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Exploring the Occupational Health and Longevity of New General and Special Education Teachers: A five year study of novice teachers prepared by Bethel University

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Exploring the Occupational Health and Longevity of New General and Special Education Teachers: A Five Year Study of Novice Teachers Prepared by Bethel University*

Peg McCormick, PhD & Geri VonGrey, PhD

Purpose:

Bethel University prepares teachers to serve K-12 students in Minnesota's public schools. Each year, for accreditation and continuous program improvement data are gathered on their teaching performance and their satisfaction with the training they receive at Bethel. However, we were curious to explore additional factors, including;

- What challenges do novice teachers face as they enter the field?
- How long do they remain in the field and what role does the onset of occupational burnout play?
- What can we do to support the mitigation of this process?

Participants

In 2016, we recruited 65 teacher candidates from Bethel's undergraduate and graduate education programs to participate in a longitudinal study spanning five years after program completion to learn more about who stays in the field, who leaves, and why. After initial consent, 43 participants continued through 10 phases of data collection.

Methods and Measures

The *Big Five Personality Test* (Truity Psychometrics LLC (2012-2015)) was administered at the start of the study, followed by three administrations of the *Maslach Burnout Inventory/Areas of Worklife Satisfaction Survey* (Maslach & Jackson, 2018) in the first, third, and 5th year of data collection. Intermediate administrations of the MBI (short) form were conducted throughout the study to sustain a twice-per-year check-point on Burnout levels.

The data were analyzed using multivariate linear regression (alpha value of $p < .05$) which provided an understanding of how the individual independent variables, *personality types* and *areas of worklife satisfaction* were associated with the dependent variables of *teacher burnout* across the first five years of teaching. Informal analysis of qualitative data occurred at the close of the study.

Data Collection

Each fall and spring, we collected quantitative survey data and qualitative anecdotes from our respondents. To encourage sustained engagement in the study, twice each year, we updated contact information and mailed full-color inspirational posters with encouraging messages and teaching ideas to all participants. Response rates varied from 32% to 54%.



Research Questions

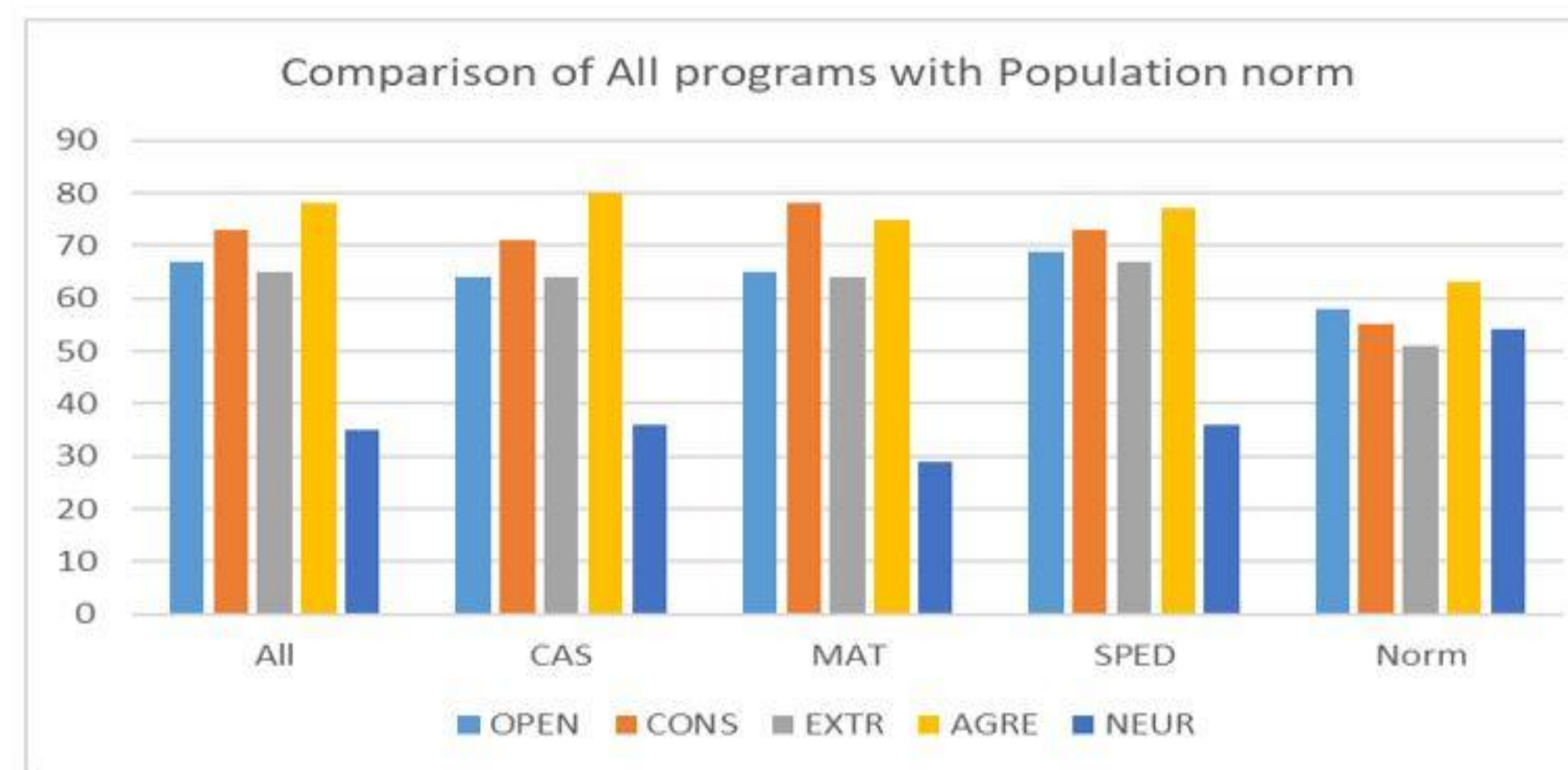
RQ1. Is there a significant relationship between teachers' personality type and burnout factors?

- Are there patterns of significant association between teachers' personality type and multiple measures of burnout factors across the first five years of teaching?

RQ2. Is there a significant relationship between teachers' work-life variables and burnout factors?

- Are there patterns of significant relationships between teachers' workplace variables and burnout factors across the first five years of teaching?

Summary of Findings RQ1



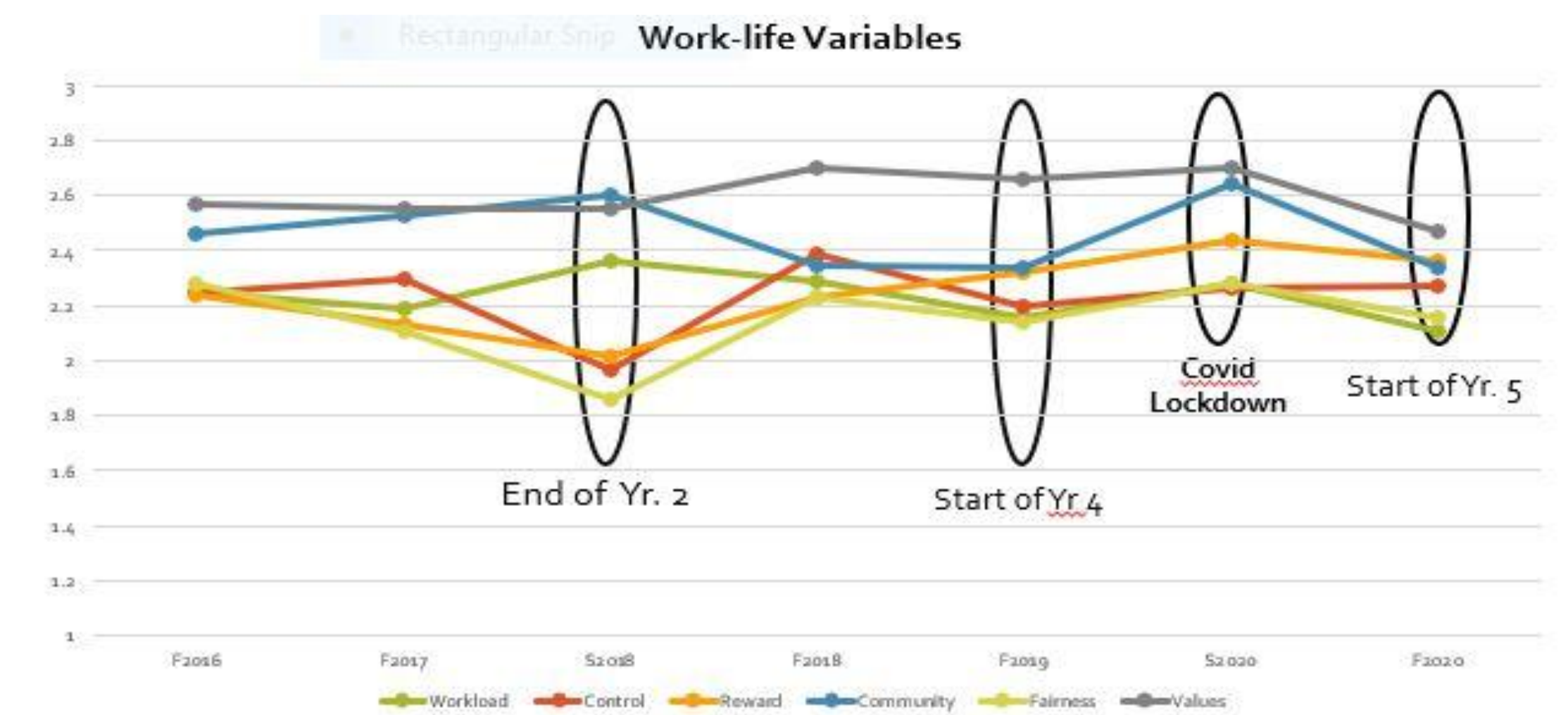
RQ1. Those with higher levels of openness and extraversion were best able to maintain satisfactory relationships with students during year three. These results were not observed again after year three.

Summary of Findings RQ2

	Workload	Control	Reward	Community	Fairness	Values
Year One						
EE	-.593**	--	--	--	--	--
Year Three						
EE	.500*	-.651**	--	--	-.530*	--
Year Five (covid)						
EE	--	--	-.473**	-.439*	-.440*	-.523**

- In Y1, exhaustion (EE) influenced satisfaction with workload
- In Y3, exhaustion (EE) influenced satisfaction with workload and control
- In Y5, exhaustion (EE) influenced satisfaction with reward, community, fairness, and values

Summary of Findings RQ2 (cont.)



- After year one, we see teachers questioning variables that are "systems related" or due to circumstances outside of the classroom
- The second year seems to have been the toughest.
- There was a recovery with the start of year three (new positions in new schools) with a slight second dip in some areas.
- There was a notable rebound with the onset of Covid in the spring of 2020, year 4, with a drop at the start of year 5, fall 2021. Over time, control, community and values are stable areas of workplace satisfaction
- Workload, reward, and fairness are less stable and rated with less satisfaction.

Conclusions

In Y1 and Y2, workload negatively influenced satisfaction in work-life measures. Later in Y3-Y5 as teachers "found their feet" issues of community, fairness, and reward were of greater influence. We saw a dip in work-life satisfaction around Y3 when teachers often leave their first jobs to find new ones and have to go through finding community again and adjusting to new leadership and new students.

Our teachers reported feeling a sense of purpose and mission as they entered the field. Through the five years, many reported that they remained confident in their choice to become teachers. However, many also reported stress and discouragement in ratings and qualitative data across the five years.

Current literature suggests a great need for evidence-based therapeutic interventions that may reverse the scourge of teacher burnout. However, there is a body of work emerging that suggests best practice in helping teachers avoid the onset of burnout. Within this study, we found evidence among some variables (community and values) that hold promise for preventative intervention.

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Presentations

McCormick, P., Von Grey, G., Lavery-Wanat, E. (2023) Camp Hope: A promising model of retreat for teachers' emotional and spiritual restoration. AACTE 75th Annual Convention. St. Louis, MO.

McCormick, P., Von Grey, G., Lavery-Wanat, E. (2022) Hope theory: A promising path for teacher retention and mental health. MACTE Conference, Plymouth, Mn