Abstract: The purpose of this study was to measure perceived professional and personal life satisfaction of Indiana Workplace Specialist I (WS I) faculty and their mentors. Workplace Specialist I teachers are all first year Career and Technical Education (CTE) faculty who must complete the WS I training program to be eligible for the Workplace Specialist II teaching license. These new teachers bring significant professional skills and experience to the secondary classroom; but none had completed traditional teachers college training before licensing. WS I faculty are assigned mentors during the first year of training. Mentors have at least five years of K-12 teaching experience and are typically CTE faculty.

At a WS I / Mentor training workshop, 84 first year WS I faculty and 68 mentors were asked to take the Life Satisfaction Index for the Third Age (LSITA) in an effort to determine perceived overall life satisfaction; 105 participated in the study. The 45 mentors had perceived life satisfaction higher than that of the 60 first year WS I CTE teachers. The results of the statistical analyses revealed statistical significance at the 0.1 level (0.068).

When analyzing only those age 50 and over, the results of the statistical analyses revealed a statistical significance at the 0.05 level (0.023) between the perceived life satisfaction results of the 10 first year WS I faculty and the 37 mentors. Mentors age 50 and over had a higher level of perceived life satisfaction than the first year WS I faculty age 50 and over.

Introduction

Unwanted employee turnover is one of the largest and most costly problems organizations face. Various studies (Hundley, et. al., 2007 and Drizin & Hundley, 2008) report that the costs associated with employee turnover can average upwards of $25,000 per employee, because of lost productivity, loss of intellectual capital, and the direct and indirect expenses of recruiting, selecting, and training new employees. Beyond costs is the relationship employee loyalty has on an organization’s ability to serve customers and succeed in an ever-competitive global marketplace. Employee loyalty is directly associated with organizational success, including its impact on performance, innovation, professional and life satisfaction and retention. Employees with low levels of professional and life satisfaction are less loyal than those who report high levels of professional and life satisfaction (Hundley, et. al., 2007).

Despite the importance of finding and keeping good employees – and the direct relationship employees have on the organization’s overall ability to succeed – several K-12 school districts face challenges in the retention and motivation of their workforce. According to the 2003-2004 U.S. Dept. of Education Schools and Staffing Survey, about two-thirds of public
schools with teacher vacancies in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) areas such as biology, physical sciences, math and technology reported difficulty in filling those posts. This compares to only 41% reporting similar difficulties in filling English/Language Arts positions. For well over a decade, school districts across the U.S. have struggled to recruit and retain effective STEM faculty in general and math teachers specifically. This problem appears to be more acute in schools serving high poverty student populations (Boyd et al., 2006; Boyd et al., 2008; Hanushek et al., 2004). Historically, this has meant that often middle and high school STEM teachers are teaching out of field (Ingersoll, 2003). The National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future (Barnes, Crowe & Schaefer, 2007) has estimated the cost of replacing teachers, who turn over in the early years, at $15,000 to $20,000 per teacher in our largest urban schools. The additional cost of remediation for students who lack expert teachers more than doubles that amount.

However, according to Arthur Levine, President of the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation and former Dean of Columbia University’s Teachers College, “We can help retain teachers by ameliorating the key problems that cause them to leave: poor salaries, bad working conditions, low status, and too little preparation for the classroom… (Education Week, 2008).” This research examined more than external conditions that impact STEM teacher retention, such as working conditions, salary, preparation and low status. This study examined the very essence of why and if high school STEM faculty, especially Career and Technical education (CTE) teachers, are satisfied with their professional and personal lives.

**Research Questions**

Do the mentors for the first year Career and Technology (CTE) occupational teachers as a group have a higher life satisfaction than the group of first-year CTE occupational teachers, as measured by the LSITA? Do the mentors, 50 years of age or older, for the first year occupational teachers as a group have a higher life satisfaction than the CTE occupational teachers, 50 years of age or older, as measured by the LSITA?

**The Importance of the Research**

This research examined more than external conditions that impact STEM teacher retention, such as working conditions, salary, preparation and low status. This study examined the very essence of why and if high school CTE faculty, especially career and technical education STEM teachers, are satisfied with their professional and personal lives.

**Methodology**

The quantitative data has been subjected to variance analysis techniques to answer the research questions. The authors will form an expert panel to analyze the qualitative research and findings for their specific impact on the adult education relationship.
Status of Research and Summary of Findings

At a training workshop, 84 first year CTE faculty and 68 mentors were asked to take the Life Satisfaction Index for the Third Age (LSITA) in an effort to determine perceived overall life satisfaction; 105 participated in the study. The 45 mentors had perceived life satisfaction higher than that of the 60 first year teachers. The results of the statistical analyses revealed a statistical significance at the 0.1 level (0.068).

When analyzing only those age 50 and over, the results of the statistical analyses revealed a statistical significance at the 0.05 level (0.023) between the perceived life satisfaction results of the 10 first year CTE faculty and the 37 mentors. Mentors age 50 and over had a higher level of perceived life satisfaction than the first year faculty age 50 and over.

Implications

It is imperative that CTE administrators not underestimate the power of experienced CTE faculty to serve as mentors, coaches and professional role models for junior faculty. It is also imperative that meaningful and directed pedagogical training be given throughout this first year of teaching, as it is important to the well being and retention of the new faculty. These interventions have increased satisfaction by the first year faculty, coupled with an increased self perception of adequacy in terms of classroom management, lesson planning, and teaching. We believe that this should increase first year teacher retention in these critical fields. Further research needs to be conducted to determine if the perceived effectiveness of WS I training, or additional years of teaching, has an effect on the perceived life satisfaction of new WS I faculty. In addition, it may be useful that similar research be conducted on other STEM areas. While Career and Technical education is important, and not all CTE areas are necessarily in STEM areas, it would be useful to know how other STEM faculty perceive life satisfaction. Comparative research should be undertaken to determine if other STEM professions (such as medicine, physics, computer and information technology, engineering, statistics, etc.) have similar or different results between experienced professionals and novice workers. Finally, research should be conducted to determine the relationship between teacher self efficacy and perceived life satisfaction.

References


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