Teacher Survival: Staying Alive in the Job of Teaching

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Abstract

This study presents information gathered during personal interviews with dynamic and capable teachers in the areas of preparedness for teaching, teaching concerns, survival skills and strategies, and how these teachers support themselves and others in the teaching profession. The data are related to Purkey and Novak’s work on invitational education and connections are made to Combs’ perceptual orientation. Potential participants were gathered through personal recommendations from their colleagues. All teachers recommended were approached and asked for voluntary participation. Of those who agreed to participate, 6 were selected based on gender and years of experience. There was a male and female participant at each of the following career levels: early, mid, and late. The 4 major survival skills that became apparent were the ability to believe in oneself and others, to act decisively upon that belief through personal and professional goal-setting as well as accessing resources, to actively seek opportunities for interaction with other professionals, and to celebrate personal and professional successes.
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All of the aforementioned can rightfully claim a share in the success of this thesis. Any defects I will willingly admit to being my own.
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CHAPTER ONE: THE PROBLEM

“I think with teaching it’s so easy to be negative. To worry about the black and the downside of it all. What the boards do. What the Federation is doing. What the community thinks. You have to rise above it and that’s hard. When everybody is pushing down around you it’s hard to maintain that spark but you have to.”

-Doreen

Preface

I was already wondering how I was going to make it through the year. It was the Labour Day weekend and I was facing my 8th year of teaching. The Minister of Education, my “boss,” had already announced that I was overpaid (compared to teachers in Newfoundland), that I shouldn’t have the right to strike, and that I needed to introduce a fourth “R” into my curriculum. In addition to reading, ‘riting, and ‘rithmetic, I needed to add “relevance.” If that wasn’t demoralizing enough, my board of education was negotiating my contract and rumours had already been flying about a possible lockout situation. My classroom roster was at an all-time high of 27 children in a 1/2 split. I was teaching, for the 2nd year, a child that was confined to a wheelchair and, for the 2nd year, we were still waiting for a special desk that had been ordered for her. As of the first day of school it was still “on order.” I was also teaching a child who would be wearing two hearing aids and would be able to hear me through the help of an FM receiver system. He was put into my class because my room was carpeted and it was explained that this would help reduce sound interference for him. No one seemed to care that the carpet was over 11 years old and was so moldy that every morning, fall, winter, and spring I had to open
the windows just to get rid of the damp smell that filled the room. In addition, I had been teaching either Grade 1 or 2 for the last 7 years. Each year that I asked for a change or a new assignment my pleas fell on deaf ears.

I was becoming frustrated with the lack of professional development opportunities or personal challenges, so I began to find ways to create my own. The following is the culmination of my need for personal and professional development as well as the need to find ways to not only survive the frustrating circumstances that I was faced with as a teacher in the elementary school system but to thrive in the job as well.

Introduction

This was a study of the ways in which elementary teachers have survived and attempted to thrive both personally and professionally as they engage in the occupation of teaching. The study investigated three specific areas. It looked first at how early, mid, and late-career teachers have personally and professionally supported themselves and others in their profession. Next it attempted to determine what skills and strategies teachers use to maintain a dynamic presence in the classroom and to thrive in the job of teaching. Finally it looked at the concerns that teachers have and how they have dealt with those concerns in a way that allows them to maintain a positive attitude.
Background of the Problem

There are many areas of concern for teachers as they move through the teaching profession. These concerns lead to a range of questions such as: Am I ready to teach my own class? Will I be able to control my class? Have I prepared myself well enough? Am I meeting the needs of the kids? Have I communicated effectively with the parents? Will I be able to make this new programme meaningful? Is my administrator happy with my programming? Does the public really understand what my job is all about? Will I have a job next week, next month, next year? All of these questions relate to one specific concern or question: How am I going to thrive and grow as a teacher?

Survival means many things to many people: “Survival of the fittest;” “Hanging on by the skin of one’s teeth;” “Keeping one’s head above water.” In this study, survival has been defined as staying alive. The term “staying alive” can also have negative connotations, but in this study I have defined it as being intellectually, emotionally, and physically well-balanced as a person and a professional. To be alive intellectually is to stimulate and be stimulated by others. To be alive emotionally is to experience an emotional interdependence with one’s friends, family, colleagues, and students. To be alive physically is to try to maintain a healthy body. In all of the above examples, balance is the key.

Teaching is a stressful job. This is primarily due to the fact that the teaching profession involves working with other human beings and involves interacting with others on an unprecedented scale (Lowther, Gill, & Coppard, 1985). Each year, 20 to 30
or more students look to each individual teacher for learning, love, and laughter. In essence they look for nurturing of the intellect, the emotional self, and the physical. This is a demand that can immediately set anyone off-kilter who has not had a great deal of experience teaching. Consequently, early-career teachers, although recognizing the need for personal and professional balance, often are the least equipped to create it. This may occur for a number of reasons. They may recognize the need for balance but do not recognize the importance of planning for and meeting that need. They may also perceive their lives as already having that balance. This happens because they may not have families yet, or their peer group is also at the same stage they are and hence it does not seem strange to them that professional development has become a primary focus. They often do not recognize that their personal lives revolve around their professional lives instead of a more interdependent existence.

First-year teachers seem to plunge headfirst into the job of teaching. They are dedicated and eager and yet they are scared and unsure. Due to this, they generally dedicate most of their waking hours to working. They want to prove themselves to the world (Burden, 1982a) which includes their students, their families, their friends, and most importantly, their administrators. Such a narrow focus on professional growth can lead in one of two directions: burnout or a reassessment in which balance is restored. This is rarely the case. Some burnout does occur of course, as does some reassessment, but for the most part, early-career teachers maintain a high level of focus on the job of being a teacher. This focus often continues well past the first year due to the fact that new teachers are low on the seniority list. They have a high degree of mobility among grades and schools. Each time they move schools or grades they are perceived by others,
and perceive themselves, as new. This perception helps to maintain their focus on work because they still see themselves as trying to prove their ability as they are faced with each new aspect of teaching.

How then do they survive, thrive, and maintain their commitment to the profession if they do not have a balance? Some research has shown that it is only as they are moving into the mid-career stage that teachers begin to actively seek out those skills that create a balance in their lives among school, home, and self (Watts, 1980). How the early-career teachers make it to this mid-career stage in the first place then, merits closer inspection. What skills or strategies do they draw upon to provide support for themselves both personally and professionally in the early stages of their careers? Furthermore, if the mid-career point is the time when teachers begin to actively look for those skills, what do they then find that helps them create that balance so that they eventually arrive at the late-career stage?

In order to answer these questions, it is important to look at three of the main influences on teachers as they move through their careers. Initially, faculties of education are the ones which are primarily responsible for providing teachers with the essential skills and knowledge they will need to be successful. Second, boards of education, through individual schools, often provide induction programmes, professional development opportunities, and personal development workshops that are intended to support teachers’ needs as they arise. Third, the support received from fellow teachers, from families, and from social peer groups plays a large part in dealing with the survival concerns of teachers at all career stages and provides them with concrete suggestions and meaningful experiences.
Although faculties of education try to provide the best possible balance of educational theory and practice, many teachers commonly feel unprepared to teach during their first year. They "bemoan their limited skills" (Stone, 1987, p. 370) and often feel they must pretend that they are ready to teach (Aitken & Mildon, 1991). This is of obvious concern to the faculties of education since, as Koehler (1984) stated, even though early career teachers complain "that they were never taught how to do certain tasks...educators can point to lesson plans and amounts of time spent on those tasks" (as cited in Stone, 1987, p. 371). This problem is generally a result of what Lortie described as "observational apprenticeship" (as cited in Housego, 1990, p. 223).

Since most Canadians have a history and experience of what it means to be in school and to be taught, and since most prospective teachers come to faculties of education already having over "10,000 hours of exposure to teachers" (Stone, 1987, p. 370) it is understandable that most pre-service education students feel they have nothing to learn about teaching. Student teachers come prepared to teach and have a high sense of efficacy (Smith & Sanche, 1992) about their ability to carry out any task related to teaching. In addition, the faculties of education often specifically interview for pre-service students who exhibit such attitudes. These attitudes, of course, make it nearly impossible for faculties of education to prepare teachers for the physically, emotionally, and mentally draining task of teaching. It seems, on the surface, that there is very little that the faculties of education can do, at the pre-service level, to provide teachers with the skills to stay alive both personally and professionally as they move through their teaching career.
Boards of education also have some key problems with many of their own structures. These structures can often inhibit or negate any supportive opportunities that the boards of education put in place. While faculties of education must try to combat the realities of observational apprenticeship, the boards of education must overcome the problem of what Katz, Raths, Mohanty, Kurachi, and Irving labelled the "feed forward problem" (as cited in Stone, 1987, p. 371). In essence, this is providing information, experiences or opportunities for learners before they are prepared for them. Boards of education often perceive teachers after the first 1 or 2 years of teaching as a homogeneous group. They provide professional and personal development opportunities that are usually fairly static and if the opportunities do change at all, they usually reflect changes in Ministry policies rather than reflecting the needs of the teachers at the board level. Workshops are often designed to quickly in-service teachers on the newest curriculum focus or the most recent policy change. These opportunities, of course, can and often do meet the immediate needs of some of the teachers but, for the most part, teachers who are interested in growing personally and professionally must seek out and establish their own growth opportunities. Even the induction programmes that some boards of education have in place often provide more than the targeted teachers need and hence become expensive exercises in futility. These programmes may look good on paper but end up doing very little for the individual teacher. Survival for teachers, in this case, generally amounts to gleaning what one can from a huge array of possible support opportunities.

The third area of support comes from the people who surround the practicing teacher. There is a common perception that teachers arrive at school, go to their
classrooms, and close their doors until the end of the day. It seems unlikely that this is a true perception due to the fact that teaching is a profession based on interaction with others. This interaction certainly occurs between teachers and students. It seems logical that this interaction would also occur between colleagues as well. Furthermore, family and friends outside of the educational setting also provide opportunities for growth. They help support teachers by providing strategies and help them to develop skills that will create a balance between home and school. It is this third area of study that plays the largest role in helping teachers to survive.

From the research then, there did not seem to be a great deal of organized support that was designed to appropriately meet the needs of teachers as they move through their career. This seemed to be a system problem that began with faculties of education and continued to flourish within the structures that were adhered to by boards of education. The question then still remained: How do teachers survive both personally and professionally as they engage in the complex job of teaching?

Statement of the Problem

This study is attempting to find out what the skills and strategies are that teachers use to survive in the education profession. Further to that, it attempts to look at how those skills and strategies are developed and their use supported.
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine what support structures were needed by teachers so that they could stay alive both personally and professionally as they move through the different stages of teaching. It dealt directly with surviving teachers and then attempted to connect the information gleaned from those investigations to the greater structures that surround teachers such as boards of education, families, peer groups, and federations. Connections were made between the skills and strategies used by teachers across all career stages. Furthermore, this study attempted to answer the following questions: 1. What are the concerns of teachers at the early, mid, and late-career stages? 2. What skills do teachers accumulate as they move through their careers? 3. What support structures do they access as they move through their careers? 4. What support systems that were not provided or were not accessible are needed in order to meet the needs of teachers at the various stages of their career? 5. How can the needed support systems be provided for teachers? 6. How can we recognize what needs the teachers have? 7. What are the appropriate times to try and meet those needs?

Rationale

As outlined in the background section, many studies have investigated and supported the existence of teacher concerns but few went far enough in looking at how teachers dealt with those concerns and continued to attempt to survive and thrive despite them.
Importance of the Study

During a time when teachers are continually being placed in positions where they must defend their profession, it is essential that we find ways to support teachers in the work that they do and to ensure that the support they receive is valuable and serviceable. Teachers who are satisfied are less likely to be overwhelmed and eventually leave the profession (Friedman & Farber, 1992). In addition, it is important to document the strategies and skills that teachers use in order to survive and maintain balanced and healthy lives. Furthermore, that documentation needs to be shared with teachers in order to share with them the tools that they can use in order to be survivors themselves.

Scope of the Study

This was not a study that attempted to provide added support to the idea that teachers have concerns about their jobs. It specifically attempts to connect the concerns teachers have to the possible skills and strategies used by teachers to survive, to investigate the ways in which teachers use those strategies to deal successfully with those needs, and to focus on whether or not those needs were being met as well as to suggest ways to meet the needs if they were not.

Outline of the Remainder of the Document

The remainder of this thesis has been presented in five sections. Chapter 2 contains the literature review. It begins by defining some important terms related to this
topic and teaching. They are as follows: survival, stress, and burnout. It continues by reviewing the research on factors that possibly contribute to teacher stress, burnout, or non-survival. It concludes by examining the need for more personal and intimate investigations that go directly to the people engaged in the role of teaching and ask them how they survive and thrive.

Chapter 3 presents the methodology and data analysis for the study. It begins by outlining the methodology to be used and presents an overview of how the data will be analyzed in this study.

Chapter 4 shares the results of the study. It will outline the profiles of the participants in the study which will include their background, educational history, and their personal reflections. In addition it will present the data collected and a summary of the findings through the participants’ own stories.

Chapter 5 presents my interpretation of the findings.

Chapter 6 summarizes and presents conclusions. It gives recommendations for practice and further research. It discusses the importance of the study’s findings and relates those findings to the concepts discussed in Chapters 1 and 2. It is followed by the references and appendixes for the study.
Early Career Teachers have concerns related to survival which depend upon developing balance between personal life and professional life in the areas of physical health, intellectual health, and mental health. Strategies and skills learned from families and peers, faculties of education, boards of education, and other teachers create a balance.
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

“This year was a year of survival. I’m quite proud of what the kids and I have done.”
-Brenda

Introduction

Teacher survival is heavily influenced by a variety of factors. It is my hypothesis that, of these factors, the most important are the ones related to physical, emotional, and mental health. In other words, if a teacher is healthy in those three areas, he or she can survive, despite external stressors, by the virtue of being able to find healthy avenues for relieving stress.

In order to support this hypothesis, it was essential to review the literature related to a number of concepts. Initially, it was important to define as clearly as possible the meanings of survival, stress, and burnout. Further to that, it was important to take these definitions and find connections between them and the daily practices of the job of teaching. Once the connections between stress, burnout, survival, and teaching were made, it was necessary to review the literature that dealt with identifying the factors that could be attributed to teacher stress, burnout, and survival.

Since organizational systems have the largest impact on teachers, any study of teachers and their ability to survive in the profession cannot be completed without taking a close look at the structures and constraints within which teachers work. Not only does that structure screen prospective teachers and influence their potential as teachers, but it
also trains them, employs them, and provides a framework within which they can, or possibly cannot, grow as professionals. In order to gain a better understanding of how the organization of schools forms teachers, it was necessary to break it down into smaller more manageable units.

Upon careful consideration, I chose to approach the factors that are part of the larger organization and can influence the survival rates of teachers in a chronological fashion. I began with the screening process and focussed closely on not only the structures in place for admitting prospective teachers into the training stage but also on the possible personality types that are successful at this stage and whether or not the structures screen for “survivability” as well. Following that, I have presented research on the processes involved in training and later, on inducting prospective teachers. Finally, I have looked at the possible stages that teachers move through as they develop as professionals in connection with the effect that the organizational structures of the school system have on teachers and their ability to survive.

Upon completing this review, I have attempted to summarize where the research has taken us and where we still need to go.

Definition of Survival

Survival is usually defined in biological terms as being alive or existing. This definition does not capture the essence of survival as a teacher. It seems necessary therefore to broaden the definition and look at survival in terms of surviving as a teacher in a school organization. Although there seems to be no specific research in the 1990s on
teacher survival, there are some earlier studies that attempt to define survival in terms of teachers and education. Charters (1970) and Mark and Anderson (1978) defined a surviving teacher as someone who consistently turns up year after year on the board roster of employees. They have created a profile of what a survivor looks like in the profession of teaching. This profile outlines the typical survivor as a teacher who is older and male (Charters, 1970; Lowther, Gill, & Coppard, 1985; Mark & Anderson, 1978). That, of course, is not meant to imply that young females do not survive for very long after entering the teaching profession, but instead that there seems to be a greater ability in older males to survive the stresses of teaching according to their method of investigation.

Charters (1970) and Mark and Anderson (1978) found that there is greater incidence of lack of survival during the first 5 years of teaching. Approximately 59% of teachers survive past the first 4 years of teaching and, those hardy teachers who make it past the first 5 years have a greatly increased chance of overall survival (Mark & Anderson, 1978). Why and how these people survive is not part of the body of research, but it is a question that needs to be answered. As mentioned earlier, the survival rates were compiled by looking at the names on the board rosters and figuring out how many were missing each year. This is an obvious flaw in the research design of the above studies. Since they are just looking at the appearance of names on a roster, these studies ignore the fact that females may be more likely to leave the profession early on in order to start families but may return to the job at a later date. Survival in these examples, therefore, means just being there in the classroom alive and existing. While these teachers are physical survivors, they may not necessarily be emotional and mental survivors.
Certainly, there must be more to survival in teaching than just being a constant on the board of education employee roster.

At this point it is helpful to recall my statement about survival earlier on in the first chapter. My conceptualization of survival was not only to be physically in the classroom, but to be thriving as a teacher. Survival in any profession must be seen as dynamic. Survival rests on one’s ability to grow, learn, and challenge oneself in healthy and positive ways. Purkey and Novak (1984, 1996), using a less drastic term than “survival,” defined a survivor in the teaching profession as one who remains personally and professionally inviting. Someone who is classified as such generally tries to maintain, protect, and enhance the impulse that motivates all people to learn, not only in others but in him or herself as well. The key to this type of survival is to maintain a balance between personal invitations and professional ones. Personal invitations that help teachers to survive may involve staying in shape, celebrating successes, showing care for others by sending thoughtful notes, or something as simple as being on time for appointments with colleagues to show them that one values their time. All of these demonstrate a healthy value for self and others. Professional invitations can range from joining professional groups and reading about what other educators are doing, to using “we” and “us” statements when working with colleagues to promote sharing and inclusion in the professional learning process (Purkey & Novak, 1984, 1996).

This seems to be a much more positive and dynamic definition of survival and as such will form the keystone of the research to be conducted. For the sake of simplicity, survival in teaching will henceforth be defined as maintaining a healthy personal and professional interest in life by being consistently engaging both to oneself and to others.
Definition of Stress

It is important to remember that being personally and professionally alive does not preclude having to deal with stress. In order to gain a better understanding of the effects of stress it is necessary to define this term as well. This undertaking may be more difficult. To begin with, “there is still today no generally agreed upon definition of ‘stress’ in such systems that allows anyone to determine unequivocally when the state exists and to categorize it as present or absent, if not to measure it” (Hinkle, 1987, p. 561). Although the concept of stress has been closely studied since 1956, when Hans Selye began trying to define it, it has tended to remain an elusive concept. Selye worked at it backwards by trying to define stress negatively. In other words, he tried to define stress by defining what stress was not. He finally came up with the following operational definition: “stress is the state manifested by a specific syndrome which consists of all the nonspecifically induced changes within a biological system” (Selye, 1956, p. 54). More simply, this means that stress is a condition that occurs as a result of a specific occurrence and which results in what can be either a positive or negative physical or biological response. Hinkle (1987), having reviewed much of the research since then, defined stress in more specific and comprehensible terms.

According to Hinkle (1987), there are three types of stress: biological, psychological, and social. All three have several things in common. They are all a two-part process. There is the actual occurrence that demands an adjustment by the organism; these are called stressors. There is also the effect those stressors have on the organism; this is called stress. Therefore, stress is the adaptive behaviour within an organism that is
precipitated by a stressor. In order to get a better sense of how stress can affect a person, it is best to look at the three different types of stress more carefully.

Biological stress is the actual physical manipulations that occur within the body in reaction to stressors such as unhealthy foods, trauma, or infections. Psychological stress deals with higher order reactions (usually cognitive) to perceived stressors such as an external event or emotional trauma. Social stress is an extension of psychological stress. It also is a result of external stressors related to frustration, conflict, or pressure but it is specifically related to stressors involving societal constructs (Hinkle, 1987). For example, Hinkle (1987) stated the following:

Stress occurs for a person when he is faced with a situation that implies for him two or more different kinds of behaviour, based on two or more different sets of guidelines and values, which are in conflict and are not necessarily reconcilable. (p. 562)

It is important to note that while biological stress relates specifically to internal adjustments by an organism, external stressors which trigger psychological or social stress can, by relation, trigger a biological response such as increased heart rate, hypertension, or increased stomach acidity. Due to this, any of the three types of stress can result in a biological reaction that is damaging to the organism.

How does this relate to teaching and teacher survival? All three types of stress are a reality for those in the occupation of teaching. Teachers are faced daily with a myriad of occupational stressors that impinge upon a teacher’s ability to survive in the profession. Some stressors, such as having to live with a negative public image, disciplining students who will continue to engage in disruptive behaviours, dealing with a
lack of support from parents or administrators, and teaching in curriculum areas where one does not have the necessary background needed to teach the subject (Kalker, 1984) are insidious and constant. Other stressors are more immediate or are confined to a specific time period. Examples of these are reduced educational funding, teacher layoffs, meeting a new class, or grappling with a newly mandated curriculum (Delattre, 1981). In addition, teachers are faced with the reality that, while their job is certainly becoming more complex and intensified as they try to individually meet the needs of not only their students but parents and administrators as well, their job is also becoming increasingly more routine and de-skilled. Teachers are told what to teach, when to teach, how to teach it, and how to evaluate student progress with very little professional autonomy (Hargreaves, 1992). On top of that, teachers are further faced with biological stressors related to interacting with a large number of children, many of whom come to school ill. All of these can and often do result in increased frustration, ill health, pressure, and conflict, thus triggering a stress response.

There are indicators that some of these stressors are not related so much to the actual job of teaching but to external factors that interfere with or do not allow teachers to get on with the essential work of teaching (Farber, 1984). Administrators and parents are perceived by teachers to be major external contributors to job stress (Farber, 1984; Poplin, 1992). This is a result, not only of a lack of support, but an increase in expectations and an increase in the willingness to question and critique teachers’ professional decisions (Farber, 1984). Other external stressors are things such as meetings that deal with larger school or board decisions that divert teachers’ energies away from the classroom (Zeichner, 1991); lack of valuable in-service opportunities and
lack of resources (Ball & Stenlund, 1990); as well as the lack of growth opportunities in terms of promotion or recognition (Tarrant, 1991). In fact, teachers are often “punished” for displaying excellence in the classroom. Instead of being given opportunities to challenge themselves and build on their strengths by trying a new class or division, they end up teaching the same thing on a daily basis for their entire career. Some might perceive that this lack of movement or change could result in less stress for a teacher, but keep in mind that frustration is a stressor and occurs not only because a person is challenged beyond his or her ability, but can also occur because there is no opportunity for any creative outlet or possible growth. This is exactly the feeling that I described in Chapter 1 as I entered my 8th year of teaching.

It is evident that stress is a major part of the life of a teacher. What then, is the result of this stress? What impact does it have on teachers, their students, and the education system?

**Burnout**

Depending on how teachers deal with stress, the result can be either survival or burnout. Burnout has increasingly been the subject of much research. After summarizing much of the prominent or leading research in the area of burnout, Perlman and Hartman (1982) defined burnout as “a response to chronic emotional stress with three components: (a) emotional and/or physical exhaustion, (b) lowered job productivity, and (c) overdepersonalization” (p. 293). Kalker (1984) and Farber (1984) helped make this clear by defining and delineating the concept of burnout. Both stated that while stress is
situational, burnout is a result of cumulative stress and little or no mental, emotional, or physical support. Farber (1984) further stated that burnout is the result of a series of “unsuccessful attempts to cope with negative stress conditions” (p. 324). Furthermore, when relating burnout to the teaching profession, Farber (1984) stated that teachers end up being “worn out rather than burned out” (p. 323). Instead of working harder to provide their service and eventually leaving the profession because they have no more to give, as is the case with classical burnout, teachers simply become worn out and lose interest in personal growth and in their students. They “stop attempting to succeed in situations that appear hopeless” (Farber, 1984, p. 328). And yet, unlike those who burn out, teachers who become worn out stay in the profession and mentally close their classroom doors. The implications of this in terms of its effect on the students seems clear, but there is also a high financial price as well. Absenteeism, waste, turnover rates, and long-term disability can result in phenomenal costs to the boards of education (Holt, Fine, & Tollefson, 1987).

Having defined stress and burnout, and having attempted to make connections between both of those concepts and teacher survival, it is necessary to go one step further. Since burnout could logically be classified as “non-survival,” there is a need to investigate what factors might be related to non-survival in teachers. Perlman and Hartman, in their 1982 study, listed five “variables found to be significantly related to burnout” (p. 295). These variables are consistent with the factors affecting survival of teachers that I plan to review. Those factors are as follows: personality types in teaching, teacher education, developmental stages of teachers, and organizational attributes. To begin with, it is of value to understand what types of personalities are attracted to
teaching; whether those types are accepted into the teaching field, and whether or not those types can be considered "survivor" types.

Personality Types

The idea that personality may have some effect on surviving stress is supported by Charters (1970) who felt that survival relied on personal attributes, and by Kalker (1984) who felt that teachers who engaged in negative talk will often feel helpless and powerless to effect change. These certainly are aspects of personality but do all personality types tend to feel this way when faced with the job of teaching?

The most widely recognized tool for calculating and organizing personality characteristics into personality types is the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. This is a test specifically designed to help individuals become more aware of themselves and of others in terms of how they tend to behave in various situations. However, it is not a test that is used primarily to connect personality types to possible career choices. This specific area is dominated by the work of John Holland. Holland categorized people into six personality types. These types are based on the adaptive behaviours that people make use of when interacting with their environment and with others (Holland, Gottfredson, & Power, 1980). The types outlined in his research are as follows: Realistic, Investigative, Social, Conventional, Enterprising, and Artistic (Brown, Brooks & Assoc., 1990). In connecting these types to specific work environments, Holland stated "that a person's primary direction of choice is determined by the model type he [sic] most resembles, e.g. Investigative - scientist" (as cited in Gothard, 1985, p. 20).
According to Holland, teachers fall into the realm of Social personality types. They are individuals who like to work with people to enlighten, inform, help, train, or cure them or are skilled with words (Holland, 1980). Holland’s theory was based on the idea that people are attracted to certain professions because those professions offer an environment that tends to be occupied by people of the same personality type. In a sense then, people are attracted to teaching not only because it provides a structural environment in which they would feel at ease, but also because there are a large number of people already working there who would be of the same or similar personality type (Brown et al., 1990).

Further research in this area has been completed by Cranton and Knoop (1995). They have created a personality indicator that is based on the structure of the Myers-Briggs’ indicator but leans heavily on the theory of personality within Jung’s work on psychological types. The indicator that Cranton and Knoop have created is labelled Personal Empowerment Through Type (PET). While the Myers-Briggs’ labels people as a specific type, the PET focusses more on the idea that, although there is a tendency for people to behave in a certain way according to their type, that behaviour is situational and depends on the request being made of them at any specific time. This indicator tends to be a much more balanced one in the sense that it recognizes that, although people have preferences in regard to how they want to interact with the world, they are often asked to behave in ways which are not in their area of strength and yet they are quite capable of drawing on their less strong characteristics and using them effectively. Hence, a teacher who is an introverted-thinking type may prefer to work independently and with abstract ideas but may be quite capable and successful at performing in front of a class in a more
extroverted-social way. Ideally then, survivors in the teaching profession are not those of a specific type but they are people who recognize their needs and preferences for interaction and build in regular opportunities for meeting those needs in positive ways.

This is an important distinction to make. It can be very easy with personality type theory to slot people into positions “fitted” for them according to their personality type. The more important question to ask is whether or not those most suited to a profession according to their type are also survivors. Clearly, this would only work if people of the chosen personality type were also recognized and tested to be “survivors.” For example, if the screening process for teacher training included a personality type test, the education profession could end up with a very homogeneous group that may not necessarily have the skills or the strategies to be survivors in the profession. Using, as a more clear example of this, Holland’s (1980) Social types, it may very well be that having the traits needed to be successful at sharing information, helping others or training, is not enough. A teacher must also have personality traits necessary to deal with the more negative aspects of teaching such as hard to motivate students and poor administration. It may even be likely that Holland’s social types which are indicated to be best suited to teaching, may actually be non-survivors because they are frustrated in their need to do what they do best, according to their personality characteristics. This idea is supported by Farber’s (1984) research which stated that teachers’ greatest stressors are those that divert them away from the essential work of teaching. And, as mentioned before, this frustration can lead to stress which can then eventually lead to burnout.

It seems then, that while certain types may be attracted to certain jobs, they are not necessarily devoid of stressors or structures that frustrate the very type that they attract.
Therefore, while, according to Holland’s theory, Social types fit best into the career of teaching, it seems that they must be Social types with some other strategies that will help them deal with frustration and help them survive. In 1979, Kobasa classified survivors as having the trait of “personality hardiness” (as cited in Holt, Fine, & Tollefson, 1987, p. 51). This trait is displayed through a number of sub traits. These sub traits are: commitment, control, and challenge. Teachers who have a general life outlook that involves a sense of purpose, a belief in change, and a sense of influence over their own life events, display survivor ability (Holt et al., 1987). These traits coincide with the concept of locus of control (Rotter, 1966) which is the degree to which people believe they are masters of their own fate. If one has an external locus of control, one believes that one’s actions are controlled by luck or chance. If one has an internal locus of control, one believes that controlling what happens to oneself is reliant upon one’s own behaviour (Rotter, 1966). In a sense then, if we combine Holland’s (1980) theory of personality types and Holt et al.’s (1987) concept of personal hardiness which implies a belief in internal locus of control, a teacher who has these survival traits would ideally be one who is successful at sharing information and helping others, as well as having a sense of personal control over the variables associated with teaching.

Of course, just having these traits does not necessarily mean that one will actually survive. They just merely provide the potential for survival. The ability to survive also depends to some extent on exposure to the realities of teaching and an opportunity to be trained effectively in the field.
Teacher Education (Pre-service)

Educating or training individuals to become teachers is commonly known as helping students move to the other side of the desk. In other words, it is an opportunity to actually practice the skills involved in the job of teaching. This is an area of considerable concern among researchers. There are concerns that there is a serious gap between theory and practice when it comes to educating prospective teachers (Newport, 1983), as well as elemental concerns about the qualifications and credentials of those teaching at faculties of education (Awender & Harte, 1986). In addition, many researchers are calling for extending the length of the practice teaching experience (Covert & Clifton, 1983; Fullan, Connelly, & Watson, 1990; Holdaway, Johnson, Ratsoy, & Friesen, 1994) because they fear that student teachers are learning, not to become life long learners but to play a game and conform to whatever their host-teachers or faculty supervisors would like to see (MacKinnon, 1989).

While practice teaching is considered to be the most important aspect of teacher training, there is a great deal of disagreement about exactly which aspect of it is most important. Some feel that just the opportunity to practice the skills students are learning in lectures is key to the pre-service teaching experience (Holdaway et al., 1994). Others feel that it is the opportunity to become part of a school culture that is most important (Brieschke, 1981). Still others believe that the mentor relationship that develops between the host-teacher and the teacher-candidate is what is essential about the practicum experience (Cochran-Smith, 1991; Huling-Austin, 1992). Because of this diversity, there is also disagreement regarding how to make this experience better. The fact that it needs
to be improved is unquestioned by most researchers. In Chapter 1, I noted that the majority of teachers in the profession felt that they were ill-prepared for the actual job of teaching. They tended to blame the faculties of education for this lack of preparation. Research has, as indicated above, laid the blame on the faculties as well; supporting the accusations made by practicing teachers.

But have the faculties really failed? It may be that they face the same problems that the boards do when providing support for first-year teachers. I am referring to what Katz, Raths, Mohanty, Kurachi, and Irving labelled the “feed forward” problem (as cited in Stone, 1987, p. 371). It is possible that the faculties are providing prospective teachers with all the skills, strategies, and knowledge that they will need to survive in the teaching profession but that faculties are providing that information long before the students are ready for it or, indeed, are even asking for it. It is for this reason that much of the research calls for extending the teacher-training experience. These recommendations range from extending the practicum experience so that it simply weighs more heavily than the time spent on theory (Holdaway et al., 1994), to extending the entire programme so that it involves the following: the student must complete an undergraduate degree followed by a theory based year at teacher’s college, followed by 2 years in which the student interns at a school to engage in practice teaching experiences, and then completed by another 2-year commitment in which the student apprentices in a school provided by the board that hires him or her (Fullan et al., 1990). This apprenticeship, if successfully completed, would culminate in certification as a teacher. Fullan et al. (1990) felt that such a process would not only support beginning teachers in those crucial first years but would also give them the time and the experience to engage in learning that is meaningful
and useful in helping them to survive. This supports Combs’ (1965) belief that faculties spend more time teaching students “about teaching instead of helping them become teachers” (p. 28).

Teacher Induction

The first year of teaching is crucial to the survival of a teacher. It is for this reason that there is a call for beginning teacher support through induction programmes. Burden (1982a) called this first year, interestingly enough, the “survival” year (p. 4). The first year involves uncertainty about one’s role and position in the school culture, an unwillingness to be creative with teaching methods, and a sense that the first few years of teaching are oppressive trials that need to be passed (Burden, 1982a). Researchers feel that the first years are the most important in terms of helping teachers to survive and that induction programmes that support classroom improvement by linking first-year teachers with exemplary teachers as mentors is a first step toward achieving that goal (Fullan, Bennett & Rolheiser-Bennett, 1990; Olsen, 1991). Of course, pairing a new teacher with a mentor who is considered an example of an excellent teacher could create more stress for a beginning teacher instead of alleviating it. Fuller’s (1969) research pointed out that beginning teachers are concerned with their personal image and how others perceive them. Pairing them up with a mentor who is far beyond them developmentally in terms of teaching may only serve to highlight their own inadequacies and turn their first year into an uninviting experience.
In addition to the recommendations that there is a need to prepare and support teachers appropriately and meaningfully during their first year and before they actually have a class of their own, it is essential that this support continue throughout the teacher's career.

Teacher Education (In-service)

In-service education is one way of enabling and allowing teachers to continue to thrive and grow as they move through their careers. This type of education is often classified as professional development. Professional development that can help teachers survive is any activity that helps teacher to internalize their locus of control. If teachers experience a feeling of consequentiality and feel able to bring about change or make a difference in the lives of their students then they are well on their way to survivor status. Fullan (1993) supported this idea by reporting on four ways that professional development can help teachers survive and thrive. He recommended that professional development must involve opportunities for personal vision building; opportunities to engage in inquiry in order to be life long learners; opportunities to practice mastering new behaviours that will help change thinking; and opportunities to develop collaboration skills that will enable teachers to support each other both personally and professionally.

These goals obviously can support teachers in their drive to survive. They can help teachers to become more “personally hardy” as well as support and invite teachers to engage in practicing skills and strategies that will enable them to grow as individuals and professionals.
How this professional development is provided relies almost wholly on the organizational structures created by schools and school boards. These structures may involve opportunities for sabbaticals; time to attend workshops; money to attend larger and more expensive presentations; teams to develop in-school learning opportunities; or flexible in-school coverage that gives opportunities for teachers to observe and learn from each other. While all these opportunities may be available in most boards, the access to these opportunities relies squarely on the commitment that individual school boards have to these types of programmes. Organizational structure and the flexibility of that structure can be a significant influence on the survival or non-survival of teachers.

Organizational Structure

Organizational structure, in education, means the constructs of the system through which administrators at all levels deliver the service of education. This can be interpreted by administrators as a very flexible or a very rigid system. While there are pockets of attempts to make the system flexible, for the most part, the education system is viewed as rigid and is accepted as such. Boards of education tend to be organized around fairly formal structures. These structures can include: a clear division of labour; a strict chain of command; purposefully designed opportunities for passivity; and a need for dependence among workers (Ferren, 1971). This has an overwhelming effect on the opportunities provided for teachers to grow and thrive in the classroom. Most systems generally see teachers as a homogeneous group. While there is recognition that there are teachers who are having significant difficulty doing their job, it is widely accepted that
the rest of the teachers are competent and they are basically left alone to pursue their own interests and needs. This begins in first year when it is assumed that new teachers, being young, eager, and on the "cutting edge" of education do not have much need for professional development activities. This problem is further compounded by the fact that many boards evaluate teachers through a supervision process that does not recognize individual differences, strengths, or needs (Bosetti, 1994; Poole, 1994). In addition, most professional development opportunities provided by the boards are also designed to be delivered to a homogeneous group at set times during the year. They are not organized to meet a need, unless of course it is a Ministry need, and they are often repeated year after year.

Coleman (1976) and Ward (1978) both felt that this type of professional development was not, at the time, meeting the needs of teachers but that it was still essential to provide professional development opportunities so that growth would be promoted among teachers, and barriers that support teacher isolation removed. It seems logical that teachers who feel less isolated might be more likely to be survivors. It is also essential, as mentioned above, that professional development opportunities be designed to meet the varied needs of the teachers. For example, workshops that present information to teachers as a homogeneous group (as most of them do) will fall short of the mark in terms of providing professional growth and motivation. Any professional development must provide freedom to explore new ideas, time to reflect, and opportunities to learn through practice (O'Reilly & Latimer, 1990). In addition, any effort to support teachers, whether it be through professional development or system opportunities, must be more than skin-deep (Farber, 1984). If it is a temporary or band-aid measure, or if it tries to
help already struggling teachers who are identified through the supervisory process as at-risk, instead of trying to prevent attrition, it is already doomed to failure. The system must be designed to support the different needs of teacher at different times in a more proactive way (Tarrant, 1991). An example of a more flexible organizational structure that tries to meet the real needs of teachers might be to provide sabbatical opportunities that give teachers a break from the everyday stresses of teaching and offer opportunities for renewal and growth that is designed specifically for each individual (Gaziel, 1995).

In addition, although the concepts of structure and relationships seem incongruent, the structure of the organization can have a significant effect on the morale and health of teachers by allowing for, and building in, opportunities for teachers to develop personally and professionally supportive relationships. Researchers in this area feel that relationships are the key to survival within the system. Greathouse, Moyer, and Rhodes-Offutt (1992) stated that, since many teachers are not surviving the first few years of teaching, it is essential that administrators provide more support by facilitating positive relationships with parents, peers, and mentors and by reducing the number of system tasks dealt with by teachers. This is supported by O'Reilly and Latimer (1990) who felt that change, growth, and survival are not created by systems but are usually a result of an "isolated action or experience" (p. 7). They called these experiences "critical incidents" (p. 7) and stated that they primarily result from interaction with others in supportive relationships.

These incidents presently occur randomly but organizations can encourage these opportunities simply by being committed to helping their teachers to be survivors. If the teachers are survivors, the students will benefit greatly. In fact, the organizational
structure of the education system must be designed to meet the needs of teachers in much the same way as it is designed to meet the needs of children in the classrooms. Just as children move through fluid and flexible stages of development, so do teachers move through developmental stages of teaching (Fuller, 1969). Any and all opportunities provided to help support teachers in their goal to survive must recognize the differing needs of teachers as they move through the developmental stages. For example, Watts (1980) found that early-career teachers need reassurance, practical information, and a lighter workload in terms of classes or duties, while mid-career teachers want opportunities to initiate programmes, raise questions, and reassess and reflect on their work. In addition, Watts found that late-career teachers are primarily looking for additional responsibilities, opportunities to discuss educational topics and time to write about or share their expertise.

Fuller and Case (1969) have also shown that teachers’ needs are not the same. They stated that as teachers move through differing developmental stages, the organizational structure of the education system needs to support these teachers by creating programmes and providing opportunities that will genuinely meet their differing needs. Fuller and Case (1969) classified those needs as ones that move away from external rewards which are based on a desire for recognition from peers and supervisors in order to feel good about oneself, to internal or intrinsic rewards which are gained from interacting successfully with pupils and recognizing that the changes in their progress stems from the competence and caring displayed by the teacher.
If the organizational structure of the board allows for and plans to meet the differing needs of teachers it can help teachers develop commitment, gain personal and professional control, and offer challenges that provide them with learning opportunities.

Summary of Literature Reviewed

The research outlined above makes it clear that a great deal needs to be in place in order for teachers to survive. Teachers need to be able to deal effectively with stress. Teachers need certain key traits that will help them to deal with other aspects of the teaching job that have very little to do with educating others. Teachers need to be able to pass a rigorous screening process that will define them as “survivors.” Teachers need to have an internal locus of control (Rotter, 1966). Teachers need appropriate and lengthy training that will prepare them effectively and make them feel ready for the job of teaching. Teachers need to continue their education while “on-the-job” through meaningful professional development activities. Finally, teachers need to work within an organizational structure that recognizes their different developmental needs and provides flexible system-wide opportunities for professional and personal growth.

How then do teachers survive? Very little of the literature on any aspect of teacher survival has dealt with this question. Researchers have not yet tried to discover what it is that helps actual survivors to survive in the first place. Evidently, there is a need for more qualitative research into the complexity of teaching (Wideen & Holborn, 1986) and into the coping skills and strategies that teachers use to survive and thrive both personally and professionally in the job of teaching. It seems important to move away
from hypotheses about what needs to happen to help teachers and instead go directly to the survivors themselves and have them share with researchers what it is, specifically, that helps them to survive. The following research methodology is meant to support an investigation of what survivors are doing and have done to keep them alive and thriving in the teaching profession.
Figure 2. Chapter 2 concept map.

Research on Teacher Survival predominantly focusses on Problems involving Lacking in the area of Studies focusing on IS Lacking in the area of Lack in the area of X Studies of the Personality-Type Job-Fit Teacher Education Organizational Structures Structures of the that allow used by Skills Teachers at all Career Stages Support to themselves others Thrive in the Professionally in the Job of Teaching Personally
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

“I am happy in the role. The kids, everyday, the kids make it worthwhile. What they do and what they learn and what they teach me about teaching and learning is amazing. They have really opened my eyes and they make everything worthwhile.”

-Ellen

Overview

The purpose of this study was to explore how individual teachers have survived and thrived in the job of teaching. It was to examine, at a deeper level, the skills and strategies that these teachers have used in order to remain actively engaged when teaching. Due to this, a qualitative research methodology was used to investigate this research problem. The research data were primarily gained through one-to-one personal interviews that were based on personal experiences or self-stories gleaned through focussed interview questions.

Description of Research Methodology

According to Bogdan and Biklen (1982), qualitative research is becoming the dominant research methodology within the field of education. This type of research enables researchers to gather or accumulate what Denzin (1989) termed as “thick descriptions” (p. 83). These types of descriptions are layered or detailed accounts of a situation, occurrence, or experience. They are retrieved through personal or self-stories
that are narrative in design and allow for developing a richer or deeper understanding of the way in which people see themselves as they experience the world around them.

This type of research is of particular benefit within the field of education since education deals primarily with the process of thought. Since this is considered to be a "soft" area in terms of data, as no two people's thoughts are the same, empirical or statistically gathered data often miss the key elements involved within the process of reasoning or within an individual's experiential framework. The experiences we have make us different and the most effective way to investigate these differences between individual experiences is to ask those involved. There is disagreement about this, though. Some researchers feel that asking those involved still may not lead to the "correct" summary of what actually occurred. This assumes, of course, that there is a correct answer. For one person, it may be the correct interpretation and for another it may not. Interpretation is the key word here. While researchers are keen to learn from their subjects and the idea of replicable, internally valid, and generalizable research is highly valued, it is important to remember that any research involving human beings involves personal interpretations at some level. Even the most empirical research can be undermined by a subject who is trying to personally interpret what is expected of him or her.

This is why I chose to use a qualitative research design. As mentioned before, qualitative research provides an opportunity for researchers to learn from their participants in a more interactive and subtle way. In order for researchers to understand the experiences of the participant, it becomes imperative for researchers to interact with
the participant and continually check to make sure that their understanding is consistent with what the participant has experienced.

In this study, the most effective way to do this was through the interview process. Interviewing provided time for the participants to relate their experiences through a rich oral tradition. It allowed me to verbally and quickly confirm my understanding and it allowed for flexibility in terms of the nature of the information gathered. For example, a participant may have been discussing one topic and through divergent discussion revealed something that was of interest to or supported the hypothesis of the study. Furthermore, if the participant was not providing the information that I was looking for, he or she could be directed through more specific questioning.

The interview process then, seemed to be ideal for gathering information from individual teachers regarding their skills and strategies for survival. I believe it provided a deep and more detailed understanding of teacher survival through their interactions with their students, administrators, and parents. It seems probable that how they perceived these interactions has had some effect on their survival. Therefore, it was essential to get their “stories” including the personal interpretations that they gave to them.

Although interviewing was certainly the most appropriate way to gather information from teachers regarding their survival stories, how that interviewing took place was of foremost concern. Bogdan and Taylor (1975) recommended carrying out lengthy interviews of 3 to 4 hours on a weekly basis as well as having researchers keep a journal of their own personal impressions or observation. In addition, Bogdan and Taylor felt that two lengthy interviews could be done in a row (morning and afternoon) with the same participant without detrimentally affecting the information gathered.
Seidman (1991) disagreed. He felt that qualitative research which was looking for in-depth information should fall into a framework designed around three separate interviews. The first should be set up to gather background information on the participant. This is meant to give the researcher a framework for understanding the future actions taken by the subject. The second interview should be organized around talking specifically about the subject that the researcher is researching. Finally, the third interview should be designed to discuss with the participant what meaning the researcher’s topic has for him or her. It is meant to be an opportunity for reflection and discussion about possible future actions.

Seidman felt that interviews should not be over 90 minutes in length. He felt that any discussion longer than that would become stale and that requests for longer interviews were only bothersome and intrusive to the participant. In addition, more practically, he felt that the time spent on transcribing tapes of the interview became too onerous once an interview exceeded 90 minutes. It was my feeling that Seidman provided a more workable and reasonable structure for the interviewing process. It was upon this structure that I organized my own interviewing schedule.

Ethics Committee Submission

Once the organizational structure for my research was in place, it was necessary for me to put together a submission for the Brock University Ethics Committee regarding the use of human participants in my study. The submission outlined many of the areas discussed in this chapter. I included the intent of the study, the methodology, and how
the data would be collected and stored as well as the information and consent forms that would be shared with the participants (Appendixes B, C, & D). In addition, I also reviewed the possible risks to which the participants would be exposed (Appendix A). Once approval was received from the Ethics Committee, I began to approach the recommended teachers to request their participation in my study.

Selection of Participants

I looked for participants who spanned a large section of years in terms of career experience. I looked for a male and a female early-career teacher (1-6 years); a male and a female mid-career teacher (7-20 years) and a male and a female late-career teacher (21-30 years). These ranges were chosen by me for the following reasons: a) As the research in Chapter 2 made plain, early-career teachers are those who are still finding their way in the job or those who might not have had sufficient opportunities to establish a balance between their personal and professional lives; b) Mid-career teachers are the largest group and they are those who have settled into the job and who, for the most part, will not be retiring for at least 10 years; c) Late-career teachers are those who are in their last 9 years of teaching. They are close to retirement and have had an opportunity to reflect on the changes that they have faced throughout their career; and d) I wanted to see if there were any skill or strategy similarities across this wide range of teaching experience.

My initial approach to this research topic was to ask other teachers in the system to identify colleagues that they felt matched the above criteria. I asked them to
recommend teachers that they admired because they perceived them as excited and enthusiastic about their jobs as well as highly competent and capable at doing the job of teaching. Once I received the recommendations, I approached those teachers and inquired as to their interest in taking part in my study. It was my good fortune that I did not need to go beyond this initial step. Of the teachers recommended to me, only two of my initial attempts were turned down. For the most part, the teachers who had been recommended were interested and eager to take part in the study.

For two reasons, I focussed only on elementary teachers. Both reasons stemmed from the fact that I, myself, am an elementary teacher. I hoped that I could bring to the interviews an implicit understanding of the specific problems and structures inherent in the job of an elementary teacher. In addition, it was, and is, my intent to personally learn from these “survivors” and make use of any common skills or strategies that have arisen out of the research.

As well as focussing on elementary teachers, I chose as participants those who had chosen to remain teaching in a classroom. Teachers who had moved away from the classroom experience, either as consultants, administrators, or other support staff, had, by choice, removed themselves from the day-to-day experience of teaching elementary students and therefore did not fit the participant “model” that I was looking for. This was not meant to call into question their competence or enthusiasm for teaching but recognized that in removing themselves from the classroom experience, they had chosen a different path for their career development.

Finally, I chose only teachers employed by the same board of education as myself. Since this was an organizational structure I was most familiar with, and was the area
where I knew the most people, I felt that this helped me to be most comfortable and effective as a first-time interviewer and gave me greater access to my potential participants.

Process

Once I gathered a list of potential participants who had been recommended to me, I initially approached these people either over the phone or through the board electronic mail system using the introductory letter (Appendix B). I introduced myself and explained my reasons for approaching them. I indicated to them who had recommended them to me and asked for permission to send them an overview of this study. When permission was granted, I sent the Study Information Sheet (Appendix C) to the participants through the interoffice mail system. I followed this up with a phone call at an appropriately later date to ascertain whether or not they were interested in participating in the study. Once the permission was granted I set the first interview date with them at that time. As indicated on the Study Information Sheet (Appendix C), there were two interviews of approximately, but not exceeding, 90 minutes in length. The place, time, and who was present during the interview was entirely dependent upon the participant when setting the initial interview date. He or she was given these choices to make. For the most part, the participants chose to carry out the interviews in their own homes. In all cases, the participants chose informal settings that allowed for few interruptions and all of them chose to participate in the interviews during their time away from school in the summer months. The first set of interviews and some of the second set were completed
before the end of July, 1996 and the remainder were completed in early August, 1996 before the teacher-participants returned to their classrooms in late August to set up for the following year.

All of the interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed upon agreement of the participant. Before the first interview started, the participant was asked to sign the consent form (Appendix D) which outlined that the study had been explained to them and that they had agreed to participate. In every case, the transcript of the first interview was sent to the participant to review before the second interview took place. The transcript of the second interview was sent to the participant with a self-addressed stamped envelope. Any written work that involved a participant’s data was sent to him or her prior to publication for review by the participant in question.

Data Processing and Analysis

All of the interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. After reviewing the transcripts of the taped interviews, I used Rubin and Rubin’s (1995) structures to help organize the material into common areas based on some larger overall themes. These common areas and overall themes were gleaned from the interview transcripts in several ways. To begin with, I listened to the taped interviews once through entirely before even commencing the transcription. During that time, I made a master list of any specific stories or anecdotes that seemed to directly relate a skill or strategy used by the participant as a coping method. In addition, I listened for anecdotes that specifically related to the concept of invitations as outlined in the literature by Purkey and Novak
(1996) or to personal perceptions of teaching and teaching situations as described by Combs’ perceptual theory (1965). As I listened to each successive interview, I reviewed the master list and put checkmarks beside any skills or strategies that reoccurred either in the second interview or in the interviews with the other participants. Any new or fresh skills or strategies that were shared were added to the master list in succession. Following that, I took the master list and tried to group the skills or strategies into a few fairly distinct categories, using common or frequently reoccurring words as a key. Finally, I reviewed the actual transcripts and, using a different highlighter for each category, proceeded to highlight the actual sentences, paragraphs, or stories that best illustrated those categories or themes. These highlighted sections later became a large part of the stories or narratives that formed Chapter 4.

Limitations

In terms of the research design outlined in this chapter, the following limitations may have affected the results. One limitation may have been the possible bias involved in using interviews as a way of gathering research data. Furthermore, the fact that I talked to people with whom I have organizational structures in common, may have resulted in a situation where I led the interview based on my own personal understanding of the situation. This was of particular concern with the participants who were at the same career experience level as I was. It is possible that I accepted answers without probing further in these situations, although the resulting similarities between the different career levels indicates that this was likely not the case.
Another potential limitation was the external validity of the research design. Due to the selection process I used, which involved a small and nonrepresentative population, and the possible interviewer bias that I may have brought to the research, the extent to which the findings of this study can be used as knowledge about all teachers in general is limited. In summary, this project should be read as a pilot study. It was designed to help identify some possible commonalities and to lead the way for further research.
Figure 3. Chapter 3 concept map.

This Research

based on

Qualitative Methods

allows for

Layered

Detailed

In-depth

Descriptions

gathered through

of personal

Situations

Occurrences

Experiences

shared by

Participants

at

selected upon

during two

Various Career Stages

Personal Recommendation

90 Minute Interviews

from

that allow for

Fellow Colleague

Flexibility

Reflection

Honesty

Narrative Self-Stories
CHAPTER FOUR: THE DATA

"From the time I started kindergarten I wanted to be a teacher. I don’t know whether my kindergarten teacher inspired me or not. Right from the first day of school I came home and said to my mother, ‘That’s what I want to be.’ It never changed.”

-Frank

Preface

The following summary briefly outlines who the participants are. It describes their educational background and experiences as well as the reasons they have chosen teaching as a career. The sections following that are broken down into the four major topical areas of this study. The first section deals with the sense of preparedness that these teachers had upon entering the profession. The second section looks at the concerns that they have as teachers. The third section outlines the skills and strategies that they use to help them deal with those concerns, and the fourth section describes how these teachers were or were not supported within the profession and also how they support themselves and others. These sections consist, in large part, of the responses and comments made by these teachers during the interviews. Andrew and Brenda are the male and female participants from the early-career stage, Chris and Doreen are their equivalent from the mid-career stage, and Ellen and Frank are both in the late stages of their career.
Background

Andrew has been teaching for 5 years. His contract has ranged from half-time to 75 percent and for the past 2 years he has been on a full-time permanent contract. His contract was also "pink-slipped" and then eventually rescinded but to Andrew, that's "par for the course." Every year since he started teaching, he has been either declared surplus, redundant, or he still did not know what he was teaching by the end of August. He has a Primary-Junior qualification and has taught just about every combination of those two divisions as is possible, as well as splitting his time between two or more schools to fulfill his contract percentage. Andrew came to teaching in a casual way. His mother and several aunts and uncles were teachers and at the time he graduated from university teaching seemed "to be a half-decent job" possibility. Now that he is in the job he is completely happy with his decision. "I absolutely love the freedom of working independently and being trusted as a professional. I just like being in a classroom with the kids. I absolutely love it."

Brenda has been teaching for 3 years. She is qualified to teach in the Primary-Junior division and although she has had an opportunity to work with kids across both divisions, most of her experiences are in Grades 1 and 2. Teaching was not her first choice and yet, once she set her sights on teaching she never looked back. She volunteered in classrooms, worked as an Instructional Assistant, and worked as a lunchroom supervisor. When that background did not get her a spot at a Teacher's College in Ontario, she went to the United States and worked on her degree there. When she returned, she contacted anybody and everybody she could in the boards she wanted to
work for and continued to upgrade her skills. She attended “every single workshop offered, Primary, Junior, whatever, and had pages and pages” on her resume. Brenda admitted that it has been a tough start in the profession for her. She started with occasional contracts and she received a pink slip this year indicating that she would no longer have a job. She managed to maintain a positive outlook though, and fortunately for her, her pink slip was rescinded. She is excited about teaching and the opportunities it offers her. “It’s nice to have things that are changing. You have different kids, you have different units and different schools. You’re not just locked into something that’s the same all the time.”

Chris has been teaching for 9 years. He has taught at two schools and is presently teaching at this third. He is qualified to teach in the Junior-Intermediate division and has taught in both. He has taken a parental leave from teaching and although he enjoyed being off with his children he was also looking forward to returning to the job. Like Brenda, teaching was not his primary career choice. He eventually decided to go to Teacher’s College because he had worked with kids before and he felt that teaching was something he might enjoy. Now that he is in the job, he has found it to be a rewarding experience. He especially enjoys watching the kids develop. “I just really enjoy working with kids. It’s fun when they start to grow up and you see the maturity and the growth.”

Doreen has been teaching for 16 years. Her career has been broken up into two distinct sections. She worked for 6 years, met her spouse during that time, and left teaching to start a family. She had absolutely no plans to return. Eventually though, she did return. She found that she was spending so much time doing teaching-related activities that she felt the need to return to the classroom. She has been back now for 10
years and is loving it. She has taught at four different schools in the same board and the majority of her teaching experience has been in the Junior division. One of her most exciting experiences as a teacher has been to be involved in opening a new school. Although she loved working with kids and had a wide range of experiences doing so, teaching was not her first career choice. Having made that choice though, she looks back with no regrets. "I'm pretty satisfied. I'm not saying that I've always done things perfectly and I'm not saying that there's not room for improvement because there always is, I think generally I'm pleased. I've had a lot of fun."

Ellen has been teaching for 27 years in the Primary-Junior division. She has taught at eight different schools, all of which were for the same school board. She initially came to teaching for two reasons. Her mother was a teacher and as Ellen so succinctly puts it "in those days you had no other option. You either went into teaching or nursing. So I went off to Teacher's College." Ellen saw teaching as a temporary job. Her primary plan was "to get married and have a family." She proceeded to follow through on that plan and she left teaching with no intention of returning to it. Eventually though, she did return as well. She began by job-sharing, then moved into a half-time contract and eventually back into a full-time teaching position. Ellen feels that her love of the job has grown over the years. She says it best: as "I got more involved in professional development, I began to really appreciate the job and now I don't even want to think about retirement."

Frank has also been teaching for 27 years. He has taught in four schools which were also all within the same school board. He is qualified to teach kindergarten to Grade 10 but has focussed his energies on the Primary-Junior division as well as taking on as
much of the Physical Education instruction that he can at whichever school he has worked. He remembers wanting to be a teacher from his own first day in kindergarten. “Right from the start, my first day of school I said to my mother, ‘that’s what I want to be.’ It never changed...I wanted to be a teacher.” He has never taken any time off from teaching and although he is both happy and satisfied with his decision to become a teacher, he is looking forward to his retirement date. As he puts it “I’ll be happy in 7 years when it’s all over, but that’s for different reasons. I’m at a point in my life now where my leisure time is extremely important. So I am looking forward to that.”

Feelings of Preparedness

The following excerpts are responses by the participants to a series of interview questions that tried to gauge their level of preparation upon entering the teaching profession.

Andrew

I was prepared but it was by my practice teaching exclusively. Honestly. We did a lot of stuff in the class part...uh, the instructional part, which gave us good ideas of things to do in the classroom but until we went into the classroom it was just theory. My practicum placements gave me a taste of reality. You know, just exploring what the kids were actually like. I mean, we had all sorts of structured activities where we were in class at the college and we were pretending we were in an elementary classroom but in that case you’ve got sixty 25 to 50-year-olds pretending to be really good elementary kids. It’s kind of a skewed perspective.
Brenda

As far as teacher’s college? I think so. I went to a teacher’s college in the States. So, as far as technology, yes I feel I was prepared because it was mandatory that we had to be certified in the state of Maine which means taking a computer course to be certified here in Ontario. As far as cooperative learning techniques, like “think-pair-share,” cooperative grouping and other teaching strategies, I would say I was not prepared. In terms of just basic curriculum, they were behind in the States where I was. Teachers had to write all their own curriculum so, no I don’t think I was prepared for that. Yet, when it came to having my own classroom I was really ready. That came from my practicum experiences and I also did a lot of volunteering on top of my practice teaching. If I hadn’t done the volunteering or gotten jobs that gave me more experience I don’t feel I would have been prepared.

Chris

No. I wasn’t prepared. I’d been out of university for a few years and I went back and did the cooperative programme in outdoor and experiential education at Queen’s which is a year long. It starts in May. And...it’s um...it wasn’t that it was useless or all that. It was a good programme but all the things you learn that are really useful to you, I think you learn after you start teaching. As a result, my first year was pretty hard. In the fall I did supply teaching after I graduated. I did some supply teaching because there just wasn’t a job available at the time. That was good because it got me out to different schools and I was in the board I wanted to work for. Then I started full-time. I taught Grade 8 and that was pretty hard coming in the middle of the year. I think especially because you’re coming into what somebody else has already done. There also wasn’t
very much notice before I started. I think it was just that for a lot of the time I didn’t feel I knew what I was doing. I really didn’t and I was struggling with whether I was doing what I was supposed to be doing. You know? I don’t know if I knew what I was getting myself into in the first place.

Doreen

My first year? It was uh, it was all a whirl. Teacher’s College back in the dark ages, when I went, there were a lot of opportunities you know, to be out and teaching. You know the practice teaching. I recall...I remember, my first 2 week stint of teaching I almost quit because I didn’t care for the person whose classroom I was using. But the first year, there was just so much going on. And I jumped right in with both feet and did everything. I knew I would have a good rapport with the kids but I certainly did feel that I was making up curriculum as I was going along. But you know what? I still feel like that. I don’t know if that’s good or not. I mean, I guess I’m glad that I don’t get in a rut and that I’m still creating and being creative in the job. If somebody told me that I had to do something in a certain way I don’t think I would do it. I mean, every class you get, you can’t really get out last year’s stuff and use it without change.

Ellen

Whether or not I was prepared, I was lucky I guess because of my mother. The first day a lot of people knew me. My mother was very active in Federation and was considered a good teacher and so a lot of people knew me. I probably had a lot more support or felt more secure in the role because there was always somebody that knew who I was. So that probably made it easier. I don’t know if I’d want to start teaching now. I think it would be very difficult. Everything in those days was laid out for us. You had
your little grey curriculum and you just followed this little grey book. You had your little, uh, "High Road to Singing" or whatever it was. Or you had boxes... ditto books. We didn’t have the curriculum planning or Pathways, or anything we have today. There wasn’t the parent involvement either. There wasn’t the focus on parents. Parents in classes? No chance. I had 33 kids in classes from what we called the unit system then. So I had the Grade 1s, 2s and 3s all in one room. There were 33 or 34 kids. But the kids sat in seats. In rows, I mean. I copied everything from guidebooks. I spent my weekends on the kitchen floor with chart paper, copying onto charts out of the guidebooks. In fact, I got permanent magic marker on my mother’s kitchen floor. She could never get rid of it. I didn’t feel the pressure so much.

Frank

No. I didn’t feel prepared to teach. I was 19 going on 20 years old. I was just out of high school. I didn’t really feel that the way the Teacher’s Colleges were organized was at all preparing me for what I had to do. Well, I do think that the people at the college were teaching. They were modelling lessons but they were doing it to adults. Of course, when, you know, we model a lesson to adults it always works. You do the same lesson for children and there are always 8,007 things that will happen that never occurred in the lesson with adults. Also in our practice teaching, the time we spent in the classroom was very limited. We were only in 1 week at a time. So, you know, you observed on Monday, taught one lesson on Tuesday and then by Friday you had to carry just about the whole day. Kind of a trial by fire. And really, what good is Friday?
Concerns

The following excerpts are from the responses of the participants when asked to describe their concerns about the many different aspects of teaching. The interview questions inquired about teacher morale, stress, and any other problems connected with the teaching profession.

Andrew

The morale of teachers today? Brutal. Uh, I'm just thinking of the school I've been at for the last year and a bit. No...it's been a huge change from the time I entered teaching. The people were generally positive then and now I don't see very much of that at all. It's sort of, like being persecuted. You know, sort of we can't do anything. But then again, things have certainly become more militant. I think that's because of economic conditions. Just the fact that I think most people agree that 3 years ago the social contract was necessary and they made sacrifices for those 3 years with the understanding that things would get better after that and then they obviously haven't and so people are getting fed up with it.

I don't think that the stressors in teaching have increased which would explain the morale problem. I think the issue...well...most of the issues in the school...the negative ones are still the same issues from when I started. The kids haven't gotten worse and the parents haven't become more demanding than they are. I don't know, I've seen....I've seen all those things... the administration, the parents, and the students as a constant. I haven't seen an escalation in those stressors.
Teaching is stressful, though. What stresses me the most? Uh...well, the one thing that stresses me the most is to try to do the best I can do. In order to do that, I need to spend countless hours on it which I don’t always have. So I don’t feel that...that I’ve done as much as I could do even though I’ve stayed until 7 or 8 o’clock or whatever it is. There’s always something else that could be done.

Another stress is trying to keep up to date. Trying to implement all the new stuff that you hear about. On your grade team when there’s one or two people and you’re trying to do planning and all that other stuff which is really time-consuming in addition to all the classroom stuff there’s just too much work to be done.

One of my biggest concerns right now... it just...it just bugs me... is the perception of teachers... other people’s perception of our profession. I remember the first year I was teaching I would look at all the teacher-bashing articles in the paper and my mom, who was, like, 2 years from retirement, would listen to me say “How can you believe this? Listen to what this person is saying? It’s so...” and she would say she didn’t read them anymore. They didn’t know what they were talking about and I would drive myself nuts if I tried to think about that all the time. I would be very defensive for the first few years. It really bothers me that the public does not realize how hard we work. I went to teacher’s college. I’ve taken all these courses. I have a university degree. I’ve studied. I’ve done research. To have someone come in who wants this done, this done, and this done because that’s the way it was done when they were in school. It drives me crazy.

What do I dislike most? Um, parents who get irate with their child or me because of uh, perceived programme difficulties or lack of success with the kid and yet who refuse
to implement suggestions to help that child get better. They take it out on you. They see the lack of success as your problem. They try and shift the blame.

On top of that, our resources are nonexistent. At the places I’ve been, Special Education support has been abysmal. So have periphery ones like speech pathologists and that kind of stuff. I know their ranks are being decimated by the budget crisis. Curriculum resources are woefully inadequate. Over the last few years with the Common Curriculum we have been completely unsure about what it is we are supposed to teach. You know, as of September, 1996 you shall be teaching to the Common Curriculum goals. Well... that’s a little vague. That’s pretty broad. Give me something to work with here. They just give you the basic curriculum and say this is what you should do--do it. Rather than, this is what you should do...here’s something you can use to give you some ideas. In terms of in school stuff, hands-on manipulatives and stuff. I can find enough.

Brenda

Well I think now with all the changes happening in education, teachers are probably feeling very pressured. I think, with cutbacks, that was my biggest cloud overhanging me. My first position originally was only supposed to be just for a couple of weeks and that got extended on a daily basis so I didn’t know what was going on. I was just kind of wondering what was going to happen next. So that was my biggest fear: the cutbacks. Beyond that? The job itself is very stressful. Especially stressful as a beginning teacher. I was there the last 3 weeks before school. Every day. There was also the stress I felt from working with other teachers. I was the young one, the new kid on the block. I was arriving before anyone else and I was leaving at 6:30 at night. It made for long days, but I didn’t take a lot home on the weekends. The thing is...you never
really get any rewards out of it, really. All the hours you put in the overtime. You never really get any super recognition.

I think my biggest concern has to be teacher attitude as far as belonging to a union and dealing with all these cutbacks. You know, there’s talk of cutting back on planning time and some teachers are saying “Well forget that, I’m not bringing my work home, I’ll have to find the time during the day, and I won’t be as prepared then.” I can see the profession sliding, I can see the quality, and our board’s excellent reputation sliding. Morale will definitely go down. You know some teachers are going to arrive 15 minutes before the bell rings and it’s not going to be a pleasant place to work. That’s the scary part. So many people are just so “Union, union, union! I’ve got to go to the latest meeting and I’ve got to go find out this and that. We have rights and we have this and that”... well that’s true, but I do think though that I’m there for the kids in my classroom. I’m there because I want to be there, because I enjoy what I’m doing.

I find also there’s really no follow-up to professional development. I mean with our board’s Learning Outcomes this year... we had an in-service once this year for... I don’t know... half a day or whatever. We’ve never come together again. There was no suggestion to try it out and come together and report back on how it went. No. That was it. Now we should all be using them and we should have no questions and everything should be fine.

The public for the most part really doesn’t understand what is going on in the classroom. Sure, there are some people who think teachers are a real godsend but no one really knows how much we put up with beyond just teaching reading, writing, and spelling. There are so many problems brought into the classroom that teachers have to
cope with every day. On top of that, some people think that we have banker's hours. They think that at 3 o'clock the bell rings and that's it. Quite often they see us leaving with the kids but they don’t know that we are heading out to make it on time to a workshop or something. I feel so guilty when I’m leaving just before the bell rings and the parents are all waiting and some of them even say, even though it's meant as a joke, “oh, leaving before the kids, eh?” Well I know I’ve stayed late so many nights but I start to feel guilty. I always hate that part. That has always kind of upset me, defending the hours and the holidays. People don’t know how early some of us are there or how late we stay and actually do the extra work that people do on weekends and get together with planning and the whole bit. They don’t know any of that. So they just kind of assume you know that we have a pretty easy day.

Chris

I see morale as going down because of all of the problems that we are being faced with. Overall I think it’s still good, most of us still enjoy our jobs but I think a lot of people are frustrated though with the negative publicity and the money problems. When I started over 8 years ago, the contract came up and we negotiated for an increase. Then the social contract hit and the last 3 years I’ve been stuck on the grid. We’ve been...you know, stuck there in one place so it’s hard not to let that get to you.

I found teaching particularly stressful when I first started. I think I had more problems with kid’s behaviour when I first started teaching. Parent interviews were probably the most stressful thing. The first set of report cards along with parents interviews. They were probably the worst thing.
I am concerned about the future and the way public perceives education or what teachers do. I think there are a lot of people out there who appreciate what we do but we don’t hear it that often. The negative newspaper articles and the cutbacks and things going on in our school board seem to stand out more. For example, the role of the Special Education Resource Teacher (SERT) is changing. I know at a lot of schools the SERTs have been taken out of the classroom and they’re not involved as much in the classroom setting. That’s because they are cutting back on the SERT positions.

Other things I would like changed? Fewer kids would be nice. If I could choose the subjects I was going to teach that would be nice. I don’t really like the time that the job takes during the school year. You know, the evenings and the weekends. When three or four nights a week you are doing two or three hours to keep up, you tend to forget the summer ever happened.

Doreen

Most people are a little depressed. But I think with all the teacher-hate that’s going on, the teacher-bashing, I think we are discouraged. But at the same point, you know, while people are really bummed out about things, if there’s something that’s going on, most teachers, they jump on. They get involved and away we go. There’s quite a transition going on in teaching. I feel we’re becoming like a teacher sandwich. We have the community pushing and the Ministry pushing and we just feel like nobody really cares. So for that reason I think that morale is down.

The kids concern me. I’m concerned that their needs, and the needs can be academic, social or emotional, that their needs seem to be getting greater. And I, I don’t know, I’m sure it would be easy to point fingers, all I’m going to say is that the needs are
getting greater. And that seems to be the area where the board is pulling away from supporting. I’m not just too sure about the board’s rationale either. I’m concerned about the buck. I know they have to save money but I’m concerned about what is driving this whole agenda. I think it’s great when kids with special needs are included in the classroom but they still have special needs and they still need special support. Without that support in the classroom, I’m pulled away from other kids. From 90 percent of my class. They need to have a normal-type programme as well. All your energies are put toward a small part of your class and that’s not fair. So I worry, I worry about the kids from that point of view.

I think the community is frustrated and they’re jealous. I mean, I’d be jealous of anybody who had my job when I had to be working and I never had this kind of time. I think the community is frustrated like everyone is. There’s not enough money. They’re being cut back or laid off like everyone is. Attacked in their own workplace. You know, it’s gotta, it just comes down the line. It comes to us.

I’ve always felt that teachers were special because they were people who weren’t driven by dollars and cents, they weren’t driven by figures... they were driven by compassion, by awareness of the needs of others. I resent it if I’m looked upon as a person who works for the money. And I’m not. When I know the time and all that I put into it, that kind of belief makes me sick. But at the board level it’s become client oriented. We have to provide a service and it’s “how are we going to do it with the least amount of money?”

I’m concerned about um, getting up to date with computers. It just seems to change every week, you know? But we just don’t have the money for it. So that’s kind
of frustrating. I thought our school was up to date but it isn’t. We’re behind. It’s scary. Um, new books, particularly the new math books that are coming out. We just don’t have the resources to get them and that’s what is frustrating. I think the days of everyone having their own math book have passed. You just come up with your own activities. But we don’t even have enough money to buy even the teacher guide books. I end up spending my own money. I try not to. I really try to hold back. Things were tight financially for me this year so I tried to hold back but it usually comes out of my pocket. Fortunately I have a husband who understands because really that’s coming out of our own budget. So that’s, that’s a little disturbing.

Ellen

Morale today is bad. People are not looking at the big issues, they’re looking at the little issues instead. I think the public plays a big part too. I mean, we never hear the good things that teachers do. It’s the negative. Or, you’ve got your summers off and you’re making this kind of money and the media builds on that.

I can remember years ago when I was first teaching, on Thursday nights we used to go to Federation meetings and then we’d go off to Yorkdale to shop. We don’t have the fun that we used to have. We don’t have the fun times. We don’t have the staff kinds of things that build morale. I think people are so busy. I don’t know. Why are we so busy? But we all seem to have that difficulty. I mean, I sit in the staffroom with another fellow and we never miss going to the staffroom in the morning for our tea or coffee. People don’t do that anymore.
I think the parents are pulled in by the media and we don’t help that. I think they read the newspaper and they only get half of the story and they run on that and so you’ve got to straighten them out. I think we need to educate our parents.

What stresses me? Probably the paperwork stresses me because it doesn’t fit into my programme. All the itty bitty things that you have to do. Teaching, I love. It’s getting papers down to the office. The hassle of hot dog day. Secretarial kinds of paperwork... I think we need private secretaries in our classroom.

Money is a stressor too. I find I spend a lot of my own money. I end up spending a lot of my own. I buy a lot of material for the kids. I bought them writing folders this year. I bought them portfolio boxes. Over and above what I spent on books. I bought different types of paper for the writing centre. I bought little notebooks, envelopes. That kind of thing that make it more interesting. I buy it whenever I see it for a good price. I’ve spent $600 this year in books. I will have a wonderful library when I’m finished and if you want to do a wonderful programme it lightens the load. It takes the pressure off you. I’m in a position where I have a bit of money that I can spend. That’s not true of the people starting out or with young families. That’s a lot of money.

Also the bigger classes. I had 29 kids with special needs. I just couldn’t get to each kid and they all have something special to share... they all have something to celebrate. So that part of it stresses me.

Frank

I can’t stand to hear how we’re doing nothing and getting paid exorbitant amounts of money. Teachers really resent what is happening as far as the publicity is concerned.
The negative publicity. But they’re dedicated. They will do whatever it is that they feel is best for kids. It’s a tough job:

I find nowadays, the basic lack of respect from the students is stressful. They, they sit there and look at you and they say “Make me!” I have trouble with that because that’s not the way it should be. Part of that also involves dealing with parents who think they know what’s best for their kid. That’s stressful. The fact that the administration is afraid to stand up to parents when the requests of the parents aren’t educationally sound. The principals bend over backwards to accommodate the requests of the parents. That’s a biggie but it stems right from the top. Even our board’s administration sort of support the idea that we are there to satisfy the needs of the parents. As far as I’m concerned I’m there to satisfy the needs of the kids.

Nowadays it’s a societal change. We protect children from having to suffer the consequences of some of their actions. That’s, that’s a big thing. The parents are protecting their kids from everything. They say “not my Johnny, not my Johnny... it had to have been the other child’s fault.” I find they are tunnel-visioned about their own child. They can be the nicest people but I end up teaching their children and they have tunnel vision when it comes to their own child. It sometimes affects how you teach.

I think that the board’s main goal with this whole renewal thing is simply a cost-cutting issue as opposed to what is really good for kids or best for everybody involved. There’s a lot of issues that they haven’t clarified and hopefully um, the people... the powers that be, won’t be just looking at the dollar signs and instead will look at the underlying effects of the decisions.
What do I dislike? All the paperwork. Like, for example, when you want to deal with an issue with a child who’s having difficulty. All the paperwork you have to fill in and all the... everything you have to go through. You have to sit in front of a communal group that basically make you feel like you are not doing your job because the child is not meeting with success. So that’s a really negative part of my job. And I don’t like the trend that is happening in Special Education where the Special Education teachers are working more with the teachers in the school designing programme instead of delivering programme to the kids in need. I mean, that’s why the kids are in need... because they are not successfully coping. Sometimes they just can’t work in a group of 30.

Skills and Strategies

In the excerpts below, the participants are responding to questions relating to the skills they have or the strategies they use to maintain a healthy and dynamic professional and personal demeanour.

Andrew

I just get as much done as possible. I mean I do what I have to do. I don’t leave out anything that’s essential but I do have to compromise sometimes. So I focus on one or two things. Then I work through that. Knowing in the back of my head that rubrics are wonderful evaluation and assessment tools but that I’m already trying to get my portfolios set up and the reading and writing workshops. So uh, I let some things slide into the background. Things are always changing. You have to pick and choose what you are going to try and do.
Professionally I try to keep myself up to date. I started my Master’s this summer. So that’s keeping me a little more up to date. I take what workshops I can that are interesting. I’ve taken Technology and Learning in the Curriculum courses the last 2 years which is a lot of extra time. It was 4 hours basically twice a month for 5 months. That’s how I keep up to date. I set my own goals and I try to meet them.

I know I’ve had to deal with a lot of changes in my career but I like change. I look at it like this: I’ve had more experience in the last 4 years than most people I know who are teaching. I mean, I figured it would take me forever to teach all those grades... 1 year here... 1 year teaching Grade 5... all that stuff and being at all the different schools. Odds are, if I get transferred again, it will be somewhere I’ve already been so it will be a little less stressful. I just treat it as something that is part of the job. I’ve made some close friendships with people even though I’ve moved around a lot. My first teaching partner and I still get together to golf.

I maintain a positive outlook by doing the best I can. Worst case? If I lose my job I’ll do supply work or occasional until I can get something more permanent. I feel I’ve had enough contacts... I’ve had enough experience that in the worst-case scenario I’d still have occasional contracts or something to fall back on.

You just have to be completely confident that what you are doing is the right thing to do and you do your best. I mean you do the best you can for the kids in the few hours that you see them. I get to the parents right off the bat. I send home letters explaining my philosophy, what the kids will be doing, explain some of the activities. That helps.

Resources are a problem but there are ways to get them. Get to know the secretary and the principal. Whoever is in charge of budget. Make sure you make friends
quickly. There's usually lots of stuff that teachers have ordered and that they don't use. I grab that stuff. With administration, you have to be proactive in your approach. You have to say... this is what I want. This is why I need it. This is why it's important. You should find the money for it and, a lot of the time it's not a problem.

I spend less of my own money now than I used to. The only thing I guess I spend money on now is books for the classroom. I don't have a problem with that. But as far as manipulatives and textbooks. No. I borrow. I can get things that way. Then again, I get a lot of teacher resource books free from book clubs and bonus coupons and stuff and I always ask in the book stores if I get a teacher discount.

I've had to change schools frequently and every school is different. I've found that I spend a lot of time at the beginning of the year trying to figure out the focus of the different teachers or their idiosyncrasies and pet projects and that kind of stuff. You have to figure out what the principal values and what the community values. You kind of get a feel for it by looking at other classrooms. You see the kind of things that are in place in terms of school initiatives like whether there's a lot of cross-class projects or school-wide themes or whatever. You see whether or not the principal lets people do their own thing.

I do like to share ideas and things but sometimes I just stay quiet and do my own thing. I latch on to someone I can relate to and get the scoop. What usually happens after a few months is that I find the people that I can relate to and do what I think needs to be done. In the mean time I go to the meetings I have to and work with the people I have to. Generally I put all my energy into making the class work.

I guess I would leave teaching when I start noticing that my attitude changes towards the job or whether or not it's affecting my health. You know, if it gets so
stressful that you can’t handle it. That it’s overwhelming every single day. Then I guess that’s the time to move on. I don’t think that will happen though. I hope it doesn’t.

To be a good teacher you have to have an incredible energy level. You need to be able to get along with the kids, be able to relate to them and see things the way that they see it. Start to look at things from their perspective rather than always your perspective, I guess. Try to understand what it’s like from their point of view. There are always kids that you get frustrated with because it seems that nothing clicks but then you just haven’t found it...I guess.

You do get overwhelmed. There’s always something you want to try and there’s no place to fit it in the programme or there’s no time but you try it and hope that it works and that the kids learn it quickly enough and accept it quickly enough so that it can fit in to everything else that you are doing.

Survival suggestions? Pick one or two things that you can handle. Continuously update your stuff and try new things. I find it beneficial to sit down and think about my goals for the year on my own. The administration can help you with that but they tend to guide you towards their goals. Keep up to date. Don’t get stuck in a rut. Keep enjoying what you are doing. Have fun with it. Don’t take it super seriously. Think of all the funny things that the kids say. That’s what I do. I’m not kidding. There’s always something that will make you laugh. Think about how good your job is. Think about how much fun it is to teach the kids. To watch the little light bulbs go off. And if you are not enjoying that, if you can’t see those things or you can’t find them then you shouldn’t be teaching anyway. If you are not having fun with your kids you are not learning. I think that having fun is important for learning.
Brenda

To get resources I knew about the ordering of curriculum documents. I ordered what I needed. I made connections with people and I worked through my connections. I think it started as being exposed to the material and I would think “Can I get a copy of that?” I went through so many file folders and filing every little thing. I didn’t know what grade level or anything I would be teaching so I wanted to keep everything I could.

Then I would network. So if I’m working with a teacher I would get introduced to the principal. Then I would try to remember that principal’s name. I’ve worked with the consultant and I’ve contacted her and just asked for other resources and her own expertise and we’re sharing things back and forth. I go to workshop sessions, initially, because I want to find out what is new in our board and then because I want to use this stuff in my classroom. I think I’ll always be the person who’s going to workshops because I love going and trying out new ideas. I look through some of the education journals. I pull upon my resources that I’ve collected from different workshops. I talk with my SERT and she recommends reading material. It’s nice when I have other teachers around me who can help me with that.

When I’m stressed I talk with my husband about it a lot. It’s nice to talk to somebody outside of it all to get another opinion. When I ran into problems with another teacher around sharing materials and resources I just knew that I had to do what I had to do and that there’s a way to do it if not through the sharing. I don’t like talking about other people behind their back or in the staff room. Well, I try not to be there when everyone is talking like that. I don’t like to get into the lunch room cliques and sitting with the same people all the time who are the complainers. I like to sit with different
people and go out with different people. Um, I sort of take it in and deal with it as I like. I don’t take everything at face value. I have one person on staff who I can confide in who’s as motivated as I am and that’s going to be my partner for next year.

I don’t think I’ll always be coming in at 7:30 in the morning until 6:00 at night. I’ll do what I can and that’s it, there’s always a tomorrow. I go back into work in the summer to tidy up things in my classroom and get things ready so I won’t have to put so much time in in August. So I’m sort of compromising. I’m able to do it. The school is open. I use part of my holidays to get work done for start-up so it will be less stressful.

I set my own goals. Usually one or two big ones and then other things that I want to keep working on throughout the year. I do what I have to do and I know how to get there and what resources and contacts I need to access. But for other people, I think it is helpful to sit down and sort of look at things and set goals for yourself.

I’m pretty good at saying no to things. I’m beginning to step back and look at my workload and say no. I don’t really have a problem saying no because it is for my own sanity. There always is a bit of guilt though when I say no. I always feel that I’ve got to justify it. You know, “No. Not this time. I’d like to help you out but I’m involved in this and this and this...however think of me next time.” I think I will always be searching for the proper balance.

To be a good teacher you need to have patience, flexibility, and creativity. You can’t keep pulling out the same stuff every year. You also need excellent communication skills, with your co-workers, with the kids and parents. You have to have a drive for professional development. You have to keep on top of things that are changing within
your board, and within your school. You also need to be a team player. If you can, hook up with other teachers at your grade level and share. Share units and share resources.

I think for my own sanity I have to have interests outside of work. I don’t do reading as such. I go for a walk. I like to decorate, I don’t have a lot of money to do that, so, I’ll get by and I’ll do something little. It’s kind of like I have all these little projects.

Chris

I think you have to compromise. Especially if you are team teaching. We don’t often really disagree over things, it does occur but I guess that’s always a compromise. But you get something out of it. You don’t always have the freedom to say that today we are going to do this if your partner is expecting you to do that. I guess dealing with kids is always a compromise... you know, you want to do something and they want to do something else so you do something entirely different.

If I’m stressed when I get home I try to do things in manageable units. I do things I like first. I just go on the computer and check our board e-mail system and see what everybody else is doing. When I have work to do, I do the things I tend to enjoy doing. So, if it’s something I can do on the computer then I’ll go do that first.

With the negative press I try to remember that it’s usually not based on fact anyway... you know, “Oh he doesn’t know what he’s talking about. He left out this and this and that.” There’s not too much you can do about it. Anytime I talk to somebody I try to make them aware of what we do and explain things and hope they understand.

Finding resources takes some time. Mostly you share with other teachers and they point you in the right direction. Teachers are basically supportive of each other. I remember the first year of teaching someone said “Oh I’ll sign off your OSR’s for you”
and I remember thinking...  sure...  what’s that?  Librarians also.  The librarian was good at finding resources in places I wouldn’t think to look.  I think the more people you meet in other schools the more you have access to other resources.  Because you can call up so and so or you can go on the e-mail system and ask if someone has this or that.  Or, you know, you can contact such and such a school to see if they have it.  The e-mail system has been great for that.  We use it both in the school for planning with the Special Ed. Team or even just for conversing back and forth.  I know this year our SERT and my teaching partner and I were on the system and our former librarian was on and there are a number of the teachers in our school who connected that way.  It’s quite useful.

This year I had my own computer on my desk in the classroom.  I bought it for school.  It was wonderful.  I hooked it up to the network.  We have an Apple Talk network in the library.  It’s hooked up to a laser printer and we ran a line over to the classroom.  It is a bit of an expense but if it makes my job easier and means that I take less work home, then it’s worthwhile.

A good teacher must have patience.  The mechanical skills as well.  Um, you know, reading, writing, math, uh, technology for sure now.  You see that on every job ad.  But I think it’s the people skills.  You have to be able to work with people.  If you can’t work with the other teacher then you can’t really expect the students to work with each other.  You set an example that way.  I think I’ve developed those skills.  I’ve always got along well with people but I found as I started teaching that there were a lot of little things that you had to learn that made everything else so much easier.  The little classroom management things.
I get away from school by working on projects at home. We are building our own house. That’s about all there is to it. There isn’t too much beyond that. It certainly makes me focus on something beyond teaching. Sometimes I don’t know if I have a good balance really. Sometimes in the school year I think that all of my energies go into teaching. Then during the summer it swings back the other way.

The summertime is always a time to sit back and think about what you want to do, what you’d like to do. You don’t always do it once you get back... so it’s the ongoing goal setting that I think I really follow through with.

I do feel comfortable saying no. I haven’t really been pressured into saying yes. I guess most of the things that I’ve been asked to do are things that I would like to do anyway. You know, there are some circumstances when I just don’t have the time to do them. I can’t really think of any time that I’ve really been put into that situation. If it was something that I didn’t have time for then I would say no.

Doreen

I’m a busy person. Sometimes I say to myself, “you need a balance here.” And yet, um, that just seems to be my style. There’s so much to do and so little time to do it. I just try to do it all. When things get stressful I have different ways of dealing with it. There’s a group of teachers. There’s only six of us. We get together and we tell raunchy jokes. We’ll bash this, that, and the other thing. We’ll giggle and we’ll laugh and feel better and go on with our day. We get involved with projects. This past year we planned a workshop that we had and presented that to about 80 teachers. I also tend to get involved in things that are active. I like to walk the dog. I’m learning how to roller-blade
and I’m a disc jockey on the side. I do weddings and things. I love it. People dance and I dance with them behind the table.

You do have to compromise. Certainly with team members. I don’t know. It seems to be... life. I don’t know. I’m always adapting to work with someone. Sure you have to compromise because everybody thinks their ideas are the best. So you certainly have to compromise. Um, I take a little bit of what everybody is saying... and use it like a recipe. That’s what I do. I’ve made a recipe. Season it how you want. But isn’t that life though? Don’t you have to do that? Isn’t that coping? Things don’t happen just for you, you have to work with other people.

I imagine if I was in a situation where things weren’t working out I would ignore it. I would go on with something else. That’s my way of dealing with things. If I have to, I will stand up and be heard. Usually I would just busy myself in another way so that I’m not involved with whatever I have trouble with.

We are going through a big change process in our board and I think there’s going to be hurt feelings and there’s going to be hateful feelings but it would be nice if the change, if through the change, we had some caring and compassion. You know, I do find at school that I will say things. I’m not a person to sit in the staff room and deal with all the kerfuffle, but at a staff meeting I hear what people are saying then try and put it into my own words. I think I respect what other staff members say and they do with me too.

When people talk negatively about my job in the past I’ve been hurt. I think, I’m doing it in a different way now. That would be just to say... you’re right. I do have an excellent job. Mind you, I work hard for your child and I am always an advocate for your
child. If they don't think I'm doing what needs to be done then either the two of us have
to talk or they need to go to my administration.

I think to be a really good teacher you really have to like what you are doing. I
think you have to be totally thrilled with the whole idea of teaching. That it's not a job.
It is a profession. It is an opportunity. You have to have a sense of humour so that you
can laugh with the kids. You can laugh at yourself because every once in a while we do
make mistakes. You've got to be... I'll use the term lifelong learner. When someone says
that to me, I say "Do you mean I'm slow?" What I mean in this case is that you are
always wanting to find out something new. Always wanting... always wanting to be on
the edge. That's what I'd like to see in teachers out there. When there is a new format
for something... there's a new way of doing something... there's new equipment for doing
something or new ideas about something... that the teacher wants to be out there finding
out about it. Getting together with people is essential. Hook up with people who want to
try things out with you. Your team or a consultant who'll see you through. Don't do it
all alone. Because then you don't know what's good and what's bad. You can't find
your way. Don't be afraid to ask your kids... "What do you think of this?" Don't be
afraid to ask the parents how you are doing. How does your child feel about coming to
school? Celebrate in the job. When you finish something, party. We do it all the time
here. I think it's really important.

I try to keep up to date with what's new out there. I think sometimes I get so
busy doing the job that I don't take the time to do you know, little quickie courses that the
board offers. I'm energized but I don't always take the time to see what's out there. I
think that's why it's important that teachers buddy up. I like to converse with our
consultant. I like to talk to her about things. I sign up for workshops. My friends and I keep ourselves up to date you know, just by getting together and talking about ideas. Getting involved in writing curriculum keeps me up to date too.

I'm not good at saying no. I don't know my alphabet. I don't know the letters between M and P. I always think that if you say no you are going to miss out on something. You might miss the golden opportunity. You just don't know what you are going to see there.

Ellen

I think as a teacher today you must keep up to date. You must choose to read. There is such wonderful research out there which tells you so much about kids. I think, once you’ve established child development, you know, the stages of growth that kids go through, then it makes your teaching a lot more easy, too. And there certainly are resources out there now. You just have to tap them. I think that’s where some of us fall down. We don’t use our support systems. When I was at teacher’s college I was taught there were seven concepts of discipline. If you couldn’t handle that in a classroom then you were in trouble. So a lot of us feel that we can’t ask for help. Whereas I still go to all the support systems and I think we have to use our consultants. Lots of people won’t because they’d look at it as though “Well, I’m inferior because I can’t figure this out on my own. I have to call in somebody else.” Two heads are greater than one. The SERT role is abused as well. People do not use their SERT effectively. They give the SERT kids and say “fix them.” A good SERT should have a lot of that kind of developmental research and stuff to give teachers. I think we need to tap into other people.
I think too, what we need to work on is that people have a really negative view of parents. I think, and I've always believed that my parents are my ambassadors. If I don't have a good rapport with my parents, then I'm not worth too much. If you are out on duty then or morning duty, I always make a point of going over to talk with the parents and sharing the successes of the kids. I think we have to do that. We have to do our PR.

I handle stress by working in my garden. When I come home at night I have a very supportive husband. On the weekends I just kind of pull into my own little shell here and my husband and I enjoy doing things together. I look for the positive in people and I look for change in everything I do. I change my garden, I change my decorating, I change my clothes, I change... I'm always looking for something to be new and do it better. That helps with the stress.

Professionally, I don't worry about my security and if I don't get along with my principal it doesn't bother me too much. I come home and complain about her but I know that people respect what I do. People who mean something to me. I also find that professionally I do a lot of in-servicing for teachers. I've done a lot of workshops this year. I find it stressful but I also find it extremely rewarding. So maybe sometimes we have to battle these kinds of challenges. I take that by the horns and I go and throw myself to the dogs and say “OK, this is what I'm going to do.”

If I'm unhappy about something I will go in and speak to my principal but that would be as a final measure. I'm not really confrontational. I stay away from negative situations. I don't have the strength to deal with that. I move away... it keeps me healthy.

Good teachers need to be up to date. They need to be flexible and they need to have passion. They have to believe in what they are doing. To get excited over seeing
someone learning. To be excited about their job. I mean, you get excited over your decorating or you’re excited about your garden, you kind of celebrate those things. You know, like try it. Plant some lilies. That kind of celebration. I think if you believe in yourself it’s easy to believe in others. Good teachers have to be interested in kids and love working with them. Organization, I think, helps too. They need to be an agent of change both for themselves and others.

Reflection is a large part of what I do. I involve the kids in it. It’s part of my timetable. I do that more now than I used to. Because that’s the way I teach. Now that I reflect, I see myself as a better writer. I see myself as a better thinker. I’m thinking more about what I’m doing. I’m constantly modifying and changing which I never used to do. I think it’s because of the different approach I take and I can see how it’s made a difference for me and for the kids. It’s made them better students. It’s made me a better teacher.

I think that I set my own goals. My goal for this year was my math programme. So I personally set that goal. Last year my goal was to really have a good literacy-based programme. So I do set goals for myself. I don’t consciously plan it at the beginning. It just sort of goes along. I know what I want to end up with so it is constantly in my mind as I go through the year.

To be a survivor you need to find a mentor. Find somebody that you think you can relate to. It could be someone older or the same age. Someone that you can be secure with and that you know you can sound off with when you are frustrated. That to me is the...the mentoring programme. I don’t know whether they still do that in the board. We need to support each other and challenge each other. We need to connect. It’s just like
in the classroom. The whole thing about learning is being able to share that learning with someone else. Not to have to iron it out on your own but to be able to connect with others. Also, don’t be concerned about everything. Pick one area that you are going to focus on for your first year and try not to do the whole thing at once and do it perfectly. Certainly look for support. Anybody who can give you some support is going to be a big help. Like I think, cutting back on the support. The consultants. I think that is a big mistake. Not only for beginning teachers but for all of us who are learning all the time and need support when the learning gets tough.

In general, I just keep going. I believe in myself. I can get knocked down and I get up and try again. I just don’t give up. I’m just not that type of person. I always look at the positive side. You know, you can be down and out but the next direction is up.

Frank

I manage stress really well. I’m just really low-key. I don’t let it bother me. I go on with my job. I do my job well and I’m secure in that way. I don’t let other things bother me. I have a lot of outside interests that I involve myself in and that helps. Golfing is one. I enjoy that. It keeps me busy. My wife and I, both being in the profession, if we’ve had a particularly stressful day we can very easily come home and open a beer or have a glass of wine and just sit and relax for a few minutes. I’ve always been able to leave school worries at school.

Professionally I deal with it much the same way. I keep myself busy. If you’re really busy you don’t have time to sit and worry or stew over something that you can’t do much about. I speak my mind. If something bothers me, if it’s not what I had in mind or it wasn’t what I understood it was going to be, I speak my mind.
I am balanced. I mean there are times when I say, even say to my principal...I just can’t do that. That’s it. I’m not doing that because I can’t. I learned to do that very early on in my career. I found that unless you did do it... stand up and say no every once and a while... you were sunk. There was just more and more pressure on your shoulders and more and more things that you needed to have done.

I deal with parents quite openly and quite bluntly. Sometimes they get angry with me but they come around because they begin to see that I know what I’m doing. I’m finding that you develop a reputation in the community. The first year and the second year, you prove yourself and years after that you are known. I find also that if you don’t prove yourself as a teacher right away then you are dead in the water. You need to get out there and communicate with the parents.

Compromise is a big part of the job. We have to compromise every day in our profession. We are dealing with people and that’s the only way to deal with people. I usually shrug it off if I have to compromise. I know that if I have to give up something now, the next time I’ll gain. In return, I’ve won or gained other things because it’s all part of the negotiating and the compromise of working with a group of people.

There are always things that you are reluctant to deal with but if it’s part of your job then it’s part of your job. You do stuff that you don’t want to do but if you see it as important to your role then you do it.

I spend less and less of my own money. There’s less and less of it to spend. Especially with my kids getting older and demanding more and more of the family resources. They are going into college and things like that. Um, certainly I do spend a lot of money on my own professional books. My own professional upgrading.
A good teacher is someone who has patience. Someone with a sense of humour. They have the ability to see the good in just about any child. They have the ability to capitalize at the spur of the moment on that goodness. Take advantage of the moment. Flexibility. I think flexibility is a big plus. I think it is something that I really do have. It never bothers me when someone comes up and says... “I have to change this because something has happened.” Big deal... that happens. So, I’ll teach off-the-cuff today. I think that’s a big one. Being well prepared for anything is an important way to maintain flexibility. Realize that success is sometimes measured in small quantities as opposed to looking for the big picture. Be accepting of some of the things that you may not agree with at times. Things like knowing very well that a lot of the parents are going to do work for the kids. You know, you get projects from the kids and you think there’s not a hope in hell that this kid has ever written this. You just learn to hope that they’ve learned something in the process.

I’ve always done my own goal setting. I always go in to meet with my principal prepared. Simply because I’d rather set my own goals than have anyone else do it. I know at some times the administration will have goals for you and that’s fair. They have school goals. Generally I go in with goals that suit their philosophy because you know what they are looking for. That’s what I mean by being prepared.

I consider myself a lifelong learner. I’m always looking at new things to do. Our board e-mail system is one way of finding out what is available out there. The other way is to keep your eye on things that come into the school. I think it’s up to me personally to create or find my own professional development. In any school I’ve been in that’s how it
works. Now I've been part of the Professional Development committee so I see everything that comes in.

To survive in the profession my advice would be, number one, to balance your life and don't give 110% to your professional life and nothing to your home life. Your home life is the most important. You need that support. Number two, be flexible, and number three, don't sweat it out. Relax and enjoy your job. If times are tough at the moment then just do what you can and prioritize and leave the rest for another day. You have to enjoy what you are doing and you have to have fun doing it. Or you're not going to survive. And if I don't have fun at work I come home and have fun.

Opportunities for Support

In the following excerpts, the participants share their feelings and experiences regarding the support structures in place for teachers.

Andrew

The system hasn't been particularly supportive. Every March I get ready to get a letter that I'm either excess or surplus or redundant to the board. Every August I find out what I'm teaching... if I'm lucky.

The process that takes place when you change schools really never differs. Usually, if I know where I'm going, there's the introduction to the staff during the last month of school and I remember absolutely no names and they say "Oh yah, here's the new guy." If they know a bit about you they may try to match you up with staff...or with a certain class. Generally, you just get placed wherever they need somebody. It's
because they don’t know you. And you don’t have a chance. There’s not enough time to figure out a month before school. So it’s usually only the teachers in the classroom around me who I get to know well.

I learn what’s happening through watching and talking with other people and having to do certain things. You just pick up on those types of cues. Because I’ve been in positions where I have shared my contract between schools, it’s hard to coordinate what everyone is doing. Especially last year when I wasn’t there on Mondays. I started to feel a little overloaded because if we were doing a big centre thing or rotations through the library and that kind of stuff... then I was planning for the person who was in for me on Monday as well as planning for the school that I was going to be at. I made two sets of plans for each Monday.

I have supported myself by finding my own leadership opportunities. Finding out what’s available is usually a hit-and-miss process. You have to keep an eye on any of the posters that come into the staff room. I’ve been doing my Master of Education. It’s just so much fun being in that class. I think a lot more about what I’m learning now than when I was in university. I’m being a lot more critical too. Not just accepting everything I hear.

The kids support me too. Nearly every single day there is something that some kid says or does that just makes it. The absolutely hilarious things that the kids say and do. When you can look at a kid in September and then see him in June and compare the work samples and see a kid that has really tried.

Recognition is extremely important to me. It's another aspect of support. This year was the first principal I’ve had that has gone out of his way to write a letter or put
something in my file that says I’ve done something or has gone out of his way to get me some spares so that I can continue to do the stuff I do. It makes me feel higher than a kite. And principals… that’s exactly what they need to do. It keeps us motivated. It’s re-energizing. At the time you think you are doing all this stuff and no one notices. No one has said thank you. Just even a minor notice really helps. I love recognition from the kids. I think it’s important that kids like me. I like to have parents on my side. And when it’s from your peers… other teachers saying good things about your programme, it feels good. It’s fulfilling.

There are formal opportunities for recognition. There’s the Teacher Excellence Award… whatever it is… the ACE awards. You look through any journal and there’s always this scholarship or this award for teaching excellence. Though, it’s not well publicized and I don’t think teachers go out of their way to seek that kind of recognition.

The evaluation process for me has been varied. So widely different between administration that it’s not even the same process. My first year out of Teacher’s College, I knew that I was going to be evaluated to the hilt. I knew it was going to be five times over the first 2 years so I figured I would have three in the first year. I went to my principal in January and asked him if I was supposed to have an evaluation a few times that year and he said “Well there’s your first one.” He had just printed it. I didn’t even know I was being evaluated. It was very casual and he came in and out and observed very casually. So my first year it didn’t feel like a formal evaluation whatsoever. My next year was a bit different because we had an interview process at the beginning where we set goals and he spent an entire 20 minutes in my room for the entire year. This was followed by a letter saying here’s what I saw. Then the next year I was evaluated again
because “You are at a new school now and I evaluate everyone who is coming in.” That was the most distressing because it was so formal. It was an hour interview beforehand for goal setting. Then nine times over a 2 month period he popped in at random and stayed for 45 minutes... completely... and so from the one point, I can see from an administration standpoint that that’s good. I mean you can get a truer reflection of what’s going on in the classroom if you just did it randomly. And I can understand that completely. But when it was planned before, I knew damn well that when it was time to be evaluated I was going to have a really good lesson planned. I haven’t received much feedback though. All I got was a written observation of what had taken place in the classroom. Nobody ever in the first 3 years gave me anything concrete to go by or gave me any feedback such as “You need to start doing this... or try this... or try that.” They just seemed to be keeping tabs to make sure that no catastrophe’s happening. That’s what the supervision and evaluation process seems like right now. Damage control. If there’s a problem get on it... but if things look like they are going OK then just let it ride. It’s usually been an exercise in paperwork that needs to be done.

Brenda

This was a year of survival. I mean, in the Grade 1 role as far as teaching the reading and the writing, I took a teaching reading course in Teacher’s College but there was nothing that I learned in that course. I wanted to take Teaching Reading Part One but it wasn’t offered anywhere here. So I felt for Grade 1, I wasn’t prepared in that sense, so I sort of read up, and did my own things and found out what I needed so I could do it.

As I said before, there is not a lot of follow-up to professional development. It’s sort of like, this is kind of what’s happening, you should be doing it, but if you’re not, you
should be thinking about it. But there never seems to be any follow-up. It’s sort of, “You know what to do, you’re professionals, then go with it.” Those who don’t, well, if you don’t, you don’t.

This year, I heard that they had the evaluation process last year at my school and the principal lost the disk so nobody ever had a follow-up. Well, the last week of school, the Monday, we had something in our mailbox that asked us to reflect on this year. Did we meet our goals? Well, there never were any goals out so we kind of looked back and filled stuff in. She’s supposed to mail us a letter this summer about it.

At the beginning of the year though, my principal said to me that if there was anything that I needed, any resources or if I’m unsure of anything then she’s there for me if I need. I could call her at home. I could talk to her at school. If I wanted to officially set goals or write things down and submit them to her, she said she would be willing to sit down with me but it wasn’t required as such. So I talked to her. You know, chatted with her about portfolios and so on about the things that I planned to get involved in and that was it. I was comfortable with that. I didn’t need the process. I networked with the consultants and other people that I know in the board. I wasn’t by myself to sort through matters.

Recognition is important to me. I get it from myself. I get it from parents in my class. They give me a kind word or write me a note or send me a card or give me a gift. I get it from my principal sometimes. Definitely I get it from my supportive teaching partner. She’s always there with a pat on the back for me.
Chris

I knew that I had my job only a couple of days before Christmas. So there wasn't very much notice before I started. I just remember arriving and the teacher who had retired who I was replacing had taken everything out of his day book. There was nothing there from the Fall to see what they had done. So all I could do was ask the kids what they had done. Did you do this, did you do that? Fortunately the other two Grade 8 teachers were a big help. We did pretty much the same thing. So it was great. These other two teachers kept handing me things. You know, this is what we are doing today. A lot of times they would tell me to bring my kids into the pod and we would do things altogether with three classes in the pod. When I started I didn't get the traditional tour around the school and opportunity to meet everybody like they do if you start at the beginning of the year. I missed a lot of the beginning of the year start-up things.

Teaming is great. You get lots of great ideas that way. You know, it's not that I don't have enough good ideas on my own that I have to get them from other people but it's just the benefit of working with people who have different strengths in different areas. I also worked a lot with our librarian and the consultants.

When I wanted to take my leave, there was no problem. I just said "This is what I want to do. I don't know if I'm going to come back at Christmas or the March Break but it will be the March Break at the latest." They said that it was fine. My principal just said to let him know by November which date I would be coming back by.

I didn't formally have a mentor. I just worked on my own at connecting with other teachers in the school. There wasn't anything formal at all. It might have helped
although I guess informally the staff did a good job of helping me. I think that’s true in most cases. Somebody in the school will take on that role.

I’ve tried to support others. For example, there haven’t been that many teachers coming in but when they have I’ve tried to take on a supportive role and do that for them like it was done for me. I help out in areas where I have strengths, like with the technology. I just spent an hour at somebody’s house who was having trouble with one of the computers from our library. I’ve done some workshops. That kind of thing. As well as just being the problem solver.

I’ve only had one real evaluation where there’s been anything formal. It was a couple of years ago. I’d have to remember back. It was done with the principal and I think my teaching partner and I went through it at the same time. In fact I think the three of us may have done it at the same time. The SERT was working with us. Not that we did it altogether. We always met together about it but we sort of were working on it at the same time. That’s how I remember it anyway. It was very positive.

It’s nice when someone recognizes you for a job well done. I’d say it comes fairly equally from different places. Maybe not quite as much from parents, although you do get recognition from them as well. From parents, sometimes it will just be a comment or a note or something like that. From teachers it’s usually just comments. With kids you can always tell whether they like it or whether they are learning something or not. It comes from the principal both informally and formally with things like year-end letters or just during the year and a little note of thanks would be put in your box.
I remember when I reentered teaching after having my family and I was given this huge binder and I said “I’m... I’d like some guidance, what do I do?” They just gave me the binder and I thought... where do I start? You know... I was told it just happens. And I thought, I need more guidance than this!

I had a mentor when I first started. I think I did, although that word was not around. I had two wonderful ladies right on either side of me. I remember my principal saying to me, “If you ever want to, want to mold yourself after someone, watch Mrs. Smith.” And I did. She worked hard. She was always out for the kids and it’s not that we ever talked a lot of school stuff, I just found that watching her classroom stuff was a learning experience. I think it’s important that teachers buddy up so that you have someone who you do these sorts of PD things with. You know, if it were you and I that were partners, maybe my strength is to be doing one thing and your strength is to take the time to read up on other things that are available out there. Then you connect with me and say “Hey have you tried this?” and then the two of us would share. It’s important to do that so that I’ll look forward to coming to school, so that my colleagues look forward to coming to school and so that the kids look forward to coming to school.

I went to a whole language conference in New York state two summers ago and I had to pay for it totally myself because it was; a) out of the province, and; b) I didn’t get the grace of the board to go. I really enjoyed it and I thought that it was stimulating and I think that if everybody could have a chance to do that once every couple of years it would be so beneficial. I like to get involved with projects. This past year, with the Phys. Ed.
consultant and some other teachers, we planned a workshop that we presented to about 80 teachers. Then a colleague and I helped the consultant write a Grade 4, 5, 6, and 7 human sexuality programme. That was neat. I guess what I was getting at is that, when I deal with that group, that’s a diversion. The consultant always gets me laughing about something and I forget my crummy day. So it’s a give and take. Very much so. And it’s so with the administration as well. When I came here my principal was awesome. I mean she knew programme. Every staff meeting was an in-service. It was amazing. She cared about you. She cared about kids. She could look at you and say, “Something tells me you’re just not feeling your best today. Come into my office and let’s talk about it.” I mean, it just kind of blew me away.

I support teachers and students in any way that I can. When something works well, when somebody does something well and you comment on that, you can make their day. You can help out in some small way and you know it right away. You don’t have to wait for great big lengths of time. I like that. I just like being with people. It’s just a great job for me.

I’m not sure that the board supports us in finding a balance. I sometimes find that they talk the talk. They say that you should keep things in balance and yet the expectations are that you could do so much more. I mean, I had a personal experience, not at this school, where a principal said, “Well you’ve got to keep things in balance.” I said “OK fine. I’m not going to go to that workshop.” His answer was “But you have to!” When I didn’t, he came down, pulled me from my room and took me to the workshop because he wanted it to appear that his staff was in full support of this. So even though I had said I’d opted out of this, it didn’t happen.
There is a support system through the board that does offer you some personal help. It's easily accessible. When I felt things weren't good with the boys and I was concerned that my whole family was going in different directions and I could see stress developing in our family, I wanted some outside help. It was no problem getting it. I've offered that suggestion to others who need some outside assistance.

I really question the whole evaluation process. Again, it's only from my own personal experience. When I read my report after I'm evaluated and it says, "She does this well, does this well and does this well." I think... yah, yah, yah. I want to move on from there. So I went to my principal this year and said I would really like to have a manager's letter format. At the beginning of the year we set out some goals. I set out my personal goals, my academic goals, my class goals, and my school goals so that at the end of the year I'll see how I managed. How did I fare? I think that keeps you on track. You don't jam for one little section of lessons and then get on with it. Well, the end of the year I got an awesome letter from my principal. I think administration try and make it meaningful but again, it's workload. You become so busy doing things that you don't have the time to followup and see. I know, there were evaluations written up this year where the person writing it was never in the classroom. That tells me there's something wrong with that system.

Recognition is important to me. I get it from the kids who come in early in the morning when they don't have to. They just want to be there. I get it from the parents. I don't know if parents ever realize how much their little notes mean. I get it from my staff members. They'll either say things or write me notes. I've always been fortunate that way.
Ellen

We have to educate each other. People who are not taking in-service or who have not professionally developed themselves, or haven't done any professional reading, they are really starting from behind. Somehow we have to get these people on board too. That way parents trust what we say. They may see and believe in what I'm doing but they wonder if their kids are going to get it next year as well. So you have to do it slowly. People can be threatened by new things. I would go into the staff room with stuff I had done with the kids or the kids had done in class and then they'd start to make their way into my room. You could just see their eyes going around and taking everything in. Another example is literature circles. Someone was wanting to know about literature circles. Well there's a great book out. So I said, "This is a really easy read. Just take it home and post-it when you see things that you think are applicable to your class."

Whatever I can do to stretch people and support their interests, I do.

I had a situation this year where I was rearranging my room and my principal came to me and said "I don’t want you to. I’m sorry but I wish you’d told me that you were rearranging your room because I don’t like it.” I said “What’s the problem?” She said “It’s too easy to see and I don’t want the parents to see in.” I said, “Have you got a problem with that?” and she said, “Yah, a big-time problem. I don’t want parents just walking in.” And yet, in the other breath she is saying to me we need to romance the parents.

I like to learn new things and share what I’ve learned with others. Yes. Actually, that’s what I’m working on with this writing team. I wish I had as much knowledge about the job, and I don’t think it’s necessarily what I’ve learned on the job as much as it
is the people that I've met that have presented me with challenges. The consultant type of people. And also, again, my reading has really triggered a desire to learn more.

I'm no longer that person who stands at the front dictating. The kids teach me. We are all learners together. That's a big change. I mean, I used to be the authority. I mean, I was the teacher. Now we are all learners together. I really believe in that and I think even when you are doing your professional reading and saying yes... we should be lifelong learners and we should be giving children choice that you realize that's what we are already doing. Every day, I learn something from the kids or the kids confirm what I've always believed in, that they can do this, or they can learn in this way, or they can question.

I don't find the system is supportive about keeping a balance. They are always wanting more. And it's the kind of job where there is always more to do. If you are that kind of a person you can work and work and never reach the end. I think that sometimes administrators who have been out of the role for so long have high expectations of the everyday teacher. They forget what it's like. I think that's part of the reason why we have so much unrest. It's because the expectations are always so high. Our board has been notorious for trying out new things and getting on the bandwagon. It always seems that the Primary division is where everything starts then it gets to Grade 3 and dissipates.

Our evaluation process is not ongoing. It's not an across-the-board evaluation. I got an evaluation at the last school only because I was leaving. I'm sure I got an evaluation this year only because when I came in and I was commenting on the fact that we don't have an evaluation process and that I'd come from a school where I'd only got it because I was leaving. Well, this principal hadn't done it in 3 years. So, all of a sudden
she's become very aware of the need to be doing them. So, I happened to get chosen this year to get evaluated but it was a joke. She'd set up a date and then cancel it. It got down to the end when she was going to have to write up her letter that she came in and figured she had better see something. I have yet to be in a school where the process has been anything effective.

Professional development can't be an option. We have to do it. Most principals I've had are certainly keen. My last principal was certainly supportive. He saw it as important to get things across to staff. So he was very supportive of me and would encourage me to go out and take courses or give me the money to buy things that were needed. I think administrators need to be more like that. There have been some really good workshops available but a lot of it is often during the day and you have to have coverage for that time period. Due to that, I think as a staff we have to become more flexible and more creative in how we support our professional development. It doesn't mean that you are the best teacher but it's nice to know that you can get another perspective and just go to other classes and see what's happening within our own schools and within our own board. We can learn so much from each other.

Recognition? I'm just like the kids. I want someone to tell me that I'm doing a good job. Not that I need them to but it's nice when someone notices the hard work that I do. I'm proud of what I'm doing and it just gives me that much more enthusiasm to do better. I think we all want to be recognized. I think the people who aren't willing to recognize what you do, hurt you. They are often consumed by their jealousy or their insecurities. We all have our strengths and we should build on that and recognize it. It
used to be principals would leave little notes on your desk. It puts your chest out a little. You know? Most people don’t take the time to do that anymore.

But you know we could probably be mentors with our own peers. We don’t do enough of that. We need to support each other and challenge each other. We need to connect. It’s just like in the classroom. The whole thing about learning is being able to share that learning with someone else. Not to have to iron it out on your own but to be able to connect with others. There’s safety in numbers. We have to feel safe and secure. It’s just like kids. We don’t get good results if the child is feeling insecure or feels that they can’t take a risk.

Frank

Actually, I taught with a lady during my first year of teaching. She was across the hall from me and she was sort of a mentor. And she was about 55 and well respected in the community. I mean this lady...she’s retired now. She was so highly respected by everybody. I also had a very old school principal for my first teaching experience. He walked in during August, while I was setting up, and gave me a book which was about 30 pages long outlining what he expected my room to look like.

Most administrators are pretty good at knowing what your comfort level is. Also most are of the philosophy that if you’re not at your comfort level then you are not doing your best teaching. I don’t think they would put you somewhere where you’d be really unhappy. Not against your will. I have yet to see anybody that would.

Very early on I realized that the administrative role lacked contact with the kids. That’s the whole purpose of why I chose to go into the profession in the first place. There was a time when I wanted to get out of the classroom and work in a different aspect. I did
that through the Phys. Ed. That gave me leadership. You do get a lot of opportunities to dabble in administration. I have to do all the ordering and the administration of the track team. I’m in the school in a leadership role. I’m directing an entire part of the programme for the whole school. I’m working with just about every class in the school. It also gave me the vitality.

I work on writing curriculum...delivering workshops. I work with a group of teachers. We are all about the same age and we all work with the Phys. Ed. consultant. If you look at the Phys. Ed. curriculum that has come out in the last 10 years you’ll see at least two of our names on it. Our main goal was; we saw the consultant losing control of her ability to have an effect because she was being spread so thin. Every year they were adding more and more on to her role as a consultant. So we became her support group in the Phys Ed. and Health angle. We will meet with her to do Phys Ed. things. We help her write. We help her deliver. And whatnot...we’ve just all become very good friends. We laugh.

How do I support my colleagues? Well I try to give them as much positive feedback as I can as far as the job they’re doing. I’ve only been in the situation maybe once where the teacher really was depressed. It had nothing to do with what was really going on but it was the community’s perception. It had to do with an issue that had happened a couple of years before and she just needed the support of someone saying “Look you are doing a good job.”

The evaluation process has been varied. It’s been different with different people. I found that there was one administrator that I worked with a few years back and it was probably the most excruciating experience of my life. It was positive, but he decided that
because we were working in a team, he wanted to do the evaluation as a team. So, he arranged with us that he was going to spread it out over a full week. You had no idea when he was going to arrive in your room. You just knew that over that week he would come in. At the end, the three of us sat down with him and said that it was the most excruciatingly painful experience that we’d had. We just felt that the process was too long for that particular purpose.

I need recognition. Very much so. How do I get it? By doing good things. By doing lots of good things. I think it’s really important that the administrator recognize the good things that you do. Even the small things that you do in the school. Let’s face it. Every school has it. They have the teachers who are dynamic teachers but don’t ever walk outside their classroom doors. They don’t ever get involved in things outside their classroom. That’s fine. They are still good teachers. There are also the teachers who may not be as equally dynamic but are team players and who are heavily involved in other parts of the school and they need to be recognized too. I think a lot of mine comes from parents of the kids that I’m involved with. I find that because I’m involved in the athletic aspect of the school I’m constantly in a position to chat with the parents. They give you feedback and it’s honest. It’s important that it’s worthwhile. I value being recognized for the important things and not necessarily the itty-bitty things. It’s got to be meaningful and it’s got to be done immediately. You can’t wait until the end of the year with a letter that says thank you for this, thank you for that. You can’t remember what you’ve done.
Figure 4. Chapter 4 concept map.

Excerpts from the Individual Interviews reflect the Personal Histories and Educational Experiences of the Six Teachers in relation to Preparedness, Concerns, Skills and Strategies Developed, and Support Found and Shared for the Job of Teaching.
CHAPTER FIVE: INTERPRETATION OF THE DATA

“Be flexible. Be willing to change if you start into something and it’s not going right. You know, you don’t have to beat your head against a brick wall to try and make it work. Learn to give up if you have to or find another way of getting it done.”

-Chris

Overview

As mentioned in the methodology section of Chapter 3, the interviews were reviewed for common key words, phrases or anecdotes (Rubin & Rubin, 1995) that related to skills or strategies used for coping and that also might connect to the literature on invitational education (Purkey & Novak, 1984, 1996) or perceptual psychology (Combs, 1965). After this extensive review, three themes emerged. They are as follows: frustration, perception of the value of teaching and learning, and commitment. Furthermore, these themes emerged within the context of personal narratives that dealt with initiative-taking ability, perception of self and others, interaction with other people, and celebrations.

To begin with, these teachers saw teaching as a stressful job in which they alone were responsible for their survival. Despite the fact that they highly recommended developing supportive relationships, many of the strategies that they used successfully involved making independent decisions regarding their classrooms, their students, and their own personal and professional goals. While these strategies were certainly an effective way for them to cope with the problems that they were faced with daily, this dichotomy between what they valued and what they were required to do created some
level of frustration. When Doreen talks about her sense of frustration around the lack of resources she is highlighting the fact that she feels that people say education is important but not important enough to spend money on. In a sense, the coping strategies or survival skills that these teachers have developed are a way to deal with the roadblocks or frustrations within their jobs. To illustrate this, it is useful to refer back to Brenda’s anecdote in Chapter 4 in which she talks about how she is very comfortable setting her own professional goals and reflecting back on those goals at the end of the year. This comfort has come about as a result of her having to deal with her frustration with the professional development opportunities offered at her school. She feels that many of the professional development opportunities are haphazard at best and are rarely followed up by her administration or colleagues.

Additional frustrations result from direct intervention by others in the decisions and choices that these teachers make. For example, there have been times when these teachers have made a conscious choice to follow a specific course of action and that choice is subsequently taken away from them. Doreen’s story about choosing not to go to a workshop and then having her principal literally come down and remove her from her classroom in order for her to attend is just one example of this. When Ellen made a concerted effort to change the atmosphere in her room by moving things around and altering the look of her classroom in other ways, she was told by her principal to change it all back.

Both of these teachers apparently managed to cope in these situations but the coping strategies certainly did not change the frustration that they felt in the first place. In fact, all of the participants could easily relate stories in which they had experienced anger,
isolation, or confrontation and yet were able to cope with it. It is clear though, that while they were all able to share with me the ways that they coped with these situations, they would have felt less disappointed or frustrated if the system were structured in such a way that these opportunities for frustration arose less frequently.

In spite of the frustrations and stressors, it will become apparent when looking more closely at the key concepts, that, as mentioned earlier, these teachers knew that regardless of the programmes available to support them, they were basically on their own when it came to surviving and thriving. In essence, they recognized that the system did not, as a result of its basic structure, support them. Instead, they found ways to create that support through their own personal choices. It is for this reason that these people were defined as survivors by their colleagues. They were people who were thriving and dynamic in the classroom and were characterized by their colleagues as good teachers.

The second theme that arose out of the data was that all of these participants saw their job as a socially important one. They saw a high level of value in what they did as teachers. They saw the value to society in the long run but primarily they saw the value of what they did with the students they teach. When Andrew said he needed to spend “countless hours” on work so that he could do the best he could do, he was responding to the reality that, in order to be of value to all the kids in his classroom, he needed to come highly prepared. When Brenda talked about the problems that teachers had to cope with in a classroom on a day-to-day basis, she was highlighting the fact that there were some very needy children in the school communities whose only positive role model was the teacher. When Chris related his concerns about cutbacks to Special Education teachers, he was expressing a concern about not being able to be as valuable and supportive to the
kids in his classroom who were in need. Doreen plainly stated that she was worried “about the kids” in the face of board cutbacks and layoffs. Ellen recognized that sometimes it was only the teacher in a child’s life who was willing to listen and recognize the specialness of each child. Frank says “it’s a tough job” but that teachers “do whatever it is that they feel is best for kids.” These teachers then, although frustrated, recognized the need for and the value of dedicated educators.

The third theme that arose out of the data was related to commitment. Combs’ (1965) stated that commitment takes the form of personal involvement. This personal involvement is with ideas, classroom programme, students, the profession, and colleagues. As will be discussed, in relation to the concepts, all of the participants had a high level of commitment in all of these areas.

When these three themes were put together, it became obvious that teachers were faced with situations that required “two or more different kinds of behaviour, based on two or more different sets of guidelines or values which are in conflict” (Hinkle, 1987, p. 562). It was their perception of themselves and their job that was in conflict. These teachers knew that their job was important. They saw the value in what they did every day with their students and they were committed to being good educators. Yet they felt undervalued by the community around them. The community had become much more active in criticizing these teachers’ professional decisions than they used to be (Farber, 1984). Either the communities felt that teachers did not do an important job and that in reality they were simply engaged in glorified “baby-sitting” or communities felt that the job was important but that it did not merit the rate of pay that teachers receive. This last perception is, of course, closely related to Housego’s (1990) research mentioned in
Chapter 1. Since the majority of community members have spent a great deal of time within the school system they therefore assume that they are fully informed about what the job entails; in reality, they are not. In addition, this sense of being undervalued by the community as a whole also included a sense of being undervalued by the Ministry of Education, the boards of education, and sometimes even administrators. This was manifested in the fact that teachers were being asked to become involved in more things apart from the classroom (Zeichner, 1991). Teachers saw this redirection of their energies as moving them away from their primary task of teaching children and it implied for them that classroom work was not as important.

How did these participants then deal with this source of tension? How did they still manage to become exciting and dynamic educators instead of emotionally and mentally exhausted or even burnt out (Perlman & Hartman, 1982)? These teachers had a “theory of practice” (Purkey & Novak, 1996, p. 7). In essence, they have developed a way of thinking about teaching and learning and have found ways of putting into practice the ideas and concepts that have come out of their own reflective stance. In this way they have integrated theory into practice. Several concepts arose out of the data that helped to explain how this integration was managed. First, all of the participants discussed the concept of expectations. They shared stories about their own personal expectations and their expectations of others. This concept connected closely with Purkey and Novak’s (1996) as well as Combs’ (1965) research on perception of self and others and has been discussed more fully in reference to that. Another distinct concept that arose from the data was that of “taking charge” or initiative. These teachers all shared stories in which they had independently forged ahead, made decisions when they perceived a need to do
so, or followed up on an idea even if they were unsure of the eventual outcome. This is an example of what Combs’ termed “personal involvement with ideas” (1965, p. 29). When looking more closely at this concept, it became clear that the teachers expressed it most clearly through three separate areas. These areas were: how they perceived themselves, goal setting, and accessing resources.

The final two concepts also became apparent upon review of the data. The first was the idea of “interaction” and the second was the need for “fun.” The participants in this study rarely spoke about teaching as an isolated event. They consistently related stories and events in terms of interactions with other people. These people may have been students, colleagues, parents, administrators, or family members. This supported Combs’ (1965) idea that good teachers were personally involved with students, colleagues, and the profession as a whole. How these participants individually developed and maintained relationships has also become a prime focus for discussion. In addition, their need to have fun in the job has been related to Purkey and Novak’s (1996) work on the importance of personal and professional celebrations.

Finally, throughout all of the following discussion, it will become apparent that these teachers have learned to question or challenge the status quo. This is not meant to imply that they were continually engaged in conflict and confrontation but that they were always looking beyond what had been traditionally done to find out how it could be changed to meet the changing needs of the present-day system. This ability has been highlighted as it occurred in the aforementioned four concept areas.
All of these concepts were tightly intertwined, which made it somewhat difficult to focus on them separately. Therefore, while they have been looked at individually, in the spotlight so to speak, the connections between them have been noted as well.

Personal Perception

As a starting point to being dynamic and thriving educators, these teachers began by expecting themselves to be able, valuable, and responsible (Purkey & Novak, 1984, 1996). While they discussed the negative attributes of the job, they did not engage in the type of negative talk that made them feel powerless or helpless (Kalker, 1984). Andrew stated it positively when he said “you just have to be completely confident that what you are doing is the right thing to do and you do your best.” This was not just a statement of belief in themselves, but was a result of their choice to maintain a high level of professional development. Since this belief was a result of personal choices, I feel it cannot readily be accepted as purely a result of personality type as outlined by Holland, Gottfredson, and Power (1980) or Brown, Brooks, and Associates (1990).

For example, all of the participants were focussed on improving their professional skills in one way or another. Andrew was working on his Master’s degree. Frank had his specialist qualifications. Brenda attended every workshop that she could. Doreen kept in close contact with the consultants. Chris looked for ways to tie technology into his teaching and Ellen kept up to date on her professional reading and was building her professional library. None of them were willing to accept that having their teaching degree and doing nothing else was effectively meeting the needs of today’s students. It
was their choice to increase their knowledge and to hone their skills as teachers and because of this choice, not because of their personality type, they depended upon and believed in their ability to make good decisions for children. They believed that what they had to offer as teachers was of value not only to their students but to their colleagues as well. Furthermore, they recognized their responsibility to the education of their students and because of their choices, they came highly prepared and motivated to teach.

It might be argued that the act of making such choices may be a result of being a particular personality type. Cranton and Knoop’s (1995) study would remind us though, that many different personality types can make the same choices or decisions when faced with specific situations at specific times. Therefore, these teachers believed in themselves, not because it was an integral part of their personality, but because they had made choices and decisions on which to base that belief.

As Purkey and Novak (1996) stated, this belief in oneself is the foundation needed in order to be a dynamic and inviting educator. The participants in this study are dynamic and thriving teachers because they believed in themselves first. They expected that they would be able to responsibly deal with the demands placed upon them in the profession. Their confidence came from knowing they were up to date and always willing to learn more. This confidence was further manifested in their ability to say no and to follow their own educational path when they found it necessary to question the paths they were being asked to follow. This is not meant to imply that these people were renegades and that they shut their doors and did their own thing. In fact, while Brenda, Chris, and Frank were quite comfortable with saying no, Andrew, Ellen, and Doreen found it to be a difficult process. Instead, what they all had in common was the fact that the needs of
their students came first and that, because they all believed strongly in their ability as teachers to do what was best for their students, they were willing and able to take charge of a situation or forge ahead on a path that was less familiar.

This belief in themselves created an openness to learn from others. Since they had such a strong foundation and belief in what they were doing, they were willing to give that foundation a shake by questioning what they did or reflecting on their teaching practices. In other words, they knew that what they were doing was right but they were always open to ways to enhance or develop that knowledge. This is a prime example of their personal involvement with the ideas associated with teaching and learning. Ellen said it best: “Every day, I learn something from the kids or the kids confirm what I’ve always believed in.”

This strong independent belief in oneself, of course, can create some tension. As I mentioned earlier, all of the participants shared their stories by relating their personal interactions with people. Furthermore, they all stressed the need to connect with other people either as partners, through teams, or through workshops. This apparent desire to connect with people and to get support from others can obviously conflict with the need to stand apart and make decisions for students or for themselves. The participants could relate stories in which they had to go against the beliefs or wishes of others. This tension was alleviated through the participants’ expectations that others around them were as capable, able, and responsible as they themselves were.

While this was a more difficult area to interpret based on the interview information, it became apparent that the participants held a core belief in the ability of others around them. The difficulty began at the beginning of this chapter when I noted
that the participants all felt a sense of frustration and that this frustration sometimes involved colleagues, administrators, or parents. Since Poplin (1992) and Farber (1984) have noted that these are major external contributors to job stress, it was not surprising that when asked to discuss their concerns, all of the participants shared some of their concerns in terms of problems with other people. Brenda was concerned about her colleagues ruining their professional status by becoming time-clock oriented and forgetting about the needs of the kids. Chris, Doreen, Andrew, and Ellen were concerned about the image of education in the media being presented by trustees, the Ministry and others. Frank had concerns about administrators who let parents make decisions that were not "educationally sound."

While this seemed to be in complete contradiction to the importance they placed on their relationships with other people, the participants expressed these concerns and others about student behaviour, administrative meddling, or the bottom-line attitude of the board only within certain boundaries. For example, through further discussion it became clear that the participants felt that the people around them were hindered in their ability to perform successfully by outside constraints or other factors. These constraints may have been a result of any number of things, but in general they were expressed in one of two ways. The participants believed that people outside of the profession were uninformed or given only one-sided information upon which to make their decisions. In addition, they believed that people inside the profession were trying to deal with the same frustrations that the participants were dealing with: an increased workload, less money, or just plain worry about their jobs. In essence, the participants, although expressing concern about the motives or actions of the people around them, were willing to
recognize that these occurrences were the result of other influences. Doreen makes a poignant statement that certainly reflected this feeling: "I've always felt that teachers were special...they weren't driven by dollars and cents, they were driven by compassion, and an awareness of the needs of others. But at the board level, it's become client oriented. We have to provide a service and it's 'how are we going to do it with the least amount of money'?" In other words, the participants felt that the people around them believed in the importance of education but in reality must deal with shrinking resources and therefore were hindered in their decision making.

It is important to recognize the origin of these concerns and the rationale behind them before we decide that these teachers do not believe in the ability of others to do their jobs. The fact that they were worried or had concerns about the ability of people around them to make good decisions does not necessarily mean that they did not believe that others were able, responsible, and capable. In fact, although they did have doubts, all of the participants definitely recognized that people were not one-dimensional and therefore often had to make decisions based on a number of conflicting factors and to make the best individual decisions possible.

In the case of students, these teachers believed wholeheartedly in the ability of their students. They believed that their students were capable and motivated to learn. When they discussed difficulties with students, it was usually with the recognition that the students were also often hindered by some other factor. These factors included problems at home, upbringing, special needs, or self-esteem issues. As Doreen pointed out, "I'm concerned that their needs, and the needs can be academic, social, or emotional, that their needs seem to be getting greater."
This sense of understanding was also true of their feelings about administrators and board officials. They recognized that administrators were being asked to meet more and more demands in the job which left them overworked and overwhelmed when it came time to make decisions in the best interest of the kids. They also recognized that board officials, a large number of whom are elected, have no choice but to try and deal with the requests and demands of the Ministry of Education and the more outspoken community members. For example, Frank recognized that “the board’s main goal with this whole renewal thing is simply a cost-cutting issue... hopefully, the powers that be... will look at the underlying effects of the decision.”

Essentially then, although they did have concerns about the structure of the education system, the demands that it places on people, and the processes involved in meeting those demands, these teachers, in general, believed in the ability of others to do their best within the constraints placed upon them. As Doreen pointed out, “I think I respect what other staff members say and they do with me, too.”

Relationships

As mentioned earlier, Combs’ (1965) theory stated that people who believe in themselves and in others will value and seek out relationships with others. This was certainly true of the participants in this study. In fact, throughout the whole interview process, this need among the participants to connect with people clearly stood out. Ellen discussed the need to connect with people and to find mentors and peers to support herself. Doreen and Frank both discussed the professional and personal connections they
had made with a group of like-minded teachers. Andrew and Brenda talked about finding one person to whom they could really relate, and Chris enthused about using technology to establish new relationships and support old relationships.

There was a certain amount of tension involved in this process as well since, the building of relationships did not occur, according to these teachers, without compromise or what Purkey and Novak (1996) would label “negotiation” (p. 77). All of the participants, while enthusing about the value of supportive relationships, recognized that compromise played a big part. And yet, they perceived this need for compromise as a natural part of working with people.

While not everyone talked specifically about compromise or even compromise with people, they did have some keen insights into its necessity. Frank said: “Compromise is a big part of the job. We have to compromise every day in our profession. We are dealing with people and that’s the only way to deal with people.” Chris agreed, adding that “dealing with kids is always a compromise... you know, you want to do something and they want to do something else so you do something entirely different.” Doreen saw compromise much like creating a recipe in which you “take a little bit of what everyone is saying... and... season how you want.” Andrew and Brenda on the other hand, at the early-career stage, found that they had to compromise in terms of choosing how much time to spend at work. They were concerned about finding time for themselves and for their relationships apart from school.

Despite the fact that compromise involves tension and requires skill, all of the participants, when asked to give words of advice to new teachers, highly recommended making connections with students and colleagues for a variety of reasons. Brenda
recommended that teachers “hook up with other teachers at (their) grade level and share. Share units and share resources.” Andrew suggested that teachers “have fun with the kids because if you’re not having fun with the kids you’re not learning.” Chris saw it as an opportunity for modelling as well as a support for himself. He stated that you “have to be able to work with other people. If you can’t work with the other teacher, you can’t really expect the students to work with each other.”

In addition, many of the participants discussed the need for going beyond traditional professional relationships and establishing personal relationship with their colleagues outside of school. It was essential, they said, to step away from the school setting but to still have the support of someone who understands the life of a teacher. Personal relationships with colleagues and the support of family members met that need. Both Doreen and Frank accomplished this by getting together with colleagues to plan workshops and sometimes just to laugh and joke around. Doreen viewed it as a way to make sure that teachers did not become isolated. She felt that “getting together with people is essential. Don’t do it all alone. Because then you don’t know what’s good and what’s bad. You can’t find your way.” Finally, Ellen pointed out that finding a mentor was a good way of connecting with people. She felt that teachers needed to not only support each other but “challenge each other as well.” In these ways, teachers could then discuss educational concerns and frustrations within these relationships with the knowledge that these concerns would not be used to judge their commitment or caring as a teacher. This has become especially true in the negative political climate that these teachers felt they faced.
Building relationships therefore, both social and professional, seemed a key component in how to survive as a teacher (O'Reilly & Latimer, 1990). As stated above, it was an essential outcome of one’s perceptions of self and others but it was also the starting point for the last three survival strategies. For the participants in this study, developing relationships has been a way of dealing with the negative aspects of teaching by relieving stress and celebrating the positive. It has been a way for them to set goals, develop programmes, and challenge themselves professionally. They have learned from, and received support from, others through both organized and impromptu discussions.

Accessing Support

Another area of commonality among the teachers in this study were their experiences in receiving and accessing support. All of them felt that the system itself provided a minimal amount of proactive support. This supported much of the research discussed in Chapter 2 on teacher stress. Some stressors, such as a general lack of support, are part of a constant background of stress (Kalker, 1984). For example, although there had been, at one time, mentor programmes, these programmes certainly did not apply to new teachers entering a school mid-year. Chris expressed his feelings on this as he entered his first year of teaching at Christmas. “I knew that I had my job only a couple of days before Christmas. So there wasn’t very much notice before I started. I just remember arriving and the teacher who had retired that I was replacing had taken everything out of his day book. There was nothing there from the fall to see what they had done. So all I could do was ask the kids what they had done.” Furthermore, the
mentor programme itself was cut out entirely within a few years after start-up. In addition, consultants were being cut back or asked to do more than possible. According to Doreen, "the board has overloaded their expectations to the point that even though consultants are expected to field the teachers needs and questions...they can't do it and deal with all the other things that their job now entails." The result of this was to make them inefficient at providing practical support to teachers. Other stressful situations such as declaring teachers as surplus, redundant, or no longer employed were handled callously and with little concern for the well-being of employees. This created an immediate or intense stress response (Delattre, 1981). Both Andrew and Brenda experienced this type of response when they were laid off this year. Both of them received pink slips which declared the loss of their jobs the week prior to a March break that included 5 social contract days without pay and then, as if to indicate that the board had put little thought into the process for the people involved, the slips were rescinded within 3 weeks of returning to school. This was demoralizing as well as confusing and stressful. In addition, new programmes, curriculum, or guidelines were often given to these teachers with minimal in-service and even less follow-up. Ball and Stenlund (1990) have shown that this lack of support is a significant contributor to teacher stress. And yet, despite these setbacks, the teachers in this study were able to find and access a variety of resources. This is where the concept of "taking charge" or showing initiative fits in.

While it was not always an easy or simple task and can be fraught with frustration, these teachers managed to get the resources they needed through a number of common strategies. All of them attended workshops and kept files of any handouts or ideas generated. Andrew talked about going into other teachers' classrooms and asking to
borrow or use materials that were plainly not being used. Ellen devoted her time and energy to cleaning out or searching through stockrooms for long-forgotten materials. Chris borrowed materials from friends and colleagues in other boards. As well, he, along with Doreen and Brenda, have called up, electronically chatted with, or personally connected with consultants and other support personnel. Decidedly, they were united in their drive to leave no stone unturned in the search for resources. They were even willing to spend their own money on resources.

These strategies are what make these participants unique. They questioned the traditional idea of going into one’s room and closing the door. For example, while other teachers complained about the lack of reading material in their classrooms, Andrew was not willing to accept that there was no money just because there was none left in the “language budget.” Instead he lobbied his administrators for excess budget money from other areas.

Not only did these participants know where to get the supplies, but they learned who to approach and how to approach those people. As Andrew pointed out, “if you’re smart, you’ll get to know the secretary and the principal or whoever is in charge of the budget. Make sure you make friends quickly.” Doreen warned though, that it was essential for teachers to make good and appropriate use of the people resources. These teachers do not call in their consultants and when the consultants get there say “I need some help in math.” Instead, they made many preliminary phone calls and electronic mail messages which outlined their concerns, needs, and time-lines. Therefore, they used their time and the time of others effectively and with respect. This, in return, paid off for them when they needed help later on.
Goal Setting

Using their time and the time of others effectively was often a starting point for the goal setting process among these participants. While this may seem an odd starting point for goal setting, it was an initiative taken in recognition of the system demands and the rather unstructured process for supervision with which they were faced. For all of the participants, the evaluation process had been very different. This was not because it had been designed to meet their differing needs (Tarrant, 1991), but because there had been no clear structure in place for organizing the goal-setting process between administrators and teachers. The teachers in this study all professed a desire and a need to take charge of their own learning and growth by setting their own personal and professional targets. They also recognized though, that their system required them to set goals that were in line with their administrator’s goals, their school’s goals, and their board’s goals. Most of them found it to be a disappointing process. Their experiences support Bosetti (1994) and Poole’s (1994) research that the supervision process rarely recognizes individual differences or needs.

Andrew was evaluated intensely during his first 3 years and yet never, in his opinion, received “anything concrete to go by.” He saw the process as “damage control” and therefore of little value to him. Frank stated that the evaluation process totally depended upon the administrator. There was no consistency. Doreen tried to be proactive when she began to “question the whole evaluation process.” She approached her administrator and asked for a manager’s letter in which she would set down personal, academic, classroom, and school goals. This was well received by her administrator but
in the end she received a year-end letter much in the same manner as she had received in
previous years. The administrator promised to try the manager’s letter again the
following year. Chris, on the other hand, remembered that the outcome of his evaluation
was positive but he remembered very little of the actual process. Brenda, at the time of
our interview together, had been waiting a full month since the end of the school term to
receive her evaluation letter. It did not mean much to her that she had not received it
since her evaluation consisted of her filling out a checklist of things she had done that
year and handing it to her administrator. Ellen had found that the process only occurred if
a teacher was leaving a school so that at least one evaluation was on file for each school
she had been at. She called it “a joke.” Clearly, they questioned the value of the
supervision processes in place for them. For these participants, the evaluation process
merely touched the surface of their needs (Farber, 1984). They dealt with this by
displaying their own goal-setting initiative.

Many of the participants have set their own personal and professional goals
regardless of the process that may have been in place at their school. They did this
actively and with great care. They began by reflecting on their own needs as teachers and
the needs of their students. This reflection time differed for all of them and it seemed to
connect closely to their career stage. For Frank it was often an ongoing process where he
was reflecting on the lessons as they played themselves out or he was working with a
group of teachers to provide Physical Education workshops. For Ellen, it began by
keeping a professional reflection journal that she wrote in at the end of the day and by
attending summer writing institutes at which she could share her expertise. Watts (1980)
explained this as a need for late career teachers to discuss educational topics and to find
time to write about or share their expertise. For Andrew and Brenda, the summer was their time for reflecting on the year as a whole and making plans for the upcoming school year. This reflects a need in early career teachers for practical information and planning (Watts, 1980). For Doreen and Chris, it involved sharing and discussing programme ideas with colleagues and reflecting on targets or goals during that process. Watts (1980) supported this direction by stating that mid-career teachers need opportunities to raise questions and reassess or reflect on their work.

The goals that came out of this reflection though, encompassed a wide range of possibilities that many of the participants had engaged in at one point or another in their career. Brenda and Ellen focussed on professional readings. Andrew, as mentioned earlier, had begun working on his Master of Education degree. Doreen, Ellen, Frank, and Chris provided workshops for other teachers as a way to try and share their skills. All of these were goals that provided opportunities for these teachers to professionally invite themselves and others (Purkey & Novak, 1984, 1996). In addition, these teachers also used goal setting to invite themselves and others personally. These types of goals typically involved projects to do at home. Brenda tried to set aside time to exercise or read. Doreen had become quite a successful disc jockey. It was a flexible and fun job that she loved. Frank and Andrew made sure to set aside time for golf and other activities. Chris was building his own home. Ellen was committed to setting aside time with her family. All of these goals or targets taken together were stepping stones to the larger goal of being better teachers, maintaining or finding a balance between their personal and professional lives, and challenging themselves in the job. This clearly coincides with Combs’ (1965) theory regarding perception of purpose. Good teachers
“view events in a broad perspective; (their) goals extend beyond the immediate to larger implications and contexts” (Wasicsko, 1977, p. 9).

Celebrations

For these teachers, as important as it was to always keep the big picture in mind, it was also important to make a big deal of the little steps that it took to get there. I know, as a teacher myself, that it is very easy to get caught up in feeling that, because of an inability to reach one student, then somehow I am a failure. I can often forget to celebrate the success of reaching the 26 other students in the class. Furthermore, for the one student that is difficult to reach, there are probably still a lot of small successes worth celebrating with that child.

Although only Doreen and Ellen actually called it celebrating, all of the participants did touch on the need to celebrate in the job. They just discussed it in different ways. When Andrew talked about having fun with the kids, he was really talking about celebrating with them. He told us to celebrate when “the little light bulbs go off.” When a project is completed or a unit of study is over, Doreen celebrated the success with a “party.” Frank celebrated in the job by being aware that “success is sometimes measured in small quantities as opposed to looking for the big picture.” Furthermore, he recommended that teachers “relax and enjoy” the job and if the day on the job didn’t go well, well then, “come home and have fun.” Ellen tried to involve parents in her celebrations. She shared the successes of the kids with their parents at every opportunity and she celebrated herself through quiet reflection time.
Brenda and Chris seem to have been left out in this process and yet, if one looks closely at Purkey and Novak's (1996) definition of celebrations, they were celebrating in their own way. Purkey and Novak have defined celebrations within the context of doing something special for yourself or others (pp. 106-107). When viewed in that way, all of the teachers have found ways to celebrate. Chris was taking pride in working on his home. It was a goal but it was a pleasure as well. Brenda liked to decorate and do household projects. Ellen enjoyed her gardening. She called planting a lily a "celebration." Doreen had her disc jockey job and Frank and Andrew enjoyed golfing. They also did special things for others. Doreen tried to comment on the good things she saw her colleagues doing. Frank told people "look, you are doing a good job." Chris was willing to go to colleagues' houses during the summer to help them get set up technologically. Ellen and Brenda shared their professional libraries with anyone looking for a resource. Andrew tried to make connections in learning for the kids by trying to see "their point of view." All of these things are celebrations as defined by Purkey and Novak (1996). As Doreen very succinctly put it, teachers need to find ways to keep themselves "up and optimistic in a natural... nonchemical way."

Conclusions

Although the participants in this study came from different backgrounds and had different educational strengths, they had some essential things in common. They certainly all continued to be faced with frustrating circumstances within the job and yet they all perceived teaching as valuable and important and, because of that, they found
ways to cope with or work around obstacles in an effort to avoid frustration altogether. They also maintained a high level of commitment to the job. This commitment was maintained by developing several survival strategies. They showed that, as a result of believing strongly in themselves and others, as well as understanding the constraints people must work within, they were able to create supportive relationships with others in both the personal and professional spheres.

From that support network, they were able to invite themselves and others both personally and professionally to take initiative, access and share resources, set short and long-term goals, and take the time to have fun and celebrate the good things on the job. These teachers were alive and thriving in every sense of those words and were continually working to find ways to maintain a healthy personal and professional balance. In essence, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, they had developed a way of thinking about the job of teaching that enabled them to form effective strategies designed to support their dynamic teaching practices.

It is important to remember though, that this survival or application of the strategies takes place within a fairly rigid and structured workplace which can create tension and frustration in and of itself. Furthermore, as the participants shared in Chapter 4, the job of teaching was undeniably stressful and the strategies that they had chosen to apply depended upon the tensions or conflicts associated with the situation (Cranton & Knoop, 1995). Chapter 6, then, will look at how the structure or organization surrounding a teacher can be changed in order to remove some of the frustration or conflict associated with the day-to-day existence of being a teacher.
Figure 5. Chapter 5 concept map.

Connections

between

Participant Responses

show that

Surviving Teachers

continue to experience

perceive

display a

maintain a

Frustration with Teaching Commitment

with Valuable Important

by taking the connecting with perceiving encouraging

Initiative People Themselves Others Celebrations

Goal Setting Decision Making Personal and Professional Interactions Able

Accessing Resources
"I like seeing, and I see it more with the little kids, the huge growth that occurs. When you can look at a kid in September and then see him in June and compare the work samples and see a kid that has really tried, you can say... ‘I did that’... ‘I helped do that’.”

-Andrew

The four key survival strategies emerging from Chapters 4 and 5 are as follows:

a) perceiving oneself and others to be able, capable, and responsible; b) making supportive connections with people; c) taking initiative in regard to accessing resources and setting personal and professional goals; and d) celebrating successes. The final area for discussion then is what needs to be done or provided for teachers in order to facilitate their use of the survival strategies.

To begin with, it is important to connect what we have learned from this study back to some of the organizations mentioned in Chapter 1. The faculties, boards, teacher federations, and schools can all play an important part in supporting teachers and facilitating their use of the survival strategies. This chapter will attempt to make recommendations in regard to policies and practices that would help develop the skills and strategies previously listed and that could be implemented by the above organizations. It will then end with some personal recommendations for teachers.
Faculties of Education

Initially, it makes sense to begin with the faculties of education. As Chapter 1 discussed, most teacher candidates have a high sense of efficacy about their ability to teach. It is quite possible, therefore, that the faculties are teaching important lessons on instruction skills or curriculum but that the students are gaining little from those classes because, as Housego’s (1990) research stated, they think they are capable and prepared already. When we look at the participants in this study, all of them stated that they did not feel that their faculty of education courses prepared them for teaching in their own classrooms. In the case of the late-career teachers, it is possible that since they started teaching at such a young age they simply did not have the maturity necessary to prepare them for the job. This is not the case for the mid and early-career teachers. It is their experience that nothing really prepared them for the realities of the classroom.

Although Housego (1990) made it clear that the faculties are not responsible for this discrepancy between what is taught and what is learned, it seems that it may be important for the faculties to try and alleviate this problem. One way of doing this would be to train the pre-service candidates in problem-solving skills and strategies. All of the participants in this study were highly adept at recognizing problems, identifying the factors involved in them, and finding ways either to solve the problem or, more frequently, to find a way around the problem. Training student teachers to be problem solvers will help them to develop the survival skills that the participants displayed. Beginning teachers with effective problem-solving skills would be more likely to have the ability to access resources that initially may seem unavailable, as well as helping them to
set their own personal and professional goals based on a clear assessment of what their needs are. Furthermore, it might teach them that sometimes it is important to ask for help as a way of solving problems.

In terms of policies, faculties could mandate that part of the teacher training programme include a section on survival strategies or problem-solving skills. How this is provided in practice could take many forms. A course could be offered that focusses specifically on those areas or a tutorial that deals with problem solving could be added on to an already existing course. Knowing how competitive it can be at the university level, my recommendation would further include that the course have a pass or fail evaluation. This might alleviate some of the competitiveness in terms of marks. The essence of this is to give student teachers every opportunity to discuss, share, and problem solve around any concerns or problems they may have as well as any possible scenarios that are presented by the faculty member in as open and noncompetitive an atmosphere as possible. The key element is to get student teachers thinking about and working on the survival strategies as early as possible. This would begin to deal with the problem of giving students too much information before they need it (Stone, 1987). By discussing and practising basic problem-solving strategies as problems arise, faculties would be giving students the valuable skills necessary to deal with problems that can only occur in those crucial first years when the students are in their own classrooms and the faculty support is no longer available (Fullan, Bennett, & Rolheiser-Bennett, 1990).

Furthermore, another important aspect of this type of instruction is that it occurs regularly and involves group discussion. As Combs’ (1965) stated “abstract ideas do not affect behavior [sic] until the behaver has discovered their personal meaning for him
Simply providing a lecture or two on problem-solving skills only glosses over the importance of being prepared to meet and deal with any such problems. It also does not allow students the time necessary to gain the security they need in order to share the problems they are facing or the concerns they may already have. Giving students an opportunity to thoroughly discuss the concerns or issues that may arise not only provides them with opportunities to walk through the possible steps they may take but may give them opportunities to learn to share with others when they are having problems, instead of hiding it and pretending that they are doing just fine.

Another policy of the Teacher's College programme could be to provide opportunities for peer-coaching. This could, in practice, be a part of any practicum or core course. Since interacting with others and setting personal and professional goals are key survival components, teaching students how to peer-coach each other is an ideal way of connecting both those components. Tying this into the practicum is one way of making sure that there is a fit between theory and practice (Holdaway, Johnson, Ratsoy, & Friesen, 1994). Students often carry out practice teaching assignments in the same schools but in different classes, therefore it is an ideal opportunity for them to peer-coach each other and to practice learning from and supporting each other. Hopefully, through this process, students will begin to recognize that teachers are continually trying to hone their skills or to learn new ones. They will begin to see that interacting with people is an essential way of getting support and they will learn how to set small manageable targets in order to meet larger, more encompassing goals.

In addition, faculties could create more opportunities for celebrating successes. This can be done at the individual class level by having students share at the beginning or
the end of the class a lesson that went particularly well or an interaction with someone that was positive or uplifting.

Of course, teaching those concepts, strategies, and skills and providing time to practise them is not enough. There will always be students who feel that they have little to learn and will hence get very little out of formal classes on survival strategies. There are two ways of dealing with this attitude which is a result of observational apprenticeship (Housego, 1990). The first way is to try and look for students who have these survival skills already and use these strategies effectively, as part of the screening process for admittance into the faculties. Of course, that is easier said than done and it is important that these recommendations be reasonable and practical. Therefore, the other possibility is to make some changes within the other organizations with which these students will interact.

Boards of Education

Teachers' lives are influenced to a great extent by the board for which they work. In this study, the participants had independently found ways to make their working atmospheres more palatable by developing strong and supportive relationships with colleagues, students, and parents. While they created most of these connections on their own, there are ways in which these connections can be more easily made. It is in this way that the policies and practices of a particular board of education can create a supportive and dynamic atmosphere for working. Since teacher negativism and burnout can result in incredibly high costs to boards of education as a result of chronic disability or
absenteeism (Holt, Fine, & Tollefson, 1987), it is important for boards of education to be active in their fight against teacher stress. One way to try to create and sustain a sense of togetherness and collaboration among teachers would be to implement a board policy that states that employees will be valued and supported by the organization. Since the first year of teaching is most important in terms of survival (Fullan et al., 1990), teachers could be made to feel valued and supported through a mentorship programme. Many of the participants shared their own personal experiences with mentors but all of these relationships were informal and, again, they were initiated independently by the participants themselves. By taking over the organization and implementation of a mentorship programme in which a new staff member entering at any time of the year would be partnered with a mentor in his or her workplace, boards could alleviate some of the stress associated with new environments.

How to choose that mentor and create that relationship is an area where the policy can fall apart in practice. Logically, a mentor is someone with more experience who can help guide a newcomer. Also, it is ideal if the mentor does basically the same job as the new employee. Essentially though, what is most important is that the new employee is not so overwhelmed by the experience and expertise of the mentor that he or she begins to feel inadequate and insecure about sharing concerns or problems. Since personal image is fragile and therefore extremely important and highly protected by individuals (Fuller, 1969), it may be hard for a new employee to learn and be supported by someone whom they perceive as overwhelming.

This is where the board policy can help implement the practice. The board could come up with a set of criteria that describes the characteristics of a mentor. Following
that, it could provide workshops to help train individuals to practise these skills. Once some staff have been trained, the schools could set about approaching people who have the outlined criteria and ask them to be mentors. That way a mentor could be younger or older, highly experienced or less experienced, but still able to effectively support a new employee. This could work for new employees to the system as well as employees transferring from an old school to a new school. The mentor would be the direct contact or support person for that newcomer. Of course, as Brenda would stress, it is extremely important that any such mentor programmes be monitored closely and follow-up meetings be established in order to ensure that the programme does not become another one-shot effort.

School culture can also play an important part in making this type of board policy effective and positive in practice. Principals can support a mentorship programme by scheduling planning times so that mentors and their partners can be free at the same time. Staff meetings can include time set aside for partners to work together or in teams. Mentors could be released from other duties such as committee membership or yard supervision as a way of recognizing the importance of the job and the extra commitment that is made by the mentor. Essentially, any structure that the board can put into place that would help develop supportive and collaborative relationships would help teachers to make use of or develop the survival strategies.

In terms of finding ways for teachers to celebrate, most boards now support the celebration aspect of the survival strategies by providing awards to exemplary teachers. This is wonderful, but does not really recognize the everyday efforts of many teachers. One way to do this would be to create a board newsletter or an electronic conference in
which teachers and community members could share positive anecdotes, experiences, and success stories. This would not only provide some staff with leadership opportunities but would most certainly combat much of the negative things that are written about teaching and teachers.

Schools

School organizations are, in reality, the place where all board policy is put into practice. For example, choosing appropriate mentors becomes a school task. Supporting and valuing employees becomes a school task as well. One way of making employees feel welcome, whether they are new to the board or just new to the school, would be to provide orientation sessions for any new staff. These sessions could be led by an administrator, by a team of people who would be responsible for new staff, or by an individual looking for some leadership experience. Providing school handbooks, labelled pictures of staff, staff telephone lists, and tours of the school are all ways in which staff can be made to feel valued and supported. In addition, these kinds of activities would help teachers to learn about accessing resources and would help to develop supportive personal and professional relationships among staff members.

Another way in which the school organization can support teachers and help them to make greater use of the survival skills would be to allow for the kind of flexible goal setting that has been outlined by Fullan (1993). Supervisory officers could focus the process on the goal of making each person a better teacher. With that goal in mind, it becomes easier to accept academic and personal, as well as the usual professional goals.
This recognizes that becoming a well-rounded person can help someone to become a better teacher. It allows for a greater amount of autonomy and trust within the process and supports the whole person, not just the professional part of being a teacher. This again would support, in practice, the board policy that teachers are valuable and capable.

Technology can also play a role in helping teachers to survive. As Chris mentioned, setting up a board electronic mail system helps teachers from across the county connect with and support each other, problem solve, share successes, and access resources. Schools can set up individual networks that carry inventories of the resources available at each school. Teachers would then have a greater opportunity to investigate and access the resources that may be hidden away in their own school as well as the resources that may be available at other schools in the same area or region. Conferences could be designed to allow teachers to post curriculum ideas or teaching strategies for different subject areas. This would help teachers to gather information and ideas from a larger pool of individuals. All of these suggestions recognize that teachers are eager to share with, and learn from, others. The recommendations build on that desire by providing the tools to meet those needs.

Finally, schools can also help teachers celebrate. Staff luncheons, opportunities during staff meetings to share success stories, a staff “member of the month” section in the school newsletters, or announcing a success story or a positive occurrence on the public address system each morning are ways to highlight the good things that teachers are doing and provides teachers and communities with an opportunity to share in that celebration. These can facilitate what O’Reilly & Latimer (1990) called “critical incidences.” These are connections made by teachers or insights learned by teachers
through positive and open interaction with colleagues. They are essential to the growth and survival of teachers.

Federations

Federations can also build on and support the five survival skills outlined in this study. For example, federation professional development days would be more effective if they focussed on the survival skills. Instead of workshops that are designed for a homogeneous group of people (Coleman, 1976; Ward, 1978), federations could allow teachers to connect with people by allowing them to work in teams or with partners on agendas of their own choosing. This would support the idea that they are able, capable, and responsible for their own professional development and it allows them to set their own goals. It also supports the differing needs of teachers at differing career stages (Tarrant, 1991). Teachers could be expected to share the agenda with the principal or vice principal prior to the actual day in order to make sure it meets the professional development day requirements. Such agendas could include: a) time set aside to gather resources for an upcoming unit or theme; b) personal goal setting or goal setting for the school; c) workshops where teachers have opportunities to cooperatively share ideas during roundtable discussions; d) training sessions that could teach teachers how to peer-coach or to create appropriate and attainable goals or; e) sessions that allow teachers to actually create resources to take away with them. All of these support Fullan's (1993) ideas that professional development must involve: personal vision building; opportunities to question and discuss educational ideas; opportunities to practise new behaviours; and opportunities for collaboration. Furthermore, it allows for individuals to
specifically design their own professional development (Gaziel, 1995). Again, any type of professional development must be followed up. Setting up opportunities for teachers to share their learning in a small group or forum would go a long way toward making professional development activities more meaningful and focussed.

In addition, although federations also provide awards for exemplary teaching and they do have newsletters that share successes, federations can further celebrate with teachers by creating media campaigns that share with the public the commitment, caring, and success of teachers in the school system.

Teachers

Essentially though, faculties, school boards, schools, and federations cannot really effectively implement any of these recommendations without the support of teachers. Therefore, the final recommendations must go directly to teachers. Ellen and Frank feel that teachers themselves have to become more aware of how they can help support each other and develop supportive relationships. Doreen and Chris state that teachers need to be willing to mentor or peer-coach each other in order for educational practices to work. Brenda and Andrew think that teachers need to actively share their resources and feel comfortable in setting goals that meet their needs first and, following that, can be connected to the needs of the school. In order for teachers to do this though, they need to become more informed about the options available to them. This research, hopefully, is one way of informing teachers about what other teachers, who are dynamic and thriving in the classroom, do in order to survive.
Summary

Faculties, boards of education, schools, and federations must look carefully at their policies and practices to ascertain whether they hinder or support the survival of dynamic teachers. Their focus should be to create organizations that are based on the concepts that teachers are able, capable, and responsible professionals (Purkey & Novak, 1984, 1996) who are committed to the job of teaching. Teachers who feel that they are trusted as professionals are more open-minded, willing to reflect, and willing to grow and change (Combs, 1965). If these structures are in place, support can be provided for teachers at any developmental stage in their career.

Finally, I believe that it is important that teachers become more aware of the survival strategies discovered in this research. While having the knowledge does not necessarily imply that teachers will practise the strategies, it may be a step in the right direction. It is my belief that commitment to education and survival strategies are closely interconnected. If a teacher is committed to using the strategies, then he or she will likely be committed to educational growth in teaching and learning. If a teacher has a professional commitment to education, then he or she will likely practise some or all of the survival strategies identified in this study.

This research has hopefully provided one piece in the larger puzzle of teacher survival. It was primarily intended to be a resource for teachers to become aware of the strategies that they could implement. It was not intended to be a recipe for survival but can be seen, however, as one way of defining and highlighting the possibilities available to all teachers.
Figure 6. Chapter 6 concept map.

Teachers can be supported by Faculties of Education, Boards of Education, Teacher Federations, and Schools through implementation of policies and programmes that confirm the value of the Survival Strategies by providing courses, workshops, broadcast successes, employee celebrations, and problem solving, peer coaching, mentoring, allowing for flexibility in terms of goal setting, scheduling, visual, electronic, and print media.
References


Appendix A

Section B of Ethics Committee Submission: Risk to Participants

Section B - RISK TO PARTICIPANTS

1. Since this study involves working with people who are considered dynamic and competent as well as dealing with topics related to work, it does not seem conceivable that participants will experience emotional stress due to any aspect of the study. Although it does not seem likely that this topic will cause participants emotional distress, the investigator will continue to make clear to the participants that participation within any aspect of the study is voluntary and that they do not have to answer any questions or discuss a topic related to this study that they do not feel comfortable with. This should eliminate any risks or uncomfortable feelings on the part of the participant.

2. It is possible that this research structure could isolate the participant and the researcher for a greater part of the participants’ involvement. This will only occur on the request of the participants when they are given the opportunity to choose the time, date and venue for the interviews. For example, should they choose to meet in their own homes it is possible that the interviewer and the participant will be alone. The fact that the participant is given that choice should ensure that he or she feels safe and comfortable during the interview session. Should the interviewer, on the other hand, not feel comfortable with the choice in light of safety reasons, the interviewer will try to come to some agreement on venue that is mutually acceptable to both the participant and the interviewer.
3. Should the unedited tapes get into the hands of people other than the interviewer/investigator, it is possible that the participant will be embarrassed, offended or disconcerted. This possibility should be easily avoided by the erasure of the tapes and the reliance of the interviewer on the transcripts accepted and reviewed by the participant as well as the fact that the pseudonym will be attached to all of the research that involves the participant’s name excepting of course, for the consent form. The participants should not be embarrassed, offended or disconcerted as part of the actual study. If the participants are uncomfortable with any aspect of the study, it is hopeful that it has been made clear enough to them through the introductory letter, the Study Information Sheet and the consent form as well as the re-assurances of the interviewer, that they may choose what and what not to answer in the course of the interview.

4. No part of this study will expose participants to or cause participants harm to their health. Since the venue for the interviews is chosen by each individual participant, it is likely that they will not expose themselves to personal physical harm or health dangers.

5. Since participants are able to choose what questions to answer and what questions not to answer in the course of the interview, it is highly unlikely that participants’ rights will be infringed upon in any way. Should they feel uncomfortable with any aspect of the study they may choose to withdraw themselves from the research with support and understanding by the interviewer/investigator. There is no cost to the participant. The interviewer will drive to any location requested by the participant and the transcripts will be returned in the stamped envelopes provided.

6. There are no other risks to the participants that this investigator can see in the above study. This study is conducted with an honesty and openness that hopefully supports
participants in their personal decisions. There will be no attempts to conceal any information from the participants.
Appendix B
Introductory Letter to Possible Participants

Dear ____________,

I am presently working on my M.Ed. thesis and I am studying teachers who are surviving in the job of teaching. By surviving, I mean that I am looking for teachers who have chosen to remain in the classroom so far in their career and who are dynamic, interested in teaching and learning, and engaged by the job, as well as professionally and personally motivated both by themselves and by others.

Your name was recommended to me by ________________ and I am hoping that you would be interested in taking part in my study.

Before you make any commitment I would like you to know the parameters. You would be asked to engage in two 90-minute interviews that would be set at your convenience. That’s really all there is to it.

I will be contacting you within a week’s time to discern whether or not you are interested. If you require more information you may contact me through my CHAT account if you wish or you may call me at (519) 767-0272. Furthermore you may contact my supervisor Prof. John Novak at (905) 688-5550 ext. 3361 (Brock University). You can, at any point along the way, remove yourself from the study should you find it necessary.

Thank you for your time and I am looking forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Kim Phillips
Appendix C

Study Information Sheet

1. Rationale and Purpose of the Study:

The job of teaching has, over the past few decades, become increasingly more complex and intensified. Teachers are expected to be educators, social workers, administrators, care givers, and coaches. This intensification of the job of teaching has coincided with a severe reduction in resources, an increase in class size, and a decrease in positive public opinion and support of teachers.

In the face of these significant changes, it seems it would be relatively easy for teachers to become bitter, overwhelmed, or burned out. And yet, despite these changes and their negative impact on education and educators, there are many teachers who remain engaged, even invigorated, by the challenge of teaching. They are survivors in the education field.

The purpose of this study is to talk with and learn from these survivors. It is meant to investigate how they have managed to thrive in an increasingly demanding profession and to discover what skills and strategies they have used in order to remain actively engaged as teachers.

“Actively” and “engaged” are key words. Survivors are not those who are just barely hanging on, they are the teachers who have continued to grow both personally and professionally in the job of teaching. They are actively engaged by teaching and in turn they engage others; both colleagues and students.

2. Researcher Motives and Intentions:

I have been a primary teacher for the past seven years. Within my other role as a part-time Master of Education student at Brock University, I have had an opportunity to learn a great deal more about the larger structures that surround and influence teachers.

It is of interest to me, and I hope to other teachers, to find out how teachers maintain a high level of personal and professional efficacy within these organizational structures and influences. I want to be one of the teachers who survive within the system. I hope to be able to find some key skills or strategies that are common to “surviving” teachers and to learn from them myself as well as share what I have learned with other teachers.
3. The Study:

Research Process: I will investigate my research problem through confidential one-to-one interviews. I will meet with my participants two separate times. Both meetings will be focused interviews and both meetings will be approximately 1 to 1 1/2 hours in length. During the interview sessions, I will ask questions about each participant’s individual experiences as a teacher. I will ask participants to reflect on the skills that they have and the strategies that they use in order to stay interested in and engaged by teaching. Furthermore, I will ask the participants how they help engage others both personally and professionally. These interviews will be held at locations and at times that best suit the convenience of the individual participants. Each interview will be tape-recorded and each tape will be transcribed.

Confidentiality: To maintain the privacy and confidentiality of the participants, they will be assigned a pseudonym for the entire study. I will be the only person who will be aware of their true identity.

Voluntary Participation: A participant’s cooperation in this study will be completely voluntary. This means that a participant does not have to answer any question that he or she does not want to. Should a participant choose to remove him or herself from the study at anytime, he or she is free to do so.

Final Say: After each interview, I will transcribe the conversation. The participants will be sent a copy of their personal transcription and will be asked to edit it to change or clarify anything that was said in the interview. Also, I will send the participants a copy of what I plan to use in my final draft of my thesis to ensure that they are satisfied with it. They may make any changes they feel necessary before it goes to print.

Publication / Circulation: The results of this research will be documented in my Master’s thesis. If these results are to be used in any other future publication, the participants will be contacted and asked for their permission before it goes to print.

If you have any questions at any point during the study, please do not hesitate to call me.
Appendix D

Teacher Survival Study

Consent Form

I, ________________________________ agree to take part in a study investigating teacher survival. The process and steps of the research process have been fully explained to me by the principal investigator, Kim Phillips. I understand that I will be asked to answer several questions regarding my past experiences in two one-to-one interviews. I understand that participation in this study is voluntary and I can withdraw from the study at any time. I also understand that I will be given final say on all my data, and that my involvement will be kept completely private and confidential.

Date ________________________________

Name of Participant ________________________________

Signature of Participant ________________________________

If you have any questions or concerns about your participation in the study, you can contact me at (519) 767-0272 or through CHAT. Or you may contact Professor John Novak at (905) 688-5550, extension # 3361.

I have fully explained the procedures of this study to the above volunteer.

___________________________  ______________________________
Researcher Signature                  Date

Brock University, Faculty of Education
Appendix E

Interview Questions:

Background Information
How many years have you been teaching?
How many schools have you taught at?
What grade levels and areas of teaching have you experienced?

Stressors and Outlook
Upon entering the profession did you feel you had been prepared for the requirements of the job? How did that affect your first few years of teaching?
How do you find the morale of teachers today? Compared to previous years?
How do you maintain a positive outlook in the face of poor teacher morale?
Did you or do you find the job of teaching to be stressful? What kinds of things are stressful? How do you handle it?
What role does compromise have in your job?
Have you ever felt that you were in a teaching position which you were not well prepared to teach? Tell me about it. How did you handle it?
What kinds of things concern you as a teacher? (Classroom, system, personal)
Do you feel that you can vocalize these concerns?
How do you go about doing so? Do you feel it is effective?
How do you feel the public perceives the teaching profession?
How have you come to that conclusion?
How do you respond to that as a teacher both professionally and personally?
There have been many sweeping changes taking place in education. As I name a few, I would appreciate if you could comment on how whether or not you are aware of the issue and how you see it affecting the future of education in the classroom.
No OAC
K-6 and 7-grad schools
business taking a greater part in classroom education
parent councils
College of Teachers
Common Curriculum
Provincial report cards
Standards and Benchmarks

How do you see it affecting how you do your job? Will you make changes or adjustments to how you provide the service of education?
In your career span, how have you seen education change either positively or negatively?

Personal Attributes
We’ve talked about larger, more general issues and I’d like to discuss some issues that affect you more personally....
Why did you become a teacher? What initially brought you to teaching?
Are you satisfied or happy with your decision? Can you elaborate on that?
What are the things you enjoy most about teaching?
What are the things you dislike most about teaching? How do you deal with those things?
Have you ever worked in a team setting?
Can you tell me about your experiences working with a team?
Have you ever been in a mentor relationship (formal or informal)? Can you tell me about that experience?
Do you feel there are enough resources available to you? Do you have the things that you need or can you get them?
Do you spend any of your own money on your classroom? How do you feel about that?
Have you ever thought about moving out of the classroom and into a position of added responsibility such as administration, consultancy, or SERT? Why or why not?
How did you come to the decision to move schools?
Tell me about your experiences in moving schools. (Positive or negative)
What makes the difference between the good experiences and the poor experiences?
Have you taken any time off from teaching?
What were the reasons behind that decision?
How long were you off and what made you decide to go back?
What skills do you think are necessary to be a good teacher? (Someone who remains dynamic and thrives in the job.)
Do you have these skills?
Will these skills still be valuable considering the changes we talked about earlier?
How do you maintain a balance between your personal and professional lives?
Do you find that the educational system supports your efforts to maintain a balance? Are your efforts respected? In what way?
What has the C.S.+E. process been like for you? Tell me about some of the experiences you’ve had with that process. (C.S.+E. = Co-operative Supervision and Evaluation)
What other professional support systems are available to you as a teacher? Have you ever accessed these supports? Can you tell me about the circumstances?
Do you feel that there are sufficient opportunities for you for professional development in the teaching profession?
How do you find out what opportunities are available to you?
How do you access those opportunities?
Do you feel that you have sufficient opportunities to be involved in decision making within your job? (system, school or classroom decisions)
Is recognition in your profession important to you? In what way? Tell me about your experiences getting recognition.
What words of wisdom would you pass on to a new teacher today in order to help them thrive as a teacher?
Consider what you just said about the future of education; would you still go into teaching today? Why or why not? Would you do anything differently?
Before our time comes to a close I would like to give you an opportunity to reflect on your participation in this study. Is there anything you would like to add or that you feel is important to say that we might not have gotten to in the course of the interview?