't-supposed-to-be-on-the-floor-anyway glue.

The class erupted in laughter. They were in stitches. For some reason, it was so funny that I, their teacher, had stepped in a glue stick. I was thickly covered, and the mess made walking impossible, with hopping my only option. However, I didn't need to

hop. Between giggles and without any prompting, four students jumped from their seats running over to me. With precision that could have led me to believe they had done this before, a student lifted my ankle and three others headed for the sink. Still laughing they ran and back and forth from me to the streaming water, armed with wet paper towels and snorting out orders to each other. They rotated, taking turns scrubbing the bottom of my shoe and then returning back to the sink for a new paper towel. One student came forward to scrub while the other went back for more fuel. Eventually they had two students holding my ankle steady while others were scrubbing. They were on a mission to save their teacher, and loving every minute of it. (Molly: Session 1, Story, 2 September)

Teachers, like parents, can use laughter as a tool to enhance children's mental and physical state, release tensions, deal with difficult situations, and encourage relaxation (Lovorn, 2008). As evidenced in this story, moments that could have resulted in anger or frustration on the part of the teacher instead produced an opportunity for students to excitedly work toward a common goal. Their laughter began the situation, but what made the situation so poignant to them and to their teacher was the work they were able to do together to ensure that glue was not left all over the classroom. The tension that could have taken over the room in that moment was released through laughter and followed up with service.

It is also important to note that laughter can promote learning, and most importantly for this study can strengthen relationships, since it is these strong relationships that bring joy to teachers in high poverty schools (Lovorn, 2008). As shown through both of Molly's stories above, laughter can lead to stronger relationships between students and teachers. These relationships form as a result of a greater trust between teacher and student (Lovorn, 2008). As

relationships between teacher and student improve, teacher happiness also increases as shown through Molly's thought that it was okay to laugh together, to enjoy each student's personality, and to enjoy yourself as you teach. According to Molly, "Laughing keeps everything afloat," including, and sometimes especially, the teacher (Molly: Session 2, Story, 6 September).

**Relationships formed through play.** A second path to a relationship resulting in teacher joy that was seen in multiple stories occurred in teacher-student interactions of play. These stories were of moments when the teacher was able to put aside work-related responsibilities and stresses and engage with her students in play and recreation. These small moments of play, moments when the teacher was truly present and able to slow down and observe her students in their environment rather than rush around, were important to the teachers' happiness (Rodgers & Raider-Roth, 2006). As stated by one participant, these were important moments to her happiness as a teacher because she was able to connect with her students on a different and more personal level (Jessica: Session 1, Story, 2 September).

Jessica told a story of a playful interaction with her students that allowed her to create stronger bonds with students that had been difficult to connect with earlier. Her willingness to give them some of her time and attention allowed a greater connection to form:

My class was just going outside to have class game time, PE, and I was looking forward to having 30 minutes alone, where I could actually get some things done in my classroom. As I dropped my students off at PE, I realized that while my class was in PE the other classes in the grade level were having recess. I left my students with their coach, and I started to head back inside when I was stopped by a few girls from another class. They begged me to play with them, and despite the pile of things waiting on my desk, I was compelled to say yes.

In our grade level we specialize in subjects, which means that I work with all of the students at some point during the day. I have learned that playing with my students outside during recess is a great way to get to know them better, to connect with them on a different level, and to build upon our classroom community. Interacting with my students through play allows them to feel more comfortable and safe in my classroom because they form a stronger connection to me as their teacher.

The girls asked me to play on the playground bars with them and learn a windmill flip. I had tried this the year before, and I knew that it had left bruises on my legs the following day. I was worried about trying it again, but at my students' encouragement I jumped up on the bar. They were thrilled and I soon realized other students walking over to watch or staring at me from afar. I did not like all of that attention but I was happy to see some students approach me that normally would not have done so before. Almost my whole class, who were supposed to be paying attention to their teacher, were staring over at me and completely distracted by their adult teacher acting like a child. I followed the girls' instructions and flipped around on the bars, sometimes being successful and other times not. They loved it!

They wanted to show me different tricks; they continued to ask me to try new things; and they were all giving me pointers and tips for success. I could feel the bruises beginning to form on the backs of my legs, but I kept going because it was worth it to strengthen the relationships with my students. I continued to play with them for a little while, and then I returned to where my class was in order to play a quick game with them during their PE. Before my half hour of planning was completely over, I hurried inside to try to get something checked off my to-do list.



When I picked up my class, I gave them a quick extra recess since they had missed theirs. As soon as I dismissed them to play some of my students began to question me about the bars, because they had seen me playing on them during their PE. They wanted me to teach them what I had been practicing and asked for help as they began to learn the skill as well. This was when one student who I had been struggling to connect with all year came up and started asking me questions as well. Then he attempted the skill on the bars.

The following day no one had forgotten my time on the bars and many were insistent that I try again and try some other skills as well. I tried for a little bit and they gave encouraging words as well as affirming words of their appreciation for me as a teacher. My relationship with my students did not dramatically improve right away, but I could tell that the time I was willing to come to their level and play with them made them more comfortable. This time allowed me to connect with them in a new way, and it helped them see me as more than just their teacher, or an adult in their life. (Jessica: Session 1, Story, 2 September)

As Jessica mentioned in her story, students felt more comfortable with her and showed appreciation for her willingness to spend time with them. She also remarked that her students seemed to be happy because they saw an adult taking time and investing it in them in simple ways. By giving some of her time to her students, she recognized that she was able to create a stronger connection with them, which increased their happiness as well as her own happiness as reflected in her statement regarding this experience, “I felt truly happy and excited to be a teacher” (Jessica: Session 1, Story, 2 September).

Emily told a story of a difficult day at school; it was a day filled with stressful meetings, and unhappy parents, teachers, students, and administrators. It was a day where everyone she talked to told her she was letting them down in some way or how she was not doing the best job she could. Her day was off to a tough start and was quickly moving toward a terrible day:

My desk was filled with unfinished lists and piles of work but I could barely get a second to sit down. As I sat looking at all of the things I needed to do, one of my students, a nonverbal student with autism, entered the room. He kept trying to play with one of the para-educators in the room while she worked to do some other things around the room so I found myself taking his hand and leading him away from her.

As I pulled him away and tried to turn his attention to something else, he turned to me and began an interaction of twirling and spinning. This interaction soon turned into wild giggles and laughter on his part. I found my other responsibilities shrinking away a bit and I found myself just focusing in on this one student and soon I was laughing with him. Our interaction was brief, only five or ten minutes, but those giggles with my student were enough to completely turn my day around, put a smile on my face, and remind me why my job is so important to me and why I deal with all of the other things that were causing me stress and anxiety that day. (Emily: Session 3, Story, 18

September)

This moment of play, which led to smiles and laughter, was an indicator to Emily that she had made a deeper connection with her student, but it was also a great reminder to her about the things that she appreciated about her job. By finding things to appreciate within her job, beginning with a giggling and smiling student, especially on a day where so many things had been reminding her of the difficulties of her job, Emily found happiness as a teacher.

In the stories shared by Emily and Jessica, the relationship was strengthened between teacher and student(s) because of the teachers' willingness to take time from her schedule and give that time to her students. In taking time away from their needs as a teacher and focusing it on their students, these teachers provided students with the whole of their attention and the whole of themselves, which in turn led to a greater foundation of trust through their willingness to be present (Rodgers & Raider-Roth, 2006). This increase of presence allowed for stronger bonds to form, and for greater happiness on the part of the teacher, and a greater happiness that could be seen in the students as well.

**Relationships formed through difficult circumstances.** In contrast to accounts of relationships forming in laughter and play, a third path to a relationship was seen in stories that focused on a relationship forming through difficult circumstances. These difficult circumstances happened both inside and outside of school, but the common thread among these stories was the idea that once relationships formed with students trust was in place and a bond was created. Strong relationships with students had the potential to turn a teacher's day around, as well as a school year.

Bethany told a story of a relationship that was difficult to form, because of a lack of information and a resistant child. This student was one that had been mentioned to her as difficult before the year even began, but very little specific information had been shared and much of what had happened the previous year was blamed on his teacher, who was no longer at the school:

In the beginning of the year I was told that all one of my new students needed was love and to know that his teacher cared about him. I took that as solid advice and I set out in the year trying to ensure that this student always knew he was loved in my classroom,

which is my typical goal with all students, but I decided to make a concerted effort with him.

I remember very clearly the first day of school when he disappeared from my classroom. It took me a minute to realize he was missing because I was still getting used to all of the new faces. This is how I learned he liked wandering the building and walking into other classrooms to get away from his own. I remember the first time he tipped a desk because he got frustrated. I remember the first time he told me how much he hated me and how dumb he thought the school was. There were so many first memories with him that were negative that I began to doubt that I would ever be able to form a relationship with him.

I reached my breaking point, when after a long day, I was walking down with him to the special education room because he was making unsafe choices in our classroom. As we walked down the hall, he grabbed onto my arm and began twisting it in different directions and with a grin on his face he threatened to break my arm. I barely kept it together long enough to get him where he needed to go before I felt the tears welling up. I had to go and sit alone for a bit, while my class was in music, in order to get my emotions under control enough not to cry in front of my class of 27 other students. I struggled to know how we could make it back from that moment because right then I could barely imagine letting him back in my classroom, let alone enjoying his presence in my classroom.

Following this incident his caseworker, the principal, and I worked on a system to help him be more successful in the classroom and put it into place quickly. With his new system in place, and him having a feeling that he had pushed the line too far, I was

willing to let him come back into my classroom, and I tried to look at him with fresh eyes. It was not easy. I think I held that against him for longer than I wanted to admit because in the moment I truly believed that, given the chance, he would have followed through, and broken my arm. We both threw ourselves back into the classroom and with consequences and boundaries clearly set and being followed through with by more than just me, our relationship could finally begin to form.

It did not happen overnight, but by the middle of the school year I knew we had formed a lasting bond. The day I finally realized I had broken through came after a few more months of work. At the end of a long Friday, I had a meeting to go to. During my meeting my students were going to music. I walked out of the room and got about halfway down the hall before I realized this boy was following me. He followed me quietly and when I didn't notice him he started getting more vocal. I turned and gently reminded him that he was supposed to be with our class because I needed to go to a meeting. He then told me that he didn't want to go with the class because he wanted to be with me. I told him I would be back after my meeting and he would have a great time in music. I thought I had convinced him to go back to class so I walked into my meeting; he followed me in. One of the other teachers had to get him out of the room because he refused to leave my side. After getting him into the hall and locking the door so we could start our meeting, one of the other teachers stayed outside to work with him and for the next 20 minutes we could hear him outside the room asking for me. At one point, his frustration led to tears. It was heartbreaking to hear him cry through the door, but at the same time I was elated because I knew I had broken through. I knew that he knew I cared and I finally knew that he cared too.

The rest of our year together was full of ups and downs, but on the last day of school he gave me a hug and told me he would miss me. He then asked if he could come back to my class the next year. He came back to our school for two weeks of the next school year and then moved. When I said goodbye to him I was choking back tears and I could see he was too. I later cried when another teacher told me that he had expressed to her that I was his favorite teacher. The progress he made through the year and the growth I had seen in him renewed my hope, and it renewed my belief in my own abilities as a teacher. He still has a lot of progress to make and I am sad that I will not be there to see it, but the relationship I built with him through that year is one I will remember forever.

(Bethany: Session 1, Story, 2 September)

Bethany's story is an example of a relationship moving from resistance and anger, at times on the part of both teacher and student, into a relationship of trust and interdependence leading to both teacher and student finding joy in the relationship even though there were still moments of difficulty. For example, when Bethany had to attend the meeting and had to leave the child crying in the hall, the child wanted to stay with Bethany. In the beginning of the year, Bethany was focusing on the frustrating interactions with her student and the difficulties he brought into the classroom. Her interaction with the principal and the child's case manager led to a viable plan that Bethany could confidently enact and which enabled her to develop a more positive and proactive relationship. By the end of the year, she was able to appreciate her student, anticipate his needs, prevent some of those behaviors, and move others to more positive responses. Thus a bond formed that she had not imagined possible at the start of the school year. In the end, the relationship was a source of joy because of the positive moments that had now become the focus for both Bethany and her student.

Emily, after hearing the four stories shared in story cycle one, remarked that our stories all focused heavily on the relationships built with students as we made time to connect with them and we allowed those bonds to change our attitudes toward our job and toward other things we were dealing with. She then went on to state, “I think we wouldn’t all be here, especially after our past tough years if it weren’t for the bonds we build with students, parents, and other coworkers. In the end those things make the tough times worth it” (Emily: Session 1, Response 2, 2 September). Through this thought, Emily asserted that these bonds, or connections, are the real things that keep us going as teachers. As demonstrated in Bethany’s story above, these connections can take a long and demanding process to develop, but can then become extremely rewarding and sustaining. The following story illustrates how these connections were often found in small, simple, positive daily interactions.

Emily shared a story of a difficult morning leading up to a full day of teaching. The difficulties outside of the classroom had made her morning begin so terribly that she arrived at school frustrated, upset, and already ready for the day to be over. It was winter, she was exhausted, and she had to force herself out of bed that morning in order to make it to school on time. She was running late, almost ran into someone on the way to school, and had a 25 minute commute that had grown in length due to the freshly fallen snow, and in her own words, it was shaping into a “terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day, kind of day” (Emily: Session 1, Story, 2 September). Her difficult circumstances outside of school had created a day and a mood that left her feeling like a cloud was hanging over her head that would be there for good:

At the time I taught in an all-day kindergarten class for students with autism. As I walked into my classroom that morning, I was welcomed with the most excited and energetic hugs and greetings. The students were all so excited to see me and made me

feel so loved. The day was one of those days where things ran a little bit more smoothly than usual and I was able to have a successful and enjoyable day at work in large part because of my students.

As I reflected on the day, which had such a horrendous beginning, I realized that it was my students, and the interactions that I had with them that day that were the catalyst for a change in my attitude. I always care very deeply for my students, but in those moments of reflection it was an overwhelming love and appreciation for my students, the job I was able to do, and the incredible happiness that could be found even on challenging days. I was so grateful for my students who were able to completely flip my day around and not just make me feel okay about being there, but made me feel overwhelmingly and extremely . . . happy. (Emily: Session 1, Story, 2 September)

Emily's story is an important story that identifies the importance to teachers of small, positive interactions with students. Like the story of the glue stick, whether founded in laughter or difficulty, when students reach out and help teachers, such service from students brings teachers happiness. As revealed in both these stories, such service is both valued and unexpected. It signals to teachers that students care about them and their work as teachers is important to the children they teach.

It was the interactions with her students, as mentioned in the story above, which led to Emily's change in her attitude and an overall change in her day. As she asserted later in the same story cycle session "We do this for the kids and for those small moments of laughter and smiles. They are the reason we are still here and why we can stay happy at our jobs" (Emily: Session 3, Story, 18 September). These small and seemingly insignificant interactions are often



the moments that happen every day but have a lasting impact on teachers' emotions, attitudes, and happiness in their positions.

Both Emily and Bethany shared stories of relationships growing and developing through difficulties. While there was a similar theme to their stories, a difference was seen between the difficult circumstances they were facing, as well as the way in which the relationship formed or was strengthened. The difficult circumstances leading up to the relationship that formed in Bethany's story were the result of negative interactions with a resistant student that decreased her desire to be at school and increased her frustration levels to a breaking point, while Emily reached a similar breaking point in one day filled with negative experiences outside of school followed by a need to go into her classroom and go on as normally and happily as possible. In Bethany's story, she, as the teacher, had to fight for a positive change to occur between her and her student. In contrast, Emily's students were observant enough to sense her struggles of the day and were able to enact positive moments that led to a change for her. In both stories, a major source of change came when students found a way to communicate to their teacher that they cared and the teacher was able to recognize that expression of caring. This is when joy emerged for both Emily and Bethany. Noddings (2013) asserted that when students or the "cared-for" respond to the caring of their teacher, the "one-caring," their responsiveness provides the teacher what she needs most to continue caring. This was exemplified in these shared stories, as teachers cared for their students and then recognized their students' care for them.

Creating a strong and meaningful relationship with a student or students was not always easy, and often meant the teacher made a sacrifice. Teachers noted how their time could have been spent more effectively, how they could have avoided pain, both physical and emotional, how their stress levels might have decreased if they had given up on and not tried so hard or how

their to-do lists could have been shortened. However, teachers also stated the importance, in those moments of laughter, play, and trial, of taking their time to focus on their students and truly be present in order to build upon budding relationships, solidify relationships already in place, or to develop entirely new relationships. As one teacher stated during the analysis phases of one cycle, “listening to each story and thinking of my own made me realize that to find happiness and joy in teaching, you have to be willing to connect on levels that are not always easy, but that end up being so worth it” (Bethany: Session 1, Response 1, 2 September).

### **Teacher to Teacher Relationships**

The second common theme that emerged in our stories focused on the importance of having strong and meaningful relationships with coworkers as a source of happiness for teachers teaching in high poverty schools. In the beginning, I considered separating relationships with faculty and administration into two categories because of differences in terms of power levels. However, as I looked at the stories collected, it seemed whether in the stories were of relationships with superiors or with peers, the most important component seemed to be having a positive community of support.

This community included other adults in the building that teachers could turn to for a variety of levels of support. Their open communication with the other adults in the school community allowed teachers to find support through laughter and gain professional and emotional support from people who listened as they talked about the ins and outs of their day. Because of a shared workspace, this community was more empathetic than anyone else teachers could turn to in troubles or triumphs, because they were living and working alongside the teachers. They were able to sympathize and empathize because they had shared experiences, they could connect to each story because of common ground, and they could offer advice if

necessary because of a greater understanding of the situations teachers were facing. These stories corroborate Rogers' (2002) assertion that the support of colleagues can significantly affect stress and coping for teachers.

**Shared laughter.** As with student relationships above, important relationships among teachers were also formed through laughter. This laughter came as a result of shared experiences, willingly telling about funny and ironic moments, and taking time to play. Also as with teacher to student relationships, the idea supported by research that laughter supports trusting interactions and increases the comfort level was seen among the adult community in the school (Smidl, 2006). The willingness of the adult community to take time to talk, laugh, and play together allowed bonds to form which resulted in happiness on the part of the teachers who were part of those shared experiences.

Jessica shared a story of a difficult year in her teaching career that improved because of her interactions and relationships with coworkers. This was a year when Jessica faced many doubts about her decision to become a teacher, and she often felt as though she did not have the skills to continue her job:

I spent many afternoons following school hours in tears as I tried to process my day and how I could continue working with my frustration levels so high. As I took time to get to know other people working in the building better, I found myself going for walks to the other side of the school on particularly difficult days. My walks often led me to the office of the instructional coaches at my school, which soon became a gathering place for me as well as some other coworkers. These walks made my once solitary, difficult, and emotional afternoons turn into afternoons filled with helpful conversations with coworkers and moments of fun to release some of my negative emotions.

As the year continued, these moments became more frequent and varied, and they often included a wide range of others in my building. These afternoons following contract hours became essential to my happiness and my survival that year. We released energy and pent up frustration by playing silly games, like my favorite “hip ball” a simple game we created which was played with a yoga ball and our hips. We also began to relax and rejuvenate by having races up and down the halls or in the cafeteria on scooters. These two activities, as well as moments to share funny experiences from the day, led to us laughing as much as possible, often leaving the stress of the day behind us, even if just for a little while.

While my year began with a large amount of difficulty, by the end of the year I had created many positive relationships with other adults in my school community. These relationships created a safe environment to express myself, work through problems, seek advice, and laugh. By the end of that year, my coworkers had truly become some of my best friends, and I knew that on difficult days I always had them to turn to for support. The relationships I built with my colleagues during this year transitioned my year from a difficult time into a memorable year when I was able to find some of my new best friends in my coworkers. (Jessica: Session 2, Story, 6 September)

Jessica began her story by sharing some of the difficulties she was facing during her school year and then explained how her coworkers, because of their willingness to laugh and play together, were a cause for change in her attitude and her feelings toward her job. As Jessica put more time in her schedule toward developing relationships with her coworkers, specifically through laughter and play, she created friendships that carried her through the year on more solid ground. Emily said it well when she stated, “Sometimes when we can’t find joy in our job

because students are just a little rough, coworkers can be the saving grace and help pull you through those tough times.” (Emily: Session 2, Response 1, 6 September)

As Jessica and her colleagues took time to have more face-to-face interactions instead of only “face-to-face-on-the-run” interactions, their relationship increased in trust and there was a greater willingness to seek out help and advice (Rogers, 2002, p. 160). This type of safe and positive environment was made possible by having colleagues who would listen without judgment, offer some advice, and oftentimes just take her mind off of what her struggles were for a little bit. By turning to colleagues, as well as instructional coaches, Jessica found an outlet in “shared talk” which led to “shared laughter” that then led her to the help she was seeking as her colleagues were now aware of her needs and struggles within the classroom and ways that they could help and offer support (Rogers, 2002, p. 177).

Laughter providing a necessary support could also be seen in our experience of sharing our stories with one another through the process of story cycles. Bethany commented during the story cycle process, “I think it is evident in how often we laugh as sharing that happiness can come from being able to share these stories and being able to hear others’ stories” (Bethany: Session 2, Response 2, 6 September). While we discussed stories of happiness and those times that brought joy, we laughed together, and sometimes we cried together. Whatever emotion we were feeling, it brought us joy to remember these moments, to share them with others, and to realize that some of the experiences were shared experiences with one another.

**Professional support.** According to Rogers (2002), teaching can be an extremely isolating and lonely profession even though one may be surrounded by people. This can occur because of a desire to shield yourself from any perception of weakness or shortcoming, but it can also occur because throughout the day you are alone as an adult in a classroom of students

(Rogers, 2002). When teachers step outside of this isolation, and reach out to colleagues for support, engaging in those face-to-face moments as described above by Jessica's story, not only can that loneliness diminish, but teachers can find needed support from their colleagues.

One form of support that was mentioned in Jessica's story above and is evident in the following story is professional support. Jessica found professional support mixed in with supportive laughter because she was willing to talk to this group of teachers regarding her struggles in the classroom that she felt she could no longer deal with on her own. While laughter was one of the main ways that Jessica found joy during that difficult year, those moments of laughter also allowed for a relationship of trust to form and that safe environment was solidified as she was able to seek advice and help during those afternoons with her colleagues. This lends support to Maslach's (1976) finding that burnout rates were lower for those who could express and share personal feelings with colleagues in part because it allowed for the analysis of difficult situations, a new perspective to those situations, and constructive feedback could be given in an open environment.

Bethany shared a story of a time when she felt the support and validation of her principal as she was presented with a new and challenging possibility. She was nearing the end of her second year of teaching when the challenge was presented to her, and initially it was a terrifying new possibility that she was not thrilled with:

One night, not long before summer, I was talking with my principal. She and I were talking about the plan for the following year and came to the subject of split classes. I did not know a lot about what a split class was so she explained it further. At my school, a split class is formed when there are too many students in two consecutive grade levels to only have three teachers, but not quite enough to have four teachers. It is a way to

lower class sizes for both grades from what they would have with three teachers, and it is a way for the school district to save money because they are paying for one teacher instead of two. It means that about half of the class comes from one grade level while half of the class comes from another grade level. It amazed me at first that this was even a suggested solution, as it sounded like a lot of work and like a huge challenge for the students in the class, the teacher of the class, and the teachers that were on the teams supporting the class.

After explaining all of this, she then presented it to me as a question of whether or not I would be willing to teach a split should the need arise. She expressed her full confidence in my ability to take on the challenge, and she told me that she was certain that I would be able to handle the difficulties that would follow. She then explained why they had hired me in the first place, concluding with the fact that they had been very impressed with my knowledge and understanding of the core standards and the need to teach according to the standards rather than the teacher's manual. Her confidence in me, and in my ability as a teacher, even in my early years, was so encouraging and it made me feel like I could take on something that sounded like a real challenge. (Bethany: Session 2, Story, 6 September)

In Bethany's story, it is important to note that it was the confidence of a trusted leader which gave Bethany a greater faith in herself and which allowed her to feel that she was valued. This principal could have presented the opportunity as a mandate, because whether Bethany wanted to take on the responsibility or not, she might have had to do it. However, her administrator chose to present the opportunity as a challenge with the assurance that she knew Bethany could meet it, therefore instilling that belief in Bethany. Bethany went on to give

further evidence of ways that her administrator proposed to support her through the difficulties that might accompany the challenge.

Both experiences show moments when colleagues were present to provide the support and validation that was needed by the teacher at that time. When they knew that they had the support of people around them and they were willing to open up about the needs they might have that could be fulfilled by their supporters, teachers felt joy. That joy was sometimes found because others were willing to listen, to offer help, to support them within the classroom, and to provide feedback from a new and professional perspective.

**Emotional support.** As has been noted in previous stories shared, teaching is not an easy job. In fact, research has shown that while teaching can provide many moments of satisfaction or joy, it is also a source of many difficulties for those who chose teaching as a profession (Helms-Lorenz & Maulana, 2016; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015). These pressures and difficulties can sometimes come from expectations set within the school, and expectations set by outside forces (Ravitch, 2010; Rogers, 2002). From my own experiences as a teacher, and from my time spent with other teachers, I can see that difficulties from the personal lives of teachers are easily, and often, compounded by the stresses of everyday teaching.

These emotionally draining times, when it feels as though you may not be able to continue, are not singular experiences, and in sharing stories with other teachers this became even more evident since we could quickly and easily make connections to one another's stories through experiences of our own. As one participant remarked, "I think it's safe to say that working with others who lift us up in times of need . . . these times make our jobs as teachers more enjoyable" (Jessica: Session 3, Response 1, 18 September). As Jessica stated, being around coworkers who could buoy you up during those difficult times and provide an emotional support



specific to your needs, based on their intimate understanding of what you are dealing with, brought joy and happiness.

Emily's story of a difficult day turned around by a playful interaction with a student also included an important interaction with a coworker that provided evidence of the importance of bonding with the people we work with. Emily's morning of frustration was followed by a short time with a trusted coworker, where she set aside her school worries and focused on something else long enough to refresh her thoughts and move forward with her day:

Teaching can take over your life. It can be overwhelming, busy, full of challenges, and exhausting. One Friday all of this was painfully evident as I left a meeting feeling unsupported, stressed, and inadequate. Leaving the meeting, I still could not seem to get a moment's peace as I was bombarded with information from the school secretary, multiple teachers, and para-educators telling us about what seemed to be endless numbers of difficult student behaviors that had occurred during our meeting. By 10:30, I had made three phone calls home to parents regarding unacceptable behaviors and other situations happening at school. One of those phone calls included a parent yelling at me because they felt their child was not receiving the necessary services to succeed. This was a child that we were spending far more time than was written into her IEP simply because we were trying to help and this was a child who was attending our school on a permit (she was assigned to a school other than ours) which made this an even more difficult and frustrating conversation.

By lunchtime, I could not believe that it had not been an entire day yet and I was ready to leave for the day and maybe not come back. I settled for fleeing the facilities with a trusted friend and we raced out for a quick lunch away from the craziness and

chaos that we could not seem to escape at school. When you work with some of your best friends, your time away from school can often be overtaken by school talk, but this day as we were both hitting a high frustration level, we decided not to talk about anything school related for at least 30 minutes. Instead, we had much needed girl talk as we caught up on things going on in our personal lives. Being able to escape even for a half hour, and having a trusted coworker go with me was comforting enough to help calm me down and relax me enough to return back to school to face the rest of the day. (Emily: Session 1, Story, 2 September)

In this story, Emily tells of some of the everyday experiences that make teaching a difficult job. The challenges she faced on this day were nothing extremely different from what any teacher in a high poverty school faces on any given day. When those minor, and sometimes major, challenges arise and compound, it is easy for them to become overwhelming, as Emily described. The emotions that are required to deal with difficult situations at work, which are often less than ideal and usually intensified in high poverty schools, leave teachers drained, exhausted, and overwhelmed (Tricarico et al., 2015). When we found people like Emily's trusted coworker to lend a helping hand, or, sometimes even better, a listening ear, we worked through some of those emotions more effectively than we could when trying to work through them on our own. Sometimes trusted colleagues can lend just enough emotional support to take our minds off what is bothering us most and allow us to refocus, rejuvenate, and return to the work that deep down we do love. As stated by Bethany, "While our job is not an easy one, I think it is one that you get through best when you can trust and communicate with the people you work with" (Bethany: Session 3, Response 2, 18 September).

Bethany shared a story of a time when the difficulties she was facing came from things happening outside of school. Through this difficult time, she learned that her coworkers were willing to lend emotional support in ways she never imagined she would need them to:

I was awakened in the middle of the night by a text from my brother-in-law that said my sister, a healthy 33-year-old new mom, was going in for emergency open-heart surgery. I did not sleep again the rest of the night and after not sleeping; I got out of bed to get ready for the day. I got ready for the day crying intermittently and very unsure of how I was going to make it through the day at school. I debated staying at home that day but I knew that if I stayed at home I would just worry the whole day and I would still be crying by the end of the day. I left for school still very shaken, worried, and dreading the day ahead of me, but I was determined to make it through without crying too many times. I drove to school knowing that, if nothing else, at least teaching for the day would take my mind off my sister and would give me other things to think about. I also knew that by going to school I would be surrounded by a great support system as I had very good relationships with the other members of my faculty.

As I walked into the school, I felt like a mess and I almost started crying again. I walked in, set my stuff down, and then walked directly to the neighboring classroom where I found Janice. Janice had been my teammate for 3 years. She was near the same age as my mom, and because I lived far away from home, she had taken on a motherly role in my life. I almost ran into her as she was headed to another meeting, but as soon as she saw me, she could tell something was wrong. I looked at her and just asked if she would give me a hug. She put her stuff down quickly and almost had to catch me in her hug as I just started to cry. She had no idea what was going on but she just continued to

hug me for a few moments as I tried to compose myself. I was sobbing so loudly that I could barely get words out to explain why I was upset, but she just continued to comfort me and to try to help me cope with a situation that I felt completely helpless in. After composing myself long enough to explain what had happened, she grabbed me in another hug and told me that things would work out okay. She then asked what she could do to help me get through the day, even going so far as to offer to take my class for a good chunk of the day, to give me some time alone or to allow me to go to the hospital. I told her thank you, but chose to go on with my day as normally as possible in order to remain distracted from things that I could not control. Her offer was not lost on me.

As I went through the rest of the day, many people stopped me to see if I was okay as I was not my usual self. I confided in a few of them what had happened, but mostly kept to myself because I was still trying to process my own feelings. At the end of the day, I decided to send out an email to everyone to ask for their prayers, or good vibes, and just to let them know what had happened so that I did not need to keep avoiding questions or have to answer the same questions over and over again. The responses from my coworkers that day and the next were incredible. So many people were coming by to see if they could offer help or to just offer a hug. Another powerful response came from a very unexpected source the next day. A teacher that I was friendly with but not exactly friends with due to a lack of experiences sought me out in the afternoon. She found me in the computer lab with my class and said she had been searching all over for me since reading my message. She came to find me to give me a hug, and to offer help in any way she could, including making peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, as they were her specialty. She put a smile on my face and made me feel

loved, all by making a silly, but very sincere, offer. These experiences made me realize that the support of my coworkers was a key reason that I was glad to have the job I did.

(Bethany: Session 3, Story, 18 September)

As evidenced by both interactions Bethany described, as well as the small acts of support on those difficult days that she mentioned, her coworkers were instrumental in helping her work through a very difficult personal trial. Their support was evident in their willingness to reach out and pull her in when she was really struggling. In this experience, their support did not come as a response to school needs. The result of their kindness did not have a huge impact on Bethany in the classroom, but their comfort and sincere offers of love and support were moments that brought her happiness in her position at that particular school at that particular time. “Without their love and support in the big times and the small, I don’t know if I could keep teaching. I don’t know if I could keep going because their support provides a necessary emotional support for those times I think I might give up.” (Bethany: Session 3, Story, 18 September) As shown through this statement, Bethany’s need for the support from her coworkers was not only a source of happiness, but also a sustaining source that kept her teaching.

Emily and Bethany both shared stories of necessary emotional support provided by their coworkers. Each of them needed emotional support. Emily was bombarded by the challenges of teaching students who faced so many challenges in their own lives in a setting where needs were great and her ability to meet student, parent, and system needs was sometimes compromised, leaving her overwhelmed and unsettled. Bethany’s challenges emerged from outside school, but she came to school and again faced all the needs of students in a high poverty school while she was in the midst of a deep personal challenge. The type of support that was required was different, but in both instances teachers sought out their coworkers for support. This confirms

Emily's assertion "that when people know you and care about you, they know what type of things can help in those troublesome times" (Emily: Session 3, Response 1, 18 September). Therefore, turning to people, in this case colleagues, in moments of struggle leads to finding the support that is needed because they have a greater understanding of what is needed and how to help.

When meaningful relationships with the other adults in the school community were created, a support system was also put in place. This support system allowed space to laugh when things were funny or too hard to process, to lift when times were hard, to propel forward when trying new things, and to celebrate when good things happened. When one could confide in her colleagues, it provided an outlet for frustrations and tears, whether work related or not. "And sometimes experiencing tough things with coworkers . . . can help you grow and bond together and makes you feel that much closer when you have made it through those tough patches." (Emily: Session 2, Response 2, 6 September)

Openly communicating trials and triumphs with coworkers provided a sounding board for these participants, allowing space to discuss things and to try new ideas. The best thing this open communication provided was a person or group to listen when participants had successes and struggles that others might not think mattered. The other teachers in a high poverty school make up a group that understands teachers' feelings more acutely because they have seen ways teachers have failed before, they have heard frustrations of the teachers, they have witnessed their hard work, and they have provided assistance along the way. Further, they themselves have often endured similar experiences. Jessica said it well when she stated, "The relationships we make with our students, parents, and co-workers make us happy to be teachers" (Jessica: Session 1, Response 1, 2 September).

Noddings (2013) explained that a relationship of caring is self-serving as well as other-serving as it is not a sacrifice to care for others. The relationships described by Noddings (2013) focused heavily on teacher to student relationships, with the teacher as the “one-caring” and the student as the “cared-for”. These stories of teachers turning to other teachers for support provided examples of this relationship of caring being present between teachers. By turning to other teachers for support, the teachers in this study moved from being the “one-caring”, to the “cared-for”. This transition allowed these teachers to get the support and care that they needed in order to prevent them from “being lost as one-caring” in relation to their students (Noddings, 2013, p. 185).

### **Humor in the Situation**

Another theme seen in the positive stories collected was the ability of the teacher to identify humorous moments in the midst of a long day or a busy morning or just a regular day. Earlier in this document, laughter was discussed as one pathway to form relationships with students and teachers. This theme is distinct from earlier explanations of laughter as a theme because in the earlier relationship discussions laughter emerged in interactions between the teacher and another person, student, or coworker and often resulted both in released frustrations and deepened relationships. In this theme, the focus is not so much shared and unexpected moments of laughter with others, as it is moments of humor. The teacher alone can appreciate these moments of humor, or they can be moments shared with others with a similar appreciation for the humor in the situation. Teachers’ stories from this study supported the idea that humor could result in a temporary release of frustration, anger or painful feelings, among other things (James, 1995). Through these moments of humor, teachers were able to let go of and move on from moments that might have led to tears or if allowed to continue, might have led to teachers

leaving either the school or the profession. Some of the stories already shared in this thesis provided evidence of this. Humor was important to teacher happiness particularly when teachers took time to stop and laugh with students, to play with them, and to notice them and their needs. It was also seen in stories as teachers shared the importance of being able to laugh with colleagues, before school, after school, and away from school.

Teachers sharing these stories often gave examples of teachers taking an ordinary and simple moment and turning that situation into a laugh or shared humor. By turning some of those moments into laughs, teachers were able to take greater enjoyment in their everyday experiences and as Jessica expressed, “Laughter can sometimes get us through the day and I also think it helps us appreciate our kiddos,” and I would add to that our jobs and coworkers (Jessica: Session 2, Response 1, 6 September). This was seen in Bethany’s story shared above as she was suffering through a personal trial and dealing with many strong emotions. She chose to confide in her colleagues because she needed the emotional support they could offer. After receiving the emotional support that she needed, and after feeling that support from many of her coworkers, Bethany was then able to get through those difficult days and in the end was even able to laugh when her colleague offered her a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. Her coworker offered emotional support first, then when she no longer knew how else to provide support she turned to shared laughter as a way to boost Bethany’s spirits, and it worked.

Molly shared a short funny story regarding a humorous experience in her classroom. This experience allowed her to focus for a short time on the funny side of teaching and the joy that comes in those humorous moments:

One year my students had a routine of writing in a notebook every morning for a self-starter. I would give them a prompt, and then they would have about 15 minutes to spend



time writing in their notebooks. One day, the prompt was, “Would you ever go to space?” I received various responses that day, but the best response was, “I wouldn’t want to go to space because I am too young to die. I’ve been hit by a lot of things in my life, but I’m not ready to be hit by a meteor.” It was just a few lines of text, but it put a smile on my face, and brought joy into a small moment of a long day. (Molly: Session 2, Story, 6 September)

The example that Molly gave here shows an everyday experience that provided her laughter and then happiness in the moment. It later served as a reminder that even as we are trying so hard to teach and instill knowledge in each of our students, they are still kids. They need to be able to be kids, and sometimes we just need to step back and appreciate the way their brains work instead of always focusing on the next thing they need to learn.

Another story shared by Molly, tells of a brief interaction with a student that she was able to go back to throughout the day and continue to smile about. It was a laughter-inducing story that not only brought her joy that day, but also on difficult days since then. When she needs a laugh it is still a story that is quick to come back to her memory:

One day, a student, a Ukrainian refugee, was not feeling well. His stomach hurt, and his forehead was crinkled with pain as he walked up to me. He rounded the corner of my desk and in a sad, deep, thickly-accented voice said, “Miss, my body is ouch.” He said it several times. It was the cutest thing I had heard in ages! I kept a straight face as I helped him to get what he needed, and then I sat down and had a good long laugh at the whole situation. (Molly: Session 2, Story, 6 September)

As with the first story about journal writing, Molly was able to find humor in an everyday experience. In sharing it with us, she could not stop herself from laughing again because she

thought it was such a precious moment. Just remembering that brief interaction and taking time to share it with other teachers was enough to bring her happiness, and again to serve as a reminder as to why teaching is enjoyable, even when it was draining. While both of Molly's shared stories provided her with reminders of why she continues to teach, each of those participating could listen to her stories and see the humor in them. We could see and appreciate the humor because we could come up with similar moments in our own teaching careers to connect to what she shared and, sometimes, because we also knew or had taught the students in her stories. Molly's story was a reminder to all of us of what Emily said, "We do this for the kids and for those small moments of laughter and smiles. They are the reason we are still here and why we can stay happy in our jobs." (Emily: Session 3, Story, 18 September)

Emily, as a coping strategy for dealing with the pain of losing a student, found herself looking back on a funny memory with the student as a reminder of a positive experience. It was hat day at their school, and her student, rather than choosing to wear his own hat for the day, wanted only to wear her hat. Her hat was a great big white sun hat, and this student refused to take it off the whole day. They took pictures to commemorate the day because he thought it was so funny that he was wearing her hat instead of his own. While the rest of us hearing the story had not been there to be a part of that day, we could connect similar fond memories to students we have taught and could see the humor in her story as well. Looking back, sharing that memory with others who could connect to her story and being able process the humor of that day, brought great joy to Emily as well. This positive and silly memory still serves as a powerful reminder to Emily of why she is committed to her job on days when she finds herself struggling or questioning her decision to teach.

The examples of humor were many and varied, but often became more poignant to each teacher as she shared them with others. This goes back to an idea Jessica discussed in her story about her afternoon walks to the instructional coaches' office. In that story, much of the laughter came from shared experiences of playing games and having races, but one aspect of her story also included the idea of having some debriefing time each day with trusted coworkers who then became trusted friends. I remember a board policy being pointed out at a faculty meeting once regarding required teacher hours. The policy said something about how a good teacher devoted any time that was necessary to their job, and that the contractual hours of about half an hour before and after school were minimal requirements. Usually the half hour before and after is just that, the minimum of additional time devoted to our job. As a participant in these afternoon group sessions with Jessica and the instructional coaches, I recall many afternoons spending moments waiting for contract hours to be finished. We gathered in the coaches' office talking about our days. Often, this meant that funny stories of our day came up and we all enjoyed some laughter at what those humorous moments entailed. This was one way that we could "release our anger, exhaustion, and frustration" before playing games together, heading home for the evening, or, more often than not, returning to our classrooms to work on school obligations (Jessica: Session 2, Story, 6 September).

In each case of finding humor in teaching, finding the humor and then sharing it became a process by which the teacher could work through difficult days of teaching. This process allowed teachers to shake off difficult emotions, and move on to new situations with a clearer perspective. These moments also served as important reminders of happy moments in times when given our challenges as teachers and the challenges of our students humor was more difficult to find.

### **Joy through Difficulty**

The fourth and final common thread that emerged as we discussed happiness in our profession was finding joy or happiness through, or after, difficulty. It was interesting to see how many times a story that began with great frustration, difficulty, or sadness could lead to a great deal of happiness for the teacher involved. It seemed as though the frustration needed to precede the joy in order for the joy to be recognized more fully and remembered more vividly. The moments of sorrow, pain, and sometimes even tragedy were often turned around by the connections discussed above, teacher to student connections or teacher to teacher connections. While relationships with others served as an important commonality among the stories of difficulty leading to joy, another commonality was seen as difficult times were followed by moments of support which, as with humor, came because teachers were willing and able to share their stories of difficulty and accept the help of those around them. Noddings (2013) asserted that joy comes in unpredictable moments that often surprise us. Stories shared in this study confirmed that happiness or joy seemed to come at the most unexpected times and often came in moments that surprised everyone involved. These moments quickly became moments that would stick with the participants and serve, not just in the moment of experiencing them but later as well, to remind them of the happiness and joy they could experience in teaching in a high poverty school.

In Bethany's story shared above, she told of going through a time of great personal trial; at that time she found support through the caring she experienced with her colleagues. It was a period of time when Bethany did not quite know how to deal with the emotions that came with her personal trial that were compounded by the difficulty of everyday teaching. She went to school to try to escape or distract herself from the emotions from her personal life, but then she

had to carefully manage those emotions to be able to teach her students. This was difficult and not something she could easily do on her own. Fortunately, Bethany did not have to manage her emotions completely on her own because her colleagues were there to buoy her up during this time of difficulty. The support offered by her colleagues was possible because of the relationships she had built with them, but her happiness came because of their willingness to lend a helping hand. Their support was enough to keep her going through some difficult days; those moments of support from her colleagues generated great appreciation for them. This appreciation led to happiness, enough so that Bethany was able to continue doing what she needed to do, knowing that she was not alone in her work.

Emily told a story of losing a student, which brought heartache to her young teacher heart. While heartache came at the loss of her student, his passing also brought to the forefront of her mind happy moments as well as tender connections with this student. These reminders also provided confirmation that her job was worth doing and continued to bring joy into her life. Her story is as follows:

Having a job as a special education teacher, I feel like I have had the special opportunity to work so closely with some of the sweetest students and those that have some of the most heavenly attributes. In my second year of teaching, I had a student who as he left each day would say “I wuuuuuuuv you” until he got a response of “I love you” from one of us. Sometimes we tried to ignore the repetitive farewell or we would take a long time to respond and he would just keep repeating until he got his response. Because of his insistence on waiting for a response, the last thing I ever said to this student was “I love you.” He passed away later that day.

I attended the funeral along with many other teachers, students, and even administration from our school community. Being in a place of great sadness surrounded by people who loved and supported this family and this little boy in particular was a powerful reminder of the importance of my job and the importance of my students in my life. My students have tough times, times when they make me crazy and times when they are extremely challenging, but this loss was just one indication of how great a blessing it is to do my job. This student is still one that I look back on and remember fondly. I remember his humor and positive memories with him and on extra difficult days memories with him remind me why I decided to do what I do and why I continue to do what I do. (Emily: Session 2, Story, 6 September)

This story tells of an extremely difficult situation that teachers often have to face, the loss of a student. Emily faced this tragedy while the student was still in her care, which is something that none of us participating could fathom. But as a teacher who had lost a former student, Bethany could commiserate Emily's pain at the loss of a young life, and Emily and Bethany could take comfort in one another's stories. As Emily noted, this allowed her to feel closer to Bethany because they had similar experiences. Emily found happiness in her story in seeing the community that surrounded her student come together in support of him and his family. Even after the experience of loss, she found happiness in remembering positive moments with her student and in being able to empathize with other teachers.

Molly shared a story, which put into perspective one of the greatest difficulties a teacher can face. It is a great struggle for teachers because it is one that is never ending:

Every day I pour over my list. It is usually written in thin purple, blue, or black marker on unlined computer paper and clipped under the metal binding of a clipboard. Made a mistake? No problem, I will just rewrite it.

Usually I don't finish my list, never is everything crossed off. One time though, I did finish it. I think it was a Tuesday. The bell rang and I still had juice left in my personal battery pack to keep working for a few hours. I stayed until around 6 p.m. and left, with my schedule up for the next day, my floor vacuumed, and all papers corrected. I emailed three parents, submitted an office discipline referral, made all the copies I needed for the next day, and entered two weeks' worth of MCOMP grades into the computer.

I felt wonderful, elated, organized, and completely with it.

This has not happened since. It's rare that all of my grand plans for maximum productivity fall into place. Usually I leave a mountain of work piled on my desk or all over the room to greet me as I skip in in the morning. (Molly: Session 3, Story, 2 September)

Molly's simple story of the seemingly impossible to-do list and the one occasion when she could check off every item, concerned a story of a common difficulty that teachers face: fitting it all in. In Molly's story, she finally finished her to-do list, one day out of years of teaching. She was only able to accomplish this by remaining at school two hours longer than her contract required, after an already long day of teaching. With her to-do list finished, she was ready to go home. As she went home that night, I am sure it was with the knowledge that the next day there would be a new to-do list to make and new items to accomplish. She left with that knowledge, but was still willing to come back the next day and do it all over again. Molly

shared an important insight regarding her to-do list. Sometimes teachers have to finish the to-do list to find happiness as a teacher, however, usually the list just does not get done and on those days “even if your list is not done, skip in anyway” (Molly: Session 3, Story, 18 September, p. 1).

Often time teachers respond to queries about their profession by mentioning moments of great stress, but then follow up with stories of great joy or moments, which led to their satisfaction (Helms-Lorenz & Maulana, 2016; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015). This makes me think that we cannot have the good without first experiencing some of the bad.

(Bethany: Session 1, Response 2, 2 September, p. 4)

This was a pattern that was seen repeatedly as we discussed stories of happiness. A trial came, and while it was difficult, painful, and sometimes seemed like we would be overcome by it, through supportive listeners, willing empathizers or open communication we were able to make it to the other side smiling, and still skipping as Molly said. This supports the assertion that joy can “invade us even in pain and periods of deep grief” (Noddings, 2013, p. 150). She continued that while the pain or grief may not always be lessened by these surprising moments of joy, that the joy becomes like a “rainbow over tears” that slip in momentarily (Noddings, 2013, p. 150). These moments of joy during moments of grief or difficulty can often be just enough to keep one going.



## CHAPTER 5

### Conclusions

This study began as an opportunity for teachers, myself included, to share positive experiences in their profession in hopes of providing participants with a forum to explore their reasons for continuing to teach. While that is where the study began, in the end it has provided important contributions to the discussion of teacher happiness in high-poverty schools, and in connection, teachers staying in high-poverty schools. These contributions to the discussion came in the form of stories, which Noddings (1991) asserts, “have the power to direct and change our lives” (p. 157). As was noted by Bethany, “The importance of sharing these stories is noticeable . . . because each of us can laugh, tear up a little, or remember right along with the storyteller the experiences being shared because we have all been in those places” (Bethany: Session 2, Response 2, 6 September). Bethany’s comment highlights the power to both the sharer of stories and the other participants when teachers participate in safe spaces where stories with positive endings are shared, analyzed, and reflected on. This is particularly evident in the discussion of theme three, humor in the situation, and theme four, joy through difficulty. These experiences not only provide interesting findings concerning teachers’ experiences of happiness, but they support teachers in experiencing happiness and satisfaction teaching in high-poverty schools. In this study, both the sharers and the listeners were strengthened and supported.

This study was grounded in Appreciative Inquiry and utilized the tool of story cycles, a tool of Narrative Inquiry. This tool has not been used frequently, which means that this study has provided another example of a less utilized tool of Narrative Inquiry. The use of story cycles can provide a rich exploration of experiences, through the process of collecting and analyzing stories (Bunting, 2014; Clandinin & Caine, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Pinnegar et al.,

2005). Through the use of story cycles within an Appreciative Inquiry, a rich exploration of positive experiences of teachers was conducted, and the participants were able to identify common threads among their stories. These common threads identified pathways toward happiness for teachers in a high-poverty setting through their simple, everyday experiences.

The process of story cycles, as well as the appreciative nature of the stories contributed, allowed teachers to share their own positive stories and participate in the analysis of those experiences. This sharing and analyzing process of positive stories allowed teachers to better know and own their own stories (Carter, 1993). Teachers in the study indicated that reminding themselves of positive experiences increased their commitment to teaching in such schools and helped them identify where they might look for happiness.

Teachers who participated in story cycles, therefore, had a greater voice in the inquiry process, which gives their stories greater meaning (Carter, 1993). This greater voice allowed the stories shared to exist in a community where something could be made of them for more than just the storyteller (Carter, 1993). This meant that their stories could have greater power than to just direct and change the storyteller's life; they could also impact the community in which they are shared, which in this case was a community of teachers.

Teachers, as demonstrated through the stories shared above, are usually in the role of the "one-caring" in the caring relationship (Noddings, 2013). Noddings (2013) asserts that if the "one-caring" is not "supported and cared-for, she may be entirely lost as one-caring" (p.114). Her explanation is supported by the high rates of teacher turnover, particularly in high poverty schools (Ingersoll, 2001). Based on the findings of this study, district personnel, administrators, and teacher mentors could provide greater support, potentially leading to longer tenure by teachers in high poverty schools through the sharing of stories. Engaging teachers in telling

positive stories about their experiences that lead to happiness helps teachers recognize sources of joy in their teaching so that they can relish and recognize such experiences. This study also indicates that teachers need their leaders to provide support in ways that lead to their experiencing themselves not just as the one-caring but also in a role of being cared-for (Noddings, 2013). This transition of the caring relationship can come through the formation of meaningful relationships, recognition of and sharing of humorous experiences, and provision of support through difficult times until joy can be found.

Themes emerged through the retelling of everyday stories and everyday experiences, experiences that were not isolated exemplars. For example, notice how many times teachers' stories connected on one or more level. This shows that happiness can come from experiencing the everyday ups and downs of teaching when this leads to relationships forming among teachers, colleagues and students and when teachers have opportunities to share those moments with others. Teachers need safe spaces where experiences can be discussed, shared, laughed at, and explored with others who share in their experiences or can connect to them.

Sharing experiences allows educators to find support through their ability to own their stories and determine their personal reasons for staying. This process in itself was a demonstration of one way that schools can begin to make a necessary shift in allowing times for teachers to be the cared-for (Noddings, 2013). Molly noted during the initial analysis phases that "participating in this exercise of recalling and verbalizing joyful experiences as teachers reminds each of us what makes us happy in our jobs" (Molly: Session 2, Response 2, 6 September). Providing a consistent and regular time when teachers can verbalize their joyful experiences and share them with others can prevent schools from becoming a part of the crisis of caring Noddings (2013) described. This crisis occurs where teachers and students are attacked, caring is not

fulfilled, and teachers are “suffering symptoms of battle fatigue” (Noddings, 2013, p. 190).

Teachers need to be able to share their stories, but they also need to feel that their stories are heard.

Future research could be conducted with a more diverse selection of teachers or with a larger number of participants. This exploration could further examine reasons for happiness in order to gain a more generalizable picture of teacher happiness in high-poverty schools. Involving a larger number of participants with greater ethnic and racial diversity, from a wider range of high poverty schools (rural, inner city, etc.) would allow for a broader picture of teacher happiness. The findings of these studies could lead to new insights about how districts could enable teachers to continue teaching in high-poverty schools. Increasing the number, context, and range, of positive stories could provide deepened understanding of the dynamics of happiness that could be promoted in high-poverty schools (Whitney & Cooperrider, 2005).

Examining problems in teaching without looking closely at the experiences of teachers will never paint a clear picture of what it is like to be a teacher or why teachers leave, or in the case of this study, stay. One reason why this study supported teachers in staying is through their participation in the story cycle process of telling, examining, and reflecting on their experiences validated the experiences and led them to more deeply value teaching in high poverty schools. I believe Jessica said it well when she said, “What we teach isn’t what makes us teachers; it’s the experiences we have while being teachers” (Jessica: Session 3, Response 2, 18 September, p. 4). Teachers need to be able to explore their experiences, talk about them with other educators, and process them in a healthy, safe, and supportive environment. As teachers embrace and celebrate their joyful experiences of teaching, their joy becomes a sustaining power, which then allows teachers to renew their commitment to caring (Noddings, 2013).

## REFERENCES

- Bondy, E., Ross, D. D., Gallingane, C., & Hambacher, E. (2007). Creating environments of success and resilience: Culturally responsive classroom management and more. *Urban Education, 42*(4), 326-348. doi:10.1177/0042085907303406
- Bunting, B. D. (2014). *Being transformed by being a peer mentor: An examination of high-impact and transformative peer mentor experience* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Brigham Young University, Provo, UT.
- Carter, K. (1993). The place of story in the study of teaching and teacher education. *Educational researcher, 22*(1), 5-18. doi:10.3102/0013189X022001005
- Clandinin, D. J., & Caine, V. (2013) Narrative inquiry. In A. A. Trainor & E. Grane (Eds.) *Reviewing qualitative research in the social sciences* (pp 166-179). New York, NY: Routledge
- Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Creswell, J. W., & Miller, D. L. (2000). Determining validity in qualitative inquiry. *Theory into Practice, 39*(3), 124-130. doi:10.1207/s15430421tip3903\_2
- Darling-Hammond, L., & Sykes, G. (2003). Wanted, a national teacher supply policy for education: The right way to meet the "highly qualified teacher" challenge. *Education Policy Analysis Archives, 11*(33). Retrieved from: <https://epaa.asu.edu/ojs/article/viewFile/261/387>
- Garcia, S. B., & Guerra, P. L. (2004). Deconstructing deficit thinking: Working with educators to create more equitable learning environments. *Education and Urban Society, 36*(2), 150–168. doi:10.1177/0013124503261322

- Goodlad, J. I. (1994). *Educational renewal: Better teachers, better schools*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Hamilton, M. L., & Pinnegar, S. E. (Eds.). (2015). *Knowing, becoming, doing as teacher educators: Identity, intimate scholarship, inquiry*. Bingley, UK: Emerald Publishing.
- Harzer, C., & Ruch, W. (2013). The application of signature character strengths and positive experiences at work. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, *14*(3), 965-983. Retrieved from <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/e76b/9aed60e75962c2591671be010209631b6c3c.pdf>
- Helms-Lorenz, M., & Maulana, R. (2016). Influencing the psychological well-being of beginning teachers across three years of teaching: Self-efficacy, stress causes, job tension and job discontent. *Educational Psychology*, *36*(3), 569-594.  
doi:10.1080/01443410.2015.1008403
- hooks, b. (2000). *All about love: New visions*. New York, NY: Harper Collins.
- Ingersoll, R. M. (2001). Teacher turnover and teacher shortages: An organizational analysis. *American Educational Research Journal*, *38*(3), 499-534.  
doi:10.3102/00028312038003499
- Ingersoll, R. M. (2002). The teacher shortage: A case of wrong diagnosis and wrong prescription. *NASSP Bulletin*, *86*(631), 16-31. doi:10.1177/019263650208663103
- Ingersoll, R. M. (2004). *Why do high-poverty schools have difficulty staffing their classrooms with qualified teachers?* Washington, DC: Center for American Progress. Retrieved from <https://www.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/kf/ingersoll-final.pdf>
- Jacob, A., Vidyarthi, E., & Carroll, K. (2012). *The irreplaceables: Understanding the real retention crisis in America's urban schools*. Brooklyn, NY: The New Teacher Project. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED533959.pdf>

- Jacob, B. A. (2007). The challenges of staffing urban schools with effective teachers. *The Future of Children*, 17(1) 129-153. Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/17407926>
- James, D. H. (1995). Humor: A holistic nursing intervention. *Journal of holistic nursing*, 13(3), 239-247. doi:10.1177/089801019501300305
- Locke, E. A. (1969). What is job satisfaction? *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance*, 4(4), 309-336. doi:10.1016/0030-5073(69)90013-0
- Lovorn, M. G. (2008). Humor in the home and in the classroom: The benefits of laughing while we learn. *Journal of Education and Human Development*, 2(1), 1-12. Retrieved from <https://www.cambridge.org/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/S1833367216000195>
- Lyubomirsky, S., & Lepper, H. S. (1999). A measure of subjective happiness: Preliminary reliability and construct validation. *Social Indicators Research*, 46(2), 137-155. doi:10.1023/A:1006824100041
- Maslach, C. (1976). Burned-out. *Human Behaviour*, 5(9), 16-22. Retrieved from [http://www.scirp.org/\(S\(i43dyn45teexjx455qlt3d2q\)\)/reference/ReferencesPapers.aspx?ReferenceID=1415508](http://www.scirp.org/(S(i43dyn45teexjx455qlt3d2q))/reference/ReferencesPapers.aspx?ReferenceID=1415508)
- Mishler, E. (1990). Validation in inquiry-guided research: The role of exemplars in narrative studies. *Harvard Educational Review*, 60(4), 415-443. doi:10.17763/haer.60.4.n4405243p6635752
- Noddings, N. (1991). Stories in dialogue: Caring and interpersonal reasoning. In C. Witherell & N. Noddings (Eds.), *Stories lives tell: Narrative and dialogue in education*, 157-170. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

- Noddings, N. (2013). *Caring: A relational approach to ethics and moral education*. Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.
- Olsen, B., & Anderson, L. (2007). Courses of action: A qualitative investigation into urban teacher retention and career development. *Urban Education, 42*(1), 5-29.  
doi:10.1177/0042085906293923
- Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2004). *Character strengths and virtues: A handbook and classification*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Pinnegar, S., Lay, C. D., Bigham, S., & Dulude, C. (2005). Teaching as highlighted by mothering: A narrative inquiry. *Studying Teacher Education, 1*(1), 55-67.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17425960500039975>
- Ravitch, D. (2010). *The death and life of the great American school system: How testing and choice are undermining education*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Rockoff, J. E. (2004). The impact of individual teachers on student achievement: Evidence from panel data. *The American Economic Review, 94*(2), 247-252.  
doi:10.1257/0002828041302244
- Rodgers, C. R., & Raider-Roth, M. B. (2006). Presence in teaching. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice, 12*(3), 265-287. doi:10.1080/13450600500467548
- Rogers, B. (2002). *I get by with a little help...: Colleague support in schools*. Camberwell, Vic, Australia: Australian Council for Educational Research.
- Ronfeldt, M., Loeb, S., & Wyckoff, J. (2013). How teacher turnover harms student achievement. *American Educational Research Journal, 50*(1), 4-36.  
doi:10.3102/0002831212463813



- Sachs, S. K. (2004). Evaluation of teacher attributes as predictors of success in urban schools. *Journal of Teacher Education, 55*(2), 177-187. doi:10.1177/0022487103261569
- Seligman, M. E. (2002) *Authentic happiness: Using the new positive psychology to realize your potential for lasting fulfillment*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- Skaalvik, E. M., & Skaalvik, S. (2015). Job satisfaction, stress and coping strategies in the teaching profession—What do teachers say? *International Education Studies, 8*(3), 181-192. doi:10.5539/ies.v8n3p181
- Smidl, S. L. (2006). *Portraits of laughter in "kid" ergarten children: The giggles and guffaws that support teaching, learning, and relationships* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA.
- Start Class, (2016) Parkside School in Murray, Utah. Retrieved from <http://public-schools.startclass.com/1/92694/Parkside-School#References&s=ref>
- Strack, F. E., Argyle, M. E., & Schwarz, N. E. (1991). *Subjective well-being: An interdisciplinary perspective*. New York, NY: Pergamon Press.
- Tharp, R. G., & Gallimore, R. (1988). *Rousing minds to life: Teaching, learning and schooling in social contexts*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press.
- Tricarico, K. M., Jacobs, J., & Yendol-Hoppey, D. (2015). Reflection on their first five years of teaching: Understanding staying and impact power. *Teachers and Teaching, 21*(3), 237-259. doi:10.1080/13540602.2014.953821
- U.S. Department of Education (2015) Improving basic programs operated by local educational agencies (Title I, Part A). Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/titleiparta/index.html>

Utah State Office of Education, (2016). Parkside School. Retrieved from

<https://datagateway.schools.utah.gov/Schools/40129>

Veenhoven, R. (1997). Advances in understanding happiness. *Revue Québécoise de*

*Psychologie*, 18(2), 29-74.

Whitney, D., & Cooperrider, D. (2005). *Appreciative inquiry: A positive revolution in change*.

San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Yildirim, K. (2015). Testing the main determinants of teachers' professional well-being by using a mixed method. *Teacher Development*, 19(1), 59-78.

doi:10.1080/13664530.2014.970663

## APPENDIX A

## Consent to be a Research Subject

**Introduction**

This research study is being conducted by **Brittany Lund** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Master of Arts at Brigham Young University. Assisting in the research process as a faculty advisor is Ramona Cutri, Ph.D., a professor at Brigham Young University. This study seeks to explore **the experiences of teachers in high poverty school settings that lead to happiness**. You were invited to participate because **you have similar demographics and similar teaching experience to the primary researcher and other participants**.

**Procedures**

If you agree to participate in this research study, the following will occur:

- you will write three different stories regarding happiness (1-2 pages each)
- you will come together with the group and participate in further discussion and writing (approximately 1-2 hours, less than 1 page of additional writing)
- discussion and writing sessions will take place at the researcher's home  
XXXXXXXXXXXXXX
- the discussion and writing time will be recorded for extra stories mentioned throughout the process
- the researcher may contact you later to review analysis of your stories for approximately fifteen (15) minutes.
- total time commitment will be less than 10 hours

**Risks/Discomforts**

**Participation in this process may require some emotional discomfort, as you will be sharing feelings and personal experiences with others. This will require openness and vulnerability that may lead to discomfort.**

**This research will be conducted in a private setting (a home) with only those participating present, who are all coworkers and well acquainted. As the researcher and participant group we will discuss together and try to work through emotional discomfort together. Information shared within the group will be kept within the group with the exception of what is included in the write up of the research. When written about within the research your name will be changed in order to protect your privacy.**

**Benefits**

There will be no direct benefits to you. It is hoped, however, that through your participation researchers may discover what experiences lead to happiness within teaching particularly in a high poverty school setting, which may be able to lead to a greater conversation regarding teacher happiness within the education field.

**Confidentiality**

**The research data from this study will all be digital and will be collected and stored on the primary researcher's personal computer. The computer is password protected and will be viewed only by the researcher, participants and BYU faculty supporting the researcher. Upon completion of the study, data will be deleted from the computer by the researcher. Anonymity of participants will be maintained by a change of names, of the participant and any names included in the stories shared. An alternate name and generalized location will**

**also be created for the school of employment. When files are on the computer they will be labeled using the alternate name for each participant so that anonymity will be maintained.**

**Compensation**

Compensation will not be provided for participation in this study.

**Participation**

Participation in this research study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any time or refuse to participate entirely.

**Questions about the Research**

If you have questions regarding this study, you may contact Brittany Lund at (XXX) XXX-XXXX for further information.

**Questions about Your Rights as Research Participants**

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant contact IRB Administrator at (801) 422-1461; A-285 ASB, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT 84602; irb@byu.edu.

**Statement of Consent**

I have read, understood, and received a copy of the above consent and desire of my own free will to participate in this study.

Name(Printed): \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX B

### Story Cycle Example

#### **Phase 1: Bethany's Narrative (Session 1)**

Before school began my fifth year of teaching, I had been told by administration that a boy in my class would be a challenge. They told me he just needed to know that his teacher cared about him; he just needed love. I began the school year determined to find a way to connect with this student and almost convinced that it would not be too hard due to the reassurances of the administration.

School began and he pushed so many of my buttons that I thought for sure he would drive me to quit. For the first few months, he nearly did. His negative attitude toward me, his refusal to show respect for others or their stuff, and his constant desire to be anywhere but my classroom, made it difficult to bond with him. After a while of believing all that I had to do was get this child to like me I was ready to give up; give up on him and give up on my career. I had tried everything I knew how to do and it felt as though nothing was working, nothing was making a dent in his prickly exterior, and my energy was spent everyday. Everything came to a head when one day he was pulling my arm in different directions and then threatened to break it with a grin on his face. I fought not to cry in front of him and then I had to go back to my classroom and keep teaching. I cried as soon as I was alone. I thought that it was hopeless to keep trying and I was convinced that nothing I could do would ever get through to this child, which in turn made me feel as though it was not worth trying anymore. After some self-pitying, I moved past the despair and hopeless feelings and decided to keep fighting. I was determined that this boy was going to be my best friend by the end of the year, or at least that he was going to admit to liking me.

This breaking point led to renewed determination. As a team we came up with a different system for him and put it in place. We found something that motivated him and we began to see improvements. Although there were difficult days there were a lot of good days as well. The day I finally realized I had broken through came after a few more months of work. At the end of a long Friday I had a meeting to go to. During my meeting, my students were going to music. I walked out of the room and got about halfway down the hall before I realized this boy was following me. He followed me quietly and when I didn't notice him he started getting more vocal. I turned and gently reminded him that he was supposed to be with our class because I needed to go to a meeting. He then told me that he didn't want to go with the class because he wanted to be with me. I told him I would be back after my meeting and he would have a great time in music. I thought I had convinced him to go back to class so I walked into my meeting; he followed me in. One of the other teachers had to get him out of the room because he refused to leave my side. After getting him into the hall and locking the door so we could start our meeting, one of the other teachers stayed outside to work with him and for the next 20 minutes we could hear him outside the room asking for me. At one point his frustration led to tears. It was heartbreaking to hear him cry through the door, but at the same time I was elated because I knew I had broken through. I knew that he knew I cared and I finally knew that he cared too.

The rest of second grade was full of ups and downs, but on the last day of school he gave me a hug and told me he would miss me. He then asked if he could come back to my class in third grade. He came back for two weeks of third grade and then moved. I said goodbye to him yesterday. I almost cried when another teacher told me he had expressed to her that I was his favorite teacher. The progress he made through the year and the growth I had seen in him renewed my hope, and it renewed my belief in my own abilities as a teacher. He still has a lot of

progress to make and I am sad that I will not be there to see it, but the relationship I built with him over the past year is one I will remember forever.

### **Phase 2: Bethany's Response 1 (Session 1)**

Each story that was shared connected to students and relationships with students. Emily's story made a very clear connection between her happiness in teaching and the interactions she had with students on that particular day. Molly's story put a smile on my face as I could picture her hopping around as well as the students that might have been helping her...some of whom I had taught before. The connection and bond that was made between teacher and student that day was probably huge, bigger than even realized as it was happening by either student or teacher. It is amazing how the silliest of moments can sometimes bring the greatest connections between people. Jessica's story also brought attention to the idea of connection. Teaching is a very different role than parenting, but the connection she made to her students that day and the comment regarding how for some the interaction with their teacher is the largest interaction they have with adults was a poignant reminder that as adults interacting with children we have to be willing to do crazy things sometimes and really move out of our comfort zones. It seems that when we move out of our comfort zones with the kids we work with we make a greater connection which leads to a better relationship. Listening to each story and thinking of my own made me realize that to find happiness and joy in teaching, you have to be willing to connect on levels that are not always easy, but that end up being so worth it.

### **Phase 3: Bethany's Response 2 (Session 1)**

One thing that I hadn't really thought of as I listened to everyone's first story was how the stress of teaching came first and after the stress, and the hard work, the joy came. This idea that difficulties often lead to greater happiness, was a common thread between the stories shared that

I missed before. Taking time was another common thread that led to happiness. Without time and effort put into teaching it can be difficult to make the necessary connections because developing those relationships takes time. In hearing each story and the thoughts that come along with it it made me think of the research I've looked at where often time teachers respond to queries about their profession by mentioning moments of great stress, but then follow up with stories of great joy or moments which lead to their satisfaction. It makes me think that we cannot have the good without first experiencing some of the bad.



## APPENDIX C

### Analytic Memo

#### **Critical question**

What are the experiences of happiness of teachers, in their first ten years of teaching, in a high poverty school that sustain them enough to remain teaching in the context of high poverty schools?

In going through the three sessions of story cycles, 4 common strands emerged quite noticeably regarding the experiences of teachers that lead to joy or happiness:

1. Relationships with students
2. Relationships with faculty and administration
3. Finding joy through difficulty
4. Finding humor in the little things

#### **Student to Teacher Relationships**

The first common strand, strong and meaningful relationships with students, was something that was discussed in at least one story in each session. These meaningful relationships were formed in different ways for each teacher and her student or students. Some formed the relationship through laughter, some formed it through difficult circumstances, and some formed the relationship through play. The most important thing was that all formed the relationship by just taking the time to allow it to happen. Creating a strong and meaningful relationship with a student or students was not always easy, and often meant giving up something else, or letting go of something that time could have been spent doing. While teachers noted how their time could have been spent more effectively or in a different way, they also mentioned the importance of taking that time to focus on their students.

“None of these stories focused on teaching content, but the improvement or realization of student-teacher relationships.” Molly, Session 1, pg 3

This is a time that I felt happy and excited to be a teacher. I was able to connect with students on a different level.” Jessica, Session 1, pg 3

I really think the relationships we make with our students, parents, and co-workers make us happy to be teachers. Jessica, Session 1, pg 4

I was so grateful for my students who were able to completely flip my day around and not just make me feel okay about being there, but made me feel overwhelmingly and extremely...happy. Emily, Session 1, pg 2

I think we wouldn't all be here, especially after our past tough years if it weren't for the bonds we build with students, parents, and other coworkers. In the end those things make the tough times worth it. Emily, Session 1, pg 4

At one point his frustration led to tears. It was heartbreaking to hear him cry through the door, but at the same time I was elated because I knew I had broken through. I knew that he knew I cared and I finally knew that he cared too. Bethany, Session 1, pg 2

Listening to each story and thinking of my own made me realize that to find happiness and joy in teaching, you have to be willing to connect on levels that are not always easy, but that end up being so worth it. Bethany, Session 1, pg 3

All four of us expressed something that wasn't necessarily ideal but how interactions with students made it better. Emily, Session 1, pg 3

He will forever have a special place in my heart and when I have rough days and sometimes wonder why I decided to do what I do, he is one of the first things that comes to mind. Emily, Session 2, pg 1-2

Our students and the times we spend with them, even outside of academics, also help us to enjoy our profession. Jessica, Session 3, pg 4

We stayed there spinning and dancing for probably only 5 or 10 minutes but those 5 or 10 minutes turned my whole day around and helped remind me why I put up with all the lists and overwhelming requests from parents, admin and coaches. Emily, Session 3, pg 2

We do this for the kids and for those small moments of laughter and smiles. They are the reason we are still here and why we can stay happy at our jobs. Emily, Session 3, pg 2

(in talking about the first session's stories and the similarities in that session) It made it seem as though these stories were the most poignant and obvious stories in our memories. This makes it seem as if the initial reaction we each had to the prompt was to connect joys of teaching to our students. Bethany, Session 3, pg 3

### **Teacher to Teacher Relationships**

I considered separating relationships with faculty and administration into two categories because there are some differences between the two. However, I realized that whether the relationship is with superiors or with your peers, the importance is in having a positive community around you with people you can trust, rely on, and turn to when times get tough. By being able to communicate openly with the other adults in your school community, you connect with people that you can talk to about the ins and outs of your day and who understand a great deal more than anyone else you may talk to about it. They can sympathize because they have experienced similar things, they can connect to your story because of the common ground you share, and they can offer advice if necessary because they have a greater understanding of the situation and the other factors that are impacting you in the decision process. When you have meaningful relationships with the other adults in your school community you have a support system that is there to lift you up when times are hard, to propel you forward when motivations are low, and to celebrate with you when good things happen. When you are able to confide in your colleagues it provides an outlet for your frustrations and for your tears, whether work related or not. It also provides a sounding board for things to try and new ideas. The best thing it provides is a person to listen when you have small successes that others may think do not matter, but they understand the reason they do because they have been there to see ways you've failed before.

My difficult year in 2nd grade soon turned to one I will never forget because of my co-workers who quickly became some of my good friends. Jessica, Session 2, pg 1-2

Almost every day I would find relief with my co-workers. Jessica, Session 2, pg 1

They listened not just like a coach but more like a friend. We found ways to release our anger, exhaustion, and frustration. Most of the time in childish games like our made up game Hip ball. Jessica, Session 2, pg 1

Both in need of some extra support we sought out comfort and strength, happiness, in adults in our building to offer validation and support when we needed it most. All stories still pointed to the importance of building strong relationships, whether with our students or with our coworkers and administrators. Bethany, Session 2, pg 3

I believe I mentioned last session how teaching is not just about teaching to the core. It's about the influence we have on our students or even co-workers. Although I sometimes get to wrapped up in how difficult teaching can be I sometimes forget about the small or big moments that we have and the experiences we get to share with one another. Jessica, Session 2, pg 4

That also helped me realize that sometimes experiencing though things with other coworkers, or your class, or even particular students, can help you grow and bond together and makes you feel that much closer when you have made it through those tough patches. Emily, Session 2, pg 4

Sometimes when we can't find joy in our job because students are just a little rough, coworkers can be the saving grace and help pull you through those tough times. Emily, Session 2, Pg 3

I think it is evident in how often we laugh as sharing that happiness can come from being able to share these stories and being able to hear others stories. Bethany, Session 2, pg 4

I think it's safe to say that working with others who lift us up in times of need, like in Bethany's story, or get us away from a messy morning, like Emily, these times make our jobs as teachers more enjoyable. Jessica, Session 3, pg 3

The type of support from coworkers to Bethany and Jessica was given in different ways but it shows that when people know you and care about you, they know what type of things can help in those troublesome times. Emily, Session 3, pg 3

These experiences made me realize that the support of my coworkers was a key reason that I was glad to have the job I did. Bethany, Session 3, pg 2

Without their love and support in the big times and the small, I don't know if I could keep teaching. I don't know if I could keep going because their support provides a necessary emotional support for those times I think I might give up. Bethany, Session 3, pg 2

While our job is not an easy one, I think it is one that you get through best when you can trust and communicate with the people you work with. Bethany, pg 4

### **Joy through Difficulty**

As we discussed happiness in our professions, it was interesting to see how many times a story began with great frustration, difficulty, or sadness. It seemed as though the frustration needed to precede the joy in order for the joy to be recognized more fully. Those moments were usually turned around by the connections discussed above, teacher to student connections or teacher to teacher connections. Those moments seemed to come at the most unexpected times and were often moments that probably surprised everyone involved as moments that would stick with them and matter in the long run.

Often time teachers respond to queries about their profession by mentioning moments of great stress, but then follow up with stories of great joy or moments which lead to their satisfaction. It makes me think that we cannot have the good without first experiencing some of the bad. Bethany, Session 1, pg 4

Molly's and Emily's stories brought to mind the idea that happiness can come in those unexpected moments, whether moments of laughter, moments of tears, or moments of worry, those little, unexpected moments have a lasting impact. Bethany, Session 2 pg 3

It is interesting how some of our strongest memories of happiness still seem to follow our moments of great difficulty and sorrow. Bethany, Session 3, pg 3

## Finding Humor

Another theme that seemed to stand out was being able to locate humorous moments in the midst of a long day or a busy morning. Kids have strong personalities that they sometimes decide to share with us, usually after a relationship discussed above has been formed. They form that relationship after time and effort has been put in on both sides. By forming that strong connection with them, they are more willing to let their guard down and laugh with you. This was seen in a few stories as teachers took time to stop and laugh with them, play with them, and notice them and their needs. Teachers also noted the importance of being able to laugh with colleagues, before school, after school, and away from school.

Laughter can sometimes get a through the day and i also think it helps us appreciate our kiddos more. Jessica pg 3

Almost every day I would find relief with my co-workers. Jessica, Session 2, pg 1

They listened not just like a coach but more like a friend. We found ways to release our anger, exhaustion, and frustration. Most of the time in childish games like our made up game Hip ball. Jessica, Session 2, pg 1

importance of just laughing at work and sometimes forgetting about the logistics of everything and remembering that students are still kids and to enjoy the fun way that their brains work rather that just trying to mold them into what we think they should be. Emily pg 3

I love that Molly's story still connected to having humor while teaching. Those humorous moments are often what help us connect the most with our students as they begin to trust us as we laugh with them. Bethany, Session 2, pg 3

We do this for the kids and for those small moments of laughter and smiles. They are the reason we are still here and why we can stay happy at our jobs. Emily, Session 3, pg 2

Jessica summed it up really well when she said, "What we teach isn't what makes as teachers, it's the experiences we have while being teachers." Jessica, Session 3, pg 4