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Elevating Joy In Education Through An Investigation Of How Teachers And School Leaders Make Learning Joyful

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ELEVATING JOY IN EDUCATION THROUGH AN INVESTIGATION OF HOW TEACHERS AND SCHOOL LEADERS MAKE LEARNING JOYFUL

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to all the people in my life that bring me joy: my family, my friends, my colleagues, and all my former students. Thank you for bringing me endless amounts of joy that has fueled my mission to spread joy in education.

This dissertation is also dedicated to all my former teachers that grew my love of learning and to all teachers in the world who are doing their best to make learning joyful. This research is for you. Your work and efforts matter, and I cannot thank you enough. We need a world where joy is brought to all students in all places.

Acknowledgments

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Abstract

Joy in education is an underexplored construct that could serve as the key ingredient to cultivate positive learning environments and inspire innovation. The purpose of this study was to determine how joy might flow to students and what teacher efforts, instructional decisions, and administrative supports might influence the level of joy in the classroom. The central research question was, how do schools and teachers foster joy in their students? This research was explored from a strengths-based, positive perspective with theoretical foundations in organizational flourishing and positive psychology. This study used a survey research design with a school district that was in the midst of a multi-year initiative on joy. Survey data were collected from 178 elementary school teachers from 21 schools about the perceived level of joy in their classrooms and schools, their levels of joy, teacher efforts, instructional decisions, and administrative supports received. The results showed that the perceived level of joy in the classroom correlated most strongly with the teacher's level of joy, with a variety of teacher efforts and instructional decisions that correlate positively with perceived joy in the classroom. The strongest administrative support for the teacher's joy was supporting teachers' self-care. Instructional decisions to allow students to collaborate and offer opportunities for an in-depth exploration of the content contributed independently to the prediction of the classroom's perceived level of joy. This study serves as an invitation to educators to experiment with a variety of strategies to find what makes learning a joyful endeavor in their classrooms.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

As educators across the United States continue to navigate the triple pandemic of the coronavirus, threats to democracy, and racism and economic inequality (Mehta, 2022), they are questioning the impacts of the current climate, the ongoing accountability movement, and more generally the traditional school model, on student learning and well-being. The underexplored construct of joy has the potential to serve as a key ingredient that will cultivate a positive learning environment, which in turn will facilitate lifelong learning and inspire future innovative contributions to society. Joy is a positive feeling where contentment, satisfaction, delight, and gladness intersect. Joy in the classroom is when students experience the intersection of contentment, satisfaction, delight, and gladness in what or how they are learning. An educational system that fosters ongoing curiosity and skill development can empower all students to achieve personal goals and become independent citizens (Cunha de Araujo, 2021). In particular, learning conditions are influential in students' ability to set their own goals and drive their own learning (Ross et al., 2022). More specifically, joy can have an explicit impact on the development of lifelong learners (Hansel, 2018; Shareski, 2017a).

Because teachers and students spend the majority of their time in schools, adults and children alike should be able to feel individual joy in their learning and work, as well as share it together in community. Over the past 15 years, practitioners have engaged in conversations around the cultivation of joyful classrooms, including recommendations for various approaches and strategies (Erwin, 2005; Frank, 2020; Gray, 2013; Muhammad, 2022; Platt, 2020; Wolk, 2008). And yet, there is very little empirical research to show how teachers make classrooms

joyful, specifically in terms of strategies, programs, resources, and supports. The purpose of this study was to determine which of the intentional efforts in one school district already prioritizing joy influenced the presence and quantity of joy in the classroom. Specifically, practitioners could use this district's practices as an exemplar, from which they could glean strategies for their own learning communities. More broadly, the results of this study could serve as evidence in the literature that would advance the conversation among scholars, policymakers, and practitioners committed to improving the learning environment, which has beneficial implications for students and society.

Statement of the Opportunity

Flower Hill School District (a pseudonym has been used for the purpose of this dissertation), located in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States, is on the cutting edge of prioritizing joy in learning through a district-wide initiative of prioritizing joy among its staff, celebrating and growing its presence in schools. A leader in their professional growth and innovation department spearheaded this charge in the division through a variety of approaches:

- Created a web of joy leaders, called Joy Ambassadors, who met quarterly
- Provided professional development to school administrators on joy
- Hosted workshops on ways to make learning more joyful through relationships, kindness, and helping others
- Exchanged ideas across schools of joyful moments and how to create them through a dedicated hashtag on social media and division-wide newsletters
- Offered a two-hour class on how joy relates to teacher well-being where participants made joy maps
- Compiled a reading list and hosted a book study on joy

- Offered daily tips and suggestions to spread happiness and build relationships

Flower Hill School District serves as a premiere example of how a school community can leverage power to improve learning environments through the alignment of vision and values of school leaders with everyday practices of instructional staff. Since this experiment, with the goal of enhancing joy in their learning spaces, had been underway for a few years, it was an appropriate time to begin determining the effectiveness of these practices. In a qualitative pilot study, I had already explored and described what the teachers and school leaders of these learning spaces do to make learning joyful. I found a potential route of how joy spreads in the classroom and a host of teacher efforts, programs, and resources teachers used and the supports they needed to foster joy in their classrooms. Now, this dissertation study expanded on those results and determined how joy flows to students and which teacher efforts, instructional decisions, and supports contribute to higher levels of joy. Based on the unique context and initiatives of this school district, in combination with the results from my pilot study, I believe I unveiled practices that might affect the presence of joy and therefore make a significant contribution to the educational field.

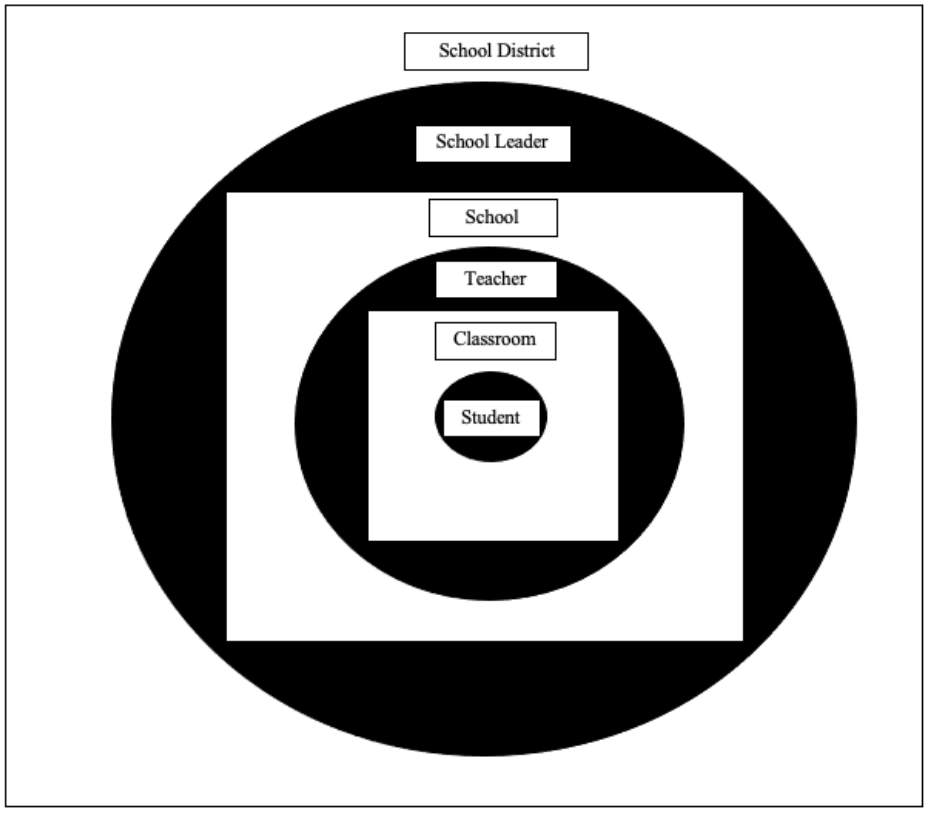
Conceptual/Theoretical Framework

I created the Context of Joy Conceptual Framework and grounded this study in Bandura's Social Cognitive Learning Theory, Glasser's Choice Theory, and positive psychology, to illustrate the importance of both interpersonal and contextual impacts on students' ability to experience joy in school. In particular, the Context of Joy Conceptual Framework (Figure 1) depicted the influence of context on people showing how joy may flow between the influencers in these contexts. Bandura's Social Cognitive Learning Theory contributed to this study with the notion that environmental factors influence behavior, especially in that students might mimic

desired behaviors from teachers. Glasser's Choice Theory contributed to this study with the thinking that to be motivated to complete tasks, a need for belonging and fun must be met. Therefore, to motivate students in schools, educators should find ways for students to feel as though they are part of the classroom community and have opportunities to have fun. Positive psychology contributed to this study as an umbrella field that incorporates the role of joy in human flourishing that then affects organizational well-being and functioning. Knowledge from this field applied to how joy might contribute to student and teacher flourishing which then influences the effectiveness of the school's functioning.

Figure 1

The Context of Joy Conceptual Framework



In Figure 1, squares represent the context and circles represent the people nestled within their context. Contexts, in this model, are set environmental spaces, therefore, they are represented by rigid squares. People are more fluid, with the potential to change roles and spaces, so they are represented by softer circles. The student is at the center of this model because students are the focal point of education. Then, students are within the context of the classroom, which is influenced by the teacher. The teacher is situated within the context of the school, which is influenced by the school leader. The school leader is situated within the school district. The classroom that is nestled within the school and largely within the district is important to this work as I investigate how efforts and actions in Flower Hill School District affect the level of joy in and how joy flows to the classroom, the space where students learn. This framework is meant to describe the actors within education, and how I envision the impact of the influencers within their contexts, to understand how students might experience joy while learning in their classrooms. Following existing school climate and culture research, students' context matters.

Bandura's Social Cognitive Learning Theory

In this theory, Bandura claims that personal, behavioral, and environmental factors affect learning, and more specifically that individuals who observe desirable behavior will mimic that action themselves (Tadayon Nabavi, 2012). Frenzel et al. (2009) used Bandura's Social Cognitive Learning Theory as part of their theoretical framework in a study about the effect of teacher enjoyment on student enjoyment during math instruction. They discovered a relationship between teacher and student enjoyment, mediated by teacher enthusiasm (Frenzel et al., 2009). These findings gave me reason to believe that if a teacher is teaching joyfully, then students should have the capability to mimic that behavior and learn joyfully as well. This theory, in both

its original form and its application in Frenzel et al.'s (2009) study, underlines the importance of considering the influence of both the learning environment and the adult stakeholders on students' ability to feel joyful. At the classroom level, both the teacher and the setting can affect students; similarly, school leaders have the opportunity to positively influence teachers.

Glasser's Choice Theory

Glasser's Choice Theory (1986) claims that humans have five fundamental needs, of which the first is the physical need to survive and the other four are psychological, including belonging and love, power, freedom, and fun. Because these needs drive personal motivation, Glasser (1986) argued that a good school makes students feel that their work will satisfy their needs, which in turn motivates them to work in school.

With a driving need for love and belonging, the key to a happy life is to build relationships with others (Glasser, 2000, as cited in Lečei & Lepičnik Vodopivec, 2014). Although this study focused on joy, themes of relationship-building emerged from my pilot study, which connects back to the central need for love and belonging. Suggesting ways to form relationships, especially in education, Glasser (2000, as cited in Lečei & Lepičnik Vodopivec, 2014) offered "seven caring habits" that included: "encouragement, belief, support, respect, acceptance, negotiation, and listening" (p. 41). These habits also emerged from the preliminary data on joy in my qualitative pilot study, namely what teachers need from school leaders to foster joyful classrooms. Our conceptual framework depicted the impact school leaders have on the school that then influences the teacher.

This theory grounds this study in the theories of human motivation that suggest that work must satisfy needs. The central need for belonging will connect to the school and classroom community, and the need for fun will connect to the presence of joy in the classroom and school.

Positive Psychology

The field of positive psychology centers on concepts that align with joy. Defined succinctly, "positive psychology is the study of well-being, which includes five essential elements—positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment" (Chu, 2022, p. 154). Researchers aligned with positive psychology study joy from an emotions-mood perspective (Johnson, 2020). Within the branch of positive psychology, the focus is on an individual's positive qualities not their negative ones, which leads to research and strategies that cultivate perspectives, thoughts, and routines that are positive (Kutsyuruba et al., 2021). In this study, I explored teachers' strengths to promote joy amongst others. Positive psychology teaching strategies focus on gratitude, positive interactions, good news, stories that promote resiliency, growth mindset, goal setting, and encouraging students to use their strengths (Chu, 2022). When applied to education, the five essential elements of positive psychology—positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment—help build students' resiliency, ability to tackle difficult tasks, and confidence to become successful (Chu, 2022). Positive emotions also can influence the openness to learning new things (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018). Positive psychology investigates the positives that promote confidence, resiliency, and growth. Within positive psychology is a smaller field that uses a lens to understand the positives of organizations.

Positive Organizational Perspective. A positive organizational perspective allows for a focus on what is going well in an organization, adopting a strengths-based approach (Kutsyuruba et al., 2021). This perspective does not discount challenges, stressors, or trauma that might exist within an organization, but this perspective does not solely focus on those (Kutsyuruba et al., 2021). Instead, a positive organizational perspective "sees the system from the perspective of

what is working well, what makes us feel whole, connected, engaged, and alive" (Kutsyuruba et al., 2021, p. 2). A positive organizational perspective can see the strengths and can examine what components within the organization lead to true, overall flourishing.

Flourishing. Flourishing is a term that incorporates many positive attributes within an organization, one of which, can be joy. From a synthesis of understanding of flourishing from the perspective of positive psychology and organizational research, Kutsyuruba et al. (2021) define flourishing in education as "describes teachers and administrators who, within and in spite of the challenges, confines, struggles, and strains of their work, experience a sense of engagement, connection, meaning, and enjoyment in their work" (p. 3). Kutsyuruba et al. (2021) have explored flourishing to understand from educators who are flourishing how they arrived at that state and how that knowledge can be shared with others to help all educators flourish.

Joy. Joy is an element of flourishing in education. The feeling of enjoying being in the classroom is one descriptor for flourishing (Kutsyuruba et al., 2021). Some indicators and descriptors of flourishing overlap with indicators and descriptors of joy. These indicators describe flourishing as laughter or enjoying teaching and acknowledge that it can be contagious (Cherkowski & Walker, 2018; Kutsyuruba et al., 2021). In one study on flourishing, educators found joy when they saw the positive impact they had on students (Cherkowski & Walker, 2018), which connects broadly to teacher well-being and to flourishing.

Therefore, joy is situated as an element of organizational flourishing, which can be found through using a positive organizational lens. This study explored this organizational element of joy from a strengths-based, positive perspective.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to determine how joy might flow to students and what teacher efforts, instructional decisions, and supports might influence the level of joy in the classroom. Flower Hill School District has taken a unique approach to educating students through their devotion of time and resources to joy. Now serves as a pivotal time to evaluate their practices to see what intentional efforts can leverage joy in the classroom. I explored which of their efforts and supports correlate with joy. The research questions at the core of this study were as follows:

Central Research Question: How do schools and teachers foster joy in their students?

Sub questions:

1. To what extent is the teacher's perceived level of their own joy related to the same teacher's perception of the level of joy in their classroom?
2. To what extent is the teachers' perceived level of joy in the school related to the perceived level of joy in its classrooms?
3. What efforts by the teacher correlate with the teacher's perceived level of joy in the classroom?
4. What instructional decisions correlate with the teacher's perceived level of joy in the classroom?
5. What administrative supports correlate with the teacher's perceived level of joy in the classroom?

Significance of the Study

For a study to be worth conducting, it should be both interesting and important. The present study on joy was centered on a dimension of school that has rarely been discussed in

empirical literature but is highly valued by school leaders and teachers. Based on the breadth of these practitioners' recommendations for making learning joyful (Erwin, 2005; Frank, 2020; Gray, 2013; Muhammad, 2022; Platt, 2020; Wolk, 2008), in addition to the current challenges facing American public schools today, it is a critical time to elevate the discussion of joy to the scholarly level. Despite the inclusion of joy in other disciplines, such as psychology and religion, there is currently no explicit definition of joy in education. The creation of new shared language, in addition to the generation of empirical evidence on effective teacher strategies and associated supports needed to cultivate joy, has the potential to transform learning environments for students. The results of this study support actions that facilitate joy in the classroom and also reveal the relationship between teacher and school leader efforts and joy.

The contributions of this study to the literature provide research to support teachers and their strategies in promoting joy that could benefit students' experience of education and passion, as research suggests that joy in the classroom helps to create the condition that results in students becoming lifelong learners (Hansel, 2018; Shareski, 2017a). Further, research in joy can help humans promote flourishing (Johnson, 2020). These are all positive outcomes, important to students' success in life, that will resonate with educators, parents, and other community stakeholders. This study helps improve practice by providing teachers with strategies to try to increase the level of joy in their classrooms and by providing leaders with supports to try to increase the level of joy in their schools. This study also helps improve policy by providing suggestions to policymakers for what teachers need for their classrooms to foster joy and for providing evidence to support decision-makers ready to prioritize programs, initiatives, and policies that help to foster joy.

Definition of Terms

- Teacher efforts: Intentional actions by the teacher.
- Instructional decisions: Choices made by the teacher for teaching and learning that are then implemented into lessons.
- School climate: "Is a reflection of the way people perceive and come to describe the characteristics of their environment" (Verbecke et al., 1998, p. 319), specifically within schools it "creates the physiological and psychological conditions for productive learning" (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018, p. v).
- School culture: "The shared norms and behavioral expectations that guide how work is completed within the organization" (Glisson et al., 2008, as cited in Williams et al., 2021), more succinctly put, "the way things are done in an organization" (Verbecke et al., 1998, p. 320).
- Teachers: Adults who provide instruction to students in the classroom
- Administrators: School leaders at the building level (assistant principals, principals)
- School Leaders: Can include building level leaders (assistant principals, principals) and central office staff (region superintendents, directors, superintendents)
- Flourishing: "describes teachers and administrators who, within and in spite of the challenges, confines, struggles, and strains of their work, experience a sense of engagement, connection, meaning, and enjoyment in their work" (Kutsyuruba et al., 2021, p. 3).

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Although the concept of joy has been developed within disciplines including psychology and religion, few researchers have explored the concept of joy within education. For school leaders, educators, and community members to best support students, it would be beneficial to establish a shared language around what joy is, how to foster it, and its value in education so that we can learn to cultivate its presence so students learn, grow, and flourish.

To create a foundation upon which the current study can rest, as well as fill in the existing void in the literature, I first share a variety of previously established definitions and descriptions of joy in the contexts of education, psychology, and religion, from which my working definition and description emerged. Next, I explore what we do know about joy in relation to education which brings us to the purpose of this study. The lack of major empirical studies and the plethora of practitioner-friendly, advice-centered literature focused on joy in classrooms and schools provide the rationale for this study. The following sections of this chapter present how joy is defined in other disciplines, my working definition of joy, what we know about joy in education through research and practitioner texts, the impact of organizational culture and climate, why joy is lacking in our current educational system, the argument against and for joy in education, and both the research-based recommendations for fostering joy in the classroom as well as those that grow out of the practitioner focused literature.

Definition of Joy in Education

Scholarly educational literature lacks a comprehensive and clear definition of joy, which is a problem because joy is often conflated with other constructs, making recommendations for how to foster it confusing and potentially misleading. When defined, joy is described as an

outcome or result of education (Muhammad, 2022). To combat this issue of defining joy, Wolk (2008) leaned on the Random House Dictionary's definition that joy is "the emotion of great delight or happiness caused by something good or satisfying" to ground his recommendations for making school a place of joy for students (p. 10). Practitioners have more concrete definitions and descriptions of joy because educators recognize its value in the classroom. A clear definition of joy needs to be elevated to the scholarly research level, so researchers can conduct research that provides evidence of its importance to drive policymakers to create and support policies that foster joyful learning environments. This cycle has the potential to bring change to the classroom level, which will better support teachers and their work in classrooms for students.

Practitioners define joy in education in relatable teacher moments such as the feeling of loving one's work and wanting to continue with it because of that love (Shareski, 2017b). In other words, "it's the outward manifestation of success, achievement, and being. It's learning for the sake of learning, not because of a grade or compliance" (Shareski, 2017a, p. 15). This connection gives reason for those studying joy to associate joy with an internal motivation for learning, a feeling that promotes the desire to learn.

Joy is often written about in the literature in conjunction with other constructs, making them synonymous with one another. Although joy and happiness are distinct constructs, they are sometimes written about as interchangeable constructs. It is still useful to consider the positive attributes of joy even when equated with happiness. For example, joy can be "a positive, pervasive, and long-term state of being," (Platt, 2020, p.11) and specifically in education, "in a truly joyful classroom, students feel happy even when the work they are engaged in is not immediately fun" (p. 11). Similarly, joy and fun can become so intertwined in the literature, that they can be misconstrued as interchangeable constructs as well. Providing recommendations for

making classrooms more fun become directions for developing joyful classroom environments (Erwin, 2005).

If there is too much confusion among related constructs and joy, then it will become too difficult to reach the essence of joy. Once joy is isolated, then researchers and scholars can better understand what may cause or trigger it, what conditions encourage it, how to sustain its presence in an environment, and its true benefits. It is important to understand joy as its own construct. Perspectives from other disciplines offer more clarity on joy, offering dimensions for education to consider and potentially adopt when defining joy in education.

Definition of Joy in Psychology

With a basic understanding of joy in education, it is equally helpful to recognize how the fields of positive psychology and positive organizational scholarship further contribute to the understanding of joy. As a reaction after World War II where psychology only focused on diseases and negative attributes of human life, psychologists created a new subfield in psychology to focus on positive experiences, positive individual traits, and positive institutions (Peterson & Seligman, 2003). It is within the subcategory of positive experiences that positive psychologists study joy (Cameron et al., 2003).

In the field of psychology, there is a parallel to education in the experience of a lack of clarity for the construct of joy as well. Johnson (2020) took the first step to gather the studies he found on joy in psychology and synthesized the collective findings. His review of the literature brings confidence in the overall definitions of joy he found.

Joy has been described as being experienced in three different ways: (a) excited vs. serene joy, (b) individuated vs. affiliative joy, (c) anticipatory vs. consummatory joy (Meadows, 2014, as cited in Johnson, 2020). These different types of joy capture its high or low energy, how

it can make a person feel calm and in harmony or feel excited, its potential to be experienced alone or with others, and that it can be situated in anticipation of a wish or once a wish has been actualized.

From his review, Johnson (2020) created the framework that "joy can be viewed as an emotion, mood, disposition, or spiritual fruit" (p. 16). In this framework, joy can be experienced at different levels of intensity, from low energy where one might feel calm and at peace to high energy where one feels excited. Joy is usually shared with other people, although can be experienced alone. Joy may be elation and gladness. At its pinnacle, it can be experienced as ecstasy or bliss so long as one does not lose self-consciousness. Joy can have different levels of stability in one's life and may come with a "pervasive spiritual sense of satisfaction, confidence, or gratitude" (p. 16). Culture and language may affect experiences of joy, and individuals may be trained to experience more joy. Based on his review, Johnson (2020) suggested that suffering may help others experience more joy and that sharing our joy may increase our joy. There are counterfeit feelings of joy when we celebrate others' demise, which is not true joy. Joy may come in forms that are too intense and our urge is to return to harmony and experiences of negative emotions may follow experiences of high joy. The opposite of joy is acedia, a form of apathy that leads to boredom and then to distraction. But most importantly, since joy is motivational and contagious, it could help humans flourish.

Studying joy at the organizational level is important as well. The work of positive organizational scholarship surrounds the promotion of flourishing, thriving, and excellence (Cameron et al., 2003). Aligned with positive psychology, positive organizational scholars suggest "organizational members' experiences of positive emotions—like joy…can be transformational and fuel upward spirals toward optimal individual and organizational

functioning" (Frederickson, 2003, p. 163). Research on individuals has shown that positive emotions, like joy, can help individuals function better, leading to the hypothesis that individuals experiencing joy in an organization can help the organization function better too (Frederickson, 2003). Therefore, studying the experience of joy in classrooms and schools can support understanding how to optimize the functioning of the educational system. This premise leads us to the current study, that an analysis at the organizational level can be beneficial.

We want students to grow, learn, and thrive in the classroom so they can become contributing members of society upon graduation. Since psychologists make the theoretical connection that joy contributes to flourishing in any context, Kutsyuruba et al. (2021) propose that joy will contribute to flourishing in education. This supports the value of joy in educational contexts.

Definition of Joy in Religion

Despite the variety of descriptions and implementations of joy across religious texts and practices, two spiritual leaders, in particular, have offered a universal approach to experiencing joy, regardless of religious affiliation. His Holiness the Dalai Lama of the Buddhist religious tradition and the Archbishop Desmond Tutu, a devout Christian, synthesized their life experiences and knowledge with the assistance of Douglas Abrams who recorded their wisdom in a text about joy. Joy is described as a state, but it can also become a trait. It spans a variety of emotions such as pleasure, excitement, wonder, pride, gratitude, and more. And finding joy is a quest for finding satisfaction. These leaders propose that the greatest joy is "when we seek to do good for others" (Bstan-'dzin-rgya-mtsho et al., 2016, p. 59). These two religious leaders identified eight pillars of joy, antecedents that "allow us to experience more joy" (p. 193): perspective, humility, humor, acceptance, forgiveness, gratitude, compassion, and generosity. In

contrast, they also identified the following obstacles to joy: anxiety, stress, fear, sadness, despair, loneliness, envy, suffering, and illness (Bstan-‘dzin-rgya-mtsho et al., 2016). Based on the belief that the goal of human life is “to live with joy and purpose” (Bstan-‘dzin-rgya-mtsho et al., 2016, p. 299), these spiritual leaders recommend helping others, as well as showing compassion and living in gratitude in community, as a means of becoming joyful. From this religious perspective, joy can be a feeling as well as a state of being, that can be achieved to the utmost when helping others. It is often difficult to achieve when feeling lonely.

The understanding of joy from the discipline of religion offered insight into joy as both a feeling and an intentional stance towards daily life. It also offers suggestions about embracing compassion and living in gratitude.

Definition of Joy

I have crafted the following definition of joy, based on my understanding and synthesis of both academic research and personal musings of experts, researchers, and scholars on this construct in a variety of contexts.

I propose that joy is a positive feeling (Platt, 2020) of satisfaction and excitement (Johnson, 2020), that can be experienced in a moment in time, but that can grow into an intentional stance towards daily life (Bstan-‘dzin-rgya-mtsho et al., 2016). When truly engaged in a moment, joy is the feeling where contentment, satisfaction, delight, and gladness intersect, melding into an excitement that manifests physically through smiles, bright eyes, and sometimes even laughter (Karjalainen et al., 2019; Tschannen-Moran, 2020). Joy can be experienced alone or with others (Johnson, 2020) on a scale from low to high energy, with low energy joy feeling like a sense of internal harmony, sereneness, and calmness to a high energy joy feeling like intense excitement (Meadows, 2014, as cited in Johnson, 2020).

Joy might envelop feelings of elation, gladness, great delight, pleasure, excitement, wonder, pride, gratitude, and great happiness but is not so intense one loses self-consciousness as in the feeling of ecstasy (Johnson, 2020). Experiences that might produce joy include finding satisfaction; helping others; showing compassion; living in gratitude (Bstan-‘dzin-rgya-mtsho et al., 2016); experiencing success and having an impact (Liu, 2019); being acknowledged (Liu, 2019); and anticipating a wish or experiencing a wish’s actualization (Meadows, 2014, as cited in Johnson, 2020). Its effect of bringing people together makes joy hard to achieve when feeling lonely (Bstan-‘dzin-rgya-mtsho, 2016). Its opposite is apathy (Johnson, 2020).

More specifically, in the classroom, joy is when students are engaged and enjoying what or how they are learning. When students experience joy, it can then fuel and sustain an internal motivation for learning (Shareski, 2017a). It is evident in students’ eyes, smiles, and laughter (Karjalainen et al., 2019; Tschannen-Moran, 2020) and when students have a desire to return to school each day. Joy can be felt even when the content is difficult (Platt, 2020). Joy can be shared with (Johnson, 2020) and spread to others in the classroom. Joy is both a means, represented by the emotion and energy conveyed during teaching and experienced during the learning process and an end, or the outcome for students (Muhammad, 2022) to find learning enjoyable. A synthesis of the understandings of joy from education, psychology, and religion led me to this understanding of joy.

What We Do Know About Joy in Education

With theoretical underpinnings in positive psychology and influenced by religion, joy can be understood in education as an overall feeling of positivity, satisfaction, and excitement. Next, it is important to highlight how joy may be identified in the classroom, examples of joy, how it

connects with other constructs in the field, and how scholars are beginning to develop ways to measure joy.

Although many educational researchers use the word "joy," they often do not define it. In fact, joy is frequently overlooked or "taken for granted" when it comes to research and work in the education field (Karjalainen et al., 2019). But joy is regarded highly as being important for developing lifelong learners (Hansel, 2018; Shareski, 2017a), and its ability to develop students' identity of themselves as being "curious and capable learners" (Hansel, 2018, p. 4). Joy can help people remember what they have learned (Walker, 2015). Practitioners in the field argue effective classrooms have students and teachers that work hard and are happy, and that joyful students will learn better, conquer challenges, and take more risks (Platt, 2020). Further, teachers play a key role in making learning joyful, which requires their focus, efforts, and their leadership's support (Hansel, 2018). For teachers, they find joy when they see the impact they make on students (Cherkowski & Walker, 2018). Shareski (2017a) asserted that school leadership plays a key role in fostering a school culture that is joyful by building community and sharing the joyful learning with stakeholders. Administrators have the power to create an environment where teachers can flourish through a prioritization of their well-being, so students can then flourish (Cherkowski & Walker, 2018).

Although there is little empirical research, education researchers have explored identifiers of joy, described examples of joy in the classroom, and connected joy to other constructs. They also have begun to create ways to measure joy, and most frequently, offered recommendations to foster joy in the classroom (Omidire et al., 2021). One group of researchers proposed a theoretical connection between school climate and the joy of learning (Clement et al., 2018). Clement et al. (2018) developed the Vibrant School Scale that measures a school climate that

leads to student flourishing. The Vibrant School Scale uses three subscales and measures: enlivened minds, emboldened voices, and playful learning (Clement et al., 2018). In their research on school climate, these researchers suggest that when students are invited to be curious, their voices are heard, and they learn in playful ways, they will find learning joyful (Clement et al., 2018). Even with this proposed theoretical connection, there is still a gap in the literature of empirical evidence for this connection and further, evidence that intentional effort can impact the presence and/or level of joy in the learning environment.

Identifiers of Joy

Since joy is an invisible construct, we rely on identifiers of joy to know when it is present. Two studies (Karjalainen et al., 2019; Tschannen-Moran, 2020) share overlap in three identifiers for joy: smiles, a specific look in the eyes, and laughter. Tschannen-Moran (2020) added to this list of common indicators through her definition of playful learning as a "joyful, lively energy" (p. 8) to include: movement, fun, and camaraderie (p. 8). Karjalainen et al. (2019) studied shared joy and added the following indicators: statements like "This is fun!", body language, and the researchers' own knowledge of joy. These shared and additional indicators of joy can serve as observable actions to alert others that a person or group of people are experiencing joy.

Examples of Joy in the Classroom

Once the identifiers of joy are established, it can be helpful to name moments where joy may be present in the classroom. Studies and books on joy in the classroom name examples of joy and joyful moments. One empirical study explored moments of joy in the classroom that are shared between teachers and students at an early childhood education center in Finland (Karjalainen et al., 2019). The research team found that shared joy happened during planned

activities and occurred spontaneously; it occurred in moments throughout the day. When joy was shared between teachers and students, their traditional roles changed where students became more in control and teachers embraced the spontaneous joyful moment.

Joy can be found in classrooms and schools in a variety of ways. It is important to note, a joyful classroom can take different forms, sounds, and structures/styles based on the teacher, time, or content (Platt, 2020). Joy may arise in different ways; the following are examples of moments of joy in schools: It can be seen when students arrive at a challenge's solution, when students do not exit class immediately because they are conversing with others in the lesson, when a teacher names a student as an expert in an area, when a teacher invites a student to share about their extracurricular activity, and when students smile because peers are cheering for them (Shareski, 2017a).

Joy's Connections to Other Constructs

In the literature, joy is discussed among a host of desirable characteristics, attitudes, and constructs in classrooms. Perhaps it was easier for educators to discuss joy indirectly, as being tangential or connected to other constructs than discussing joy in isolation without a defined definition. And currently, throughout the literature, authors connect joy or theorize a connection to joy amongst various constructs, including fun, deeper learning, student engagement, wonder, play, project-based learning, community, gratitude, curiosity, and flow. As a result, it is hypothesized that joy is related to or is a byproduct of many positive constructs in education, and a focus on joy may give further evidence to support these other elements in the classroom. The following section describes how other researchers have made connections between joy and other constructs.

Joy is often discussed in connection with the concept of fun. Erwin (2005) equated joy with fun and proposed that a return to students having fun in the classroom would bring alongside it a return to students experiencing joy at school. While others caution that fun is not all there is to joy (Hansel, 2018; Wolk, 2008), having fun can lead to joy. But joy in school can exist without fun (Wolk, 2008).

Joy is hypothesized to be connected to deeper learning. In a study using classroom observations, interview data, conversations with students, and analysis of documents, Mehta and Fine (2019) found that classrooms that modeled deeper learning had connections among the identity and purpose of the teacher and the classroom environment. These classrooms had what the researchers labeled as an "ethos of rigor and joy" (p. 351). The teachers went deep, saw students as creative and curious, saw the teacher's role as facilitator, gave students choice, and engaged students in topics they thought the students would find interesting. This study's findings give us a hint that curiosity, deeper learning, teacher as facilitator, and student choice may be connected to joy and that the teacher may serve as a center for joy in the classroom.

Joy may also be an outgrowth of student engagement. When students are interested in a task, they report positive emotions. When students and teachers are engaged, it can support a cycle of learning and joy (Christenson et al., 2012). Joy and student engagement can be seen as an input-outcome relationship, with joy being "an outcome of engaging learning" (Shareski, 2017a, p. 16).

Joy has been associated with wonder, play, project-based learning, a sense of community, and gratitude (Shareski, 2017a). Joy is also connected to curiosity as finding the answers to our curious questions brings joy (Goodwin, 2020). Therefore, Goodwin (2020) theorized that if we allow children to be curious in school, then the learning process will be more joyful. Similarly,

the construct of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), has been associated with joy. If students experience flow at school, then they will also be experiencing joy at school (Wolk, 2008). Students are so entranced in learning that they have no other distractions and are enjoying it fully. Therefore, joy seems to be connected to flow in that if teachers can set up opportunities for students to get into flow while they are teaching, then students will experience joy in school.

As a result, knowing these connections will bring us closer to an understanding of what may cause joy and its potential to fuel curiosity and sustain student engagement. Despite its encouraging potential, there is still a debate on its place as a focus in education.

Ways to Measure Joy

First, it is important to acknowledge the debate surrounding the measurement of joy. One side of the debate leans on the arduous task of measuring joy as it is a non-concrete, malleable, and non-uniform construct. The argument that joy is difficult to measure coincides with the claim that it is a beautiful phenomenon that should be left unquantifiable (Soutter, 2020).

However, the other side of the debate centers on issues of equity. Through an equity lens, if a school outcome for all students is to enjoy learning and develop a love of learning, cultivating lifelong learners, and if stakeholders desire positive school climates that lend themselves to these outcomes, then ensuring all students have access to these climates and the same likelihood of these outcomes requires a measurement tool for evaluative purposes. As a result of the accountability movement era, stakeholders focus on data and what is measured in schools (Soutter, 2020). Succinctly put, measuring joy is "a social justice issue" (Soutter, 2020, p. 26), because all students deserve to learn in a place that is joyful (Platt, 2020).

For a focus on joy in schools to exist, it must be measured (Soutter, 2020), and an emphasis on play could also elevate joy as an emphasis for classrooms (Conklin, 2014).

Therefore, although some may argue to leave joy as a beautiful, unmeasured phenomenon, if there is a desire for all students to learn in joyful environments developing a love for learning, then it is important to measure joy.

There are a few recommendations for measurements of joy in schools and instruments that have been designed with joy as a measured construct. Some researchers (Renshaw et al., 2015) have begun to measure or discuss how to measure joy (Soutter, 2020) leaving much room for scholars to build on these initial ideas to create a robust measure of joy. Soutter (2020) recommends "it may be best to take a holistic look at the school's climate, curriculum, and classroom practices, rather than zeroing in only on the feelings and attitudes of individual students" (p. 27). This serves as a helpful recommendation to future researchers that to better understand joy, there must be an analysis of school climate and what is happening in classrooms.

In the current literature, I have found one example of a quantitative measure for joy and a qualitative measure for joy. In an effort to develop a quantitative measure for students' subjective wellbeing, Renshaw et al. (2015) used joy of learning as one of four subscales for students' subjective wellbeing. The research team administered the pilot survey to 1,002 adolescents in two middle schools, Grades 6-8, with a majority of Black students and students receiving free or reduced-price lunch. The research team found their new measure and its subscales to be reliable. The four survey items they used to capture joy of learning were:

- I get excited about learning new things in class
- I am really interested in the things I am doing at school
- I enjoy working on class projects and assignments
- I feel happy when I am working and learning at school.

Although the authors concluded that the new tool was able to articulate indicators for the joy of learning, there remains a gap in the literature that provides evidence of "practices for targeting students' joy of learning and educational purpose" (Renshaw et al., 2015, p. 549). In a replication of this study, Renshaw (2015) found the measurement tool to be a valid and reliable measure, but suggested further studies be conducted using various populations in different environments before the results from this measure can become fully generalizable.

Another empirical study used a qualitative research design to investigate the joy of teaching and learning. Omidire et al. (2021) used a questionnaire among lecturers and students in a higher education context, coded responses, organized codes into themes, and generated conclusions about collaborative learning, joy of learning, and technology as a method for restoring joy in diverse learning communities. There were 53 participants as part of this case study. The researchers found, specific to the higher education context of its participants, that students needed to be validated in the learning environment and identify with the content being taught. The participants had a desire for learning to happen amongst their peers and in a variety of ways and acknowledged the powerful role technology can play in making learning joyful. The researchers, then, recommended strategies for joyful learning to be sharing ideas, embracing diversity, having content that resonates with the students' prior experiences, valuing all students in an inclusive manner, and using technology. This study lacked in rigor as the researchers used only one data source, an open-ended questionnaire, and did not mention in detail its coding processes that would ensure trustworthiness. However, the effort in attempting to understand joy from a qualitative lens is helpful as a first step to exploring joy in an educational context.

Both studies serve as inspiration for future research. From the quantitative measure, there are ideas that can serve as potential survey items for measuring joy. From the qualitative

measure, there is rationale for beginning to explore joy from a qualitative lens and for follow up with potential survey items based on the results. These studies will help inform the development of my quantitative instrument.

Effects of School Culture and Climate

Although there is little research specifically on joy, there is research on the power of organizational culture and climate. Verbecke et al. (1998) defined organizational climate as people's perceptions of the environment and the organizational culture as "the way things are done" (p. 320). Bolman and Deal (2017) described the existence of a dichotomy in beliefs about organizations and culture. One belief is that organizations have culture, as opposed to the idea that organizations are cultures. Amongst the existence of this dichotomy, Bolman and Deal argued, organizations create and facilitate their own beliefs, values, and customs, which can become positive or negative.

More specifically, there is research on the impact of school culture and climate, to suggest that elements of school climate and culture are worth investigating. Researchers describe that the climate of a school, which could range on a spectrum from open to closed, could affect teachers and thus affect school life (Hoy, 1990). Beginning in the 1970s, researcher Wayne Hoy (2012) investigated if there were organizational factors that might affect student achievement. He found that school climate did have an impact on students and their outcomes, and after a 40-year journey to understand cultural factors that affect student achievement, Hoy (2012) reported that trust, collective efficacy, and academic emphasis are three cultural factors of a school community that affect student achievement.

Further, in a robust literature review of school climate research, school climate was found to relate to students' health, positive development, motivation, decreased student absenteeism in

secondary students, and academic achievement (Thapa et al., 2013). School climate has been found to also impact teacher productivity (Villani, 1997, as cited in Stronge et al., 2008), and be related to teacher self-efficacy and job satisfaction for teachers (Aldridge & Fraser, 2016). School climate is argued to affect school culture (Stronge & Xu, 2021). Therefore, there appear to be elements of school climate that affect student learning, making a strong case for further exploration of additional elements of school climate that could impact the student experience, school culture, and student learning.

Why is Joy Lacking Now?

With joy being connected to multiple positive constructs, it is puzzling that its presence is not seen with high frequency in school vision statements, strategic plans, and classroom goals. But due to the accountability movement, joy has been absent in many classrooms (Wagner & Dintersmith, 2015). The focus on teaching has been on standards-based learning and success on standardized assessments.

Additionally, society is facing a "triple pandemic" with the health crisis of COVID-19, inequality among social statuses and race, and threats to democracy (Mehta, 2022, p. 54). Visionaries in education call for the cultivation of joy among students to combat these pandemics and claim it as a move towards equity (Mehta, 2022). With such societal turmoil, school may be students' only opportunity to experience joy. So, if the school climate is not joyful and joy is not being measured, it is time to define joy, develop a way to measure it, and bring joy to all students as they learn.

Critique of the Accountability Movement

A concerning pattern in education emerges from anecdotal observations from practitioners in that students come to school joyful at the beginning of their educational journey

and then the current educational experience causes them to lose that joy and begin to dislike or dread their school experiences (Erwin, 2005; Muhammad, 2022). Educators claim the pressure from high-stakes testing instilled from the accountability movement that began with the passage of the No Child Left Behind legislation led to increased workload, pressure at work, and an evaporation of joy from classrooms and learning (Erwin, 2005; Shareski, 2017a). Thus, the current structure of the American education system is creating an absence of joy for many students and teachers (Wagner & Dintersmith, 2015). In one research study using parent focus groups, after the focus groups viewed a short video of a kindergarten day, one participant expressed concern that the academic pressure to prepare for the standardized assessments led to an absence of joy in the classroom to make room for the increased focus on standards (Brown et al., 2019). Conversations among educators in schools, specifically in professional learning communities, focus on data and little on joy (Cherkowski & Walker, 2018).

With pressure to meet academic achievement goals based on state and local assessments and ensuring that students perform on examinations to earn or maintain accreditation, instruction has become focused on test-taking, scores, and academic achievement. This has led to a reliance on "drill-and-kill" memorization strategies and teaching test-taking strategies rather than an experience cultivating critical and creative thinking skills, discovery, imagination, movement, play, and concepts related to joy. Conversations at school board meetings, in professional learning communities, and amongst educators surround data points on standardized tests rather than dialogue that focuses on whole-child development and their love for learning.

Why Teacher Joy is Important and What Creates the Conditions for That Joy

In my search of the education databases, ERIC and Education Research Complete, I did not come across any empirical articles on why teachers should feel joy in their classrooms. So,

there is a gap in the empirical literature on why teachers feeling joyful is important. However, practitioners claim teachers feeling joy at work is important because it builds resilience, recenters the right priorities, and helps people feel happier and more fulfilled (Schwanke & Deagle, 2022). Additionally, feeling joy as the teacher helps the teacher create a joyful classroom (Platt, 2020).

Since joy is proposed as a part of well-being (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2021; Platt, 2020; Shareski, 2017a), the rationale for supporting teacher well-being can be considered potentially parallel to the reasons for supporting teacher's joy. Supporting teacher well-being is important for student well-being and for providing optimal learning opportunities (Cherkowski & Walker, 2018). Therefore, using that rationale in parallel to joy, I propose that supporting teacher joy is important for students to feel and experience joy and for optimal learning opportunities to take place in the classroom.

Although the importance of teacher joy is not widely shared in the literature, empirical research and reflections on research do capture suggestions for creating conditions where teachers can feel joy. Derived from teacher responses on a survey regarding teaching students who are multilingual, the students' personal qualities, the diverse student community, the teacher's own personal and professional development, and the relationships with students brought teachers joy (Alisaari et al., 2022). Educational leaders (Schwanke & Deagle, 2022) attribute the findings from a business study on what makes adults feel joy at work as potential suggestions for school leaders for how to make the school work environment joyful for teachers. These conditions include finding ways to acknowledge and recognize employees, encouraging collaboration and fun, and modeling and sharing personal joys and celebrating efforts (Liu, 2019). Making a connection to well-being and joy as well, Alisaari et al. (2022) suggests that caring, the act of helping promote a student's well-being will help fuel a teacher's joy. The

students themselves, the act of caring for students, and opportunities to highlight teacher growth and efforts might hold the potential for cultivating teachers' joy.

Just as practitioners reflected on why teacher joy is important, they offer suggestions for teachers to control their ability to feel joy at work to include: focusing on love, letting go of rude behavior in the workplace, practicing self-care, giving grace to oneself and letting go of perfectionism, setting boundaries, reflecting and not obsessing, and having fun (Platt, 2020). These suggestions that stem from empirical evidence and professional opinion demonstrate there is a possibility for school leaders to create conditions for teachers to feel joy, as well as power in the teacher to impact one's own feeling of joy while in school.

Disagreements for a Focus on Joy

There can be disagreement for the prioritization of joy through learning, because not all aspects of education are joyful. There are content students must learn, based on state standards, that expose students to traumatic historical experiences, disappointment, failure, and a global understanding of inequities, war, and injustice. Students will experience negative emotions when they learn about injustice and experience or witness bullying, but these emotions can be channeled for good (Shirley & Hargreaves, 2022). It is important to qualify that a focus on joy in education with its connection to other positive constructs such as happiness, fun, wonder, and play does not elicit a mission to make all learning "fun" or "playful." This work focuses on an approach to making the learning environment safe and joyful when possible. There will be content that elicits negative feelings and difficult emotional responses (Shirley & Hargreaves, 2022); however, there can still be joy in the overall learning environment and a return to joyful moments as the content evolves and continues.

Schools should focus on more than just the imparting of knowledge and the development of academic skills. At the societal level, education is more than simply academic learning, it also serves a purpose to develop students socially and personally (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2021). When education develops the whole child, it will help society reduce war, poverty, ignorance, and oppression (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2021). Therefore, students' personal and social development, their well-being, is an important part of the work in schools, with joy playing a role in students' well-being (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2021).

Similarly, a movement for joy in education should not discount that the work of educators is demanding and difficult. This is not to add to the already heavy workload of educators, but rather to elevate the experience for all and bring the best outcomes for our students, which in this case, will elevate the experience for teachers and school leaders as well. This work follows a similar perspective as in Kutsyuruba et al. (2021) in that this work does not aim to discredit the difficulties that lie in the work of educators and school leaders but rather focuses on the positive to restore the field and promote a sense of flourishing and thriving. Researchers in other sectors, such as social work are careful not to discount the challenges in their field as they focus on joy and are intentional in acknowledging those challenges (Pooler et al., 2014). Therefore, a focus on joy helps to promote the flourishing of all involved in the system with respect for the challenges that lie ahead as well.

Fostering Joy in the Classroom

To promote flourishing for all students and those working in school buildings, it requires an identification of the steps, strategies, or foci to arrive at flourishing. Scholars and education experts believe transformational change based on research in specific areas has the capability of restoring or fostering joy in the classroom. Growing out of empirical evidence, a school climate

based in trust, validation, curiosity, creativity, and engaging learning might restore joy (Clement et al., 2018). In another empirical study, Frenzel et al. (2009) found that teachers' enjoyment while teaching influenced students' enjoyment of learning, and this positive relationship was mediated by teachers' level of enthusiasm. Therefore, teachers' emotions can transmit to their students. Growing out of research and informal interviews, Regenstein et al. (2018) highlight that teachers are using assessments to create more joyful classrooms by using the data to inform instruction to make lessons and activities more appropriate, challenging, and related to students' interests (Regenstein et al., 2018).

Other recommendations for fostering joy in the classroom stem from theoretical understandings. A theory based on William Glasser's Choice Theory argues that humans need to have fun and meeting other needs (for survival, for love and belonging, to gain personal power, to be free) will allow people to have fun (Erwin, 2005). And when students have fun in the classroom, it creates the conditions for there to be a presence of joy in the classroom. So, for students to experience joy in the classroom, teachers should create safe learning environments, help students feel like they belong and are accepted, give students voice and feel heard, and offer choices that lend themselves to students having more freedom (Erwin, 2005). Smaller, more actionable steps that have been suggested include having regular class meetings, using teambuilding activities, having consistent routines to promote order and maintain safety, attending students' extracurricular performances and games, and allowing for play in the classroom through games (Erwin, 2005). Using a theory rooted in cultural responsiveness, as a response to racial inequities in schools, Muhammad (2022) prescribes that educators teach true history, a past that does not erase certain stories or peoples. Joy can be realized in education

when teachers pursue joy by asking if it is central to their curriculum and instruction, and if they are finding ways to include joy of marginalized peoples (Muhammad, 2022).

Education experts and practitioners use their professional judgment to offer recommendations to foster joy. Evolving from the childhood freedom movement, where adults insist on children having the ability to play without rules and follow their interests, Gray (2013) proposes education systems will become joyful when children are allowed to play and be free in schools. More suggestions for teachers include prioritizing joy (Frank, 2020); reflecting on one's own teaching (Frank, 2020); building relationships with students (Platt, 2020); creating a safe environment (Platt, 2020); showing off student work (Wolk, 2008); making students feel proud of their progress (Platt, 2020); creating a safe and inviting learning environment (Platt, 2020; Wolk, 2008); allowing for student choice (Platt, 2020; Wolk, 2008); and finding one's joy as the teacher (Platt, 2020).

These recommendations from researchers, scholars, and practitioners alike illustrate the importance of joy in classrooms, but often with the current state of the education system, a joyful classroom is difficult to achieve.

Summary

The definition of joy in education can be crafted from understandings of joy in education, psychology, and religion. From psychology's understanding that joy is positive, religion's understanding that joy is a state and a trait, I propose that joy is a positive feeling (Platt, 2020) of satisfaction and excitement (Johnson, 2020), that can be experienced in a moment in time, but that can grow into an intentional stance towards daily life (Bstan-'dzin-rgya-mtsho, 2016). When truly engaged in a moment, joy is the feeling where contentment, satisfaction, delight, and gladness intersect, melding into an excitement that manifests physically through smiles, bright

eyes, and sometimes even laughter (Karjalainen et al., 2019; Tschannen-Moran, 2020). Joy can be experienced alone or with others (Johnson, 2020) on a scale from low to high energy, with low energy joy feeling like a sense of internal harmony, sereneness, and calmness to a high energy joy feeling like intense excitement (Meadows, 2014, as cited in Johnson, 2020).

Researchers have developed identifiers for joy, sharing smiles, bright eyes, and laughter as common to observe (Karjalainen et al., 2019; Tschannen-Moran, 2020). Others offered examples of joy in schools (Shareski, 2017a), noting it can come in many forms (Platt, 2020). Joy has been connected to many positive constructs in education: fun (Erwin, 2005); deeper learning (Mehta & Fine, 2019); student engagement (Christenson et al., 2012; Shareski, 2017a); wonder, play, project-based learning, community, and gratitude (Shareski, 2017a); curiosity (Goodwin, 2020); and flow (Wolk, 2008), with two researchers attempting to create measures for joy (Omidire et al., 2021; Renshaw et al., 2015).

Joy seems to be lacking in education from the effects of the accountability movement (Wagner & Dintersmith, 2015) and the triple pandemic (Mehta, 2022), with pressure from high stakes assessments, lack of connection from coronavirus shutdowns, and the exacerbation of inequality. But a focus on joy is what is needed to develop lifelong learners (Hansel, 2018; Shareski, 2017a), motivated by curiosity to then lead the world in innovation. Practitioners in education know that joy is valuable by providing several recommendations for ways to foster joy in the classroom (Erwin, 2005; Frank, 2020; Gray, 2013; Muhammad, 2022; Platt, 2020; Wolk, 2008). This leads us to the present study, with a recognition from practitioners that joy is important, it is time to build empirical evidence to support these educators with the strategies and supports they need to foster joy.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

Although many practitioners have offered recommendations on fostering joy in schools, more empirical research is needed on the practices and resources teachers need in order to successfully implement joyful learning environments. In addressing this gap in the literature, Flower Hill School District's community-wide initiative around joy presents the perfect context for me to explore the relationships among their efforts, with the potential to provide stakeholders with evidence that it may be possible to leverage joy in schools. Therefore, the research questions that guided this study were these:

Central Research Question: How do schools and teachers foster joy in their students?

Sub questions:

1. To what extent is the teacher's perceived level of their own joy related to the same teacher's perception of the level of joy in their classroom?
2. To what extent is the teachers' perceived level of joy in the school related to the perceived level of joy in its classrooms?
3. What efforts by the teacher correlate with the teacher's perceived level of joy in the classroom?
4. What instructional decisions correlate with the teacher's perceived level of joy in the classroom?
5. What administrative supports correlate with the teacher's perceived level of joy in the classroom?

Method

I used a quantitative survey research design for this dissertation study. My aim was to investigate the relationships among variables I identified in my qualitative phenomenological pilot study, as well as the presence of perceived joy in a broader population of elementary school teachers across the Flower Hill School District. Because survey research design is an appropriate methodology for the exploration of relationships among variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), I chose this approach to determine the degree to which connections among the teacher's level of joy, the classroom's level of joy, the school's level of joy, teacher efforts, instructional decisions, and supports exist in this context.

Pilot Study

For the qualitative pilot study, I conducted a phenomenological study in order to arrive at the essence of joy in classrooms and identify emerging themes of teacher actions and supports needed to foster joyful learning. The central research question was: How do teachers make their classrooms joyful? The sub-questions were: (a) How do teachers define or describe joy in their classrooms? (b) What do teachers do to make their classrooms joyful? (c) What supports do teachers need to make joy happen in their classrooms?

At the outset of this study, my working definition of joy, based on existing literature, was *an internal sense of satisfaction, delight, and happiness that comes from being fully engaged*. This definition evolved during the study, based on a second careful reading of the research literature, into the following: *Joy is a grounded delight or elevated satisfaction; that can be experienced in temporary moments yet serves as a renewable energy; or can be a sustained internal approach to the outside world*.

After receiving Institutional Review Board and school-district approval, I sought assistance from Flower Hill School District's Office of Professional Growth and Innovation in identifying participants for this qualitative study. From the list of recommended teachers, based on their leadership and participation in related professional development initiatives, I contacted individual teachers and found three participants, who were all elementary school teachers in the Flower Hill district with classroom teaching experience ranging from 2-18 years, providing me with preliminary results. Two of the participants taught Kindergarten, and the other taught Pre-Kindergarten. It is important to acknowledge one limitation of these preliminary results is that these teachers were all focused teaching primary grades. One of the participants had prior experience teaching third and first grade as well. See Table 1 for participant demographics.

Table 1

Qualitative Pilot Study Participant Demographics

Participant Code	Grade Taught	Years Teaching	Previous Teaching Experience
AE	Kindergarten	14	PreK-3, PreK-4
TF	Pre-Kindergarten	18	Third Grade, First Grade
KD	Kindergarten	2	Substitute, Teacher Assistant

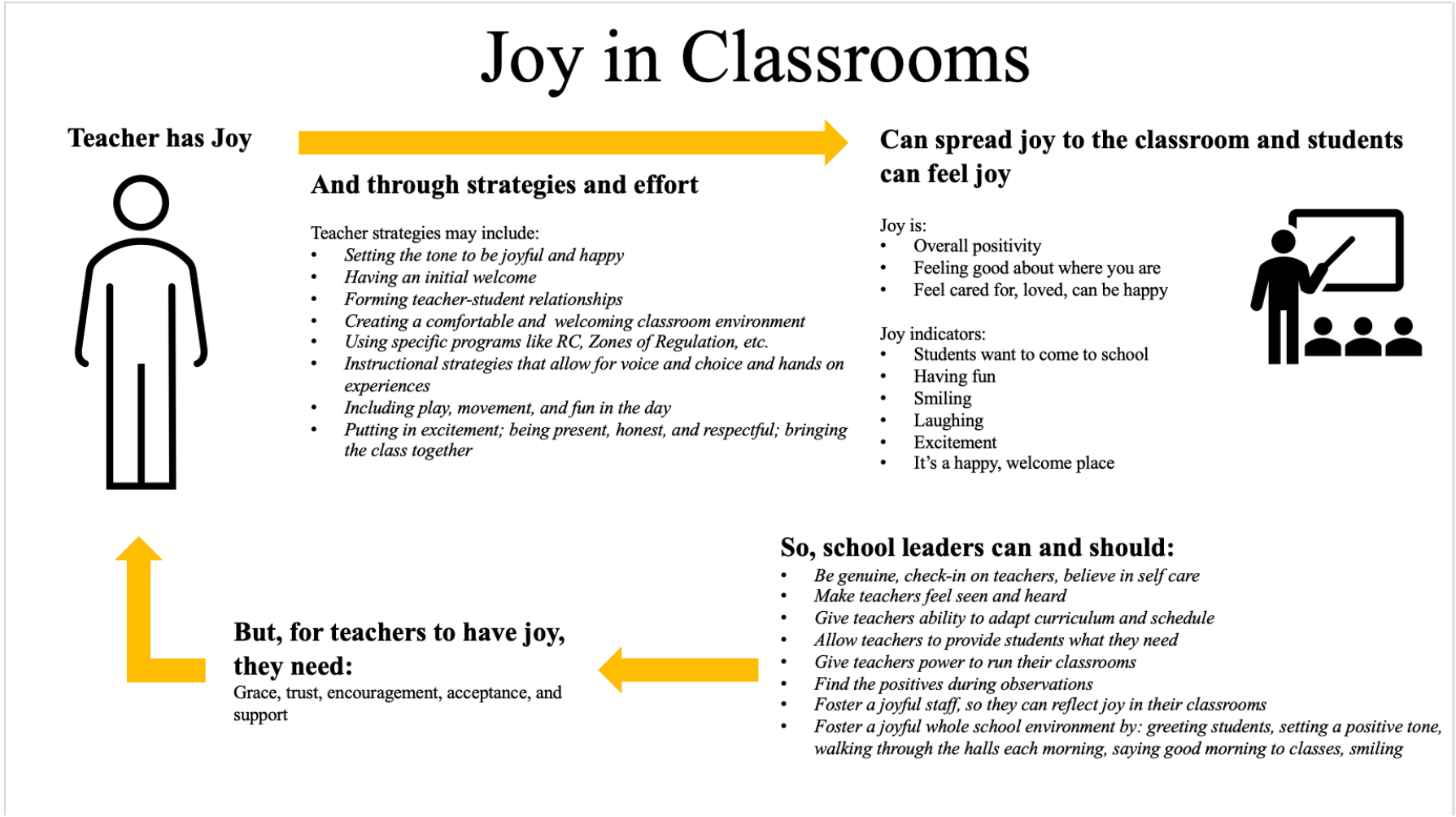
For this study, I conducted two interviews and one classroom observation. The first interview was a one-hour semi-structured interview conducted online via Zoom. The interview questions focused on participants' definitions of joy, their teaching strategies, and the supports they used. Next, I visited each participant's classroom for an observation at a time chosen by the participant, according to their prediction that I would likely be able to observe joy in the

classroom. All participants chose a morning observation, which lasted 1-2 hours depending on the activity being observed. As the observer, I recorded the activities in the classroom, teacher moves, student reactions, moments when I noticed joy, indicators of joy, and what I could infer might be the cause of the joyful moments. I took notes when I saw moments of hugs, smiles, laughter, and excitement in the students' and teacher's eyes.

Following the classroom observation, I conducted a second informal 30-minute interview with each participant where I asked follow-up questions from the observation for clarification and to explore possibilities for why certain teacher moves led to joy, as well as feedback on the themes I noticed emerging from the data. After the first round of interviews, I coded the data and organized the codes into themes. I edited the themes based on participant feedback from the second interviews, arriving at a refined list of themes. Using this refined list, I engaged in the data analysis processes of noting patterns and themes, engaging in clustering, and noting relations between variables (Miles et al., 2020). I then created a visual presentation of the data from the proposed relationships that emerged and from the clustering analyses (Figure 2).

Figure 2

Joy in Classrooms: A Visual Representation of Results



In alignment with the methodology of phenomenology, I followed Moustakas' (1994) process of formulating textural and structural descriptions for each participant, then created a composite textural and composite structural description, and finally used the composites to arrive at the essence of the experience. It should be cautioned that the following essence of the experience is derived from my participants and further research can further explore these potential definitions, relationships, suggestions, and claims.

Essence

Joy Defined. Joy is an overall feeling of positivity, feeling good about where you are, and a feeling of excitement. Joy requires happiness and involves spreading it.

Indicator. Joy in the classroom is evident when students have a desire to return to school each day.

Where It Comes From. Joy in the classroom begins with the teacher. It flows from the teacher to the students through effort in building the classroom community and excitement poured into lessons and teaching. A teacher can personally receive joy from others to then create a joyful classroom, but it is easier when the entire school climate is joyful, and joy can flow from the school leaders to the teacher to the students.

Why. Joy in the classroom leads to students being motivated to be present at school which leads to learning. Joy in the classroom impacts the daily classroom experience.

How. Joy in the classroom springs from the classroom environment created by the teacher. Joy in the classroom happens when the environment is a safe place, where students feel loved, cared for, supported, validated, and connected. There is a sense of community and emotional safety. To develop this environment, teachers can take a genuine interest in their

students, welcome students each day, be present in the moment, and be flexible to address students' emotional needs. Teachers need to get to know their students, have open communication, and let students know they are part of a team fostering that feeling and sense of connectedness.

Supports Needed. Classrooms are situated within a larger system. Teachers need support and encouragement from parents, colleagues, and school leaders. Specifically, administrators can get to know students and control the climate of the school, building a school culture of joy. Teachers need administrators to offer them support, validation, autonomy over their classrooms, as well as trust in their abilities and support their self-care.

Summary of Pilot Study Findings

The findings from this pilot study provided me with important information that I then used in my dissertation study. The pilot study results led me to the conceptual idea that joy is centered in the teacher, with the flow of impact coming from the school leaders to the teachers to the students. The environment seems to play an important role in the presence of joy. The pilot study findings also highlighted strategies teachers used to foster joy and the supports they needed. This information was used in the dissertation study to examine the spreading of joy in the school context, whether the strategies and supports named are generalizable to the population, and if they correlate with perceived levels of joy in the classroom.

Study Design

In my current dissertation study, I invited all elementary school teachers (PreK-5th grade) in Flower Hill School District, spread among 55 schools, to participate in my survey (Appendix A). My participant population included general education teachers, specialists, and special education teachers. Those specialists and special education teachers who work across grade

levels and classrooms were exempt from answering survey items related to the classroom level of joy but were invited to answer the other survey items. This was designed to alleviate pressure on those teachers from choosing which classroom to share about and ensure they only take the survey one time, instead of multiple times for every classroom they work in.

After obtaining approval from William & Mary Educational Institutional Review Board and Flower Hill School District, I emailed elementary school principals of Flower Hill School District for permission for their teachers to participate in my survey (Appendix B). I provided the principals with an email invitation letter that they could then forward to their teachers for ease in participation (Appendix C). The survey was conducted through the internet, which provided ease of collecting data, involved little cost, and was analyzed using online data analysis software (Ball, 2019). The data collection phase lasted two weeks. Prior to the survey window closing, I emailed school principals a second invitation for their teachers (Appendix D) with an email letter they could forward to their teachers (Appendix E). Three invitations within a 2-week survey period has been suggested (Dillman et al., 2014), but due to the heavy workload of my population, I only sent two invitations at the discretion of the principal to send.

Because monetary rewards have been shown to be an effective method of increasing response rate (Dillman et al., 2014), I used this strategy in raffle form due to limited funding to increase the response rate within the sample population. In the invitation to the sample population to participate, I offered that after completion of the survey, participants could enter a raffle for a $25 gift certificate to Target, with 20 winners chosen from Flower Hill School District. I also recognized that this demographic of participants was already under a heavy workload expectation, so the raffle of prizes was designed to incentivize participation. Once participants completed the survey, they could enter their name and email address and be entered

into the raffle. The email addresses entered into the separate raffle system were used to email the gift certificates to all winners after the data collection period closed.

Data Sources

To answer my research questions, I used an original survey instrument I developed, named the Joy in Classrooms and Schools Survey (Appendix A).

Survey

The survey first consisted of a consent form presenting potential participants with the purpose, benefits, protections, and possible risks of the study (Appendix A). After participants agreed to participate, the survey asked three demographic questions, 46 unidirectional scale questions, one multiple choice question, and three qualitative open-ended questions. Within the unidirectional scale questions, I asked questions to measure the level of joy for the teacher, the level of joy for the classroom, the level of joy for the school, degree of frequency of teacher efforts, degree of frequency of the use of specific instructional choices, and the degree of frequency of administrative supports.

The scale used a unidirectional response scale, with options ranging from one to nine. Indicators were on the odd numbers, and even numbers did not use anchors. The anchors were 1- *Not at all*, 3- *Very Little*, 5- *Sometimes*, 7- *Quite a Bit*, and 9- *A Great Deal*. This scale was modeled from the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001) to show one direction of frequency (Bandura, 1978) and allowed for multiple options to allow for variability among respondents. A sample of survey items by variable is included below.

- Level of joy for the class: In general, my students feel excited in my classroom. (Item 10)

- Level of joy for the school: In general, students in our school want to come to school each day. (Item 13)
- Level of joy for the teacher: As the teacher, I feel satisfied at work. (Item 23)
- Teacher efforts: How much effort do you put in to…knowing your students? (Item 32)
- Instructional decisions: In your classroom to what extent do you…allow for student choice? (Item 36)
- Admin supports: To what degree do you feel…supported by the administration at your school? (Item 46)

Because this was a new survey instrument, I took steps to examine its reliability and validity before conducting my study. I first examined the instrument for content validity using a panel of experts. Then, I conducted a field test with a group of teachers to assess face validity, clarity, and length of the survey. Then, I ran a pilot test to assess for reliability and validity of the instrument before beginning the data collection process.

Content Validity. My dissertation committee served as an initial panel of experts on educational leadership and provided feedback for changes to refine the instrument to best attain information about joy and teacher efforts, instructional decisions, and administrative supports. Based on this panel's feedback, I removed 18 items. This included deleting items regarding resources since those items were more oriented toward program evaluation. I also removed items that included various supports and left the remaining items in supports solely focused on the supports provided by administrators. This shortened the scale to become a more reasonable survey, removing 20 unidirectional scale items and increasing the number of open-ended items from one question to three questions. Based on the panel's feedback, I also made a few edits to

the language used. To better capture the genuineness of laughter and smiles, I added the language "good-natured" to "laughter" and "genuinely" to "smile."

Next, content validity was also assessed with a panel of content experts. The panel included three scholars who all study flourishing and educator well-being and make connections to joy through their scholarship. They served as my content experts to evaluate my new instrument for content validity. I provided the content panel experts with a copy of my survey and asked them to evaluate it for reasonableness and as an appropriate tool to measure joy. Additionally, I gathered advice on other items they would add to the instrument. All three experts reported the instrument was sensible and comprehensive. I did incorporate one minor suggestion to write out the word "administration" instead of the colloquial term "admin" for clarity on specific items.

Field Test. Following the feedback implemented from the content validation process from the panels of experts, I conducted a field test of the survey among five elementary school teachers. Each teacher took the survey in my presence via video conferencing and spoke aloud their thoughts, reactions, and confusions. This process provided me with feedback on the clarity of the directions and items, the length of the survey, and the survey's face validity. The survey was completed in a reasonable amount of time and the field testers reported the items were straight-forward and easy to answer. Based on the feedback, I changed the language for describing the scale in the consent form, changed the stems to match in the teacher efforts items, and reworded a school joy item to read more smoothly.

Pilot Test. After receiving IRB approval, I conducted a pilot test of the new survey instrument among a group of teachers. I invited approximately 34 elementary school teachers to participate in this pilot test and then recruited additional teachers using snowball sampling. I had

24 participants and ran the means and standard deviations of my survey items to assess the instrument's construct validity. All items had reasonable means and standard deviations. Then, I ran a Cronbach's alpha reliability analysis for the overall instrument, and the Cronbach's alpha was .957. Then, I ran a Cronbach's alpha reliability analysis for each of the subcomponents. They demonstrated good internal consistency, and no adjustments were necessary.

Survey Instrument with Data Collected. Once data were collected for the study, I re-ran reliability analyses for the overall instrument and the subcomponents. The Cronbach's alpha for the overall instrument was .953. See Table 2 for the Cronbach's alpha for each of the subcomponents. The subcomponents demonstrated good internal consistency.

Table 2

Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Analysis for Subcomponents

Subcomponent	α (Study)	α (Pilot Test)
Level of Joy in Classroom	.917	.895
Level of Joy in School	.944	.910
Level of Joy in Teacher	.928	.898
Teacher Efforts	.946	.842
Instructional Decisions	.926	.917
Admin Supports	.939	.871

To further validate this new survey instrument, I ran a Factor Analysis to determine if the participants responded to the survey as I intended, responding to three separate types of joy (classroom, school, and teacher joy), as opposed to approaching them as one global understanding. I ran a Factor Analysis with the items for classroom joy, school joy, and teacher joy using Principal Components Analysis because this was a new instrument. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy was greater than .70, at .897, which means that there were an adequate number of items for each factor (Morgan et al., 2013). The Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant at $p < .001$, so I proceeded with the analysis. The communalities were adequate, and no items were removed. The total variance explained by the three factors using the Principal Component Analysis was 74% as shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Total Variance Explained for Three Types of Joy

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction of Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	10.63	50.63	50.63	10.63	50.63	50.63
2	2.70	12.84	63.47	2.70	12.84	63.47
3	2.22	10.56	74.03	2.22	10.56	74.03

The Principal Component Analysis using varimax rotation extracted three components, see Table 4. The factors have strong loadings for specific items that align with the three types of joy: classroom joy, school joy, and teacher joy. This could mean that my participants did respond to the survey by differentiating between joy in the school, joy in the classroom, and joy of the teacher as three separate types of joy as intended. It is important to note that the component matrix does show cross-loadings among factors, which is likely due to the common construct of joy and that each of the contexts had connection to one another. The teacher works in the classroom, which is situated in the school, so it makes sense that cross-loadings would be present. Classrooms and schools are part of a nested system, as seen in the Context of Joy Conceptual Framework shared in Chapter 1. These three contexts are not separate from one another and may have an impact or connection to another. Yet, the strongest loadings for each factor came together as school joy (Component 1), teacher joy (Component 2), and classroom joy (Component 3).

Table 4

Component Matrix for Three Types of Joy

Survey Item	Component 1	Component 2	Component 3
In our school, students appear to feel satisfied.	.877	.198	.286
In our school, students smile.	.857	.328	.210
In general, students in our school feel excited.	.851	.271	.260
In general, students in our school enjoy learning.	.848	.235	.226
In our school, students engage in good-natured laughter.	.839	.233	.236
In general, students in our school want to come to school each day.	.837	.248	.217
In general, our school feels like a positive space.	.537	.501	.114
I feel excited when I am teaching.	.208	.814	.118
In the classroom, I genuinely smile.	.285	.812	.160
As the teacher, I want to come to school each day.	.260	.798	.132
In the classroom, I engage in good-natured laughter.	.261	.789	.187
I enjoy teaching.	.069	.787	.156
I feel positive when I am teaching.	.266	.750	.367
As a teacher, I feel satisfied at work.	.300	.717	.138
In my classroom, my students appear to feel satisfied.	.259	.135	.882
In general, my students feel excited in my classroom.	.255	.049	.814
In general, my students enjoy learning.	.180	.249	.811
In my classroom, students smile.	.118	.094	.809
In my classroom, students engage in good-natured laughter.	.238	.218	.780
In general, my students want to come to school each day.	.311	.147	.674
In general, my classroom feels like a positive space.	.043	.431	.656

Then, I ran a Factor Analysis using the items for classroom joy using Principal Components Analysis to ensure that these items came together as one factor. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy was greater than .70, at .889, which means that there were an adequate number of items for each factor (Morgan et al., 2013). The Bartlett's Test of

Sphericity was significant at $p < .001$, so I proceeded with the analysis. The communalities were adequate, and no items were removed. The total variance explained using the Principal Component Analysis was 68%. The analysis extracted one component (Table 5). Just as anticipated, the items for classroom joy hung together as one factor, or in other words, represented one construct.

Table 5

Component Matrix for Classroom Joy

Survey Item	Component 1
In my classroom, my students appear to feel satisfied.	.92
In general, my students enjoy learning.	.86
In general, my students feel excited in my classroom.	.84
In my classroom, students engage in good-natured laughter.	.84
In my classroom, students smile.	.81
In general, my students want to come to school each day.	.75
In general, my classroom feels like a positive space.	.73

I next conducted a Factor Analysis with the items for school joy using Principals Components Analysis. Similarly, I found that the items for School Joy hung together as one factor as well. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy was greater than .70, at .911, which means that there were an adequate number of items for each factor (Morgan et al., 2013). The Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant at $p < .001$, so I proceeded with the analysis. All of the items demonstrated adequate communalities. The total variance explained using the Principal Component Analysis was 77%. The analysis extracted one component (Table 6). The items for school joy hung together as one factor, representing one construct.

Table 6

Component Matrix for School Joy

Survey Item	Component 1
In general, students in our school feel excited.	.92
In our school, students appear to be satisfied.	.92
In our school, students smile.	.91
In our school, students engage in good-natured laughter.	.90
In general, students in our school enjoy learning.	.89
In general, students in our school want to come to school each day.	.88
In general, our school feels like a positive space.	.73

Finally, I conducted the same Factor Analysis using Principal Components Analysis with the items for teacher joy. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy was greater than .70, at .876, which means that there were an adequate number of items for each factor (Morgan et al., 2013). The Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant at $p < .001$, so I proceeded with the analysis. The communalities for all items were adequate. The total variance explained using the Principal Component Analysis was 70.56%. The analysis extracted one component (Table 7). The items for teacher joy hung together as one construct, or one factor as well.

Table 7

Component Matrix for Teacher Joy

Survey Item	Component 1
As the teacher, I want to come to school each day.	.86
In the classroom, I engage in good-natured laughter.	.86
In the classroom, I genuinely smile.	.86
I feel excited when I am teaching.	.85
I feel positive when I am teaching.	.84
As a teacher, I feel satisfied at work.	.82
I enjoy teaching.	.80

In summary, the items for classroom joy, school joy, and teacher joy, when run separately in a factor analysis, each came out as one factor. With all joy items run together in a factor analysis, three factors were extracted which demonstrates that the instrument has strong content validity in collecting data on what was intended to answer the research questions. The strong Cronbach's alpha for the overall instrument and each of its subcomponents demonstrated sound reliability.

Participants and Data Collection

The survey was administered via Qualtrics, an online survey management tool. This database collected and stored the data under a password-protected account. All elementary school teachers in the district were considered eligible participants in the study and were contacted initially with an email invitation to participate by their principal. Principals forwarded an email invitation to their teachers at their discretion, convenience, and availability. There was no guarantee that all teachers received the email invitation. One school did not receive the invitation because the email address of the principal bounced back and there was no other school email address provided to use.

I distributed the survey to the 54 elementary school principals at Flower Hill School District via an email invitation to forward to their teachers beginning on Thursday, February 9th. According to the Flower Hill School District schools' websites, approximately 2,716 teachers were eligible to participate in the survey. The survey window was open for two weeks and principals received a follow-up invitation to send to teachers on Tuesday, February 21st. The survey closed on Thursday, February 23rd, and I used data collected until 11:59 p.m. in the analyses. A total of 198 participants participated in this survey, however after cleaning the data, 178 cases remained for analysis. One case was deleted due to a lack of agreeing to the consent

form, and 19 cases were deleted due to missing data. Therefore, if all teachers eligible to participate received the email invitation from their principals, this would be an approximate 6.6% response rate. In a meta-analysis of published research in education and education-related fields, the average online survey response rate was 44.1% (Wu et al., 2022). In comparison, this survey response rate was lower than the typical response rate of online surveys in published research, but the number of responses is better than expected considering the stressful teaching conditions many teachers report post-pandemic. Next, I will discuss the demographics of the participants that completed the survey and were used in analyses.

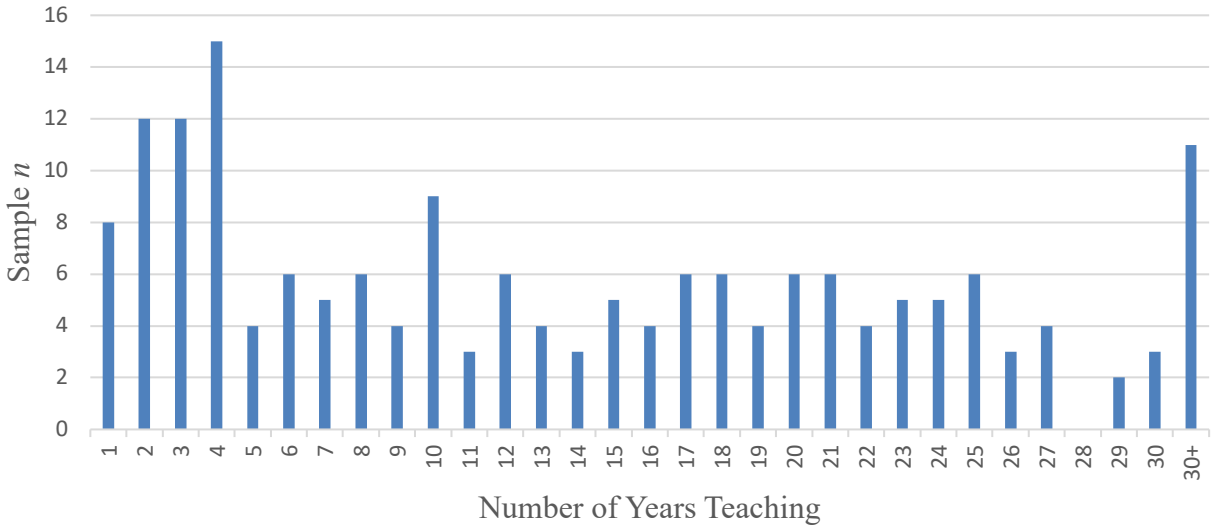
Demographics of the Sample Population

I asked three demographic questions in the survey: (a) years teaching, (b) grade level taught, and (c) school name.

Years Teaching. Teacher participants selected a number from a drop-down menu in Qualtrics for the number of years they have spent teaching, to include this current school year in their cumulative response (Figure 3). The sample included a variety of teaching experience in years.

Figure 3

Participant Demographics: Number of Years Teaching



Note. There was one missing case for number of years teaching.

Grade Level Taught. Teacher participants selected the grade level they were currently teaching. In this school district, elementary schools included Preschool, Kindergarten, and First through Fifth Grade. Participants could also select if they were a special educator working across multiple grade levels or classrooms or if they were a specialist working across multiple grade levels or classrooms. See Table 8 for the results of the grade levels represented in my sample. All grade levels, special educators, and specialists were represented in the sample.

Table 8

Participant Demographics: Grade Level Taught

Grade	*n*	%
PreK	6	3.4
Kindergarten	26	14.6
First	15	8.4
Second	22	12.4
Third	16	9.0
Fourth	11	6.2
Fifth	11	6.2
Multiple (special educator)	23	12.9
Multiple (specialist)	48	27.0

School Name. Participants selected the school at which they worked from a list of all elementary schools in Flower Hill School District. Of the 55 elementary schools in Flower Hill School District, teachers from 21 schools participated. Schools are given pseudonyms in Table 9 to show the distribution of responses while protecting the privacy of the participating school district.

Table 9

Participant Demographics: Schools Represented

School Code	*n*	%
A	7	3.9
B	5	2.8
C	15	8.4
D	12	6.7
E	42	23.6
F	2	1.1
G	9	5.1
H	12	6.7
I	8	4.5
J	7	3.9
K	8	4.5
L	7	3.9
M	7	3.9
N	4	2.2
O	8	4.5
P	1	0.6
Q	7	3.9
R	1	0.6
S	4	2.2
T	1	0.6
U	11	6.2

Reliability of the Sample

Of the target population, the average number of years a teacher in Flower Hill School District has taught is 13.96 years. The average number of years of teaching experience for the study sample was 13.62 years. The average number of teaching years of my sample is almost identical to the population, which shows that this sample is close to representing my target population.

All grade levels were represented in the sample, which also shows that the sample represents the target population. I had a higher proportion of specialists that responded to the

survey than grade-level teachers, but that may be due to interest in the topic or time available to participate in the survey.

There were 55 elementary schools in Flower Hill School District. Of those 54 schools, teachers from 21 schools responded. Twenty-one schools out of a total of 55 schools possible were represented. The schools that were represented in the sample were similar to the total population of elementary schools in the district. Schools represented in the sample included: Title I schools, schools with Dual Language Immersion programs, and had a range of student populations. There were slight differences in the proportions of Title I schools and schools that offered Dual Language Immersion programs. An independent samples t-test comparing the schools' student populations showed no significant differences between schools with teacher participants and the schools where there were no teacher participants in the study, $t(53) = .558$, $p = .240$. See Table 10 for a comparison between the schools represented in the sample and schools that had no teacher participants and thus were not represented in the sample.

Table 10

Participating Schools Compared to Non-Participating Schools

School Characteristics	Schools Represented	Schools Not Represented
Range of student population	362-715	315-986
M of student population	527	547
No. of Title I schools in group (%)	4 (19%)	11 (32%)
No. of Schools with Dual Language Immersion programs (%)	3 (14%)	2 (6%)

Overall, the sample population spanned 38% of schools, covering all grade levels possible and specialists and special education teachers. The teachers that responded to my survey had almost an identical average in years of teaching experience when compared to the entire population, therefore, the sample was fairly representative of the population of elementary teachers in Flower Hill School District.

Data Analysis

The statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS Software. Multiple regressions, Spearman Rho bivariate correlations, and qualitative data coding and analysis were used to answer the research questions (Table 11).

Table 11

Data Analysis Plan by Research Question

Research Question	Data Sources	Data Analysis
Central: How do schools and teachers foster joy in their students?	Survey data: Items 4-10 (Level of Classroom Joy), 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45 (Teacher Efforts, Instructional Decisions), 53	Multiple regression, Frequency Count
1: To what extent is the teacher's perceived level of their own joy related to the same teacher's perception of the level of joy in their classroom?	Survey data: Items 4-10 (Level of Classroom Joy), 18-24 (Level of Teacher Joy)	Correlation
2: To what extent is the teachers' perceived level of joy in the school related to the perceived level of joy in its classrooms?	Survey data: Items 11-17 (Level of School Joy), 4-10 (Level of Classroom Joy)	Correlation (with aggregated scores at the school level)
3: What efforts by the teacher correlate with the teacher's perceived level of joy in the classroom?	Survey data: Items 4-10 (Level of Classroom Joy), 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33 (Teacher Efforts)	Correlations, qualitative data coding and thematic analysis
4: What instructional decisions correlate with the teacher's perceived level of joy in the classroom?	Survey data: Items 4-10 (Level of Classroom Joy), 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45 (Instructional Decisions)	Correlations, qualitative data coding and thematic analysis
5: What administrative supports correlate with the teacher's perceived level of joy in the classroom?	Survey data: 4-10 (Level of Classroom Joy), 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52 (Admin Supports)	Correlations, Multiple regression, qualitative data coding and thematic analysis

Delimitations, Limitations, Assumptions

It is important to recognize the delimitations, limitations, and assumptions of this study for a holistic picture of the study's potential power and its limits due to the constraints of the research design and decisions I consciously made.

Delimitations

I chose to focus on elementary schools. I suspect that teaching strategies may be different at the secondary level and thus I would predict a different tool would need to be created to better match that art and skill. So, this study only focused on elementary school teachers.

I also chose to focus on one large school district that had an initiative centered on joy in particular. This allowed me a large enough sample population to gather data while still being knowledgeable enough of their practices and resources, so the instrument was tailored to this district's expectations and experiences of teachers in the district. Choosing one large school district limited my findings and I recognize that smaller districts or other districts without a specific focus on joy may have different findings.

I chose to focus on a district that already had a priority for joy, to then be able to study what strategies and supports led to joyful education spaces. This is a delimitation in that this population did have a focus on joy, has thought about joy before, and may then have had higher responses to levels of joy than other districts who did not make joy a priority yet. Therefore, I could not make generalizations that the levels of joy in these classrooms and schools are generalizable to the entire U.S. population, but rather I gained information about the relationships between strategies, supports, instructional choices, and other variables related to joy.

Limitations

A limitation of this study was that the data collection relied on the principals to distribute the survey invitation to their teachers. I do not know whether all of the principals complied with the request, and if not, how many chose not to have their teachers participate. A further limitation of the study was that not all invited teachers elected to participate. Therefore, this

study only represented the responses of those who received the invitation and that chose to participate. There could be many reasons as to why teachers chose not to participate in the study, and it is unknown whether non-participation was a result of personal reasons or due to the principal not sharing the invitation with their staff. It could be a source of bias that the principals who did share the study invitation were the leaders who believed in the work of joy or have more joy than those that did not. There was a slightly less proportion of Title I schools participating in the study compared to those that did not, so perhaps this may have served as a factor in participation as well.

Inherent in survey research design is the limitation of response bias (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Another limitation is that the construct of joy is highly valued in schools in general and in this school district in particular, so participants may have felt a desire to rate their perceptions of levels of joy higher than they felt, because they knew joy should be present. This is considered the social desirability bias (Grimm, 2010) and was considered when analyzing the results overall. Variability within responses was used to determine relationships even when scores were overall inflated due to the social desirability bias that may have impacted responses. Also, since the design of this study was through a confidential survey, hopefully it led to less social desirability bias than would have an in-person interview (Grimm, 2010).

Another limitation of this study was that the source of data was from the teacher's perception. The teacher was the person rating the perceived level of joy for their classroom and their school. Because of this, the levels of joy for the classroom and the school were not objective levels of joy. The levels of joy may have been higher or lower than the teacher perceived them to be. But due to the limits of this study, this was the closest measure for the level of joy for the classroom and the school that was possible, at that time. Similarly, there was

only one source for the classroom perception of joy which was coming from the teacher who also rated their own level of joy, which created a limitation for the first sub-question. For the classroom level of joy, since the teacher was providing their perception, it was an average level of joy in the classroom, recognizing that there was variability among individual students' experiences of joy in the classroom. Some students in the classroom likely experienced higher levels of joy in the same classroom than other students experienced. Therefore, the teacher's perception of the level of joy in the classroom was an average experience.

Assumptions

Since I used a sample population from a school district with a preestablished initiative around and shared focus on joy, I assumed that the participants had already considered how they define joy and could speak to levels of perceived joy within themselves, in their classrooms, and in their schools using the indicators I provided in the survey instrument.

I hoped to learn more about the relationships among joy and teacher efforts, instructional decisions, and supports. Because I was operating from a post-positivist perspective in this study, I was assuming that I was unveiling knowledge about joy from the data and evidence I collected from the measurements I created (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Therefore, I believed knowledge could be unveiled, rather than co-constructed amidst a subjective reality.

Ethical Considerations

I submitted this study for approval by the William & Mary Educational Institutional Review Board before any data collection began. I also submitted this study for approval by Flower Hill School District's research committee before any data collection began. To protect participants from any harm, the survey began with a consent form and participants' continuation of the survey construed consent. In the consent form, I informed participants that they may stop

the survey at any time without consequence. The content of the survey items did not contain any traumatic survey items and were worded to capture strengths rather than faults. I provided participants with the purpose of the study in the consent form and communicated that their responses would be kept confidential.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

In this chapter, I present the findings on joy in schools and classrooms. I share the results from the statistical tests that address the central research question, "How do schools and teachers foster joy in their students?" and information on district level initiatives that contribute to joy in these classrooms and schools. Then, I share the results from the statistical tests and qualitative analyses that address the five sub-questions. I conclude with a summary of the findings.

Central Research Question

The central research question was an overarching question of: How do schools and teachers foster joy in their students? I used the items for measuring the teacher's perceived level of joy in the classroom to arrive at a total mean score for the classroom's level of joy. Then I ran a multiple regression for the teacher efforts and instructional decisions to determine the extent to which strategies explain the variance in the classrooms' mean levels of joy. Then, I used the initiative question to determine, which different opportunities for professional growth, were most frequently taken advantage of, which may lead to more questions about how these initiatives could potentially help foster joy in the classroom. Finally, the results from the analyses run to answer Sub-Questions 1–5 also helped to answer the central research question.

The combination of variables to predict classroom joy from all of the teacher efforts and instructional decisions items was statistically significant, $F(19, 81) = 2.648$, $p = .001$. The beta coefficients are in Table 12.

Table 12

Simultaneous Multiple Regression Analysis Summary for Teacher Efforts and Instructional Decisions Predicting Classroom Joy (N = 101)

Variable	*B*	*SE B*	*β*	*t*	*p*
feel loved (TE)	.043	.341	.038	.126	.900
feel cared for (TE)	.183	.307	.150	.595	.554
feel validated (TE)	-.317	.273	-.297	-1.164	.248
feel connected to community (TE)	.140	.228	.124	.614	.541
emotional safety (TE)	.095	.349	.080	.273	.786
present in moment (TE)	.036	.148	.042	.245	.807
flexible (TE)	.055	.136	.055	.403	.688
know students (TE)	-.027	.229	-.024	-.117	.907
student voice (ID)	.248	.128	.301	1.945	.055
hands-on experiences (ID)	-.029	.110	-.038	-.263	.793
student choice (ID)	.070	.104	.098	.672	.504
collaboration (ID)	**.235**	**.103**	**.326**	**2.285**	**.025**
in-depth exploration of content (ID)	**-.220**	**.103**	**-.368**	**-2.132**	**.036**
extended time to explore interests (ID)	-.159	.092	-.305	-1.733	.087
creative expression (ID)	.041	.109	.068	.379	.706
movement (ID)	.039	.108	.052	.361	.719
play (ID)	-.048	.069	-.095	-.699	.487
fun (ID)	.150	.114	.206	1.314	.192
excitement (ID)	.189	.107	.232	1.770	.080

Note. $R^2 = .383$; Adjusted $R^2 = .239$, $F(19, 81) = 2.648$, $p = .001$. TE = Teacher Effort. ID = Instructional Decision.

Two of the survey items independently significantly predicted classroom joy when all nineteen variables were combined. Those items were: allowing for collaboration (ID) and allowing for an in-depth exploration of content (ID).

The overall model had an adjusted R^2 value of .239. This means that this model, with all teacher efforts and instructional decisions combined, explained 23.9% of the variance in the classroom's level of joy. This represents a medium effect (Morgan et al., 2013).

Then, with the knowledge from the findings from the first sub-question, to be discussed in detail in the following section, I decided to re-run the multiple regression, adding in the variable of teacher joy. This second model included all parts of the survey that the teacher was in control of: all teacher efforts, instructional decisions, and the teacher's level of joy. This model was even more predictive of the classroom's level of joy when the teacher's level of joy was added as a predictor. This combination of variables to predict classroom joy was statistically significant, $F(20, 78) = 3.070$, $p < .001$. This overall model had an adjusted R^2 value of .297, explaining 29.7% of the variance in the classroom's level of joy. This was a moderate effect (Morgan et al., 2013). In this model, the teacher's level of joy, allowing for collaboration, and allowing for an in-depth exploration of content all significantly independently contributed to the prediction of classroom joy. The frequency of participation in the district's joy initiatives is shown in Table 13.

Table 13

Participation in Flower Hill School District Joy Initiative Elements

Joy Initiative	***n***	**%**
Served as a Joy Ambassador	9	5.1
Participated in the Joy book study	14	7.9
Attended a workshop on how to make learning more joyful	23	12.9
Attended the 2-hour class on joy and teacher well-being	11	6.2
Participated in the social media campaign #FHHasJoy	21	11.8
Read the PGI Newsletter for Joy ideas	40	22.5
Used the daily tips and suggestions from the PGI Office	37	20.8

Note. The PGI Newsletter is the Office of Professional Growth and Innovation's newsletter

This information shows the participation of the sample population in joy initiative elements. The two activities with the largest participation included the PGI Newsletter (22.5 %) and the daily tips and suggestions (20.8%). These two initiatives were the most successful in terms of participation, with more than 20% of the sample. Attending a workshop on how to make learning more joyful (12.9%) and participating in the social media campaign (#FHHasJoy) (11.8%) were each engaged in by more than ten percent of the sample. These percentages of the sample population's participation provide insight into the potential need and desire for these initiative elements for learning and growth.

In terms of individuals' participation, more than half of the participants did not participate in any initiative elements (53.4%). Of the participants that did engage in any element of the initiative, most of them engaged in one aspect of the initiative (25.3%). There were some participants who engaged in two (10.1%) or three elements (7.3%). And there were very few that engaged in four (7.3%), five (2.2%), six (0%), or all seven (.6%) of the elements. These data suggest that most teacher participants either did not engage in any of the district's joy initiative

elements or engaged in just one of them. A few teacher participants engaged in the initiative with fervor, participating in many of the district's offerings.

Sub-Question 1

The first sub-question was: To what extent is the teacher's perceived level of their own joy related to the same teacher's perception of the level of joy in their classroom? There were seven items related to the teacher's level of joy and seven items related to the classroom's level of joy. Teacher participants rated these items on a scale from one to nine. To answer this question, I aggregated the seven teacher joy items into a mean score for the teacher's level of joy and aggregated the seven classroom joy items into a mean score for the classroom's level of joy. Then, I ran a correlation between the teacher's mean level of joy and the classroom's mean level of joy.

The mean variable for classroom joy was not normally distributed, and there was one outlier in the scatterplot. Therefore, I ran the non-parametric test, the Spearman Rho correlation. There was a positive correlation between the teacher's level of joy and the classroom's level of joy, $r(102) = .589$, $p < .001$. This was a strong correlation (Morgan et al., 2013). This means that the teacher's level of joy correlated with the classroom's level of joy, so a teacher with a higher level of joy more likely had a classroom with a higher level of joy.

Sub-Question 2

The second sub-question was: To what extent is the teachers' perceived level of joy in the school related to the perceived level of joy in its classrooms? There were seven items related to the classroom's level of joy and seven items related to the school's level of joy. Teacher participants rated these items on a scale from one to nine. I used the items that measure the teacher's perceived level of joy in the school to arrive at the mean school level of joy. Then I

aggregated the means from the teachers at the same school into an overall school level of joy score, for any schools that had at least 10 teacher participants. I also used the items that measured the teacher's perceived level of joy in the classroom to arrive at a total mean score for the teacher's perceived level of joy in their classroom. From there, I ran a correlation to examine if the mean score of the teacher's perceived level of joy in the classroom correlated with its mean school level of joy score.

When I ran the school-level data analyses, I only included school data for schools that had at least 10 teacher participants. And to make adequate claims about schools in a sample of 55 schools, I needed at least 10% of the schools participating, which would be approximately five schools with 10 participants or more each. In the sample, there were five schools with at least 10 teachers that participated. Since some teacher participants taught across multiple classrooms and/or grade levels, not all teachers reported on a classroom's level of joy. Therefore, Table 14 shows the schools with at least 10 overall teacher participants and how many classrooms' levels of joy were reported.

Table 14

Schools with High Participation in Survey

School	No. of Teacher Participants	No. of Classrooms' Levels of Joy Reported
C	15	7
D	12	9
E	42	25
H	12	4
U	11	7

Using the data from Schools C, D, E, H, and U with enough participation for confidence in a mean school joy score, I ran a Spearman Rho correlation. I ran this non-parametric test because the variable, classroom joy, was not normally distributed and violated the assumption for the parametric test. It is important to note that using the mean school joy score and running this test did not account for the variability in the range of scores from the teachers on the level of the school's joy. A school could have had a mean joy score of 5 with a range of 3–7 and another school could have had a mean joy score of 5, with all teachers reporting the same level of 5. This analysis did not account for that variability in responses.

There was no correlation between the mean school joy score and the classroom joy score, $r(50)= -.141$, $p = .319$. There was one outlier in the data, and even when removed, there was still no significant correlation between the variables. This means that the average of the school's level of joy did not correlate with the levels of joy in its classrooms.

Sub-Question 3

The third sub-question was: What efforts by the teacher correlate with the teacher's perceived level of joy in the classroom? There were seven items related to the classroom's level of joy, rated on a scale from one to nine, that I aggregated into a mean score for classroom joy. Then, to answer this question, I ran a correlation between the classroom's mean level of joy and each of the teacher efforts items. I also coded the responses from the open-ended item on additional teacher efforts and used thematic analysis to capture the emerging themes of the responses to further answer the research question.

The mean of the classroom's level of joy and the teacher efforts were not normally distributed, violating the assumption for the parametric test. Therefore, I ran Spearman Rho correlation analyses (Table 15). Each of the teacher efforts had significant positive correlations

between the teacher effort and the classroom's level of joy. These correlations could be statistically significant due to the high sample size (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019), but when considered what it could mean practically, it makes sense that the teacher efforts would positively correlate with the classroom's level of joy.

Table 15

Correlations Between Classroom Joy and Teacher Efforts

Teacher Effort	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**
1. Classroom joy	.381**	.386**	.309**	.429**	.458**	.426**	.302**	.257**
2. Ensuring that your students feel loved	-	.872**	.878**	.756**	.879**	.528**	.505**	.577**
3. Ensuring that your students feel cared for		-	.757**	.670**	.801**	.428**	.396**	.542**
4. Ensuring that your students feel validated			-	.759**	.782**	.573**	.534**	.709**
5. Ensuring that your students feel connected to the classroom community				-	.785**	.639**	.488**	.584**
6. Ensuring that there is a sense of emotional safety in your classroom					-	.588**	.518**	.565**
7. Being present in the moment						-	.658**	.852**
8. Staying flexible to address students' needs							-	.482**
9. Knowing your students								-

Note. $N = 105$.
** significant at the .01 level.

There was a positive correlation between the classroom's level of joy and putting in effort: to ensure that students feel loved [$r(103) = .381$, $p < .001$]; so that students feel cared for [$r(103) = .386$, $p < .001$]; so that students feel validated [$r(103) = .309$, $p = .001$]; so that students feel connected to the classroom community [$r(103) = .429$, $p < .001$]; so that there is a sense of emotional safety in the classroom [$r(103) = .458$, $p < .001$]; to being present in the moment [$r(103) = .426$, $p < .001$]; to staying flexible to address students' needs [$r(103) = .302$, $p = .002$]; and into knowing your students [$r(103) = .257$, $p = .008$]. The correlations were weak to moderate with a range of .257 to .458 (Morgan et al., 2013). Ensuring that students feel loved, cared for, validated, and connected to the classroom community had moderate correlations to the classroom's perceived level of joy. Similarly, putting in effort so that there is a sense of emotional safety in the classroom, being present in the moment, and staying flexible to students' needs were also moderate correlations to the classroom's perceived level of joy. Putting effort into knowing your students had a weak correlation to the classroom's perceived level of joy.

This means that all these efforts by the teacher correlate with the level of joy in the classroom. In other words, the more effort the teacher puts into these areas (students feeling loved, students feeling cared for, students feeling validated, students feeling connected to the classroom community, ensuring a sense of emotional safety, being present in the moment, staying flexible to address students' needs, and knowing students), the more likely the classroom had a higher level of joy.

Following the correlation analyses, I used qualitative coding and analyses to interpret the open-ended responses for the final item on teacher efforts, which asked, "What other efforts help you foster joy in the classroom?" I recorded the open-ended responses and coded them using In

Vivo and Descriptive Coding (Saldaña, 2014). I matched codes that were the same or similar. Then, I organized the codes into categories of emerging themes and six themes emerged.

The emerging themes were: (a) building relationships with students and families, (b) creating a sense of community, (c) celebrating students, (d) intentionality in creating the classroom environment, and (e) ideas to infuse into the school day. There was a sixth theme that arose in the open-ended responses related to instructional decisions that I saved for the fourth sub-question. It is interesting to note that many of the participants considered decisions about instruction to be an effort by the teacher, which illuminates that these categories of instructional decisions and teacher efforts were constructed by the researcher and are not clearly differentiated in the field.

Responses under the theme of building relationships with students and families included: taking time to talk with students, getting to know students' interests and including them into the school day, and communicating with parents. Creating a sense of community included the suggestions: making the class feel like a family, using bonding activities, sharing feelings, giving students opportunities to share about themselves, extending grace and forgiveness, caring for one another, and implementing morning meeting and closing circle. Another theme was celebrating students, where respondents shared about: celebrating student successes both inside and outside of the classroom, building confidence, having a student of the day, and using shout-outs or positive affirmations. There were many ideas for how to intentionally create the classroom environment. For the physical environment that included: creating a bright classroom, using lamps and low lights, and having a calm corner. For the emotional environment that included: looking for the positives, making the classroom a safe space, greeting students, being transparent, and using open communication. Finally, ideas to infuse into the day included: brain

breaks, dancing, read alouds, music, games, play, crafts, jokes and humor, yoga, mindfulness, fun, excitement, silliness, smiles, nature, and laughter.

Based on the multiple positive correlations from the survey and the variety and robustness in suggestions from the open-ended survey item, there appears to be a cornucopia of teacher actions that could foster joy in the classroom.

Sub-Question 4

The fourth sub-question was: What instructional decisions correlate with the teacher's perceived level of joy in the classroom? There were seven items related to the classroom's level of joy, rated on a scale from one to nine, that I aggregated into a mean score for classroom joy. Then, to answer this question, I ran a correlation between the classroom's mean level of joy and each of the instructional decisions items. I also coded the responses from the open-ended item on additional instructional decisions and used thematic analysis to capture the emerging themes of the responses to further answer the research question.

The mean of the classroom's level of joy was not normally distributed and many of the instructional decision items were not normally distributed, so the assumption of normality was violated. Therefore, I ran Spearman Rho correlation analyses (Table 16). All the instructional decision items were significantly and positively correlated with the classroom's level of joy, most in the moderate range. Some of the correlations were significant at the $p < .05$ level and others at the $p < .01$ level.

There was a positive correlation between the classroom's level of joy and allowing for student voice [$r(99) = .391$, $p < .001$]; offering hands-on experiences [$r(99) = .353$, $p < .001$]; allowing for student choice [$r(99) = .344$, $p < .001$]; allowing for collaboration [$r(99) = .390$, $p < .001$]; allowing for an in-depth exploration of content [$r(99) = .226$, $p = .023$]; allowing students

extended time to explore content that interests them [$r(99) = .206$, $p = .039$]; allowing students opportunities for creative expression [$r(99) = .390$, $p < .001$]; including movement [$r(99) = .324$, $p < .001$]; including play [$r(99) = .265$, $p = .007$]; including fun [$r(99) = .386$, $p < .001$]; and putting excitement in lessons [$r(99) = .436$, $p < .001$]. These correlations had weak to moderate strength (Morgan et al., 2013), with a range of .206 to .436. Allowing for student voice, student choice, collaboration, and opportunities for creative expression had moderate correlations to the classroom's perceived level of joy. Offering hands-on experiences, including movement and fun, and putting excitement into lessons also had moderate correlations to the classroom's perceived level of joy. Allowing for an in-depth exploration of the content, allowing students extended time to explore content that interests them, and including play had weak correlations to the classroom's perceived level of joy. Thus, the instructional decisions on the survey correlated with the classroom's level of joy.

Table 16

Correlations between Classroom Joy and Instructional Decisions

Instructional Decisions	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Classroom joy	.391**	.353**	.344**	.390**	.226*	.206*	.390**	.324**	.265**	.386**	.436**
2. Allow for student voice	-	.578**	.681**	.543**	.583**	.590**	.640**	.250*	.310**	.369**	.447**
3. Offer hands-on experiences		-	.581**	.514**	.652**	.522**	.654**	.554**	.552**	.588**	.571**
4. Allow for student choice			-	.600**	.639**	.502**	.497**	.274**	.333**	.413**	.434**
5. Allow for collaboration				-	.664**	.559**	.549**	.321**	.389**	.406**	.389**
6. Allow for an in-depth exploration of content					-	.723**	.640**	.460**	.520**	.564**	.504**
7. Allow students extended time to explore content that interests them						-	.788**	.353**	.543**	.547**	.453**

8. Allow students opportunities for creative expression	-	.509**	.531**	.603**	.530**
9. Include movement		-	.605**	.639**	.490**
10. Include play			-	.751**	.535**
11. Include fun				-	.680**
12. Put excitement into your lessons					-

Note. $N = 101$.
** significant at the .01 level.
* significant at the .05 level.

Following the correlation analyses, I used qualitative coding and analyses to interpret the open-ended responses for the final item on instructional decisions, which asked, “What other instructional decisions help you foster joy in the classroom?” I recorded the open-ended responses and coded them using In Vivo and Descriptive Coding (Saldaña, 2014). I matched codes that were the same or similar, and then, I organized the codes into categories of emerging themes. Seven themes emerged.

The instructional decisions codes that arose from the responses for the third sub-question were repeated in responses for the fourth sub-question and were addressed in the following emerging themes.

The emerging themes were: (a) classroom management and community building to set the environment for learning, (b) deeper learning tasks, (c) student power, (d) teacher activated joy, (e) joyful lesson elements, (f) types of lessons, and (g) specific examples.

Teachers commented on the importance of setting expectations and having a good classroom management system for lessons to run smoothly and have the potential to be enjoyed. These comments included building the classroom community, using incentives, and setting expectations. Then, there were a series of deeper learning tasks that emerged that teachers shared that they felt made their lessons joyful such as: offering open-ended tasks, having students engage in problem solving, and employing inquiry-based lessons. Connected to the survey items of allowing for voice and choice, teachers offered several comments on ways to give students power in the classroom which fostered joy, such as letting the class vote on activities, offering choice boards, using flexible seating and schedules, and offering students jobs within the classroom. In comparison, there were ways that the teacher had control, where it was within the

teacher's responsibility to activate the joy, which included suggestions such as: the teacher making the content interesting, the teacher bringing the joy, and the teacher being prepared to teach.

The participants also offered ideas for lesson elements that they believed fostered joy during their teaching and those included: playing games; using songs; incorporating students' interests; using culturally diverse lessons; using multiple modalities; making it fun and interesting; using videos; and allowing for creativity, art, and drawing. Teachers also described different types of lessons as being joyful such as lessons that are: hands-on, interactive, collaborative, relevant, and engaging. They also shared that a variety of lessons, science experiments, and time for sensory play were also joyful lessons.

Finally, participants shared specific examples of joyful lessons and moments during instruction such as: poetry readings and writings, socio-emotional learning lessons, extension activities, master classes, obstacle courses, unstructured time, discussion of ideas, Science Technology Engineering Art and Mathematics (STEAM) lessons, soft starts, and brain breaks.

It is important to note that while the emerging themes suggested ways these teachers fostered joy through the decisions they made about their instruction, in several of the open-ended comments teachers shared concerns that although these were elements and lesson types they would like to use, often the curriculum that is required to be taught or the pacing guide that is set restricts teachers' ability to make these decisions in their actual classrooms. Even in Flower Hill School District where there is a focus on joy, teachers reported being bound to the formal curriculum that constrained their flexibility. This may have resulted in a taught curriculum that hindered in-depth exploration, creativity, and other optimal and joyful learning opportunities.

There appears to be many options in designing instruction that correlate positively with joy, including many more that teachers suggested that also help to foster joy. Current teaching realities may limit the use of some of these strategies, but in a world conducive to joyful learning, there are environments and lesson elements and examples teachers would use to foster joy.

Sub-Question 5

The fifth sub-question was: What administrative supports correlate with the teacher's perceived level of joy in the classroom? There were seven items related to the classroom level of joy, rated on a scale from one to nine, that I aggregated into a mean score for classroom joy. Then, to answer this question I ran a correlation between the classroom's mean level of joy and each of the administrative support items. I additionally ran a multiple regression to see if any actions by the administration have a significant impact on the variance in the classrooms' levels of joy. Finally, I coded the responses from the open-ended item on additional administrative supports and used thematic analysis to capture the emerging themes of the responses to further answer the research question.

The classroom's mean level of joy and each of the administrative support items were not normally distributed, so the assumption for the parametric test was violated. Therefore, I ran Spearman Rho correlation analyses. See Table 17. There were positive correlations between each administrative support and the classroom's level of joy. There was a positive correlation between the classroom's level of joy and feeling supported by the administration [$r(101) = .292$, $p = .003$]; feeling validated [$r(101) = .263$, $p = .007$]; feeling that administrators give teachers autonomy over their classrooms [$r(101) = .269$, $p = .006$]; feeling the administrators at your school trust you [$r(101) = .218$, $p = .027$]; feeling administrators support teachers' self-care

[$r(101) = .293$, $p = .003$]; and feeling administrators emphasize the positives during teaching observations [$r(101) = .365$, $p < .001$].

This means that the administrative supports of administrators making teachers feel supported, validated, and trusted; administrators giving autonomy and supporting teachers' self-care; and administrators looking for the positives during teaching observations all correlated positively with the classroom's level of joy. In other words, the more these administrative supports were in place, the higher likelihood that the classrooms in these schools had higher levels of joy.

Table 17

Correlations Between Classroom Joy and Administrative Supports

Administrative Supports	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**
1. Classroom Joy	.292**	.263**	.269**	.218*	.293**	.365**
2. Supported by the administration at your school	-	.889**	.634**	.682**	.809**	.776**
3. Validated (seen and heard) by the administration at your school		-	.724**	.693**	.836**	.754**
4. Administrators give you autonomy over your classroom			-	.663**	.661**	.606**
5. Administrators at your school trust you				-	.722**	.668**
6. Administrators at your school support your self-care					-	.817**
7. Administrators emphasize the positives						-

during your teaching observations								

Note. $N = 103$.
** significant at the .01 level.
* significant at the .05 level.

It is important to note that these correlations were weak to moderate in strength (Morgan et al., 2013). The only moderate correlation to the classroom's perceived level of joy was administrators emphasizing the positives during teaching observations. Feeling supported and validated by the administration, administrators giving teachers autonomy, and trusting teachers, and administrators supporting their self-care all had weak correlations to the perceived level of joy in the classroom. These correlations may have been statistically significant because of the large sample size (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019), but it makes sense practically that there would be positive correlations between administrative supports and the presence of joy in the classroom. The means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations can be found in Table 18.

Table 18

Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations for Administrative Supports and Classroom Joy (N = 103)

Variable	***M***	***SD***	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**
Classroom Joy	7.77	.96	.180*	.124	.148	.095	.166*	.208**
Predictor variables								
1. Supported	7.03	1.81	-	.905**	.592**	.744**	.825**	.821**
2. Validated	6.62	1.99		-	.682**	.776**	.860**	.791**

3. Give you autonomy	6.87	1.84	-	.580**	.574**	.564**
4. Trust you	7.35	1.82		-	.777**	.728**
5. Support your self-care	6.90	1.98			-	.802**
6. Emphasize the positives during observations	7.44	1.68				-

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

Then, to determine if any of these administrative supports made a significant or more important contribution to the mean level of joy in the classroom, I ran a multiple regression using all six of the administrative supports items. The combination of variables of support, validation, giving autonomy, supporting self-care, and emphasizing the positives during observations to predict classroom joy was not statistically significant, $F(6, 96) = 1.285$, $p = .271$. The beta coefficients are in Table 19.

Table 19

Simultaneous Multiple Regression Analysis Summary for Administrative Supports Predicting Classroom Joy (N = 103)

Variable	***B***	***SE B***	***β***	***t***	***p***
Supported	.144	.135	.273	1.073	.286
Validated	-.190	.138	-.393	-1.372	.173
Give you autonomy	.072	.071	.139	1.019	.311
Trust you	-.079	.089	-.150	-.882	.380

Support your self-care	.073	.105	.151	.694	.489
Emphasize the positives during observations	.117	.109	.205	1.078	.284

None of the variables independently predicted classroom joy when all six variables were combined, nor did the full model. The R^2 value was .074 and the adjusted R^2 value was .017 with a standard error of .95. This model did not explain the variance and did not serve as an adequate predictor of the classroom's level of joy.

Following the correlation analyses and multiple regression, I used qualitative coding and analyses to interpret the open-ended responses for the final item on administrative supports, which asked, "What other administrative supports help you foster joy in the classroom?" I recorded the open-ended responses and coded them using In Vivo and Descriptive Coding (Saldana, 2014). I matched codes that were the same or similar, then, I organized the codes into categories of emerging themes. Four themes emerged. The emerging themes were: (a) specific administrator behaviors that make teachers feel supported, (b) specific administrator actions that make teachers feel supported, (c) ways to support students and families, and (d) how teachers want to feel.

Responses of specific administrator behaviors that make teachers feel supported included: being well-organized, being present in the moment, being flexible, being positive, genuinely caring, being understanding, being unassuming, trusting, listening, and being available / having an open door.

Responses of specific administrator actions that make teachers feel supported included a wide range of suggestions: giving positive feedback, offering productive suggestions, leaving positive notes and messages, checking in on classrooms and teachers, assisting teachers when

necessary and unprompted, celebrating staff and students, reducing workload, gifting small treats, and offering jeans days. Teachers felt supported by administrators when they felt administrators had their backs when dealing with parents and the community. Participants also shared that administrators should help with student behaviors and discipline, make sure students have what they need to learn, and provide wellness opportunities and supports for students. Finally, teachers wanted to feel appreciated, cared about, heard, valued, supported, cared about as a person, and treated like an equal partner.

There were many administrative supports that positively correlated with the classroom's level of joy, even though they were weak to moderate correlations. None of the supports independently predicted the classroom's level of joy. But participants shared many ways in which administrators could support teachers to foster joy in their classrooms.

Auxiliary Results

These findings led me to explore a new question, what administrative supports correlate with the teacher's level of joy? Since many of the open-ended item responses felt connected to the individual teacher, I decided to pursue this question. Since the administrative supports items were not normally distributed, violating the assumption of normality, I ran Spearman Rho analyses using the administrative supports items and the teacher's level of joy.

This set of correlations between administrative supports and teacher joy had stronger correlations than when correlating administrative supports and classroom joy. See Table 20. All the administrative supports were correlated positively with the teacher's level of joy, ranging between $r = .410$ and .512. There was a positive correlation between the teacher's level of joy and feeling supported by the administration [$r(168) = .479$, $p < .001$]; feeling validated [$r(168) = .478$, $p < .001$]; feeling that administrators give teachers autonomy over their classrooms [$r(168)$

= .410, $p < .001$]; feeling the administrators at your school trust you [$r(168) = .437$, $p < .001$]; feeling administrators support teachers' self-care [$r(168) = .512$, $p < .001$]; and feeling administrators emphasize the positives during teaching observations [$r(168) = .465$, $p < .001$]. It is important to note that the correlation between administrators supporting teacher's self-care and the teacher's level of joy was a strong correlation (Morgan et al., 2013).

Table 20

Correlations Between Teacher Joy and Administrative Supports

Administrative Supports	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**
1. Teacher Joy	.479**	.478**	.410**	.437**	.512**	.465**
2. Supported by the administration at your school	-	.905**	.619**	.663**	.730**	.728**
3. Validated (seen and heard) by the administration at your school		-	.686**	.678**	.764**	.718**
4. Administrators give you autonomy over your classroom			-	.684**	.706**	.635**
5. Administrators at your school trust you				-	.770**	.729**
6. Administrators at your school support your self-care					-	.781**
7. Administrators emphasize the positives during your teaching observations						-

Note. $N = 170$.
** significant at the .01 level.

The qualitative responses felt personal to the teacher, which led me to explore the new question investigating if administrative supports correlated with the teacher's level of joy. They

did positively correlate. This showed that administrative supports, while only weakly correlated with the classroom's level of joy, more strongly correlated with the teacher's level of joy.

Summary of Findings

The statistical analyses and qualitative analyses produced new findings. All the teacher efforts and instructional decisions used in the survey combined predicted the perceived level of the classroom's joy, with allowing for collaboration and in-depth exploration of content independently significantly contributing to the prediction. In an additional model, adding in the variable of the teacher's level of joy, even more strongly predicted the perceived level of joy in the classroom. The district offered various opportunities that this sample of teachers took advantage of to advance their initiative for joy.

Overall, the teacher's level of joy correlated with the teacher's perceived level of joy in their classroom. However, the perceived level of the school's joy did not correlate with its classrooms' levels of joy. Teacher efforts and instructional decisions moderately correlated with the perceived classroom's level of joy, with participants offering many more teacher efforts and instructional decisions that they believed fostered joy. Administrative supports slightly correlated with the perceived classroom's level of joy, but more strongly correlated with the teacher's level of joy. The correlation between administrators supporting teachers' self-care and the teacher's level of joy had a strong correlation.

CHAPTER 5: RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to understand how teachers and schools foster joy in their classrooms. This final chapter summarizes the major findings from Chapter 4 and discusses these findings in connection to the extant literature. This chapter also includes recommendations for policy and practice, as well as recommendations for future research.

Summary of Major Findings

This study aimed to investigate how schools and teachers make learning joyful. At the district level, the most frequently accessed district initiatives for joy were the professional development office sharing tips for joy and their newsletter. At the school level, schools had classrooms with various joy levels; however, administrators could offer supports with a more indirect impact on the classroom, by supporting teachers. The strongest relationship between an administrative support and the teacher's level of joy was the administrators supporting teachers' self-care. Other supports that were found to have positive relationships to the teacher's level of joy were feeling supported and validated by the administration, administrators giving teachers autonomy over their classrooms, administrators trusting teachers, and administrators emphasizing the positives during teaching observations. Teachers also individually reported smaller administrator action steps that they believed helped them to foster joy, including listening, having an open door, checking in, giving positive feedback, and giving small gifts. Teachers also found it beneficial when administrators cared about the teacher as a person.

At the classroom level, the teacher having joy and engaging in specific teacher efforts and instructional decisions had positive relationships with the classroom's perceived level of joy. Specifically, the teacher's level of joy, allowing students to collaborate, and allowing students

the opportunity to explore content in-depth all independently predicted the classroom's level of joy. All the teacher efforts that were examined in the survey items had positive correlations to the classroom's perceived level of joy, and teachers provided additional examples that they believed helped them to foster joy in the classroom, see Table 21. There are many avenues for teachers to foster joy that they can control or work towards in the classroom environment that center around relationships, community, and care of and for students.

Table 21

Teacher Efforts Summary Table

Examined in the Survey	**Additional Open-Ended Responses**
Ensuring students feel loved	Building relationships
Ensuring students feel cared for	Creating a sense of community
Ensuring students feel validated	Celebrating students
Ensuring students feel connected to the classroom community	Celebrating the classroom environment
Ensuring there is a sense of emotional safety in the classroom	Infusing specific elements, such as: dance, music, jokes, yoga
Being present in the moment	
Staying flexible to address students' needs	
Knowing students	

Similarly, all the instructional decisions that were examined in the survey items had positive correlations to the classroom's perceived level of joy, and teachers again provided examples of more instructional decisions that they believed helped them to foster joy, see Table 22. There is a

plethora of decisions teachers can make instructionally to create the conditions for learning to become joyful.

Table 22

Instructional Decisions Summary Table

Examined in the Survey	Additional Open-Ended responses
Allowing for student voice	Setting the environment for learning using good classroom management and community building techniques
Offering hands-on experiences	Employing deeper learning tasks
Allowing for student choice	Giving students power
Allowing for collaboration	Activating the joy as the teacher
Allowing opportunities for creative expression	Incorporating students' interests
Allowing for an in-depth exploration of content	Making lessons relevant and engaging
Allowing students extended time to explore content that interests them	Allowing for unstructured time
Including movement	Having brain breaks
Including play	Using music
Including fun	Playing games
Putting excitement into lessons	

Administrators and teachers had a host of actions and behaviors they engaged in to support joyful learning environments, with administrators having a more in-direct role, by supporting teachers and their joy. Teachers had a more direct role by creating a classroom

environment and community that fostered joy and making decisions in their lesson planning that gave students deep, rich, and dynamic experiences.

Discussion of Findings

The results of this study show that the teacher's joy is related to the classroom's perceived level of joy. There are a variety of ways to make learning joyful with a few exceptional methods regarding instructional practices. A district-wide initiative on joy where educators share ideas for making learning joyful could be a fruitful venture.

The Teacher Matters

From the results of this study, the classroom's perceived level of joy did not correlate with the school's perceived level of joy, but it did most strongly correlate with the teacher's level of joy. Since results of correlations cannot lead to confirmations of causation (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019), I cannot draw the conclusion from these data alone that the teacher's joy caused the classroom to be more joyful or that the classroom's joy caused the teacher to be more joyful. The statistical analyses demonstrated that these joy levels did vary together. However, the results from the qualitative pilot study may suggest an explanation for the relationship. The qualitative pilot study findings suggested that the teacher's joy can be spread to the classroom, making the classroom more joyful. This connects to the work of Frenzel et al. (2009) who found that teachers' emotions can transmit to students.

The teacher's joy served as the strongest correlate to the perceived level of joy in the classroom and with the explanation of how this relationship may operate from the qualitative pilot study, it seems clear that the teacher matters in terms of the classroom's level of joy. Previous literature already captures the power of a teacher in terms of academic achievement and student success (Leithwood et al., 2004; Stronge, 2018) and now this study can expand on the

power of a teacher. Teachers can make their classrooms more joyful with their own level of joy present and through their efforts and instructional decisions that positively correlated with the classroom's perceived level of joy.

Thus, it is important to discuss how to support teachers in making their classrooms joyful. Administrative supports that correlated with the teacher's level of joy with strong correlations were supporting teachers' self-care. Administrative supports that correlated with the teacher's level of joy with moderate strength were feeling supported by the administration, feeling validated by the administration, administrators giving teachers autonomy over their classrooms, administrators trusting teachers, and administrators emphasizing the positives during teaching observations. Just as administrators are seen as having an indirect effect on student achievement through teachers (Leithwood et al., 2004), it appears that for joy, administrators can also play that indirect role by affecting the joy of the teachers that can then spread to and affect the joy of their students in the classroom.

Supporting teachers' self-care is prominent in the literature on teacher well-being. Cherkowski and Walker (2018) argued that school leaders have the opportunity to create conditions of flourishing in schools, including promoting teachers' well-being. This condition of flourishing can come from administrators prioritizing well-being; creating conditions where teachers can do their best and thrive. They can serve as a positive leader who builds positive relationships and climates; communicating positively and recognizing teachers for their work; demonstrating empathy in knowing when to step in, step back, step away, or step up; and understanding the many different teachers' needs to support their well-being (Cherkowski & Walker, 2018). Administrators can support teacher well-being by being encouraging, persuading teachers to do what is best for their well-being, and sharing wisdom and enlightenment that

promotes well-being to policymakers and others (Cherkowski & Walker, 2018). Supporting teachers' well-being has already been explored in the literature, and now this study offers additional evidence for its importance. Administrator support for teacher well-being can support teachers' joy, which they can then spread to their classrooms. The teacher plays a strong role in making their classroom joyful, and administrators can support this endeavor by supporting teachers' self-care. Administrators can also support their teachers' level of joy through the other supports this study found to correlate with the teacher's level of joy: supporting teachers, making teachers feel valued and heard, giving teachers autonomy, trusting teachers, and looking for the positives during observations.

Variety of Ways to Make Learning Joyful

There were numerous variables and items that positively correlated with the classroom's perceived level of joy. The strengths of these correlations were not overly strong, which indicated that there was not one particular teacher effort or instructional decision that should be deployed without question above the rest. There were even a few teacher efforts and instructional decisions with weak correlations that only explain less than five percent of the variance, so they may not have practical significance. But there were no teacher efforts or instructional decisions examined via the survey that did not have a statistically significant positive correlation, so there were no efforts or instructional decisions to report that worked against joy.

This connects to the literature where many scholars, practitioners, and theorists connect joy to multiple constructs. In the literature, joy is connected to fun (Erwin, 2005); deeper learning (Mehta & Fine, 2019); student engagement (Christenson et al., 2012; Shareski, 2017a); wonder, play, project-based learning, community, and gratitude (Shareski, 2017a); curiosity (Goodwin, 2020); and flow (Wolk, 2008). Similarly, practitioner-friendly texts also share various

ideas to make learning joyful (Erwin, 2005; Frank, 2020; Gray, 2013; Muhammad, 2022; Platt, 2020; Wolk, 2008). This study's findings run parallel in demonstrating that joy is connected to many actions, efforts, and decisions that teachers make. These start with the teacher having joy. They also include making sure students feel loved, cared for, validated, and connected, and that there is a sense of emotional safety in the classroom. The teacher also fosters joy by being present and flexible and knowing students. Instructional decisions that foster joy include allowing for student voice, choice, collaboration, in-depth exploration of content, and opportunities for creativity; putting excitement into lessons; offering hands-on experiences; and including movement, play, and fun. These all seem to point to: (a) recognizing the human need for connection, because students come to the classroom as people and classrooms are communities of people; (b) joyful learning involves a learning process that is active, engaging, and alive; (c) elements that contribute to deeper learning, preparing students with the skills needed for the 21st century, foster joyful learning experiences.

The variety of responses shows that there is not a single recipe for joy (Shareski, 2017a). There is no distinct set of teacher efforts or instructional decisions that work in all classrooms. But rather, there is a plentiful list of ways joy can ignite and spread in the classroom during learning. I think this could be because teachers are unique, with their own personalities, strengths, and teaching styles, so one set of actions will not work for all educators. In a practitioner-friendly blog, Sarfo-Mensah (2020) suggested educators apply the Zone of Genius framework to their own selves and consider their abilities, passions, and talents to uncover opportunities to individually share their gifts and develop their own unique teaching style. Just as teachers differentiate for the needs, strengths, and interests of their students, teachers should have choice in how they cultivate joy in their classrooms based on their needs, strengths, and interests

too. Therefore, I propose that teachers can use the tools, strategies, and resources that work for them, their teaching styles, and their classrooms to make learning joyful.

Among the instructional decisions that correlated positively with the classroom's perceived level of joy, allowing for collaboration and in-depth exploration of content rose as independent contributors to predicting the classroom's perceived level of joy. When students collaborate, they work together, voicing their ideas and opinions and may even engage in making choices within the group, so allowing for collaboration might envelop some of the other correlates to the classroom's perceived level of joy as well. When students collaborate, they are connecting with peers, and since joy can be shared with others (Johnson, 2020; Karjalainen et al., 2019) and can be contagious (Cherkowski & Walker, 2018; Kutsyuruba et al., 2021), this social form of learning may contribute to a greater transfer of joy. Similarly, exploring content more in-depth grants students the opportunity to explore their curiosity rather than rushing through a breadth of content, getting into a state of flow, and feeling accomplished as a more knowledgeable citizen, all constructs that have been connected to joy in the literature or have been used to describe joy. Therefore, it could be valuable for teachers to consider these two instructional decisions in particular.

Collaborative Learning. Teachers can make instructional choices that allow for students to collaborate with one another. Collaboration is a skill that students in Flower Hill School District among others in the same state are expected to master before graduation, because it is a skill deemed necessary to be successful in the 21st century (Fullan et al., 2018). Hattie's research on positive influences on student achievement determined collaborative learning had positive benefits to student achievement with a 0.34 effect size (Visible Learning, 2018). Collaborating with peers gives students the opportunity to participate in conversation and share their thoughts,

ideas, and opinions (van Leeuwen et al., 2015). Collaboration also teaches students skills to be able to work with others, navigate group conflict, and how to learn from others and help others to learn (Fullan et al., 2018). One study in particular found that when students had opportunities to collaborate with one another using the cooperative learning model during mathematics instruction, the research team saw increases in the students' self-efficacy and motivation (In'am & Sutrisno, 2021). It should be noted that collaboration needs to be facilitated effectively (Webb, 2020). A superficial understanding of students merely working in groups does not satisfy the integrity of this instructional strategy in a manner that would truly enhance joy. Teachers must set the appropriate boundaries for student collaboration, intervene when necessary, and encourage participation (Webb, 2020). It is reasonable to connect students working together and sharing ideas as a potential method to making learning joyful, especially when they are both linked to student motivation.

In-Depth Exploration. Teachers can also make instructional choices that allow for students to explore the content they are learning in-depth. Marzano (2010) outlined instructional strategies for educators and includes an entire category on helping students to deepen their understanding by providing time and space to go deeper, compare and contrast ideas, find holes in logic, and practice with information. When students explore content in-depth, it allows their curiosity to flourish (Goodwin, 2020). In sharing vignettes of various teachers that exhibit deep teaching, Mehta and Fine (2019) described teachers who value depth over breadth of content when they approach teaching and student learning. These teachers reported that time to explore in-depth "equalized access to understanding, engendered widespread engagement, and built deeper understanding" (Mehta & Fine, 2019, p. 316). It is again reasonable to connect students'

exploring content in-depth as a potential method for making learning joyful when it aids engagement and understanding.

As discussed earlier, teachers should use the instructional strategies that work for them and their classrooms, but these two areas seem especially worthy of extra consideration to implement.

A District-Wide Initiative on Joy

This study intentionally explored Flower Hill School District, because of its priority of joyful learning. In analyzing the results from the lens of the Context of Joy Conceptual Framework, classrooms are situated in schools within districts, a nested system, so contexts overlap and efforts at the district level might affect schools and its classrooms. Although this study reported teachers' participation in the various district-wide elements of the joy initiative, this study did not investigate the impact of the initiative elements on the classroom's perceived level of joy. I think it is important to discuss that all of the statistical analyses violated the assumption for normality, because the perceived levels of joy were positively skewed, meaning many of the classrooms were perceived as having high levels of joy. It seems that having a district-wide initiative on joy could be beneficial for maintaining joy as a priority and being on the minds of those educators. Joy at the forefront of this district may a rationale for such high levels of perceived joy, beyond being explained solely by the social desirability bias.

The most widely used joy initiative that the teachers of Flower Hill reported having participated in was the professional development office's newsletter and sharing tips and ideas for cultivating joy. Out of the possible initiatives, these were easily accessible, easy to digest, were not time-consuming, and did not require much effort outside of the current teaching

demands. The newsletter and sharing of ideas were also ongoing and continuous, which are two of many characteristics of effective professional development (DiPaola & Wagner, 2018).

The sample population seemed to welcome the sharing of ideas, based on their choice to engage with this initiative element, which matches a similarly popular phenomenon in the extant literature on joy. The current literature on joy in education is less focused on empirical studies and is more robust in terms of practitioner-friendly articles, books, and texts that offer ideas and lists for how to make classrooms more joyful. Examples include Erwin (2005), Frank (2020), Gray (2013), Muhammad (2022), Platt (2020), and Wolk (2008). The findings from this study validate the plethora of resources that offer teachers ideas for spreading joy and validates their demand, showing that teachers do want to exchange ideas and learn from one another. It appears worthwhile, and desired, by the target audience of educators, to share ideas about ways to make classrooms and learning joyful. Therefore, a district-level initiative on joy and the opportunity to share ideas for making learning joyful appears to be a fruitful endeavor.

Implications for Policy and Practice

With knowledge of the findings from this study, I will now present recommendations for policy and practice. Table 23 includes the major findings from this study, the recommendations that stem from these findings, and their connections to the existing literature.

Table 23

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

Findings	Related Recommendations	Supporting Literature
Teacher joy matters for the classroom's joy	Administrators should support teachers' self-care, prioritize teacher well-being, and operate with an ethic of care	Cherkowski & Walker, 2018; Stronge & Xu, 2021
There are lots of ways to make learning joyful	Teachers should experiment with ideas and strategies to see which work for them and their classrooms to foster joy	Shareski, 2017a
	Administrators should give teachers the freedom to explore ways that work for them and recognize what is creating the joy and allow it to grow	Kutsyuruba et al., 2021
Allowing students the opportunity to collaborate and explore content in-depth can help foster joy in learning	Embed opportunities for student collaboration and time to explore content in-depth into the curriculum or allow time in pacing guides	Fullan et al., 2018; Goodwin, 2020; Marzano, 2010; Webb, 2020
	Administrators should support the use of these instructional strategies	Fullan et al., 2018

Recommendation 1

From this study's data and its pilot data, the teacher's level of joy matters. One of the best supports for this joy is for administrators to support teachers' self-care. Therefore, I recommend that administrators should support teachers' self-care, prioritize teacher well-being, and operate with an ethic of care. This may come in the form of administrators protecting teachers from political issues, student disrespect and misbehavior, and other issues that lead to teacher burnout. Prioritizing teacher well-being is also recommended by Cherkowski and Walker (2018) who claim that this prioritization will help lead to overall flourishing. Other scholars note the

importance of taking care of teachers as individuals and suggest school leaders operate with an ethic of care (Stronge & Xu, 2021), helping aid in these leaders' effectiveness.

Recommendation 2

Several examples of strategies and actions that could make learning joyful emerged in this study, with multiple positive correlations to the classroom's level of joy. Thus, the second recommendation is that teachers should experiment with different ideas and strategies to find which work best for them and their classrooms. As this study found and as Shareski (2017a) concluded, there is no recipe or mandated guide for making learning joyful. Shareski (2017a) recommended that teachers "just go for it" (p. 47). With the efforts and instructional decisions provided in this survey instrument, as well as the suggestions provided in the data from this study's participants in open-ended responses, there is an excellent starting point of ideas and strategies for teachers to try, as well as the various lists that are already published in the literature. This recommendation recognizes teachers as unique with different styles, strengths, and passions and classrooms as different environments with their own special combinations of students, allowing for a variety of approaches and combinations of ideas and strategies to making learning joyful.

Recommendation 3

Connected to my second recommendation, in order for teachers to experiment with different ideas and strategies to make learning joyful in their own classrooms, they must be given the opportunity to explore and experiment. Therefore, my third recommendation is that administrators should give teachers the freedom to explore ways that work for them, recognize what is creating the joy, and allow it to grow. In advice to leaders, Kutsyuruba et al. (2021) suggested that leaders recognize what is leading to joy in their schools and give it the space to

expand and grow. They argued that this will help schools overall to flourish (Kutsyuruba et al., 2021). This recommendation gives teachers the flexibility and opportunity to use what works in their classrooms and for their students, a resonating theme from the qualitative pilot data that there is a need for teacher autonomy and to be allowed to do what they need to do for their students.

Recommendation 4

Teachers reported in the open-ended response items that there were instructional decisions on the survey that they believed fostered joy, but they were not given the opportunity to use these strategies due to constraints in the curriculum and tight pacing guides. Therefore, my fourth recommendation would be for opportunities for students to collaborate and explore content in-depth to be embedded into the curriculum or given time to do so in pacing guides. Since, collaboration is a 21st century skill, it is being embedded into curriculums because of state-level expectations for schools across the state that Flower Hill School District resides in. Many states, districts, and specialists recommend student collaboration as a part of the learning process in classrooms (Webb, 2020). Similarly, advocates for deeper learning may impact curriculum development, increasing opportunities where students can deeply explore content. This gives students an environment where their curiosity can flourish, and they can expand on their thinking and knowledge (Goodwin, 2020). Educators that follow Marzano's (2010) recommended instructional strategies recognize the importance of allowing students to deepen their knowledge as important for learning and academic achievement. For teachers to implement these aspects of deep learning, they will need to learn new ways of designing for learning (Fullan et al., 2018). Fullan et al. (2018) call for teachers at the local level to facilitate deeper learning. Embedding it into the curriculum would facilitate this effort. Then, once it is embedded into the

curriculum and teachers are given the space to try and implement deeper learning, these strategies can be implemented and flourish. Necessary to this charge will be administering assessments that then gauge students' deeper learning (Wren & Gareis, 2019). Based on this study's results, the structure of "what" to teach seems to be impeding "how" to teach, so work for alignment would benefit teachers and their ability to make learning deeper, so it is engaging and motivating.

Recommendation 5

In approaching this from a systems-wide lens, for teachers to use these instructional strategies, they should be supported by their school leaders. Therefore, my sixth recommendation is for school leaders to support teachers using instructional strategies where students collaborate with one another and deeply explore content. This might mean supporting classrooms that have more conversations and noise, or that fall behind in traditional pacing guides, until my fourth recommendation is fully implemented. If teachers feel supported in their buildings experimenting with these strategies, they may be more likely to try them. For deep learning to occur, where students collaborate and explore content deeply, deep learning needs to be a vision at the leadership level (Fullan et al., 2018). Therefore, leadership support is crucial for this work.

Recommendations for Future Research

This dissertation serves as an invitation to continue exploration on the construct of joy in education. This initial exploration of an area seldom empirically studied demonstrates the potential for studying joy to reveal more information on how to benefit students and contribute to developing an environment conducive to growing curious and motivated lifelong learners. With a new definition for joy and a new measure for quantifying the level of joy in the classroom, there is room now to explore a vast array of questions based on what was learned from this

study. Additionally, the limitations of this study provide ample opportunity to explore more dimensions of joy in education.

First, I would recommend a deep exploration and investigation of joy in classrooms at the secondary level. Since teaching pedagogies can differ at the secondary level, a qualitative investigation to first interview and observe joy at the secondary level would provide a starting list of teacher efforts, instructional decisions, and administrative supports that may lend themselves to fostering joy at the secondary level. Then, a follow-up, quantitative investigation using the joy measures from this study and the teacher efforts, instructional decisions, and administrative supports found from a qualitative pilot would provide more information to understand how joy is fostered at the secondary level and perhaps draw comparisons to this study's findings at the elementary level.

Second, I used a measure based on indicators that existed in the extant literature that captures high energy joy. However, Johnson (2020) describes joy on a scale from low to high energy. Future research could explore indicators of low energy joy and then use those indicators to assess the existence of low energy joy in classrooms and what facilitates the spreading of this type of joy. Once this research is conducted, the instrument provided in this study could be expanded to include indicators for both low and high energy joy. Further testing and validation of this instrument, including low and high energy joy, across different populations, would be beneficial and contribute to higher validity of the generalizations of its findings.

Third, this study took a strengths-based approach by learning about joy from a school district that prioritized joy. This district happened to represent a large, suburban setting. In growing in understanding about joy in education, future research could explore the existence and efforts, instructional decisions, and administrative supports used to foster joy in rural and urban

settings, small districts, and in districts where joy is not yet a priority. This could give a more holistic view of what joy looks like in different instructional settings and a realistic picture of the presence of joy in schools in spaces where joy is not yet a focus.

Fourth, it can be difficult to attain data from participants under the age of 18 due to ethical concerns. However, a more accurate representation of a classroom's level of joy would include reports from its students and any additional staff members present in the classroom including any assistant teachers, paraprofessionals, or special educators. A next step for future research would be to collect data on joy at the classroom level from students, teachers, and staff and at the school level from students, teachers, staff, and parents. Then this information could be used as a more accurate representation of the level of joy present to answer more questions about joy and related actions or impacts.

Fifth, this study explored the teachers' participation in various elements of the district-level initiative on joy. The instrument did not include items that asked about how participation in specific activities may have impacted the level of joy in the classroom. Future research could more deeply explore the elements of the initiative beyond participation and into impact. This exploration could investigate if more time and effort intensive initiatives had a stronger impact on teachers' practices and perception of the cultivation of joy in themselves and their classrooms.

When there are levels of joy reported, future research could investigate how joy impacts student achievement, student behavior, and student discipline. Joy scores for classrooms and schools could be used in analyses to determine if joy affects how students behave, if joy lessens discipline issues, and if joyful learning leads to more successful students in both academic achievement tests and in college and career goal attainment.

Summary

This study aimed to explore the understudied construct of joy in education. From understandings from different disciplines; musings from scholars, theorists, and practitioners; and knowledge from pilot data, this dissertation provided a new definition for joy and joy in classrooms. *Joy is a positive feeling where contentment, satisfaction, delight, and gladness intersect. Joy in the classroom is when students experience the intersection of contentment, satisfaction, delight, and gladness in what or how they are learning.* Then, this work produced a new, reliable survey instrument that quantified joy for the teacher, the classroom, and the school, as well as collected data on different efforts, decisions, and supports. The results from this study showed that the teacher's joy correlated most strongly to the classroom's perceived level of joy and administrators could best support teachers' joy by supporting their self-care. There are a wide range of teacher efforts and instructional decisions that correlated with the classroom's perceived level of joy and many more believed to help foster joy in the classroom. In a district prioritizing joy and growing in this work, there were a number of initiative elements that teachers participated in to cultivate joy in their classrooms. In conclusion, this dissertation opens the door to the exploration of joy in education with a new definition and measure, building on the list of strategies for educators to experiment with as they find what fosters joy, and encourages school leaders to support teacher well-being and joy and their freedom to explore what makes learning joyful in their classrooms. This work can serve as an initial step to empirically researching joy in education so we can transform learning environments that will mold students into lifelong learners and innovative contributors to society.

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APPENDIX A

JOY IN CLASSROOMS AND SCHOOLS SURVEY

Consent Form

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in this research study of the presence of joy in schools.

Joy is a positive feeling where contentment, satisfaction, delight, and gladness intersect. Joy in the classroom is when students experience the intersection of contentment, satisfaction, delight, and gladness in what or how they are learning.

Participation in this study involves completing an online survey containing 53 items. There are 3 demographic questions, 46 unilateral scale questions, 1 multiple choice question, and 3 open-ended questions. The survey should take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

There are no anticipated risks to participation and your responses will be kept confidential. The only inconvenience is the time that you spend filling out the survey. You may drop out at any time. There are no penalties or consequences of any kind if you decide that you do not want to participate.

The primary benefit of participation is contributing to research, help educators and school leaders help create joyful learning environments. You will be presented with an opportunity at the end of the survey to share your email address to be entered into a raffle to win a $25 gift certificate to Target for participating. There will be 20 winners chosen.

If you have a research-related problem, you may contact the principal investigator, Stephanie McGuire at slmcguire@wm.edu or her supervising professor, Dr. Megan Tschannen-Moran at mxtsch@wm.edu. If you have additional questions or concerns, you may contact Dr. Tom Ward at 757-221-2358 (tjward@wm.edu) chair of the William & Mary committee that supervises the treatment of research study participants.

THIS PROJECT WAS FOUND TO COMPLY WITH APPROPRIATE ETHICAL STANDARDS AND WAS EXEMPTED FROM THE NEED FOR FORMAL REVIEW BY THE W&M PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS COMMITTEE (Phone 757-221-3966) ON 2023-01-09 AND EXPIRES ON 2024-01-09.

I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the Fostering Joy Survey Study. Its general purposes, the particulars of involvement and possible hazards and inconveniences have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand the purpose of this study. I understand that I

will fill out 1 online survey that will ask questions about me, my teaching, my classroom, and my school. I understand that I will not be punished if I choose not to participate, and this information will not be used to evaluate me. I also know that I may quit at any time and not face any penalties in any way. By moving forward with this survey, I am agreeing to participate in this study and confirm that I am at least 18 years of age.

Yes, I agree.
No, I do not agree. You may exit the window now.

Demographics

1. At the end of this school year, how many years have you been teaching?

   1
   2
   3
   4
   5
   6
   7
   8
   9
   10
   11
   12
   13
   14
   15
   16
   17
   18
   19
   20
   21
   22
   23
   24
   25
   26
   27
   28
   29
   30
   30+

2. What Flower Hill School District school do you teach at?

   *Masked Options

3. What grade level do you teach?

   PreKindergarten
   Kindergarten
   1st Grade
   2nd Grade
   3rd Grade
   4th Grade
   5th Grade
   I am a specialist and work across multiple grade levels or classrooms
   I am a special educator and work across multiple grade levels or classrooms

For the following items 4-32, 34-44, 46-51, the response scale is:

Not at all (1), 2, Very Little (3), 4, Sometimes (5), 6, Quite a Bit (7), 8, A Great Deal (9)

Joy Questions

<u>Level of Joy for the Classroom:</u>

4. In general, my classroom feels like a positive space.
5. In general, my students enjoy learning.
6. In general, my students want to come to school each day.
7. In my classroom, students smile.
8. In my classroom, students engage in good-natured laughter.
9. In my classroom, my students appear to feel satisfied.
10. In general, my students feel excited in my classroom.

<u>Level of Joy for Students at School:</u>

11. In general, our school feels like a positive space.
12. In general, students in our school enjoy learning.

13. In general, students in our school want to come to school each day.

14. In our school, students smile.

15. In our school, students engage in good-natured laughter.

16. In our school, students appear to feel satisfied.

17. In general, students in our school feel excited.

Level of Joy for the Teacher:

18. I feel positive when I am teaching.

19. I enjoy teaching.

20. As the teacher, I want to come to school each day.

21. In the classroom, I genuinely smile.

22. In the classroom, I engage in good-natured laughter.

23. As the teacher, I feel satisfied at work.

24. I feel excited when I am teaching.

Teacher Efforts

25. How much effort do you put in to…ensuring that your students feel loved?

26. How much effort do you put in to…ensuring that your students feel cared for?

27. How much effort do you put in to…ensuring that your students feel validated?

28. How much effort do you put in to…ensuring that your students feel connected to the classroom community?

29. How much effort do you put in to…ensuring that there is a sense of emotional safety in your classroom?

30. How much effort do you put in to…being present in the moment?

31. How much effort do you put in to…staying flexible to address students' needs?

32. How much effort do you put in to… knowing your students?

33. What other efforts help you foster joy in the classroom? _____

Instructional Decisions

34. In your classroom to what extent do you…allow for student voice?

35. In your classroom to what extent do you…offer hands-on experiences?

36. In your classroom to what extent do you…allow for student choice?

37. In your classroom to what extent do you…allow for collaboration?

38. In your classroom to what extent do you…allow for an in-depth exploration of content?

39. In your classroom to what extent do you…allow students extended time to explore content that interests them?

40. In your classroom to what extent do you…allow students opportunities for creative expression?

41. In your classroom to what extent do you…include movement?

42. In your classroom to what extent do you…include play?

43. In your classroom to what extent do you…include fun?

44. In your classroom to what extent do you…put excitement into your lessons?

45. What other instructional decisions help you foster joy in the classroom? _____

Admin Supports

46. To what degree do you feel…supported by the administration at your school?

47. To what degree do you feel…validated (seen and heard) by the administration at your school?

48. To what degree do you feel…administrators give you autonomy over your classroom?

49. To what degree do you feel…administrators at your school trust you?

50. To what degree do you feel…administrators at your school support your self-care?

51. To what degree do you feel…administrators emphasize the positives during your teaching observations?

52. What other administrative supports help you foster joy in the classroom? _____

Flower Hill School District Initiatives

53. Which of the following elements of the Flower Hill School District Joy initiative have you participated in? (Select all that apply).

    Served as a Joy Ambassador

    Participated in the Joy book study

    Attended a workshop on how to make learning more joyful

    Attended the two-hour class on joy and teacher well-being

    Participated in the social media campaign #FHHasJoy

    Read the PGI Newsletter for Joy ideas

    Used the daily tips and suggestions from the PGI Office

Thank you for your time spent taking this survey. It is greatly appreciated!
Your response has been recorded.
If you would like to enter the raffle to win one of twenty $25.00 gift certificates to Target for participating, please click this link to enter! (directed to new Qualtrics form).

APPENDIX B

LETTER TO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

Dear _____,

My name is Stephanie McGuire, and I am a doctoral student at William & Mary. I am working on my dissertation research, studying joy in the context of elementary schools in Flower Hill School District. This is an important context for my study because of the joy initiative underway here. Would you be willing to forward my invitation to your teachers to participate in my online survey that will take approximately 10 minutes to complete?

I would like to include all general education teachers, special education teachers, and specialists to participate. At the end of the survey, participants can enter into a raffle to win one of twenty $25.00 gift certificates to Target since I know this is an extra task for staff and is an opportunity to spread more joy.

Attached is the approval letter for the study from the Office of Planning, Innovation, and Accountability. I look forward to hearing from you, and from one educator to another, thank you for all that you do!

Sincerely,
Stephanie McGuire
Doctoral Student
William & Mary
slmcguire@wm.edu

APPENDIX C

INVITATION LETTER

(For elementary school principals to forward to their teachers)

Hello!

I am a doctoral student at William & Mary working on my dissertation research, studying joy in the context of elementary schools in Flower Hill School District. I would be so appreciative if you would complete my online survey to share about your classroom and practices to help others learn how to make their classrooms joyful and how leaders can better support their teachers. The survey will only take about 10 minutes of your time.

I know this is an extra task for you when you already have so much on your plate. As a result, I invite you to enter into a raffle to win one of twenty $25.00 gift certificates to Target at the end of the survey. I am so grateful for your time and insights!

Here is the link to the survey to participate:
https://wmsas.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6LFhpCjigfdPRkO

From one educator to another, thank you for all that you do!

Sincerely,
Stephanie McGuire
Doctoral Student
William & Mary
slmcguire@wm.edu

APPENDIX D

SECOND LETTER TO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

Dear _____,

Thank you for your consideration in supporting my dissertation research / Thank you so much for supporting my dissertation research, studying joy in the context of elementary schools in Flower Hill School District. I will send a second email that you can forward to your teachers (general education, special education, and specialists) who might be willing to participate in my online survey. The data collection window will close on Thursday, February 23rd.

As a reminder, at the end of the survey, participants can enter into a raffle to win one of twenty $25.00 gift certificates to Target since I know this is an extra task for staff and is an opportunity to spread more joy.

Attached is the approval letter for the study from the Office of Planning, Innovation, and Accountability. Thank you for your time and more importantly, thank you for all that you do!

Sincerely,
Stephanie McGuire
Doctoral Student
William & Mary
slmcguire@wm.edu

APPENDIX E

SECOND INVITATION LETTER

(For elementary school principals to forward to their teachers)

Hello!

I am a doctoral student at William & Mary working on my dissertation research, studying joy in the context of elementary schools in Flower Hill School District. I would be so appreciative if you would complete my online survey to share about your classroom and practices to help others learn how to make their classrooms joyful and how leaders can better support their teachers. The survey will only take about 10 minutes of your time.

I know this is an extra task for you when you already have so much on your plate. As a result, I invite you to enter into a raffle to win one of twenty $25.00 gift certificates to Target at the end of the survey. I am so grateful for your time and insights!

Here is the link to the survey to participate:
https://wmsas.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6LFhpCjigfdPRkO

The survey window will close on Thursday, February 23rd.

From one educator to another, thank you for all that you do!

Sincerely,
Stephanie McGuire
Doctoral Student
William & Mary
slmcguire@wm.edu

VITA

Stephanie Lynn McGuire

Educational Background

Ph.D. William & Mary, Williamsburg, VA
Educational Policy, Planning, and Leadership (2023)
Endorsement, K-12 Administration (2023)

M.A.Ed. William & Mary, Williamsburg, VA
Elementary Education (2013)

B.A. William & Mary, Williamsburg, VA
Major: Psychology (2012)
Minor: Religious Studies (2012)

Professional Experience

Graduate Assistant William & Mary, Williamsburg, VA (2020-present)
Teacher Cherry Run Elementary, Burke, VA (2013-2020)