An Exploration of Women Elementary School Teachers' Perceptions of How Their Decision to Return to Teaching Part-time from a Maternity Leave Influences Their Professional and Personal Lives

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to explore women elementary teachers’ perceptions of how their decision to return to teaching part-time from a maternity leave influences their professional and personal lives. The investigation focused on the decisions surrounding a mother’s choice to reenter the teaching profession part-time in a field where each mother had previously been employed full-time.

A collective case study was undertaken based on an in-depth interview with five mothers who had made the choice to return to the classroom part-time. The data collected in this study were analyzed and interpreted using qualitative methods.

The following four major themes emerged from the interviews: decision-making process, challenges faced by mothers who teach part-time, the importance of support, and the enhancement of instructional practice from parenthood. Using these four themes, an analysis was conducted to examine the similarities and differences among the experiences of the participants.

The mothers’ reflections, my analysis, and the related literature were used at the conclusion of this report to compile implications for teaching practice, theory, and further research.
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Dedication

To Tyler and Ava - my inspiration for this project.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM

This study explored women elementary teachers’ perceptions of how their decision to return to teaching part-time from a maternity leave influences their professional and personal lives. The investigation focused on the decisions surrounding a mother’s choice to reenter the teaching profession part-time and the experience of working part-time in a field where each mother had previously been employed full-time. A qualitative approach was used based on in-depth interviews with mothers who have made the choice to return to the classroom part-time.

Background of the Problem

One of the most significant changes that has taken place in the United States and Canada over the past 50 years is the feminization of the economy (Keller, 1994; Lee et al., 1994). In 2000, 70% of all women with children less than age 16 living at home were part of the employed workforce, up from 39% in 1976 (Statistics Canada, 2001). As well, there have been especially dramatic increases in the employment levels of women with very young children over the past quarter century. By 2000, 61% of women with children less than age 3 were employed, more than double the figure in 1976 when only 28% of these women were employed outside their homes (Statistics Canada). With significant numbers of women with dependent children entering the workforce each year, the traditional models for dividing work and family responsibilities are rapidly disappearing. This suggests that society can no longer assume that work and family can operate as separate entities; that is, “there is no longer the option of a gendered division of labour among partners when it comes to the organization of work and family” (Lee, Duxbury, & Higgins, 1994, p. 1).
Women are increasingly having to balance employment and familial responsibilities while men are beginning to shift their focus away from employment outside of the home and are accepting more familial responsibility (Michelson, 1983; Pleck, 1985). The challenges resulting from work-family conflict have been found to be associated with many negative consequences including decreased productivity, tardiness, absenteeism, turnover, poor morale, reduced life satisfaction, and poorer mental health (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Kelly & Voydanoff, 1985; Pleck, 1985; Pleck, Staines, & Lang, 1980; Voydanoff, 1989). A mother’s employment status has also been shown to have an effect on a child’s development (Hoffman & Youngblade, 1999). Accommodating the dual demands of employment and parenting influences the family structure, functioning and interaction patterns, and childrearing orientations, which, in turn, have been related to children’s sex-role attitudes, academic performance, and social competence. As Lee et al. (1994) put it, “work-family conflict is an important concern for both employers and employees” (p. 2).

In recent years, researchers have begun to focus attention on the challenges that workers face as they attempt to balance family and work responsibilities (Gilbert, 1994; Stebbins, 2001). More specifically, they have examined the ways in which working mothers cope with the demands of work and family as they attempt to achieve balance (Bailyn, 2006; Lee et al., 1994). Their findings indicate that even among women who are coping relatively well with the demands of work and family, a large proportion actively consider leaving their job. In the study conducted by Lee et al., the data clearly showed that employed mothers face considerable time pressures in attempting to fulfill their work and family roles. The recommendations resulting from this research indicated that
organizations should consider restructuring the work environment to offer greater work-time flexibility. It was also suggested that organizations should seriously consider offering the option of part-time positions to their employees. It was felt that "part-time work, detached from the traditional definition of part-time jobs (those requiring low skill and having low potential for upward mobility), would enable women (and men) to handle work and family requirements more effectively" (p. 32).

Statement of the Problem Context

In response to the demands of their jobs and their families, an increasing portion of Canadians and, in particular, Canadian teachers are employed part-time (Young & Grieve, 1996). Of the Canadian teachers that are employed part-time, 90% are women (Statistics Canada, 2001). According to Young and Grieve, these women teachers, who had often held full-time continuing contracts with their district school board before moving to part-time, are often seeking some flexibility to reconcile the multiplying demands of their professional and domestic responsibilities.

My interest in the subject of part-time employment within the teaching profession is not entirely academic. When my son was born in 2003, I was suddenly confronted with the realization that in 12 short months I would be required to decide whether or not I would be returning to my chosen career as an elementary teacher in the public school system. Choosing to return to work part-time was one of the hardest decisions that I have ever had to make. Early on in my maternity leave, my husband and I began to consider and compare the positive and negative aspects of a return to full-time or part-time work or a temporary leave from the teaching profession in order to stay at home and care for our son. In our situation the choice for me to return to part-time work was not based on a
financial need but rather on a personal need to be content both professionally and domestically. As well, we considered that the flexibility that I would have in working part-time rather than full-time would allow my husband to adjust his work schedule so that we could maximize the time that both of us could spend with our son. Even after all of our research and conversations with others who work part-time, I was not mentally prepared for the changes that I encountered when I finally returned to my Grade 8 teaching position as a part-time teacher in September of 2004.

**Purpose of the Study**

This study explored women elementary teachers’ perceptions of how their decision to return to teaching part-time from a maternity leave influences their professional and personal lives. The investigation focused on the decisions surrounding a mother’s choice to reenter the teaching profession part-time and the experience of working part-time in a field where each mother had previously been employed full-time. The research methodology for this investigation was a collective case study. A collective case study refers to a situation in which multiple cases are described and compared to provide insight into an issue (Stake, 1995). For the purposes of this study, an in-depth interview was conducted with several mothers who had made the choice to return to teaching part-time. Creswell’s (2005) process for analyzing and interpreting qualitative data was then used for the analysis of my data. The qualitative analysis process allowed me to make connections across the data in order to identify the common themes that arose from my exploration of the professional and personal lives of the mothers who were interviewed in this study. The findings from this research may be beneficial to principals who are dealing with the staffing needs of their schools and to mothers who are making
both a professional and a personal decision as to the direction of their lives at the end of a maternity leave. The results should encourage administrators to evaluate whether their staffing arrangements are designed to effectively support part-time mothers returning from a maternity leave. As well, this research should give women returning from a maternity leave a better perspective about the part-time teaching scenario.

**Rationale and Research Questions**

Research on the topic of part-time teaching in Canada remains sparse (Young & Brookes, 2004; Young & Grieve, 1996). Although some research has been conducted in regard to the factors influencing negotiations for reduced work employment arrangements for teachers (Young, 1999; Young & Brooke; Young & Grieve), it does not explore women elementary teachers’ perceptions of how their decision to return to teaching part-time from a maternity leave influences their professional and personal lives. To explore the lives of working mothers who teach part-time, the following research questions guided my investigation:

1. What factors influenced the decision of these women to return to teaching part-time?

2. Has the ability of these women to implement their personal philosophy of education been affected by their part-time status within the classroom?

3. Has the instructional practice of these women changed as a result of their part-time status within the classroom?

4. How have these women’s relationships with staff, students, the school community, and their family been affected by their part-time teaching position?
5. What are the challenges that arise from teaching part-time that could cause these women to feel professionally restricted?

6. How have these women’s perceptions of their personal and professional identities been affected by teaching part-time?

7. What impact has part-time teaching had on these women’s ability to successfully balance work and family?

**Scope and Limitations of the Study**

Because they most accurately mirrored my personal situation, female elementary school teachers were chosen as the participants for this study. All of these participants were employed by the same large district school board located within southern Ontario and had returned to teaching part-time after a maternity leave. These teachers held a variety of teaching assignments and were in their part-time positions for varying amounts of time after returning from their maternity leaves. Conducting a series of interviews with each of the participants at different points after returning from their maternity leave would have given me a more detailed description of the perceptions of part-time teaching on the professional and personal lives of mothers. However, time constraints prevented me from pursuing this more encompassing approach.

A further limitation of this qualitative study is that the interpretation and analysis of the data are limited to the depth and scope of my personal lens as a researcher. With this knowledge, every attempt was made to remain objective. In addition, the participants were asked to verify my interpretation of the data.
Outline of Remainder of the Document

Chapter Two discusses the literature that I felt was relevant for the exploration of the questions that I expressed as the goals of this study. The review of literature examines three distinct fields of research that together show the need for further study in the area of mothers with young children and the perceptions they have of the impact of part-time work on their professional and personal lives. The first section of the review focuses on the challenges faced by employed mothers as they attempt to balance their careers and family life. This section is followed by a brief look at professions other than teaching in which research has been conducted on women who have chosen to return to work part-time. The final section of the review focuses on research conducted in Alberta, Canada during an educational reform that changed this province’s outlook on part-time teaching. This section also includes a small glimpse into feminist perspectives about women in teaching and the impact of motherhood on their career.

Chapter Three provides an outline of the research methodology and procedures that I used to collect and analyze the data for this study. Included in this chapter is an intensive review of the case study process in order to justify why this approach was the most appropriate method for the study of the issues that this research addressed. The data collected in this study were examined following the example given by Creswell (2005) for analyzing and interpreting qualitative data. The personal profiles of each of the women interviewed in this study are included in this chapter to introduce the reader to each participant by relating the nature of each part-time position held and the child-care choices made by each woman. The limitations of this study, as well as strategies for
establishing credibility, are also outlined in this chapter. Chapter Three concludes with a restatement of the problem situation.

Chapter Four presents the findings of this study by discussing the major themes that emerged from the analysis of the data. The themes are organized under the following four headings: decision-making process, challenges faced by mothers who teach part-time, the importance of support, and the enhancement of instructional practice from parenthood.

Chapter Five begins with a brief summary of this research study. The chapter proceeds with a discussion of the research findings as they relate to the research questions that guided this study and to the literature. Implications for practice, theory, and further research are discussed at the conclusion of this chapter.
CHAPTER TWO: CRITICAL REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

To explore the questions, concerns, and interests that I expressed as the goals of this study, I critically examined a varied body of literature. The first section of this critical review focuses on employed mothers and the challenges that they face while attempting to achieve balance between their careers and family life. This section is followed by a brief look at three professions in which research has been conducted on women who have chosen to reduce their work schedule to help balance work and family. The final section of this review focuses on research conducted in Alberta, Canada during an educational reform that changed this province’s outlook on part-time teaching. Feminist perspectives about women in education and the affects of motherhood on their career are also discussed.

Mothers at Work

Over the past 50 years one of the most significant changes that has taken place in the United States and Canada is the feminization of the economy (Keller, 1994; Lee et al., 1994). This dramatic change has come about with the entrance of married women with children into the workplace, particularly with the employment of married women with children under 6 years of age. By 1960, the labour force participation of this group had risen to 19% and then continued to grow – 30% by 1970, 45 % by 1980, 58% by 1990, and by 2000, 64% of women with children less than 6 years of age were employed (Statistics Canada, 2001).

The increase of mothers in the labour force is significant because it has created a discrepancy between traditional middle-class family values and those values being demonstrated by market place labourers (Keller, 1994). Traditional gender roles for men
and women are very different. The gender role for men in the family and the gender role for men in the workplace were considered to be the same. A man’s occupational role and familial role was defined as being the primary “bread-winner” or economic provider for his dependent family members. The woman’s traditional familial role was defined as the caretaker of her household and she was to support her husband in his role as provider but was not expected to provide in an economic way for her family (Keller). She was also considered to be the primary caretaker of the children. She was responsible for their “social, intellectual, and moral development,” especially in the preschool years (p. 3). The woman’s attitude within her family was supposed to be one of self-sacrifice rather than self-fulfillment (Epstein, 1974). This image of the family became the accepted sociological model of the 1950s and 1960s when Parsons and Bales (as cited in Keller, 1994, p. 4) defined the family as a “stay-at-home mother and a breadwinning father with their children.” Parson and Bales felt that modern society could not function without a clear division of gender roles. They defined this familial model as the “Normal American Family.”

While Parsons and Bales (as cited in Keller, 1994) took liberties to define what should be considered a “normal family,” women were beginning to seek employment outside of the home – a movement that was contrary to the middle class norm. Inflation, a rising standard of living, and the desire to share the benefits of consumers all encouraged the growth of the two-income family. In the 1950s, women in the labour force were increasing at a rate four times faster than men. (Chafe, 1977, p. 94)
This massive movement of females into the workforce in the 1960s and 1970s began to put stress on the traditional family model. Due to this huge increase of employed mothers, the 1950s have been identified as the beginning of the division between the "traditional or normal" industrial family and the "modern" familial arrangement of the two-worker married couple with children (Chafe 1977; Keller 1994). The exponential growth of women entering and staying in the workforce began to obliterate the gender division that once was. The destruction of this division however has not resulted in equality amongst the genders within the labour force or in the home. That is a topic outside of this research, but noteworthy, as it challenges many of the new traditions and norms relating to the intensity and degree to which a female enters and participates in the workplace. Gaskell and Mullen (2006) discuss how men still occupy the top roles in most professions. They further comment on how "sex segregation contributes to women's lower pay and authority because occupations that are predominantly female tend to pay less than male-dominated occupations" (p. 459). Clearly, there is need for further evolution as society (still highly driven by male perspective in my opinion) views women in limited capacities. Women still seem to find themselves in occupations where they fulfill the identified role of the 1950s woman – i.e., teacher (educator); waitress (provider); housekeeper (organizer); nurse (nurturer). Now these observations are anecdotal and as such are broad generalizations, however it is clear that full acceptance of women in the workforce across all categories has not yet arrived. The other side to this observation is the appeal that such jobs, as aforementioned, provide. For example, the teaching profession allows for flexible schedules, summers and holidays off work, and a sense of fulfillment to be educating the generation of tomorrow. In a study conducted by
Moreau, Osgood, and Halsall (2007), teaching is described as being more female-friendly than ‘male-dominated’ industry due primarily “to working hours (described as fitting in with children’s schooling times) and to the possibility for returning after career breaks” (p.243). Another key variable that many women are required to consider through choice or external pressure, is the having and rearing of children. Many of the now traditional occupations of women provide the flexibility and self-fulfillment that many women require as they attempt to balance work and family.

Prior to the 1950s, the dilemma faced by middle-class women “had generally been perceived to be the decision between employment or a family” (Keller, 1994, p. 5). But with the record number of middle-class women participating in work outside of the home, a conflict was created as women attempted to fulfill both the expectations and the realities of the traditional wife/mother role and the role of financial provider. Society could no longer assume that work and family could operate as separate entities. That is, “a gendered division of labour among partners when it comes to the organization of work and family was no longer an option” (Lee et al., 1994, p. 1). Women were increasing having to balance employment and familial responsibilities while men were beginning to shift their focus away from employment outside of the home in order to accept more familial responsibility (Michelson, 1983; Pleck, 1985). The phrase “work-family conflict” emerged in the 1980s as a result of the steep increase of married women’s labour force participation (Barnett & Garcis, 2006). The clear boundaries between what had previously been seen as two distinct areas of life – work (primarily the domain of men) and family (primarily the domain of women) – were eroding.
The changing roles of men and women with respect to familial and economic responsibilities has generated many questions for researchers (Gilbert, 1994). Gilbert identified that the types of questions asked by researchers over the past 50 years, in regards to changing gender roles within the family, could be categorized into three distinct areas of study. The earliest set of questions that were asked about changing gender roles within the family focused on women making the transition from the traditional role of caretaker of the household to the more contemporary role of both caretaker of the household and economic provider for the family. Gilbert found that the thrust of these questions focused on the idea that as women became employed outside of the home, they might neglect their traditional responsibilities within the home. Questions focusing on how women’s changing roles affected their children’s development and their ability to care for the household were asked from a traditional perspective. However, men were not questioned in regards to their role in helping their wives balance the responsibilities added by employment outside of the home. It should be noted that while some research showed that young children cared for by someone other than their mothers were at no disadvantage when compared to those children given constant daily maternal care (Heynes, 1982; Zaslow, 1987), other research conducted by Hoffman and Youngblade (1999) showed evidence that a mother’s employment status did in fact have an effect on a child’s development as it related to their sex-role attitude, academic performance, and social competence.

Temporally, the next area of research within the realm of dual-income families focused on the changes for which women began to advocate to help balance work and family; specifically, changes in the husband’s familial role (Gilbert, 1994). Research
found that women viewed their decision to be employed outside of the home as “their right” as well as “their choice” (p. 102). This area of research found men beginning to take part in familial responsibilities. Women were no longer expected to balance employment and familial responsibilities on their own as both spouses were considered to have more than one role within the family unit (Michelson, 1983; Pleck, 1985). Questions in this area of research centered on how balanced the responsibilities between men and women were within the home and the different ways in which men and women managed to occupy multiple roles. It is my opinion that the results of this research remain confusing and mixed. Some research reports that the experience of men and women in dual-career families is positive and encouraging (Barnett, Marshall, & Singer, 1992; Barnett & Rivers, 1996). Benefits for women reported in this research included an increase in their self-esteem, better overall physical and mental health, and enhanced economic independence. Women and men are reported to be actively negotiating new ways and means to fulfill the demands of work and home and are happy, healthy, and thriving. Other research reports that men and women in dual-career families feel continual time-pressures, are less satisfied with life and have poorer mental health, spend less time together as a couple, and are not taking advantage of family-friendly work options that are available to them (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Kelly & Voydanoff, 1985; Pleck, 1985; Pleck et al., 1980; Voydanoff, 1989). The debate about what roles individuals, companies, community, and government have to play to resolve work-family conflict continues, and researchers and policymakers continue to struggle to address basic issues of what mechanisms of support we need to implement to “nourish and sustain the community and the family” (Stebbins, 2001, p. 49).
The third and current area of research looks at dual-career family life within the realm of "societal norms and practices" (Gilbert, 1994, p. 102). Researchers are now asking questions that consider the types of care provided to children while both parents are working, the effects of these varying types of care on children, and the types of work environments that are available that permit the employee to fulfill both work and family responsibilities (Aldous, 1990; Hoffman, 1989; Lee et al., 1994; Zedeck & Mosier, 1990). Gilbert felt that "the more employers' policies reflect a traditional workplace culture in which women with children leave the workplace and men with children are unencumbered by family responsibilities, the more difficult it becomes for both parents to parent" (p. 102).

In a Canadian study conducted by Lee et al. (1994), it was reported that working mothers feel the pressure of time constraints when attempting to complete all of their daily tasks. The women felt that once they had completed their employment and familial responsibilities, they were left with very little personal time. The results of this study also suggest that working mothers are beginning to identify the difficulties associated with balancing work and family responsibilities. DeMeis, Hock, and McBride (1986), who had similar findings in their study, stated that "all mothers must resolve the issue of how to balance their own needs and those of their family" (p. 627). Consequently, Lee et al. reported that the women who were best able to cope with their many roles did so by setting priorities for themselves and their families and by dividing household responsibilities, when possible, with their spouse and their children. The women in the Lee et al. study also identified that they would like their employers to support them by providing more understanding of their work-family conflicts and more flexibility in terms
of when they have to work and where they work. In this study it was identified that the challenges of balancing work and family responsibilities were most difficult with women who were raising preschool children. During the time when their children are very young, Lee et al. found that mothers identified experiencing “extreme time pressures and felt burdened with the concern about finding reliable childcare arrangements that fit their work schedule” (p. 28). This study suggests that “if the period of most intense family need is viewed within the perspective of a work life, then the number of years of disruption is relatively short” (p.29). Lee et al. felt that if employers were able to maintain this perspective, they may then be able to attract and retain competent female employees if they choose to provide a work environment that allows the employee to fulfill both work and family roles, thereby, reducing the amount of work-family conflicts that dual-career families experience.

Gilbert (1994) reflects that “it is now the norm for women and men to combine occupational work and family life across the life cycle, although, this pattern is still somewhat out of step with social institutions and with how people define careers and achieve occupational advances” (p. 104). As women’s wages increase and men’s roles within the home grow, work-family conflicts are being viewed less as a “women’s issue” and more as a family and societal responsibility (Stebbins, 2001). For women and men in this day and age “the dual-career family form stands among the marital patterns that are available and acceptable in our society” (Gilbert, p. 104).

So what should be the next area that researchers should focus on? Googins (as cited in Stebbins, 2001) argues that the community has been the forgotten stakeholder in the work-family debate and that the issue needs to be brought forward for the public to
review. Society needs to view the issue of balancing work and family as an issue of public rather than corporate policy. Researchers need to begin to examine the underlying societal values that are at play and strengthen work and family programs within our organizations of work and the community at large. Googins calls for a family-friendly society rather than a family-friendly corporation. Other researchers argue that we need to carry out more in-depth research studies that focus on the current experiences of men and women within various organizations (Gilbert, 1994; Lee et al., 1994). These studies, these researchers believe, will help us to document the corporate culture, the family-friendly initiatives they have implemented, the management styles in operation, and the voices of men and women who describe their day-to-day realities within these contexts. The research that I conducted focused on the real experiences of mothers within a specific employment location and culture. In an area where most research has focused on mothers who work full-time, I believe that my research assisted by offering the reader a more current glimpse into the experiences of mothers who return to work part-time as described through their voices, as well as my analysis of what their experiences offered for consideration.

**Career Choices**

When conducting this review of literature I found that although much research has been done in the area of dual-career families and mothers who are employed full-time, little research has been done in the area of part-time employment practice. The studies that I did find looked at part-time work within the medical profession, university tenure positions, and general professional occupations. Within this section I explore the factors behind the move of professionals in the aforementioned professions from full-time to
part-time employment positions in an effort to identify reasons for choosing part-time work.

In a study which considered physicians who chose part-time employment, Maresh (2004) found that a significant number of family physicians have practiced part-time employment at one point in their career. Maresh also found that physicians in other specialties had similar findings. She further indicates that the concept of working part-time or flexible schedules is of high interest to many physicians. The "desire to spend more time with family" or to "reduce commitment level prior to retirement" were identified as the most common motivators for choosing part-time work (p.45). One question that arises is whether or not a physician can provide adequate healthcare service for patients in an environment of part-time availability. Murray et al. (as cited in Maresh, 2004) found that part-time physicians performed as well as full-time physicians with the exception that some continuation type care (which undoubtedly requires a greater time commitment) was found to be lacking for those working on a part-time basis. A negative aspect to practicing part-time medicine, as reported by Maresh, is the idea that full-time physicians looked down on those physicians who choose to reduce their hours of work. Through a conversation with a close relative who is a full-time family physician in the Niagara region, those physicians participating at a part-time level of employment in the health care arena in Ontario are looked upon in a negative manner in his circle of colleagues, due primarily to the doctor shortage in the province and the fact that current resources are already stretched to dangerously thin limits. Regardless of the personal reasons for a physician to practice part-time, part-time employment often carries the stigma of "lack of commitment". However, the physicians in Maresh's study felt that the
benefits of part-time work outweighed the obvious benefits of increased peer acceptance and financial gain that would come from full-time employment. The physicians from Maresh’s study who chose part-time work reported that there were times that they “wished they had more money for fancy cars and vacations”, but on the whole, they would never trade in what they did gain – “more energy, time, and emotional involvement with their family” (p.50). Some of the unanticipated benefits of part-time work that were also identified in this study were having more time for reading medical literature and staying on top of the advancements in their profession. Offering part-time positions was also shown to benefit medical practice in a variety of other ways. Part-time work was identified as being a “good recruiting draw” and an “effective retention tool” for medical practices (p. 50). Part-time practice could also “allow a clinic to expand its hours to evenings or weekends, thereby gaining a competitive advantage and creating services that patients really like” (p.50).

Research within colleges, universities, and professional schools has identified part-time work as being a professional disaster for the academics employed at these institutions. “Low pay, tiny shared offices, and indifference or outright contempt from full-time faculty members” were identified as some of the issues faced by these professionals (Mcclain, 2003, ¶ 1). Not all participants in the Mcclain study expressed the same negative outlook on part-time employment, but the academics who were enjoying their part-time positions were doing so because they had “negotiated part-time work from a position of relative strength” (¶ 2). Their strength came from entering part-time employment after they had already achieved a tenured position or had been employed full-time at their facility. Although there were downsides to doing this, such as “a loss of
income, perhaps a loss of influence, and even a loss of benefits”, the participants in this study accepted this in order to “secure more time with their families while still leading fulfilling professional lives” (¶ 2).

Hill, Martinson, and Ferris (2004) found that part-time employment helped mothers of preschool children working in professional occupations to successfully balance employment and familial responsibilities. For this study, female part-time professionals were compared with female full-time professionals. The part-time group reported an average of 20 fewer weekly working hours and they allocated their additional time primarily to caring for and nurturing their dependent children. They also reported less “job-related travel, unnecessary work, and work-to-family conflict, as well as greater work-family success, child care satisfaction, and family success” (p. 290). However, the part-time mothers did report that there was a more traditional division of labour in household responsibilities and that they were presented with fewer career opportunities and less work success. In a similar study conducted by Olsen and DiBrigida (as cited in Levinson, 1995), professional women who chose part-time employment were reported to be less depressed than mothers who were either not employed or were employed full-time. Those who were employed part-time were content with the opportunity that this employment arrangement created for spending more time with family even though the choice of part-time employment was perceived by them as being a disadvantage to their career. Bailyn (2006) also found that taking advantage of a flexible work schedule would always be seen as a liability for the development of one’s career as long as organizations rewarded the full commitment of their employees on the basis of the amount of visible time spent at work.
In summary, it appears that through the voices of physicians, academics, and general professionals, part-time employment offers women some flexibility to reconcile the multiplying demands of their professional and domestic responsibilities. All three groups reported being content with their decision to choose part-time employment regardless of the loss of income and lower chance for career advancement. It was also identified that by women choosing to work part-time in order to fulfill familial responsibilities, the traditional gender stereotypes, as discussed in the first section of this literature review, were being reinforced.

**Women as Part-time Teachers**

In teaching, as in many other professions, the number of Canadian teachers who are employed part-time has increased substantially since the early 1980s and over 90% of those part-time teachers are women (Statistics Canada, 2001). To date, published research exploring the topic of part-time teaching in Canada has occurred mainly in the province of Alberta. During the 1990s, the number of Alberta teachers employed part-time had increased by over 40%. By the 1995/1996 school year, 15% of Alberta’s teachers — including one of every five women — were part-timers (Young and Grieves, 1996). In order to explore some of the day-to-day realities of part-time teaching, Young and Grieves, Young (1999), and Young and Brookes (2004), during a multi-district Alberta study on part-time teaching employment, reported on part-time teaching arrangements as a component of flexible workforces and as an element of flexible workplaces.

When discussing the overall restructuring of employment, many people today talk about the need for a flexible workforce or, perhaps, a flexible workplace (Duffy & Pupo, 1992; Negrey, 1994). A flexible workforce reflects employers’ efforts to increase staffing
flexibility and lower their fixed staffing costs as an organizational response to financial and competitive pressures. This is considered to be market-driven employment in which employees have little influence on the conditions of their employment. For example, recent research suggests that Alberta schools have been shown to reflect the ideals of a flexible workforce (Young, 1999). The Alberta School Act gives employing school districts and their administrators considerable freedom to vary the amount of time that the teacher is required to teach from semester to semester and from one school year to the next. By legislation, part-time teachers have neither the right to expect similar hours of work from year to year, no matter how much seniority they have, nor do they have a right to move from part-time to full-time status, even when full-time teaching contracts are being offered (Young & Grieves, 1996). A flexible workplace, however, reflects greater societal acceptance that there should be opportunities for a variety of optional employment arrangements that do not necessarily involve standard, full-time employment (Hargreaves, 1994). Hargreaves argues that “the kinds of organizations most likely to prosper in the postindustrial, postmodern world are ones characterized by flexibility, adaptability, creativity, opportunism, continuous improvement, and commitment to maximizing their capacity to learn about their environment and themselves” (p. 63). By creating flexible workplaces, employees are given the opportunity to tailor their paid work arrangements to complement other dimensions of their lives, because they have some control or influence over their working conditions. Within the realm of teaching, research has shown that the individuals who most often choose to change their employment status are women who are seeking some flexibility to help balance the many
demands of their professional and domestic responsibilities (Acker, 1994; Acker, 1999; Moreau et al., 2007; Young, 1992).

Overall, the motivations for engaging in part-time employment arrangements that were stated in the studies conducted by Young and Grieves (1996), Young (1999), and Young and Brookes (2004) were similar to those already documented in research about part-time employment (Hill et al., 2004; Maresh, 2004; Mcclain, 2003). The motivation for choosing to work part-time could be divided into three distinct categories. The first is women teacher’s motivations for securing more time to fulfill family responsibilities. The second demonstrates the strategy of some teachers to create more professional space for themselves and others. The third motivation reflects on the use of part-time employment by individual teachers to effect transitions into full-time employment or retirement and its use by employing principals to act as buffers for fluctuating enrolment.

Research conducted by Acker (1999) with British primary teachers found that it was mostly women who were employed in temporary and part-time positions. Similarly, the research conducted in Alberta showed that it was female teachers who generally opted for part-time employment (Young & Grieves, 1996). Young and Grieves further identified that the women in their study chose part-time employment in order to accommodate domestic responsibilities, primarily identified as child care. The self-perceived need that many women feel to have to juggle work, family, and domestic responsibilities leads some of them to reduce their teaching time in order to help them achieve balance in their life (Moreau et al., 2007). Although the nature of teaching lends itself easily to career breaks, the choice of women to decrease their teaching time to help balance work and family adds to the perceived and acknowledged feminization of their
profession. Research indicates that due to the high employment of women in teaching, school environments have often been described as being ‘feminized’ (Gaskell & Mullen, 2006; Moreau et al.). This observation is reinforced by Anker (as cited in Gaskell and Mullen), who found that teaching is one of the most common occupations for women in many parts of the world. Smulyan (2006) also writes that “statistics demonstrate both the predominance of women in teaching and the importance of teaching as an employment option for women” (p. 470). Acker (1989) wrote that “teaching is thought of as an appropriate – perhaps even ‘the best’ – career for women, the best paid and highest status of the traditionally female professions, with holidays and hours that allow combined responsibilities in work and family context” (p.1). Traditionally throughout research it has also been documented that women are most often found in primary teaching positions and often have more difficulty then men achieving positions of power within the elementary and secondary education systems (Acker, 1994; Acker, 1999; Gaskell & Mullen; Smulyan). Gaskell and Mullen stated that teaching has been “organized, changed and framed by gender” (p. 453). Therefore, within the context of statistics and previous research, it can be recognized that “gender frames the work of teachers, and that teaching is an area in which gender can be learned, defined, renegotiated and contested” (Smulyan, p. 470). The result of mostly women choosing the option of part-time employment is a very large part-time woman workforce. This model, in turn, reinforces gender stereotypes. “Not only is it women who seem to be exercising this part-time option, but it is for an activity that involves caring (providing direct caregiving) for others, which is again a traditionally acceptable role for women” (Young & Grieves, p. 7). Gaskell and Mullen commented that “the teaching woman has been framed by images of femininity,
described through maternal metaphors, and linked to social rather than intellectual tasks” (p.453). The choice that many women teachers make to reduce their teaching time to balance their professional and domestic lives helps to sustain a particular gendered interpretation of what “family responsibilities” are and of how they differ for women and men (Moreau et al.). This practice of mainly women teachers choosing part-time employment therefore supports the traditional gender order rather than transforming it (Negrey, 1994). Many of the women in the studies conducted by Young and Grieves, Young, and Young and Brookes, who chose part-time teaching as a way of creating personal space in order to fulfill domestic responsibilities, had held full-time continuing contracts with a district school board before moving to part-time. The women in Alberta who made the shift from full-time to part-time contracts before 1999 are now stuck there, even if they would like to return to full-time employment. In a sense, these women have taken a career penalty for taking on traditional family responsibilities. Not only are these women working in the margins of their professions today, but they face long-term disadvantages related to pensions and other benefits. Other feminist scholars conducting research within the teaching profession have found similar results whereupon return from a maternity leave, women were faced with a demotion, thus returning to lower-status, marginal positions (Acker, 1999; Moreau et al.). Career breaks for family and or returning to teaching part-time were also identified as major factors in the under representation of women at management levels within the education system (Acker, 1999; Moreau et al.). Regardless of the potential damage to their career and the frustrations encountered within the schools due to part-time employment, most of the women interviewed in each of these aforementioned studies chose this option of part-time
work to help balance familial responsibilities and were ultimately happy with their
arrangements and quick to credit their principals for making their arrangements possible.
The question that remains to be answered is whether or not the teaching profession will
always be framed and organized by issues of gender. Over time, employment within
Ontario education has changed so as to provide women an opportunity for “respect,
autonomy, and financial independence” (Gaskell & Mullen, p. 463). “Women are now
paid the same as male teachers, they are allowed to teach after marriage and child birth,
maternity leave has become available, and elementary teachers are to be paid as much as
secondary teachers” (p. 465). Overall, Gaskell and Mullen feel that “research on gender
in teaching has a role to play in keeping the issues of power, respect and status of
teaching alive, as well as putting them in historical context” (p. 466). Continued research
into the issues of gender and feminism within education will serve to document the
seemingly slow but steady change in attitude and practice as we work towards achieving
equality for all teachers.

While conducting my review of literature, it became evident that research on the
topic of part-time teaching in Canada remains sparse (Young & Brookes, 2004; Young &
Grieve, 1996). As outlined in this section, although some research has been conducted
with regards to the factors influencing negotiations for reduced work employment
arrangements for teachers (Young, 1999; Young & Brookes; Young & Grieve), previous
research does not provide an in-depth exploration of women elementary teachers’
perceptions of how their decision to return to teaching part-time from a maternity leave
influences their professional and personal lives.
Summary of Literature Reviewed

The literature that has been reviewed in this chapter has examined three distinct fields of research that together reveal the need for further study into the impact of part-time teaching on the lives of mothers returning from their maternity leaves in the area of elementary education.

As illustrated through the review of literature, full-time working mothers struggle with the demands of balancing work and family. The research conducted by Lee et al. (1994) reported that working mothers feel the pressure of time constraints when attempting to complete all of their daily tasks. The women in the Lee et al. study identified that they would like their employers to help them by providing more flexibility in terms of when they have to work and where they work in order to more effectively manage their work and family responsibilities.

As a result of the multiplying demands of work and family, research has shown that in some professions, particularly the medical profession, tenured university or college positions, and general professional positions, women have chosen the route of part-time employment to help reconcile these demands (Hill et al., 2004; Levinson, 1995; Maresh, 2004; Mcclain, 2003). Within these professions, all participants reported being content with their decision to pursue part-time employment, although loss of income and influence were reported as the downsides to moving to a reduced work schedule. Similarly, research conducted in Alberta, Canada indicated that women elementary and secondary school teachers chose part-time employment as a way of creating personal space to fulfill family responsibilities (Young, 1999; Young & Brooks, 2004; Young & Grieve, 1996). The choice of these women to move into part-time employment to help
balance work and family responsibilities supports research which examines the highly feminized nature of teaching (Acker, 1999; Gaskell and Mullen, 2006; Moreau et al., 2007; Smulyan, 2006). The impact of the transition from changing from full-time to part-time employment was not reported in this research.

Therefore, in an area where most research has focused on mothers who work full-time or in professions other than teaching, there is a need for research on women elementary school teachers’ perceptions of how their decision to return to teaching part-time from a maternity leave influences their professional and personal lives. Having made the choice to return to teaching part-time after my maternity leave with very little guidance, I feel that the findings from this research will give other women returning from a maternity leave a better foundation upon which to base their career reentry decisions. The results of this study should also benefit principals who are dealing with the staffing needs of their schools by helping them to evaluate whether their staffing arrangements are designed to effectively support mothers who have chosen to return from their maternity leaves to part-time positions.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

As stated in the previous chapters, my interest in the role that part-time teaching plays in the lives of mothers who are returning to the profession from a maternity leave is both personal and professional. Prior to the birth of my first child, I was a full-time homeroom teacher in an elementary school within a large district school board in southern Ontario. After my son’s birth, I chose to reenter the teaching profession on a part-time basis and I am presently experiencing the impact of my reduced work schedule both professionally and personally. My situation made me curious as to whether there were other women who had made a similar choice as I had in returning to their teaching positions part-time after the birth of a child. Of greater interest to me was whether they were experiencing the same dramatic impact on their professional and personal lives as I was experiencing. I daily struggle with the balance of work and family. My part-time status at school allows me to spend more time with my son than if I was working full-time, but I continually question how much is enough professionally as a part-time teacher? Many times I feel like a full-time teacher with half of the pay and half of the status within the school and school board and I struggle with the time constraints of being a perfectionist both in my home and at work. Therefore, it seemed like a natural fit for me to allow these thoughts to guide the direction and nature of my research. The investigation that emerged explores women elementary teachers’ perceptions of how their decision to return to teaching part-time from a maternity leave influences their professional and personal lives. The investigation focused on the decisions surrounding a mother’s choice to reenter the teaching profession part-time and the experience of working part-time in a field where each mother had previously been employed full-time.
Research Methodology and Design

This qualitative collective case study explored mothers' experiences of returning to teaching part-time after a maternity leave. The central perspective of qualitative research is that it should consider the participant's view, describe it within a setting or context, and explore the meaning people personally hold for the research issue (Creswell, 2005). Creswell (1998) describes a case study as an “in-depth exploration of a bounded system (e.g., an activity, event, process, or individuals) based on extensive data collection” (p. 495). “Bounded” refers to a case that is separated out for research in terms of time, place, or some physical boundaries. A collective case study refers to a situation in which multiple cases are described and compared to provide insight into an issue (Stake, 1995). This research examined the decisions surrounding why mothers choose to return to the teaching profession part-time after a maternity leave. More specifically, this research explored women elementary teachers' perceptions of how their decision to return to teaching part-time from a maternity leave influenced their professional and personal lives. It served as an attempt to draw common themes from their experiences as part-time teachers. Therefore, the goals of my research are consistent with the goals of a qualitative collective case study.

From my data collection, I desired to learn about the experiences of other mothers who find themselves in a situation similar to my own. As opposed to quantitative methods, qualitative methods are most appropriate when conducting interpretive inquiry because they are geared toward understanding, observing, and experiencing natural events (Creswell, 2005). Qualitative research emphasizes detailed descriptions of events at a particular time and place, so that the events can be understood and shared with
others. Through my research I was examining the experiences of several mothers in the particular situation of returning to part-time work after a maternity leave, and I offer an interpretation and analysis of their experiences and their implications to a particular audience.

Site and Participants

All five of the women who were interviewed in this study belonged to the same large district school board in southern Ontario. The following section contains a profile of the participants describing their part-time work situations and their childcare arrangements. Pseudonyms were assigned to the participants and any identifying information has been changed to maintain anonymity and confidentiality. An overview of the participants’ profiles is provided in Table 1.

Anne

Anne was employed as a full-time teacher for 4 years before the arrival of her first child. She took 1 full year of maternity leave and returned to teaching in a three-quarter time position. She worked a 10-day cycle having 2½ days off per cycle. Her specific teaching assignment required the instruction of mathematics, language arts, and geography to a Grade 8 homeroom. She was also responsible for the teaching of drama and dance throughout different divisions within the school. On the days that Anne was not at school, her homeroom responsibilities were covered by another teacher who worked within the school. Prior to her interview, Anne had worked 1 year of part-time employment within the school board. The care of Anne’s daughter was split between her best friend and her cousin upon her return to teaching.
Table 1

*Participant Profiles*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Years Teaching</th>
<th>Part-Time Teaching Position</th>
<th>Child-Care Arrangement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anne</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beth</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathy</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debbie</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Karen

Karen was employed as a full-time teacher for 6 years before the arrival of her first child. She took 1 full year of maternity leave and returned to teaching in a half-time position. Karen worked every afternoon and her specific teaching assignment was a mixed junior and senior kindergarten class. Prior to her interview, Karen had worked 1 year of part-time employment within the school board. Karen’s son was cared for by a home daycare 4 days a week and by her mother for the fifth day.

Beth

Beth was employed as a full-time teacher for 4 years before the arrival of her second child. She returned to teaching in a half-time position when her son was 16 weeks old. Beth was assigned a Grade 1 class with all homeroom and curriculum responsibilities. She is away from the school every Thursday and Friday and every other Wednesday. Beth shares the responsibility of teaching her Grade 1 class with another teacher who is also employed half-time. Prior to her interview, Beth had worked 2 years of part-time employment within the school board. The care of Beth’s son was split between her husband and the YMCA daycare located within her school when she returned to teaching.

Kathy

Kathy was employed as a full-time teacher for 3 years before the arrival of her first child. During the next 9 years through a series of maternity leaves and leaves of absences, Kathy had three more children. Kathy returned to teaching in a half-time position working five mornings per week with the responsibility of a mixed junior and senior kindergarten class. Prior to her interview, Kathy had worked 7 years of part-time
employment within the school board. When Kathy returned to work, her youngest daughter was enrolled in a junior kindergarten program that operated every morning. Her neighbour assisted in the care of her daughter before and after school.

Debbie

Debbie was employed as a full-time teacher for 1½ years before the arrival of her first child. She took 18 months of maternity leave and returned to teaching in a one-quarter time position. Debbie works half of a day every other day of a 10-day cycle. Her area of focus within her school is prep coverage for the primary division. She is responsible for the instruction of science, art, drama, and physical education to several different primary classes. Prior to her interview, Debbie had worked 3 years of part-time employment within the school board. The care of Debbie’s son was split between her mother and her mother-in-law when she returned to teaching.

Data Collection and Recording

Prior to the commencement of this study, an application was submitted to Brock University’s Research Ethics Board for an ethical review of the study. Upon approval of the study (see Appendix A), a second application was submitted to the district school board requesting permission to conduct research within the board at the elementary level.

After approval was received from both parties, a preliminary survey was used to acquire a list of potential participants for my research using the method of purposeful sampling, more specifically snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is a form of purposeful sampling that the researcher uses to acquire participants for the study. It is commonly used after the study begins and requires the researcher to ask participants to recommend other individuals to be part of the study (Creswell, 2005). Subsequently,
through the use of snowball sampling, 10 women were recruited as potential participants for this study. These 10 part-time female contract teachers were asked to complete a preliminary survey (see Appendix B) in order for me to determine who was best suited to be interviewed for this study. Since I was interested in examining the experiences of women who are in a situation similar to my own, I created a list of criteria to serve as an aid for the selection process of my participants. The participants who were selected needed to have been employed as full-time elementary classroom teachers prior to their maternity leave, have returned from their leave to a reduced teaching schedule in a similar assignment (half-time was considered as my first choice), and preferably had only one child. Based on the results of the survey, I identified the women most suitable for my research and proceeded to contact them in order to set up a time for an in-depth interview concerning their choice to return to teaching part-time after their maternity leave.

Prior to collecting the participant data from the preliminary surveys, I conducted a group discussion with two teachers from my current school who were mothers who had worked part-time or desired to work part-time. The purpose of this discussion was to validate the survey and interview protocol that I would be using for the purpose of data collection. At the beginning of the group session, I read my survey and interview questions out loud to the two women as well as presenting them with the questions on paper. I then allowed both participants to describe their own views concerning the issues surrounding returning to teaching part-time after a maternity leave. From the discussion, I created an updated survey and interview protocol that was used in my data collection process.
Once the participants had been selected, data collection began with an individual interview with each of the women. I interviewed as many women within my participant pool that fit the required criteria until I reached a saturation point in my data collection where no new information was emerging (Merriam, 1998). Prior to the interview, each woman received a copy of the interview protocol (see Appendix C) to familiarize herself with the content of the questions and allow her time to reflect on her experiences so that as much detail as possible would be discussed during the interview. The interview commenced with a review of the consent letter and a full explanation as to the purpose of the study including the methodology that I would be utilizing. After a signature had been obtained on the informed consent form, the interview began. Each woman was asked to answer the research questions in her own words, the factors influencing her decision to return to work part-time, and the impact that this decision had had on her professional and personal life. I attempted to be as nonverbal as possible throughout the interview in order to ensure that my personal views were not leading the direction of the interview. Although each of the interviews was audiotaped, I wrote down any important observational field notes during and after the interview in my field notebook. Of particular interest were changes in the tone of voice or body language as each of the questions was being answered. After the interviews had been transcribed by a transcriber outside of this research study, the member check process was then used to verify the accuracy of the transcripts. Each participant received a copy of her interview transcript which she reviewed for content accuracy. Participants were also given an opportunity to elaborate on their thoughts or add additional insight to aid in the thoroughness of the data analysis process.
For the purposes of saving time, I hired a transcriber to turn my research tapes into texts. Tilley and Powick (2002) concluded in their study that the decision about who should transcribe – the researcher or a professional transcriptionist – needs to be considered at the research design stage. Their recommendation is that, when possible, individuals hired to transcribe have connections to the research to encourage their investment. In this study, a system was created whereby the transcriptionist was able to ask questions and receive feedback from me in order to produce quality transcripts and lend credibility to research outcomes. As recommended by Tilley and Powick, credibility of the transcripts was also established by listening to the tapes with the completed transcripts in hand in order to check for mistakes that might influence transcript quality.

Data Processing and Analysis

Following the example given by Creswell (2005), I conducted a preliminary exploratory analysis of my transcripts by reading through all of my information to obtain a general sense of the information. Agar (as cited in Creswell) suggests that you “...read the transcripts in their entirety several times. Immerse yourself in the details, trying to get a sense of the interview as a whole before breaking it into parts” (p. 103). While reading through the transcripts, I made memos to myself in the margins to help me in the initial process of exploring the data. The memos were a collection of my thoughts about the themes that I felt were readily evident throughout the transcripts.

Once I had read through all of my data, I proceeded forward with my analysis to answer my research question: What themes emerge from a discussion with a mother concerning her choice to return to teaching part-time? The analysis involved examining the data in detail to describe what I had learned and to develop themes or broad
categories of ideas from the data. Following Creswell’s (2005) process for analyzing and interpreting qualitative data, in which you identify concepts as you read the data, I began to analyze the transcripts using a coding process. The objective of the coding process was to categorize the data. Every sentence in each transcript became a text segment and as I read through the transcript, I assigned a code word or phrase to each sentence or grouping of sentences to accurately describe its meaning. I let the reading and the concepts move me forward and did not go back and change codes once they have already been assigned. Also, to note, if a sentence had no particular meaning to the analysis, it was not coded (e.g., The following sentence would not be assigned a code: I think that we are all set.). After coding the entire transcript, I used a spreadsheet program to sort all of the codes in descending alphabetical order. The program was also used in the upcoming steps of my analysis to assist in identifying themes or patterns, identifying categories, and highlighting outliers.

Continuing with Creswell’s (2005) qualitative analysis process, I began to look for clusters or affinities among the codes putting similar or related key words together into groups in order to reduce my codes to a much smaller number of themes or descriptions. Themes are similar codes aggregated together to form a major idea in the database (e.g., the codes of ‘time challenges,’ ‘family challenges,’ and ‘workplace challenges’ might be grouped together under the major theme of ‘challenges faced by mothers who teach part-time.’; Creswell). A description is a detailed rendering of people, places, or events in a setting in qualitative research (e.g., a list of the people involved in the mother’s decision to return to work part-time; Creswell). After conducting the qualitative analysis of my interview transcript, I verified my description and
interpretation by talking with each of the participants and getting her feedback and comments about the analysis. I gathered my feedback by asking the following questions: Is the transcription of the interview accurate? Are the themes and descriptions that I have identified consistent with your experiences? Are there any themes and concepts that you think I have missed in my analysis?

The concluding step to the qualitative analysis of my interview transcripts was a critical analysis of the narrative description and themes that had emerged from my data. Included in this analysis was an examination of the findings within the context of the literature and the recommendations of the findings for practice and further research.

**Limitations**

One of the limitations of this study present from its onset is the bias that I bring as a researcher. Being a mother who has chosen to return to teaching part-time after a maternity leave, I bring my own experiences and preconceived ideas to the outcome of this study. I did my best as a researcher not to allow my present experiences to direct the interviews or the coding process of this research.

A second limitation of this study is the small homogeneous nature of the participant group (white, middle-class women). Due to time constraints and regional constraints, only a few participants were used for this qualitative study. Having a larger number of participants from different regional areas and different ethno-cultural groups would have given this study higher credibility since the regional area (e.g., high density vs. low density) and ethno-cultural family and labour force practices may be contributing factors to the results of this study.
Establishing Trustworthiness

Unlike quantitative research, there are no measurement or statistical tests (e.g., measures of central tendency, t-statistic) in qualitative research. Therefore, other forms of credibility need to be used. Researchers determine the validity or accuracy of their findings through strategies, such as member checking or triangulation (Creswell, 2005). In this study, validating the accuracy of my findings was done through the process of member checking. Creswell refers to member checking as a process whereby the researcher asks the participants of the study to check the accuracy of the account. The data and their analysis collected from the interviews in this study were presented to the participants for verification of content and accuracy of the analysis, as well as whether or not the interpretations were fair and representative. Secondly, to further establish the credibility of my study, I used a large amount of rich, descriptive data throughout the analysis section of my research. I included many direct quotes from the participants allowing the reader to hear the women’s voices as well as their specific issues and concerns.

Restatement of the Area of Study

The focus of this study was to investigate women elementary teachers’ perceptions of how their decision to return to teaching part-time from a maternity leave influences their professional and personal lives. A collective case study was undertaken based on an in-depth interview with mothers who had made the choice to return to the classroom part-time. The mothers’ reflections, my analysis, and the related literature were used to compile implications for teaching practice and further research, which are discussed in Chapter Five.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Within this chapter I will be presenting the findings from my exploration of the professional and personal lives of five women elementary teachers who returned to teaching part-time from a maternity leave. An in-depth interview with each of these women focused on the decisions surrounding their choice to reenter the teaching profession part-time and the experience of working part-time in a field where they all had previously been employed full-time. The prevalent themes that emerged throughout the interviews are described in this chapter using extensive quotes from the participants to provide more than my words as representations of what was said and to contribute to the trustworthiness and credibility of my findings.

Findings

The interpretation of my qualitative analysis will be discussed by identifying the themes that emerged from the in-depth interviews that I conducted with each of the women who participated in this study. The emerging themes that I found to be prevalent in the interviews are as follows: decision-making process, challenges faced by mothers who teach part-time, the importance of support, and the enhancement of instructional practice from parenthood.

Decision-Making Process

While on maternity leave, each of the women in this study was faced with the challenge of figuring out what was important to her in both her personal and professional lives. Prior to the birth of their children, all of the women had been happily employed full-time within the school board. What came as a shock to all of them was the impact that having a child would have on the rest of their life decisions. Life to these women no
longer revolved around just what they wanted for themselves, but what was best for their new family. The analysis of the interviews revealed that when all five women chose to return to teaching in a part-time capacity, their decisions all revolved around three issues of consideration: time, finances, and job enjoyment.

Having as much time as possible with their children was a top priority for all five women in this study. Karen originally thought that she would return to teaching full-time but stated, “Once I had my son and spent the year with him I couldn’t imagine being away from him full-time.” Debbie expressed similar thoughts, stating “Personally, I just enjoyed being home with my child.” It was when Anne started to research daycare options that she realized how much she wanted to be home with her daughter so that she could be the one to raise and influence her. She stated that,

It really dawned on me when researching daycare options that I wouldn’t be home with my daughter 5 days out of the week so I started to look into part-time because teaching is a profession that seems to be more open to that as a option.

For Kathy, her daughter was starting junior kindergarten so that by working the same schedule as her daughter’s time at school, they were able to spend every afternoon together and be home when her other children finished school each day. Beth looked at part-time teaching as a way to stay involved in the school lives of her children. She indicated that,

As a teacher, I always felt hypocritical when I encouraged parents to get involved and I couldn’t do the same with my own children. So I felt by reducing my time after my last maternity leave, I would be able to get involved.
It was also a difficult decision to leave her 16-week-old son behind, and she felt that working part-time, as opposed to going back full-time and not seeing him all day, was a good compromise.

Time also manifested itself throughout the interviews as personal time for self. By choosing to return to work part-time, the majority of the women in this study expressed delight in their ability to enjoy some personal leisure activities that had become important to them during their maternity leave. Karen commented on her ability to continue attending a church Bible study in which she had become involved during her maternity leave, something that she was not able to do when she was working full-time. She also felt like she had more opportunity to connect with friends and family. Beth had some health issues that were not being controlled by conventional medical means so that by reducing her teaching time and taking up some activities for personal enjoyment, she was able to decrease some stress in her life and take care of herself. Kathy described how teaching half-time allowed her to stay involved in music, which is a very important aspect of her life. She indicated,

Teaching half-time has worked for me and I have also been able to not put everything else in my life on hold, like my music interests and being Director of Music at church. I can still do that and we have our meetings in the afternoon and so I am able to go and be a part of that and feel like I have other parts of my life that are not being taken over by work, which is what would happen if I was full-time. I feel like I have balance.

Although time with their children seemed to be the passionate driving force behind their decision to return to teaching part-time, the practical financial side played an
important role in the decision as well. For all of these women, staying home full-time with their children was financially not an option. Anne and Karen had similar financial decisions to consider in order to maintain their established lifestyle. When Anne was making her decision, she felt that she “could afford to reduce teaching time but not to completely stay off at that time.” Karen had always thought that she would have to return to teaching full-time for financial reasons, but during her maternity leave, her husband’s job changed and they were financially able to reduce her teaching time to half-time and still maintain the standard of living that they had established. Kathy’s decision to return to work part-time was financially driven due to the cost of raising four growing children. She stated that,

I felt pressure from home to return to teaching because of the bills and the rising cost of clothing and feeding teenagers. Now we have driving to contend with and the insurance is going to be rising and so is the cost factor.

Although Beth was positive about her decision to reduce her teaching time, she did express her financial concerns from a different perspective than the rest of the women. She commented,

I’m doing more stuff for my family which I think is important. Yet, at the same time, it has been difficult because we were used to a certain pay level and to cut it in half – that has been tough. My husband jokes that he would like the full-time paycheck but he does appreciate when I’m home and I’ve cooked supper or gotten the kids so he can work on something else.

The decision to reduce her teaching time financially impacted the lifestyle that Beth and her husband had established for their family. For Debbie, her decision to return to
ultimatum from the school board that she either return to teaching or forfeit her contract position within the school board. Her first reaction was not to return to the classroom because she had been off for so long and was feeling far removed from the new initiatives that had been adopted by the school board during her absence. But then she felt that “part-time might be a way to ease back into things,” and, as she stated before, “give her the opportunity to redevelop her ‘professional mind’.” Karen discussed the importance of job security when making her choice to reduce her teaching time. If she had not made the decision to return to the classroom but instead extend her maternity leave with a full-time leave of absence, she could have potentially forfeited her position within her school. Her only guarantee was that after a 2-year period, she would have some position within the school board. For Karen, whose son would eventually be attending the school at which she presently taught, risking her position within the school was not a situation with which she wanted to contend.

After thoroughly considering the issues of time, finances, and job enjoyment, all of the women in this study were content with their decision to reduce their teaching schedules from a full-time to a part-time situation upon their return to the classroom from their maternity leaves.

Challenges Faced by Mothers Who Teach Part-time

My interviews with the five women in this study were so upbeat and positive that the idea of overcoming challenges did not stand out to me as being a theme that would emerge during the analysis process. It soon became apparent, though, that each of these women had indeed been faced with several different challenges upon returning to their teaching positions in a part-time capacity. All five women discussed the challenges of
feeling professionally restricted and disconnected with their school. Several of the women also talked about the challenge of finding a proper balance between school and home life and the difficulties that can arise when participating in a job-sharing situation. The idea of being professionally restricted when returning to teaching part-time was a challenge that all five women faced. It is important to recognize, however, that the term *professional restriction* had no reference to their programming abilities. Each of the women felt that the programs that they ran in their classrooms were just as strong as or stronger than they had been when employed as full-time teachers. Debbie demonstrated this point by discussing the fact that, because she had less teaching responsibility, she had more energy to put into her program, and Beth felt that she had more patience with her students. Anne, Karen, and Beth all discussed the personal decision they had made to spend more time focusing on their classroom programming and less time on extracurricular activities within the school. Karen commented,

> When I was teaching full-time I just poured all of my energy into teaching. I did a lot of extracurricular activities and I spent more hours at home working on it. Now that I have a child I want to get home to be there for him. I still do what I have to do to make a good program but I don’t have the desire to do all those extracurricular activities like I used to.

The theme of professional restrictions that emerged from the data analysis related not to classroom programming, but to identity and growth issues.

When considering the idea of identity, Debbie was the most vocal by describing the challenge of being “just a prep-coverage teacher” within her school. She was not a homeroom teacher, had no classroom of her own, and described her teaching assignment
as being a “mishmash of everything.” She found it hard to establish a place for herself within her school. Kathy also found it difficult to establish a presence for herself at school as a part-time teacher. She found herself putting in more hours than those for which she was paid in order to gain respect with other staff members. It was not until a few other part-time teachers were hired on staff that Kathy became comfortable with her part-time identity. She stated, “I’m very lucky now that there are other part-time teachers at my school. I have the support of the other part-time teachers which helps to give us an identity.” Beth’s identity issues resulted from being involved in fewer of her school’s activities. Her part-time teaching position made her forfeit her position as division leader where she described herself as being able to “have her hands in all the pots.” She said, “I knew what was going on with all of the division’s strategies and all of the ordering we did for resources and what not, and I don’t have that knowledge now.” Having less responsibility and connection to school decisions and leadership made Beth feel “a little bit lost.” Karen and Anne also struggled with identity issues that resulted from feeling disconnected with staff and school activities. They both talked about the extra effort they needed to put in to stay connected with all aspects of the school, an effort that was never necessary as full-time staff members. Karen remarked,

Sometimes I feel out of the loop about things because I am just not there as much.

In the morning when announcements happen I don’t know what other people are doing because I work in the afternoon. The communication board in the staff room works well for me but I still try to go into the staffroom at lunch when I get there for a little bit to try and make that personal connection with the staff.
Professional growth was also a challenge that four of the women discussed in their interview. For each of these four women, professional growth or development referred to their abilities to get involved in learning activities, such as workshops, which were offered through the school board. Beth and Kathy described their professional growth as being “paused” when they returned to teaching part-time. For Kathy the pause was a result of fatigue. Returning to work and raising a family of four left her feeling exhausted with little energy left to pursue professional development. Beth, prior to her maternity leave, had been actively involved in presenting literacy workshops, an activity for which she presently felt she had little time. She still attends some workshops on occasion but not as frequently as before. Beth also felt that her professional growth was hindered because of her teaching partner. Any extra time she has is spent catching up with her partner on classroom issues. Like Beth, Karen and Anne also considered professional growth as a challenge because of time issues. Karen remarked, “Last year I just didn’t want to give any extra time to developing professionally. I didn’t really want to go to workshops after school because my son was so little.” Karen did say that after completing her first year of part-time teaching she was now finding a bit more time for professional development because of her increased comfort level with her teaching situation and daycare situation for her son. Anne found workshop involvement that ran during the school day to be the most challenging. She was already missing a full day or two a week with her students, and being out of the classroom for professional development was something she chose to forego in order to maintain her program standards for her students. She stated, “I definitely passed up some good opportunities or didn’t feel like it would be right to ask for those opportunities in some cases, so I did
miss out on some chances to grow professionally.” Out of all the women, Debbie, who is employed with the lowest teaching time, was the only one who said she had more opportunities to grow professionally as a result of teaching part-time. She remarked that because her teaching time is reduced, she has more energy to put into things like conferences and workshops because she does not feel overtaxed. She said, “Professionally I grow where I want to grow. Because I am not slotted into one specific teaching area, if something interests me, I take it up. Being part-time frees me a bit because I have more time.”

Balancing school and home life was another challenge shared by four of the women. The challenge came from trying to keep schoolwork at school, thereby, allowing them the opportunity to spend all of their time at home focusing on their families. The solution to this challenge for all four women was to become ultraorganized. For Anne, organization came in the form of long-term planning. She remarked that she already was an organized person but, as a part-time teacher, she had to become even better at long-term planning because of the time she missed with her students. She had to look ahead at holidays and professional development days because she felt that every day counted with her students. She also had to really think about due dates for assignments so that she could effectively manage to keep her marking at school and protect her time at home with her family. Because of her job-sharing situation, Beth had also learned that organization and flexibility are the keys to balancing work and family life. During her first year in a part-time situation because of differing teaching styles with her teaching partner, Beth felt the need to reteach many topics to feel comfortable with the learning levels of her students. This extra planning and marking took away from time with her family. In order
to survive, she has learned to be flexible. Through organization with her teaching partner
at scheduled communication meetings, she has been better able to balance her work and
home life. Kathy learned that organization both at home and school helped her to
overcome the challenge of achieving balance. At school, Kathy sets a time limit on how
long she stays each day after her teaching is complete. She uses this time to prepare for
the next day, mark student work, or make phone calls. At the end of the time limit, what
is done is all that gets completed, and very rarely does she take work home with her. At
home, because her husband is away a lot due to his job situation, Kathy has set up
routines with her children to help them function more effectively and maximize their time
together as a family. Karen felt that it took her a full year of part-time teaching to become
comfortable with her working situation. This comfort level and familiarity has helped her
to organize her days and weeks in such a way that she feels that she is now better able to
balance her work and home life.

The final challenge that arose for these women was that of job-sharing. Although
only two of the women were directly involved in a job-sharing situation, four of them
made direct comments on the challenges related to having a teaching partner. Anne felt
the challenge of team-teaching because she was three-quarter time and her partner was
only one-quarter time. She felt that the “smoothness” of sharing part-time was not what
she had envisioned because the one-quarter time position was the smallest chunk of her
partner’s teaching position within the school, and, therefore, the “least important.” This
became problematic to Anne as she considered the whole picture of her students’
education. She felt that things might have worked better if they had equally shared the
teaching time for their Grade 8 class. Beth felt the difficulty of job-sharing due to the
differing teaching styles of her partner and her. She described herself as “more of an uptight perfectionist” and her partner as being very “laid back.” She remarked,

I want things done a certain way and in a certain timeframe, so some days I am running to catch up with what she didn’t accomplish. Many times I have had to change my instructional practices to accommodate hers.

Beth discussed how her first year of team-teaching was a bit frustrating but how in her current year she has had to let go of some of the frustration for “survival’s sake.” Karen and Kathy also discussed the challenges of team-teaching from the perspective of compatibility and effort. Although neither teacher had team-taught, they had friends who had been in team-teaching situations similar to Beth’s, where a full class was equally shared between two partners. Their comments reflected the importance of compatibility between the teaching styles of the partners and the commitment level needed for the planning process of making the job-sharing situation effective.

After considering the challenges that were faced by each of the women in this study upon returning to their teaching positions in a part-time capacity, an overwhelmingly positive tone was still very apparent throughout each of the interviews. The answer that every woman gave as a response to each of their challenges was that regardless of the difficulties they faced, they were all content with their teaching positions and had no regrets about their decision to return to teaching part-time.

*The Importance of Positive Support*

The third theme that developed throughout the data analysis was the role that positive support played in making each of the five women’s transition into part-time
teaching as free of stress as possible. The three key support figures that each woman identified were their spouses or other family members, their principals, and their staff.

The importance of spousal support was extremely significant to all of the women. Without the support of their spouses and their families, they all felt that they would not have been able to effectively balance their work and family life. Anne, Karen, Beth, and Debbie claimed to have equal balance of household responsibilities with their spouses after returning to work, which helped to reduce the stress on their families. Due to the irregular working hours of Kathy’s spouse, she still shoulders the responsibility of the household chores, but she made it clear that when her husband is home he “loves helping,” for which she is very grateful. Other family members were also important to many of these women as they helped with childcare. Knowing that their children were being cared for by a relative or spouse again helped to reduce the potential stress that each of these women faced upon her return to work.

The second important support figure that each of these women identified was her principal. Four of the five women received positive support from their principal when they approached him or her with a desire to reduce their teaching time. Each principal was willing to create a teaching assignment that worked well for all parties involved. Karen’s principal emphasized to her that Karen’s first responsibility was to her family and has never pressured her into taking on extra responsibility within the school unless Karen made the choice to get involved. Anne commented on how she was hesitant to suggest reducing her teaching time with her principal but was “really pleased” with how her principal met her request. Beth’s principal was being moved to a different school when she submitted her request to reduce her teaching assignment to half-time. Her
principal “went to bat” for her with the incoming principal who in turn strongly supported the arrangement. Although the incoming principal was not too sure of the specific setup of team-teaching, he learned to appreciate what Beth and her teaching partner had successfully worked out for their Grade 1 class. Kathy has always had principal support for her part-time arrangement and has never been “pressured” from her principal to change this arrangement. When Debbie approached her first principal with the request to reduce her teaching time to half-time, her principal was unwilling to accommodate her request or find her another position within the school that would work for both of them. Therefore, Debbie was forced to look elsewhere for a part-time position and ended up in a one-quarter time position at another school. Her present principal has been very supportive of her situation and Debbie is content with her teaching assignment. All five women discussed the need for flexibility when working with their principals to create a part-time position that worked for both the teacher and the school. The willingness of each principal involved to create a positive part-time experience for the women in this study has helped to lower some of the stresses associated with returning to work after their maternity leaves.

The staff at each of the participants’ schools was the final support factor that helped to make their transition into part-time teaching manageable. All five women commented on the positive support that they received from their staff and the efforts that their colleagues made to help them effectively manage their different part-time teaching assignments. They also remarked on the effort that they had to personally put forth to stay connected with the staff. By seeing their efforts to “stay in the loop and make their part-
time position work,” as Anne stated, the staff members at each of the women’s schools were more than willing to assist them whenever it was needed.

*The Enhancement of Instructional Practice from Parenthood*

The final theme that emerged from my investigation was how becoming a parent enhanced the instructional practices of each of the women in this study. Throughout the interviews, each of the women discussed on more than one occasion how becoming a parent positively impacted her teaching practice. Anne discussed not only how her “identity completely changed” when she became a parent, but her personal philosophy of education was also enhanced by becoming a parent. She stated, “I think my personal philosophy has been enhanced since I became a parent. So dropping down to part-time didn’t negatively affect my instructional style but I think that I became a better teacher because of parenthood.” Debbie also felt that her personal philosophy of education was affected by becoming a parent and working part-time. She indicated that she understands the kids better and feels that she can focus on them so much more than when she was working full-time. She also felt that sometimes she puts in more work than one-quarter time but she feels good about what she is doing with her students. She stated, “I have been able to give them more, get to know them better, and provide for them more, so definitely becoming a parent and working part-time had affected my teaching for sure.”

Karen commented on how becoming a parent has made her more “motherly” which, in turn, has enhanced her instructional practices with her primary students. She remarked,

> Because I have my own child now, which I didn’t before, I just feel like I am more caring and more understanding; more motherly. I see things that my son is going through at home and it makes me think, okay, what outside factors could be
affecting my students and how can I build them up and help them through if they are crying or whatever. Now I have my own experience as a mom, so I feel like I've been able to take that into my classroom.

Beth discussed how her patience level with her students has increased not only from reducing her teaching time but from becoming a parent as well. Kathy recognized that the parents of her students responded to her differently because she had become a parent. She commented,

Because I had been home so long I was passionate about parenting and about the importance of parenting. Coming back into kindergarten I realized I had more contact with parents than in any other grade. So now I am talking more with parents and I am giving them suggestions. They are more open to hearing because I had four kids. So this current position that I have; it suits best my passion for parenting skills and also being able to be a parent to my own children.

This theme of enhanced teaching practices resulting from parenthood shows the importance of getting mothers to come back into the teaching profession after a maternity leave, even if it is only in a part-time capacity. Each of the women interviewed in this study had excellent reputations as teachers within their school board before taking a maternity leave. The fact that parenthood enhanced their teaching practices means that students, staff, and parents within these five different schools are benefiting even more by having these women back teaching within their schools. With this in mind, much can be said for the principals and staff members who have taken the time and been willing to work with these women to help them balance their work and home lives so that not only
their families benefit from their part-time positions, but the whole school community as well.

**Summary of the Chapter**

Chapter Four offered a global analysis of findings whereby the major emerging themes (see Table 2) were presented. The themes were organized under the following four headings: decision-making process, challenges faced by mothers who teach full time, the importance of support, and the enhancement of instructional practice from parenthood. The theme that focused on the decision-making process revolved around three issues of consideration: time, finances, and job enjoyment. After putting much thought into each of these areas in relation to the idea of returning to teaching part-time, all of the women were content with their decision to return to their schools in a part-time capacity. When considering the theme of challenges faced by mothers who teach part-time, the following two sub-themes emerged from all five interviews: the feeling of being professionally restricted and the sense of being disconnected with their respective schools. Professional restrictions encompassed the ideas of identity and growth issues. Two other challenges that were addressed were that of finding a proper balance between school and home life and the difficulties that can arise when participating in a job-sharing situation. A worthwhile point of which to make note is that all interviews were extremely positive in nature and all women, regardless of the challenges they faced, were content with their part-time position within their school. The theme of support was threesifold in nature; i.e., the women felt that they were successful in their part-time positions because of positive support structures which included their spouse, their principal, and their staff.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Theme</th>
<th>Minor Theme (subtheme)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Decision-Making Process</td>
<td>Time; finances; job enjoyment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Challenges Faced by Mothers Who Teach Part-time</td>
<td>Professional restrictions (identity; growth; disconnection with school); balancing home and school life; job sharing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of Positive Support</td>
<td>Spouse/family member; principals; staff members</td>
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<tr>
<td>Enhancement of Instructional Practice from Parenthood</td>
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The final theme that emerged from the analysis was the enhancement of instructional practices due to parenthood. All five women attributed their enhanced teaching practices to parenthood upon their return to teaching after having children.

A further exploration of practical suggestions for work-family transitions for mothers returning from maternity leaves and considering part-time employment is discussed in Chapter Five. Along with these suggestions will be advice for new mothers who are considering returning to teaching part-time in schools where they had previously been employed in full-time teaching positions. There is also an overview of future directions that may be explored in the area of women who return to work in part-time teaching positions after a maternity leave. Finally, there is a summary of how I personally relate to the outcome of this research and the changes that I have made to my practice as a result of this inquiry.
CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this research was to explore women elementary teachers’ perceptions of how their decision to return to teaching part-time from a maternity leave influences their professional and personal lives. The investigation focused on the decisions surrounding a mother’s choice to reenter the teaching profession part-time in a field where each mother had previously been employed full-time.

In review, the research questions that were used to explore the lives of working mothers who teach part-time were as follows:

1. What factors influenced the decision of these women to return to teaching part-time?

2. Has the ability of these women to implement their personal philosophy of education been affected by their part-time status within the classroom?

3. Has the instructional practice of these women changed as a result of their part-time status within the classroom?

4. How have these women’s relationships with staff, students, the school community, and their family been affected by their part-time teaching position?

5. What are the challenges that arise from teaching part-time that could cause these women to feel professionally restricted?

6. How have these women’s personal and professional identities been affected by teaching part-time?

7. What impact has part-time teaching had on these women’s ability to successfully balance work and family?
The research methodology that was used for this investigation was a collective case study. A collective case study refers to a situation in which multiple cases are described and compared to provide insight into an issue (Stake, 1995). For the purposes of this study, an in-depth interview was conducted with several mothers who have made the choice to return to teaching part-time. Creswell’s (2005) process for analyzing and interpreting qualitative data was then used for the analysis of my data. This process allowed me to make connections across the data to help me identify the common themes that arose from my exploration of the professional and personal lives of the mothers who were interviewed. The four major themes that emerged were organized under the headings of decisions to be made, challenges faced by mothers who teach full-time, the importance of support, and the enhancement of instructional practice from parenthood.

The following section presents a discussion of the research findings as they relate to the research questions that guided this study and to the existing literature. Implications for practice, theory, and further research are discussed at the conclusion of this chapter.

**Discussion**

The following section is a discussion of the research findings as they relate to the questions that guided this study and to the existing literature. The themes that were identified in Chapter Four act as the headings under which the research questions are revisited and the discussion is arranged.

*Decisions to be Made*

The theme, *Decisions to be Made*, directly answers the first research question that asked what the factors were that influenced the decision of the women in this study to return to teaching part-time. The analysis of the interviews revealed that when all five
women chose to return to teaching in a part-time capacity, their decision revolved around the following three main issues of consideration: time, finances, and job enjoyment.

As demonstrated by the results of a Canadian study conducted by Lee et al. (1994), working mothers consistently reported that they do not have enough hours in the day to accomplish all that they would like. Once they have fulfilled the requirements of work and family tasks, there is little time left for self. When referring to the issue of time, the first and foremost reason that all five women in this study chose part-time employment was to have as much time as possible with their families and, more specifically, their young children. As well, part-time teaching positions were preferred over full-time positions by three of the women in order to secure more time for themselves. These findings are consistent with literature that suggests that women and men in other professions choose part-time employment to spend more time with their families and have more time to pursue personal interests. Maresh (2004) reported that physicians are more interested than ever in working part-time in order to spend more time with family. The physicians in Maresh's study felt that their part-time schedules afforded them the benefits of more “energy, time, and emotional involvement with their families” (p. 50). These physicians also reported that part-time employment gave them more time for reading medical literature and staying on top of the advancements in their profession. For many academics within colleges, universities, and professional schools, part-time working positions were negotiated in order to secure more time with their families (Mcclain, 2003). Hill et al. (2004) found that part-time employment influenced the ability of mothers of preschool children working in professional occupations to successfully integrate work and family responsibilities. In a study of British primary teachers, Acker
(1999) found that it was mostly women who were employed in temporary and part-time positions. Young and Grieves (1996), Young (1999), and Young and Brookes (2004) also reported that part-time employment was chosen by women educators in Alberta, Canada, with the motivation of creating personal space to fulfill domestic responsibilities.

The result of women choosing to work part-time in order to accommodate domestic responsibilities, such as childcare, is a very large part-time woman workforce. This model reinforces gender stereotypes and staffing patterns throughout the workplace contributing to the highly feminized worldview of the teaching profession (Acker, 1989; Gaskell and Mullen, 2006; Moreau et al, 2007; Smulyan, 2006). Not only is it women who seem to be exercising the option of reducing their work schedule to part-time, but it is for the activity of providing direct care to their family, which is again a traditionally acceptable role for women. This practice, thus, supports the traditional gender order rather than transforming it (Negrey, 1994). After interviewing the five women in this study, the analysis of data revealed that none of them mentioned ever considering the option of their husbands reducing their work schedule to care for their children. Each of the women only talked passionately about their personal desire to stay at home with their children and the fact that part-time rather than full-time employment offered them the opportunity to have that extra time with their families.

The consideration of finances as a second factor in the decision to return to teaching part-time was important to all five women in this study. For all of these women, staying home full-time was not an option financially. For Anne and Karen, finances were considered with the thought of maintaining an established lifestyle. Reducing their teaching time allowed them both to maintain the standard of living that they had
established for their family – something they would not have been able to do had they chosen not to return to the profession of teaching in some capacity. Kathy returned to work to help balance the cost of raising four growing children and Debbie’s part-time position gave her family some financial freedom for extra activities. Beth’s financial considerations are most consistent with literature findings when discussing part-time employment. Although Beth reported that the financial effects of part-time employment negatively impacted her family’s lifestyle, other benefits were well worth it – personally and professionally. Maresh (2004) reported that the physicians in her study also felt that the benefits of part-time employment outweighed the financial loss. The academics within the colleges, universities, and professional schools that were interviewed in Mcclain’s (2003) study also discussed their willingness to accept loss of income in order to claim other benefits that resulted from their reduced work schedules.

The final factor that influenced the decision of all five women to return to teaching in some part-time capacity was the personal enjoyment that they received from their careers. Part-time teaching allowed these women the personal family time that they desired, to meet their financial needs, and to give them a chance to maintain and develop their professional lives. Similarly, the academics in Mcclain’s (2003) study that had worked full-time prior to reducing their positions to part-time, all reported that part-time employment still allowed them the opportunity to lead fulfilling professional lives.

Kathy and Karen discussed two other factors affecting their decisions to return to teaching part-time. Kathy was given the ultimatum from the school board that unless she returned to teaching in some capacity she would forfeit her contract position. Karen was afraid of jeopardizing her position within her school if she chose to take a leave of
absence instead of returning to teaching at the end of her maternity leave. Although these considerations played an important role in the decision-making process for these two women teachers, in the literature that was reviewed for this study, no such pressures were reported by people within other professions who chose to reduce their employment from full-time to part-time. In the studies conducted by Young and Grieves (1996), Young (1999), and Young and Brookes (2004), women teachers in Alberta chose to take part-time teaching opportunities to spend more time with family while having the security of knowing that they were potentially positioning themselves for full-time teaching opportunities when these became available. The pressure that Kathy and Karen felt from the school board to return to teaching raises the question of its significance in the decision-making process of whether or not they would return to work after their maternity leave and in what capacity they would choose to return. Had they not felt the pressure of losing their contract or teaching position, would they have managed to find a way to stay home longer with their children? Or would the factors of finances and job enjoyment have come into play as they made their decision of whether or not to return to teaching?

Through the voices of the women in this study, it appears that the decision to choose part-time employment offered them the flexibility they desired to meet their familial, personal, and professional goals. Regardless of the loss of income, the ability of these women to lead healthy personal and professional lives left them content with their decision to choose part-time employment upon their return to teaching from their maternity leaves.
Challenges Faced by Mothers Who Teach Part-time

The following two research questions showed a relationship to each other under the theme of Challenges Faced by Mothers Who Teach Part-time: What are the challenges that arise from teaching part-time that could cause the women in this study to feel professionally restricted? How have these women’s personal and professional identities been affected by teaching part-time? Mcclain (2003) noted that many part-time academics within colleges, universities, and professional schools felt that their lack of full-time employment status was harmful to their careers. These academics perceived that full-time faculty members displayed indifference or outright contempt towards them. For the part-time academics in Mcclain’s study, their professional identities were challenged as they tried to overcome the loss of influence that they experienced within their educational institutions when they chose to reduce their employment schedules. It was interesting to notice throughout the data analysis that for all five women in my study, the issue of establishing their professional identity or influence as part-time educators was the challenge that caused them to feel professionally restricted. Debbie was the most vocal as she discussed her identity challenge of overcoming being a prep-coverage teacher. She had the fewest number of teaching hours and was the only woman in the study that did not have a specific group of children directly under her care. As well, she returned to teaching part-time in a new school where the administration and her colleagues were not familiar with her strengths as a teacher and staff member. Because her teaching assignment included a variety of subjects and grades, she found it difficult to establish a place of influence for herself within the school. It is interesting to note, however, that out of all the women, only Debbie reported having the least amount of job-
related stress in her life. In contrast to the other four women all of whom discussed the challenge of feeling professionally restricted because they had little time for professional growth, Debbie remarked about how she had greater opportunity to grow professionally as a result of teaching part-time. Her reduced teaching schedule has given her more energy to put into things, like conferences and workshops, because she does not feel overtaxed.

The other four women in this study had more teaching time than Debbie, as well as homeroom classes that were under their care. They also dealt with the challenge of establishing an identity for themselves within their respective schools but in a different way than Debbie. Because of their homeroom classes, they had extra responsibilities that Debbie did not have to manage as a prep-coverage teacher. These extra responsibilities along with their increased teaching time caused these women’s professional identities to be challenged because they had little time as part-time teachers to connect with staff, hold influential positions, such as division leader, participate in extracurricular activities within the school, and attend or contribute to professional growth activities. Similarly, Acker (1999) reported that the primary teachers in her study who were employed part-time felt that they were “trying to do a full job in half the time” (p. 162). Unlike Debbie, whose professional identity was challenged because of the nonspecific nature of a prep-coverage position, the other four women did not face an identity challenge because of their specific teaching assignments. These four women felt that the professional restrictions placed onto them from a part-time perspective were the challenges of not having time to grow professionally or to contribute from a position of influence or identity to the school environment. A question for consideration for women teachers
choosing part-time employment could be the following: What is more important, having lower job-related stress due to less responsibility within the school, or having a feeling of influence or established identity when contributing fully to the school environment and professional growth activities?

Another connection can be made with the discussion provided by Anne, Kathy, Karen, and Beth that addresses the following research question: What impact has part-time teaching had on these women’s abilities to successfully balance work and family? The theme of seeking a healthy balance between maternal and career roles can be found throughout motherhood literature. DeMeis et al. (1986) completed a study on the ability of mothers to come to terms with establishing a balance between maternal and career roles. Their investigation focused on the preference of women to be employed or remain at home with their infants, and DeMeis et al.’s discussion centered on the importance of employment preference versus employment status for understanding how women balance career and motherhood. The authors stated that “all mothers must resolve the issue of how to balance their own needs and those of their family” (p. 627). Debbie, who again worked the least number of hours in her part-time position and had the least amount of specific job-related responsibility, was the only woman interviewed in this study who did not seem to struggle with balancing work and family. The other four women all commented on the fact that although part-time employment did allow them to spend more time with family, which was their original intent when choosing to reduce their teaching time, they still struggled to effectively balance work and family. How much extra time at school is enough for part-time teachers? How much time should be spent at home working on school-related material as a part-time teacher? How much time should be
spent going that “extra mile” as a part-time teacher? How much effort needs to be put forth when sharing the homeroom responsibilities with another teacher? Where is the line drawn when juggling time with school-related activities and time with family as a part-time teacher? These are questions that plagued Anne, Kathy, Karen, and Beth as they tried to balance their work and family responsibilities. These four women dealt with these questions by becoming ultraorganized in their planning activities both at home and school and deciding to leave schoolwork at school so that home time was strictly for their families. The longer these women taught in a part-time position, the more comfortable they were with their positions, allowing them to more successfully balance work and family.

Olsen and DiBrigida (as cited in Levinson, 1995) studied levels of depression of women with small children who were employed either full-time, part-time, or not at all. Their findings showed that the happiest women were the ones who were most content with their work arrangements and the level of balance they had achieved in their lives. The women who had chosen part-time employment were less depressed than the mothers who were either not employed or were employed full-time. Those who were employed part-time were content with the opportunity that this employment arrangement created for spending more time with family even though the choice of part-time employment was also perceived by them to be a disadvantage to their career.

All five women interviewed in this study were extremely positive about their part-time employment assignments within their schools. Although four of them discussed the challenge of balancing their part-time teaching positions and their time with family, along with feeling professional restrictions related to growth and identity, they all reported
feelings of contentment with their work situations because they were fulfilling their original intent to reduce their teaching time and, thus, have more time to spend with family.

The Importance of Positive Support

The research question addressing how the women’s part-time teaching positions affected their relationships with staff, students, the school community, and their families is answered under the theme, The Importance of Positive Support. Throughout the interviews, the women highlighted three key support figures who helped to make their return to teaching in a part-time position successful. Their support structure consisted of their family members, most specifically their spouses, their principals, and their staff. The positive support offered to these women from these three specific areas shows that their relationships were not negatively impacted by choosing to reduce their teaching time. Instead, these relationships seemed to strengthen due to the need to spend more time orchestrating the arrangements required to make their part-time teaching situations successful. Because of the positive support received from their principals, the relationships that these women had with the students and school community were positive as well. In fact, Kathy even mentioned that the support of the school community increased because she was now a parent as well as a teacher.

The findings from this study are consistent with literature that suggests that working mothers need the support of family and their employer in order to be successful at balancing work and family responsibilities (Bainyn, 2006; DeMeis et al., 1986; Gilbert, 1994; Lee et al., 1994; Stebbins, 2001). In the results of a Canadian study conducted by Lee et al., working mothers consistently reported that they do not have enough hours in
the day to accomplish all that they would like. Once they have fulfilled the requirements of work and family tasks, there is little time left for individual activities. These results suggest that working mothers recognize that they cannot hope to accomplish everything and manage single-handedly. Consequently, they cope by setting priorities and by dividing chores among the family members. The women in the Lee et al. study also identified that they would like their employers to help them by providing flexibility—both in terms of when they have to work and where they work. They also expressed the need for their employers to demonstrate understanding of their work-family conflicts. From this research, Lee et al. suggested that employers may be able to attract and retain competent female employees if they demonstrate that they provide a work environment that permits the employee to fulfill both work and family responsibilities.

All five women in this current study identified that because of the support of family members in roles, such as daycare provider, a spouse who shares in the familial responsibilities, a school staff that is willing to assist whenever there is a need, and a principal who is willing to allow them to return to a part-time teaching position that complements their familial responsibilities, they were able to return to work without the worry that they single-handedly had to manage childcare, housework, and a career. As the study conducted by Lee et al. (1994) suggested, the women in this study became more organized, shared familial responsibilities, and approached their principals for a more flexible work schedule to help them balance their careers and home life.

*The Enhancement of Instructional Practice from Parenthood*

The final research questions to be answered address how the instructional practices of the women in this study changed as a result of their part-time status and how
the ability of these women to implement their personal philosophy of education was affected by their reduced teaching time. The fourth theme that emerged from this investigation answers these two questions. It became apparent throughout the analysis of data that the ability of the women to implement their personal philosophy of education was not negatively affected by their part-time status. As well, these women all discussed how they felt that their instructional practices were not inhibited by their part-time teaching roles but that becoming a parent had, in fact, enhanced both their philosophy of education and their teaching practices within their classrooms. Debbie felt that being a parent helps her to better understand her students, which, in turn, helps her to provide for their needs more effectively. Beth commented on her increased patience level with her students and Karen became more “motherly” and understanding towards her students after becoming a parent. Kathy recognized that the parents took her more seriously and were more open to her suggestions after she became a mother. Finzi (1996) stated, “Among the most powerful images that culture has elaborated both to represent and to govern women, is, without doubt, that of motherhood” (p. 146). Motherhood changes a woman. In this study, all five women felt that the personal experience of becoming a mother was so powerful that regardless of the challenges they faced when they chose to reduce their teaching positions to part-time, their instructional practices and educational philosophy were enhanced due to parenthood.

Summary

A pattern began to emerge during the process of analyzing the interviews. Four of the five women had very similar responses towards job sharing, finances, childcare, the response of their principals, and opportunities for professional development. The fifth
woman, Debbie, consistently responded differently in these areas. While the first four women were working half or three-quarter time, Debbie was employed in a one-quarter time position. From the responses of the women, it would seem that overall, Debbie had the least amount of stress and the highest amount of professional satisfaction. This leads me to wonder if even dropping down to half-time from full-time is enough to allow female teachers to achieve balance in their personal and professional lives. Yet, the drop down to one-quarter time may not be financially feasible for many returning mothers. Is there a compromise? Is there an ideal part-time teaching situation for mothers balancing work and family? The results of this research would lead me to think that there is no ideal part-time situation, but it is the attitude of the mother-educator to make a situation work for her that helps her to achieve balance. Although each of the women in this study faced challenges, her choice to be content with a part-time situation allowed her to fulfill the original intent to reduce teaching time, spend more time with her family and, thus, achieve a balanced career and family life.

**Implications**

There are several implications that come about as a result of this research. These implications are based on the discussion that resulted from the analysis of the five women’s interviews. The implications are divided into the following three areas: implications for theory, implications for practice, and implications for further research.

*Implications for Theory*

The implications for theory are based on the findings of this qualitative study. In an area where most research has focused on mothers who work full-time or in professions other than teaching that have reduced their work schedules to accommodate family
demands, there appeared to be a need for research on the professional and personal impact that part-time teaching has on mothers returning from a maternity leave. The findings from this research support the studies conducted by DeMeis et al. (1986) and Olsen and DiBrigida (as cited in Levinson, 1995), which reported that for women to successfully balance their career and home life, they needed to be content with their employment situations.

DeMeis et al. (1986) studied the ability of mothers to come to terms with establishing a balance between maternal and career roles. Their investigation considered the preference of women to be employed or remain at home with their infants and their discussion of the results centered on the importance of employment preference rather than actual employment status for understanding how women balance career and motherhood. DeMeis et al. stated that “all mothers must resolve the issue of how to balance their own needs and those of their family” (p. 627).

Olsen and DiBrigida (as cited in Levinson, 1995) studied levels of depression of women with small children who were employed either full-time, part-time, or not at all. Their findings showed that the happiest women were the ones who were most content with their work arrangements and the level of balance that they had achieved in their lives. The women who had chosen part-time employment were less depressed than the mothers who were either not employed or who were employed full-time. Those who were employed part-time were content with the opportunity that this employment arrangement created for spending more time with family even though the choice of part-time employment was also perceived by them to be a disadvantage to their career.
Consistent with the study by Olsen and DiBrigida (as cited in Levinson, 1995), Noddings (1992) feels that a variety of activities that energize and make a person feel whole contribute to achieving a well-integrated and balanced life. She expresses the belief that many women think that it is impossible to do well in both spheres of family life and career – two spheres that she feels have been long represented as two distinctly different worlds. Noddings further commented on the importance of making decisions that fulfill one's deepest longings. If a woman desires to have a family and pursue a career, she should be encouraged to find a way to make it happen and find fulfillment in caring for herself.

As found by DeMeis et al. (1986), the mothers in my research study resolved the issue of balancing their own needs and those of their family by choosing to return to work in a part-time capacity upon the completion of their maternity leave. All five women interviewed in this study reported being content with their part-time employment assignments within their schools. This contentment with their employment situation, in turn, helped them to achieve a level of balance in their lives, thus supporting existing literature (DeMeis et al.; Levinson, 1995; Noddings, 1992).

However, the present study goes beyond a look at the employment strategies that women use to try and balance a career and family life. This study recognizes the great sense of effort and the specific factors that surrounded the decision of these women to choose to return to teaching part-time. Insight was also given concerning the challenges that arose upon returning to work in a part-time capacity. As well, this study highlighted the importance of support in helping these women achieve the balance between career and home life that they were so actively seeking. Finally, this research shows how the
transition into motherhood for these women teachers enhanced their instructional practices, thus, benefiting both their students and their school communities.

Implications for Practice

This research has implications for women educators who are mothers or are entering motherhood, spouses of women educators, principals, staff members within the educational system, school board administrators, and government officials. In terms of women educators, this research not only aided the five women participants as they reflected upon their own experiences of becoming part-time educators, but also has the potential to help other mother-educators or those entering motherhood who are faced with the decisions that surround their return to work at the completion of their maternity leave. For women educators who have the desire to spend time with their children and who are financially able to return to teaching in a reduced capacity after their maternity leave, part-time teaching is a worthwhile experience that can help achieve balance between career and family. Based on the analysis of the interviews, this study offers the following recommendations for mother-educators who are considering reentering the teaching profession part-time upon completion of their maternity leaves:

1. Before approaching your principal about reducing your teaching time, have an idea of how you would set up your ideal part-time position so that he/she can do his/her best to accommodate you and your family.
2. Be flexible, as part-time teaching positions can take many different shapes and forms depending on the size and structure of your school.
3. Set boundaries for yourself as a part-time teacher to ensure that you are not putting in full-time hours while working part-time.
4. Expect your influence at your school to decrease because you are only there in a part-time capacity. Facing this realization will help you set the boundaries needed to ensure that you are only putting in part-time hours.

5. Be content with your decision to return to work in a part-time capacity as this contentment will help you achieve the balance you are seeking between having a career and raising a family.

6. Do not settle on childcare – find someone with whom you are truly comfortable to care for your child while you are working.

In the Canadian study conducted by Lee et al. (1994), it was reported that working mothers feel that they do not have enough time on a daily basis to accomplish all that they would like. Once the requirements of work and family tasks have been fulfilled, there is little time left for personal activities. Working mothers reportedly recognize that they cannot hope to accomplish everything and manage single-handedly. Consequently, they cope by setting priorities and balancing chores with their family. The spouses of the five women in this study assisted their wives by helping out with familial responsibilities whenever they were able. For the spouses of mother-educators, an understanding of the importance of their role in familial responsibilities can help them to assist their wives to pursue a healthy balance between career and family.

The study conducted by Lee et al. (1994) also identified that mothers returning to work would like their employers to help them by providing flexibility – both in terms of when they have to work and where they work. They also expressed the need for their employers to demonstrate understanding of their work-family conflicts. This study suggested that employers may be able to attract and retain competent female employees if
they demonstrate that they provide a work environment that permits the employee to fulfill both work and family responsibilities. For principals, staff members, and school board administrators, an awareness of the needs and concerns of mother-educators who desire to return to teaching part-time after their maternity leave is of vital importance. The findings from this study will assist principals, staff, and school board administrators in understanding the challenges faced by mother-educators who teach part-time and how to best accommodate these women as they seek to fulfill both work and family responsibilities.

The results from the analysis of the interviews offered some practical suggestions for school board administrators and government officials to consider when accommodating mother-educators’ requests to reduce their teaching time upon return from a maternity leave:

1. Advertisement – Make the options and scenarios for part-time teaching positions and leaves of absences available to mother-educators and principals. Put a positive outlook on part-time teaching positions to keep women educators within the system while supporting their role in their family.

2. Planning Assistance – Have “back-to-work” planning seminars for mothers on maternity leave to make a smoother transition for returning to work.

3. Financial Assistance – Provide financial assistance for daycare costs of preschool-aged children. (After the completion of the interviews for this study, the Ontario government began providing financial assistance to families with children under the age of 6 to help with childcare or other childrearing costs.)
4. Child care at School – Childcare in the school allows the children to be close to their parent easing the children’s anxiety of separation upon their mothers’ return to work.

**Implications for Further Research**

This research study explored the professional and personal lives of women elementary teachers returning to teaching part-time from a maternity leave. The investigation focused on the decisions surrounding a mother’s choice to reenter the teaching profession part-time in a field where each mother had previously been employed full-time. The limitations of this study place restrictions on the extent to which the findings can be generalized outside of the examined context. The next step would be to enlarge the sample size to include women educators from other school boards and ethnic groups who have also made the choice to return to teaching part-time from their maternity leaves. This enlarged sample size would provide enough data so that the findings and recommendations might be transferred to a larger population of women educators. To broaden the scope of this research, the sample could also be enlarged to include principals who have worked with women who have chosen to reduce their teaching time upon return from a maternity leave. This would serve to help understand the administrative challenges that are involved in trying to accommodate mother-educators who desire to reduce their teaching schedules as well as keeping in mind the needs of the school and the school community.

The results from this study can also be broadened by completing a long-term, longitudinal study with a group of women with circumstances similar to the ones in this study. Conducting a series of interviews with each of the participants at differing points
after their return from their maternity leave would give a more detailed and accurate description of the experiences of part-time teaching on the professional and personal lives of mothers.

One of the results of women choosing to work part-time to accommodate domestic responsibilities, mainly childcare, is a very large part-time woman workforce. This model reinforces gender stereotypes and staffing patterns throughout the workplace contributing to the highly feminized worldview of the teaching profession (Acker, 1989; Gaskell and Mullen, 2006; Moreau et al., 2007; Smulyan, 2006). Not only is it women who seem to be exercising the option of reducing their work schedule to part-time, but it is for the activity of providing direct care for their family, which is again a traditionally acceptable role for women. This practice, thus, supports the traditional gender order rather than transforming it (Negrey, 1994). After interviewing all five women, the analysis of data revealed that none of them mentioned the idea of ever considering the option of their husbands reducing their work schedules to care for their children. Each of the women only talked passionately about her personal desire to stay at home with her child(ren) and the fact that part-time rather than full-time employment offered her the opportunity to have that extra time with her family. Essentially, by choosing to work part-time in order to fulfill familial responsibilities, the women in the present study continued to support the gender stereotypes of the traditionally acceptable role of women. Although the recruitment pool would be considerably smaller, future research could examine male elementary teachers who have chosen to reduce their teaching schedules to help achieve balance between work and family and their perceptions of how the decision to reduce their teaching schedule influences their professional and personal lives. Further research
could also look at the factors involved in the decision of who stays home with the children, mother or father, in families that choose to have one partner working a schedule that is less than full-time.

**Personal Reflections**

My interest in the role that part-time teaching plays in the lives of mothers who are returning to the profession from a maternity leave is both personal and professional. Prior to the birth of my first child, I was a full-time elementary homeroom teacher. After my son’s birth, I chose to reenter the teaching profession on a part-time basis and I am presently experiencing the impact of my reduced work schedule both professionally and personally. During my 3 years of half-time teaching, I have held two very different teaching assignments: a homeroom Grade 8 class shared with a teaching partner and a primary prep-coverage position. Both positions have had their own advantages and disadvantages. Ultimately, my part-time status at school allows me to spend more time with my son than if I was working full-time, but like most of the women in this study, I struggle daily with the balance of work and family. I continually question how much is enough professionally as a part-time teacher and I struggle with the time constraints that result from being a perfectionist both in my home and at work. I was also concerned when my review of literature indicated that women who chose to take a career break or reduce their teaching time to accommodate familial responsibilities often found themselves in primary assignments similar to myself when returning to teaching and reported having difficulties achieving headship positions even after returning to full-time positions (Acker, 1999; Moreau, 2007).
My review of feminist literature within the realm of teaching along with my own personal experiences makes me wonder if female teachers will always be penalized for choosing employment options that help to balance work and family responsibilities. Shouldn’t we be applauded for wanting to be with our children during their most formative years – rather than be shuffled into primary positions upon our return from teaching and/or reducing our opportunities for management positions later on in our career? The women in this study felt that motherhood enhanced their teaching ability as it is an experience that is continually contributing to their development as women, teachers, and, most importantly, as individuals. Therefore, when they are willing and able to return to their profession full-time, why is their “career-break” seen as a detriment? A career break to raise a family is very short for most female teachers when viewed over the total number of their years of employment. In life, the more experiences we have, the more well-rounded and hopefully wiser we become, therefore in my opinion, making us just as suitable for management positions (if we so chose) as our male counterparts or as female teachers who do not have a family or choose not to take a career break to accommodate family responsibilities.

Conducting this research gave me the opportunity to discover that my situation and struggles are not unique. It was enlightening to talk with other mothers in similar situations and learn from their reflections as they journeyed through their personal experiences as part-time educators desiring to achieve a balance between their careers and their family life. Although I personally set out in this research to ultimately discover the ideal part-time teaching position to help me be successful in achieving balance in my life, I have learned that most likely there is no such thing. I am fine with this revelation
because I discovered instead that balance between career and family comes from choosing to be content and learning to make whatever part-time situation in which I find myself work for my professional and personal life.

Every choice we make in life has positive and negative outcomes – our ability to be content with our choices and not look back, keeps us moving forward and growing as individuals. When I chose, along with the women from this study, to move into a part-time employment position to secure more time with my family, I knew that it was the right choice for me at that time. Now, as I have re-entered the teaching profession part-time and face the challenges associated with my choice, I don’t question it – but I move forward. Perhaps from having this time of reflection and an introduction to feminist literature within the realm of teaching that shows that I am not alone in my experiences (Acker, 1999; Gaskell & Mullen, 2006; Moreau et al., 2007; Smulyan, 2006), I will have the opportunity to share what I have learned and contribute in a small way to the efforts of feminists within education that strive to ensure that the welfare of women teachers is not lost in the “woman-friendly” nature of our profession.
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Appendix B

Questionnaire

An Exploration of the Professional and Personal Lives of Women Elementary Teachers Returning to Teaching Part-Time from a Maternity Leave
~ Preliminary Questionnaire ~

The information that you provide on this questionnaire will be kept confidential.

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<th>Name:</th>
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<td>School:</td>
<td>Contact Number:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(home)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(work)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of Children:</td>
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Were you employed full time prior to your first maternity leave?  Yes  No

Is this your first experience in a part-time position?  Yes  No

If you circled no please explain:

Part-Time Position (Circle One):  ¼ time  ½ time  ¾ time  Other

If you circled other please explain:

State how long you have held your current part-time position:

Description of Your Current Part-Time Position:

(A) Specific Teaching Assignment
(e.g., Grade Level(s), Homeroom Responsibilities, Rotary Subjects)
(B) Breakdown of Teaching Schedule  
(e.g., ½ days mornings, full days every other day)  

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<tr>
<th>Briefly describe your reasons for choosing part-time employment upon returning from your maternity leave:</th>
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| Do you share the responsibility of caring for your child/children with a significant other?  
Yes  No |
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| If selected, I am willing to participate in a 1-hour interview with the researcher (Amy Woodland) at my convenience during the month of May 2005:  
Yes  No |
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Thank-you for taking the time to fill out this preliminary survey and for assisting in a much needed area of educational research.

Please return your completed survey through the XXXXX District School Board’s courier system to Amy Woodland (at XXXXX School) using the pre-labeled envelope.
Appendix C

Interview Questions

The informed consent form outlining the nature of this research will be reviewed with the participant by the researcher before proceeding with the interview questions.

Background Information:

1. For how many years were you a full-time teacher?
2. How much time did you take for your maternity leave?
3. How long have you been teaching part-time?
4. Please give a description of your current job situation (i.e., ½ days, prep coverage).
5. Who is responsible for the care of your child while you are working? Are you happy with the care and treatment that your child receives from his/her caregiver while you are at work?

Impact of a Reduced Teaching Schedule:

1. What factors, both personal and professional, influenced your decision to return to teaching part-time?
2. How did you feel about returning to work after your maternity leave?
3. Please define your personal philosophy of education. Has your ability to implement your personal philosophy of education been affected by your part-time status? If so how?
4. How have your instructional practices changed as a result of your part-time teaching position?
5. How has your personal and professional identity changed as a result of teaching part-time?

6. How have your relationships with staff, students, parents, and your family been affected by your reduced time within your school and within your home?

7. Do you feel restricted professionally as a result of teaching part-time? If so, how?

8. Are work and family responsibilities balanced between yourself and your partner?

9. Describe some ways in which you have tried to achieve balance between work and family life.

10. Describe whether or not your current situation fulfills the original intent as to why you chose to return to the teaching profession part-time.

11. Were your principal (and potentially your staff members) and family members supportive of your decision to return to teaching part-time?

12. Describe how your recent part-time experiences within the teaching profession have influenced your professional and personal growth.

13. Based on your experiences and knowledge, if you had to offer advice or “words of wisdom” to new mothers who are contemplating re-entry into the teaching profession part-time, what would you suggest?

14. Describe some practical ways in which individual schools, the school board, and the government could improve the family-to-work transition to promote a balance between a mother’s professional and personal lives.

15. Overall, describe your thoughts and feelings regarding holding a part-time position within the teaching profession. Has there been any other impact from
your part-time position on your life that has not yet been discussed in this interview?

At the completion of the interview the researcher will review with the participant the nature and potential implications of this study. A feedback letter will be sent to each participant at the conclusion of this study.