Why I Am Not a Teacher: A Self-Study Examining Why I Made the Decision to Exit the Teaching Profession

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Abstract

A good teacher was once described as being like a candle; consuming itself to light the way for others (Author unknown). But as Knox (2005) says, far too many young flames flicker out before they ever get the opportunity to burn their brightest. This self-study explores the phenomenon of teacher attrition through the stories and lived experiences of one elementary teacher. I strive throughout this self-study to delve deeper into the significance of my story and lived experiences in order to enhance our understanding of why teachers exit the profession. As a result, the guiding question throughout the study is, "Why do teachers, particularly those who have only taught for a few years, leave the classrooms they worked so hard to enter?" Through the writing of a narrative entitled Sarah's Story, I was able to identify and give voice to a story openly sharing the feelings of despair; disappointment, frustration and disillusionment. This study has identified areas of tension that lead to dissatisfaction, discontent, and teacher disillusionment. It confronts the issues of complexity, uncertainty, and conflict that are experienced in teaching. It discusses the puzzling, powerful and upsetting experiences, highlighting the importance of talk between all members of the education system.
Acknowledgements

As we let our own light shine,
we unconsciously give people
permission to do the same.
As we are liberated from our fear,
our presence automatically liberates others.

-Nelson Mandela, Inaugural speech, 1994

How fortunate I am to have been able to let my own light shine. Without the unconditional love and support from my parents, it would not have been possible. I thank you from the depths of my being, and return your love. Through you, Mom and Dad, I was able to find the strength and determination to achieve the unimaginable.

To my grandparents, Nana, Poppy, and Anne, Grandpa and Anna, you have humbled me in endless ways. I thank you for instilling within our family the importance and value of education. I have felt your spirit’s presence throughout this journey.

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Dr. Mary-Louise Vanderlee, thank you for your commitment and belief in my work. You were the final piece of the puzzle that enabled this to happen. Thank you for your feedback, your suggestions, and your inspiration.

I have no regrets, only great experiences. I have opened new doors of experience and understanding, and confronted the world of teaching with a louder, more affirmative voice. I thank each and every one of you who has allowed this to happen. I will be forever grateful.

And finally, to my dear nephew Ryan, I thank you for reminding me over and over again how innocent and naïve we all truly are. Thank you for the continual laughter: what an incredible gift.

To every teacher who continues to keep their candle burning or whose candle has burnt out, I give you this:

*I give to each of you my story,*
*to encourage and to inspire,*
*I share with you MY voice.*

*May you trust YOUR voice,*
*your story and your self,*
*as you let your own light shine.*
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CHAPTER ONE: THE PROBLEM

It is Labour Day weekend, the last long weekend of the summer, which means it's the last weekend before school starts. Kids have been relishing their final opportunities to be carefree: later bedtimes, no homework, and the freedom to use their days as they choose. Teachers too have been taking full advantage of their final moments before the school year cycle begins again, although most have already spent many hours in their classroom, preparing the room and getting materials ready for the first few days. Unfortunately, for too many teachers, Labour Day weekend is not marking their return to the classroom or school where they taught last year.

This self-study is an investigation of the tensions and disjunctions that I experienced that led me to leave the teaching profession. Through stories and reflection, my experiences as an elementary teacher are shared, shedding light on the phenomenon of teacher attrition.

Background of the Problem

A good teacher was once described as being like a candle, consuming itself to light the way for others (Author unknown). But as Knox (2005) says, far too many young flames flicker out before they ever get the opportunity to burn their brightest. Unfortunately, the attrition rate for new teachers is higher than for any other profession – a devastating trend considering that when young educators first enter the profession, they are brimming with optimism, passion, and a great desire to serve (Knox, 2005).

The Ontario College of Teachers (2003a) reported that Ontario will need to hire between 9,000 and 10,000 new teachers each year to replace those who are leaving the profession. Consider a realistic snapshot of what first- and second-year teachers in
Ontario face: more than half of all teachers are hired after school starts in September; one fifth are asked to teach subjects they haven’t been trained to teach; and almost one fifth are at risk of leaving teaching altogether early in their career. Investigating the loss of new teachers seems imperative, especially since we know that it costs roughly $4,400 to recruit and hire a new teacher in Ontario (Ontario College of Teachers, 2003a).

For decades, the public has viewed teaching as a desirable profession, one with a good salary, reasonable work hours, and generous holiday time. Unfortunately this perception is often considered by teachers to be somewhat idealistic and incomplete. It does not consider the stresses, problems, and challenges that teachers encounter on a daily basis. The new demands that have been placed on the teaching profession over the past decade are often overlooked. These new pressures lead to many teachers feeling a sense of being over-pressured and under-thanked as they are asked to do more with less, to do it differently and better, and to do it more quickly (Cooper & Travers, 1996; Farber, 1991).

The job descriptions and responsibilities of teachers vary significantly from one situation to another. Yet factors such as teacher workload, effectiveness of school administrators, lack of professional growth and advancement, and levels of public support all place unique demands and expectations upon teachers (Carnegie Forum, as cited in Conley, Bacharach, & Bauer, 1989). Conley et al. believe that these factors have the power to influence job satisfaction and ultimately persuade teachers to stay or exit the profession. Shann (1998) found that teacher job satisfaction was a predictor of teacher retention, a determinant of teacher commitment, and, in turn, a contributor to school effectiveness. This suggests a strong correlation between attrition and teacher
satisfaction. Unfortunately career changes are relatively common today, often as a result of job dissatisfaction, inadequate administrative support, increasing responsibilities, insufficient time allotments, intensifying job stresses, and government imposed cut-backs (Farber, 1991).

The number of teachers exiting the profession is astounding. In the United States alone, nearly $2.6 billion is spent annually to replace teachers who have exited the profession (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004). Many analysts suggest the price is actually much higher when the cost of the loss in teacher quality and student achievement is factored in (Ingersoll, 2001b). Despite such altruistic, heartfelt motivation, a large percentage of teachers are making the decision to exit the profession, according to the National Center for Education Statistics’ latest Schools and Staffing Survey (Ingersoll, 2001a, 2003; Knox, 2005). Unfortunately too many teachers see no hope for change and decide to leave the profession altogether. McGlamery and Edick (2004) say that conventional wisdom assumes that teachers who leave the classroom never return. It has also been recognized that it is usually the best and the brightest who are the first to leave.

Identifying factors that lead to teacher job dissatisfaction and frustrations that lead to tension within the system may enable the education system to reduce teacher attrition. When teachers participate energetically, share authority, and engage in meaningful work, they will likely shed their negative emotions and feel as though their contributions are valued and important, thus leading to greater job satisfaction (Knox, 2005). Strategies that increase job satisfaction ultimately will aid in teacher retention, thus reducing the rates of attrition and improve the school culture for teachers, students, and administrators.
Statement of the Problem

This study seeks to investigate from a personal perspective the phenomenon of teacher attrition. Although teacher attrition is a global concern, this study is very specific and personal, as it is ultimately investigating why I made the decision to exit the teaching profession.

There are too many teachers leaving the profession for a variety of reasons, with too little being done to thoroughly understand the stories and experiences of those teachers and make the necessary changes. More than 60% of Ontario school boards say that retaining teachers is a problem, according to a survey done in 2000 by the Canadian Teachers' Federation (Ontario College of Teachers, 2003a). Every year, Ontario Teacher Pension Plan records show that about 3,500 teachers leave full-time classroom teaching prior to retirement, an attrition rate of 22%-33% during the first 3 years for all new teachers (Ontario College of Teachers, 2003a).

Teacher attrition is a significant phenomenon that deserves further investigation as its impact can be felt throughout the entire education system. Ontario Education Minister Gerard Kennedy stated in a press release that "we are determined to continue to reverse the trend of losing too many qualified teachers in their first few years of teaching" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004), yet the effects of such an effort are invisible. The organizational conditions of schools are often heavily influenced by leadership that creates deep-seated adversarial relations between teachers and administrators, yet little is done to rectify the problems. It is imperative that the environment in classrooms and schools be conducive to learning – something that can be jeopardized by something as simple as ineffective leadership or low teacher morale. The
research suggests that where morale is high, so to is student achievement. The implications of low teacher morale can be far-reaching, and therefore merit investigation and attention (Miller, 1981).

Current policies such as mentoring and new teacher induction programs will not solve the attrition phenomenon but will continue to divert attention away from the underlying problems regarding how teachers are treated and the ways in which schools are managed (Ingersoll, 2001b). The Ontario College of Teachers has embedded the notion of mentoring into the Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession and the Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession, yet for 2001 and 2002, with fewer than 20% of new graduates in mentoring programs, the data on its success is inconclusive (Ontario College of Teachers, 2003a).

The Transition to Teaching Study conducted by the Ontario College of Teachers found that only 53% of new teachers were satisfied with the orientation they received; fewer than half reported that their classroom resources and board in-service professional learning were satisfactory, and of the one in five who reported they had received formal or informal mentoring, only half said the experience was satisfactory or somewhat satisfactory (Ontario College of Teachers, 2003a).

Time needs to be spent investigating how organizational management and working conditions can be improved and how the system can be altered; only then may teachers’ dedication to the profession and motivation begin to change. Regardless of the reason teachers leave teaching, the end result is a system that loses highly qualified and usually very successful and dedicated teachers. Speaking from experience, I know that nobody cared when I resigned. No questions were asked; the only recognition from the
school board was a letter acknowledging the receipt of my letter of resignation followed by a simple thank you for my years of service to the board (Appendix B). They never questioned why I no longer wanted to be a teacher or, for that matter, wanted to work for them.

Although teachers have the power and the ability to take control over preserving their career satisfaction and morale, ultimately they also need to be nurtured, supported, and valued by the broader school community. It should not be satisfactory for the school boards to lose teachers, at least not without questioning their motives. School boards are doing a disservice to themselves, their students, and their communities by not investigating the leaving phenomenon. Unfortunately, seeking to understand the loss of qualified teachers requires an effort on behalf of the system, something that is most often avoided altogether.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this self-study is to represent through stories and reflection my experiences as an elementary teacher and my quest to understand the tensions and disjunctions experienced that led me to leave the teaching profession. The goal of this study is to provide policymakers, administrators, and teachers with a personal perspective on facets of the teaching profession that may be leading to the growing discontent and dissatisfaction of teachers. Ultimately this is impacting the retention rates of qualified teachers, leading to the phenomenon of teacher attrition we are currently experiencing. The purpose is to investigate tensions teachers experience such as working conditions, leadership, professional autonomy, teachers’ roles, and the importance of school culture, all from a personal perspective.
Questions to be Addressed

1. What events and experiences have occurred that have enabled me to say that I no longer wish to be a teacher?

2. What does it mean for a teacher to exit the teaching profession?

3. What tensions and disjunctions did I personally experience with the education system?

4. What happens to teachers like myself who no longer wish to teach?

5. Will I leave education altogether or will I endeavour to use my strengths and talents in a different realm of education?

6. What impact did the tensions I experienced have on me spiritually, emotionally, physically, socially, or intellectually?

7. How have they impacted my motivation and dedication to my work?

8. What facets of professional experience impact directly on teacher satisfaction, motivation, and morale?

9. Why do teachers, particularly those who have only taught for a few years, leave the classrooms they worked so hard to enter?

10. What is it that teachers need?

11. What is it that ultimately persuades them to leave?

The objective of this study was to examine teacher attrition using my stories and experiences to illuminate what propelled me to leave the profession. By doing so, tensions such as dictatorial leadership, and educational policies and practices were identified to offer a better understanding of how they impact the teaching profession and teachers themselves.
The analysis was based upon three general premises: (a) Teacher attrition is important because ultimately it affects those whom the education system ought to be most concerned about, the students; (b) to fully understand teacher attrition requires examining it at the personal level, through the voices of those who leave the profession, and (c) teacher attrition is a function not only of the individual and personal characteristics of teachers but also of the culture and conditions of the organization within which teachers work.

Rationale

I personally had the need to explore and understand the nuances behind my decision to exit the teaching profession, now that I have become a statistic. Despite the large personal investment in training for teaching, many teachers choose to leave the profession and pursue other occupations and careers. The decision does not come easily for most teachers who do decide to exit the profession, their decision being informed by a variety of factors (Conley et al., 1989).

School boards need to determine why their teachers are leaving if they hope to improve retention in the future. Communicating with the exiting teachers is essential if they hope to gain any insight into the reasons behind their departure. While there are multiple influences on teacher attrition, varying with each individual, it would be in the best interest of the school boards to give the exiting teachers an opportunity to share their experiences in order to help them improve the working conditions and future of the teaching profession.

Understanding why and how teacher commitment diminishes is crucial in maintaining the effectiveness of our schools. The literature states that teacher
commitment is imperative to ensure teacher satisfaction and retention (Fresko, Kfir, & Nasser, 1997; Singh & Billingsley, 1998). Low levels of teacher commitment may result in decreased student achievement, higher teacher absenteeism, and increased staff turnover (Rosenholtz, 1989). The literature suggests that schools that provide a high level of support for employee goal-directed activity and provide professionals with a high level of autonomy are more likely to enhance the career satisfaction of their teachers. In accordance with Goodlad’s (1984, as cited in Conley et al., 1989) findings, we know that teachers who find themselves restrained and inhibited by problems of the workplace find that frustration and dissatisfaction set in. Research has indicated that teachers expect to have a high level of work autonomy and to be highly involved in decision-making.

Unfortunately the rights that teachers expect as professionals often conflict with their roles as members of bureaucratic organizations (Bacharach, Bauer & Conley, 1986; Benson, 1983, in Conley et al., 1989). If school bureaucracy results in too much direction and control of teachers’ activities, teachers may perceive the creation of rules as infringement on the autonomy they expect as professionals. Bureaucratization may also result in increased routinization and mundaneness of work activities, and teachers’ feelings may include lack of challenge, alienation, and dissatisfaction (Schwab & Iwanicki, 1982, in Conley et al). Feelings of powerlessness and dissatisfaction that teachers experience are often a result of a lack of authority over decision-making, leading teachers to question their involvement in the organization (Wangberg, 1984, in Conley et al).

Indeed research in Canada and the United States has shown that job dissatisfaction, primarily due to poor salary, poor administrative support, and student
discipline problems, is among the most frequent reasons teachers give for leaving the profession (Ingersoll, 2001a; MacDonald; Tye & O’Brien, 2002). More recently, American researchers have indicated that factors such as government policies, portrayal of teachers in the mass media, and community attitudes also influence teachers’ general esteem and status in society, which is evident in their professional commitment and morale (Tye & O’Brien). Unfortunately the existing literature seldom goes beyond the more quantitative data, indicating the need for a more qualitative approach to investigating the attrition phenomenon.

The attrition of public school teachers from the system is not a new phenomenon in Canada or the United States. Unfortunately the stories and experiences of those teachers that leave the profession are seldom heard or sought, leaving hard statistics as the guide in implementing new systems. This gap in existing literature suggests that educational leaders need to begin investigating attrition wholeheartedly in order to effectively address this widespread, national issue. Attrition has no boundaries as teachers regardless of their age, gender, ethnicity, or grade-level are leaving the profession (Benner, 2000). Teachers are becoming disenchanted and disillusioned and are walking away from the profession at a rapid rate, and nobody is stopping them. If the existing system is not reassessed and examined closely, the so called revolving door will continue its cycle.

Importance of the Study

Deal (1988) states that for a number of reasons many public schools today have become “pockets of mediocrity and places of despair and disinterest rather than of hope and enthusiasm” (p. 212). This he suggests does not need to be the case. He believes that
the pathway to educational effectiveness is inside each school, with one essential resource being talk. Gronn (1988) suggests that a great proportion of administrative activity consists of talk in interactional settings, yet talk continues to be a neglected dimension in accounts of leadership and administration (Pondy, 1978, in Gronn, 1988).

It is important for this study to identify the support and intervention that could have changed my decision to exit the teaching profession. Understanding why I made the decision that I did will assist in the identification of what areas teachers need investigated in order to ensure that their motivation and dedication to the profession remain intact.

The Canadian Teachers’ Federation, which represents approximately 250,000 teachers across Canada, suggested in 2002 that their concerns about the instability of the teaching workforce and its potential impact on the quality of public education in Canada had been confirmed. There is a need to examine the reasons why the teaching profession is facing such a demographic dilemma. There has been nothing stopping provincial governments from becoming proactive in attracting and retaining qualified teachers, but additional research needs to be conducted to investigate regional differences in conditions of teaching as well as retention problems. Departments of education and school boards need to work with teacher organizations to examine the situation and take action to reverse the trends (Canadian Teachers’ Federation, 2002).

The Canadian Teachers’ Federation’s intentions were great, yet little in the way of change has come as a result. As in any profession, there are facets of job experiences that are deeply satisfying and others that are deeply dissatisfying. It is the conditions of teaching, those facets that are deeply dissatisfying, that need to be investigated. They are
what impact teachers' motivation and commitment to the profession and, if left unattended, may lead to retention problems.

So much money, time, and effort have been wasted on what has been referred to as the revolving door (Ingersoll, 2005), trying to recruit teachers, then treating them badly and ultimately watching them leave (Argetsinger, 1999). Although the Canadian Teachers' Federation was prepared to work at a national level in partnership with the government and other non-government organizations in the education sector, little research has been executed or accomplished to make significant gains in dealing proactively with the leaving phenomenon, teacher attrition. One of the most important reasons to study teacher attrition in Canada is a result of the lack of representative data. The identification of the tensions experienced by educators will offer governing bodies, administrators, and teachers a way to bring about the necessary change that may hopefully discourage teachers from leaving the profession.

Teacher policy needs to ensure that effective teachers want to continue teaching, and school boards need to be concerned about retaining effective teachers in schools. One effective way of ensuring that policy meets these needs is to enable teachers to speak about the existing policies, working conditions, and lived experiences and ultimately to offer support to those effective teachers in order to achieve school improvement and success (Haycock, 1998). With dissatisfaction being cited as one of the primary reasons why teachers leave (Ingersoll, 2001a), there needs to be more concern about the direct link to job performance.

There are many implications, but the disruption to program continuity is crucial; it becomes impossible to maintain any consistency in program development or
implementation over the years when teacher turnover and attrition is so high (Theobald, 1990). High levels of teacher attrition have also created a dramatic decrease in student performance (Bempah, Kaylen, Osburn, & Birkenholz, 1994). Ingersoll (2001b) makes the connection between teacher attrition and underlying problems that ultimately impact the effectiveness of the school.

Especially at a nationally representative level, there is a lack of qualitative data that share the lived experiences from a personal perspective, through the eyes and voice of a teacher. The results of this study will enable recommendations for action by educational leaders and administrators that will begin to effectively address and deal with the underlying issues that are driving teachers away.

In the past, Canada has been unable to provide sufficient data on such areas of research, as the information is neither collected by governments nor by teacher federations (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003b). This study hopes to assist in filling a gap in the literature by providing qualitative data regarding teacher attrition, directly from the source, an exiting teacher. Ultimately this study contributes and adds to existing educational theory. Hopefully in time, such information will be used to improve teachers’ professional experiences and implement the necessary interventions. It is the deeply dissatisfying facets of job experiences that this study seeks to explore – those which adversely affect teachers’ motivation and commitment to the profession, potentially driving teachers away faster than they can recruit them.

The potential impact of such a study is great. There is a need for this kind of research to be conducted so that the education system and all participating members can be informed and knowledgeable with respect to the matters that affect teacher retention,
and begin to effectively deal with the attrition problem. Teachers, administrators, policymakers, students, and communities all stand to benefit from the results of such a study, as the qualitative approach to understanding the attrition phenomena enables all to see the reality of the teaching profession through the back door.

Why is it important to hear the stories and experiences of the teachers who have decided to leave the teaching profession? The education system is governed by a hierarchical structure that is not permeable and very difficult to change (Parks, 1983; Rebore, 2001). Unfortunately this leaves many teachers in a relatively powerless position, with little impact on how or even whether change will occur.

Relevant Definitions

Teacher attrition refers to the premature and voluntary departure of teachers (MacDonald, 1999).

Teacher disillusionment refers to the condition of teachers who have been dramatically affected by the system, have lost sight of their purpose, and are fearful for the future of education (Ingersoll, 2002).

Limitations of the Study

As a result of the gap in the literature, this study identified stories and experiences of a disillusioned, dissatisfied teacher who left the classroom. Obviously this is limiting, as this study focused on one teacher's experiences and stories. In order to begin coming to terms with what teachers are really experiencing in schools and the system, this is necessary. In time, hopefully more teachers will find the courage to speak out and share their stories and experiences.
Self-confidence is very important in a self-study (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001; LaBoskey, 2004). The researcher must be comfortable with the sense of vulnerability necessary to genuinely study the personal conflicts and difficult experiences in their life. This self-study took a series of tensions, concerns, and dilemmas and transformed and translated their meanings for the larger educational system, to come to understand the leaving phenomenon in teaching.

A personal history self-study undoubtedly presents a range of limiting conditions beyond the researcher’s control, and these may restrict the conclusions or applications of the research (Best & Kahn, 1993). I chose to pursue this inquiry using the beliefs and experiences that have shaped me, which as a result present only one perspective. I was not able to speak on behalf of other new or experienced teachers; therefore this study was a result of my interpretation of a specific set of circumstances, in a particular time and place.

*When we try to interpret something outside of ourselves, be it a text or a painting or a person, there is something there before us: words or splashes of paint or actions. But what really is there when the object of our interpretive endeavors is ourselves? Our pasts, you might answer, the history of our words and deeds. But are these pasts, these histories, suitably compared to that which exists outside ourselves? They are our pasts, our histories, and are in that sense inseparable from who is doing the interpreting, namely ourselves: subject and object are one. We are thus interpreting precisely that which, in some sense, we ourselves have fashioned through our own reflective imagination.*

-Freeman, 1993, p. 5
Despite the limitation of lack of generalizability, readers may discover something of value, perhaps having been inspired to undertake their own journey to understand their lived experiences and how they have contributed to the educator they have become and their place within the larger system. I recognized that because of the complex nature of experiences, the entire, complete, whole story could never fully be told. As a result, choices were made throughout the research process about which stories were most significant. It was important to note the personal beliefs that shape this narrative, identifying where I have drawn my ideas from and who my sources have been, because it is their questions, suggestions, and opinions that have helped me refine and reshape my understanding. Generalizability is not a claim made by self-study researchers (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 1998; LaBoskey, 2004). In its place, readers were invited to link such accounts with their own experiences.

Samaras, Hicks, and Berger (2004) stated that one of the major purposes of personal history self-study is to move away from generalizability and towards real learning. They suggest that it is not reasonable to expect that every conclusion based on the personal experiences of one individual will be appropriate to generalize to all. In this way, personal history self-study is about the self in relation to others in historical and social contexts that facilitate the educative experience for its readers.

Organization

This study was organized into five chapters with accompanying appendices and references. Chapter 1 consists of an introduction to the problem being investigated accompanied by justification for the study as well as the purpose and significance of the research. In addition chapter 1 articulates the research questions, provides definitions, and
outlines limitations of the study. Chapter 2 presents a review of relevant literature
addressing issues surrounding educational leadership, educational change, school
cultures, teacher dissatisfaction and motivation and teacher attrition. Chapter 3 provides a
detailed description of and rationale for the method that will be employed in the study
and includes a description of the phases of the research study. Chapter 4 presents the
findings based on the analysis of the data, *Sarah's Story*, while using theory and the
existing literature to guide the analysis. Chapter 5 begins with an overview of the
research problem, the research questions, and the methodology of this study. It outlines
the major findings of the inquiry, discusses the implications of the findings in relation to
the literature, and draws conclusions based on the findings. The chapter also includes
recommendations and provides suggestions for further study.
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The following review of literature will be divided into two parts. Part one will focus on teacher attrition and part two will examine the methodological approach I use for this study. Both areas are crucial to ensuring a comprehensive understanding of teacher attrition as well as self-study methodology and its contributions to the field. It should be noted that throughout this study there is reference made to both American and Canadian research. This is not to suggest that the situation in Canada is identical to that in the United States. What is does imply is that there are identifiable similarities between the two that recognize many of the existing tensions and difficulties experienced by teachers.

In the field of educational research, the recognition of the value of studying the lives of teachers has been a relatively recent development (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Knowles, Cole & Presswood, 1994). Denzin and Lincoln (1994) suggest that stories are the closest we can come to understanding experience. Therefore, narrative is an appropriate methodology for researchers seeking understanding, meaning, and insight. Understanding how a self-study on matters, issues, and problems that have value to others and will contribute to broader understanding is essential. Many facets of the teaching profession will be investigated, with a focus on some of areas of tension that teachers experience. Literature that focuses on teacher attrition, leadership, mentorship and induction, working conditions, teacher dissatisfaction, teacher motivation, and the role of the teacher will be reviewed. A narrative approach to a personal history self-study, stories and experience, and the process of restorying will be further investigated to
understand how they are utilized, their strengths, benefits, and possible limitations while investigating teacher attrition through the stories and experiences of one teacher.

Teacher Attrition

Teaching is an occupation that chronically experiences a relatively high annual turnover (Ingersoll, 2002), leaving vacancies to be filled and disruption to the existing system. Not all attrition can be considered equal. Some attrition is desirable, as when teachers leave who are ultimately not suited to teach. Other times it is not desirable, as when highly qualified teachers leave. In some cases attrition is temporary and others it is permanent.

In 2002, Canadian Teachers’ Federation President Doug Willard’s goal was to initiate and encourage discussion and debate on key issues facing Canada’s teachers, even if some feathers got ruffled (Canadian Teachers’ Federation, 2001/2002). His plan was to seek constant input from the Canadian Teachers’ Federation’s members, opening up the discussions and taking them to a place they had never been to before, even if it was uncomfortable for those involved.

In 2004, the focus of World Teachers’ Day was on teacher recruitment and retention around the globe and in Canada. Terry Price, president of the Canadian Teacher’s Federation at the time, suggested that their investigations showed that up to 30% of beginning teachers in Canada were leaving teaching within the first 5 years of their teaching career. She went on to say that the Canadian Teachers’ Federation was very concerned with the situation because of the impact it was having on the quality of education for the children. It was believed that the deteriorating working conditions and
cuts to public education in the last decade, particularly in British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario, had taken a toll (Canadian Teachers’ Federation, 2004).

The U.S. Department of Education has reported that over the next decade, more than two million new teachers will walk into a classroom for their first day. Unfortunately, as the National Centre for Education Statistics found, 666,000 of those new teachers will leave sometime during the first 3 years of teaching and one million of them will not make it past 5 years (Ingersoll, 2003). Teacher attrition has become a national and international crisis which makes it an important phenomenon to investigate (Ingersoll, 2003).

New teachers go in to the profession thinking and knowing what they want to do, but they quickly learn it is not what they had hoped or expected to be doing. Every teacher experiences varied roles in their jobs. They may act as a social worker, interpreter, supervisor, organizer, communicator, negotiator, role model, coach, teacher, chaperone, problem solver, evaluator, friend, confidant, and mentor. Each of these roles elicits different behaviour, different emotions and different levels of expertise. The scope of the job is well beyond the job description, and yet every teacher is expected to fulfill the duties professionally and fulfill often unrealistic expectations (Cooper & Travers, 1996).

Something about how schools are structured and managed is leading many teachers to become dissatisfied with their career. It is imperative that the organizational characteristics of schools and the education system that are associated with teacher dissatisfaction be discovered. By doing so, change in the work environment of schools may be possible, which in turn has the potential to ensure a greater degree of career
satisfaction and retention of teachers. The literature has reinforced the notion that if schools fail to provide teachers with work environments which they may become successful, they will surely become disillusioned with their careers no matter how qualified they are. It is imperative that we come to understand the factors that prevent teachers from achieving their intrinsic goals in the workplace and, in turn, increase career dissatisfaction (Conley et al., 1989).

Individuals often discover that they work in schools that are organizationally more complex and less stable and understandable, creating a turbulent working and teaching environment (Westoby, 1988). The environment is often thwarted by an authoritarian leader, who perhaps has overlooked the fact that principal or administrator and teacher are interdependent. The success of one is dependent upon the success of the other. Packwood and Turner (1988) therefore suggest that any administrator who consistently ignores or tramples on the feelings of his or her teachers is most unwise.

Attrition is highest in the early years of the career when many teachers are moving from the survival and discovery stage to that of stabilization (Huberman, 1993, in MacDonald, 1999). MacDonald also suggests that the attrition is highest among those who are young and better qualified. Miech and Elder (1996) found that idealists are significantly more likely to leave teaching. They suggest that as a result of their deep commitment to serving children, they are more easily frustrated by the working conditions in dysfunctional school bureaucracies which prevent them from doing what they deem best. Rosenholtz and Simpson (1990) offer evidence regarding how organizational factors contribute to teachers’ commitment to the workplace. They suggest
that the burden of non-teaching obligations affect new teachers’ commitment much more than it does experienced teachers.

A recent study conducted by the Ontario College of Teachers (2003b) found that 18% of new teachers in Ontario are considered to be at risk of leaving the teaching profession. It also reported that 12% of teachers changed jobs within their schools in the first year, 52% changed jobs between the first and second years, 37% expected another change in their third year, and one in five teachers is at risk of leaving teaching altogether early in their career.

Recent statistics provide insight into the rates of teacher attrition. The National Union of Teachers has suggested that 40 out of 100 Bachelor of Education graduates never make it into the classroom and that 18% of those that do leave within 3 years (Whiteley, 2002). Other data indicate that over 40% of teachers questioned stated they would not again select teaching as a profession and that some 57% were definitely making plans to leave if something better came along or were uncertain as to whether they would stay in teaching (Parks, 1983).

Leadership

Gray (1988) suggests that many administrators have deep anxiety about losing control. It is as though they believe that being in complete control is an expectation. He goes on to say that if a school is running well, there is no need for any one to manage others. Management as we understand it is a form of control or (preferably) facilitation and support. Therefore, Gray suggests that managerial behaviour, such as leadership, is required only when problems arise. He believes that individuals ought not to decide what
others will do; they must simply work along with them in collective decision-making, a continuous collegiality.

Decisions regarding quality education, accountability, and cost efficiency are being made without directly consulting with those who experience their effects. Administrators have the opportunity and the potential to offset or weaken the external effects of governmental and board policies and ensure a high degree of teacher satisfaction. Ultimately the leader can make the school either a pleasant, attractive place in which to work or simply a place in which time is exchanged for income (Parks, 1983).

It is a widely shared belief that leaders affect the performance of school organizations. Bhella (1982) insists that principals’ behaviour and teachers’ job satisfaction are inextricably intertwined. Knowing that job satisfaction is associated with administrative behaviour would suggest that principals ought to be more aware of how their behaviour is perceived and received. Teachers are bound to be more dedicated, satisfied, and empowered if they are provided with opportunities to use their voices, if they feel supported and respected, if their strengths and areas of expertise are valued and acknowledged. Increasing teachers’ intrinsic, self-rewarding satisfaction by increasing their psychological identification with the school is truly as simple as seeking their opinions and advice with respect to the operation of the school (Parks, 1983). It does not seem unrealistic to ask that administrators support their teachers’ sense of self-determination and purpose, in order to ensure and sustain high teacher job satisfaction, which in turn would likely keep teacher attrition rates low. Teachers are capable and responsible for preserving their professional satisfaction, but they must be nurtured, supported, honoured, and valued, just as they ensure their students are.
Principals have the power to influence and affect what people think and how they act within an institution. Appropriate leadership and successful management are vital to the success of its community of learners. Teacher attrition is seen as an indicator of a relatively poor quality of school life and teacher morale (MacDonald, 1999). It is the quality of the school’s values, beliefs, and attitudes that determine how thriving the school community is for both its learners and its leaders. Both the learners and the leaders learn very quickly what the principal values and how he/she prioritizes. How the principal nurtures and inspires the children in the school is a telltale sign of their passion for learning and education as a whole. But more importantly, how a principal nurtures and inspires the teachers in their school explicitly suggests what they value and appreciate. All of this no doubt affects the culture of the workplace.

Mentorship and Induction

Ideally those who are most knowledgeable and capable of being successful mentors ought to be the ones to mentor new teachers. Unfortunately as a result of increasing demands and administrative duties, administrators are left with little to no time to mentor new staff. As a result, many teachers are inducted into teaching without experiencing a successful mentorship program by having a colleague fill the roll or perhaps miss having a mentor altogether. Leadership and mentorship have the potential to work together to positively impact the induction of new teachers, yet their absence has the potential to destruct. The literature suggests that a lack of mentoring or inappropriate induction systems are to blame for premature burnout as new teachers become disillusioned and strive to cope with the daily stressors of the profession (Tye & O’Brien, 2002). Recent literature has negated such claims, suggesting that there are a myriad of
other factors besides induction support that need to be understood in order to come to a better understanding of the high rates of teacher attrition. Tye and O’Brien indicated that teachers who had already left teaching ranked the pressures of increased accountability as their number-one reason for leaving, followed closely by increased paperwork, changing student characteristics, negativity and pressure from parents and the community, and tension between teachers and administration. “Apparently it was the work environment itself that ultimately proved unbearable” (Tye & O’Brien, p. 27).

Working Conditions

There is a basic argument that suggests that in order for schools to be more effective organizations, teachers’ work conditions must be improved (Bacharach, 1990). When teachers’ working conditions are poor, teacher dissatisfaction is ultimately the result. It is believed that schools with poor working conditions will demonstrate high rates of teacher attrition. At a time when teacher attrition levels are so high, it is imperative that school administrators become more sensitive to the factors that lead to teacher attrition. Existing research tends to suggest that school management policies dramatically influence teacher satisfaction and retention; focusing on factors such as teacher influence on school policies, sense of control and influence over their work environment, mentoring and support in day-to-day activities, as well as the effectiveness of administrators (Ingersoll, 2001a; Rosenholtz, 1989).

In his analysis, Ingersoll (2002) suggests that factors such as those tied to the organizational characteristics and the conditions of schools are in fact driving the high turnover rates. As a result, low morale, low desire, and teacher dissatisfaction are reported by teachers.
A lack of trust in the professionalism of teachers and anxiety about national educational standards have led to a policing mentality among administrators... The introduction of many more reporting and documenting requirements, as well as the standardization of many aspects of teaching, contributes both to the much noted increase in overall work load and to the erosion of pleasure on the job...[such as] flexibility, challenge, creativity, working with and for people. (Tye & O'Brien, 2002, p. 31)

Retaining committed, capable and effective teachers is an important challenge for school boards not only in Ontario and North America but around the world.

Teacher Dissatisfaction

Research suggests that high rates of turnover are both the cause and the effect of performance problems in organizations affecting student success in school settings (Ingersoll, 2002). He states that schools are dependent upon commitment, continuity, and cohesion among their staff, making them exceptionally vulnerable to employee turnover. The relationship between teacher turnover and school performance is a large concern, as it is extremely disruptive and impedes performance and the success of the students. Teacher turnover is indicative of underlying problems in the schools functioning and must not be overlooked, considering it a threat to the education system.

Ingersoll (2002) noted that almost half of all teachers exiting the profession cite either job dissatisfaction or the desire to pursue a better job, a different career, or an improved career opportunity as the motivation for leaving. Those teachers who leave as a result of job dissatisfaction usually link their departure to a combination of low salary, lack of support from administration, discipline problems, and lack of influence over
decision-making. The data show that on average teachers have very little say in many key decisions concerned with and affecting their work, but that when they do there is less turnover experienced.

Voke (2002) states that it is often the most intelligent and effective teachers, the teachers whom school boards should be striving to retain, who are leaving the teaching profession at the highest rate. A recent study reported that, according to superintendents, 75% to 100% of the teachers leaving were “highly effective” or “effective” (Hare & Heap, 2001, in Voke, p. 6). Teachers are constantly faced with challenges as in any profession, yet as a group report that they are dissatisfied by insufficient autonomy and control over their teaching.

Spring, a historian of education suggested that “in recent years the satisfaction that teachers have gained from autonomous decision-making and creativity has been threatened by expanding bureaucratic structures and attempts to control teacher behaviour in the classroom (Spring, 1996, p. 41, in Voke, 2002, p. 8). It is in part, this dissatisfaction that is leading teachers to leave the profession. It is obvious that there is no direct correlation with salary; although some might suggest the lifestyle and security of a pension play a part for those who decide not to leave. For many, if not most, intrinsic psychological rewards are the driving force behind their motivation. It is the opportunity to be engaged in meaningful work, the chance to make a difference in the life of a child that draws most to the classroom. Research speculates that when those very intrinsic rewards that brought individuals to the classroom are thwarted, teachers become less willing to tolerate or accept such factors as low salary or lack of support (Goodlad, 1984, in Voke).
Teacher Motivation

Many teachers are motivated by intrinsic rewards. For them, an environment that encourages self-respect and responsibility and supports a sense of accomplishment is motivating. If job satisfaction and motivation are both low, high levels of absenteeism and staff turnover are likely (Chapman & Hutcheson, 1982). It seems that few schools or rather school boards have taken the initiative to ensure that job satisfaction is made a priority, which in turn diminishes the opportunity to enhance student achievement as it seems to be directly correlated to teacher job satisfaction. Rosenholtz and Simpson (1990) indicate that factors such as stress and burnout contribute negatively to students’ learning.

Every experience within the school environment has the potential to impact the self-concept of its teachers. If the environment is negative and threatens their sense of self in any way, they will likely make an effort to protect, maintain, and enhance it, or they may ultimately be pushed to leave teaching altogether (Ontario College of Teachers, 2003b). The literature suggests that teachers have become dissatisfied with burdensome administrative tasks and greater curriculum expectations, yet at the same time they experience an increased sense of accountability, surveillance, and role conflict (MacDonald, 1999).

Schools are incredibly intricate systems that need oil to run efficiently. They are just like our vehicles: without the appropriate oil, the system will eventually run dry and potentially do serious damage. It is the relationships, the networks, the expectations, the beliefs, the administration, the policies, the procedures, the teachers, the parents, the community, and so much more that allow the system to run effectively. Without any one
of those members, the school community will fail and if any of the members has a negative impact on the others, the school community will ultimately suffer.

The Role of the Teacher

Many teachers continue to enter the teaching profession for idealistic reasons: they love children and they love learning. They hope for a world that is a better and more just place where all children will have the chance to live and work in a safe society. But we are learning that, today, these reasons are not enough to sustain teachers’ work for the duration of their career, in the face of the extraordinarily complex and multiple demands they face each day. In order to ensure that they stay, they need a variety of things which they are not getting today. They need school conditions where they are successful and where opportunities to work with other educators in professional learning communities rather than in isolation are supported. Teachers also need opportunities for differentiated leadership and advancement prospects during the course of their career (Ingersoll, 2001a).

The data suggest that issues surrounding teacher attrition and turnover are rooted in the way schools are organized and the way the teaching occupation is treated (Ingersoll, 2001a). In order to ensure that improvements are lasting, it is necessary to understand how the quality of the teaching job can be improved. The literature on attrition is dominated by quantitative studies with results derived from surveys and/or government statistics which seemingly contribute to a lack of cohesive literature on teacher attrition. Examining the data on the reasons teachers themselves give for leaving the profession opens the possibility of a deeper level of understanding. Self-report data of course have their limitations, being subject to biases, and hence must be interpreted with
caution. But the data can be valuable as they come directly from those who are in a position to know the reasons for teachers exiting the profession.

How do schools begin to change the teaching profession? What steps might they take to improve the teaching job and encourage more teachers to remain in the profession? Ingersoll (2003) reminds us of the importance of recognizing that no steps will be easy or inexpensive. There is a significant role for the management and organization of schools in improving the retention rate of teachers, and hence ultimately in aiding the performance of schools.

**Personal History Self-Study**

Hamilton and Pinnegar (1998) define self-study as “the study of one’s self, one’s actions, one’s ideas, as well as the ‘not self’. It is autobiographical, historical, cultural, and political…it draws on one’s life, but it is more than that. Self-study also involves a thoughtful look at texts read, experiences had, people known and ideas considered” (p. 236). Some researchers suggest that self-studies push the boundaries of what counts as research (Hamilton & Pinnegar). It is an emerging methodology that draws on other research traditions to provide the necessary evidence and context for understanding the teaching practice. It is a critical examination of one’s involvement in an experience, of the context for the experience, of the possibilities that exist for improvement and, most importantly, of how change can occur. The work of self-study scholars interrogates traditional ways of thinking about and practicing research. This work challenges the ways we see and value knowledge and the ways that we seek to answer questions (Hamilton & Pinnegar).
As it pushes the boundaries of what counts as research, self-study also pushes the boundaries of what counts as data, how to collect it, and how to report it. It may use a variety of data sources including field records, journals, family stories, unstructured interviews, photographs and personal artifacts, lived stories, letters, and autobiographical writing as strategies (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994; Hamilton & Pinnegar, 1998). It is also a means of sharing successes and frustrations with others interested in teaching. Educators that analyze their own development and work are ultimately working to improve themselves and the broader education system. The aim of self-study research is to provoke, challenge, and illuminate rather than confirm and settle (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 20).

More specifically, personal history self-study reconstructs significant life events to inform professional identity formation. Samaras et al. (2004) describe personal history as being the formative, contextualized experiences that have influenced teachers’ thinking about teaching and their own practice. The connection between the self and history allows the individual critical insight into both the nature of their relationship to individuals, institutions, cultural values, and political events, and the ways in which these social relationships contribute to the individuals’ identity, values, and ideological perspectives (Britzman, in Samaras et al., 2004). According to this view, individuals have the capacity to shape and respond to the social forces that directly affect their lives.

Personal history self-study has the ability to highlight mistakes, understandings, tensions, and insights. It is incredibly honest and specific to the context and time in which it is placed (Samaras et al., 2004). There are a wide variety of qualitative methods that have been used as a source of data collection, such as narratives, journalling,
correspondence, electronic exchanges, story-telling, memory work, emotion work, education-related life-histories, and artistic expression such as photography or poetry.

Writing about personal histories has been used as a means for understanding self, but also as a data collection method. Ultimately, personal histories that are represented through case studies or narratives showcase how personal history influences professional life (Samaras et al.).

One of the major reasons teachers and researchers have engaged in personal history self-study is for self-knowing and for development of their professional identity. There has been an abundance of research on what teachers do and less on why they do what they do, such as leaving the profession. Research about teacher beliefs first began to focus on the whys of teaching. Personal history approach extended this focus by having teachers ask themselves not only to question their beliefs but to uncover where their beliefs were generated and the impact these beliefs have on their identity (Samaras et al., 2004). In many ways, personal history self-study is about teachers trying to hold on to who they are as people, and understand and analyze how they respond to those in power, as well as contextual factors that impinge on their development (Samaras et al.).
The Narrative Approach to a Personal History Self-Study

Qualitative research is a subjective method of inquiry used to describe routine and problematic moments and meaning in people’s lives (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Teachers’ lives are frequently inundated with feelings of frustration, fear, anger and joy, and narrative research elicits these emotions. Lyons and LaBoskey (2002) suggest that narrative is not as simple as a form of storytelling. They say that it can be used as a mode of inquiry, a way of knowing, knowing about teaching. According to Kridel (1998), to be “narratively, is to know who we are and what we stand for” (p. 31). Perhaps one of the most difficult aspects of self-study research is its limited use and short history, and therefore inconsistent methodological procedure.

Narrative inquiry is an increasingly popular method in researching the nature of teachers’ experiences. Clandinin and Connelly (1987) describe narrative research as “a study which is historical, personal, factual, causal in an interpretive sense, and designed to reveal what is meaningful in a person’s history for purposes of understanding” (p. 134). They go on to argue that the principal feature of narrative methods is reconstructing meaning in terms of the narrative unities within teachers’ lives. Narrative unity, they write, is not merely a description of the teachers’ experience but “a meaning-giving account, an interpretation of one’s history” (Clandinin & Connelly, p. 131).

The stories researchers tell can prove to be informative, even inspirational, for other researchers and teachers. The struggle towards understanding the self, experiences, and the world has increasingly been approached through writing. Working narratively offers a way of researching and exploring with the hopes of coming to some understanding.
Stories engage us. We use stories to explain. Stories can help us to understand by making the abstract concrete and accessible. Stories motivate us. There are inductive and phenomenological uses for stories. We learn by both hearing and telling stories. Telling our own stories can be cathartic and liberating. Stories are powerful research tools. They provide us with a picture of real people in real situations, struggling with real problems. They banish the indifference often generated by samples, treatments and faceless objects. They invite us to speculate on what might be changed and with what effect. And, of course, they remind us of our persistent fallibility. Most important, they invite us to remember that we are in the business of teaching, learning, and researching to improve the human condition. Telling and listening to stories, can be a powerful sign of regard – of caring – for one another. (Witherell & Noddings, 1991, pp. 279-280)

Ultimately, “narrative is a process of simultaneously looking back and looking forward from the vantage point of the present” (Olson, 2000, p. 113). Narrative has an impeccable ability to assist in the retrieval and rescuing of our experiences, bringing them into the realm of meaningful experience (Jalongo, Isenberg, & Gerbracht, 1995). It is through narratives that we enable our mind to begin to make sense of the world, through insights, searches for meaning, and the pure connectedness found in the world (Hobson, 2001).

According to Josselson and Lieblich (1995), “the ultimate aim of the narrative investigation of human life is the interpretation of experience” (p. ix).

Stories and Experiences

According to John Dewey, life is experience and the study of education is the study of life (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Clandinin and Connelly suggest that if this is
true, then education must equal experience. They use Dewey’s dictum as a foundation for their work in narrative inquiry, stating that “experience is the stories people live. People live stories, reaffirm them, modify them, and create new ones. Stories lived and told educate the self and others, including the young and those such as researchers who are new to their communities” (p. xxvi). They also believe that “narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience” (p. 20).

Kelly (1955) suggests that many believe we learn from experience. He comes from the standpoint of the psychology of personal constructs, which suggests it is the learning that constitutes the experience. Even from our youngest years, we would agree that stories engage us. We use stories to explain. Stories can help us to understand by making the abstract concrete and accessible. Stories motivate us. We learn by both hearing and telling stories. Telling our own stories can be cathartic and liberating. Stories are powerful research tools. They provide us with a picture of real people in real situations, struggling with real problems. They invite us to speculate on what might be changed and with what effect. Most importantly, they invite us to remember that we are in the business of teaching, learning, and researching to improve the human condition.

Restorying

At some point during this journey I was given the space and encouragement necessary to lay out my story; to stand back and assess its content from a great enough distance to identify and locate its value. Through this process I was able to give myself the necessary break from my experiences, creating enough breathing space between me and my story. I came to understand, as Kenyon and Randall (1997) suggest, that to be a person is not only to have a story but to be a story. From this we can consider that stories
are cognitive, that they contain ideas and emotions and are affective in nature. If this is true, then our thoughts, feelings, and personal identity may be understood as a story. The question is: Do we ultimately have control over how the story unfolds or are we carried along by outside forces and constraints? Is it possible that structural constraints, such as the physical and human environment, silence our stories or voice? As human beings, we are managed by influences in both our inner and outer world, some of which we might argue we have little control over yet will always remain a part of our identity. If we are to understand life and our existence as a story, it is bound to be rich and complex and multifaceted (Kenyon & Randall).

Examining our experiences and the meaning we assign to them is a complex process. To restory our lives is the “process of re-composing the stories we have ‘made up’ about who we are, where we have come from, and where we are headed” (Kenyon & Randall, 1997, p. 1). It is the texts of our experiences which can prove to be life-changing, enabling us to become more of who we are, “more authentic and more alive” (Atkinson, 1995, p. 51, in Kenyon & Randall). How do we go about storying our lives, or for that matter how does one restory their life? There are obvious fundamental differences in how people exhibit their humanness, more specifically differences in how we remember, how we talk about ourselves and our experiences, and how we come to understand and make sense of them. The very process can prove quite daunting for some and yet enticing for others.

Kenyon and Randall (1997) suggest that the first step in the restorying process is the realization that our own story has depth and value. It is then necessary to begin considering where our story has come from and how it came to possesses its form and
content. It is essential that the content of the story have some conflict – subtle or obvious, physical or psychological. In other words, they believe that “if nothing goes wrong, then nothing can go right” (p. 67). The unfolding of these events is constant, continual, and flowing; it cannot stand still. Like a river, the story must go somewhere and unfold (Kenyon & Randall). But as Polkinghorne (1988) suggests, we constantly have to revise the plot as new events are added to our lives (as cited in Kenyon & Randall).

Occasionally the natural process of restorying a life is forced upon us, having its foundation disturbed. Whether we want to or not, we must rework our sense of who we are and where we are going, and what sort of world we share. It is at this point that with a little courage we take ownership and begin authoring and composing our life.

Some people seldom take the time to notice their existence, to question the terms of their story, while others are constantly seeking to understand that which defines them. According to Kenyon and Randall (1997), at a certain point, there is a realization that the old story simply doesn’t work anymore, as it fails to account for all of the new events in the bigger story. Carr (1986, in Kenyon & Randall, p. 61) believes that there are only two options: either we must “change the events to accommodate the story” or “change the story to accommodate the events.” My old story was that I was an enthusiastic, optimistic, and happy teacher. The new reality, though, is that I have become a disillusioned, dissatisfied, and discontented teacher. In order to change my story to accommodate the events, I needed to make fundamental adjustments to my sense of self. In essence it was the realization that I no longer needed to be the victim of my own biography (Botell & Feixas, 1993, as cited in Kenyon & Randall).
I became aware of the necessity to make intentional changes in the direction of my life-course, as in my eyes, it was not headed towards a future that challenged and fulfilled me as I once believed it could. The story I had been composing for myself, the life I imagined myself living, would no longer be. As a result, I needed to begin constructing another in its place where the pieces fit accordingly. I needed to tell my story in light of the literature. Kenyon and Randall (1997) speak about feeling the “storydness” of our lives. It seems it is essential to our functioning in the world; it means believing that events are interrelated and that things happen for a reason and with meaning.

My story was tied to my stories of others, as well as their stories of me; they were difficult to separate. We continually characterize others and then relate to one another in terms of these characterizations (Kenyon & Randall, 1997). It becomes frustrating when any of the characterizations fail, based on wrong impressions. Recognizing how different one actually is from previously supposed enables sides to be identified that may have once appeared invisible. Perhaps we have been “storyotyping” them unfairly, as Kenyon and Randall suggest, constructing a working image of them based on inadequate information. Their character that was once flat begins to take shape and come alive, and because they are co-actors in our lifestory, a change in their role requires adjustment in ours (Kenyon & Randall). This can prove both destructive and constructive depending on the nature of the misunderstanding.

What is most interesting is the effect that others’ characterizations of us have on our identity. Oftentimes they are more than simply a co-author with us and become more of an author over us. By doing so they are constantly instructing us what to do and think
and feel (Kenyon & Randall, 1997). Their vision of who we should be can lead to great frustration and a desire to do and be the exact opposite. It is also possible to become bored with the role we have been assigned, tired of the same old that no longer suits our emerging sense of self. In a sense, we tire of living as the person others believe we are, or should be. It becomes an act essentially of breaking free of their perceptions, losing interest in what others think, and “inventing ourselves afresh – to re-genre-ate, perhaps” (Kenyon & Randall, p. 105).

I did not know where my new plot would lead me; in many ways I still don’t, but thankfully I know more today than I knew a year ago. My character has changed and will likely continue to change as my life-trajectory that I once imagined continues to shift. Part of my larger story experienced a significant shift, which impacted my day-to-day existence, making it difficult to compose myself in my old way (Kenyon & Randall, 1997). By taking control and restorying my self, the system that once limited my life no longer can. The “same old story” is no longer familiar – it is strange and foreign. The frustration that has driven me to leave teaching is filled with passion in an unusual way.

Kenyon & Randall (1997) suggest that there is a unique open-endedness to who we are. Our life has a journey-like, adventurous quality to it, making our identity completely malleable. Within reason, they say, we may tell and live whatever story we choose. The act of restorying, the telling, reading, and retelling is a complex and lengthy process. As former UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld once admitted, “The longest journey is the journey inward” (as cited in Kenyon & Randall, p. 121). It is a courageous task to look at our life as a story, for it means we are continually telling and talking about ourselves – our feelings, relationships, fears, dreams. Understanding why
we feel the need to talk is almost as important as the talking and telling process itself. I am talking to influence others, to better understand my thoughts, to understand the process of my life as a teacher, and to sort through the significance of the events and people that have impacted my place in education (Kenyon & Randall). It is a focused and profound kind of self-telling, with a strong desire to get to the bottom of the unspoken.

It became a matter of imposing structure on my life. My writing needed to assume a direction; it needed coherence and a beginning, middle, and end. Though I needed to come to some understanding of the end, ultimately it is the future direction that continues to unfold, quite possibly not portraying the ideal or presumed solution. Yet what the readers or audience requires must somehow be laid out for them, for they are the ones who will at some point read the recorded self-telling. It is the talking about or the telling of ourselves from the inside out that can help us censor that which will be shared in writing, taking the time to express our story as fully as possible. As Kenyon and Randall (1997) say, “getting ourselves out of ourselves, turning our inside text inside-out (on paper or in the ears of another), inevitably changes us” (p. 128). It is the possibility of expanding and evolving from the expression, the stepping outside of the same old story, opening ourselves to the possibility of differing interpretations of who we are, and the stories we have left untold (Kenyon & Randall).

Reading ones own lifestory requires a self-imposed distance. It means stepping back from the text and being able to critique it with “dispassionate yet affectionate concern” (Kenyon & Randall, 1997, p. 129). It is the process of analyzing, the deconstruction of the textualized life. In essence, we are not only the reader, but the author, narrator, and protagonist simultaneously (Kenyon & Randall). In this way, the
telling, reading, and retelling of our life-text continually overlap. It was important for me in this restorying process to engage with my lifestory on many levels so as to identify the different feelings and the range of emotions, draw differing conclusions, and infer different meaning. It is, as Kenyon and Randall suggest, that "there is a call within, that lures us toward a lifestory that is progressively bigger and better, more embracing of our actual existence" (p. 142).

The act of restorying one’s life has the potential to be empowering. It can “certainly inspire us as we seek meaning and strength in the face of the large scale structural changes that impact our lives in today’s world and by which we are invariably, though variously, shaped – depending on our personal facticity and sense of possibility” (Kenyon & Randall, 1997, p. 169). Embarking on such a journey, that of intentionally restorying our life, insists we be “granted the serenity to accept what we cannot change, the courage to change what we can, and the wisdom to know the difference” (p. 170).

Is it not our destiny as human beings: to learn, to grow, to come to know ourselves and the meanings of our life in the deepest, richest, most textured way possible? If we do not know the self, what can we know? If we cannot learn from reflection upon our lived experiences, from what can we learn?

–Michael Brady (in Kenyon & Randall, 1997, p. 117)

Summary of Review of the Literature

The literature suggests that narrative research has become an important means for understanding teachers’ culture: that is, teachers as knowers of themselves, of their situations, of children, of subject matter, of teaching, and of learning (Clandinin & Connelly, 1991, 1994). This kind of research is moving away from the traditional
questions of who one is to a focus on when, where, and how one is. There is a gap in qualitative literature: the lived experiences of teachers, along with the phenomenon of teacher attrition, have not been addressed. There is a great need to seek out the stories and experiences of teachers who have left the teaching profession. Understanding how the system is threatening what new teachers believe and what is important to them is essential to changing the rate of teacher retention. Children deserve classrooms where teachers care, where learning is exciting, where experience is key, and where teachers are dedicated and determined and full of enthusiasm. The system is responsible for keeping that enthusiasm and dedication alive in its teachers.

The remainder of this study seeks to understand the very experiences and stories, the tensions and disjunctions I experienced as a teacher, and how they ultimately affected my motivation and dedication to teach, as well as my desire to remain in the classroom. Through an in-depth analysis of such experiences, I will identify exactly what led me to make the decision I made, producing pertinent information that may guide future change.
CHAPTER THREE: DISCOVERING A METHOD TO SHARE MY JOURNEY

To truly question something is to interrogate something from the heart of our existence, from the center of our being.

—Max van Manen (1990, p. 43)

Historically, there have not been many authors who have made themselves and their personal experiences a central focus of their research, but over the past few years this has changed significantly. There has been a wave of interest in more personal, intimate, and embodied writing (Ellis & Bochner, 2003). The purpose of this self-study (LaBoskey, 2004) was to represent through stories and reflection my experiences as an elementary teacher and my quest to understand the tensions and disjunctions experienced that led me to leave the teaching profession. Ivor Goodson (1989) suggested that we, as a community of educators, need to know more about teachers’ lives. Teachers are rarely given the opportunity to share their experiences in depth, or tell their stories with their community of educators or the community at large. And because “narratives speak the truth of teachers’ lives, they are compelling to an audience broader than the teachers who write them” (Richert, as cited in Lieberman & Miller, 2001, p. 49).

This chapter outlines the research methodology and procedures followed in this study. I have included a few examples of data collected and the process through which I confronted each piece, determining its relevance and potential to contribute to this study. This research method is grounded in phenomenology, or the study of lived experiences (van Manen, 1990). It uses narrative to explore the ways of knowing by constructing and re-constructing personal experiences. The telling of story allows for a fuller possession of the experiences had, supporting their ownership and their telling with confidence. It is
through self-study that we come to know much of what we do and how we react. LaBoskey (2004) says, “It is scholarship initiated by and focused on us” (p. 858).

Methodology

Teachers often organize their professional experiences into stories. They are actively construing their career experiences into a story that is meaningful to them. This constructivist approach focuses not so much on the facts or events in themselves, but rather the meanings they have for the teacher (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 1998). This way, the stories are always contextualized, referring to particular experiences in a particular school at a particular time. This contextualized element is important because it implies an interactionist stance; human behaviour always results from meaningful interaction with the environment or context (i.e., social, cultural, material, and institutional) (Hamilton & Pinnegar).

The stories and experiences presented in chapter 4 represent the vast and varied experiences of my short teaching life. The work did not end with the composing of the narrative. It was the reflexive struggles and interpretation of these narratives that allowed my self-knowledge and understanding to emerge. By delving deep beneath the surface, I located the tensions and disjunctions I experienced as a teacher in the public education system, which offered me a clearer, more insightful understanding of my decision to exit the profession.

Who we are and come to be as teachers and educators is a reflection of a complex, ongoing process of interaction and interpretation of elements, conditions, opportunities, and events that take place throughout our lives in all realms of our existence – the intellectual, physical, psychological, spiritual, political, and social (Cole & Knowles,
2000). The reconstructed articulation of prior and current life experiences in this study provide the opportunities to pull out the narrative threads that connect my personal and professional selves, and the influence of my personal history on my present thinking and future as an educator.

Phase One

The first phase of this research involved collecting and organizing the data. This occurred informally over a 3-year period. The data were recorded in the form of journals, letters, photographs, and short stories, as a means of retelling and recording meaningful and powerful lived experiences; essentially they were personal history accounts. The data included experiences that influenced my personal and professional understandings, practices, and beliefs. Many would argue that their personal histories are separate from their professional practice and relegate their pasts to their personal archives (Cole & Knowles, 2000). Yet through the exploration of my personal history, as both a student and a teacher, I explored and unlocked my values and beliefs and the interaction with my personal and professional experiences.

The data represents a span of time that reflects a myriad of experiences; highs and lows, frustrations, challenges, successes and failures. In many ways they represent the phenomenon that Malcolm Gladwell describes in *The Tipping Point* (2002), in that as a result of the exploration of my personal history, the powerful moments came to the surface to reveal their profound effect. It was the culmination of such powerful moments and events which led to the tipping of my beliefs and future as a teacher.

The following is an example of a piece of data that I collected. It was a journal entry from my first week of teaching:
2001

As I did one last check of my brand new classroom before the bell rang, I wondered how my first day of teaching would unfold. It had been such an unusual start for me, as the children I was getting had already begun their year in other classes. The school was in a new community where houses were closing daily. The office was always in flux, trying to find a desk and a teacher for each new child that entered its doors. My 2/3 split-grade class was made up of a myriad of students, primarily students who spoke English as their Second Language, or were at least exposed to another language in their home. We all looked very different, especially me with my fair skin and blond hair. But there was a unique feeling that day, one that told me we were all going to be all right. It was one little boy who caught my immediate attention. He was short in stature with dark brown hair; he had the most gleaming black eyes you have ever seen. The children did not speak with him; they couldn’t. He had just arrived in Canada from Sri Lanka the previous week. As a new teacher trying her best to welcome these children who were being shuffled around like a deck of cards, I wondered how it was that I was to reach this little boy. When I spoke to him, he would always smile back, shining the deepest, most pronounced dimples, but the look in his eyes told me he didn’t understand. I wanted very badly to be able to connect with this child. And yet I imagined that everything we did that first day, and for many days that followed, would mean nothing to him.

While reading through this journal entry, I was overcome by a myriad of emotions and thoughts. As they came, I would jot them down, for it was my immediate reaction that I believed offered the greatest insight into that particular experience. Here are a few such thoughts:
• lack of resources – I had been given nothing to start up that class – already by the end of the first week I had spent several hundred dollars of my own money buying books and resources

• the communication from the office was sparse – we were usually unaware of the arrival of a new student until they were standing at the door – on one occasion I even had a mixed-up kindergarten student line up with my class and join us for the morning – I assumed he was just another new student – he was tall enough to be in Grade 2 but I quickly discovered he was unable to print his own name – a red flag went up when I saw his name on his shoes – he’d taken a wrong turn and nobody knew

• there was no support for these children who had just arrived in Canada – how frightening – what skills could a new teacher possibly have that would provide them with what they deserved – I tried my darnedest

• new teachers are often assigned the most difficult classes – would it have not been in the best interest of the students to have the split class be taught by somebody experienced?

• I believed that trying to reach this child was one of the most important tasks I’d been assigned – I needed him to feel welcome, to feel safe and to want to come back to my class the next day

Upon returning to these jot notes at a later date, I would reassess the journal entry and my thoughts for their importance. While rereading them I would ask myself some questions:

• How important was this experience?
• Did it contribute to my state of disillusionment?

• Was it imperative for the reader to understand or experience in order to gain a representative picture of my life lived as a teacher?

• Was it relevant?

• Did it present similar tensions to other experiences?

I realized that I believed it was important, but that it was not imperative. It certainly contributed to my dissatisfaction and frustration with the system that I believed was deeply troubled, but it ultimately was not the most representative experience for my readers. At this point, I would move on to another piece of data, this time to a short narrative I had composed. I wondered if there was anything important locked inside of it.

2005

An army green duotang sat beside me on the couch amidst a pile of old artifacts. I could almost smell its age. Below the date was the author's name, J. M. Porter; my grandfather whom I barely knew. Upon closer investigation of the contents within the duotang, I realized it was an address that my grandfather had given at the graduation exercises of his former Alma Mater, Galt Collegiate Institute and Vocational School. As I began to peruse the address, I was immediately held captive by my grandfather's words. I found myself lost, deep inside his thoughts, all the while trying to imagine what it would have been like to have been a graduating student in the audience.

I felt both ignorant and sad and began to crave a deeper understanding of who he was as a person; a father, a grandfather, a prominent figure in education. I imagined the types of conversations we could have had if he were alive today. I wonder if he would have been proud of me. I realize that he had accomplished so much in such a short life.
He'd been the founding president of Sheridan College, a Director of Education, a Superintendent, a Principal; he'd filled the shoes of so many important roles. A true inspiration to me. I have to wonder if this has affected me, my mission to be more than just a classroom teacher. If only I had known then how much of an impact that green duotang would have on me, I might have prolonged the experience.

As I opened up the green duotang to begin reading Grandpa’s address, I found myself momentarily lost in time. The room was silent and the lights were dim. The sun periodically peaked through the clouds, offering a glimmer of hope that the rain might pass. I was finally able to concentrate and give my Grandpa’s words my full attention. As I reached page 5 of Grandpa’s address, I was immediately struck by a deep connection I felt to his words. He was speaking about the character Tennyson in “Ulysses” and made reference to one of his statements, “I am a part of all that I have met.” My grandfather went on to suggest that some people meet all sorts of experiences in life, but have little reaction to them, and as a result find themselves little modified or changed by the experience they encountered. But then he suggested that “other people are ready to profit from every experience they witness or participate in.” He said, “I think that the chief role of education is to prepare one to profit to the fullest extent from all his/her experiences.”

These words resonated within me.

Upon rereading this narrative I was flooded with thoughts and questions. Here are a few examples:

- How have I profited from my lived experiences these past few years – the positive, the negative, the fulfilling, the frustrating?

- How has my reaction to each of these experiences modified or changed me?
• Did I profit to the fullest extent as my grandfather suggested?

• Will any of these experiences affect the way I interact with students or people in the future?

• Have they made me reconsider my practice, my future, my place in education?

None of these questions were easy to answer and required much further thought and reflection, but I recognized the importance of this piece. I believed there was something of value, something I might have been able to work with at a later stage in the process. The data was not all examples of lived experiences from teaching, but ultimately they contributed to my journey, the direction I have taken and how I located myself amidst it all.

Phase Two

The second phase of this study involved drawing from the data to write a narrative piece entitled Sarah's Story. The “rewriting” of my self, as Freeman (1993) refers to it, allowed me to compose Sarah's Story, the main piece of data for this self-study.

“Wherever a story comes from, whether it is a familiar myth or a private memory, the retelling exemplifies the making of a connection from one pattern to another” (Cole & Knowles, 2000, p. 8). Writing a personal history account can raise many imperative questions: What is it about my life that is of any value for others and for me? How can writing in the first person count as knowledge? What do I include and what do I leave out? What is safe? How will I represent myself? How will I portray others?

After having identified and explored all pieces of data collected, I separated them based on their importance and ability to contribute to my larger story. Going through this phase one of this study enabled me to find and take ownership of my voice. It was then
that I began composing *Sarah’s Story*. I made the decision to document *Sarah’s Story* in the third person for several reasons, the most important being that I believed it enabled me to self-impose what I felt was necessary distance between my experiences, my emotions, and the telling of *Sarah’s Story*. I hoped that the telling of my story through a voice somewhat removed, might enrich and strengthen it while removing as much bias as possible from the telling of the story. I knew that I wanted and needed to continue to take ownership of my story, therefore the insight and analysis that follows was written in the first person.

As Cole and Knowles (2000) suggest, in fact we are like archaeologists sifting through the debris that surrounds our lives. The job of uncovering the symbolic artifacts that enabled us to construct meaning lead to the discovery of that which has shaped our actions as individuals and as educators. Personal history self-studies can prove to be quite intrusive, leaving one to wonder about self-disclosure. What do I acknowledge? What do I write? Of course there are events and perspectives shared that may be disconcerting or painful for myself and for others. For this reason, *Sarah’s Story* did not go public, as it was not included in its entirety. *Sarah’s Story* is my reality. It is my story that communicates my experiences and in the end it is these experiences that shaped me, my vision, and my practice as an educator.

Like many qualitative researchers, I was somewhat overwhelmed by the sheer volume of data I had collected. Of course deciding what to include and what to leave out was a difficult task. In many ways, I felt compelled to preserve and share everything exactly the way I had experienced it. No matter how hard I tried, it would be impossible for me to capture a complete telling of my story, but such is the nature of personal history
research (Cole & Knowles, 2000). I realized that so long as my readers understood why I had selected the events and experiences that I had, revealing my selection criteria, my honesty would be respected and appreciated.

Phase Three

Interpreting and analyzing Sarah's Story needed to be straightforward. The objective was to uncover recurring areas of tension. I devised a system of note-taking that enabled me to record my thoughts and impressions as I interacted with the data. Initially, each time tension was identified in Sarah's Story, I marked it with an uppercase T. As I proceeded with the rereading, a range of tensions emerged. Upon completion of this analysis, I listed all of the identified tensions and assigned a new name to characterize each. In order to ensure that these new names accurately represented tensions presented in Sarah's Story, I revisited the material to check for accuracy.

I then identified passages in Sarah's Story that best exemplified the tensions identified. Choosing the appropriate vignettes from Sarah's Story was a difficult but important stage of the process. I knew that I needed to select the vignettes in a systematic and thoughtful way, ensuring that the passages that were selected were those that best documented my story. How I arrived at the excerpts I included took much time and thought. I needed to identify those events and experiences that were absolutely imperative for my story to be understood. It was easy to say that they were all important and they all ought to be shared and understood.

While selecting which vignettes to include from Sarah's Story, I had several questions in mind: Was it relevant? Was it necessary? Was it ethical? In trying to decide if a particular vignette was relevant, I would remind myself of the purpose of the study.
By doing so, I was able to eliminate extraneous data which were interesting but not directly relevant to the study. Some of Sarah’s Story would have provided more detail than was necessary to establish the context of my experiences.

In deciding what to include, I continually asked myself whether it was necessary, both to Sarah’s Story and to the overall quality of my writing. I arranged the data into “manageable units, synthesizing them, discovering what [was] important and what [was] to be learned” (Bogdan & Bilken, 1992, p. 153) from them. I tried to choose the vignettes that best represented the developing tensions that I had identified, and I attempted to weave them into what I hoped developed into rich and compelling prose. With such a lengthy story, I had to be incredibly selective, choosing representative passages that exemplified particular themes rather trying to include everything.

And finally, while deciding whether or not it was ethical to include a particular vignette, I always retreated to showing the utmost respect for all parties involved. Throughout the writing of this study I ensured that I continually placed ethical considerations above all other criteria. I believed that there were enough interesting and relevant vignettes for me to include without delving into murky water.

At several points throughout the analysis, a non-traditional form of representation was included, one that went beyond the traditional verbal and text-based means. The visual representations are authentic and meaningful and articulate that which I am trying to understand and that which I am trying to represent (Cole & Knowles, 2000). The analysis of Sarah’s Story lasted many months and involved much thought, discussion, and continued reflection. The process of composing Sarah’s Story was an opportunity to share my experiences, and embed them with honesty and emotion.
In a sense, it is as Cole and Knowles (2000) suggest: again, like an archaeologist, I sifted through heaps of sand and gravel to find the nuggets of knowledge that inspired the quest. In the end, the insights led to more questions, which potentially inspired further inquiry – if not by me, by others. *Sarah's Story* offers an insider’s perspective, a view through the back door into the reality of teaching experiences in an elementary school in Ontario. I hope that through *Sarah's Story*, as well as my artistic articulation, the complexity, depth, and breadth of my experiences will be acknowledged and respected as a form of wisdom and knowledge (Cole & Knowles).

**Ethical Considerations**

Unfortunately with personal history self-study research, there are no hard and fast rules to abide by to ensure ethical behaviour (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Lincoln, 1990). There are only guiding principles. Unlike other forms of research, personal history self-studies cannot have their ethical dimensions effectively addressed through typical standardized procedures. Instead, ethical issues must be continually addressed at every phase of the research. It is very difficult in this type of research as behaviour that is ethical in one situation may be unethical in another.

There are a myriad of standard ethical considerations faced in qualitative research, but with self-study methodology there are a few specific considerations that must be addressed. Standing in the shoes of both the researcher and participant, I had many decisions to make. My biggest concern revolved around the fact that this was a very public document, a document that essentially might be read or viewed by any number of people. For that reason, it was essential that I protect the specifics of my story, including names of people and places. With colleagues’ anonymity protected, it is nearly
impossible for anyone to identify or recognize characters from the vignettes included in the data. Unfortunately, giving myself a pseudonym would offer me or anyone else involved in *Sarah's Story* little protection from those with inside knowledge.

The process of conducting self-study research presents a difficult dilemma with respect to identity. It requires a self-imposed distance at various stages – one that is difficult while simultaneously playing the roles of narrator, author, and protagonist. I made the decision to write *Sarah's Story* in the third person because I wanted to ensure that I was able to remove myself as far as possible from the events I had experienced, and because I recognized the emotion involved and the deep connection to the experiences and needed to separate the two as best I could. Though an unbiased analysis is difficult, I believed trying to look at Sarah and her experiences through a lens that was somewhat removed would prove to be more insightful and informative.

Self-study encourages the uncovering, critiquing, and celebrating of significant aspects of the teaching profession and seeks to establish an even deeper understanding of their implications regarding teacher attrition (LaBoskey, 2004). Restorying one’s experiences requires bravery. In releasing one’s story, the fear of having it used against oneself emerges. Thus, as Randall (1995) suggests, “much of what we come to restory we leave untold” (p. 286). Restorying relies heavily upon memory. The road to restorying requires complete honesty. Unfortunately there is risk involved, as the opportunity for uncovering unwanted memories exists.

Deep inquiry such as this, the continuous questioning and studying of one’s own practice, ideas and experiences, demands a particular state of mind. In many ways, one needs the strength to live with uncertainties, open-ended questions, doubts, and
hesitations. The continual inquiring, questioning, and searching attitude may prove to be a successful way of dealing with the complexities of the teaching profession. Self-studies do have the potential to make life more difficult.
CHAPTER FOUR: WHY DID I LEAVE?

*Studying teachers' lives gives voice to an occupational group that has been historically marginalized.*

- Goodson, 1992, p.15

Based on the need for more qualitative research, this study was designed to extend understandings about one teacher's reasons for leaving the profession, by specifically seeking to understand the perceptions, beliefs, and personal accounts of the day-to-day experiences, personalized through the eyes and voice of a teacher. The purpose of this study therefore was to explore the facets of my professional experiences that enabled me to say that I no longer wished to be a teacher. Through my stories and reflections, I have tried to understand what it means for a teacher to make the decision to exit the profession, by investigating the areas of tension that I personally experienced within the education system. The dissatisfying facets of the teaching profession greatly impacted my satisfaction, commitment, motivation, and morale, and as a result led me to make the decision to leave the teaching profession. I therefore sought to come to a deeper level of understanding of why I, after having taught for only 3 years, left the classroom that I worked so hard to enter.

The data and analysis in chapter 4 have been framed by three images: *Reaching, The Journey,* and *Finding a Path.* In essence, these three images frame the tensions identified that will be discussed in the analysis. The photographs were taken before the tensions had been identified but were the catalyst for the framing and analysis that follows. They represent my existence as a teacher and envelop all emotions and feelings that I endured.
Reaching encompasses a range of tensions experienced, represented by the following themes: The Process of Becoming Educated; The Role of the System; Where is the Community of Learners?; What is the Role of the Teacher?; Teacher Dissatisfaction; Standardized Testing; Curriculum; Grading and Accountability; School Culture; and Working Conditions and Teacher Commitment. The Journey encompasses tensions represented by the following themes: Intellect, Emotion, and Spirit; Voice; Motivation and Morale; Effective Communication; Professional Development; Career Development; Professional Autonomy and Decision-making; Leadership; Relationships; and Empowerment, Participation, and Collaboration. And Finding a Path encompasses the areas of tension represented by the following themes: Taking Action; The Courage to Tell, the Passion to Reflect, the Confidence to Know; What Were My Options?; My Future in Education; and The Road Yet Travelled.

The tensions I identified from through my stories and reflections will be discussed and analyzed under the chosen themes. They will be investigated and will include carefully selected vignettes from Sarah's Story to offer insight into the daily existence of a teacher, through various lived experiences. A mind map depicting the thought process I endured while developing the organization for chapter 4 is included for your reference (Appendix A).

Reaching

The photograph entitled Reaching, was taken in the Hana rainforest in Maui, Hawaii. It represents the many emotions and feelings I continually experienced while attempting to reach above and beyond my predetermined existence as a teacher.
Figure 1. Reaching.
Recurring feeling, pervasive darkness
Identity compromised, lost individuality
Strengths, character, personality traits
Interfere, clash
Expectation ~ conform, obey, accept
Speaking out, challenging, questioning ~ unwelcome
Stand as one, be as one
Straight, narrow, side-by-side
Internal struggle, sense of despair
Lost, confined
Claustrophobic
Name, unknown
Number 327854

The Process of Becoming Educated

What does it mean to be well educated (Kohn, 1999a). How do we define being educated? Do we value knowing a lot of stuff or being a good thinker? What is the main purpose of schooling? Is it purely academics? Or should “the main aim of education be to produce competent, caring, loving and loveable people” as Noddings (1992) professes? Should we be most concerned about students’ intellectual development or how strong their desire to keep learning is? Is the point to transmit knowledge to students or to help them become reflective people (Kohn, 1999b)? If all schools were striving to help children “become better able to think, care, imagine, understand, and adapt to become
autonomous learners" (Kohn, 1999b, p. 116), might schools be happier, more successful places?

Should schools be “exerting pressure upon [the students] in order that they may learn proper consideration for others, respect for customs and conventions, the need for work, etc.,” as Émile Durkheim believed (as cited in Kohn, 1999b, p. 116), or should “the principal goal of education be to create men and women who are capable of doing new things, not simply of repeating what other generations have done – men and women who are creative, inventive and discoverers, [who] have minds which can be critical, can verify [rather than] accept everything they are offered,” as Jean Piaget believed (as cited in Kohn, p. 116)? Dewey insisted that education should be seen as a “process of living not a preparation for future living” (as cited in Kohn, p. 117). What do schools believe in today? How well do the events and practices that occur within the classrooms reflect society’s commitments regarding the purpose of school?

Kohn (1999b) asks a very simple question regarding how parents or teachers would like students to turn out: What are the long-term goals we have for students. Kohn suggests that the answers from parents and teachers are remarkably similar, taking all variables into consideration. People repeatedly suggest that they want their kids to be “happy and fulfilled, successful and productive, ethical and decent, independent and self-reliant, but also caring and compassionate – and confident, curious, creative, critical thinkers, and good communicators” (Kohn, 1999b, p. 120). Kohn quickly points out that no one ever thinks in terms of their child possessing a “storehouse of facts” (p. 121). The bottom line is that there is a disconnect or a tension between that which we desire for our kids and the kind of education they may actually be receiving.
Noddings (2003) speaks about the likelihood of children seizing their educational opportunities with delight if school is a happy place to be. But clearly, if children are to be happy in schools, it is imperative that their teachers be happy too. Too often, this obvious connection is forgotten. When teachers believe in the kind of education they are providing and the benefits to the students, all is well. Yet when teachers experience a disjunction between that which they believe in and that which they are expected to do or the conditions under which they must operate, the environment is at increased risk of discontent for both teachers and students, making school an unwelcoming and unsuccessful place to be.

"Excuse me boys and girls, you know the rules. There is to be no talking for the first 10 minutes of nutrition break. When I turn the lights back on, you will know when it is okay to use your indoor voices again." The looks on the students' faces as they listened to Sarah and the other lunch supervisors repeat these words every nutrition break, was that of complete and utter frustration. They had worked so hard that morning that Sarah felt they shouldn't have to be quiet; rather, they should be celebrating their accomplishments. But she knew that if the principal walked by, there would be repercussions for not abiding by her rules.

The teachers knew that regardless of whether they agreed with it or not, what the principal expected in terms of behaviour must be followed. Sarah often thought about her years in elementary school and wondered if it was ever so extreme; she couldn't remember it being that way. Now as she was standing in the shoes of the teacher, it seemed so utterly unreasonable. Sarah wondered if it seemed as unreasonable and unnecessary to the students. "There is nothing that I can do about it," Sarah would
explain in response to their queries. "It's the principal's rule and we must abide by it". Sarah would try to imagine what it must be like not to have the chance to socialize with peers during the down times while at school. Walking in the halls, first thing in the morning, lunch break, those were the highlights of the school day, the times children longed for. It seemed that there were fewer and fewer opportunities for the students to live as children while at school.

“Our students are faced with so many challenges and demands already in the classroom; why do they need this additional pressure?” Sarah’s colleague muttered under his breath. The teachers experienced a great deal of frustration trying to manage student behaviour to such extremes. In their eyes, it often seemed like an unnecessary battle. They wondered what value there was in teaching kids to be so silent; it only made instructional time that much more difficult because they were anxious to use their voices. “Talk is so important; it is one of the most viable means for children to learn,” Sarah said. Restricting students’ behaviour in such extreme ways only suggests one thing to them; that adults are in control, and that school is not to be a fun place.

“This is nothing more than micromanaging and a matter of exerting control over the students and the teachers,” Sarah said. The teachers believed there was no harm done in having children speak with indoor voices, but Sarah did believe there was harm done in having them abide by such ridiculous rules. “I have to remind myself, I am just a teacher and that to speak out about such a matter would prove more destructive than beneficial,” Sarah would tell herself over and over again. It appeared as though the principal was far more concerned with the appearance of the school than the reality of it
being an effective and conducive learning environment. Decisions were not being made with the best interest of the students in mind; they couldn't be.

The Role of the System

The culture within the school was deteriorating at a rapid rate. Teachers were unhappy and students were the recipients of their discontent. "Gosh, the tension is so thick in here you could almost cut it with a knife," one of the teachers said. "How is it that we can be made to feel so incapable, incompetent and untrustworthy on a daily basis?" It was this internal state of despair that was driving Sarah to question her place in the education system. "If I am not able to be the best that I can be, what am I supposed to do? It simply isn't fair, for me or my students. I know that I can make a difference in the lives of children, but my efforts are continually thwarted by the demands of the system and the pressures and control imposed by our administration. This is not at all how I envisioned it to be."

Part of the problem is that the system shies away from asking the right questions, and as Kohn (1999a) suggests, following the data where they lead. Teacher attrition falls into this category. Seldom do they ask the necessary questions that would enable them to understand their loss of knowledgeable, skillful teachers, for the data may lead them somewhere they are not prepared to go. Teachers have been complaining with increasing bitterness about a changing work environment in public schools for some time now. The system needs to begin rectifying the conditions that undermine the power and effectiveness of our public school system. There needs to be a focus on creating a work environment that will continue not only to draw bright, committed new teachers, but also
to ensure they remain enthusiastic, energetic, and productive throughout their careers, and ultimately remain in the profession (Tye & O’Brien, 2002).

Where is the Community of Learners?

*Teaching is mostly listening, and learning is mostly telling.*

–Deborah Meier (1995)

A nontraditional or progressive education recognizes learning as an active process where learners are given an active role (Kohn, 1999b). This way, students’ questions help to shape the curriculum. The focus is on understanding ideas from the inside out. A classroom is a place where a community of learners, as opposed to a collection of discrete individuals, engages in discovery and invention, reflection, and problem-solving. If we take a moment to consider this framework, but apply it to teachers and administrators, could we not say that this way of recognizing the students as active agents could be used with teachers as well? Shouldn’t administration also focus on creating a community of teachers, who together work to create, problem-solve, reflect, and invent?

In many ways, the culture administrators create within a school should, and has the potential to, mirror the ways teachers create their classroom culture. The differences are obvious between a teacher-centred and an administration-centred school environment, as they are between a learner-centred and a teacher-centred classroom. Evans (2001) presents a teacher-centred approach as an education management and leadership ideology that is predicated upon acceptance of the idea that leaders have as much responsibility towards their staff whom they lead as they do towards the students in their institution.

A teacher-centred leader, Evans (2001) explains, would behave in such a way that they demonstrate as much care and interest in teachers’ well-being as would a child-
centred teacher towards the students in their care. A teacher-centred leader would focus less on their staff as a whole and more on the individuals that make up the staff. This teacher-centred approach to leadership is diametrically opposed to extreme authoritarian leadership that primarily reflects the leader’s values, ideologies, expectations, and aspirations and promotes and enforces them within institutional policies and decision-making (Evans, 2001).

“Well, the superintendent didn’t have too many positive things to say about what he saw, but he was pleased with our visitor parking,” the principal stated at the afternoon staff meeting. The previous day the superintendent had been at the school for his routine walkabout. “One of his gravest concerns is the number of teacher absences. According to his printout, you took an average of 2.5 sick days last year, and he feels this is totally unacceptable. As a result, the superintendent is now insisting that absences be more closely monitored.”

At this point the anger and frustration was evident not only in Sarah’s face, but in all of the teachers’ faces. “Our contract grants us a total of 20 sick days per year. That equates to 2 days per month. Who are they to dictate when it is okay to use a sick day?” one of the teachers said under their breath, but loud enough for many to hear. Interestingly enough, there was no interest expressed regarding an inquiry into the reasons for the absences. Had there been, perhaps it all might have become a little clearer.

Many teachers were not physically ill with a cold or the flu, but were in desperate need of what they referred to as “mental health days”. “I’m going to continue to use my sick days as I see fit,” one of the teachers said to the group at her table. “If and when I
am close to reaching my breaking point, when my motivation has reached rock bottom and I know that my students would be better off without me, I will take a sick day.” The teachers recognized the need to be rejuvenated, refresh their attitude, and take time away from all the negativity. “But he doesn’t even know why people have been away. Why doesn’t he give us an opportunity to share that with him?” If the superintendent had approached any one of the teachers, chances are good that he might gain some valuable insight into the trends he was noticing. He might have learned how much the teachers were dreading coming to work each day, how low the morale was, how incompetent they were made to feel, or perhaps he would learn about specific incidents that proved detrimental to their well-being.

It is a fact that we all tend to be happiest and most effective when we have some say about what we are doing. If we are instead just told what to do, all excitement dissipates (Kohn, 1999b). “To see a classroom in action where students are given some control over what happens, where their questions and concerns are utilized to help shape the course of study, where they’re consulted to help to decide what they’re doing, and when, and where, and how, and with whom, and why” is, as Kohn (1999b) suggests, “breathtaking” (p. 151). Would this not be the case if it were applied to the teachers within schools? Imagine the impact such a mode could have on the culture within a school.

Palmer (1993) suggested that real learning can not happen until students are brought into relationship with the teacher, with one another, and with the subject. He believes that we cannot learn deeply and well until a community of learning is created in the classroom. What Palmer is suggesting is transferable to the teachers and
administrators in schools; without establishing and nurturing the community within the school, teaching and learning are both threatened.

Palmer (1993) goes on to say that teachers must invite students into active participation in knowing, that they need to become mutually responsible participants and co-creators. Administrators must also invite teachers to be active participants as well as co-creators in policies and procedures and matters within the school that are important to them, enabling and encouraging the community within the school to take ownership of these matters. For “to study with a teacher [or principal] who not only speaks but listens, who not only gives answers but asks questions and welcomes our insights, who provides information and theories that do not close doors but open new ones, who encourage students [or teachers] to help each other learn – to study with such a teacher [or administrator] is to know the power of a learning space” (Palmer, p. 70). How similar the roles truly are.

The morale in schools can be greatly affected by the tactics used by administration. It is more and more common for teachers to feel demoralized, unmotivated, disillusioned, dissatisfied, and frustrated as a result. The “top-down” management and lack of trust can be very evident, as can be the poor communication, the insistence on abiding by very rigid and bureaucratic policies and procedures, and the administrative decisions that consistently undermine teachers’ judgment and expertise. All of this, I believe, creates and contributes to a lack of community and cohesiveness among the staff.
What is the Role of the Teacher?

The role of teachers has shifted from what we once knew it to be. Today, teachers are expected to wear many hats during the course of the school day. Teachers continue to be responsible for more, as they are required to fill many of the roles that were once taken care of in the home and elsewhere in the community. Teachers are expected to preserve and transmit traditional values to younger members of society at the same time as they are expected to prepare them to deal with an ever-changing world (Owens, 2004). While they take on new problems and mandates, little of the old role has been cast aside to make room for these changes. With all of the instrumental demands and imperatives, Hargreaves (1994) suggests the self tends to be suppressed or denied, while being trapped by the "iron cage of bureaucracy" (p. 9). He goes on to say that teachers can not be who they want to be because their selves have been subordinated to the system. The fight to cope and survive the overwhelming controls and constraints is a struggle.

What are the fundamental questions that administrators are asking to drive the practices within schools? It essentially goes one of two ways. The concern revolves around control of students and their behaviour, or care and concern regarding specific needs and how to meet them (Kohn, 2003a). Knowing which questions the administration cares about enables one to make a pretty accurate prediction regarding how the school will look and feel and what the teachers' role will be.

Often, little trivial details are the focus, leaving administrators to miss the bigger picture. The late educational researcher John Nicholls once remarked that he had met a lot of administrators who "don’t want to hear a buzz of excitement in classrooms – they want to hear nothing" (as cited in Kohn, 2003a). Nicholls was suggesting that the nature
of the tight control imposed by some teachers is a result less of their principles than of their principals. It seems unbelievable that silence and order can rank higher than curiosity, enthusiasm, and joy.

What is the role of teachers then? Are we all here to help students “act on their desire to make sense of the world,” or are we here to decide what students are required to do and to ensure they are fulfilling their obligation to do a better job (Kohn, 1999b, p. 93)? Unfortunately, so much has already been decided for teachers, making the role somewhat like that of a technician or a robot. Teachers are constantly expected to put into play decisions made by others. Telling teachers what to do and then holding them “accountable” for the results, as Kohn (1999b) says, does not reflect a commitment to excellence. It is a perfect example of the top-down model of control that is still in effect. According to Kohn (1999b), “we humans just don’t respond very well when people do things to us rather than working with us” (p. 95). This is true for many teachers – not all, but many.

Kohn (1999b) goes on to explain the importance of defining the concept of accountability appropriately. He says that if we understand it as “a sense of responsibility to oneself, to one another, and to the community – and if it’s nested in a support model,” then the idea can be valid and valuable. Kohn goes on to say that accountability has come to be a “euphemism for more control over what goes on in classrooms by people who aren’t in classrooms” (Kohn, 1999b, p. 95). Studies have found that teachers who felt controlled became more controlling, removing most if not all of the opportunities for students to direct their own learning (Kohn, 1999b). I couldn’t do my best under such circumstances, nor could my students.
Teacher Dissatisfaction

Job satisfaction is critical to teacher commitment and school effectiveness; actions by school administrators create distinct environments that are highly predictive of the level of job satisfaction for the teaching staff (Shann, 1998). Charismatic and supportive school leadership that provides a positive role model and allows teachers to focus on teaching rather than bureaucratic rules and procedures contributes to a productive environment. Teacher satisfaction influences job performance, attrition, and student performance and is a pivotal link in the chain of education reform (Shann).

Sarah began to see things differently; it was as though the light was shining a little bit brighter; things were becoming a little bit clearer. She found herself wondering about and questioning more of the mandated rules, guidelines, and procedures by which the school formally operated. What Sarah spent most of her time trying to understand was not the obvious; it was the unspoken and implicit rules that governed their day-to-day operations. “It doesn’t seem to matter how their decisions affect us,” Sarah said. “There is little to no consideration for us, as though we are of no value to them whatsoever. Little do they know that when they enforce such decisions, that we either disagree with or don’t support, the air thickens between us and them. It’s exactly how they want it to be, us versus them.”

An important part of every teacher’s job is a feeling of self-worth. Teachers, no doubt, like all employees, experience higher levels of morale when they perceive that their contributions are valued and appreciated. A higher level of dedication results when employees feel that they have an active voice in issues that directly impact them. By treating teachers in ways that empower them, such as involving them in decisions about
policies and practices and acknowledging their expertise, administrators can help sustain teacher morale. There are both internal and external reactions to low morale. According to Briggs and Richardson (1992), internal characteristics exhibited may be confusion, insecurity, frustration, lack of confidence, fear of supervision and an attitude of futility. As a result of low morale, educators may resist change, and the school may have a high rate of teacher absenteeism. Briggs and Richardson found that teachers with low morale may react by bickering, communicating resentments, forming cliques, or even resigning from their teaching assignments.

The staffroom was beginning to take on a very different feel. What used to be the vibrant, noisy, laughter-infused room with tables pushed together was now made up of individual tables, with few teachers and little to no discourse. Perhaps it was a result of the number of teachers who were now choosing not to come to the staffroom for their breaks, or maybe it was a result of the negative attitude many teachers were carrying around with them. “Come on,” Sarah would say. “You need to take a break, have a change of scenery, at least for a few minutes.”

It was becoming more and more difficult to encourage teachers to come and socialize; there was little enjoyment in it nowadays. Sarah was the first to recognize this as the conversations tended to be dominated by others who needed to vent about something that was going on; this didn’t really prove to be a fulfilling change of scenery. It became an additional stress, listening to others bitch and complain about a variety of issues but take no initiative to do anything to try to rectify or improve the situation. This drove Sarah crazy. It didn’t take long for her absence to begin being noted. It just wasn’t fun anymore.
Hunter-Boykin and Evans (1995) state that high morale doesn’t always contribute to high productivity, insinuating that satisfied teachers are not necessarily the most productive. They say that high morale leads to lower teacher turnover, less absenteeism, and a better academic environment for instruction. They believe that principals are the ones who are primarily responsible for motivating teachers towards achieving their organizational goals. Principals have the ability to improve teacher satisfaction by such simple changes as listening to them and supporting them.

_There may be jobs a person can do well when he/she is mad at the world, but teaching is not one of them._

—Jack Porter (1963)

Sarah had not encountered any educational theory that would prepare her for the devastation she experienced. Her administrator and the teaching profession itself constantly shook and rattled her faith. Her experiences rocked and blurred her long-range vision; it soured the sweet taste in her mouth. Sarah began this quest to search for insights that would restore her faith and replenish her drive. She felt a great desire to understand the chaos she was experiencing and move forward with her life and her career, wherever and however that might be. As Sarah’s enthusiasm dissipated, she began to question her vision of herself; she was seriously questioning her fit in a profession that was continually casting dangerous shadows around her. Any component has the potential to be devastating if we are ill prepared for the implications; Sarah was not prepared to leave teaching. _It had never even occurred to her that that was an option._

Teaching can be exhilarating and at times exhausting. Many teachers experience a tremendous struggle or tension between whom they envision themselves to be as teachers
and whom they are mandated to be under the restrictive structure of the school.

Hargreaves and Fullan (1992) suggest that teachers are people who make up their own minds; they are pro- rather than re-active and choose a particular course of action or strategy because it seems to them to serve their purpose. Teachers often feel that they are not permitted to choose their own course of action, which often leads to feelings of dissatisfaction, a lack of control and feelings of powerlessness. Non-instructional matters faced on a daily basis often impede our ability to do and be the best in any given situation. It seems that we are living in uncertain world of teaching; one that is rigid, hierarchical, changing, and often chaotic.

"How do I hold on to what I believe? How do I remain confident about what I know? How do I move past these feelings of being buried and voiceless?" Sarah wondered. Her sighs seemed to be getting deeper, her face longer. "I feel as though the moment my tires cross into the school parking lot, my entire outlook and disposition change. I almost dread walking through that front door. You know the moment you open it, you are handing over all control and your individuality."

Freudenberger (1977) warned of the contagiousness of dissatisfaction, noting that dissatisfaction as well as depression among teachers in schools can spread to other teachers very much like a disease. Freudenberger went on to state that teachers who are merely thinking about leaving the profession are no less a concern than those who actually carry out their intentions because the presence of disgruntled elements in a school system may well infect others and start a chain reaction.

There are a myriad of issues that ultimately lead to teachers becoming dissatisfied. Many teachers become dissatisfied by what some have referred to as career
flatness. It is possible for teachers to challenge themselves year after year, by implementing new innovative measures, by changing grade level or school, but in the end, there is little possibility for anything more than horizontal change.

Standardized Testing

Teachers are often at odds trying to balance covering the curriculum with ensuring that their students are as well prepared as can be expected to take the test. There are teachers like myself who are honest and trustworthy and there to do their job. Then there are teachers who are there to ensure their school gets the best scores possible and will do whatever it takes to ensure that happens, even if it means teaching to the test and being dishonest with the administration of it.

Freire suggested that the concept of facts being deposited in students' heads and then withdrawn on demand was very much like the act of banking (as cited in Kohn, 1999b). This is a quite accurate depiction of what goes on in a Grade 3 or Grade 6 classroom prior to provincial testing. Grade 3 and 6 teachers are constantly fighting the battle that the success or failure of the students is a direct result of their individual teaching as well as that of every other teacher who has taught the students. It is not a test on Grade 3 curriculum; it is cumulative across the grades.

Kohn (1999b) states very affirmatively that standardized tests are not a necessary part of school: “Their impact is deep, direct, and personal” (p. 73). He goes on to say that when tests are designed, it is obvious that their goal is to include questions that some test-takers – not all of them, and not none of them – will get right. Whether it is reasonable for the student to get it right is completely irrelevant.
"Have you checked out the math booklet yet?" Sarah's teaching partner asked her with a twinkle in her eye. "It is unbelievable. I actually had to sit down and concentrate, really think about how to go about solving some of the math investigations. And between you and me, there is at least one that, in the words of our students, I don't get!" The irony was that no teacher could figure out this one particular question. How on earth did they expect an 8-year-old to solve it, or have fun trying? What does it say if the teachers don't know? It's Grade 3 math curriculum; it's absurd!"

In the end, the provincial test seems to be best at measuring how much (or how little) a young child is able to cram inside their short-term memory. The test is supposedly designed to assess the curriculum from the entire year, but unfortunately the test is administered in early May. The school year calendar does not end in early May; it goes until the end of June. So not only are students expected to retain all the skills and knowledge gained, their learning time has been reduced and crammed into 8 months as opposed to the traditional 10. They have barely been given the time to consolidate the skills taught and are then expected to apply them consistently and effectively without error, or at least to ministry standards.

Though I do believe there are some very good teaching opportunities embedded in the standardized testing phenomenon, it also creates an abundance of unnecessary stress for students and their families. Oftentimes it is the parents who are most concerned about the test, lending their fears and anxiety to their children. The expectations in the past have been rather unrealistic in terms of the number of hours of testing in total, as well as the length of testing each day. Asking an 8-year-old child to stay seated and focused for 2 to
3 hours per day for 5 days is outlandish, and having any hope that they will produce quality work is even more so.

We should be striving to encourage students to take control of their lives with a focus on confidence, self-esteem, and curiosity. We are not doing this when we beat them down with testing. What we are doing is creating a situation where they feel incapable, lose confidence, and lose their interest and passion for learning. We want learners to feel strengthened and energized and believe that they are powerful in this world. We know that students learn best when they are nurtured and challenged, when they are allowed to explore, experiment, and take risks. We learn best when we trust the environment and the people in our environment. Should the purpose of school not be to open doors, open worlds and possibilities for each person to live life fully and well?

Kohn (1999a) suggests that the current problem with assessment has existed for decades. Ultimately it is the difference between focusing on how well you’re doing something and focusing on what you’re doing. When the concern is all about achieving, as a result either of external or internal pressure, ultimately students are unable to enjoy the process of learning and can become disengaged. Of course it matters how effectively students are learning, but in the end we cannot get carried away as it can prove devastating and destructive. Students may come to regard learning as a chore, avoid challenging tasks, think less deeply, fall apart when they fail, and in the end value ability more than effort (Kohn, 1999a). Kohn (1999a) reminds us of the point of education: to immerse our children in learning and to teach them to think and write and explore without worrying about how good they are. What is it that we ultimately care about: that students should constantly be thinking about improving their performance or focusing on
their learning? The two are fundamentally different and have differing effects on students and on the teachers who teach them.

Curriculum

The education system is one that is often disempowering to both students and teachers. It is an impersonal system where one is expected to become obedient, to conform, and to follow rules. Teachers are given little time to learn about their students: about their interests, their areas of wonder, their concerns, and what they care about. How often are students given the opportunity to reflect on how they have been hurt or what they are frightened of? Who asks them about their dreams or their hopes, the things that really matter to them?

Students deserve to feel strong, healthy, secure, and independent. They should know that they are connected as worthwhile members of the group. They should be encouraged to act with courage, to take criticism, to be good allies to others. We need to help them face up to their shortcomings and failures, to learn how to keep going against all odds, and to experiment with new realms. Unfortunately the curriculum is built on a deficit model, one that is focused on repairing weaknesses; we need to build on students’ strengths, experiences, skills, and abilities. We need to engage the whole person.

As Kohn (2005) suggests, school reform is changing what we value. With such a huge focus on raising achievement, learning beyond the academic is lost. He goes on to suggest how difficult it is for teachers to teach the whole child when they are held accountable only for raising reading and math scores. It is not uncommon to observe incidences of a low-performing child being seen more as a liability than as a challenge or
an opportunity for improvement (Wilgoren, as cited in Kohn, 2005), all driven by accountability and test scores.

Much of what is occurring in schools today is not preparing or allowing students to become effective and enthusiastic learners. Because of the tight rein on academic performance, students are not experiencing the joy of learning as they should. The pressure to succeed, to achieve, and to excel far outweighs the pressure to enjoy school and find a true inner passion for learning.

Kohn (2005) speaks about unconditional teaching or being an unconditional teacher. In essence, unconditional teachers are not afraid to be themselves with students; they are comfortable acting like human beings rather than controlling authority figures. Unfortunately, to be an unconditional teacher is very difficult today. With board policies, school expectations, and union rules, teachers must always think twice about what they say or do.

*I am a teacher at heart, and there are moments in the classroom when I can hardly hold the joy... but at other moments, the classroom is so lifeless or painful or confused – and I am so powerless to do anything about it...*  
—Palmer (1998, p. 1)

I believe the curriculum is forcing teachers to teach too much too early. As Kohn (2005) suggests, children today are on the receiving end of curriculum specified by powerful and very removed others. Unfortunately because the curriculum is so dense, often teachers become more concerned with what they are teaching than with what the students are learning. Students are left wondering why they are doing what they are doing, with no understanding of its usefulness or applicability to their world. Kohn
(1999b) has suggested that there are disturbing signs that many students lack a firm conceptual grasp of the goal of the activities in which they engage.

In many ways it is like a race, a race to cover as much curriculum as we are held accountable for, regardless of how superficially. Unfortunately this does not give students nearly enough time to learn; it is a given that learning takes time. How often are teachers frustrated over the need to cover the curriculum? Howard Gardner and his colleagues refer to coverage as the single greatest enemy of understanding (Kohn, 1999b, p. 60).

"There's no way we're going to be able to get all of this covered before reports go out, at least not in any way that will allow the students to benefit and learn from it. I just don't understand why there has to be so much; it is near impossible to do it all. I hate to dismiss science and social studies or even art as less meaningful or useful, but they take the back burner up against literacy and numeracy. Of course it's ideal to integrate it all, but realistically, for the students to grasp the material in any way, they need more time with it. More time to explore, experiment, talk, wonder, and just be immersed in it. It's as though right when they're about to get their hands dirty in it, we have to tell them it's time to pack up and move on. And not only that, we must assess their knowledge and skills; how unfair," Sarah proclaimed!

Policymakers and school boards need to reassess the relevance and engaging nature of what they are mandating students to do and to learn. How often does a school's mission revolve around student interest? This is not to say that all curriculum must be of interest to students, but they must be able to see the connection with their world. The goal as Kohn (1999b) suggests, is "to create a learning experience that arouses and sustains children's curiosity, enriching their capacities and responding to their questions in ways
that are deeply engaging” (p. 130). It means “being attentive to how excellence follows from interest,” creating effective schools (Kohn, 1999b, p. 130). Jerome Bruner once said that “knowing is a process, not a product” (Kohn, 1999b, p. 58).

Grading and Accountability

There had been several occasions where directions had come from administration stating exactly what could and could not be done with respect to report card marks. At one time the stated expectation was that teachers were not permitted to give pluses or minuses to their students. This was not accepted well by the experienced teachers, and in fact many, including Sarah, rebelled. Realizing that it would be more difficult to validate or justify a mark that the student didn’t actually deserve, they took the chance of assigning pluses and minuses.

But this time Sarah felt it was totally unacceptable and beyond reasonable, “It doesn’t matter that I am confident and able to justify every mark I have given, I don’t feel that it’s appropriate for the leader of our school to, without any prior notice, ask us on the spot to validate any grades that we’ve assigned that she believes are too high.” When word got out that a supply teacher was arriving at teachers’ doors and telling them their presence was requested in the office, the feelings of fear, anger, anxiety, and disbelief pervaded. “It’s the day before report cards are to be printed and signed; how could they possibly do this?” Sarah and her colleagues were utterly dismayed; completely overwhelmed by the audacity of their administrator. It said nothing more clearly than they didn’t trust the teachers’ professional judgment, their skills, or their ability to do their job. “It’s as though she doesn’t trust our professional judgment; she has little faith
in our ability to do our job. But this IS our job,” Sarah said. “It's not her job. We are abiding by ministry guidelines.”

Public school teachers have been feeling an increased pressure as a result of public scrutiny when topics like accountability and testing for schools attract so much attention. Jerome Bruner suggested that our goal should be to create an environment where students can “experience success and failure not as reward and punishment, but as information” (as cited in Kohn, 1999b, p. 151). Why is it that students’ efforts are so often reduced to a letter? How do we expect this to motivate all students or entice them to continue learning? Many students are fearful of report card day, as a result of either internal or external pressure. The thought of what marks their teacher will give them, how their parents might react, or how they will measure up to their friends ultimately weigh down the spirits and enthusiasm of students. How could it not?

Unfortunately many believe, as Kohn (1999a) says, that “getting A’s is the point of going to school.” Study after study has shown that the creativity and long-term recall of facts are adversely affected by the use of traditional grades (Kohn). Do 8-year-olds truly need to be striving towards obtaining high grades, or could we not strive to instill in them a love for learning and the drive to acquire information simply for the joy of learning?

“Please don't get upset over the ‘B’ your child received in science. If you read the comment beside the grade, as well as the comments in the learning skills box, you will notice that in fact your child is doing very well,” Sarah seemed to repeat over and over again during the parent-teacher conferences. “The ministry mandates that in order for a student to obtain a ‘B’ or a level 3, they must meet all of their expectations. In order for a
student to achieve an ‘A’ or a level 4, they must be able to independently and consistently demonstrate the skills or knowledge by going beyond the ministry expectations," she continued. It was a battle teachers were always fighting, trying to inform their students’ parents about how the ministry operated and what exactly was expected of their child.

For many parents, report cards are all about the grades. They seldom read the notes and pay little attention to the learning skills comments. In my opinion, the learning skills section is the most important section on the report card, as it is there that parents can learn who their child really is at school; where they are capable and successful and where they need to improve. Ultimately it is these skills that either encourage or hinder their success in all other academic and social areas. Many parents today are still reassured by the signs of a traditional education, such as letter grades, spelling quizzes, and textbooks, regardless of their impact on the child’s learning.

School Culture

Owens (2004) suggests that an effective and successful school culture is thought to have a climate or “ethos” that is conducive to teaching and learning. Research has proven that academic performance is strongly affected by school culture. What facets of school life are impacted by the culture within a school? How does a school’s culture impact teacher satisfaction? What happens when the ethos of a school is in complete disarray?

"Word is travelling quickly around the community and the board," one of the teachers said. "Teachers are talking. They’re hearing about things that are happening in our school. Can you believe one of the first things people are talking about is our infestation of butterflies?" "It’s amazing what puts your school on the map!" Sarah said.
The teachers understood that every school was to have a mascot with an accompanying slogan, but they didn't think it would ever be ridden with such negativity. It was evident that there was money in the school budget for miscellaneous items to enhance the appearance of a new school, but how much could there possibly be? Did décor really come before instructional supplies and material?

When teachers had yet to receive items they had been asked to order or were denied certain requests because they were too expensive, and the school continued to be inundated with new purchases to enhance its décor, the teachers became incredibly disgruntled. Classrooms were in need of a variety of instructional material, such as overhead projectors, books, bookshelves, and listening centres. Yet the butterflies were accumulating and the instructional supplies were not. Perhaps the frustration was more about the times when the administration would slip out during the day to go shopping, or the time spent roaming the halls with the custodian trying to decide where the new butterfly or butterfly picture would be hung. It felt so inequitable to the teachers.

The students expressed little interest in the butterflies and took little pride in their presence around the school. The words “Awakening Brilliance” meant nothing to them; leaving them just as perplexed as the teachers about the inundation of butterflies. Had their presence had a positive impact on the school culture or the students themselves, perhaps it would have been justifiable. Instead, they continued to be a source of tension and frustration for the teachers, as they found no value in the allocation of time and funds to their acquisition.

The teachers wondered if they were overreacting; they felt that perhaps they were making a mountain out of a molehill. To any outsider this would seem meaningless and
totally irrelevant, but for some reason it was a big deal for the teachers. The issue was greater than butterflies alone; the teachers began to recognize that it was more about the message. There seemed to be an inundation of such messages as a result of actions and decisions made by their administration. What mattered to the teachers didn’t seem to matter to their administrator, and what their administrator valued the teachers did not. This silent clash began to gradually disrupt the culture in the school and contributed to their discontent.

Working Conditions and Teacher Commitment

The ominous discontent of the teachers was palpable. It appeared to the teachers that the principal was avoiding any possibility of confrontation, so much so that staff meetings were being cancelled when in fact the teachers truly had many issues to discuss that were cause for concern. Yet for some reason they weren’t being given the opportunity to raise them, at least not together as a staff. If the teachers wanted to speak out about specific concerns, they’d have to approach the principal on their own. “I can’t believe another staff meeting has been cancelled. Not that I’m upset that we don’t have to stay after school on Wednesday, but it all seems so strange and really quite unprofessional,” Sarah said. “The psychological illness of our staff is evident. In fact in many cases it’s spilling over on the students and nothing is being said or done about it. It’s simply being dismissed, overlooked and avoided altogether. This should not be allowed; we owe it to the students to try to rectify some of the issues.” “It’s ridiculous,” one of the other teachers said. “What a way to deal with problems, by avoiding them.”

Given the increasingly complex challenges of schooling over the past few decades, it is not at all surprising that teachers are experiencing a diminished sense of
selfhood and personal agency in their work (Piper, 1997). Changing conditions in schools as a result of budgetary restrictions, along with bureaucratic administration lacking in leadership to meet the needs of classroom teachers in one way or another, "amounts to an assault on the very idea of what it means to be a teacher, and on teachers' abilities to maintain a strong sense of self, or high self-esteem in their profession" (Piper, p. 52). The nature of the school workplace has historically been of interest to scholars of educational organizations, but more recently, educational researchers and school practitioners have taken a more sustained interest in the topic.

Teachers' perceptions of the school's work environment are what establish the organizational climate, according to Hoy, Tarter, and Kottkamp (1991). They say that teachers' perceptions are affected by the formal organization, informal organization, and leadership practices in the school. Thus, the working conditions are directly influenced by the principal, and in turn affect the commitment and behaviour of teachers. Just as the principal's leadership can influence teacher behaviour, so too can the teachers' behaviour affect the principal's behaviour (Hoy et al.).

Commitment embodies a sense of being bound emotionally or intellectually to some course of action, which may include a person's relationship with another individual, group, or organization (Huntington, 1986). It has also been defined as loyalty, identification, and involvement with some appropriate object (Buchanan, 1974). In an organizational setting, such loyalty involves feelings of attachment, which develop as individuals share values in common with other members of the group. This identification occurs when individuals take pride in the organization, participate with interest in its activities, and speak positively about their connection with the organization (Mowday,
Porter, & Steers, 1982). Such commitment to an organization or institution is rarely present when the climate is negative; teachers often exhibit a lack of interest, dedication, and/or feelings of attachment to the organization.

"I'm sorry, I don't really understand," Sarah said to her principal. "I thought that other teachers had used their personal days to attend weddings." Many of Sarah's colleagues had attended weddings the previous month and had been granted approval to use their personal days. "It doesn't seem fair that we're now being told this is not allowed and that we would have to take the days as unpaid," Sarah's colleague said. At the same time that Sarah was seeking approval to attend a wedding two other colleagues were fighting a similar battle. One was getting married and the other had to move. Both teachers were as disgruntled as Sarah at the inequity of the situation. Yet when they expressed their concerns and dissatisfaction with the unfairness in treatment, there was no response, no recognition of the inequity or their concerns; it was almost as if they had not even been heard.

The impact of such a simple decision was great. The teachers felt that the working conditions were unjust and that the teachers were receiving inequitable treatment. "It makes me want to call in the days as sick days," Sarah said. "Here we are trying to be honest and truthful, and we are in a sense being penalized for it." "We could have or maybe should have just called it in using a sick day and not told her; that's likely what I'll do the next time," Sarah's colleague said.
The Journey

This photograph entitled *The Journey*, was taken during the summer after my second year of teaching. They are my footprints on a beach in Kauai, Hawaii. At the time my footprints in this photograph were simply a unique snapshot, a record of my journey through the islands of Hawaii. Yet today, I find that they document and portray beyond what words are able to, aspects of a more significant journey. They appear to have a story all of their own; one that has been waiting to be told since that summer in Hawaii.

Growth
Movement
Direction
Destination unknown
Naïve yet directional
Simplistic yet detailed
Innocent yet powerful
Focused, aware of space and time

Alone
Uncertain
Heavy
Resistant
TIME TIME TIME
Lighter, natural, effortless

Independence
Figure 2. The Journey.
Intellect, Emotion, and Spirit

Palmer (1998) reminds us that if we as teachers listen to what we ought to be doing, we will likely find ourselves overwhelmed by such external expectations that our identity and integrity get distorted. He says that “in our rush to reform education, we have forgotten a simple truth: reform will never be achieved by renewing appropriations, restructuring schools, rewriting curricula, and revising texts if we continue to demean and dishearten the human resource called the teacher on whom so much depends” (p. 3).

*Reduce teaching to intellect, and it becomes a cold abstraction; reduce it to emotions and it becomes narcissistic; reduce it to the spiritual, and it loses its anchor to the world. Intellect, emotion, and spirit depend on one another for wholeness.*

—Palmer, 1998, p. 4

With outcome-based learning and standardized testing as the norm in today’s educational climate, it has become difficult to nurture the mind, body, and spirit of each child along the way. It requires diligence, hard work, and the confidence to go against the norms to continue to nurture students’ souls. I personally crave balance in my life; I constantly need to be aware and in control of my being through mental, emotional, and spiritual awareness. I know that I am unable to effectively nurture the souls of others if I have neglected or am unable to nurture my own. This is very difficult in an unhealthy school environment, where the feel, character, and values and beliefs of the organization are in disarray.

“How well do I know myself...as a person...as a teacher? When my body talks to me do I listen?” Sarah asked herself. Every day while teaching, various messages were
being sent to Sarah through her feelings and emotions, but why? “Do I answer them or push them away?” Sarah wondered. “Do I ever allow my emotions to guide me? Does my body send a message of comfort to guide me when I make the right choice? What about discomfort when I make the wrong choice?” she wondered. Sarah was trying to identify what emotions she experienced most frequently while teaching. “Well, as of late it has been anxiety, sadness, and fear. At one point it was happiness, peace, and fulfillment. I wonder how this shift has impacted my ability to teach,” she asked herself.

Sarah was hoping to identify how she would normally respond to the demands that were placed upon her while teaching, in all realms. “If the demands exceed what I can comfortably handle creating negative feelings or discomfort,” Sarah asked, “Do I take the time to recover and receive the necessary vital energy back?” The answer to that question was very simple: “No!” Well that wasn’t so true as of late. Sarah was beginning to take note of how her environment was affecting her, emotionally, physically, spiritually, and mentally. She was able to recognize when things began to affect her well-being, and started to take control of it. “I am a firm believer in leading a balanced life, one in good health. I want to inspire my students, and colleagues for that matter, to do the same.” It was the simple things that Sarah did such as staying active and leaving school in good time without taking work home that ensured she recharged and nurtured her soul. But how many around her were not, that was what was most startling. People were losing control and their minds and bodies were being sacrificed.

Striving to create an atmosphere where teachers have a positive mental and emotional attitude about their jobs is in the best interest of everyone. A healthy and sound school culture has the capacity to impact student achievement, motivation, teacher
satisfaction, and productivity (Hart, Wearing, & Conn, 2000). Poor physical health, exhaustion, irritability, tension, and poor psychological health all have the potential to lead to poor teaching performance, poor job satisfaction, increased absenteeism, poor decision-making and bad judgment (Ho & Au, 2006).

Unfortunately Sarah’s foundational experiences were not enough to enable her to overcome the mental, spiritual, and emotional destruction that was occurring; something more needed to be done. “How did I allow my dedication, enthusiasm, and passion to be destroyed by the negativity that surrounds me? The safe, non-threatening environment, that I once knew, no longer exists.” Sarah felt that she could no longer risk sacrificing her own integrity and succumb to the poisonous environment that surrounded her on a daily basis. It was destroying her spirit, as a person and as a professional.

Palmer (1998) noted the frequency with which society turns questions into objective problems to be solved. He suggests that it is as though for every objective problem, it is believed there is some form of a technical fix. External fixes in education, especially when dealing with teacher attrition, are not sustainable. Schools need to pay more attention to nurturing the teachers’ morale, spirits, and souls. Investing in teachers’ well-being by helping them feel good from the inside out is often overlooked or forgotten. Healthy teachers, like healthy students, are no doubt more productive, driven, and dedicated. Palmer suggests that the external structures of education would not have the power to darken our spirits if they were not rooted in fear. Fear has the potential to paralyze education, leading students to lose their love of learning and teachers their love of teaching. Education can be a fearful enterprise, generating behaviour such as silence,
withdrawal, and cynicism, while darkening teachers’ spirits and forcing their candles to burn out.

Voice

It is not a challenge for most people to establish themselves as teachers. For it is a natural way of being, something innate and intuitive, done with strength and confidence. When it seemed impossible to continue to be true to what I believed in and to myself – when, as Piper (1997) said, I was leaving my real self behind – I knew that something needed to change. Nothing was worth compromising my strong and authentic sense of self that I had worked so hard to develop; whatever happened, I owed it to myself to maintain it. In many ways it was as Gergen (1991, as cited in Piper) argues, that our identities are being threatened by multiple competing voices that are trying to shape and control us in a myriad of ways. I could not allow myself to be driven by others’ voices and become so alienated from my own emotional responses. It pushed and stretched me beyond my breaking point.

“Why did she even bother asking us to voice our opinion regarding the possibility of moving to nutrition breaks, when she had already made up her mind about its implementation? It was all a hoax, a scheme to enable us to feel as though she cared about our opinions and concerns, when in reality, she didn’t.” When the teachers were made aware of the potential change for the upcoming school year schedule, a schedule that offered two 40-minute breaks instead of a one-hour lunch and two 15-minute recesses, the reaction was very much not in favour of the change.

Sarah and her colleagues had some very fair and real concerns regarding this proposed new schedule that were quickly overlooked and dismissed. If at that time it had
been a board-wide initiative as it is today, then the reception would likely have been very
different. "You know, it's not as though we are not a flexible staff. We have accepted and
implemented every new initiative under the sun without asking any questions. And now
that we are asking questions and voicing our concerns, we're being told to suck it up and
accept it because no matter what, this is the way it's going to be. It's obvious this change
does not affect administration, but it actually will change our entire existence here at
school, for 7 hours a day, 5 days a week. It has the potential to damage an already
tarnished culture and community of teachers. She doesn't understand that, or rather, she
doesn't care I suppose."

Teachers need the opportunity to develop a stronger voice to represent their
perspectives. Having no voice often contributes to dissatisfaction and apathetic attitudes
and causes teachers to question authority (Jones, 1997). To understand teaching,
therefore, either as a researcher, administrator, or colleague, it is not enough merely to
witness the behaviour, skills, and actions of teaching. One must also listen to the voice of
the teacher, to the person it expresses and to the purposes it articulates. It is as Hargreaves
(1994) says, that "failure to understand the teacher's voice is failure to understand the
teacher's teaching" (p. 249).

Motivation and Morale

Evans (1992) defines morale as a state of mind determined by the individual's
anticipation of the extent of satisfaction of those needs which s/he perceives as
significantly affecting his/her work situation. Ingersoll (2001a) found that school
characteristics and organizational influences that have significant effects on teacher
motivation and morale and often result in attrition have been overlooked by much
previous research. Teachers normally enter the profession with an early commitment to teaching and children, but often find that factors in the structure and organization of schools work against their sense of professionalism and greatly affect their motivation. Traditional, rigid, bureaucratically administered schools have often resulted in low teacher motivation and job satisfaction, leading to low morale. But progressive and flexible schools that use collaborative problem-solving strategies tend to promote a feeling of affiliation with the school and, as a result, raise teacher morale. Here, teachers believe that they can contribute to positive school-wide changes and that their contributions will be sought after and valued. In schools where the atmosphere is open and collegial, teachers are more motivated, experience greater satisfaction, and exhibit higher morale. In schools where the atmosphere is tense and where teachers feel isolated, they tend to be less motivated, experience less job satisfaction, and exhibit lower morale.

The office at one time was a fun place to visit; before school to check your mailbox, to make photocopies, or even just to stroll through on a planning time for a chat. This all quickly changed as the tension between administration and the teachers continued to grow. “I haven’t been to check my mailbox in days,” Sarah’s colleague shared with her as they were leaving one day after the bell. It became the norm to avoid the office at all costs, even if it meant exiting and entering the school through alternate doors. “I’ve got nothing to say, so why do I want to go through there? Every time I do, I come out feeling worse then when I went in. I’ve caught myself on several occasions tiptoeing past their office doors so as not to have them hear or see me,” Sarah said. There was so much frustration and anger looming in the air that it was rare to find a teacher lurking about, anywhere but in a classroom.
There was little enthusiasm to be found anywhere; the only bit was behind closed doors, shared between students and their teachers. This was the only way that teachers were able to distance themselves enough from the happenings in the school, to physically close off their space to the rest of the world. This didn't stop the interruptions from the office, the continual announcements or disturbances, but it did allow Sarah and her students to momentarily escape all the external chaos and try to enjoy learning as they once had.

Morale is a problem in many schools today and is therefore of great importance. Research has found that school environment has great influence on teacher motivation and commitment (Hargreaves, 1988; Rosenholtz, 1989). Ideally, we should not wait for times of crisis to worry about the morale in our schools. Reducing stress and boosting motivation, job satisfaction, and morale require bold interventions that reach deep inside an organization to remedy the existing problems. And in the case of teachers, researchers say, these interventions must begin with strong school leadership. Principals have the power to uplift teachers' morale more than anything or anyone. Effective management styles, defined school missions, promotion of a positive climate for both students and staff, and principal-teacher collaboration all have tremendous power to impact teacher morale. Hart et al. (2000) point to a growing body of evidence that indicates organizational factors are more significant than classroom-specific issues in determining teacher morale. Most successful organizations value the input of their employees, and involvement in decision-making by the very people who will be responsible for implementation of those decisions seems not only reasonable but also responsible (Jones, 1997; Weil, 1997). Participation in this way can produce positive results.
Perhaps it would be fair and reasonable to consider an alternative perspective. Evans (2001) argues that it is not a matter of an institution having a motivating or morale-friendly environment, as job-related needs and ideals are so diverse. She suggests that it is more about the degree of match between individuals and their institutions, something she refers to as round pegs and square holes (Evans, 1998, as cited in Evans, 2001). So perhaps I was the round peg being wedged into a square hole, with needs and ideals that differed from what the institution or perhaps the profession was able to provide. A good match would suggest an acceptance of institutional policy and practice, rather than overall dissension (Evans, 2001).

Teachers undoubtedly have expectations with respect to the leadership their administrators provide. Research has found that when these expectations are fulfilled, motivation among teachers soars; when these expectations are disappointed, morale takes a nose dive (Chase, 1953, as cited in Evans, 2001).

Effective Communication

Effective communication has the potential to support successful organizational climates inasmuch as ineffective communication can lead to segmentation. Ineffective communication makes it difficult for teachers to discover what is going on beyond their own little sphere of operation, their classroom. When poor communication exists, teachers are left in isolation and feel uninformed. They find it difficult to take pride in their school because they have such little understanding of the hows and the whys of all the goings on.

The door to the classroom was positioned just right; it was in such a place that it gave a clear view of the stairwell. It was very easy for Sarah to see who was coming
through the doors, entering the upper level of the school. Whenever it was the principal, which was a rare occurrence, the teachers sensed it was never without a motive. It was not a normal everyday occurrence to see her walk the halls and visit with students in their classrooms, for many students were not even familiar with who she was.

More often than not, it was in the event of the infamous classroom walkabout. “Maybe if she communicated what she was doing, or even why she was doing it, teachers would be more receptive to her sporadic drop-ins. Instead, she appears so mysterious and comes across as being somewhat vindictive, as though she’s out to catch us doing something inappropriate,” the teachers professed after each walkabout. It wasn’t only the principal who was known for the walkabouts, as occasionally throughout the year the superintendent would drop by for a visit and would do the same. This must have been where she received her training.

“If only she knew just how intrusive these walkabouts feel,” the teachers proclaimed. “If only she would let down her administrative guard, and get down to our level, the children’s level, literally. Our doors are always open for a reason; she is welcome any time. The students would love it if she spent time in the room, expressed some interest in them, their work or their accomplishments.” In fact, Sarah used to phone down to the principal’s office quite often to request a visit so that her students could showcase something they were proud of. More often than not it was inconvenient and the students were left disappointed.

“Has she totally forgotten that she was once a teacher too? It’s as though she has forgotten how to interact with the students. I wonder if she recognizes how her body language is perceived by the students. She appears incredibly uncomfortable and rather
standoffish." The administration would leave, never offering any feedback to the teachers after the visits, leaving teachers to speculate about their perceptions, thoughts, or reactions to what they had observed. Of course this perpetuated a vicious cycle of poor communication, and reinforced the uncomfortable power dynamics in the school between students, staff, and teachers.

Perhaps one of the simplest ways of communicating effectively is to discuss problems with teachers so they are aware of the problem and the need to make a decision about this problem or concern. Even if participation on behalf of the teachers is limited to discussion, they are at least aware that a problem exists and that a decision will be made and therefore will likely accept the decision more readily than if the discussion does not occur until after the decision is made. Even if the problem or concern is presented to the teachers with the intent of listening to suggestions, reactions and ideas and trying to reflect such participation in the final decision, the communication is far more effective than simply offering a final, non-negotiable decision.

Matters relating to the obtrusive interventions by the province, school board bureaucrats, and administrators are often expressed as areas of frustration by teachers. More often than not, it comes down to how such matters are communicated. Teachers need to become their own best advocates.

Sarah and her colleagues had read about other schools that recognized Teacher Appreciation Day; in fact they'd heard about some that had week-long celebrations. "Do you know that in the 3 years that this school has been here, the community has never recognized Teacher Appreciation Day? I suppose it is really up to the principal to communicate the significance of the day with the community to seek their support;
otherwise how else would they come to know about it?” Sarah and her students always took the time on Bus Driver Appreciation Day and even Secretaries Day to ensure they knew how much their services and dedication was appreciated. Was communicating with the community to make them aware of Teacher Appreciation Day something they should have expected from their principal?

Clearly, Sarah realized that building teacher morale really does go well beyond polished apples, coffee mugs, freshly squeezed orange juice, or early morning breakfasts provided by grateful and appreciative parents. It even goes beyond compliments, plaques, or any other token reward. But their absence suggested a complete lack of appreciation altogether. The culture and climate had already experienced such extreme destruction that at this point in time the devastation would be difficult to rectify. Ultimately, it is the principals who have control over the contingencies in the work environment and are the source of potential and necessary reinforcement for teachers.

A successful school leader needs to be an effective communicator, just as any leader does. Maintaining open communication with staff is essential to ensure their support and satisfaction. Schools should invite and celebrate communication, led and modelled by the principal. Many administrators are so concerned with public relations in the community that they often overlook the necessity within their four walls, dismissing the staff entirely. Administrators always encourage and support consistent and honest communication between parents and teachers, yet it is not always practised with the staff. The more interaction administrators have with their staff and the less dictating it is the better.
The teachers often felt as though they were walking on eggshells, having to be aware of and monitor every action as well as every word spoken in the presence of their administrator. It became such that they often withheld their thoughts and comments simply in fear of repercussions. Sarah had witnessed what had happened to many of her colleagues when they chose to speak out; she knew that she didn’t want to experience the same. It seemed that matters were never clearly communicated as there was always a state of confusion and uncertainty amongst the staff.

"Yesterday we were able to send home communication to our parents and today nothing is permitted without her approval. When and why did things change? Does she not think it might make for a smoother transition if she informed us about the need for the change? Instead it comes across as a reactive measure to cover any future mishaps, and quite honestly, it appears somewhat punitive. Perhaps this procedure should have been in place a long time ago if our communication is that unprofessional," Sarah said. It wasn’t so much that the teachers disagreed with the new procedure. Rather, it was how they had learned about it; it had not been communicated to them. Teachers were often learning about new rules or decisions via other teachers, not from the administration directly.

This, the teachers felt, was very unprofessional. The only time there seemed to be clear communication was when dealing with decisions that were non-negotiable; these were usually stated in a memo.

It seems that by being reactive to the constraints of the system, too much energy is wasted on survival. Energy needs to be expended finding ways to communicate about what truly matters; how it is impacting the education of our students, both positively and negatively. When people begin to feel helpless and powerless, with no hope of making a
change, they begin to accommodate and live with it, at least until its damaging effects are felt.

Professional Development

*Professional development emerges from a process of reshaping teachers’ existing knowledge, beliefs, and practices rather than simply imposing new theories, methods, or materials on teachers.*

–K.E. Johnson & Golombrek (2002, p. 2)

What is the purpose of professional development? Who makes decisions about the purposes and the course taken to pursue it? Professional development can be turned into bureaucratic control, offering little choice or say on behalf of participating members. More opportunities are provided today for teachers to gather with colleagues during professional development activities. But unfortunately teachers don’t always feel as though they have actually grown as professionals as a result. It never really seemed as though individual growth was a priority; the focus was really on simply providing professional development opportunities. Consideration was not always given to how it could be most beneficial for all teachers involved. Teachers need opportunities to hone their skills and increase their effectiveness. Unfortunately what each teacher requires is likely to be different, making it difficult to provide valuable and relevant on-site professional development. As a result, opportunities that are presented seldom match individual needs, leaving teachers feeling frustrated, longing for an opportunity to participate in professional development of their choice.

According to Eisner (1991), schools today make little place for reflexivity. The result, he says, is an institution that fosters little professional growth in teaching after the
first 3 or 4 years. Once teachers “internalize the routines and learn the content they are to teach, once they develop a good nose for smoke and learn to anticipate fires, their ability to cope is assured and with it the need to grow as teachers diminishes. To be sure, there are individual teachers who set their own professional agendas and who continue to grow throughout their careers, but they work in institutions that do little to make such growth possible or even to reward it. About half of all the teachers leave the profession during the first five years of teaching” (p. 114).

Before taking an educational leave to work towards a Master of Education, Sarah was at a point where the infamous new teacher “burn-out” had not yet arrived, but the idea of returning day after day to an environment that prohibited her from demonstrating the enthusiasm that characterizes young teachers in the profession lacked lustre. Her freshness, optimism, and hope were diminishing at a rapid rate. Sarah came to realize that her professional growth had come to a complete halt. Her growth as a teacher was not being supported by the system within which she worked. She recognized that the growth that she experienced as a person was inseparable from her growth as a professional. “It feels as though each new day I’m moving backwards, negating all development that has occurred during my first few years in the profession,” Sarah proclaimed. “It just seems like the professional development that we’re being offered within the school board is doing little to help me develop as a professional or support my growth as a person the way I hoped it would.” Sarah realized that the negativity that surrounded her was inundating her with destructive thoughts, feelings and visions of her future in education.
“It’s not as though I’m asking for a sabbatical or a paid leave. I’m simply asking for an unpaid educational leave, to further my education,” Sarah shouted. There’s no cost to them, not a cent!” Human resources suggested to Sarah that if she were able to get a letter of support from her principal as well as the support of her superintendent, that an educational leave would be considered. But they were quick to confirm that she would not receive a year’s experience for the leave as she did not have the necessary 5 years’ teaching experience. It seemed that everyone Sarah spoke with wanted to know why she was leaving to do her master’s. Nobody seemed to understand or appreciate the decision. “I’m not sure WHY I’m leaving to do a master’s,” Sarah would say. “All I know is that I can’t spend the next 30 years of my life in a classroom.” Most people understood this to mean that she had intentions of getting into administration; ironically, this was furthest from the truth.

“I spoke to the superintendent this morning and he suggested that there was no way he would support your leave,” Sarah’s principal said to her. “He asked what made you so special, why you were any different than everybody else,” she said. “But I encouraged him to reconsider his decision. He just got back to me and he has agreed to allow you to take it.” “Oh,” Sarah muttered, a little overwhelmed with emotion, somewhat in disbelief at what she had just heard. How could he not support her? She momentarily felt a pang of anger, followed by complete and utter disappointment. It was strange that disappointment was the feeling that stuck with her. Sarah was beginning to see and think about things differently. “Wow,” she said to herself, “The school board is sending a very powerful message whether they realize it or not. Their decision to make an
educational leave an experience that is unobtainable for teachers with less than 5 years’ experience is a big mistake, HUGE mistake.”

So often we find ourselves speaking about the value of allowing students to make decisions. We know that there are direct benefits to giving children choices. And yet in most professional development activities, teachers are mandated to attend on a pre-selected topic, without any choice. They are given a choice when it comes to what they would like to pursue on their own, when they’re footing the bill. But unfortunately for many teachers, the course fees are difficult to budget for so the additional qualifications or professional development rarely occur. Teaching is one of the few professions where there is little to no financial assistance for furthering education; this is quite daunting for teachers, especially those who want to go on.

Career Development

“It’s hard to believe that this is my third year teaching the same strands, covering topics such as Canada, plants and soils, magnets, and bridges. You know, thinking back to my first year when I taught a 2/3 split for the first half of the year, followed by a 3/4 split for the remainder, I really enjoyed and crave that kind of challenge. Most people thought I was off my rocker accepting such a position and opting to take the 3/4 split midyear as opposed to keeping a straight Grade 2 class. But all of this feels rather boring and repetitive. I don’t know how people teach the same grade year after year, for 30 years of their life,” Sarah shared with her teaching partner.

Sarah was the first to admit that of course there was no way she had even came close to doing a fantastic job that first year, but she was confident that she had done her best under the circumstances. It certainly wasn’t easy having no resources, no reading
material, teaching two sets of curriculum simultaneously, while dealing with an abundance of ESL students. But the challenges in many ways made the job that much more rewarding. "I just don't know how I can diversify enough to keep me challenged for the next 30 years," she said to her teaching partner. "Perhaps I'm crazy; perhaps I crave a different kind of challenge than you, or those around us." "No, I understand exactly what you're saying," he said. "I'm just not sure what the answer is."

Sarah was pleased in her third year to be asked to take on the role of Early Math Lead teacher, thinking it might offer her the kind of challenge she needed. But in the end, the training days proved to be rather unorganized, often a waste of time, and really quite frustrating. After all was said and done, it was a lot of work to ensure her students kept up with the curriculum in her absence. At the end of the day, the training offered Sarah little more than a few interesting ideas to take back to the classroom. The role was still in the early stages of development, since they had rushed to get it going the first year, so perhaps the role would prove to be more fulfilling the following year.

The literature suggests that there are some reasonably strong trends that recur across studies that enable researchers to identify phases or stages in the ways that teachers develop throughout their career. Though they are often considered to be tentative and uneven, it offers a way of analyzing the professional life cycle of teachers. Huberman (1992) suggests that at the phase of career entry, the themes of survival and discovery recur. The succeeding phase, stabilization, tends to correspond to a subjective choice, a definitive commitment to the teaching profession. It is believed that teachers who have reached this stage are often striving to increase their impact in the classroom, on children's lives, and on the education system as a whole. This desire can lead one to
become aware of the institutional barriers that constrain such attempts, driving them to attempt to change the more "surreal flaws" in the school or school board (Huberman). At this point in the cycle, teachers may be ready for new challenges, perhaps growing stale in their profession a little bit sooner than anticipated.

Many teachers are looking for more steps and pathways on the career ladder, with increasing and differentiated responsibilities (Tye & O’Brien, 2002). They want each of these opportunities to be easily accessed from their first day in the classroom until the day they retire. For me, it was as Huberman (1992) described it; somewhere between a "gnawing sense of routine" and "a growing sense of monotony" (p. 130). The feelings of disenchantment I experienced are typical of teachers between their 12th and 20th years. Perhaps it was an early plateauing in teaching that I experienced, or a result of an intentional disengagement from policies and practices of which I disapproved (Huberman).

For most new teachers there is a high degree of initial job challenge. If individuals begin to feel as though they are stagnating in their work, the organization may in fact be at fault (Cruickshank et al., 1986). Kaufman (1975, in Cruickshank et al.) suggests there are a number of ways to prevent career stagnation, such as by establishing better communication among co-workers and with administrators and by establishing participative leadership. Teacher commitment, job morale, and other personal and professional outlooks frequently shift a great deal in the early years of teaching. Teachers may become dissatisfied, discouraged and wish they could get out of teaching (Cruickshank et al.). Being able to identify that which helps or hinders such dissatisfaction and development becomes essential in retaining teachers in the profession.
Looking back, I realize that I was blessed with mentors at every crucial stage of my young life, at every point where my identity needed to grow: in adolescence, in college, in graduate school, and early in my professional career.


Like Palmer (1998), I was fortunate to have found such partners along my journey; like magic, they appeared in times of great need. One of my greatest lessons learned was that it was impossible to see all that surrounded me merely by looking around. What I saw was entirely dependent upon the lenses I was wearing at the time, greatly impacted by time and place. By changing my surroundings and my lenses, I was able to change what I saw. What this new vision allowed me to see was shocking. As I looked around me, I saw teachers being controlled, almost as if their minds and their hearts were being pulled by an invisible puppeteer (Palmer, 1998). I realized that I needed to take responsibility for my own life; I needed to use my power to prevent me from being a victim of such detrimental circumstances.

Career development in teaching is somewhat different from other occupations because the day-to-day activities don’t necessarily change as one’s career moves forward over time. The activities for a classroom teacher after 20 years of teaching may not be that different from the ones they started with in their first few years. This is to suggest that new tasks or new curriculum does not necessarily provide the necessary challenge. Unlike many other jobs where performance is recognized and often rewarded, teaching is strictly tied to seniority. In the end, seniority offers little in the way of supporting teachers’ professional growth and development.
“I can’t continue to do this,” Sarah confided in her teaching partner. “My students are sensing my anxiety. They are so intuitive. They know I’m not myself.” Sarah recognized how her practice was being shaped by the conflict and stress that surrounded her. It was hindering her ability to do her job as she once had: with optimism, dedication, enthusiasm, and vigour. The teachers were beginning to appear callous and cynical. Their freshness was dissipating. Each time that a decision was made without consulting with the teachers, the decisions silenced the teachers even more.

“The dismissal procedure has worked for 2½ years and now, as of today, it has been turned upside down. For what reason?” Sarah asked. A new procedure was being implemented that required an additional 15 to 20 minutes of duty for every teacher in the building, so as to alleviate the congestion in front of the school at dismissal time. “That’s great that it makes her job easier. This new procedure leaves no children lining up for their buses outside. For this to occur, we all now have to stay with our class until the students’ individual buses arrive and they are called down by the secretary over the PA. It’s ridiculous. Why change something that isn’t broken?” one of the teachers asked. “Do you know what’s even more ridiculous?” Sarah asked “The fact that at we are expected to keep them quiet! Walk into any other school and I guarantee you will not see anything as absurd as this. Students leave when the bell rings and they are most certainly permitted to talk as they do.”

“The administration thinks that this new procedure works very well,” Sarah said. “Of course they do. It works very well for them. But I have to ask: Is this the most efficient way of dismissing students? Could it be that the administration is most
concerned with their interests, discrediting those of 40 teachers?” The administration had no intention of changing this new procedure back to the old way, even though they knew how inconvenient it was for every teacher. This is just the way things were going to be now. “I have never in my 15 years of teaching seen such a thing,” one of the teachers said. “If this isn’t micromanaging, I don’t know what is.”

The personal decision-making style of administrators is important as it sets the stage for how the school as an entity will go about identifying problems, conceptualizing them, and finding ways of dealing with them (Owens, 2004). When individuals are asked to explain why they behave the way they do, their answers may reflect the basic values of the organization (Hoy et al., 1991). Action is often infused with such values as openness, trust, cooperation, loyalty, commitment, or teamwork. When norms are not formally stated or openly discussed, they can take on the “just the way things are” designation, sometimes a result of a non-negotiable stamp.

Effective leaders have teachers share in the decision-making process, allowing them to feel some form of ownership of the course of action to be taken. Rebore (2001) suggests that participatory leadership offers teachers an active stance in reaching agreements, making implementation easier as those that are affected by it are the decision-makers. Participatory decision-making, according to Rebore, ultimately enhances morale and has a positive influence on the course of action taken by administrators. It clearly demonstrates to teachers that they are valued members of the school community.

Participation in solving problems and making decisions suggests there is a certain degree of mental and emotional involvement of teachers that ultimately encourages them
to contribute and share responsibility, taking some ownership of the decisions. This means teachers are genuinely involved, not simply going through the motions.

Recent research has indicated that teacher autonomy has been shown to impact job satisfaction. Perie and Baker (1997) found that teachers with greater autonomy showed higher levels of job satisfaction than those with less autonomy. They also suggested that school boards that are able to increase teachers’ control over their classrooms and other school decisions stand to increase long-term job satisfaction. Empowering teachers and including them in the decision-making process can be a productive tool that appears to influence the school culture in a positive way. Decisions today in schools are frequently based on financial equations rather than on what’s in the best interest of the students, the teachers, or the community.

Research conducted by organizational theorists has suggested that participatory decision-making will lead to more effective organizations and higher staff morale (Hart et al., 2000). It seems incomprehensible for an administrator to know what is needed without being present in the classroom, observing what is occurring, and speaking with the staff and students, even if they once taught in a classroom. For this is how clear decisions are and should be made; informed decisions are far more successful than decisions made by the powers up above. Teachers are the first to recognize that some decisions are a result of board policy or that they come directly from the Ministry of Education and must be implemented, but in many cases students and staff simply want to be aware and informed regarding their intentions.

Unfortunately the structure of schooling exhibits little room for shared authority. Over time it has appeared very clear that teachers’ voices have little to no impact on
decisions being made, whether the results impact teachers or not. Teachers have a great desire to be appreciated and supported in their work, and have their voices and opinions honoured for what they are.

**Leadership**

Owens (2004) suggests that like two sides of the same coin, leadership and decision-making are inseparable. In today’s fast-paced world dominated by change, a growing body of literature addresses the need to find new and better ways to lead under such unstable and unpredictable conditions that confront schools, “conditions that are increasingly being described as chaotic” (Owens, p. 259). Owens believes that principals deal with exercising influence on their teachers through social interaction, using a range of types of power either by leading or commanding. I believe that the climate that is created by the principal sets the tone for how teachers or employees feel about the environment and the organization. A particular leadership style may either foster or hinder teacher commitment.

*It was the day Sarah was to have her first TPA, otherwise known as the Teacher Performance Appraisal. “Are you all set for your observation?” her teaching partner asked her. “You know, I’m not so worried. I kind of like the idea of having her in the room. Some feedback and guidance would be greatly appreciated. The minute they release you from the Faculty of Education, you’re on your own. Nobody to guide you, make suggestions, or offer constructive criticism, so in reality, it’s a great opportunity to ensure I’m heading in the right direction.”*

*Part of the evaluation included observing transitions, so it had been arranged for Sarah’s principal to come first thing in the morning. The bell had rung, the students were*
in the hallway organizing their belongings and starting to get settled in the classroom while Sarah waited patiently for her arrival. As any teacher would, Sarah had told them that the principal was coming that morning, but the students understood it was to observe their behaviour, not Miss Gambrell’s!

“Didn’t you say the principal was coming this morning?” one of the students asked. “Yes I did. She should be arriving any moment.” Sarah looked at the clock for what seemed like the 35th time, wondering where she could possibly be. “Perhaps something has held her up, or there’s been an emergency that she needed to tend to,” Sarah said to reassure herself that she’d not been stood up. She was to have arrived nearly 25 minutes ago. Sarah had been stalling so as not to begin the lesson that she had arranged for her principal to observe, but she was beginning to wonder if she was still going to come.

“So, how did it go?” Sarah’s teacher partner inquisitively asked on their way down to the staffroom. “It didn’t.” “What do you mean it didn’t?” he replied. “She never showed up. She never came. We waited, and waited, but she never arrived. I suppose she forgot, or got tied up, or something,” Sarah said. Later that day, Sarah received an apology from her principal; in fact she had forgotten. A new time had been arranged for the following day. “It’s not really that big a deal,” Sarah thought to herself, “but if I’m ever in such a leadership position, I will ensure I never forget to arrive for a new teacher’s evaluation, I just won’t do that to anybody. It just sort of stinks that I am and will continue to be at her mercy, on her schedule, being managed to meet her needs, with no consideration for mine.”
When teachers are not drawn to the ideas of their administrator, when they do not share the values and beliefs of their principal, or disapprove of their actions, they do not voluntarily grant their leader power; they may even withdraw support already entrusted. What is more prevalent today in schools is leadership that is done to people, a manner of behaving towards people. Recognition is currently growing that leadership cannot be reduced to formulas and prescriptions but must be attuned to the existing human variables and confusions present in the school organization (Owens, 2004). Owens says that "when you lead in battle you are leading people, human beings. I have seen competent leaders who stood in front of a platoon and all they saw was a platoon. But great leaders stand in front of a platoon and see it as 44 individuals, each of whom has hopes, each of whom has aspirations, each of whom wants to live, each of whom wants to do good" (p. 266).

Owens (2004) suggests it is inarguable that schools have been, and still largely are, organized and administered as bureaucracies, using the factory as a model. It has been suggested that schools require leadership, not simply management, on the part of the administration. Perhaps this is based on the view that one manages things, not people, and one leads people, not things. There is an obvious qualitative difference between managing and leading. Bennis and Nanus have said that managers are people who do things right, where leaders are people who do the right thing (as cited in Owens). Perhaps the existing difficulties are a result of the belief that principals ought to ignore the ideas and emotions of teachers and avoid direct involvement of others in leadership, and pay attention to structures, roles and indirect forms of communication. The result has been a withdrawal of attention from teaching and learning, with an emphasis on rules, plans, management controls, and operating procedures. Research has suggested that most
educational administrators conceptualize their work largely in terms of management of operational routines (Owens).

In order for leadership to be effective, each participant needs to feel valued as an individual and be allowed to participate fully in the school community (Rebore, 2001). In order for an administrator to have the common good in mind, promotion of the growth and development of all individuals must be a priority. The role of an effective leader should include establishing visions and goals for the school community. Neufeld (2004) suggests that effective leadership is possible but that it requires a functional mastery of authority, something that many principals lack today. He goes on to say that this mission is not easily achieved without the motivation of staff towards a common vision. And unfortunately, teachers do not easily give their respect or consent – it must be earned.

“One of my parents during our parent-teacher conference asked the principal if she was an assistant in the classroom,” one of the teachers shared at the lunch table. “She had to inform them that she was in fact the principal of the school.” “Oh my, that must have been an uncomfortable moment,” another teacher said. “I don’t know, in my perspective, leaders ought to be visible, to students, teachers and parents in the community,” Sarah said. “If I were in her shoes, without a doubt, I would be outside before and after school; I’d even be out at recess. How else can you stay informed and aware of what’s going on? I’d be in the classrooms, participating in events around the school; I’d even be certain that I made time to read to each class,” Sarah firmly stated.

“I understand that administrators’ roles are highly dictated by administrative-type duties, but if they are not leading the schools, who is going to? What school doesn’t require a visible leader? Perhaps it is wrong of me to be critical of her actions when they
are the direct result of the pressures the system imposes on her. I know that when it's -10 with a wind chill that she could be out with us for at least a few minutes, establishing relationships with the students and the community.”

Sarah and her colleagues had had such a discussion numerous times. They just couldn't understand how she envisioned herself as a leader; she did so little to lead, to inspire, to motivate, to teach, or to guide the teachers or the students. Perhaps those are no longer roles administrators are to play; if so, the change has created a serious gap in the day-to-day operations.

Rebore (2001) says that earning respect is one of the most effective ways of leading and hence bringing about reform. A leader should be focused on increasing human happiness and decreasing human misery. In many cases, principals do not assess the outcome of their decisions and as a result, human misery increases, decreasing the commitment and support of the teachers. Effective leadership requires a constant give-and-take relationship. Evans (1998) suggests that the most strikingly common factor to emerge as influential for teachers' morale, job satisfaction and motivation is school leadership. She says that whether it is the extent to which it enables or constrains teachers, creates and fosters school professional climates that are compatible with teachers' ideals, or engages their commitment and enthusiasm, the leadership effected by their [principals] is clearly a key determinant of how teachers feel about their jobs” (p. 118, as cited in Evans, 2001). Principals play a major role in uniting teachers into collective action to improve teaching and learning; research has confirmed that such schools are successful at raising student academic achievement (Williams & Matthews, 2005).
Understanding which key issues in schools impinge upon professional experience and can therefore influence teacher satisfaction, dissatisfaction, morale, and retention is part of effective leadership. School leaders can influence the culture and purpose of their organizations, and as such they are able to create an environment which can influence job-related attitudes. Evans (2001) suggests that leadership can shape work contexts that either match or are at odds with what individuals want in relation to equity and justice, organizational efficiency, personal relations, collegiality, and self-conception and self-image. A lack of opportunities to influence school policies was found to be deeply dissatisfying for teachers. Kyriacou (2001) identified many leadership interventions that were capable of reducing teacher stress. School leaders have the ability to influence the emotional climate of their organization and, as a result, motivate their teachers and have a positive impact on teachers' working lives.

Leadership is meant to set the standards and the expectations in schools, but most importantly it is meant to provide the necessary inspiration effectively and efficiently. There has never been and never will be one type of leadership that is effective with all staff and all schools; it is ultimately up to the administration to determine what is required. The leadership that is necessary and expected from administration is growing and expanding quickly. At times it appears as though perhaps it is far more than any one or even two administrators can handle effectively. It is very easy for the administrators to become so busy and so absent that students are unaware of or unfamiliar with them. When all the critical and necessary areas of leadership experience some disequilibrium, the school feels its effects. Just as we hold teachers accountable for students' learning, we must also hold administrators accountable for building and maintaining a school culture
that fosters high expectations and high student achievement, as well as a strong sense of community among staff and students.

It becomes problematic when school leaders’ goals seem to be derived from personal needs and focused on school administration rather than students. When administration is so focused on the school’s appearance and the day-to-day operations, constantly maintaining control, the results can be devastating. Schools need administrators who are visible and interact frequently with their staff and students. Administrators who recognize teachers formally or informally for their success or performance are highly valued and respected. Today, reflection is an essential skill that is being encouraged within education. Rarely do teachers witness administrators reflecting on procedures or mandated policies, reviewing their effectiveness or suitability.

When institutional conditions create more combat than community, when the life of the mind alienates more than it connects, the heart goes out of things, and there is little left to sustain us.

—Palmer (1993, p. x)

A supportive and healthy work environment is necessary to carry out the vital work of educating students. It is possible that for both beginning and veteran teachers, issues in the work environment may provide the impetus for teachers leaving the profession. Most teachers would agree that the working conditions play a large role in retaining teachers in specific schools as well as the profession.

“Did you hear that we have a new photocopy code?” Sarah asked her teaching partner. On her way into the school this morning, while walking past the office, she met a colleague in the hallway who was exiting the office with a frazzled look on their face.
“Well, again things were changed without notifying anyone. It’s almost as if they wait until we’re all out of the building, to turn whatever we once knew upside down and make things more difficult for us,” her colleague said.

As of yesterday, teachers were being given two packages of paper per month. This was different from the previous arrangements. It now meant that any time a teacher needed or wanted to copy anything, they needed to remember to bring their paper with them. Some teachers were a little bothered by this as it was rather inconvenient and more difficult for them, especially coming from upstairs or outside in a portable.

As a result of the grumbling, later that day another new system had been created whereby all teachers were now given shelf space in the photocopy room to store their paper. The very next morning as teachers tried to go and get their copying done before the bell rang they found their paper was gone. “So they give us paper and then take it away the very next day? What is going on here?” Sarah said. “Well, now each grade level has been given a certain number of copies per month and will have their own code. When your teams’ numbers run out, you’re out of luck. There’s nothing you can do,” Sarah was told. “Did they have any intention of sharing this decision with the staff, communicating why yesterday’s procedure, which replaced the previous day’s procedure, was ineffective?” Sarah wondered.

As word spread throughout the staff about what had occurred, teachers were becoming more and more frustrated by the conditions this created. Never did administration consider how their decisions would impact the teachers. It was always about what worked and was most beneficial for them. There was such control exerted over things like photocopying and supplies, creating an abundance of unnecessary stress.
The locked cupboards alone suggested that teachers were not trusted. "It's like they think we're going to steal something. They treat us like we're thieves."

Relationships

Principal-teacher interactions set the stage for the organizational life in schools. Regardless of whether the principal's behaviour is supportive, directive, or restrictive (Owens, 2004) it really sets the stage for the type of relationships that exist in the school. Principals must find ways to develop teacher loyalty and trust.

"She shows such little consideration for our personal needs," one of the teachers suggested. "What would you ask her to change, you know, if you could?" she asked Sarah. They both knew that no teacher in their right mind would speak in such a way, but in a way the question felt almost cathartic. "I would ask for her to be genuinely cared about, but I guess if someone doesn't care, you're never going to change them. I'd ask that she respect us for our professional competence, sometimes it feels as though she doesn't believe any of us is truly capable. I would ask that she treat us as equals; it drives me bananas the way she walks around as though she's 10 feet taller than the rest of us. I would ask for help when it was appropriate, for her to consider giving compliments freely like we do with our students, to offer constructive criticism, and perhaps that she look out for our personal welfare," Sarah blurted out, hardly taking a breath in between her words. Each suggestion got a wee bit louder, showing a little bit more frustration. "You know, if she knew that her restrictive, controlling behaviour was impeding our ability to work efficiently and effectively, I wonder if she'd change?" Sarah asked. "The fact that she hinders more than facilitates our work is a major issue." Just as the last few words
were spoken, who should walk around the corner but their principal. The two teachers caught each other's eyes briefly, with a panic-stricken glare.

Sarah and her colleagues really just wished that their relationship with their administrator was one that consistently exhibited cooperation and respect. They longed to be listened to and have their principal be open to their suggestions. Seldom was any praise given, let alone genuinely. “Her style of leadership is so ineffective. It appears controlling and rigid, as well as unsympathetic, unconcerned, and unresponsive,” Sarah suggested. “This only makes me more frustrated, apathetic, and suspicious of her.” The teachers craved a leader that was confident, self-secure, cheerful, and sociable with the staff. Were they asking for too much? Did such a principal really exist?

Relationships require collaboration. This involves talk about individual beliefs, understandings, and values. When such talk is permitted, a shared language is likely to develop between teachers and administration. There needs to be an abundance of respect and trust and a preservation of individual integrity, along with a valuing of individual perspectives. Teachers and administrators need to feel comfortable agreeing and arguing, because without this there is conflict and conflict has the power to detrimentally shape practice.

“Not only were they talking about individual teachers, but they did so in an open environment where other staff could overhear, right in the middle of the office!” Sarah shouted. “It was so uncomfortable. I was using the photocopier when I overheard her begin the conversation speaking very negatively about another teacher.” Sarah and many of her colleagues had found themselves in such a position, in the middle of very unprofessional talk, and they would immediately panic. They would freeze on the spot,
wondering what to do, what the best next step could be. If they were to move, they might have been discovered with the realization that that likely they had overheard. If they didn't make them aware of their presence and they were stumbled upon, it would appear that they'd been eavesdropping. There was no good solution; it was such an awful situation to be in. "It's so devastating to hear your superior speak so unprofessionally," Sarah said. "Who else does she talk about in the open like this? Gosh, if she'll do it out in the middle of the front office, who knows what she'll say behind closed doors." The principal very quickly began losing credibility with the teachers, and as a result, was approached with great trepidation.

Teachers often feel that administrators dismiss or ignore their feelings. According to Rebore (2001), if feelings are suppressed or ignored for extended periods of time, the result can be disastrous. Cold, disingenuous, dispirited relationships may result, or even an eruption of erratic, compulsive behaviour. Rebore suggests that often administrators view their teachers more as objects to be dealt with than as people to be encountered. Relationships are difficult to nurture when teachers feel they are not being perceived as people with dignity or freedom.

In many schools, there is little interest or time spent by administrators in nurturing positive relationships with staff or students. This does little to inspire confidence, trust or respect among staff members, and does little to develop or foster a collegial environment. With operational issues dominating most of their time these days, principals are left with little to no time to play the role of instructional leader. If communication is not effective between staff and administration, teachers may perceive the lack of visibility as a result of a lack of commitment or passion for their job; it often appears that the principal is
uninterested. Ideally a teacher hopes that their administrator is their advocate and there to work for and with them, not against them. This means assisting to remove barriers that are preventing the best job from being done, providing the necessary resources for teachers to be successful, alleviating teachers from unnecessary stressors such as additional duty or paperwork, and ultimately recognizing the hard work and successes and ensuring that teachers feel appreciated. Administrators are not there to make teachers' jobs more difficult than they already are; at least they should not be permitted to.

“When I learned tonight confidential information had been broadcasted to the entire staff in an on-line posting today, I was thoroughly humiliated. I was appalled that any administrator could do such a thing; in many ways it was quite surreal. How could she take such personal information and believe that every teacher in the building was entitled to know?” Sarah screamed. It was really quite unbelievable for the staff to see on their broadcast page, something you would never wish to be written about you. “The memo doesn’t specifically say your name Sarah,” a former colleague pointed out. “Yes, I am completely aware of that. But let’s be honest here. It’s a dead give away. It is either me or one other teacher, but I am away on an educational leave; any teacher would know it’s me,” Sarah replied. “It doesn’t matter. What she did was incredibly unprofessional and violated my confidentiality rights.”

Sarah had done exactly as she had been asked to do. She provided her administrator with a medical note pertaining to this personal matter. She tried relentlessly to go back in time, wondering what she could have possibly done to deserve this. “I feel violated. It just feels so wrong. I don’t understand why she would do such a
thing; was she not thinking about the ramifications of her actions? Did she not consider how confidential a medical note is?” Sarah wondered. Sarah’s heart felt heavy and her spirit darkened immensely as a result. This was perhaps the tipping point. “It might just be the final straw,” Sarah said. “My final reminder that I’m not to go back to that school.”

Sarah proceeded with extreme caution though with the utmost professionalism. In order to remain true to herself, she knew she had to let her principal know how unacceptable her actions were. She had to let her know that what she had done was very inappropriate and unacceptable. “You’d better consult the union for guidance on how to handle this Sarah,” her former colleague suggested to her, “But be very, very careful. Administrators know how to manipulate any situation. Be sure you document everything.”

Teachers need strong working relationships with their administrators. The lack of such a relationship may ultimately impede the functioning or conditions within the school and may lead teachers to leave. Teachers need to know, just like children, that their administrators care about them as people. Having a comfortable working relationship creates a rapport that enables feedback and coaching to occur and be welcomed. By having administration be visibly engaged in the daily life of the school, regularly visiting classrooms, and communicating consistently, teachers learn to honour and value the presence of their administrators. It can be very destructive if such relationships fail to exist. Determining how to maintain the cooperation and performance of a group of demoralized professionals is quite perplexing for administrators (Parks, 1983).
Many if not most teachers crave connectedness as any human being does. They are there with more invested than just performing the duties of their job. They want to contribute, they want to make a difference, they want to feel as though they belong and are a necessary component of the team and school culture. It is imperative that administrators focus on nurturing the compassion and excellence that their staff embodies.

Empowerment, Participation, and Collaboration

The term teacher empowerment has been one of the most recent buzzwords in educational discourse (Owens, 2004). One of the most important aspects of teacher empowerment is that it provides opportunities for teachers to participate actively, openly, and without fear. If this is allowed to happen, teachers are able to contribute their knowledge, insights, and ideas into the development of the vision for the school. They acquire greater personal ownership, and thus a greater sense of personal commitment to the values for which the school stands.

Empowering teachers to participate in important decisions is not only highly motivating but will likely impact the quality of the decisions being made. This way, administrators are less likely to make quick decisions based on speed and efficiency. Support from administrators can be one of the most empowering experiences for a teacher. Such support would be reflected in an administrator’s genuine concern for his or her teachers. The administrator would respect the professional competence of his or her teachers and treat them as equals. A supportive principal would recognize where credit is due, recognizing and complimenting teachers on a job well done. They would recognize that just like children, adults need to be empowered and experience positive reinforcement too (Hoy et al., 1991).
New teachers and experienced teachers both need to be empowered by their principals. They deserve to be treated as the professionals that they are. If they aren’t, the results are fatiguing, demoralizing, and unhealthy. There is often too much unnecessary distress experienced by teachers. Normal stress is tolerable and controllable; but distress erodes teachers’ feelings of personal worth and their energy. It is uncontrollable. Teachers should frequently experience a feeling of achievement; they should feel as though with each new day they are more capable and resourceful than the last. The work and the environment should be uplifting. But what happens when it is not such a place? What happens to teachers when they work within a system that continually defines them as anything but wholesome, powerful individuals?

Some say it is the teachers themselves who create the culture of powerlessness they live in by perceiving a complete inability to have control. A highly structured, controlling system leaves few opportunities for teachers to use their personal decision-making abilities, to take the time to form their own opinion, or use their voices and have them heard. The sense of powerlessness has the ability to pervade; its effects have the potential to debilitate and demoralize those that the schools need most, the teachers. Unfortunately keeping silent and striving to comply is only a temporary solution, and ultimately not one that is healthy for either the teachers or the students. Teachers need to find ways to be heard and treated as equals, ensuring that there is participation and collaboration among all members.
Finding a Path

The photograph entitled *Finding a Path* was also taken during the summer following my second year of teaching. It too was taken on a beach, but this time it was a beach on the island of Maui. At the time, the rocks captured my attention for their natural, rustic beauty. Today, they seem to represent the steps I have taken and attempted to take, and will continue to take, in search of my place in this world and in education.

Each stone is uniquely placed, a result of natural forces.

I navigate my footing, they are solid and slippery.

I lose my footing and land abruptly in the cool water.

I am reminded that I must exercise caution with each step taken.

At times my path appears logical and easily identifiable, Other times I feel lost and uncertain.

Can I take a wrong step?

Is there potential for danger or unexpected happenings?

I continue to navigate my way, seeking a clear path.

Destination is still unknown.

*A journey awaits you. It is one filled with possibility and meaning. It will call you to come to know who you are and where you are going. At times you will need to share this pathway, whereas at others, you will travel alone. You will make many important choices at crossroads along the way. Each step will carry you toward new discoveries, so step with great care.*

—Whelan (in Connelly & Clandinin, 1999, p. 20)
Figure 3. Finding a path.
Taking Action

_Sometimes we avoid being present because, in the secret places of our heart, we suspect that by paying attention, we will discover some unpleasant truths about ourselves or our lives._

—DeAngelois (1994, p. 74)

Compelling narratives, Rodriguez (2002), says, push us to act upon the world. They should challenge us to understand and reckon with the implications and consequences of our actions and lack thereof. We so rarely think about how many aspects of education could be different, but aren’t. Why is this so? Have we not acted when we ought to have? Or perhaps we’re experiencing the consequences of taking the wrong steps towards change. Shortly before John Dewey’s death, he reflected on how little of his vision had ever made it into schools, how the changes that did occur were merely “atmospheric” and hadn’t “really penetrated and permeated the foundations of the educational institution” (Kohn, 1999b, p. 7).

Change has occurred in education, but how much of it has been for the better? Teachers seldom hear about how things have improved; rather, there is a constant focus on improvement as a result of kids not meeting the standards or test scores being too low. But what about improving the system, making changes that encourage and enable improvement in a variety of areas? The “atmospheric” changes that have occurred, as Dewey refers to them, are too numerous to mention. In fact, most changes have altered the school environment in such a way that it has had obvious, detrimental effects on the students.
"Another walk and talk recess," the students groaned after hearing the announcement during their nutrition break. "When will we be able to go back on the field again?" they asked with great persistence. It seemed that it had been forever since they'd been allowed on the field. Unfortunately the rules at the school prohibited the students from going on the field on days when it was wet, as the grass was being damaged.

Recess duty was incredibly stressful for teachers as it was as though they were on a mission to catch all of the students who were breaking the rules; it was like policing the hardtop. "I understand that they're damaging the grass when it's wet, but is there no other alternative besides a "walk and talk" recess? Why then do they have grass? Perhaps they should be installing Astroturf so that the kids could continue to get their exercise," Sarah grumbled to her teaching partner. Not only did it impact recess, but it also posed great difficulties for the physical education teacher. Bottom line is, the kids need things to do at recess. They need to be able to run and exert themselves as they choose. With obesity reaching epidemic proportions today, the last thing we should be doing is restricting their ability to be active.

"What child doesn't need to run at recess and let off some steam?" Sarah asked. Aside from all of these rules, there was nothing for the students to do outside. "There is no playground equipment for them to use to entertain themselves. There are no basketball nets, no baseball diamonds, no climbers; they can't even play soccer because they can't go on the field. What do we expect the students to do if all they can do is walk on the hardtop?" It was Sarah and the other teachers who suffered the consequences as the students returned from recess after having had little opportunity to rejuvenate
themselves. Was this a financial decision, a result of safety concerns? Why was this the case? Was there really no other alternative?

Many believe the changes that have occurred are primarily a result of funding cutbacks the system has experienced. If we consider physical education classes, the emphasis or value placed upon gym class today is far less than it was a generation ago. It used to be that kids had gym class every day; this is no longer the case. Schools are very fortunate if their student population is such that they may allocate a full-time position to a physical education teacher, and if their administration values healthy, active living. Otherwise it is left up to the teachers to cover the physical education and health curriculum, which often presents additional challenges for teachers. Unfortunately, when this is the case, the students often get shortchanged as many teachers find it difficult to fit it into their schedule with so much other curriculum to cover.

Sarah thought her principal might find the research she was doing for her Primary Specialist interesting. She also needed to inform the office any time she took her class outside of the school building so she thought it'd be best to have her principal on board. “The kids get two 20-minute recess breaks per day. Have you considered how many times they go up and down the stairs each day?” This was the only feedback Sarah received from her principal. “She’s got to be kidding,” Sarah said to herself as she walked back to her classroom reading the yellow sticky note attached to her research. “The kids more often than not must walk at recess on the hard top, and perhaps they climb the stairs twice per day. This is so far from adequate and is not providing the students with quality daily fitness. Thanks for your support!” Sarah muttered to herself as she walked back to her classroom.
Sarah's students were now receiving two 40-minute physical education classes every 8 school days. This meant that an entire week could go by without the students getting a gym class. This prompted Sarah's research to implement more daily activity to identify the impact on student behaviour and/or productivity. The correlation was obvious even before she began the research, but Sarah knew her students needed to become more active and begin to take responsibility for their health. "It's amazing how it has all transpired," Sarah reported to her professor in her Additional Qualification course. "It started with each morning getting 20 minutes of exercise outdoors, usually walking, running, or skipping, and now we spend a great deal of time every day talking, writing, and thinking about healthy, active living. The kids just love it. I hear them talking about it outside during recess with their friends in other classes."

Sarah immediately noticed a difference in her students. But what was most fascinating was how the minor change in their daily routine led to a whole wealth of discussions regarding healthy, active living. The students were becoming interested in healthy eating, in ensuring they got more exercise and were learning simple ways of doing so. They kept journals of how they felt before, during, and after, of what they were eating, and were really just becoming more aware. "The focus is continually on literacy and math these days; the rest is just meaningless to her," Sarah suggested. "I am now beginning to understand how the physical education and music teacher feel; they have even less support from the principal than we do."

It seemed that so much of the unnecessary stress that teachers were enduring was as a result of change that was brought about in the system with little consideration for the impact on students and teachers. The changes that were happening all around were far
from being in the best interest of the students, supporting student growth. There had to be other ways of doing things that were simply being overlooked, or perhaps dismissed. It just seemed so illogical sometimes, as though nobody cared.

"When are we going to the library Miss Gambrell?" Sarah's students seemed to always be asking. "I'm not sure if it's open today. We'll have to send someone to check," was her usual response. The school was now into its third year; the book collection had grown immensely, yet it appeared that the library was closed now more than ever. Many students didn't know any differently, but those that did, including the teachers, were not very pleased by it all.

"I remember the librarians from my years at school with great admiration," Sarah shared with her colleague. "The time we spent in the library was exciting, enriching, and fun. It was such a peaceful place to be at school." "I remember my library was always thriving, filled with keen, inquisitive students who were always supported by a dedicated and passionate librarian," her teaching partner said. "It was a place to do research, to work in small groups, to share stories with the librarian, to be able to work at one of the round tables with a group to accomplish some great feat for a project, to browse the book selection with comfort or simply as a class to see a segment of Télé Français; it was always such a treat," Sarah said. "Do you remember that show? What a riot that clown was! What was his name, something like Sol?" she asked. "Absolutely! We always looked forward to it!" he said. "It's as though because the librarian is a good friend of the principal, whatever happens is fine. It seems that it has just been accepted that there is no library, no collaboration between the teachers and the librarian, no programming taking place, it barely even gets used...because it's never open," he said.
“It’s very frustrating for all the teachers, but more so for the students who deserve that experience more than anything.”

Not having access to the library became very dissatisfying for the students and the teachers. The students had a scheduled 20-minute book exchange once every 8 school days, and were seldom permitted to even be in the library. As a result of being in a new community and the unexpected growth in the school, there was the necessity for an acting vice-principal. The librarian continued to be the acting vice-principal for quite some time, until the school was officially granted a vice-principal. Though the staff was pleased to have somebody assist with administrative duties, they definitely missed having a library.

As time passed, the staff began to notice the library being closed during the hours that it was to be open; this seemed quite odd as they had felt they were seeing some improvement. To their dismay, word trickled around the staff that the librarian had been spotted on a number of occasions, during the times when the library was to be open, in the administrative area having tea with the principal. This continued. The librarian would take what was recognized by the teachers as a second lunch with the administrators once the afternoon bell had gone. It was not uncommon to find them in the office kitchen preparing their lunches together and disappearing behind a closed door for a lengthy period of time during the afternoon instructional time. Some days it was lunch; other days it was afternoon tea. It was also quite common to find them in the staff room on treat days, while everyone else was busy working in their classrooms.

“It just seems so unfair,” one of the teachers said. “It IS unfair. It’s not a matter of seeming unfair, it actually is,” another teacher said quite angrily. “I actually called
the union for advice about what could be done about a) having little access to the library for the third year in a row, and b) the inequity of it all. " The teachers hoped that one day the superintendent would drop by unexpectedly for a visit and catch them with their feet up. In the meantime, the students had little to no access to the library and the teachers were witnessing tremendous inequity. "But what can we do about it?" "That's exactly the problem, very little. If we challenge them on this, who knows what could come of it? We are essentially at their mercy, again."

The Courage to Tell, The Passion to Reflect, The Confidence to Know

Every day we make choices, some being more crucial than others, but somehow we come to make a choice to do or not do something.

A calming inner peace disseminated throughout Sarah's body when she realized that she had made the best possible decision for herself, at this particular time in her life. She frequently wondered where and how she positioned herself amidst it all. She would find herself lost within her own literature (thoughts, reflections, artifacts) and in various places and at various times within her journey. Where and how she became positioned throughout this, Sarah believed, was crucial to the movement she would make, backwards and forwards in time, inward and outward within herself.

The decision to leave teaching was devastating for Sarah, more than anyone realized. Sarah wished over and over again that there had been an opportunity for her voice to be heard; she thought it deserved to be respected and valued not only on a daily basis but especially at a time such as this. The union had discouraged Sarah from raising the issue, though they offered their full support if she chose to. "What's in it for me?" Sarah wondered. "If I go ahead with this, I know without a doubt that she will seek
retribution, she will make my life very difficult. I've seen it happen to those around me. I know she's capable of it."

Sarah often wondered why there was not a regular, open form of communication between the system and its teachers. The barrier that prevented teachers from following through with concerns or frustrations really came down to one thing, fear. "It will not make my life any better. In fact all it will do is make it more difficult and more awkward than it already is. She has destroyed my drive and my passion and made my soul cringe. It's unfair; it's sad and so utterly disappointing. There is little I can do that will change any of that, and nobody in the system even cares."

I frequently revisited the words of Judith Barrington, if only to reconfirm the telling of my story; I was doing it because I cared about the future of education, about the teaching profession, and knew deep inside my soul that something needed to change.

*The red ink, the echoes of "nobody could possibly be interested in my life," and the implications of self-indulgence raised by that persistent "who cares?" – all combine to crush self-expression. One of your first tasks, then, is to ask yourself: why do I care about this? The answer will make you feel entitled to tell your story.*

-Judith Barrington (1997, p. 35)

I recognized as did Fulford (1999) that "most of us feel the need to describe how we came to be what we are. We want to make our stories known, and we want to believe those stories have value" (p. 14). For me, it wasn't only that I felt a great need to justify my departure from teaching, but that I felt I owed it to the profession, to my colleagues, and to future teachers to give voice to my story. I witnessed numerous young teachers
drowning in constant negativity, day after day. I hoped to provide inspiration or motivation to those who had had similar experiences; I wanted my experiences to become a source of strength.

Sarah’s Story is a story about love and determination. It is about strength and courage and the will to survive. It is a story about persistence and dedication and the struggle to make a difference in the lives of children. It is about being the very best that you can be and standing your ground. Unfortunately, it is also a story about sadness, anxiety and despair. It is about disappointment, frustration, and disillusionment. It is a story about losing hope and losing faith.

My story was about gaining ownership, about strengthening and establishing a voice. It was an inner journey of inquiry and reflection, one that had recurring tensions and emotions. Throughout it, I have tried to locate my perspectives, my belief systems, and my vision of what teaching and education are all about; because they are the underlying structures embedded in my questions, frustrations and wonderments about teaching. I was constantly questioning how I saw my reality, knowing full well that it was all a result of what I had read, and how I reacted to and built on what I encountered in life.

*Stories take us beyond the here and now, beyond our everyday existence, and allow us to enter the domain where all life is sacred. Whatever we emphasize the most in our stories shows us what is most important to us, what our greatest struggles are, what our greatest triumphs are, where our deepest values lie. Our stories tell us what our potential is, what we most want to do to help others. They show us what our quest has been,*
where we have been broken, where we are whole, and where we are most authentically us.

—Atkinson (1995, p. 11)

I, like the majority of teachers, never envisioned leaving my chosen profession. I was able and willing to cope with the myriad of teaching difficulties; the student discipline, the difficult parents, the lack of sufficient teaching materials, student motivation problems, understanding the complex school policies and systems, and ultimately meeting the needs of individual students. But there were certain factors that I could not contend with. Unfortunately these factors proved to be incredibly destructive to the staff and myself, and in the end prompted numerous teachers to leave – some the school, some the school board, while others, like myself, have left teaching altogether. The deeply rooted issues, such as the lack of professional respect, the sense of powerlessness, the autocratic leadership, the unnecessary bureaucratic procedures, and ultimately poor leadership and poor communication were “the tipping point” for me (Gladwell, 2002).

I often wondered what possessed me to be a meaning maker, someone who was constantly striving to make meaning of my life, of my experiences, and of my thoughts and actions. It became a matter of finding the courage to tell, the passion to reflect, and the confidence to know what this was all about and understand that it truly did matter in the bigger picture of teaching and education. I was always amazed by the amount of writing that my hand was able to produce each time I would write. The fluidity of the motion suggested to me that my mind was always a very active and busy place. But what I found most rewarding and perhaps intriguing was not the actual act of writing, but the
process of going back to those words at a later date and reflecting upon them. It was then that I was able to look at the words, the experiences, the thoughts and emotions, and the tensions experienced through a different lens. It was through the very act of self-reflection that I believed I was able to begin to make sense of my actions and my experiences. By the very act of monitoring our thoughts, we are able to reshape them and see issues and concepts from broader and different vantage points. We are then able to reexamine our past, which enables us to better understand our present and see possibilities for the future.

I made the decision that giving voice to my silence through actions rather than words was what I needed to do, and as a result I walked away from the teaching profession. It is only now that the words have come and are coming out. Sarah's Story is an intensely personal and highly vulnerable journey. Like many professions, teaching requires a lot of energy; emotional, spiritual, social, intellectual and physical. Teachers require tactics to keep their energy alive. When any of the above are threatened or out of balance, the disequilibrium experienced has the potential to be detrimental.

What Were My Options?

*The only path to finding out what life is about is a patient, slow attempt to make sense of the realities of the past and the possibilities of the future as they can be understood in the present.*

-Csikszentmihalyi (1997, p.4)

There are a plethora of programs and policies that neither ask what teachers think nor seem to care how they feel. Ingersoll (2001a) uses Hirschman's (1970, in Ingersoll, 2001a) framework to suggest that teachers who disagree with the policies of an
organization, in this case schools, face three basic options: exit, voice, or loyalty. If there are few mechanisms for the expression of disagreement and little protection for those who do disagree, teachers will be more apt to leave.

Sarah and her colleagues frequently met to discuss what action could be taken to try to rectify their discontent. The problem was that the more experienced teachers adamantly deterred any of them from being the one to speak out, using their own voice. It was suggested over and over again that they had seen similar circumstances where a younger, more naïve teacher decided to speak out, and suffered serious retribution. “But this can’t be,” Sarah’s teaching partner blurted out angrily. “They can’t do that. Isn’t that why we have a union to protect us?” “You’re absolutely right, but unfortunately that’s not the way it always works. Principals know how to play the game. They know how to manipulate the system in such a way that you end up being the bad guy, or end up with a negative evaluation and put your career in jeopardy.”

Sarah could feel the tension in her neck tighten; this was incomprehensible. Here they were, practically an entire staff extremely discontented and upset over a whole range of issues, and they were being told not to raise them with their superior. It was ludicrous. “They don’t even care if we’re unhappy, our objections don’t matter; it’s inhumane.”

Ultimately changes need to be made in the way schools are organized and the way the teaching profession is treated; improvements need to be made in the quality of the teaching job. Otherwise, teachers like myself will see little hope for change in our time. Kohn (1999b) says that if we are going to talk about schools in a way that matters, we need to talk about the people in schools. It’s more than just the students that need to be
talked about. It’s the teachers as well, for they are, in essence, the backbone, the glue that holds it all together. They are what keep the fire burning.

My Future in Education

Sarah became what many referred to as a disillusioned teacher. She was eager to find her place in the world of education, but had no idea how. It seemed that every day she battled a new set of tensions. “I have more questions than answers about what we are mandated to do; this is not satisfying. It makes me frustrated and discouraged; I feel lost and confused.” Sarah found that many experiences were proving to be far more destructive than empowering to her teaching identity. Each day she tried to come to grips with what was happening around her, trying to make sense of the direction schools were taking, the impact the government and the ministry were having on the staff and as a direct result the students. “I feel so at odds with the system as a whole,” Sarah said. “I have visions of how things could be done differently, how things could have been handled better, and what is being done wrong, and yet, no real way of influencing any of it.”

Becoming a teacher catapulted Sarah into learning more about herself, her assumptions, her commitments, her direction, and her very existence as an educator. “I feel the need to speak; it has become a need I can no longer resist,” Sarah said. “I have come to realize that wherever difficulty exists, so too must a story. I am constantly puzzled by life and by the education system. I find myself surprised, bothered, anxious, provoked, and deeply frightened. There is something enormously rewarding about confronting the things in our lives which have presented us with the most difficulty. By doing so, I have been stopped in the tracks of my life and been forced to pay attention to
how I have been living. I want to make visible what is often left hidden, not seen by the eyes of the public."

One of the most common criticisms of educational administrators is that they manipulate teachers by using a veneer of seemingly participative involvement (Owens, 2004). Many teachers generally accept the hierarchical power of principals as a reality of a teaching life, being both inevitable and legitimate. It would be commonplace for such teachers to say to their principal, “Just tell me what you want me to do and I’ll try my best to do it”. I am not one of these teachers. I have had my views brushed aside but refuse to be manipulated and coerced by my superiors. I will not comply with organizational goals that I disagree with through any form of subtle or manipulative means.

Palmer (1998) refers to the words of Rilke, reinforcing the importance of living each day, to live everything. Palmer infers from Rilke’s words that if we do not fully live the tensions that come our way, the tensions will not disappear; rather they will go underground and multiply. Recognizing that we may not know how to solve them, but knowing that by trying to live out their resolution we are opening ourselves to new possibilities and therefore keep the tensions from tearing us apart. Perhaps I lead an unlived life, a life that has been lived in denial of the tensions that I constantly experienced. Those tensions, left unacknowledged, “rippled the fabric of my life” (Palmer, 1998, p. 86), and now I am dealing with the consequences.

Frustrations with various aspects of the profession can weigh heavily on teachers.

“I am just one of thousands of teachers; I have lost my name and my identity. I am simply a number to them. I am not recognized for being any different than any other
teacher. So long as I perform my duties, we will all be the same.” When Sarah looked around, she would see herself shadowed by the darkness of others. It was hard to see through, up above, behind or directly in front. She could barely make out her surroundings, for it all seemed to blur together, as though they really were all one. “How can we be forced to act as one; we are all so different?” Sarah wondered.

There were thousands of teachers whose individuality had been replaced by a number. Some days Sarah felt as though she could stand up tall and reach for the sun, seeking the brightness that blanketed over her head. And yet other days she found herself feeling incredibly claustrophobic, as though there was barely enough room to breathe, barely enough room to move. Together, they would walk to the beat of the drum, almost as if they were robots. Sarah couldn’t stand the feeling.

“I’m not excited about it anymore. There’s so little room for creativity and originality. “So teach a different grade. Then you’ll have a different set of curriculum,” the teacher beside her said. “I’ve already taught Grade 1, 2, 3, and 4 curriculum. None of it really excites me. All I’ve got left is 5 and 6 and then I’ll have done it all, all that I’m officially qualified to teach. Then what? I’ve still got another 28 years before I can retire.”

What possesses certain individuals to feel the need to maximize their potential and truly carve out their place in society while others are content doing the same job for 30 years, completely at the mercy of their superior? What propels these teachers to leave? Is it the sink-or-swim attitude the first few years, where little support is offered, difficult teaching assignments, few resources, or a lack of experience? Or is it simply that the
profession is changing, providing unsatisfactory working conditions with little autonomy and control?

Holland (1973, in Chapman & Hutcheson, 1982) suggests that vocational satisfaction depends on the congruence between one’s personality and the environment in which one works. This is based on the assumption that people search for environments that will let them exercise their skills and abilities, express their attitudes and values, and take on agreeable problems and roles. This would suggest that career changes then are made as a result of changes in one’s personality, triggered perhaps by life-stage development, or by changes in the environment (e.g., changes in teaching as a profession). Career changes may also be triggered by changes in one’s perceptions of what is involved in teaching (Chapman & Hutcheson). Perhaps my perceptions have changed; perhaps the system truly has experienced change; perhaps it’s neither.

The Road Yet Travelled

To grow, to move forward rather than backward, seemed to become the nourishment of my spirit...

- Bell hooks (1989, p. 7)

At the most opportune time in Sarah’s journey, an unanticipated mentor entered her story. Many graduate students go searching for such a character and here Sarah was blessed by the arrival, completely unaware and unprepared for the road ahead. Initially there was much careful listening, empathy, and the sharing of feelings. Sarah was guided, coached, and advised by someone she perceived to be “an expert.” She provided Sarah with advice, knowledge, experience, and support. Both had strong and independent characters, and were confident and courageous in their own ways. This relationship had
a profound impact on Sarah's personal and professional life, as well as her academic world. She learned to trust this new friend; she admired her.

Sarah learned to recognize and honour the ways in which she differed from many of those around her; she was encouraged to make use of those differences. Sarah felt respected; she finally felt as though her opinions and ideas were valued and important. She had not felt this way in what seemed like forever. Sarah found herself gaining strength to move forward with her journey, to continue searching for that which fulfilled and challenged her. This relationship instilled Sarah with the confidence to be true to herself; she felt empowered. Sarah felt inspired and hopeful and was being challenged in new ways.

Sarah recognized that she was in a very vulnerable position. She had barely begun her journey of growth and expansion after making such a bold decision to resign from teaching. But thanks to this relationship, Sarah found herself growing both personally and professionally; she became much more aware, in every sense of the word. At times, Sarah felt young and naïve. She was desperately trying to understand where she was headed, for what reason, and how she would eventually find her way.

The mystery remains. What happens to successful and dedicated teachers who exit the teaching profession? While individual stories reflect the unique moments of their own lived experiences, their themes might be ones shared by others. Hopefully individuals who are moved and awakened by these stories will also want to seek change, and begin to tell their own stories.
Too many will quit permanently because they are fed up. Their ambition and self-respect will take them into business or other professions... They leave behind an increasing proportion of tired time-servers.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE JOURNEY HAS ONLY BEGUN

Teacher attrition is a significant phenomenon that deserves further investigation as its impact can be felt throughout the entire education system. Based on the need for more qualitative research investigating this phenomenon, this study was designed.

The number of teachers leaving the teaching profession today is a matter of great concern, and one that ought to be investigated in a qualitative manner. Recent research has suggested that 30% of new teachers leave teaching within 3 years of entering the profession and 50% leave within 5 years (Ingersoll, 2005). The implications of the revolving door of teachers are great (Ingersoll, 2001a), and thus merit considerable attention.

Researchers have been trying to understand why such large numbers of teachers are leaving the profession early in their careers. Recent research from the Project on the Next Generation of Teachers (NGT) suggested that the discontent that today’s new teachers are expressing seems to be driven by new concerns. It seems that previous factors have since been replaced (S.M. Johnson & Project on the Next Generation of Teachers, 2004). Ultimately, something about what new teachers discover in their first few years of teaching is leading them to recognize that their future may not be in the classroom.

Having positioned myself on the outside looking in, with a passion to deliver my story and share my experiences about why I chose to leave teaching, Sarah’s Story has shed light and provided some understanding of the driving forces behind my personal struggle working within the education system.
The purpose of this self-study was to represent through stories and reflection my experiences as an elementary teacher and my quest to understand the tensions and disjunctions experienced that led me to leave the teaching profession. Chapter 4 therefore explored the facets of my professional experiences that enabled me to say that I no longer wished to be a teacher. Through my stories and reflections, I have come to understand what it means for a teacher to make the decision to exit the profession, by investigating the areas of tension that I personally experienced within the education system. The dissatisfying facets of the teaching profession greatly impacted my satisfaction, commitment, motivation, and morale, and as a result led me to make the decision to exit the teaching profession. I sought and have now come to a deeper level of understanding about why I, after having taught for only 3 years, left the classroom that I worked so hard to enter.

Summary of the Study

One of the particular strengths of qualitative research is its capacity to identify the unexpected and illuminate the odd (Hargreaves, 1994). Through this self-study, I have invited the reader into the research process by asking that my interpretations be checked, that my identified areas of tension be scrutinized and that the “so what” question be virgourously pressed (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001). The aim of this self-study, as Bullough and Pinnegar say, was to provoke, challenge, and illuminate rather than confirm and settle.

Sarah's Story in many ways has been about becoming an active agent in my life, rather than allowing myself to be deemed a victim of the system. By uncovering my own agency in my story, I established a point from which I was able to critique the social and
political situation in which I live and work. This journey has been a process of writing about people, places, and things becoming, not being. I recognize that I am a work in progress and that there is nothing complete or static about me as a person or a professional. This journey is about what has been, what is now, and what is becoming. I have been looking backward to the past and forward to the puzzle of who I will be and how I will continue to contribute to education. I have been looking at myself, inward as a researcher and an educator undergoing change, experiencing continual growth and transformation. This has been a journey that has ventured to unlock beliefs, perceptions, and experiences; it has been a quest to question the unexamined.

This inquiry was not only about the observable, lived experiences I had. It enveloped an entirety of inner experiences, feelings, doubts, uncertainties, reactions, and remembered stories. I became aware after my first few years of teaching that my spirit was being left hungry for something more, yet I was incapable of identifying what it was I craved. “What sort of being it is who pauses long enough to engage in inner dialogue, who wishes to make sense of the personal past, and who traces its trajectory as a means of discovering the origins of the self?” (Freeman, 1993, p. 26). For “we must know from where we have come in order to understand where it is we are going” (Cole & Knowles, 2000, p. 29). Teacher attrition may be the condition that ensues when as teachers we no longer know why we are doing what we are doing (van Manen, 1990, p. 123).

Discussion

Taking the time to talk about what surprised, moved, bothered, startled, provoked, and frightened me is part of the job, yet it rarely occurs. As I reflected on specific experiences and found the courage to share them, the story form ultimately began making
the hidden seen, the unformed formed, and the confusing clear. It was all about finding, organizing, making coherent, sharing, and appreciating my stories and my experiences (Atkinson, 1995), and ultimately enabling myself and others to learn from them.

I obviously experienced an incredible decay of community, where values and expectations were in complete disarray. Administrative authority and leadership were slipping by the wayside. It was not only the leadership but it was also the education system as a whole that took its toll on me. As a result of being submersed in such a negative school culture, I felt alienated, disillusioned, demoralized, unmotivated and full of uncertainty. I, like many other teachers, lost my drive, motivation and happiness. It became evident that there were a range of administrative decisions and actions within the system that caused for the crumbling of the community spirit within the organization and my ultimate discontent.

The resentment that resulted led staff members, including myself, to be in a state of constant distress. The morale within the school had undergone a severe transformation; teachers who were once filled with enthusiasm and dedication were now hesitant, skeptical, hurt, frustrated, and, at times, angry. I believe that much of the discontent was a direct result of administrative and system-wide decisions, as well as the style of leadership. Low morale was the immediate result of the feelings of alienation experienced by the teachers, followed by increasing rates of absenteeism, a decaying community, continual solemn faces, and lack of enthusiasm; none of them are being addressed or dealt with.

Living in an uncertain world of teaching, one that I found to be rigid, hierarchical, changing, and often chaotic, allowed me to see and understand schools as a landscape of
interacting stories that impacted directly on my teaching identity and my satisfaction as a teacher (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999). Quietly, behind a closed door, I continued to teach in a way that was purposeful and honoured meaning. I believe that the overwhelming number of policies that place teachers outside the decision-making realm and create situations of disempowered choice, along with an administration that dictates, quickly eliminates the possibility for teachers to hold on to their enthusiasm, freshness, hope, and perspective. What it did do was create a system that was full of increasingly callous and cynical teachers.

I learned very quickly that my practice as an educator was ultimately being shaped by the conflict within the school culture, which as a result prohibited me from doing my best work with my students. My visions of education and its potential to empower and change the world echoed the belief that “knowing the world as beautiful and feeling it are two quite different things” (Freeman, 1993, p. 72). The plethora of programs and policies that neither asked what I thought nor seemed to care how I felt (Wasley, 2001) was destroying my drive and my vision for a fulfilling future as a teacher.

As I battled the negativity day after day, I wondered how I could ensure I held on to what I believed in, how I could ensure that I continued to feel confident about what I knew. I believed in the potential of all my students. I recognized the need for their voice in their learning. A focus on relationships was central to student learning in my mind. I wanted to ensure that I continued to develop relationships based on trust and mutual support, demonstrating an unquestioned acceptance and sense of warmth and belonging. I wanted my students to know and understand that collaboration involved talking about personal beliefs, understandings, and values, and that by doing so, they would find
support and understanding. I wanted them to understand the importance of respect, trust, and the preservation of individual integrity. I wanted them to value individual perspectives, feel comfortable agreeing and arguing, and be able to articulate their own dilemmas and be able to pursue a means to resolve them. I wanted to do and be and offer everything that I had expected from my administration and from the system.

Yet all of this became difficult. It was a struggle each day to continue to respond to my call to teach without being concerned by the ambiguity that I was experiencing day after day. It was not being modelled, supported, or practised by administration, making the battle very difficult. I wanted for myself and for my colleagues exactly what I believed my students needed and deserved. It was no different. It seemed obvious that there was an appropriate way to work with and educate children in order to see positive results and happy students. Yet the corollary was not the case. There was not the necessary emphasis on the ways administrators should be working successfully with teachers – it was not a priority. The ramifications are and will continue to be huge, until the time is taken to properly monitor and investigate the working conditions and the reality of the teaching job.

Thoughts and Speculations

Teacher shortages are not so much a result of lack of supply as they are a problem with retaining qualified teachers. Most often, the solution is to recruit more teachers to fill the vacancies that schools are experiencing, rather than addressing the issues that are underlying the teachers’ decisions to leave and working towards solutions – which, according to Ingersoll (2002), would be a more effective means of solving the problem.
I am in many respects a classic example of a young teacher who has left the teaching profession. Yet I am unlike many teachers because I have chosen to take the risk and share my reality with the educational community. Having become a disillusioned, dissatisfied teacher who resigned from the teaching profession, I was the perfect subject for this study. In the future, it would be exceptional to have other teachers who have also left the classroom do the same, sharing their perspectives, their stories, and their experiences to ultimately contribute to a growing body of literature aimed at enhancing and improving the system’s way of dealing with teacher attrition.

School leaders have the ability to tap into the powerful energy of the inner motivational forces that are routinely repressed and discouraged in educational environments. Teachers most often respond to events in terms of learnings that have developed through experiences over time, not solely the events that precede the behaviour. As a result, principals should be concerned with the forces and processes through which teachers develop perceptions, values, and beliefs concerning the school organization because these no doubt have a direct impact on behaviour (Owens, 2004). A focus on observable changes at the school level may also impact teacher attrition and satisfaction. For example, teachers who perceive their school leadership as non-inclusive are more likely to leave. Therefore, employing a school management style that’s more communicative and responsive would likely impact teachers’ perceptions. Schools need to be organized not only to support and encourage the support of students, but to support teachers as well.

Of course every school culture is distinctive and unique in indefinable yet powerful ways. The social systems that exist in schools vary tremendously depending on
the administration. How administrators opt to organize their school, the ways in which decisions are made and who is involved in making them, and the communication patterns among teachers and administrators all have a great impact on the school climate. Administrators ultimately make decisions regarding the organization of the school including such factors as supervision, support services, decision-making practices, communication patterns, control mechanisms, and patterns of hierarchy. Ultimately, administrators have direct control or at least a strong influence on a school’s climate (Owens, 2004).

The internal characteristics of a school, according to Likert, dramatically impact its performance (as cited in Owens, 2004). As a result, administrators ought to be most concerned with how those characteristics come to be. The administration ultimately can choose the design of the structure (bureaucratic or flexible); similarly they can choose the leadership style (authoritarian or participative), as well as the philosophy of operation (teamwork or directive, problem-solving or rule-following). These decisions are incredibly influential and powerful in determining a school’s culture (Owens).

Implications

*If we do not learn, we cannot grow; if we don’t grow there will be no change.*

—Author Unknown

The results of this study have important educational implications. The results offer a more in-depth understanding of what I experienced as a teacher, highlighting potential areas that lead to dissatisfaction, disillusionment, and ultimately teacher attrition. I realized that I needed to confront all of the surrounding issues of complexity,
uncertainty, uniqueness, and conflict that I was experiencing. I needed the “power to critically examine a situation and confront it, rather than be dominated by it” (Hamilton, 1995, p. 30). Schon (1991) says that we tell stories about experiences that are puzzling, powerful, or upsetting, in order to render those experiences more sensible. School boards need to make understanding teacher attrition a priority by listening to and speaking with teachers. They need to begin to take a sustained interest in their teachers, and learn from those that they are losing.

The reality is that the implications are huge and detrimental to everyone: teachers, school boards, schools, and students. They are irreversible and may impede teachers’ performance in the future or affect their drive or future interests. Attention needs to be diverted to the area of teacher attrition, locating the stories and the experiences and drawing from them to improve teaching as it is known today. One way to do this would be to conduct anonymous exit interviews, which would provide an opportunity for those teachers to speak out without fear of retaliation. The possibility of retribution or retaliation is so great that most teachers choose not to use their voice to speak out about areas of tension they are experiencing.

Uncovering what causes teachers to become dissatisfied and leave the profession may in fact help to prevent teachers from becoming dissatisfied and leaving the profession. Little research has been done that examines the individual level and school level of teacher dissatisfaction and attrition and the interplay among the two. There are obvious ways of influencing teacher satisfaction through means such as mentoring and induction programs and professional development opportunities. Yet the presence alone
is not sufficient. It is the teachers’ satisfaction with the opportunities presented that ultimately influence their satisfaction.

Unfortunately, to effect change that has long-term staying power, it is not merely certain parts of the system that one must change, but the whole system. The ways in which administrators and teachers deal with one another and the extent to which together or individually they are involved in identifying problems and seeking solutions to them ought to be a priority in schools. What people think, how open their communication is and how they deal with conflict should not be overlooked; they have incredible influence on the school climate. It is not sufficient or acceptable for teachers to learn to keep their thoughts to themselves, or to be discreet in voicing doubt or criticism. Unfortunately the culture of many schools encourages such behaviour, “leaving decisions to the upper echelons and frowning upon lower-level participants who ‘cause trouble’ by raising questions” (Owens, 2004, p. 238).

One of the greatest resources available to schools trying to change or improve their culture is their own teachers. Owens (2004) suggests that by encouraging the teachers to become involved, concerned participants rather than making them feel powerless and manipulated by unseen and inscrutable forces, the school can tap into the strength, vitality and creativity of its teachers. Administrators need to facilitate a more adaptive decision-making style to replace the rigid hierarchical structure that most often exists in a mechanistic organization.

The main concern of administrators was once, and unfortunately often still is, the controlling of teacher behaviour, with planning and decision-making entirely in the hands of the hierarchy. The focus today is much more on developing a vision that involves the
teachers, inspires them, and motivates their efforts. A shared vision, Owens (2004) says, cannot be developed without delegating some of the power that has traditionally been held by administrators. Teachers need to have access to information about the school, the authority to participate freely in making decisions, recognition of their place as stakeholders in the school, and an environment that facilitates the development of trust and open communication between themselves and administrators.

Perhaps this analysis lacks understanding and empathy for the role administrators play each day, their work characterized by many brief interactions, meetings, phone calls, and paperwork. But administrators have considerable freedom to vary the pace of their work as they desire. Teachers on the other hand experience critical time constraints (school year, school day, school bell, fixed constraints) that sharply limit what they can and cannot do.

I was asked a very intriguing and thought-provoking question: Was I failed by the system, or did I in fact fail the system? The literature suggests that the longer one stays in the profession, the harder it is to leave (Tye & O’Brien, 2002). Did I give up too soon? I suppose this is for me to decide. For now, I am satisfied with my decision and am confident that I remain true to my values and beliefs. Might things have changed in the system, in my school, in the teaching profession? I don’t know the answer to those questions. What I do know is that discouraged and unhappy teachers do not always leave the profession and this is potentially very dangerous and destructive. Some teachers will stay, do a poor job, and feel helpless, negative, and overwhelmed (Tye & O’Brien). I couldn’t allow this to happen; I refused to continue to be one of those teachers who was not doing the best that they could. Had the working conditions and the system been
different, had I felt valued and respected, and had the leadership I experienced been empowering and effective, perhaps I would not be where I find myself positioned today, researching teacher attrition.

Many teachers experience highly gratifying intrinsic rewards from the connections made with their students yet at the same time, often feel that, as professionals, they are not accorded the stature they deserve. Teachers’ voices need to be placed at the centre of the debate about how to keep good teachers. Only then will the necessary people come together to discuss and develop an action plan for improvement. Teachers are at the heart of the matter, they are the ones who need to speak out, need to be confronted, and need to be heard. The solution lies within, drawn from their stories and experiences and perspectives. If teachers’ input is solicited, they will be and feel empowered. Teachers need to be given avenues through which they feel confident and comfortable expressing their concerns and their solutions.

Suggestions for Further Research

The limitations inherent in this study are evident. Conclusions cannot be drawn, but speculations can be made and certainly questions can be asked. I did not explore all tensions raised in the existing literature. There were many areas of tension that were investigated, but there is the need to understand where there were gaps in the support and intervention I received. Further research would offer a more representative picture of the kinds of support that could have been offered and is being offered to other teachers that might have impacted my decision. Perhaps there were trajectories where intervention might have led me down a different path. It is these areas that need to be further
investigated in order to render a complete and accurate and representative depiction of what other teachers may experience.

Similar studies need to be undertaken with larger sample sizes, which would ultimately provide more representative data for comparison. Perhaps teacher attrition can be stopped in its tracks if more teachers use their voices and share the impact the education system has had on them as individuals and as professionals. More research needs to be done into working conditions and their impact on teacher retention. Teachers need to feel empowered enough so that they feel confident and safe speaking out about the tensions they have or are experiencing as a teacher.

How does the system go about maintaining the cooperation and performance of a group of demoralized professionals? How do administrators lead a group in which morale is so low? How can the system begin taking the necessary steps to improve the work environment, motivation, and satisfaction of teachers, knowing that an unsatisfactory work environment over an extended period of time will only result in increased teacher dissatisfaction? These are all certainly worthy areas of further research. Educators, administrators, and policymakers must understand the culture of teaching and begin responding to the areas in need. It is up to school leaders to create, where possible, the conditions within their schools which will enhance the quality of teachers’ professional lives, foster increased job commitment, and cause teachers to decide that they want to stay in the profession.

So What?

The question “so what?” is the driving force behind all good research. It is a valid question that merits deep thought and retrospection. Why did I feel the need to tell my
story? Would anybody really care? How do I know that anyone will be interested? Will this inquiry make a difference? How do I know that my inquiry interest is anything more than personal or anything more than trivial? Was it purely narcissistic as some might speculate, or was it done with the intent, as June Carter used to say, to do something that mattered?

In many ways the very act of writing *Sarah's Story* proved to be liberating and somewhat cathartic, but that was not my intention. In many ways I believe there was a mismatch between who I was and who I was supposed to be; this I feel was the catalyst for the growth and transformation I experienced. I have taken a brief pause, reconstructed a vision of myself, my experiences and their meaning, and allowed myself to move past the *Reaching* and *The Journey* stages of my existence. I am still trying to find my path, looking forward, seeking to understand how this process has changed me and my future as an educator.

In the meantime, I am certain that this study has contributed to the world of academia and the teaching profession, and fairly, with as much accuracy as possible, represented my quest to understand the tensions and disjunctions experienced that led me to leave the teaching profession. I believe that I was able to learn about teacher attrition by engaging in this inquiry in ways that would not have been possible through other means. I also believe this study will fit with and even shift the existing social and theoretical conversations pertaining to teacher attrition.

**Epilogue**

As I complete this thesis and prepare to leave the world of academia, I brace myself for the return to the working world. Had I been asked upon commencement of this
master's degree if I would be returning to the classroom upon its completion, the answer
most likely would have been yes. Some who know me well say my resignation was no
surprise; unfortunately I didn’t have the same insight. I now no longer have to fear the
cloak of conformity or fear losing the authority of my story, my individuality. I no longer
need to oppose the discourse of the institution or protect my standpoint from which I
view the world of teaching.

Since having resigned from the school board, I have been blessed with the
opportunity to evaluate and assess my dreams, my visions, my hopes, and my desires. I
have come to realize that there are a multitude of ways to reach out and work with
children outside of the classroom, in places and ways that are more in line with my
beliefs and my passion.

I no longer need to imagine the possible or daydream about what might be; I am
now free to act upon it as I choose. I will continue to make a difference in the lives of
children, but I will do so in different ways. I will touch the lives of those who need
touching most. I will offer my strengths and talents to a community of people who are in
need and will appreciate and respect them. I will be involved because I want to be. I will
do the things I’m doing because I have chosen to and because I believe in them
wholeheartedly. I will continue to do that which drives me, because I am me.

The end of one story is only the beginning of another.
References


Neufeld, J. (2004). *Two interpretations of power*. Unpublished manuscript. Brock University 5P64, St. Catharines, ON.


August 31, 2005

Dear [Name],

This will acknowledge receipt of your letter of resignation effective August 31, 2005. On behalf of the Board, we thank you for your contributions and wish you success in your future endeavours.

Sincerely,

Superintendent of Human Resources Support Services

File
APPENDIX B

Mind Map

The Journey
- Leadership
- Intellect, Emotion, Spirit
- Communication
- Motivation, Morale

Professional Development
- Career
- Autonomy
- Empowerment, Participation
- Voice

Gaps in Support Intervention
- Role of Teacher
- Teacher Disatisfaction
- Becoming Outcasted
- Curriculum
- System

Finding a Path
- Options
- Tell, Reflect, Know
- Future
- Road Yet Traveled

Transformation

Sarah's Decision to Leave
- Lived Experience of Being a Teacher
- Initial Perception
- Community
- Working Conditions

System