

**STRESS AND DISTRESS  
IN TEACHING:  
ONE TEACHER'S STORY**

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## ABSTRACT

An integrated model of teacher burnout is presented as the backdrop to a personal history of one distressed teacher. Using a series of collaborative interviews, Sarah's experiences as a classroom teacher are explored as part of a search for the contributors to her feelings of distress and dissatisfaction with teaching. A number of themes are identified which relate to Sarah's life in the classroom, her search for autonomy and proximity, and the diversity of her roles within the bureaucracy of the school and the network of her family. Sarah has developed an inventory of coping resources compatible with her values, goals, commitments and personal style. She includes problem-focused, emotion-focused, and preventive strategies. As the study progressed, we came to believe that the fundamental stressors in Sarah's life have arisen out of the fact that she is a woman, doing a woman's work of teaching and nurturing a family, and experiencing all of the expected and unique stressors that are a part of that experience. The complex role of women in teaching is discussed, and the suggestion is made that the nature of schooling would change if women had greater access to decision-making levels within their profession. Suggestions are also made regarding inservice and preservice training for teachers in order to increase their coping resources.

## PROLOGUE

In studying Sarah, the teacher whose story is told in this thesis, I learned a lot about Sarah, her experiences, her thoughts, values and goals. I also learned a lot about myself. In struggling to understand Sarah, and in sharing parts of her life, I came to better understand myself as well. As you read this thesis, you will have an opportunity to share in Sarah's story. You will also have the opportunity to share some of my own story, for Sarah's story became the vehicle for my own personal growth. Sarah is an intelligent, articulate woman, and I am most grateful to her for her trust, her candour, and her patience.

The thesis begins with a fairly traditional review of the literature on distress and burnout, and then outlines a less traditional, but defensible research methodology. Sarah's story is then presented as the product of a series of collaborative interviews in which we explored Sarah's experiences as a teacher specifically, but also as a working mother and wife. The process we used was recursive in that we returned often to ideas that held special interest for us, allowing us to explore a number of themes that seemed to be emerging as important in Sarah's life.

Together, we tried to discover patterns and structures in Sarah's life that gave it meaning, and I tried to match these patterns with the research on stress and burnout. However, it was not until after the first five interviews, and after I had written most of "Sarah's Story", that I became increasingly aware of an over-arching theme that Sarah and I had never directly discussed: the impact of her gender on her feelings of distress and her dissatisfaction with her life.

Sarah once said that she dislikes models -- that they hold little meaning for her; I, on the other hand, had always liked models. I liked their "neatness" and the way that the originator had been able to visually depict the relationships between ideas. As the study progresses, I became aware of a fundamental problem with many models in the social sciences: they are often two-dimensional and linear in structure, and seldom can reflect the complexity and the subtleties of the human lives that they are attempting to portray. Therefore, although I had set as my goal the "testing" of an integrated model of stress and burnout against the life experiences of one teacher, the model seemed to be increasingly inadequate as I tried to work towards the inner core of meaning in Sarah's and my discussions.

It became increasingly apparent to me that while

the model I had chosen had been useful in providing an initial framework for our talk, it did not incorporate in any real sense the fundamental gender issues. While these issues could appropriately be addressed in the context of societal, institutional and role-related stressors, something seemed to be missing. The consideration and identification of fundamental issues of gender seemed to provide the lens that brought into focus the various elements in Sarah's life.

After Sarah and I had read and thought about what I had written, we talked about the fact that the subject of "being a woman" had never directly been addressed in our earlier interviews, though we had discussed many of the supporting themes. Feminist viewpoints often threaten our fundamental values and relationships. Perhaps it was indicative of an increasing level of mutual trust that we were eventually able to discuss these issues. Both of us have a lot to think about.

From a personal perspective, I am aware of a process of "growing into" some ideas that are new for me. The ideas that I have read about, talked about, and written about are gradually becoming a part of me. This thesis reflects some of the transitions in thinking and subsequent discontinuities that are part of my own conceptual evolution.

## Acknowledgements

My work on this thesis was a true learning experience, a culmination of several years of study, and the realization of a number of personal goals. I wish to express my sincere appreciation to some very special people:

- to my advisors, Dr. David Smith and Dr. Myrna Greene, for their commitment to the importance of teachers and teaching, their guidance and support, their willingness to listen, and their personal encouragement as I struggled to find my "voice".

- to "Sarah", whose story formed the basis of this thesis, for her honesty, her insights, and her trust.

- to my professors, colleagues and friends, who listened, questioned, and shared their experiences, allowing me to explore new ideas in a safe environment.

- to my family, particularly my children, for their continued support during the last five years.

- to Lloyd, whose vision and example is an inspiration, and whose love is a gift that I cherish.

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CHAPTER ONE  
INTRODUCTION

Rationale for the Study

People involved in the helping professions are often involved in "prolonged, constant, intensive interaction with people in an emotionally charged atmosphere" (Schwab, 1983, p. 21); these conditions often coincide with the syndrome of burnout. A number of recent studies (Blase, 1984; Hiebert & Farber, 1984; Iwanicki & Schwab, 1981; Schwab & Iwanicki, 1982) have focused on stress and burnout in the teaching profession. "Nowhere else (but in schools) are large groups of individuals packed so closely together for so many hours, yet expected to perform at peak efficiency on difficult learning tasks and to interact harmoniously" (Weinstein, 1979, in Connors, 1983, p. 18). If these situational demands are short-term in nature, or if the individual perceives that his or her coping attempts are successful, the stress experienced

will be transitory in nature. If the demands persist, a state of chronic stress (Hiebert, 1988) may result. For the purposes of this paper, I will differentiate between chronic stress and burnout by focusing on the ability of the individual to continue to cope with the stressors (see Figure 1).

It would appear that teachers, like other helping professionals, are sometimes finding themselves emotionally exhausted, no longer able to give of themselves. They are finding it harder to remain calm

short-term situational demand	persistant situational demand	persistent situational demand
individual copes satisfactorily	Individual utilizes appropriate coping resources	copng resources inadequate stress remains unresolved
situation returns to normal	situation is "managed"	Individual becomes dysfunctional utilizes destructive cognitive, emotional, and behavioral patterns
TRANSITORY STRESS	CHRONIC STRESS	BURNOOT

Figure 1. The relationship of stress and burnout

and supportive, and are developing negative and cynical attitudes towards both their students and co-workers. They feel unappreciated and discouraged, finding little sense of accomplishment in their work. I believe that

teachers who are experiencing these feelings of burnout can have negative effects on their students, their peers and the image and reputation of their school. People suffering from burnout are more likely to exhibit low morale, absenteeism, and tardiness, and may even leave their jobs (Pines, Aronson & Kafry, 1981). They may also increase their use of alcohol and drugs, and experience family and marital problems (Maslach and Jackson, 1981).

Although the literature is not conclusive with regard to demographic variables and stress in teaching, some studies have related burnout to age, sex, and grade level taught. A study by Schwab and Iwanicki (1982) found that younger teachers tended to experience more emotional exhaustion and fatigue. This age factor was attributed to unrealistic expectations which conflict with the realities of the workplace. Male teachers and secondary teachers were found to have more negative feelings towards their students than elementary teachers, and high school teachers tended to have less frequent feelings of personal accomplishment than elementary teachers. Similar results were found in Cavers' (1988) study on teacher efficacy. Moreover, in a U.S. study of female elementary teachers from across the nation, 40% of the respondents said that they would not again choose teaching as a career, this

In spite of the identification of this group as being the most satisfied with teaching (Wangberg, 1984).

Burnout is too costly to be ignored. The costs are high in terms of wasted training for those who leave their jobs, and in terms of the psychological and physical effects upon those who stay (Pines et al., 1981). It is costly for school districts in terms of lost talent and poor performance, and it is costly for the students who work with a teacher who has lost the capacity to care and respond in a loving manner.

#### Purpose of the Study

A model of burnout has been derived from the literature on stress and burnout (see Figure 2); this model will serve as a basis for analysis of one distressed teacher's personal history. In a case study, the teacher's experiences and perceptions will be explored, to gain a better understanding of her dissatisfaction with her worklife, its causes, and its impact on her as an individual. A series of in-depth interviews will be conducted, with a view to recording her thoughts, feelings and experiences with regard to her history of distress and burnout. Through a process of reflective narrative, the teacher will be encouraged to relate her experiences and explore their significance in terms of her life as a teacher.

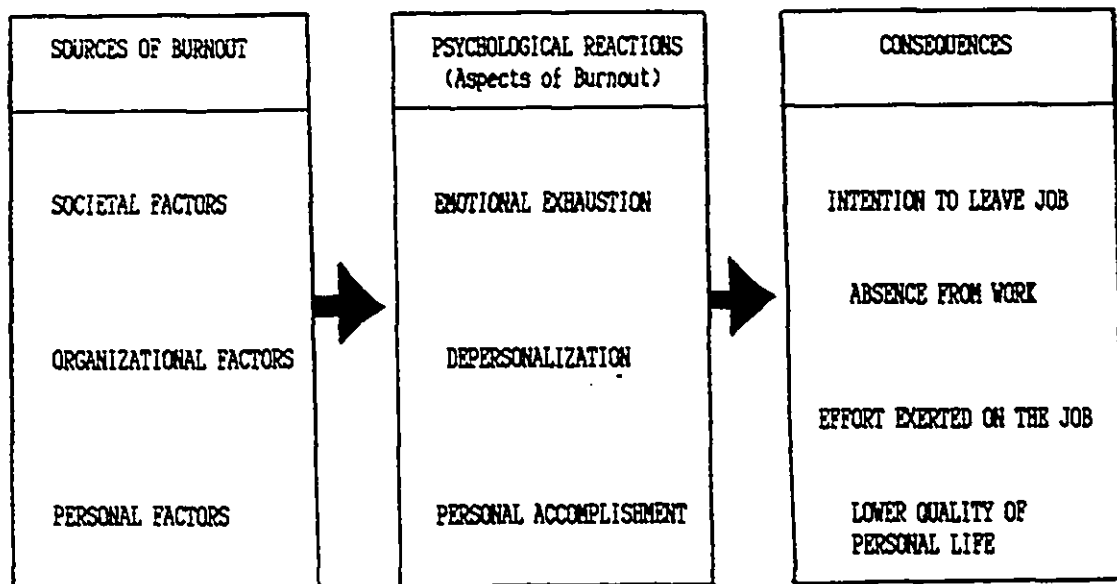


Figure 2. Integrated model of teacher burnout.  
 (adapted from Schwab, Jackson & Schuler, 1986;  
 Iwanicki, 1983)

This study has the potential to add to our understanding of theory in that provides an opportunity to test a model of stress and burnout (see Figure 2) derived from the work of Schwab, Jackson, & Schuler (1986) and Iwanicki (1983) in a specific and personal situation. Yin (1984) supports this analytical process of pattern matching which compares an empirically-based pattern with an existing one which is defined prior to the study. Teachers and teacher-educators may find the study helpful in that it provides a model which may be useful in coming to terms with the stressors in their own lives. School administrators may also find the description of the interactive process helpful. The

personal, collaborative, problem-solving approach might have implications for encouraging individual staff development in a school setting.

On a more personal level, it is anticipated that both the teacher and the researcher will benefit from their engagement in the process of reflective analysis. The greatest benefit may accrue to the teacher herself, as she gains a better understanding of the factors that affect her life and career. One of the primary features of narrative is its ability to act as an integrative process, allowing the speaker to sift through memory and rearrange or restructure concepts and organizing principles in the light of new experiences or ideas.\*

She may also acquire some strategies which can be used to control some of the negative elements in her worklife, thus reducing or minimizing the effects of the stressors. This increased knowledge could lead to better decision-making and greater control over educational processes as the teacher monitors her own perceptions of classroom contexts and experiences.

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\* The relationship of discourse and meaning is discussed in some detail in Chapter 3 of this document.



Previous study has tested the validity of elements of the model on a population of 339 teachers (Schwab, et al., 1986); this study will allow for an in-depth examination of the sources and consequences of burnout in the life of one teacher.

### Limitations

Findings in this single subject case study may be regarded as specific to this particular teacher and the circumstances in which she finds herself. As a research method, the case study has some acknowledged limitations: as a single example of the phenomenon under study, the case study is often criticized because it is difficult to generalize the findings from one case to another. However, Yin (1984) suggests that the error lies in attempting to generalize conclusions to other case studies, rather than to the theory itself. Just as a scientist does not attempt to select "representative" experiments, the ethnographer should not be required select a "representative" case study. Instead, Yin supports the selection of a single experience that can be used to reflect broader theoretical issues. This allows for what Yin calls an "analytical generalization".

The subject of this study was chosen by the researcher because the subject's experience seemed to

encompass many of the elements common to stress and burnout. An alternate strategy to the arbitrary selection of a subject would be selection by means of responses of potential subjects to a screening device such as the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). However, an objective screening device of this type does not account for a crucial element in this type of study - the emerging rapport between the subject and the researcher.

In the collaborative interview\*, one of the most important elements is the establishment of rapport, that trusting relationship that allows the free exchange of ideas, and which, in turn enhances the opportunities for mutually valid outcomes (Wallat, Green, Conlin, & Haramis, 1981). It is possible that a more traditionally "scientific" selection process might identify a teacher that was clearly suffering from burnout, but with whom the researcher might be unable to develop this feeling of rapport. As the purpose of the study does not relate directly to the development of this relationship, I chose not to allow it to function as a variable in this study.

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\* The collaborative interview method is discussed in detail in chapters 3 and 4 of this document.

A further consideration in the selection of the subject was the conflicting data in the literature with respect to female elementary teachers. Although the literature is not conclusive with regard to the role of demographic variables in determining burnout in practising teachers, some studies have correlated burnout to the age and sex of the teacher, and the grade level taught. In one study, elementary teachers were found to have more positive feelings towards their students, and more frequent feelings of personal accomplishment (Schwab & Iwanicki, 1982). Yet in another study of female elementary teachers, 40% of the respondents indicated that they would not again choose teaching as a career (Wangberg, 1984). Because of these apparent contradictions, and because of the high percentage of female teachers in elementary schools, I am particularly interested in exploring the topic of distress and burnout with a female elementary teacher.

The case study approach has been criticized because it involves strong subjective elements on the part of both the subject and the researcher. Mishler (1986) regards this personal and contextual approach as a strength rather than a weakness. In an interactive, jointly constructed narrative, both the interviewer and the respondent are engaged in a search for a negotiated meaning. A key element will be the researcher's

ability to listen empathetically to what the teacher is sharing about her experiences and feelings, and discern what the teacher believes to be the meaning of her experience.

Traditional research has demanded guarantees of anonymity for the subject(s), in order to assure that the right to privacy is maintained. It has been suggested that anonymity provides a sense of security that allows the subject to respond openly and frankly to the researcher's questions. Although attempts will be made to provide anonymity for the subject, it will be difficult to achieve in the small educational community that comprises our school district and university. However, it is hoped that as the study evolves, the teacher will gradually experience an increasing level of trust and participation, and will therefore move from subject to collaborative research partner. In any event, it will be important that the teacher understand the purposes and processes of the study, and clearly understands that she will share in decisions relating to the pacing and content of the conversations, and in the analysis and interpretation of their meaning.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW ON CONTENT

#### Stress and Distress

The school environment involves many intense interpersonal relationships, restrictions as to time and space, and a constant evaluation of effort. Sylwester (1983) sees these conditions as having immense potential for incubating stress in teachers and administrators. When a seriously threatening situation occurs in the social environment, the brain's perceptual and problem solving processes are activated in order to assess the situation, and discover what can be done to remove the threat. If the mind can solve the problem without too much difficulty, some worry and anxiety may occur, but the debilitating physical manifestations of stress will not occur. Selye calls this eustress, or good stress; the individual is responding positively to a challenge (Sylwester, 1983, p.4).

On the other hand, if the mind can discover no appropriate solution to an immediate danger or to a

continuously threatening situation, the brain triggers a series of physical responses that Selye calls the initial alarm reaction. As the body calls on its defensive forces, perception is heightened, heart rate and blood pressure increase, and adrenal hormones are released. The large muscles tense, and the body is readied for defensive or aggressive action. Selye calls this distress or bad stress (Sylwester, 1983, p.4). It is a pattern of physical responses to perceived social problems that carry no physical threat.

If the stress continues, the body makes a massive effort to sustain this higher energy level. This stage of resistance (p.3) consumes huge amounts of sugars and hormones, and will continue as long as the body can sustain the effort and the mind can see hope for a satisfactory solution. As ability and desire wane, the individual enters the stage of exhaustion (p.3), and succumbs to illness, depression or other serious emotional or social problems.

#### Stress and Burnout

The Chinese term for stress has two characters: one means danger and the other means opportunity. This view of stress suggests that danger and opportunity are not so much opposites as two sides

of a single coin - that a stressful situation for one person might be a splendid opportunity for another. (Sylwester, 1983, p.3)

A key factor in understanding the relationship between stress and burnout lies in the appreciation of the importance of individual interpretation of any set of circumstances. Gmelch (1983) cautions that stress in itself should not be avoided, for performance problems may result from both too little and too much stress. "Optimum performance comes from converting tension from an enemy into an ally; from a needless stressor to a creative motivator" (p. 6). Gmelch advocates the search for an "optimum stimulation zone" (p.10) in which the individual finds a satisfactory balance between boredom and exhaustion. He describes rustout as the "trauma of uneventfulness" (p. 10) that results from sitting in the same job for prolonged periods of time without variety, change, or stimulation. In this situation the individual is underchallenged, and suffers from frustration, dissatisfaction and fatigue. At the other end of the spectrum is the individual who is suffering the effects of burnout: the cumulative wear and tear of harmful stress (Iwanicki, 1983). This individual is ambitious, aggressive and impatient, and has not yet accepted his or his or her limitations. Gmelch (1983) characterizes

such a person as an irrational problem-solver, "exhausted from long working hours, dissatisfied from working without results, and despondent from lack of self-esteem" (p.10). Figure 3 depicts the stress and performance curve.

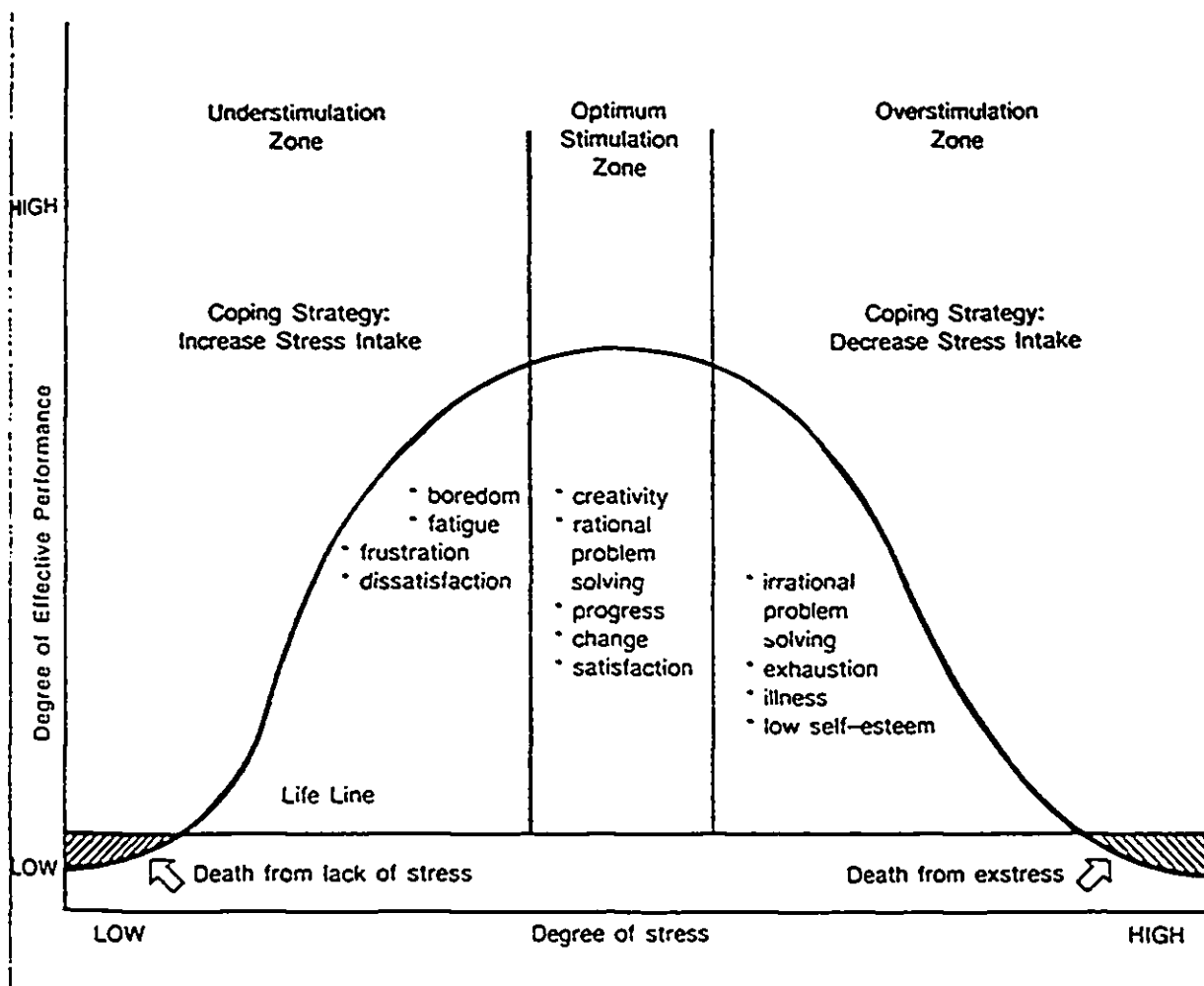


Figure 3. The stress and performance curve.

Gmelch (1983)



### Contributors to Stress

An extensive number and range of stressors have been identified in the literature. Iwanicki (1983) has developed a model which demonstrates how these societal, organizational and role-related or personal sources of teacher distress are interrelated and cumulative (p.29).

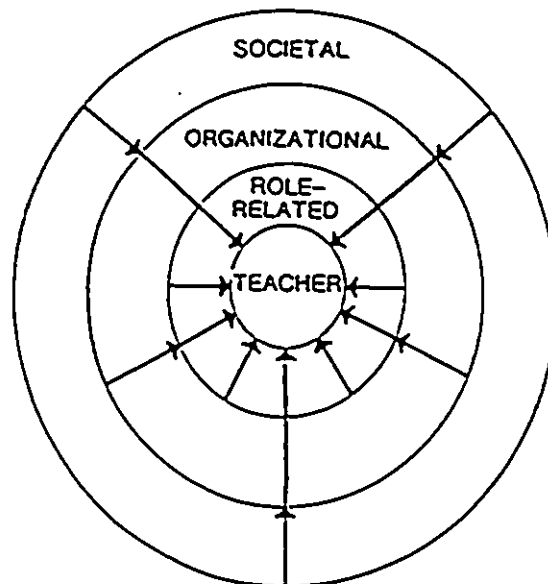


Figure 4. Sources of distress and their impact on the teacher. (Iwanicki, 1983).

Societal stress results from the pressure placed upon schools and teachers by social and political forces. Social stress is manifested in increased demands for accountability and productivity at the same time as financial support for education is declining.

Some teachers feel that their status in the community is declining; they perceive that they receive less public esteem and respect and lower pay than many other professions (Lortie, 1974). Today, the changing role of women is providing more career options, and some women teachers feel cheated because at the time they entered the profession, there were few jobs open to women. Wangberg (1984) reports that many women teachers now want to change jobs, but are unsure of how to go about it.

A second major source of distress results from the failure of the school to organize itself to meet the demands of the public, students, and teachers simultaneously. These stressors are grouped together under the category of organizational distress. Wangberg (1984) describes the dehumanizing effects of large school systems, in which teachers may be moved about with little concern for their preferences or expertise. This practice may contribute to teachers' sense of isolation, and lack of affiliation with their peers (Wangberg, 1984; Lortie, 1974).

Teachers may also experience organizational distress when they feel that the goals of the school are in conflict with their ideas of what is good for students, or feel that they are being asked to provide

a program without sufficient resources or training (Iwanicki, 1983).

Lortie (1974) characterizes public schooling as a system of "dual captivity" (p.4). Students are usually assigned to a school according to their place of residence, and, once within a school, are assigned to a particular class by the school administration. Teachers also have relatively little to say about their school, their teaching assignment, or the makeup of their classes. The teacher's role is made even more difficult by the fact that the children with whom the teacher deals are largely unsocialized to their roles as learners, and the teacher must teach the students how to learn in a group setting, where goals for individual students sometimes become secondary to goals for the entire group.

Beginning teachers are not eased into the profession under the careful tutelage of an experienced master teacher. Instead they are plunged into their role as teacher, actor, manager and psychotherapist, and are expected to perform from the first day all the duties of the experienced teacher. They are expected to learn while doing, with little support from colleagues or supervisors in these critical early months. Lortie (1974) attributes widespread anxiety to these early experiences, reporting that beginning

teachers have difficulty in making accurate, thoughtful decisions. He suggests that because of the beginner's limited observational and analytical abilities, poorly developed interpersonal skills and the narrow scope of experience and range of options, the neophyte teacher's ability to take action is limited, even if external advice is provided. The beginning teacher works in isolation, trying to work things out on her\* own as she struggles to survive. Once established, this pattern of isolation appears to continue throughout the teacher's career (Lortie, 1974).

Distress may also be attributed to a physical environment which may be unpleasant, inconvenient, overcrowded, unsafe, or unhealthy. Herzberg (cited in Wangberg, 1984) maintains that if teachers' lower level or hygiene needs -- i.e., salaries, working conditions, status, and other extrinsic motivators -- are not being met, they will be unable to work at their full potential, and will be unable to concentrate on their motivation needs -- i.e., responsibility,

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\* Because this study focused on one female teacher, I have chosen to use the singular feminine pronoun when referring to an individual teacher.

growth, achievement or advancement. Teachers often perceive that they have poor mobility or job security as budgets become tighter. This lack of security or opportunities for advancement may affect the teacher's ability to function at full potential (Wangberg, 1984).

A third source of distress in teaching relates to personal or role-related factors. Role conflict or role ambiguity, a lack of control or autonomy, and a lack of feedback about success have been cited as contributors to teacher distress (Schwab, Jackson & Schuler, 1986). Some more obvious personal stressors in teaching may be related to discipline problems, difficulty in developing appropriate programs for special needs students, finding time for professional development, or developing positive relationships with administrators, peers, or parents (Iwanicki, 1983).

Unrealistic expectations of the job contribute strongly to young teachers' disillusionment with teaching (Pines, Aronson & Kafry, 1981; Wangberg, 1984). Wangberg refers to this as the "myth of the 'Super Teacher'" (p. 14). She states that many teachers expect themselves to be nearly perfect as they play a variety of overlapping and demanding roles, roles that occur spontaneously or without prediction. In addition, she notes the high frequency of interpersonal interactions that occur each day, and

insists that it is simply impossible for teachers to be completely successful under these circumstances.

Roy (1974) has described teachers as having "caretaker personalities - they care for and give to others without thinking of their own needs" (Wangberg, 1984). Wangberg suggests that teachers need to learn to "take" if they are going to be able to continue to give. Such taking may be in the form of physical exercise, hobbies, mental health days, nutritional diets, long baths or showers, relaxation exercises, vacations or leaves, or simply learning to say "no" to extra responsibilities. Wangberg also notes that many female educators have identified the need to renegotiate roles and responsibilities at home, as many are doing two full-time jobs, one at school and the other at home.

#### Aspects of Burnout

Much of the exploratory work in burnout was undertaken by Christina Maslach, who described burnout as a function of both frequency and intensity of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal achievement (Maslach, 1982). In her many studies of the helping professions, Maslach and her associates found that the prolonged and intense stress involved in the work environment had altered their

original feelings about themselves and their work (Schwab, 1983).

It is important to view burnout as a process rather than an event. The process of burning out is gradual and cumulative, and is determined to a great extent by the individual's own interpretation of any set of circumstances. Schwab, Jackson and Schuler (1986) developed a model of burnout which illustrates how stressful circumstances can affect an individual (see Figure 5)\*.

One of the first symptoms to appear is emotional exhaustion. Teachers may describe themselves as being drained or used up; they are at the end of their rope, wiped out, and are physically fatigued. They may dread the idea of another day at a job that once filled them with excitement and idealistic expectations. Their disillusionment has come upon them unexpectedly, although, like their co-workers, they may be quite adept at perceiving and explaining burnout in other teachers.

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\* This model formed the basis for the integrated model of teacher burnout in Figure 2. Schwab et al. do not include societal factors in their model; this element was added, based on the work of Ivanicki (1983), as shown in Figure 4.

A teacher who is emotionally exhausted may do what many other workers in the helping professions do: they cope by depersonalizing their peers and students; they put a safe distance between themselves and others. Their detachment shows in a growth of cynicism and callousness towards their students.

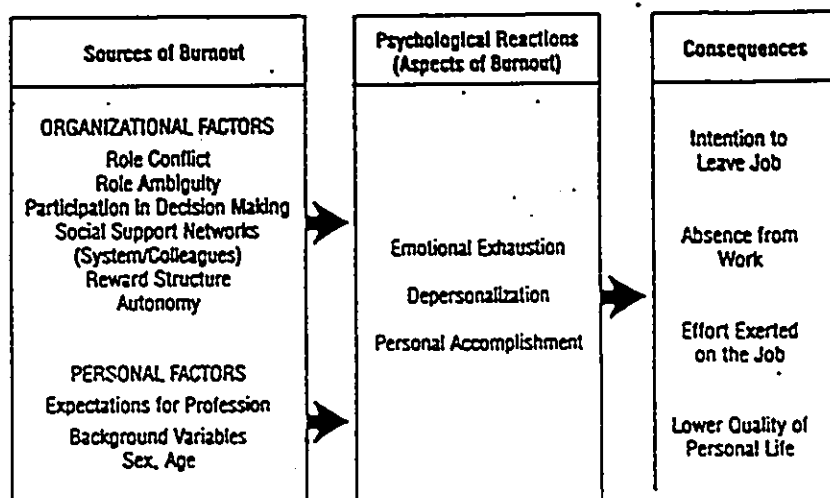


Figure 5. Model of teacher burnout.  
(Schwab, Jackson & Schuler, 1986)

The third aspect of burnout experienced by many teachers is a feeling of low personal accomplishment, due to a variety of factors, such as unrealistic expectations, organizational constraints, inadequate resources, unsupportive or uncooperative co-workers, and lack of feedback about one's successes. As a



cumulative result of all these factors, the teacher begins to think of herself as a failure, personally responsible for her lack of satisfaction with her career. Burnout escalates as she experiences the dual feelings of helplessness and hopelessness.

#### Consequences of Burnout

Some teachers react to burnout by choosing to leave their jobs. Teachers may also react to distress by absenting themselves from work. A study by Simpson (1976) of 2300 British teachers reports that absentee rates were highest among beginning teachers in the 20-25 age range. Simpson infers that absenteeism is a common strategy used to cope with the stresses of a new career (Hiebert & Farber, 1983).

The burned out teacher who chooses to stay on the job may find that less and less effort is being expended on professional concerns. This teacher may resist change, responsibility and involvement in school activity and may find that the job-related frustrations are carried over into his or her personal life.

#### Coping with Distress and Burnout

Teachers are affected by many factors in their work environment, and, because of personal differences, respond to stressful events in different ways. Pines, Aronson & Kafry (1981) suggest that, according to

Richard Lazarus, the intensity, duration and degree of burnout is determined by the individual's needs, her view of the world, her appraisal of the stresses, and her ability to cope . As stress levels increase, there is increasing interference with the teacher's ability to accurately assess the situation (Hiebert, 1989). Like many workers in the helping professions, teachers tend to attribute their unhappiness to personal qualities, and feel isolated, trapped, and guilty.

Hiebert suggests that people in stressful situations tend to exaggerate both the demands and the probable consequences of the situation, denigrate their ability to cope, and indulge in excessive worry and unproductive thought about the problem. Escalation of burnout occurs when the dual feelings of helplessness and hopelessness are on the rise. If the teacher can be helped to understand that more control is possible, these feelings should begin to diminish (Pines, et al., 1981). The simple act of participating in a workshop may break down the "fallacy of uniqueness, this pluralistic ignorance" (1981, p.36). People are often relieved to find out that many in their field share some of the same feelings. Realization that the stress is situational decreases their feelings of shame, guilt and helplessness (Kaiker, 1984). In one study, Pines and her associates found that people admitted to higher

levels of burnout after being told that the most idealistic burn out first (Pines et al., 1981, p.36).

Iwanicki (1983) suggests that teachers find societal sources of distress hardest to deal with, since they are "a product of a complex, political process over which teachers have exerted little influence" (p.30). Organizational sources of distress may be also be hard to affect, as they may be well entrenched in the bureaucratic structure of the school. Role-related or personal sources of stress are often the easiest to deal with, as teachers have a better understanding of the factors causing this type of distress, and more control over modifying them.

This idea of control is an important one. Jack Frymier (1987) suggests that teachers who have an internalized locus of control feel on top of things, believe that they can make a difference, and that what they do is important. They feel in charge of their own lives and of events and things around them. Teachers who have lost this locus of control have no confidence that what they do makes a difference. They feel pushed about by forces outside themselves, and are fatalistic, feeling that other people are in charge. These "neutered" teachers show many of the symptoms of burnout, for they lack physical strength and energy, and the motivation to work hard, to learn and to

change. "Their energies are mobilized to protect themselves rather than to improve the opportunities and enhance the welfare of others around them. Helping others is difficult when one feels unwanted and unappreciated" (p. 14).

Frymler's solution is to empower teachers, to help them to develop an internalized locus of control. He links authority, freedom and responsibility, and implicitly acknowledges the importance of the sense of personal efficacy which is developed through the process of ownership and shared responsibility. Baron and Rodin (1978), in a study of the effect of designed environments on social interaction, found that "when an individual feels in control, he or she may be happier in general, may perform better, and may be less bothered by crowding and other stressors" (as cited in Connors, 1983, p.17).

McIntyre, in a 1981 study of teacher distress, found that teachers with a more external locus of control experienced more feelings of burnout (Schwab, 1983). Seligman hypothesizes that a major causal factor of learned helplessness is the individual's belief that her responses will not be effective in influencing future outcomes (Miller & Norman, 1979, p.96). If one attributes failure to an internal cause, self-deprecation and negative affect result, whereas

attribution of failure to an external cause minimizes this affect (p. 96). Miller and Norman believe that effective treatment must be focused on changing the subject's attributions. If failure is attributed to external, variable causes, changes in outcome or situation would be sufficient to change future expectations and performance. However, if failure is attributed to internal, stable, and general causes, it is necessary to focus on changing the attributions themselves: i.e., change the way in which individuals perceive themselves in relation to their environment (p. 114-115).

Hiebert (1989) believes that stress occurs when people perceive that the demands of any situation exceed their coping resources. He has developed a framework which can be used to assist people with stress control (see Figure 6). He offers two preliminary approaches: the first attempts to reduce the imbalance between the stressors and the individual's coping skills, while the second approach tries to increase the individual's ability to manage physiological, cognitive, and behavioral responses to a stressful situation that is perceived to be unchangeable.

It is important to note here the difference between learning to cope with stress and trying to

alleviate the problem. Stress-reduction techniques may mask a problem, giving the illusion that the individual is coping well, yet doing little to change the circumstances. On the other hand, the acquisition of a variety of coping techniques may be of real assistance to a teacher in dealing with anxiety. "It is possible for a person (teachers included) to encounter a pressure situation, react by coping with the situation, and experience very little stress in the process" (Hiebert & Farber, 1983).

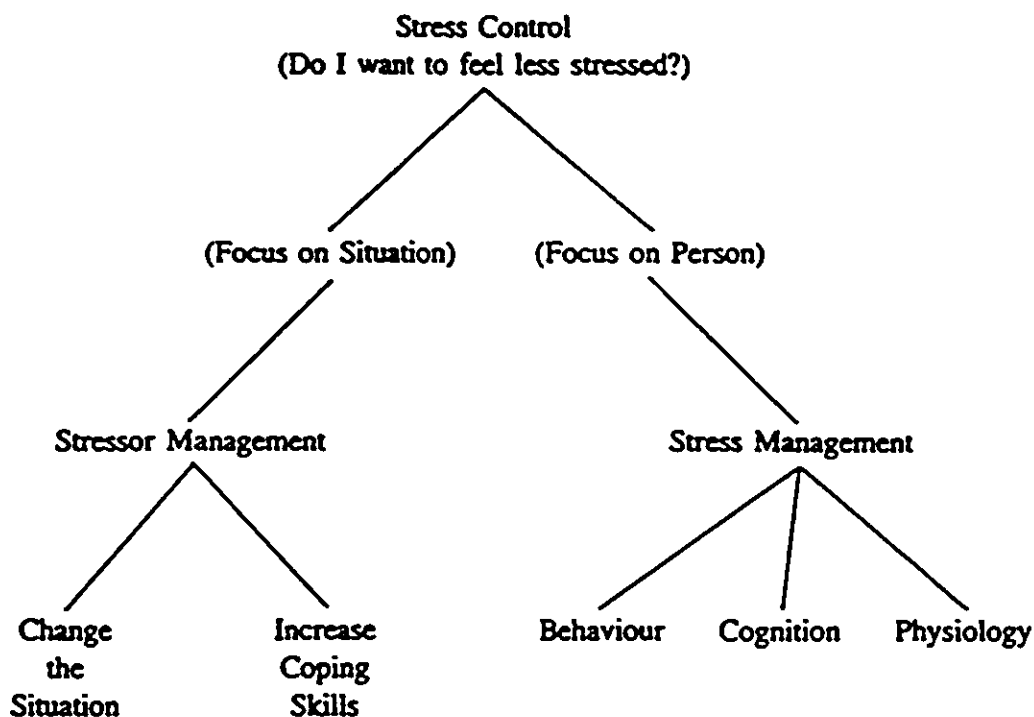


Figure 6. Framework for stress control  
(Hiebert, 1989)

Hiebert advocates moving from left to right on his model, trying first to reduce the demands of the situation so that they lie within the individual's coping repertoire. For example, if a student were suffering from test-anxiety, an appropriate situational response might be to enroll only in courses that do not have final exams. In many situations, it may also be appropriate to attempt to increase the coping resources of the individual -- in the case of test-anxiety, it might be helpful to increase class attendance, study skills and time management skills in order to enable the student to cope with the demands of the current situation. Hiebert certainly advocates exhausting these avenues before resorting to stress management techniques. If a teacher is concerned about student misbehavior, the acquisition of improved classroom management would be preferable to learning how to induce self-hypnosis in the face of classroom chaos.

Sometimes, however, stress management is the appropriate solution. Stress Inoculation (Kalker, 1984; Hiebert, 1989), is a cognitive-behavioral approach to stress management. In stress inoculation, teachers are trained to use logical, analytical and positive approaches which are helpful in discriminating between the concrete demands of the job, and the demands teachers place on themselves. They are also

encouraged to increase the frequency of positive self-talk and, if necessary, to purposefully change their belief systems, recognizing the extent and the limitations of their personal responsibility. Cognitive relaxation techniques can also be used to help teachers cope with stressful situations.

In a similar vein, Pines, Aronson and Kafry (1981) suggest four major strategies for dealing with burnout. The first step is awareness: the individual must acknowledge that a problem exists, and recognize that it is largely a function of the situation, or an occupational hazard. The next step is taking responsibility for action: there must be a willingness to do something about the problem. A key element here is the idea of personal responsibility, as opposed to waiting for the institution to take action. Achieving some degree of cognitive clarity is set out as the next stage; this is described as a reflective process of differentiating between those things that can be changed from those that cannot be changed. At this point the sources of stress have been identified, and the individual proceeds to evaluate the extent to which the stressors can be reduced. At some point in this process it is essential that the individual differentiate between the demands of the job and the demands that he or she places on herself. The final



step is the development of new tools for coping with distress, or improving the range and quality of old tools.

Bransford and Stein (1984) have developed a problem-solving model which incorporates many elements that Pines et al. consider important in dealing with burnout. The model can be represented by the acronym

IDEAL :

I = Identify the problem

D = Define and represent the problem

E = Explore possible strategies

A = Act on the strategies

L = Look back and evaluate the effects of your activities (p.12).

Bransford and Stein suggest that people often try to avoid problems that they think they cannot solve.

When people begin to analyze their approaches to various problems, many discover that they frequently use a 'let me out of here' approach when a problem seems difficult and an answer does not immediately come to mind. At times like this there is a natural tendency to attempt to get out of the situation and do something with a higher probability of success (p.4)

The ability to use a problem-solving strategy such as Bransford and Stein's might reduce the teacher's

feelings of helplessness, by providing her with a means of analyzing and dealing with a problem.

According to Miller and Norman (1979), the mere belief in personal control determines reactions to stressors. As teachers participate in understanding their situation, their feelings of power and influence should increase. Frustration and strain are reduced as the teacher works to remove obstacles to effective performance, and to modify others' expectations of her. Her sense of isolation is reduced as she gains a better understanding of both the organization and the interpersonal relationships within that context (Jackson, 1983).

### Conclusions

It is important to view burnout as a process rather than an event. Burnout is a gradual process that is strongly affected by the individual's perceptions of the situation, and his or her coping resources. If educators are to avoid or control conditions of burnout, they must "engage in rational problem solving, creativity, productive change, progress, and real job satisfaction" (Gmelch, 1983, p. 10).

Burnout cannot be alleviated until strategies are developed that allow the teacher to identify the

sources of her distress and implement strategies to control or remove the stress-producing factors. While coping strategies may be helpful in the short term, no real progress is likely until steps are taken to combat burnout on the institutional and the individual level. "By viewing burnout as a problem of the organization as well as of the individual experiencing the feelings, we can begin to solve the problem rather than live with it" (Schwab, 1983, p.25).

CHAPTER THREE  
LITERATURE REVIEW ON PROCESS

An Emerging Research Paradigm

Caplan and Nelson (1973), in discussing current research on social problems, point out that what is done about a problem depends on how it is defined.

The way a problem is defined determines the attempts at remediation - or even whether attempts will be made. . . . More specifically, problem definition determines the change strategy, the selection of a social action delivery system, and the criteria for evaluation. . . . The action (or inaction) taken will depend largely on whether causes are seen as residing within the individuals or in the environment (p. 220-201).

Caplan and Nelson note that many researchers, particularly psychologists, tend to focus on person-centered variables, with external factors largely being ignored. To a person trained in psychological theory and research, "a world disastrously out of tune with human needs is explained

as a state of mind" (p. 202). Caplan and Nelson argue that it is crucial to explore the relationships between personal and situational factors that have contributed to a particular circumstance.

William McGuire (1973) also advocates changes in the research paradigm for social psychology. He notes that hypotheses in this field tend to be based on a simple, linear, "cause and effect" model, which inadequately reflects the complexities of the individual's cognitive system and of the the larger social system. Argyrus (1968) describes the traditional research paradigm as authoritarian in that the needs of the researcher take precedence over the needs of the the subject(s). The setting, the objectives, and the pace of the activity are all controlled by the researcher, who is responsible for recording, analyzing, and reporting the results of the study. Runkel (1978) cautions that data obtained in this authoritarian manner may contain "certain defects of validity that would be much less likely to occur if the data had been produced from a more equal partnership of client and researcher" (p. 58). McGuire (1973) and Vaughter (1976), urge the adoption of a more complex research paradigm in which human interaction is characterized, not by the traditional authoritarian and hierarchical researcher-subject model (Argyrus, 1968;

Morgan, 1981), but by a mode of interaction characterized by a "reasonable degree of equality, sharing and trust" (Vaughter, 1976, p.146).

Ethnographic or field research is viewed by some as being a preferred alternative in that it is more collaborative and contextually based (Leinhart, 1978; Mishler, 1986; Oakley, 1981; Spradley, 1979; Woolcott, 1973). Leinhart acknowledges that field research may prove frustrating because many of the independent variables are beyond the researcher's control. Field research also produces confusing masses of data that may be catalogued, pulled apart and recombined in an infinite variety of ways. However, offsetting these problems is the opportunity to study a phenomenon within its natural web of interrelated circumstances.

This literature supports the move towards the personalization of the study of teaching, through an examination of the reality experienced by one teacher in her own classroom. This reality is constantly changing, as the teacher shifts from one subject to another, one physical environment to another, and one ethos to another. The reality of the classroom must be acknowledged as subjective, created by individual actors who are in turn influenced by their social and physical environment. The search for objective, quantifiable data is therefore inadequate as a single

paradigm governing research on teaching. Objective data often does not assist us in understanding how individuals perceive, organize, give meaning to, and express their understandings of themselves, their experiences and their worlds. Further, the traditional approach neglects to examine how their understandings are related to their social, cultural and personal circumstances. (Mishler, 1988, p.ix)

#### Discourse and Meaning

Traditional thought tends to view language as a symbolic or concrete means of communicating inner ideas to other people; the means of communication has been seen to have little or no influence on the speaker's way of thinking. In this view,

what is to be said already exists before it is expressed. Speech expresses meaning; it does not reveal or disclose it. Language is merely a means of communication in and through which man can convey meaning; it can never be a source of meaning and light. (Kockelmans, 1972, p.7)

By contrast, phenomenologists such as Merleau-Ponty regard speech as a creative activity that "brings meaning to light and sometimes even originates it" (1972, p.7). Merleau-Ponty maintains that order is

continually made of disorder by our ability to discover meanings, and make sense out of our experience from within it. He believes that it is possible to do so by describing the way our experience develops. Language, then, must be viewed as important as a process, rather than as a product. The location of meaning is in the context of the individual, the "living, engaged, active agent" (TelHennepe, 1965, p.141) who originates meaning in everything he or she does.

In Heideggers's view, explanation is one of the crucial elements in language and in knowing (Edle, 1976, p.77). Through the process of communication, the individual not only attempts to share his or her experiences with another, but arrives at a clearer personal meaning of that experience. Language is seen as one way of enunciating this personal meaning, a meaning that

can be 'approached' but can never be 'possessed'.

. . . There will always be more to say. . . .

Though we all experience and express the same meanings (as we all live in the world), no two persons experience or understand the same thing concerning them in every respect. For this reason . . . meaning [is considered] intrinsically ambiguous (Edle, 1963, p.544).



The very ordinariness and familiarity of language is part of the problem of communication, for meaning may be masked or hidden by the superficial structures of language. Understanding may be an illusion created by the use of familiar words or sentences, which may in fact, get in the way of understanding the "full-blown, variegated, ambiguous world of lived experiences" (Tehennepe, 1965, p.145). Listening is viewed as an essential part of the process.

Kockelmans (1972) explains that "communication is never like a conveying of experiences, opinions, or wishes from the interior of our subjectivity to the interior of another's" (p.24). Communication is more like an attempt to search out the particular words and phrases which will allow us to recall a past experience or shape a new idea. Meaning develops gradually and continuously over the career of the individual in a manner that is unique to that individual. It is dangerous to mistake one's personal experience for universal experience.

Once we understand the role of language in creating personal meaning, we will also understand the limitations of language in expressing that meaning, and our perspective with regard to research on teaching must be affected. In order to gain a better idea of the teaching process, we must try to gain an

understanding of the teacher, how she lives within her experiences and how she constructs a coherent framework that allows her to find meaning within those experiences. Because no two individuals relate to their worlds in the same way, a conscious effort must be made by both the teacher and the researcher to negotiate a shared meaning that allows them to communicate as fully as possible these unshared experiences.

#### The Collaborative Interview

Collaborative research is one of the approaches which can serve as an alternative to the traditional research paradigm. Collaborative interviews are increasingly used by ethnographers, who emphasize the importance of learning from people rather than simply studying them. The essential core of ethnography is a concern with meaning (Spradley, 1979, p.93). Research for the ethnographer becomes an interactive, evolutionary process, in which language plays a key role. Elliot Mishler (1986) advocates the use of interviews as a primary research method. He cautions, however, that how we structure and record interviews, and how we represent and use that talk, is based on important assumptions and presuppositions about relationships between discourse and meaning (p. viii).

When conducting a traditional interview, most interviewers show a "pervasive disregard of the respondent's social and personal contexts of meaning" (Mishler, 1986, p.viii). They fail to attempt to understand the way individuals perceive, organize and express their understandings of themselves and their experiences. Mishler describes the "standard" interview as being abstract, fragmented, and standardized, with meanings defined and controlled by researchers. The natural contexts of meaning are stripped away from both the the questions and the responses, with the authoritarian interviewer using a predetermined scheme of topics, categories for responses and evaluation. In this hierarchical relationship, the researcher judges the adequacy and appropriateness of the subject's responses, and, ultimately, even the meaning of those responses. The interviewer's aims, theories, and findings are usually kept hidden from the respondents. Even the range of possible responses is limited by the procedures and predetermined questions, which reflect the interests and prior knowledge of the interviewer. Mishler warns that this "identity-stripping" interview may be harmful to the individual respondent, as it "may obscure relations between events and experiences and . . . disrupt [the] individual's attempts to make coherent

sense of what is happening to them and around them" (p.120).

Mishler and others (Oakley, 1981; Spradley, 1979, Laslett & Rapoport, 1975) therefore advocate the use of interviews that are jointly constructed by the interviewer and the respondent. In this collaborative process, interviewers rely on their subjects' knowledge and experience rather than on their naivete. The narrative is viewed as a joint production, with the answers offered by the respondent "informing the evolving conversation" (Paget, 1983, in Mishler, 1986, p.97). Although the researcher may have a general view of the areas to be covered during the interview, the questions are not standardized or predetermined. Paget (1986) notes that the questions may be hesitating and halting, formulated and reformulated over the course of the the interview; this process may encourage equally searching responses. Both the interviewer and the respondent are engaged in a search for understanding. The respondent has some measure of control over the pacing and content of the discussion, and is also involved in the process of analysis and interpretation. Laslett and Rapoport (1975) argue that this interactive process enhances the internal validity of the research by utilizing a process that is meaningful to the individuals involved.

### Conclusion

The effect of the collaborative research process is a shift in focus from the investigator's problems of reliability and validity to the respondent's problems - the need to "construct coherent and reasonable worlds of meaning and to make sense of [their own] experiences (Mishler, 1986, p. 118). Mishler maintains that the central task of the researcher must be to find ways to empower respondents, so that they have more control over the processes through which their words are given meaning. Personal context is explicitly introduced as grounds for interpretation (Clandinin, 1985; Wallat, Green, Conlin & Haramis, 1981). Respondents are further empowered as they gain a greater understanding of themselves and the world, and move beyond discourse to the possibility of action, applying their new insights and "gaining a voice" (p.126).

Engaging a teacher in reflective narrative will allow both the teacher and the researcher to discover the personal meaning that is attached to particular actions, and the patterns or generalizations that the teacher believes will be useful in making sense of future situations. In this narrative process, the teacher and the researcher become interdependent as they interact with one another in an attempt to create a shared meaning. One of the primary features of

narrative is its ability to act as an integrative process, allowing the speaker to sift through memory and rearrange or restructure concepts and organizing principles in the light of new experiences or ideas. It follows that in research on teaching, narrative has a role to play, fostering self-growth and the competence-enhancing quality of the research experience for the classroom teacher.

The aim [of research on teaching] should be to increase the person's awareness of his beliefs about teaching and to have him expose them to personal examination. At that point he can become truly selective and work out a synthesis of past and current practices in terms of his own values and understanding. (Lortie, 1974, p.231)

Research should not be something that is done to the teacher. Instead, research should be done with the teacher (Wallat, Green, Conlin & Haramis, 1981) so that the potential for mutually valid outcomes is enhanced. Increased collaboration would allow teachers to share what they know about teaching, and consolidate and integrate their knowledge about children, learning and teaching. This increased knowledge would lead to better decision-making and greater control over educational processes as the teacher monitors her own perceptions of classroom contexts and experiences. As

teachers begin to make sense of their experiences and integrate them into a purposeful, coherent, and personal philosophy of teaching, they will, in fact, be empowered. Teachers will then be able to use all of their intellect, training, experience, creativity and intuition in structuring the best possible climate for learning.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### METHOD

#### The Case Study

As I undertook a review of the literature on distress and burnout, I became increasingly aware of one particular teacher with whom I was acquainted, whose experiences seemed to encompass many of the elements common to distress and burnout. Following Yin's (1984) position that a single experience can be used to illuminate broader theoretical issues, we agreed that we would undertake together a case study of her experiences as a teacher. This case study traced her personal history as a teacher. Ongoing and cumulative analysis, coupled with interactive explorations of meaning determined which elements from the integrated model (see Figure 2) were relevant to her experience. The theoretical framework provided some general guidelines as to what behavior is important in understanding distress and burnout; the literature established a focus for the examination of a



personal history of teacher distress. Previous study has tested the validity of elements of Schwab, Jackson, and Schuler's (1986) model on a population of 339 teachers; this study allowed for an in-depth examination of the sources and consequences of burnout in the life of one teacher.

This case study of "Sarah" (a pseudonym) consisted of a series of in-depth interviews which attempted to trace a teacher's history, and the development of her feelings of distress. The study is descriptive in nature, with initial interviews utilizing what Spradley (1979) calls descriptive questions -- "grand tour" and "mini-tour" questions -- which help to establish the context (e.g. "Could you describe a typical day at school?"). Structural questions were used to discover how Sarah has organized her knowledge about her role as a teacher (e.g. "What kinds of things would you talk about with the other teachers?"). Variations of these questions were often posed to encourage Sarah to probe her memory for additional examples. Contrast questions were also used to clarify meanings, or to discover the dimensions of meaning that Sarah uses to distinguish between objects and events in her world (e.g. "How is a 'good day' different from a 'bad day'?").

In addition, several instruments were used to assist Sarah with self-assessment or situational

analysis. The Teaching Events Stress Inventory (Cichon & Koff, 1978) was designed to measure the degree of stress caused by 36 events associated with the teaching profession. The first week of school is assigned an arbitrary rating of 500, and teachers are asked to rate other events as more or less stressful by assigning a number which indicates their relative stress value. Although a number of the items were irrelevant to Sarah's experience (e.g. colleague assaulted in school; preparing for a strike), use of this inventory allowed us to identify a number of areas that we wished to discuss further, such as conferences with the principal (which Sarah rated at 200-1000), talking to parents about their child's problem (700-800), and involuntary transfers (900).

A second instrument that was used was the Maslach Burnout Inventory, which can be used to assess teachers' current level of burnout. While it is not designed to be used as a diagnostic tool with an individual teacher (Maslach, 1989, personal communication), it was useful in that it provided a series of strongly worded statements that assisted Sarah to focus on her feelings about teaching. Numerous other scales might have been used to measure attitudes towards teaching and stress, such as Girdano and Everley's Dispositional Stress Scale (1977), which

attempts to measure the predisposed traits that teachers may bring to the job, or Clarke's Teacher Occupational Stress Factor Questionnaire (1980), which describes potentially stressful situations, and asks the teacher to rate them from "not stressful" to "extremely stressful". However, the focus of this study was not on quantitative measures; numbers in and of themselves were not seen as having as much significance as the meaning that was given by Sarah to her experiences.

#### The Interview Process

Sarah shared control in determining the course of the interviews. At the beginning of each interview we agreed on the general topics to be discussed that day. However, Sarah frequently added her own topics, or expanded on areas of particular interest. As interviewer, I responded by asking clarifying questions, as well as suggesting new areas for discussion. A series of five interviews, averaging about 50 minutes in length, were required to explore Sarah's experiences with distress and burnout. Sustained contact over a period of several months allowed Sarah to create her personal frame of reference, describing how she thinks and feels, and how she came to develop her perspective. As researcher, I

chose not to develop a clinical detachment from my subject. Instead, I consciously responded with sympathy and understanding, often sharing my own feelings about related experiences. Although I often returned to a topic for elaboration or clarification, I did not press Sarah, believing that, given the opportunity and the supportive climate, she would share as much as she was able (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). I attempted to create and maintain a natural, non-threatening atmosphere, and, as the interviews proceeded, we often were able to capture the informality of a "conversation between two trusting parties, rather than . . . a formal question-and-answer session between a researcher and a respondent" (p.43).

Spradley (1979) describes a sequence of stages in the rapport-building process that can be used to guide the choice of questions and response strategies (see Figure 7). He also suggests several strategies for encouraging the flow of conversation, including "asymmetrical turn taking, expressing interest, expressing cultural ignorance, repeating, restating informant's terms, incorporating informant's terms, creating hypothetical situations, asking friendly questions" (p. 67, fig. 2.1).

Mishler (1986) notes that in a traditional interview, the interviewer's aims, theories, and

## Building Rapport in an Ethnographic Interview

<u>Stage</u>	<u>Behavior of Subject</u>	<u>Role of Researcher</u>
apprehension	mistrusts motives and purpose of researcher	asks general descriptive questions: listens, shows interest: non-judgemental responses
exploration	listens, observes, tests relationship: increasing sense of sharing, relaxation	uses repeated explanations: restates subject's ideas, using key phrases and terms
cooperation	talking together: offers personal information: feels free to ask questions	shares role in defining process
participation	accepts role: becomes more assertive: analyzes from own perspective	collaborates in discovering patterns

Figure 7. Building Rapport in an Ethnographic Interview

(from Spradley, 1979)

findings are usually kept hidden from the respondents, with procedures and predetermined questions reflecting the interests and prior knowledge of the interviewer. In this study, a conscious effort was made to inform Sarah of the aims of the project and of the process that was being used, in order that she could not only

make sense of what was happening, but could also become a partner in constructing the narrative (Laslett & Rapoport, 1975; Mishler, 1986; Oakley, 1981; Spradley, 1979). Therefore, Sarah and I regularly discussed strategy, often planning out the next step in our study, or discussing our impressions of the process in which we were engaged.

To demonstrate the interactive process, I have selected several excerpts from the transcripts. Although some of the pauses, "um's and uh's" and repetitions have been omitted, the conversation in all other ways is as transcribed. It will be evident from the excerpts that my questions were not predetermined, although I had, based on my review of the literature, some general areas that I wished to cover. Paget (1983, in Mishler, 1986), in reflecting on her interviews with female artists, notes that questions may be hesitating and halting, formulated and reformulated over the course of the the interview. She feels that this process may encourage equally searching responses, for both the interviewer and the respondent are engaged in a search for understanding.

The first excerpt is taken from the opening minutes of the first interview, and shows an example of a grand tour question:

B: What I'd like to do today is just to get us started in conversation, and although I know something about your teaching situation, I'm going to ask you some very general questions about your teaching, your classroom and what things work on a daily basis for you. So if you think that I'm asking questions to which I probably should know the answer, (Sarah chimes in) "Answer it anyway!" (both laugh).

S: I got it!

B: If you don't mind. Okay? Maybe we could start by having you describe a typical day at school. Just tell me what you do when you first arrive at school, and kind of walk through the day.

S: I walk in the door, take off my coat, look at my plans. See if there is anything that I left undone from the last day, because I always try to get my plans ready the night before. And if I have any running off or anything to do, I run around and do that. I don't have a lot of time in the morning. And then I go and have coffee if there's time. And then when the bell rings, I start the class. . . . Do you want me to carry on?

B: Umhmm. (1-1)\*

The next excerpt, also from the first interview, shows an example of a descriptive question, designed to begin to discover how Sarah has organized her teaching experiences:

B: You said that you spend some time talking to teachers.

S: Usually grade one teachers, or the librarian.

B: What kind of things would you talk about during these times?

S: Problems we're having, common planning, because we all teach grade one, arranging some testing, arranging common events that we may be doing, sometimes planning some centers, . . . sharing materials. That's mostly what I do. . . .

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\* Throughout this case study the reader will encounter parenthetical notations describing the transcript from which the quotation was taken. For example, (1-3) would refer to the first interview, page 3. The letter 'r' following such a notation, (1-3)r, indicates that the quotation is taken from a response that was noted in the margins of the transcript. A series of dashes - - - indicates that the speaker paused, while a series of dots . . . indicates that a portion of the speech has been deleted. The transcripts themselves, because they contain discussions of personal and sensitive issues, have not been appended to this document.



B: You said that you talked with teachers about problems.

S: Discipline problems, learning problems, how did you teach this unit? What did you do with tens and ones? Anything. Problems we had out on the playground. Usually just to get some other feedback. It's really hard to work in a vacuum. (1-3)

Towards the end of the first interview, I attempted to provide a summary of what we had done so far, so that Sarah would begin to have an idea of the structure of the interviews. I also wanted her, at this point, to begin to consciously participate in the construction of the process.

B: Okay, what I'd like to do now is to type up a transcript of what we've talked about and from that I think will come things that pique our interest, where we can identify things that we'd like to pursue - - -

S: Okay.

B: - - - in terms of discussion, things that you've alluded to that are concerns or interests, or things that I'd like to get - - - more if you, sort of extend the discussion. Is there anything that you can suggest at this point that you would like to discuss in more

detail at this time, - - - or any direction that you'd like to go?

S: - - - I don't - - - think so, although you didn't finish your grand tour because you didn't talk about my training or experience, or extra-curricular, - - - or personal skills, or likes and dislikes, and I don't know if you want to cover that or not.

B: I think those are important.

S: Yeah.

B: All right. Well, why don't we start with those next time? (1-18,19)

After each interview, a complete transcript was prepared. Two copies of each transcript were printed. One was used for my own notes on process and content. On the second copy, two columns were added along the right side of each page. My comments and questions, arising from my analysis of the interview, were noted in the first column, while the second column was available for Sarah's response. Sarah's access to the transcripts allowed her to clarify responses, validate conclusions, and pose questions of her own. Subsequent interviews were planned in the context of what had already been discussed. In addition, Sarah had an opportunity to respond to my review of the literature, drafts of particular chapters, and the thesis as a

whole. This process is derived from the work of Mishler (1986), Yin (1984), and Spradley (1979), and modelled by Smith (1987), in her case study of a woman in science at the University of Lethbridge.

The interview process itself was the subject of some discussion. I started the second interview by asking Sarah how she had felt before and during the first interview -- whether she had found it a difficult process. Although she reported feeling a little strange at first, she said she hadn't found it too threatening, because it had covered pretty "basic territory" (2-1). We talked about her ability to talk in complete sentences, which I found impressive, given my tendency to stop midsentence to reconsider an idea or search for a word. Sarah admitted to sharing my difficulty in reaching for a particular word at times. "I mean the words are in there; it just takes a while to find them. . . . The pathways aren't as well-defined [as we age]" (2-2). We discussed the ability of conversation or verbalization to define the pathways, making new connections or make old ones clearer.

Sarah noted that she was tired at the end of the interview. "It's hard to know that you're on tape, and that you have to keep going all the time" (2-2). We talked several times about our reactions to seeing our

words in print. I was struck by the length of some of my pauses, as I formulated a question or struggled to find the words which would create the atmosphere that I was trying to establish and maintain. Sarah also felt uncomfortable at times when she read the transcripts, feeling that she had stated something too strongly, or that she sounded pompous, although there was nothing in particular that she wanted to change; "I would still probably say most of the same things again" (2-2). We agreed that the problem with transferring speech to print is that it gives it a permanency that was not intended when you had the conversation. Written speech is often softened by qualifiers or careful word choice. As Sarah said, "you're going from one language to another, and you'd edit a lot of things out" (3-1).

#### Emerging Themes

Analysis of the interview transcripts attempted to identify the emerging themes in three general areas: the contributors to distress in Sarah's teaching, the aspects of burnout she has experienced, and the strategies she uses to cope with her distress. These topics are loosely based on the models of burnout provided by Iwanicki (1983) and Schwab, Jackson & Schuler (1986). Sarah's interpretations were regarded as being of primary importance in understanding the

"inner dynamics" of burnout (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Macmillan & Schumacher, 1984). It is appropriate to place a study of teacher distress in a personal and contextual perspective because of the nature of burnout itself. As Bogdan and Biklen say, "to divorce the act, word or gesture from its context is . . . to lose sight of its significance" (1982, p.27).

It is also vital that any examination of teaching be placed in a contextual framework. The school and classroom of today are generally acknowledged to be complex social systems (Cedoline, 1982; Heubner, 1987; Hoover & Dempsey, 1982; Schlechty, 1976). The individual teacher may find this environment to be dangerous and overpowering, or perceive that she is inadequate to cope with it. The teacher's beliefs and experiences "shape both the coping process and its behavioral expression" (Lazarus, 1966, p. 245). In addition, pressures external to teaching may contribute to a teacher's mounting distress (Dunham, 1984; Latack, 1981). In order to make sense of these complex and interactive components, "attention needs to be paid to the voices to teachers themselves - teachers and teaching needs to be portrayed in a way that places the teacher at the center of the educational process" (Falk, 1987, p.x).

### Negotiating Meaning

Throughout the interviews and our written notes to one another, we attempted to find relationships between events and experiences and to make sense of what has happened to Sarah (Mishler, 1986). We relied on Sarah's knowledge and her experience and on her insightful comments, rather than on the naivete that is often valued in traditional interviews. As Sarah attempted to share her experiences with me, she arrived at a clearer personal meaning of that experience. Similarly, as I struggled to understand her experience from her perspective, my own meanings were enriched and strengthened.

As we discussed, explained, and negotiated a shared meaning, we came to realize that our view of language and our interpretations of our experiences were often quite different. We sometimes found that the very ordinariness and familiarity of our language became part of the problem of communication (Tehennepe, 1965). Although we used familiar words and sentences, they often held quite different meanings for the two of us. At one point, Sarah introduced the notion of teachers reflecting on what they were doing, indicating that "teachers who reflect on what they've done are maybe able, - - - better in touch with their teaching, and able to improve and so on". As this was a topic

which held great interest for me, I pursued it with Sarah:

B: Are you a reflective person?

S: (laughs) I don't know.

B: Well, do you spend time thinking about what you've done and analyzing it? (3-16)

Although Sarah's answer was affirmative, quite a lengthy discussion followed, with Sarah trying to explain the process that she called rehearsal, and myself trying to determine whether this was what I had called reflection. In the end, after we both had responded to the transcript, we agreed that rehearsal generally occurred before teaching, while reflection took place afterward. This process occurred frequently as we defined, redefined, or clarified until we reached a shared meaning.

I often asked Sarah to give examples of a concept to help me understand it, or posed alternatives in what Spradley (1979) calls contrast questions.

B: Do you have a sense of always keeping your eye on the clock, or do you have a sense of an internalized feeling for when it's time to move on?

S: Ah, but the two things are different, though. You have to keep your eye on the clock because you have so much work to get through. Your

internal or your sense tells you when the kids have had enough, or when you've had enough, and the two things don't always coincide. (3-6)

In this way, Sarah often refused the choice, indicating repeatedly that teaching is a very complex process, that cannot adequately be described by a single definitive statement. This perhaps is the root of some of Sarah's frustration with teaching, for she describes herself as being a "very black and white sort of person" (2-25).

#### The Teacher's Voice

At several points during the interviews, I reminded Sarah that our major purpose was to ensure that we told her story. Although I naturally picked up on themes that had appeared in my review of the literature, I stressed to Sarah that I wanted to be careful that the "framework that I'm using accurately reflects your concerns, that it doesn't skew your concerns, so if you feel that . . . the emphasis isn't correct, then you can feel free to correct me" (3-5). Our relationship during the five interviews was increasingly informal, and we found ourselves interjecting positive responses, such as "yeah" or "umhmm" much more frequently as the interviews progressed. Sarah occasionally suggested



words or phrases for me when I paused, and occasionally asked a question of her own.

B: You must have been good in school.

S: I was good academically.

B: And yet you regard learning as hard work.

S: Well, it is! Do you like studying? Do you like writing papers?

B: Yeah, I do.

S: Oh, well! (2-14)

S: How strange! (2-14r)

Like Oakley (1981), I found it hard to avoid answering these questions, and like Oakley, decided that it was only fair to try to give something back to someone who was giving me her time, her cooperation, and her confidences.

The mythology of "hygienic" research with its accompanying mystification of the researcher and the researched as objective instruments of data production [must] be replaced by the recognition that personal involvement is more than dangerous bias - it is the condition under which people come to know each other and admit others into their lives. (p.59)

As we talked and often laughed together, I came to have real affection for this woman who had been willing to share so much of her life story with me. I found that

we shared many similar experiences, and came to appreciate her as a unique individual who had responded to life's challenges in a way that was very much her own.

It is hoped that this interactive process has increased our understanding of the meaning that one teacher attaches to the events in her professional life. Because of her direct involvement in this interpretive process, Sarah was offered the opportunity to become a co-author of the study, a choice that would not necessarily have required her to give up her anonymity - i.e. she could have chosen to retain her pseudonym. The priority at all times in the writing of the case study has been the protection of Sarah's privacy, and the respect for her rights, interests and feelings.

CHAPTER FIVE  
SARAH'S STORY

The Context of the Story

The factors that affect Sarah's life as a teacher are complex and varied. The web of her life is spun of many different threads, which are interwoven in a complex and intricate pattern. Sarah is articulate and thoughtful, but would not describe herself as a reflective person. For her, the interviews provided an opportunity to think about her life as a teacher and to examine her commitments and priorities.

Sarah had described herself as "highly stressed" and was eager to explore the nature of her feelings through a series of interviews. Over a four-month period, we discussed a wide variety of topics, ranging from her training as a teacher to her relationships with students, colleagues, and parents. Although Sarah is a very private person, she was willing to discuss many areas of her professional life and how it is interwoven with her other life as mother, wife, and homemaker. As noted earlier, some elements of our

discussion have not been included in this report, because of their personal and sensitive nature.

During the study, I regularly reviewed the transcripts and developed preliminary notations regarding themes that seemed to be emerging, as a way of organizing and making sense of the data. As the interviews progressed, I added new information to the categories that I had established, discussed them with Sarah, and subsequently modified, combined or rejected some of the earlier categories. McCall (1986) used a similar process, derived from Glasser and Strauss' (1967) "constant comparative" method of analysis, in her study of one young woman's experience in learning to teach.

Iwanicki's (1983) study of the sources of teacher stress identifies three major categories of stressors (see Figure 4). In his model, organizational and role-related stressors are shown to be interrelated and cumulative, with the strength of the stressor increasing in proportion to its relationship to the individual's sense of self. This seems to be true in Sarah's case, as the intensity of emotion and the length of discussion seemed to increase as the topic moved from societal to institutional to personal concerns. The integrated model of stress and burnout (see Figure 2) proved to be another valuable reference

point for the themes which emerged in Sarah's story. However, personal histories tend not to be as tidy as models, so the themes do not have a direct correspondence with the terminology of the models. Instead, they are descriptive of the more individualized experience lived by one teacher.

In interpreting Sarah's story, I attempted to think as she would think, and feel what she had felt. This sometimes appeared to be relatively easy, as I have experienced some of the forces which are at work in her life. However, it is always dangerous to presume that one's experiences or reactions are similar to another individual's, for we can only know a small part of another person's life. My perceptions of Sarah's experiences were influenced by my own career as a teacher and an administrator, my graduate work in education, my emerging feminist orientation, my commitment to understanding and encouraging others in their personal and professional growth, and my own experiences as a working wife and mother.

### Sarah

#### An Introduction

Raised in a small town, one of several children in a close-knit family, Sarah left home at the age of seventeen to begin her university training at a large

university. Although she completed two years in a Fine Arts program, she had by that time realized that she was preparing herself for a career that she did not want. After some thought, she switched to the Faculty of Education. She selected the secondary education route in order to utilize her fine arts courses, but found her student teaching experiences in junior and senior high classrooms to be quite intimidating, perhaps because she was only eighteen at the time. When she received her teaching certificate, she accepted a teaching position in the primary grades, and has remained at that level. She likes the innocence of young children, and the sense of discovery and enthusiasm that they bring to their learning; she also finds them easier to manage, as she admits that she doesn't seem to have a "knack for dealing with major discipline problems" (2-6).

After several years, Sarah married, and interrupted her teaching for year-long maternity leaves for the birth of each of her three children. Sarah's children are now in school, and she anticipates that she will continue teaching for many years, as she is only in her early forties. Like many working parents, Sarah is challenged by the busy schedule of her two younger children, who are involved in numerous lessons. However, Sarah faces an additional challenge in her

oldest child, who is mentally handicapped, and requires a tremendous amount of physical and emotional energy. Sarah has learned to become a strong and active advocate for her son's education and care.

Sarah has been teaching for 15 years. She has taught in five different schools in the same school district, and is currently teaching grade one. In addition to her teaching and family responsibilities, Sarah also is a partner in her husband's business.

#### Theme #1: Time Management

Because of her varied roles and responsibilities, Sarah describes her life as being very full. When describing her daily routines, Sarah often refers to the pressures of time. Sarah feels that she is quite rushed in the morning, because of the need to get her family and home life organized for the day before she leaves for work, and she finds that she must leave the school by 4:30 in order to meet her family commitments. As a result, she usually chooses to remain at school for lunch. The daily thirty-minute "preparation time" which occurs as a result of early dismissal of the first-graders at noon is usually devoted to individual assistance for those students who require a little more time or personal attention, leaving little time for preparation or marking. There never seems to be enough

time for planning, locating resources, or conferring with other teachers.

"We can think of time as the single most important, general resource teachers possess in their quest for productivity and psychic reward; ineffective allocations of time are costly" (Lortie, 1974, p.177). Sarah attempts to enhance the value of the time she has by placing a high priority on planning. Before she leaves the building each day, she ensures that she has completed her plans for the next day. In order to reduce the time required to collect resources from the library or other areas of the school, Sarah has brought many of her own children's books and games into her classroom. She complains that her classroom is often messy because she doesn't have time to devote to organizing materials on a regular basis; she finds it difficult to walk out of the classroom when it is in this condition.

As Sarah plans her instructional program, she tries to build in flexibility, allowing for adjustments to on-the-spot events or unanticipated responses from the children. However, she sees time as being linear only during the planning process. In the reality of the classroom, time is much more elastic. "When you get really involved with something, you don't have a sense of time passing. . . . Experiences [become]



all-encompassing that way" (4-12). Sarah's internal sense of timing tells her when the children have had enough of a particular activity; this does not always coincide with the external clock. Although she sometimes would prefer to go with her intuition, she feels that she is obligated to follow the clock. She often feels a sense of urgency to complete the tasks or cover the content which she has laid out in her plans; "I have to get this done now, today" (3-6). Otherwise, she worries that she will fall behind in her attempt to cover the prescribed curriculum. She feels that she must measure her accomplishments against the "day clock, the month clock, and the year clock" (3-7).

Sarah's awareness of the pressures of time carries over into other aspects of her life, as she attempts to fulfill the roles of mother, wife, homemaker and partner in her husband's business. She feels that she must be extremely well-organized and alert, and has chosen to compartmentalize her life so that the demands of one area do not interfere with the demands of another. She therefore attempts to keep school and home separate, and tries not to bring schoolwork home in the evenings or on weekends, as she has found that she often forgets to do it. Instead, she returns to the school on a weekend for a few hours if she has a major task to complete.

Sarah regards the compartmentalization of her life as a conscious choice that she has made; "that's my way of dealing with it ... it mostly works for me" (3-9). This compartmentalization is usually successful, but Sarah reports that if she is upset by something that has happened at school, or is feeling pressured by report cards or another major event at school, she often has difficulty sleeping. This results in physical fatigue, which "you can sleep away" (2-18), as well as mental and emotional fatigue, which Sarah feels sometimes impair her ability to perform as she would like. This is particularly evident in times of conflict with a disruptive student, a colleague, a parent, or an administrator.

#### Theme #2: Learning to Teach

The nature of Sarah's preparation for teaching appears to have played an important role in determining Sarah's view of herself as a teacher. She entered university at an unusually young age, and after two years in a fine arts program, entered a Faculty of Education. She says "I had to think of something to do . . . and so I thought, well, I'll go into teaching. At least some of my courses will apply to teaching. So I fell into it, like lots of teachers do" (Sarah, 2-6; McCall, 1986).

Sarah describes her student teaching experiences at the secondary level as "scary", so chose to apply for a teaching position at the primary level. Because Sarah felt that her background for teaching at this level was inadequate, she continued to upgrade her "paper qualifications" by taking about one university course a year. She stopped doing this several years ago, because of other commitments.

"I think I would have been quite a different teacher had I received elementary training. . . . I had, and still in some areas suffer a massive lack of confidence in my abilities in those areas. . . . I think it would have changed my attitude in that way. [You are] more willing to experiment with new things if you know that your basic philosophy is okay (2-33,34).

"I think it's important to keep retraining, all the time. It's hard, hard work, but I think it's important, You have to force yourself" (2-10). For Sarah, it is important to keep informed of new trends in education, but she finds change difficult. She has a guarded response to what she perceives may be fads in curriculum or teaching strategies, hanging back somewhat from what "may be just another bandwagon" (3-7r). Her conservative nature, coupled with a continuing sense of insecurity, may make it difficult

to judge the intrinsic worth of a popular new program. She tends to devalue her experience as a teacher, continuing to return to what she regards as an inadequate pedagogical foundation. However, this may be an indication of low self-esteem, rather than the need for more training.

Some of Sarah's low self-esteem may be related to her perception of teaching as a low-status job.

Even though I know that it's important that children have good teachers, I'm not sure that I should be one of them. And that's something that I'm always fighting within myself, especially when I look at teachers as a group. . . . Maybe that's one of the reasons why I haven't made a larger commitment to teaching. . . . Individually, there are some very nice people, . . . but my characterization of the group "teacher" would be more negative than positive (5-27).

### Theme #3: The School as an Institution:

The physical conditions under which a teacher must work often affect their performance (Conners, 1983). Herzberg (in Wangberg, 1984), in discussing the teacher's need for safety, convenience and adequate space, says that unless the teacher's basic hygiene needs are met, she cannot concentrate on higher level

needs such as independence or self-improvement. For Sarah, a potential safety hazard proved to be a continuing source of concern, as she was unable, for several months, to convince the administration that equipment stored in front of the fire exit should be moved. However, she classes other concerns about the building as no more than "irritants": inadequate storage, glare from the windows on the blackboard, and a capricious heating system. Although she complains of always being cold at work, she generally does not view these minor concerns as having a serious effect on her teaching, although she may complain more when she is disturbed about larger issues such as a disruptive child.

Working in a school that is part of an educational system causes other difficulties for Sarah. She recognizes that any public school system caters to the majority of its clientele, but she feels some regret that more cannot be done for the students at either extreme. She wishes that she could do more for the brighter children in her classroom; this becomes evident as she talks about parent conferences:

Sometimes you know you're not providing a good enough program for them . . . or stimulating enough, and the parents sort of sit there, and you know they're thinking, "Well, I guess I'll do this

at home with my child." . . . I can only do my best. I will do the very best that I can do all the time, but I am only another human being (3-16).

Like many other teachers (Long, 1988), Sarah finds the end of the school year to be particularly stressful. There are an unusual number of demands on the classroom teacher at a time when teachers are already physically and emotionally exhausted. Tired, school-weary children must be "kept busy" while teachers concern themselves with testing, marking, and record-keeping. New supplies and texts must be ordered for the fall, sometimes involving major decisions regarding new materials and methodology. Classrooms are sometimes shifted to a new location in the school, and common areas must be tidied and inventoried. These demands are sometimes compounded by the need to make difficult decisions regarding retention or promotion of a child, or adjust to the idea of a new teaching assignment. The pressure is further intensified by unexpected directives from the school or district administration. Little wonder that Sarah reports feeling

rushed, tired, not even vaguely joyful, because I'm so tired and I know I have so much work to do yet. And I know I'll end in July with a slam, and

there it'll be, hopefully hot, and I'll be sleeping (4-18).

Theme #4: Life in the Classroom: The Search for  
Autonomy

It is one thing for teachers to prefer boundedness, to want autonomy and more potentially productive time; it is another thing to get them. Teachers cannot take such matters for granted. . . . They are dependent on the readiness of administrators, fellow teachers, and parents to grant them the work conditions they desire.  
(Lortie, 1974, p.181)

As a result, Lortie suggests that teachers tend to focus their attention on their immediate work area -- the classroom -- where their sense of autonomy and control is greatest, and where they experience their greatest rewards. Yet teachers seem to assume that the flow of accomplishment and rewards will be erratic, even within the bounded walls of the classroom.

Sarah often seems to feel that she is unable to control many of the important aspects of her teaching situation. When asked to describe the major organizing events in her teaching year, Sarah noted that reporting times and seasonal activities determined some of what happened in her classroom. Another organizer is

Sarah's awareness of the developmental level of the children in her class. At the beginning of the year, the children are "only able to do one thing for five or ten minutes, so you're like a Jack-in-the-box, you're changing all the time and you have to keep them moving" (1-8). A major purpose of a wide range of activities at the beginning of the year is the informal assessment of the level of skills and knowledge of each child.

Lots of movement, lots of singing, lots of rhythmic reading, poems and fairy tales, chanting, to try to find out what they know. Talking, teaching them a little bit of basic control, drawing, printing, coloring, cutting, to see how much of what they can do (1-11,12).

Sarah does many of these activities at the beginning of the year, but as the children become more skilled and more independent, the nature of the activities in the classroom changes somewhat, with more attention paid to the prescribed curriculum. Sarah is very conscientious about covering the curriculum, and she feels that the curriculum documents in the various subject areas have become more prescriptive and more demanding over the years. She returned to this topic several times during the interviews.

Sarah feels the need to review the provincial program of studies regularly, and has established a



series of informal "checkpoints" that she uses to assess her progress throughout the year.

[You] do your best to be where you want at each checkpoint, but you don't always make it. I keep dates in my guidebooks. When I introduce a concept or something, I date it, and so I've got six or eight years of dates, and I can vary by as much as a month in some of these things, which is sometimes indicative of the class, and sometimes indicative of a special event in that year, like the Olympics, which tends to slow things that year. . . . I guess I don't worry very much because I know I'll get there in the end (1-10).

The one thing Sarah is able to adjust and control is the level of her expectations of the children. She describes herself as being quite willing to work with slow children, adjusting objectives, strategies and time as required in order to meet the educational needs of these children. She also tries to adapt her teaching to the learning needs of her other students. Although she has plans and checkpoints, she tries to build flexibility into her lesson and unit plans. This seems to be the source of some internal conflict for Sarah, as she attempts to keep pace with her plans, and still allow for response to unexpected events or unanticipated student responses.

I'm much more stern with myself about adhering to my plans . . . with myself, not so much with the kids, but if I make on-the-spot adjustments, sometimes I really screw myself up, because I've spent a lot of time planning it, and then I didn't even go and look at my plan. That's very annoying, some days (3-7).

Lortie compares the work of a teacher with an artistic production, but notes that the teacher must serve as actor, stage manager, and director, and often as playwright, playing all of these roles simultaneously, and without the advantage of the lighting, scenery, costumes and props that help to focus the audience's attention. "We should also recall that students, unlike theatre audiences, have not come voluntarily" (p. 166). Lortie describes the relationship between students and teachers as a "dual captivity . . . [in which] each was forced to come to terms with an externally imposed requirement of cooperation" (p.4.).

Given the demands and the constraints of the job, it is sometimes difficult for teachers to achieve the "continuous, productive engagement with students" (p.175) that they desire. Like Lortie's teachers, Sarah finds herself feeling frustrated and resentful of events that disrupt the flow of learning activities

within her classroom. Sometimes the disruptions originate within the classroom itself. Sarah describes a "good class" as one in which the children have good work habits and good behavior.

If I have a good class, the job is made much easier and more joyful. . . . With a bad class, it's a struggle all the time, and you feel as if you're in a war zone. And then you feel guilty because you always have some nice children in there too. (4-21).

Sarah regrets that her teacher preparation did not deal more with classroom management and discipline strategies.

Even teachers who have finished their teacher training go into the classroom the first day and wonder what to do, because they haven't been trained properly. . . . I think that somehow we need a book that says, "If a kid stands up in class and starts talking and doesn't do his work, here's what you could do". I think that's what we need (4-3).

However, as the discussion progressed, Sarah also noted that every teacher seems to have to work out her own set of strategies, because of differences in personality and teaching style. As an alternative to the "book", she suggested that teachers might benefit

from an extended student teaching practicum, the opportunity to work with a mentor-teacher during their first years of practice, and regular opportunities to talk with their colleagues about classroom concerns.

Theme #5: Collegial Relationships: The Search for Proximity

Sarah values the supportive relationships she has with a few of her colleagues.

As with any intense experience, and teaching is, if you're involved in it, there's a certain need to let off steam and to talk about it, to take away some of the intensity of it, and being able to talk to another teacher, you're already talking the same language, and so it's very helpful, for me. It saves my family (2-22).

Sarah feels that there are other benefits, as well, in that shared planning can be a big time-saver. She and her colleagues share resources and sometimes trade classes for some subjects. Although she enjoys these mutually supportive relationships, she does not like to have another adult in her classroom, as she finds this threatening. She enjoys her work with young children, in part because she finds them to be non-judgemental and thus, non-threatening.

Sarah describes a situation in one school in which she taught which was particularly satisfying. Six grade one teachers were located in a separate wing of the school, and developed a strong sense of teamwork. It began as two teachers were experimenting with some new approaches to teaching language arts.

They were searching and needing a lot of support, and they happened to be very verbal people who needed to talk a lot, and so we had weekly grade meetings, and boy, we all learned a lot. . . . We shared materials and were in and out of each others' classrooms, we taught each others' lessons. . . . It was a good experience (4-8,9).

Sarah thinks that part of the reason for their success was their physical proximity to one another, and the fact that other people "sort of left us alone" (4-9).

Sarah's experiences appear to support the work of Lortie (1974), who sees teaching as highly individualistic, with teachers acquiring, through experience, personally tested practices, rather than relying on pedagogical theory. Strategies that work are treasured and reused; practices suggested by others are selectively adapted, according to the idiosyncratic context of personal style and contextual conditions. The teacher is the only judge of "what works for me". "From this perspective, socialization into teaching is

largely self-socialization; one's personal predispositions are not only relevant but, in fact, stand at the core of becoming a teacher" (p. 79).

As a result, Lortie suggests that some tension might be expected between the "impulse towards distance and the need for proximity - between the wish for boundedness and the search for assistance" (p.193). Close pairings between teachers are often based on friendship, and informal, mutual choice. Like other teachers, Sarah is willing to engage in extensive cooperation with other teachers, as long as the boundaries of her classroom are respected when she is actually working with students.

I rarely feel isolated. Sometimes I feel I'm working on my own, but all I have to do is step outside my classroom, and then I'm not isolated anymore. . . . Some people do a lot more visiting and sharing than others, but we're forced together more all the time, whether we'd like to be or not.

Sometimes we'd rather be left alone (4-1,2).

Sarah feels that increasingly, schools are organized to encourage interdependence and communication among teachers. She values her independence and is somewhat wary of the pressure to go along with the group.

For Sarah, there appears to be a fine line between isolation and independence, supporting and intruding.

She values a degree of involvement in school decisions, but finds staff meetings extremely tedious, usually going home with a severe headache. She values accurate, up-to-date information, and resents finding out about things through hearsay, or after the fact. However, she finds speaking up about her concerns at staff meetings to be very difficult; she feels that her remarks may be out of place, and often "I end up saying more than I want because I have to get it out in a rush" (4-34). Hyson (1982) and McCall (1986) suggest that women have been socialized to believe they have no right to protest. "They would rather rage inside than calmly inform a superior that something is wrong" (p.30). Sarah wonders if other teachers feel as she does, given their tendency to "sit there in the staff meeting, all like lumps of clay, and rarely do you hear them speak up in the meeting. They speak up at coffee, later, when nothing can be done, and that just infuriates me!" (4-34). This is another example of teachers' resentment of colleagues who fail to hold up their end of less pleasant schoolwide tasks (Lortie, 1974).

#### Theme #6: The Role of the Principal

During the interviews, Sarah was encouraged to comment on the organizational structure of schools, and

the relationships between the individuals and groups within the school community. In the course of this discussion, perhaps because of my own interest and encouragement, Sarah commented at some length on the role of school principals in her life as a teacher. She later admitted to continuing discomfort with her remarks about administrators; she explained that she doesn't discuss administrators very often. "You have to get along with them, you know. You don't usually talk about them as well" (4-10). In spite of her self-described reticence, Sarah made some very perceptive and pertinent observations about the role of the principal in the life of a teacher.

Sarah has very positive feelings about her first principal who, she says, kept her in teaching. She describes this man as being very opinionated, but also very visible, and supportive. He was often in and out of classrooms, and knew all of the children in the school. For a young, inexperienced teacher, he provided a valuable role-model in terms of relationships, values, and teaching strategies.

No matter how stupid your comments, he always listened and let you say your piece. . . . I guess he respected us as people, and acknowledged that we were adults, even though really I was very young, and really wasn't much of an adult. So we



sort of grew into the role that he seemed to be projecting for us. . . . There was no question - you knew what your role was. It was well-defined, and I guess I appreciated that (2-29,30).

Sarah admired this principal's sense of direction, and his ability to combine authority with a sense of responsibility and concern. She admits that now, as an experienced teacher, she might be a little startled and perhaps even resentful of the single-minded vision of her first principal, but recalls that there was lots of opportunity for the staff to speak up. "He would listen and listen and listen, and he would take extra time and he'd have extra meetings if that's what the staff wanted. . . . We might not like things, but we certainly had a chance to speak up" (3-26).

Sarah feels that her role as a teacher is no longer clearly defined. In the absence of clear expectations, older teachers seem to rely on past experiences to guide them in new situations.

And maybe that's good and maybe that's not, but certainly the younger teachers don't come in with those preconceived notions, and are always surprised when the older teachers do certain things, and may not notice it until after the fact (3-27).

This inconsistency of expectation often leads to confusion or discord, as teachers appear to resent other teachers who fail to hold up their end of less pleasant school-wide tasks (Lortie, 1974). Sarah feels that an administrator with high visibility, good communication skills, and a clear sense of purpose and personal values can have a strong positive effect on the school climate.

If you have a gung-ho administrator who's really interested in what you're doing, then you want to make sure that what you're doing is interesting. You try to do that anyway, but if you know that someone is interested, you'll go that extra mile. . . . You're sort of out on a limb as a teacher. It's nice to know that someone is watching the limb (3-28,29).

#### Theme #7: Career Transitions

Within any bureaucratic organization, there is the opportunity for worker mobility. For most teachers, moves tend to be horizontal rather than vertical, but as career transitions, they may still be stressful for some teachers. Because Sarah still suffers from some lack of confidence as a teacher and finds new relationships difficult, she has always felt anxious about new teaching assignments. She explains that she

is sometimes apprehensive about the administration in a new school, and dislikes having to ask "foolish" questions. "It's very time-consuming, just getting used to things, and feeling a part of things" (3-23). She still feels strong resentment about a transfer that occurred several years ago. The school year had already begun when changes in enrolments forced a move from one school to another. It was literally an overnight move, and the receiving school was unprepared for her arrival. "The new staff thought I was a sub for the first ten days" (3-22).

An involuntary transfer forces the teacher into a new situation, in which all of the fundamental relationships and organizational structures may be different. A teacher who has learned to function well in a familiar situation may feel isolated and confused in a new school. Teachers have little power in the school organization, and their success is often dependent upon their relationships, not only with administrators, but with secretaries and caretakers as well, who can provide information and services that make the teacher's life much more pleasant. A newly transferred teacher must also establish professional credibility and social relationships with colleagues, who may not welcome the newcomer. In some cases, the teacher may find herself trying to deal with hidden

resentments caused by loyalty to the teacher she is replacing; students, parents and other teachers may hold expectations that may or may not be communicated to the teacher, herself. Cichon and Koff (1978) found that an involuntary transfer was rated by teachers as the most stressful event in their teaching lives, harder to deal with than any other event, including management of disruptive children, notification of unsatisfactory performance, or the threat of personal injury. As Sarah says, "Change is much easier when you're ready for it and when you want it, rather than when it's thrust upon you" (3-24).

#### Theme #8: The Socialization of Children

Teachers are not the only people within a school who must learn to adapt to new situations and new expectations. On entering school, children are often confronted with a bewildering new culture. Sarah feels that the children's prior experiences have a tremendous effect on their ability to adjust to the routines and expectations of a classroom. In addition to acquiring the prescribed skills and knowledge, children must also adapt to the social milieu of the classroom and the larger social group. Like many other teachers (Lortie, 1974), Sarah often finds herself attempting to make up for perceived deficiencies in the moral and social

education of her students. "It seems to depend on what kindergarten they've come from and what expectations the parents have" (1-13). She goes on to explain that although some of this development appears to be age-related, the socialization process seems to be strongly affected by the experiences of the child.

Kids who are expected to put their boots away when they come in the door will do that at school, but if they don't, then we have to train them. And children who have always been in large groups really have trouble being independent. . . . [I think] that daycare children are noisier, probably a little more aggressive, and not quite so responsive to nuances (1-15,16).

Sarah often feels that her values are unsupported by both parents and administrators, attributing this to personal values that are "probably too rigid and old-fashioned" (2-30). She reasons that this disparity creates certain problems, as the children appear to be surprised when expected to do certain things.

Some of those values just don't seem to be a part of their language. . . . More and more I see children that don't seem to have a strong sense of value and commitment and integrity. Lying is wrong, like on a basic level. I want them to believe that, and they don't. . . . They think

that if they can get away with it, it's okay, and I don't like that fudging of values. . . . They're going to use [bad language] on the playground, but they're not going to use it in my classroom (1-31,32).

Because of her strong position on values, Sarah often feels that she is working alone. She worries about potential misunderstandings with parents, and appreciates the role of the principal in acting as an occasional buffer between parents and teachers.

"Sometimes parents just need reassurance that things are okay, and if the principal is able to give that assurance, and quietly check up behind the scenes" (2-28), potentially difficult situations might be defused. She values the "neutral support" that is provided by an administrator who is knowledgeable, supportive, and unobtrusive.

#### Theme #9: Relationships with Parents: Accountability and Constraints

Sarah notes that parents today are much more knowledgeable about education, and are much more vocal about their goals and concerns for their children. She discusses her discomfort with the increasing tendency of parents to question the teacher's methods of instruction and evaluation.

I've had parents ask me to show them the curriculum, or to show them the exams that were used, . . . or [ask] why did their child come home and say such and such, which - they're all legitimate questions, but . . . I guess teachers aren't used to having them asked (3-14).

Lortie (1974) points out that teachers have two basic expectations of parents: that they should not intervene, and that they should support the teacher's efforts. He suggests that teachers would like parents to be "distant assistants" (p. 191), allowing the teacher her independence, but at the same time supporting her efforts.

Parents, on the other hand, may feel threatened by the teacher who, in the eyes of their young child, can do no wrong. The teacher may feel resentful of the "intrusive" questions or suggestions of the parent, while the parent may be feeling uninformed, confused, or hostile. It is not surprising then, that parent-teacher conferences may be a tense experience for both parties, in spite of Cichon's (1978) finding that, for both elementary and secondary teachers, parent-teacher conferences induced relatively little stress.

Sarah finds parent-teacher conferences stressful because she is "not a great socializer"(3-12) and often

has trouble meeting new people. She feels that this personal difficulty is compounded because of the preconceived notions about one another that both parents and teachers bring to their first meeting.

Sarah describes the discomfort she experiences:

. . . so you're both going at each other with preconceived, possibly wrong notions . . . and then, of course, in grade one especially, you get the joyful job of often being the first professional person that has to make an evaluation of their children, educationally. And sometimes you're destroying some ideas that they had about their children. Their own evaluation doesn't agree with yours at all, so there's a lot of potential for conflict. (3-13).

Sarah goes on to say that the new perspective that the teacher brings to the child may not be welcomed by the parent; the news that the child is experiencing difficulty may be "greeted with hostility rather than with concern" (3-13). Lortie (1974) explains that parents and teachers often differ in their perceptions of the child. "To the parents, he is a special, prized person; to the teacher, he is one member of the category 'student'. . . . Teacher judgements may shock and repel parents, particularly if they have idealized their child's capacities" (p.188).



Even though she attempts to prepare for parent conferences, Sarah says she sometimes finds it hard to answer parents' questions "on the spot", without time to prepare. "Thinking on my feet can rapidly lead me into a bog" (3-14r).

I've always found parent-teacher interviews stressful, from the day I started teaching. Maybe not quite so bad now as it used to be, because I sort of know what might happen, but each year the parents seem to get a little more aggressive in their approach - maybe not hostile, but certainly, they know what they want, and they're not afraid to say so, and that's hard! Because no one can be wonderful all the time, and it's, you do make mistakes (3-15).

Sarah acknowledges the potential benefits of increased communication with parents, in making them aware of what is happening in the classroom, and in "foreshadowing" potential difficulties that their child might encounter. However, she explains that she would need another hour a month to do this. This kind of simultaneous acknowledgement and rejection of a goal may be one of the contributors to the stress that Sarah associates with her teaching. For Sarah, reflection appears to lead to a realization of her limitations, which in turn leads to feelings of guilt or regret, and

subsequent loss of sleep. "Mostly I try to get through each day in the best way I can, and try not to do harm" (1-20r).

Although we tend to view reflection as a positive experience (Clandinin, 1985; Mishler, 1986; Wallerstein et al., 1981), Sarah's experience may not be unique. As Lortie (1974) says,

Freedom carries burdens; the opportunity to assess one's own progress is also the obligation to do so. The rule of conscience is not always benign. . . . A high proportion of classroom teachers express recurrent doubts about the value of their work with students (p.142).

#### Theme #10: Stress Management

Several years ago, Sarah returned to work from a maternity leave. Her oldest child was starting school, and substantial difficulties were expected with his adjustment to school. Within weeks, Sarah was informed that, because of fluctuations in enrolment, she would have to transfer to another school. The entire summer's preparation was in vain. When Sarah arrived at the new school, anxious and tired, she found that few preparations had been made for her arrival. There were no desks or books, and the staff, unaware of what

was happening, largely ignored her. Sarah was experiencing severe distress.

Although Sarah had no access to the work of Pines, Aronson and Kafry (1981), she intuitively applied their model for dealing with stress and burnout. First, she acknowledged that the problem existed [awareness]. She realized that she was feeling angry, bitter, and exhausted, and knew that she had to make some changes in her life if she was to survive [taking responsibility]. As she thought through the problem, she began to realize that there were some things in her life that she believed she could not change [cognitive clarity], and she tried to sort through the options that she had. She gradually came to a series of decisions [coping strategies] that allowed her to deal with the many stressors in her life, and which she has continued to apply through the intervening years.

Sarah developed a coping inventory that was compatible with her values, goals, commitments, and personal style. Her coping strategies appear to fall within the three categories defined by Long (1988):

- (a) problem-focused or instrumental coping;
- (b) emotion-focused or palliative coping;
- (c) preventive coping.

Sarah first attempted to cope with her difficulties by making changes to her situation or her

own behavior. Recognizing that her primary commitment was to her family, she made a conscious decision that she would place limits on her school life. She began to consciously remove herself from the more demanding aspects of her work, refusing to volunteer for committee work or ATA representative. She also stopped "falling in love" with her students (5-notes). She feels that she had previously made them her surrogate family, but has felt a sense of loss over the years, without this sense of closeness to her students. Sarah also began to compartmentalize her life, forcing herself to be satisfied with an "adequate" job of teaching, and thus allowing more time and physical and emotional energy for the demands of her family.

Like many other professional working women, Sarah also chose to hire a housekeeper. Although this frees her from some of the cleaning, cooking, and ironing, "there always seems to be something to do" (3-10). Sarah assists her children with their homework, and still tries to read with them every day. Once the children are in bed, there is still meal-planning, mending, gardening, or ironing left to do, and the deskwork associated with the family business. For Sarah, life is wearing, perhaps because of what she describes as "unwanted responsibilities" (2-20). She feels that she is often on the edge of overload, yet

finds it difficult to relax "without a goal or reason in mind" (3-9).

Sarah realized that there were limits to the changes she could make in her life, and therefore began to look for ways to deal with her emotional reactions to the continuing distress that she was experiencing. Sarah found that physical activity was the key to maintaining her internal equilibrium. She walks and cycles regularly with her children, gardens, and takes part in a fitness class twice a week. During physical activity, her mind is "put in neutral" (3-20), and her tension gradually dissipates. If under extreme duress, or if an immediate decision is needed, she may sit down at her desk, and write down a few pros and cons, and then tuck it in a drawer and go away. Later, as she is engaged in some physical activity, "little thoughts flash into your head now and then" (3-20), and she is able to begin to resolve the issue.

Sarah also has implemented preventive measures to attempt to control the magnitude of distress that she must deal with. She has placed a great deal of emphasis on planning and goal-setting in both her professional and personal life. She has adopted a deliberately slow pace of adopting innovations, to allow herself time to integrate each one well with her existing teaching. She consciously and unconsciously

"rehearses" important events, going over them in her mind until she can act almost without conscious thought, in much the same way athletes prepare for their competitions. She values hard work, and has a strong sense of personal integrity. She balances the elements of her life carefully, and enjoys the sense of satisfaction that she gains from a job that is successfully completed. In spite of the heavy demands on her time, she has managed to maintain an involvement in a community arts group. The sense of making choices and setting priorities is important to Sarah's sense of efficacy.

Sarah also continues to make a conscious effort to sustain close relationships with one or two other teachers. These relationships give her an opportunity to let off steam, share frustrations and collaborate on special projects or daily activities.

#### Sarah's Future

Sarah's life continues to be very demanding. She lives life at a pace that many of us would find daunting, and has little time for herself and her own interests. She may, however, tend to overestimate her ability to cope, and magnify the size of her problems, a common response to stress, according to Hiebert (1989, p.18). Several weeks before school ended, Sarah

reported being so exhausted that she wasn't even looking forward to the summer. "I'm not very good the first week of holidays. I mostly drag myself around, and let the kids play in the backyard a lot and have naps" (4-18). However, when she was contacted towards the end of the first week in July, she reported that she had been taking the children to daily swimming lessons and cleaning her cupboards.

As a result of the interview process, Sarah says she has "a more formed impression of what I'm doing in the classroom rather than nebulous impressions, [and] a little more self-confidence about my abilities" (5-notes). Early in the interviews, Sarah admitted, "I think a lot of the time that I'm dragged kicking and screaming through the things that I do, which is very wearing" (2-20). However, in notes that she brought to the fifth interview, Sarah decides that

maybe teaching isn't as bad as I've always felt - that maybe I would choose it again. This is quite a revelation. . . . I have after all survived over fifteen years of teaching, and mostly I think the kids have learned something good (5-notes). She realizes that although her family will continue to come first, she is not prepared to give up teaching, so I've got to continue looking for ways for me and the students to stay in a win-win situation.

I must teach material I like and in ways that are comfortable and interesting for me, and then the students are seeing true interest and enthusiasm in their teacher and are more likely to learn well. I must never allow myself to become so old or jaded or disinterested that I forget that good teaching is a wonderful gift we can give to youngsters (5-notes).



## CHAPTER SIX

### DISCUSSION

#### Application of the Model

In Chapter One, an integrated model of teacher burnout was presented (see Figure 2, page 5). This model was derived from the work of Schwab, Jackson and Schuler (1986), and Iwanicki (1983), and describes the sources of teacher burnout, the distressed teacher's psychological reactions, and the consequences of burnout. Although the model was a good starting point, in that it provided a framework for exploring the various aspects of burnout, its limitations became evident when I attempted to use it to describe the interactive nature of distress and burnout in the life of a particular individual.

In Sarah's story, there is a complex interweaving of relationships between events, actions and responses. However, it is possible to identify specific factors which have contributed to Sarah's distress, and, in fact, I initially attempted to do so. For example, the impact of societal factors can be seen in Theme 8:

The Socialization of Children, and in Theme 9: Relationships with Parents. Organizational factors are evident in Theme 3: The School as an Institution, and in Sarah's competing needs for autonomy and proximity, which are explored in Themes 4 and 5. The influence of personal or role related factors can be seen in Sarah's struggle to balance the many competing and ambiguous roles she plays as teacher, mother, and wife. These role related stressors are amplified by the demands inherent in career transitions (Theme 7), but are somewhat reduced by positive and supportive relationships with administrators (Theme 6), parents (Theme 9), and other teachers (Theme 5).

Sarah reports feeling elements of all three aspects of burnout. She experiences emotional exhaustion, particularly at the end of the school term, and has reacted to continuing stress by compartmentalizing her life and depersonalizing her relationships with her students. Although Sarah feels that she continues to do an "adequate" job of teaching, she often feels a reduced sense of personal accomplishment as she attempts to meet a wide range of student needs. She finds dealing with student discipline problems particularly unsettling. Sarah feels she is often burdened with unwanted

responsibilities, and reports that there is "always more to do".

Although she is seldom absent from work, she considered leaving teaching, particularly during her first few years as a teacher. Because of the high level of stress in her life, she has reduced the effort expended on her job. She has allocated less time to teaching in order to meet the needs of her family. This pressure of time in all parts of Sarah's life has contributed to a somewhat lower quality of personal life. She reports feeling little joy in teaching and constantly must measure her accomplishments against the clock. Although she has managed to maintain her involvement in several activities that she enjoys, she seldom feels that she has time for herself.

In spite of the relative ease in finding data to support each of the elements of the model, I felt that this simple listing inadequately portrayed the richness of Sarah's life -- her struggles, victories, and compromises. The model is a generalization; Sarah's life is specific, real and complex. The attempt to reduce Sarah's life to fit a neatly packaged model left me feeling frustrated and guilty -- frustrated because there is so much more to be said about other dimensions of Sarah's life, and guilty because I felt that this

process of pattern-matching somehow reduced Sarah's worth as a person.

Sarah's story is the story of a woman who is an active agent in her life, attempting to deal with life's challenges by utilizing a broad range of coping resources. By neglecting the aspect of coping, the model ignores a key element -- the positive response of the individual. Sarah describes herself as being "on the edge" of burnout. She has, however, devised ways to deal with chronic stress which have enabled her to cope with the demands of her situation.

#### The Voice of the Teacher

In order to understand stress and burnout, one must listen to the voice of the individual teacher. The fundamental idea in understanding this phenomenon is that perceptions of distress are highly personalized, dependent upon the beliefs and values held by that individual, and his or her coping resources. Understanding the dynamics of the particular work situation is also very important in appreciating the teacher's level of distress, as are other factors, such as past experiences and conditions in the individual's personal or family life.

A mere recital of the "facts" of any case study are insufficient in understanding the meaning that that

Individual ascribes to his or her life experiences. The search for meaning is facilitated through the identification of themes or patterns that make up the supporting structure -- the posts and pegs on which we can hang particular experiences. Although some of these themes relate directly to the model, others have a tangential relationship, in that they overlay the elements found in the model itself.

#### The Teacher as Female

As I studied the themes that were emerging in our study of Sarah's history, I became aware that a number of key themes seemed to be closely related to a central concept: the teacher as female. Sarah's low self-esteem, her lack of control over many parts of her life, her conflicting role expectations, and her lack of a "voice" all seemed to be symptomatic of her femaleness. When Sarah and I undertook this study, I did not anticipate that gender would play such an important role in my understanding of the nature of her distress. Although I of course was conscious of the particular stressors that a woman with a career and family might experience, I allowed my "Western taken-for-granted images of women" (Watson & Watson-Franke, 1985, p.169) to mask for some time the central conflict in Sarah's life. I now believe

strongly that the fundamental stressors in Sarah's life arise out of the fact that she is a woman doing a woman's work of teaching and nurturing a family, and experiencing all of the expected and unique stresses that are a part of that existence. Sarah's story must be interpreted from the point of view "that she is a woman and enacts experience from that perspective" (p.175).

Ethnographers who have dealt with the life histories of women have often neglected to link these women's experiences and their meaning to the meaning of the world in general, often allowing women's unique experiences to "disappear", or viewing a woman only as "an agent in relation to men, not as a being in her own right" (p.172). Women then tend to be regarded as "isolated, haphazard beings who lack direction and goals" (p. 174).

The exploration of teachers and their work must therefore be grounded in the experiences and perspectives of those who teach (McCall, 1986), and in the cultural and socio-economic traditions of teaching in North America.

Since teaching is largely women's work, gender is a part of the lives of these women, influences their work in powerful yet subtle ways and may also help explain the way society views the

teaching profession as well as the views of those women who teach (p. 4).

In interpreting Sarah's story, it is important to question the degree to which gender qualities such as assertiveness, confidence, devotion, modesty, and nurturance affect Sarah's roles and decisions. The female experience in society has been generally underplayed and underestimated; reported study has focused on the "'accepting' woman who 'fits' the conventional norms of society, and we emphasize data that supports this male-oriented view of women and ignore contrary data that supports divergent attitudes and orientations" (Watson & Watson-Franke, 1985, p.182). In Sarah's story we see a more balanced account of female experience, in that it includes the struggles, victories and compromises that Sarah has experienced. It is an attempt to show Sarah as a woman who is a complete human being, "capable and prepared to make [her] own statements on life" (p.184).

#### Teaching as Women's Work

Although recent figures indicate that over 80% of public elementary school teachers in U.S. schools are women (Grumet/Hobart & Colleges, 1981; McCall, 1986), we know little of women's experiences as classroom teachers, and how being a woman affects their teaching.

Teachers today attempt to meet a diverse set of cultural and educational role expectations; they may attempt to function as the traditional and orderly classical teacher, the nurturing, responsive child nurse, or the guiding parent (Lightfoot, 1975), with many parts of one role in conflict with another.

Each of these images of the American teacher implies a different set of personality characteristics, social skills, and cognitive facilities. Each of these roles implies a different relatedness to parents and community. Each of these roles implies a different kind of adaptation and responsiveness to the changing needs and demands of society, implicitly and explicitly imposed by the world of work in which children will eventually find themselves. Despite all the differences, there is one theme shared by all three definitions: the expectation that teachers should be all-giving, nurturant servants of the people (p.114).

If this were not enough, it is also expected that schools will serve as the major institutions for creating and maintaining social justice and social mobility. In fact, schools must accomplish everything that the rest of the world leaves undone. The teacher is the central figure in the educational process, most



often viewed as a woman, and "seen as the one who makes education happen for children, the one who transmits the patterns and values of the mainstream culture" (Lightfoot, 1975, p. 110).

Ironically, both the image of the teacher as nurturing woman, and the teacher as expressive, adaptive, submissive child reflects qualities that are regarded as low-status and inferior in relation to the rest of society. In order to understand how these roles evolved and how the stereotypes continue to affect women, and contribute to their feelings of dissatisfaction and confusion, it is important to trace the development of the roles over the last century. It will then be possible to place Sarah's experience in a sociological perspective, enabling us to better understand her struggles to play the roles that society and she herself have jointly constructed.

#### The Feminization of Teaching

In the late nineteenth century, there was a dramatic increase in the demand for teachers due to population growth and an increased commitment to universal education. As well, there was a high turnover of teachers; the average tenure was estimated to be two to three years. Young women were comparatively well-educated, and their assistance was

no longer required in home industries, as production had recently moved out of the home. The supply of women for teaching was thus high, and they could often be hired for one half the salary of male teachers (McCall, 1986).

The Victorian ideal about "women's sphere" contributed strongly to the feminization of teaching. Employment of women in the classroom was regarded as being both desirable and justified, for teaching was felt to be an ideal preparation for motherhood. Indeed, it was argued that the "very qualities that made women good mothers - their nurturance, patience, and understanding of children made them better teachers than men" (Strober & Tyack, 1980, p.496). In addition, women were believed to have a superior moral character, and the womanly virtues of modesty, devotion, "piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity" (Welter, 1966, in McCall, 1986). Indeed, teaching was regarded as women's "divinely designated profession . . . yet they did not intend women to remain in teaching for life. It was to be a procession into marriage not a career" (p.496). Employers were thus able to get cheap and efficient teachers without undermining the family ideal.

Teaching was also attractive to women, as it was regarded as a status resource to women from modest but

respectable families; "It was a middle-class occupation that was presumed to make women more eligible as wives and mothers" (p.496), and it was preferable to factory work or domestic service. Furthermore, women were excluded from other occupations which were becoming increasingly attractive to men.

Employment of women as teachers was initially less common in rural areas, "in part because of one of the counterarguments of feminization, that men were better disciplinarians than women. . . . In urban educational systems, however, this argument was successfully defused from the start. The reason: school boards hired men as managers" (p.497).

Women's supposed comparative advantage in nurturance, patience, and understanding of children led the architects of the urban school system . . . to slot women into primary schoolteaching. Concerns about their potential inability to discipline older children were overcome quite ingeniously: the ultimate disciplinary function was located in the male superintendent (p.499).

The male superintendent also had advantages in linking the schools to the surrounding communities through his links with the power structure of the community through all male service clubs, church

leadership, or sports activities. Schools were dependent upon local support and "male leaders were important to the social credit rating of the organization" (p.500).

The gradual change from short terms to longer term employment, still at low pay, coincided with an increase in administrative direction. These factors made teaching increasingly less attractive to men (Strober & Tyack, 1980; McCall, 1986). Teaching jobs were structured to "take advantage of sex-role stereotypes about women's responsiveness to rules and male authority, and men's presumed ability to manage women" (p.500). Instructional procedures were tightly regulated, and women were considered ideal employees. "With few alternative occupations and accustomed to patriarchal authority, they mostly did what their male superiors ordered. Difference of gender provided an important form of social control" (p.500).

The ideology of women's place supported the conviction that teaching was appropriate to women's sphere and compatible with marriage. It also led to the increasing difficulty in treating work and home as separate domains for women. The public world of work, and the private world of family is a fairly recent invention of the nineteenth century bourgeois family, but one that is continually reinforced in the daily

lives of men and women (Arnot, 1982). Even today, with over half of the female population holding jobs outside the home, women continue to be identified with the "privatized" world of the family.

It is the ideological division between Home and Work which structures the invisibility of women, and not their real absence from the world of work.

. . . It also masks the man's presence in the home. Men and women do not inhabit two empirically separated worlds, but pass through the same institutions in different relations and on different trajectories (Powell & Clark, 1976, in Arnot, 1982, p. 83).

Arnot (1982) views gender classifications as highly complex, constructed to apply to any range of social contexts. Yet within each category, there is great diversity of values and meanings; "the tension within each category is as great as that between each category" (p. 81). Today's woman is expected to be both "dependable and dependent, childlike and mothering, a capable and intelligent consumer, as well as being politically and economically inept" (p.81). Thus, "a coherent female identity has to be 'worked at' rather than assumed to exist, in order to produce . . . a 'teeth-gritting harmony'" (Arnot, 1982, p.81).

### Role Conflict and Ambiguity

Role conflict and ambiguity are consistently identified in the literature as being primary contributors to stress in the workplace (Friesen & Williams, 1985; Iwanicki, 1983; Pines et al., 1981; Schwab et al., 1986; Wangberg, 1984). For Sarah, as for many other teachers, this has emerged as a major source of distress. Role conflict runs as an undercurrent through many of the themes in Sarah's story.

Many of the roles assigned to teachers are mutually exclusive. They are inherently contradictory, continually in conflict. By the very nature of her work, the teacher finds herself in an impossible bind. It is this bind, more than lack of time or help, that accounts for the teacher's chronic sense of absurdity, anxiety, and defeat. (Edgerton, 1977, p. 120)

The roles which teachers may be expected to assume may be described in various ways. One of the major roles categories is that of executive, which is essentially authoritarian, and requires the teacher to communicate and enforce school rules and maintain her own authority in and out of the classroom. Related to this executive role is the evaluative role, in which the teacher evaluates academic achievement and

character development. The role of intellectual guide and counsellor is often in direct conflict with the executive role expectations. In addition to these major roles, the teacher often plays a number of supporting roles, such as supply clerk, nurse, "custodian, preacher, and therapist" (Illich, 1970, in Lightfoot, 1975). As a result of trying unsuccessfully to merge these incompatible roles, teachers often become discouraged, critical of the administration, students, and parents. "Many become acutely ambivalent toward teaching itself and either literally or figuratively resign" (Edgerton, 1977, p.121).

Sarah and I discussed the frustration which we have often felt when the need to discipline children interrupts our teaching:

S: It's really hard to reconcile the two [roles]. You can't be a disciplinarian and be warm and loving in the same breath. It just isn't possible.

B: It's very difficult. . . . I find myself having to stop, take a deep breath . . . and then say, "Okay, where were we?" And then I put on my happy face and carry on. . . . It works for me to try to separate those roles, because I have to let the kids know . . .

that I'm going to shift back into my other persona (6-14).

For a teacher of young children, the role conflicts are magnified. As teachers, parents, and members of the community, we continue to cherish the image of the primary teacher as patient, nurturing, female, and completely devoted to the children in her care. Objective, scholarly or businesslike behavior that is valued and respected in male teachers is somehow felt to be less important, or even detrimental when observed in women teachers. Yet at the same time as we urge our primary teachers to concern themselves with the nurturance and development of the "whole child", we also expect that she will be able to utilize a "diagnostic attitude" with each child in her classroom, accounting for each child's progress in social, emotional, cognitive, and physical development. To do this well requires a high degree of knowledge, sophistication, and cognitive development on the part of the teacher. She must be exceptionally well-organized, and know her subject matter intimately in order to integrate concepts and skills from several disciplines into one activity. She must be able to handle interruptions from children, parents and school or community personnel without losing the flow of the lesson or the warmth of her response. She must be



mother, teacher, nurse, diagnostician, evaluator, and enforcer, at the same time maintaining the "intimacy, spirituality and innocence" (Grumet/Hobart & Colleges, 1981, p.173) that teachers are to share with children. Small wonder that Sarah misses the clarity and definition of her role as a teacher in her first position. The education of young children today has evolved into a highly complex undertaking.

For many women, the diversity and ambiguity of role expectations is further complicated because of their family responsibilities. "The dimensions of possible activity for both sexes are constructed around the oppositions of work/non-work, management/labour, and work/leisure, but in the case of women, the opposition family/non-family overshadows all the rest" (Arnot, 1982, p. 83). This is particularly true in Sarah's case. Several years ago, in a time of coincidental distress in both her personal and professional life, she made a conscious decision that her family would take precedence over everything else. This decision has had considerable impact on her life as a teacher, and on her perceptions of her worth as a teacher. In fact, Sarah noted that she has developed no real sense of her teaching as a career, because it has had to play a secondary role to her work as a mother and wife.

### Career Transitions

Career transitions are often stressful, because they require adjustment to change, and involve the assumption of new roles which may tax the individual's adaptive capacities. Latack (1981) and others have noted that personal life changes often coincide with work transitions, increasing the stress load for the individual. "The simultaneous occurrence of multiple stressors in non-work areas of life, for example, heightens individual vulnerability to perceiving job-related events as stressful and experiencing negative consequences as a result" (Hoover-Dempsey & Kendall, 1982, p. 52). The greater the amount and intensity of change in a person's life, the greater the stress. Coping strategies are the intervening processes which directly determine the the perceived job stress and job performance in the new role. However, stress is additive in nature, and coping resources are finite.

Sarah had just returned from work after the birth of her third child. She had spent the summer preparing for a new position, only to find, after several weeks on the job, that because of unexpected shifts in enrolments, she was to be transferred to a different school and a different grade. This "piggy-backing" of major job transitions coincided with personal role

adjustments caused by her return to work. She had just hired a housekeeper, and was struggling with the compromises necessitated by giving over one's children and home to the care of a stranger. In addition, her oldest child was beginning school, and substantial problems were anticipated.

Sarah felt resentful, hurt and angry about the abruptness with which she was transferred, and the lack of warmth with which she was received in the new school. She hated going to work each day, and felt she had to find some way to restore some order to a world that seemed to be falling apart.

Latack (1981) found that individuals experiencing a large number of coinciding transitions were more likely to adopt "coping strategies that divert attention from the job, rather than focusing coping strategies on the job" (p.18). As stress increases, individuals abandon problem-solving coping strategies and turn to emotion-focused coping that attempts to alleviate the stress symptoms, rather than resolve the stressful situation. (Kahn, in Latack, 1981). The method of relieving stress may be different, depending on the situation. Latack found that individuals struggling with job-related uncertainties often chose tension-relieving activities such as jogging and meditation. These options were not found to be common

in overload situations, because there was no time available.

### Coping Resources

Sarah responded to her situation in several ways. The most important decision Sarah made was a conscious one - that her family would always come first, and that her commitment to her job would be placed in that framework. She was a capable, experienced teacher, and in spite of resenting the abrupt transfer, was pleased with her reassignment to a familiar grade. She had always been well-planned, and now used this skill to maximize her time with her family. A supporting strategy therefore, was effective time-management; it became increasingly precise, as she actively worked to compartmentalize her life, scheduling blocks devoted to teaching, mothering, managing her home and housekeeper, and assisting with her husband's business. Sarah, in reality, now held four jobs. Time had become very precious, and Sarah became an expert in time-management.

Sarah's second major coping mechanism appears to have involved some degree of cognitive restructuring, in order to deal with the overwhelming demands which she was experiencing. She was physically and emotionally exhausted at the end of each day, and felt

that there was little she could do to change her situation for the time being. She unconsciously began to distance herself from her students, becoming more detached and refusing to allow herself to "fall in love" with her students, in an attempt to reduce the emotional demands on her as a teacher. She also restricted the time that she would allow for her schoolwork. She appears to have examined, consciously or unconsciously, the interactions between events in her life, and the associated beliefs which led to perceptions and emotional reactions. She then attempted to alter the way she thinks about her roles and responsibilities, in order to alter the negative emotions she was feeling (Casteel & Matthew, 1984). She was somewhat successful in reducing the stressors, in convincing herself that an "adequate" job was enough, for the time being, but felt at the same time that something was missing from her teaching. Until our discussions, Sarah was unable to name the distance between herself and her students, the depersonalization of her teaching. She wants to renew her interest and enthusiasm, but is unsure how much she can do without increasing her stress level.

Sarah has become very conscious of her coping resources and their limitations. Although she feels that she has restored a more satisfactory balance in

her life, she reports feeling "on the edge of overload" most of the time. She feels that the major source of distress is her demanding personal life, and that she brings a lot of personal "baggage" to work each day. However, she still feels that there is little more that she is able or willing to change in this part of her life. Her ability to utilize situation-focused stressor management techniques is limited, so she now relies heavily on managing the symptoms of her distress (Latack, 1981). She has become very conscious of the value of diet and exercise in relieving stress. She exercises twice a week, in addition to walking or cycling each day with her children. Gardening is another form of physical activity that Sarah uses to "dissipate" her anxiety.

#### The Ideal Self

In any given society, a set of normative statements about ideal or proper behavior . . . is built into a wide range of diverse statuses. . . . Measuring up to the standards of the ideal self becomes a vital component in the way role behavior is articulated or phrased in meeting the demands of interpersonal situations. . . . [The individual], in a way meaningful to himself, draws upon the standards of the ideal self to evaluate

his own behavior so that he can change it in more personally relevant, socially acceptable directions (Watson, L. & Watson-Franke, 1985, p. 188-189).

This process of self-appraisal is cognitively mediated, in that the individual is measuring his or her personal failures and successes against the standard of the "Ideal". Judgements and evaluations are made according to standards which have, over time, become internalized.

Like many other women, Sarah measures herself against ideals that have become part of our popular mythology. Sarah must not only be "Super Mom", or "Super Teacher"; in today's world, she is expected to be the "Super Woman", able to manage the responsibilities of home, family, career, and community citizen without complaint, question, or revolt. It is indeed a myth, an unattainable goal, but one that we continue to accept as a basis for our self-appraisal. The effects can be devastating to our morale and self-concept.

Watson and Watson-Franke refer to "critical turning points, periods of self-searching that have serious implications for [the individual's] subsequent behavior as he sees it" (p. 201). These critical turning points may relate to specific crises or they

may be more gradual transitions related to adult development or career stages (Glickman, 1980; Hoover-Dempsey & Kendall, 1982; Levine, 1989; Newman, 1980; Newman, Dernburg, Dubois, & Krantz, 1980).

Glickman (1980) urges us to consider the maturational levels of school personnel, becoming aware of career-specific stages of teacher development. He describes the outstanding teacher as one who has moved from self-concerns, to concerns for improving one's classroom, to concern for one's school and profession as a whole. Glickman's outstanding teacher knows her own competencies, knows where to seek resources and feedback, and desires to help other teachers and students improve education for the collective group. While Glickman's model has merit, I believe that a simple linear model of progression from egocentric to altruistic behavior is inadequate to explain the real-life experiences of many teachers. Our development is cyclical and recursive, and our progress within any one of the stages, or between stages must be affected by the specific contextual demands of our personal and professional lives, and our individualistic responses to our experiences. Sarah chose to deal with mounting stressors from a variety of sources by temporarily withdrawing or, to use



Glickman's developmental analogy, by "regressing" to a more egocentric stage.

Sarah has described an earlier stage in her career during which she might well have been described as an outstanding teacher, working to improve her school and her profession, and willing to work collaboratively with other teachers. Circumstances have, for the time being, forced Sarah to reorder her priorities. This is an accepted and highly recommended method of reducing stress (Bimes 1981; Casteel & Matthews, 1984; Daly & Moore, 1980; Jorde, 1982; Sparks, 1981). While she continues to maintain close, supportive relationships with selected colleagues, she has withdrawn somewhat from relationships with students. She perceives that the risks are too great at this time in her life. She might be helped by some training in identifying immediate rewards in student-teacher interactions, learning how to pick up on the small successes that students are experiencing, and beginning to celebrate those successes in a simple manner.

It is important to put this stage in Sarah's life in a proper perspective, and to realize that this is probably a temporary situation. Supportive colleagues and administrators can encourage Sarah to acknowledge and accept her vulnerability and fallibility as a teacher (Huebner, 1987).

Teachers in their early forties tend to sense a decreasing satisfaction with their teaching, as they realize that they are getting into a rut, and that they are gradually becoming "old" teachers, who have accepted the institutional status quo, use the same lesson plans every year, and never question themselves (Newman & et al, 1980). These teachers may attempt to revitalize themselves by changing schools, grades or methodology (Hoover-Dempsey & Kendall, 1982; Newman, 1980). In spite of the limitations Sarah has placed on her worklife, she has made significant changes in her language arts program, moving gradually towards a "whole language" approach, changing her basal series, and attempting to increase the degree to which she integrates subject matter and concepts. In order for Sarah to make further changes, she must be convinced of their benefit to children, and her ability to implement them to her satisfaction. She may do what McCall (1986) suggests is common practice: she may quietly subvert the intentions of some of the published programs to meet the needs of her students, or to suit her own teaching style, once the door to her room is closed. Teachers do not usually transform the curriculum, but they modify what exists, "becoming users or interpreters of the published curricula, rather than passive implementers" (p.17)

Responding to Distressed Teachers and Schools

How can a teacher like Sarah be helped? Whose problem is it, anyway? Is burnout a personal problem which must be dealt with by Sarah, herself? Is it a problem that must be owned by the school as a an organization? What should the school be doing to respond to Sarah's distress? Is the problem greater than the individual or the school, one that has its roots in our basic social structure and values?

Stress cannot be conceptualized as a unidimensional variable, with unidimensional effects on all or most individuals in the same environment (Hoover-Dempsey & Kendall, 1980). Individuals vary in the decision style that they apply to their careers, the amount and type of career change that they prefer, and the coping mechanisms that they employ. There is an interactive relationship between the motives or needs of the individual and the satisfaction derived from the work environment. There is a similarly dynamic relationship between the demands and needs of the job, and the abilities of the person to meet those demands. The person-environment "fit" is a dynamic concept that will inevitably change over time. In order to reduce job stress for all persons, the work environment must allow for adaptability, sensitivity and individualistic treatment of distressed people.

This type of response may be difficult for a bureaucratic organization like the school, which is bound by policies, regulations and traditions. A number of bipolar values have been identified that may influence the degree to which a particular intervention will succeed: "rule-centered vs. person-centered; school role expectations vs. student needs; belief in school authority figures vs. colleagues as sources of authority; focus on intellectual vs. social growth of children; viewing self as a source of support vs. dependence on colleagues" (p.51). Nevertheless, schools must continue to find ways to personalize the way in which they operate, for the benefit of teachers, students, parents and other members of the school community.

#### The School as an Organization

The authority that is inherent in the bureaucracy of the school has traditionally dominated female teachers. In spite of their dominance in numbers, women have been excluded from leadership, with the culture of schooling ignoring the overwhelming presence of women in classrooms, and continuing to identify men as "the only persons with the capacity to act" (Grumet & Hobart, 1981, p.174).

Individually-oriented responses contravene many of the bureaucratic needs and organizational principles of institutions (such as school systems). . . . Most teachers have what they termed "higher order needs" (including needs for participation, independence, challenge, expression, use of valued skills) but most school systems best meet lower order needs (e.g. fringe benefits, job security, friendly co-workers) (Hoover-Dempsey & Kendall, 1982, p.50).

Traditional male leadership tends to center on power, authority, competition, compartmentalized knowledge, and the creation of systems and structures to protect decentralized decision-making. Women's leadership style, on the other hand, tends to utilize a more collaborative, cooperative, and flexible approach. Studies cited by McCall (1982) have found women to be more flexible, holistic, and interdisciplinary in their approach to teaching and learning, while Coates (1986) found that women's use of language tends to be more facilitative, responsive, cooperative and supportive. Farkas (1983) also found that female principals perceived significantly less occupational stress than their male counterparts. However, "women's intuitive, contextual style of thinking is less valued than the logical abstract style characteristic of men" (p. 4).

Relationships are important to women, and they work hard at sustaining them. The current organizational structure of many schools is not particularly conducive to the formation of sustaining personal relationships among the people who work there. The process of "schooling children" would be changed, no doubt for the better, with greater access of women to decision-making levels in their profession.

The school has long been regarded as an ideal workplace for women, particularly those with families, because of the structure of school year, (which allows mothers to be home with their children during school holidays), and the flexibility afforded to opt in and out, allowing maternity leaves and job-sharing. However, schools may also be particularly insensitive to the women who work there. It is my perception that, due to a relative lack of power within the organization, and the interruptions necessitated by maternity leaves, that women may be transferred more frequently than men. For many women, these transfers coincide with major adjustments to new or changing roles as they make arrangements for childcare, and deal with the inevitable guilt associated with "abandoning" their children to the care of strangers. They also may be negatively regarded if they are "pushy" in requesting appointment to a particular grade level.

Yet a male secondary teacher would undoubtedly be expected to wish to teach in an assignment which was congruent with his training and experience.

Because of the biological necessity to be the bearer of children, women who choose to have a family often move in and out of the teaching force. Unfortunately, women's interrupted careers may be interpreted as signs of a lack of commitment to teaching (Whitcombe, 1979). While the choice of teaching provides a sort of continuity to a woman's life, in that

it supports a special form of integration . . . lessening the distance between her two roles [and reducing] contradictions in her self image . . . such a continuity has led sociologists to assert the lack of commitment and attachment that women feel toward their work lives. The teaching profession is seen as women's secondary role, which competes with her primary role as mother of a family" (Lightfoot, 1975, p.134).

This certainly appears to be true for Sarah, at least for the present, but many women teachers with interrupted careers still regard themselves as teachers. They continue to identify with their profession, even though circumstances and choices cause them to withdraw for short periods of time. "A

teacher's definition of her role [is] dynamic and changing, not static" (p.135) as she learns new roles, adapts to changing situations, and modifies her expectations as she is confronted with reality. Further study is required to examine career transitions as a process rather than an event. The level of analysis must be the individual, studied over time, in order to examine the processes and the individuals' reactions (Latack, 1981).

Rapoport and Rapoport (1975, in Latack, 1981) reported a high degree of mutual interdependence of work and family spheres, particularly in jobs where work tends to be central to the life of the individual. Women can build on the existing overlap between work and home, using their knowledge and sensitivity to reduce the separation between teachers and their "clients" - students and their parents. Huebner (1987) urges us to drop this technical metaphor, which reduces people to the data or substance on which we work. If we think along these lines,

we place emphasis on knowing students and their social and cultural background, not to partake in their story and they in ours, but often to better control or work with them. The technical metaphor maintains the foreboding distance between teachers and young people, a possible reason for the



alienation within schools. It contributes to the suppressed insecurity of the teacher and the desire for more protective armor - knowledge and technique (p.28).

Heubner maintains that if we shift from the technical metaphor to teaching as a vocation, "if we acknowledge that teaching is a way of living, not merely a way of making a living, and if we attend intentionally to the meaning- and value-making of the teacher" (p.29), we can start to rebuild our educational communities.

Teachers must act in a imperfect world. . . . We have no choice but to risk ourselves. The choice is to consider the risk private or to build a community that accepts vulnerability and shares risks. Vulnerability is endurable in a community of care and support - a community in which members take time telling and listening to the stories of each other's journey (p.26).

The social context of acceptance and support must be extended to teachers, students, parents, and other members of the school community. A number of strategies for personalizing schools have been suggested, but the single most important one appears to be the establishment of close, supportive collegial relationships (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1982; Gmelch, 1980; Scaros, 1981; Swick, 1980; Cedoline, 1982).

These relationships may be fostered by grade-level teams, cross-group coordination, or any other of an infinite number of formal and informal groupings. Levine (1989) suggests that "decade groups" might provide opportunities for teachers and administrators of similar ages to "explore common issues of adult development" (p.18), and share similar needs in terms of support or inservice. Kyriacou (1981, in Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1982) observed that the support of colleagues may support both palliative and direct action responses. The support of family and friends is also helpful, although there appears to be less consensus in this area.

While "communicating for the sole purpose of catharsis may create only the illusion of benefits" (Farber & Miller, 1981, in Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1982, p. 88), collegial relationships often help teachers to avoid isolation, and provide an opportunity to talk about a problem, share feelings and coordinate plans. Sarah mentions all of these reasons for making a point of interacting with her colleagues, and finds the practice very helpful. However, like other teachers, Sarah tends to associate with a small number of her colleagues, particularly those with similar interests, and she is resentful of "unnecessary" meetings to discuss topics which are of little direct concern.

Some teachers resist this type of sharing, perhaps as a result of preferred or conditioned habits of isolation (Lortie, 1975).

The school as an organization must bear some responsibility for assisting teachers with stress management during times of career transition, or as a part of the normal work experience. The organization should examine structural, policy, or procedural strategies to reduce stress factors such as ambiguity or overload.

The transactional perspective in coping implies a need to attend simultaneously to multiple elements of the situation; attention to reform in only one area of a "problem", without attention to equally significant elements of the equation, may produce but a fraction (or none) of the intended general effect (Hoover-Dempsey & Kendall, 1982, p.102).

Although workshops on understanding stress and burnout may assist the teacher in identifying aspects of the problem, and in dealing with some of his or her feelings of guilt or isolation, a workshop can go only so far. Before most people can get very far in reducing the stressors in their lives, or in enhancing their coping resources, they need help in making significant changes in their own or others' expectations of themselves, clarifying their roles,

(both at work and in other areas of their lives), and in changing the way they respond to stressful situations, either through cognitive restructuring, or lifestyle changes such as diet, relaxation techniques and exercise. To do so, they need ongoing support through collegial support groups and the active support of a caring administrator.

Teachers need time set aside to talk through their frustrations together, to look at themselves and their behavior, and to gain new insights about themselves and their profession. Feelings of isolation will decrease as they realize that other teachers have the same feelings (Bimes, 1981; Pines et al., 1981; Kalker, 1984). Teachers should be encouraged to seek solutions together in order to realize that there are alternatives. Bimes notes that teachers often become locked into routine patterns of behavior, so that their work becomes mundane and unproductive, and they lose sight of their goals. She recommends that teachers consider choice-response alternatives by using a series of questions designed to generate an "awakening discussion":

1. What behavior in my classroom do I repeat on a daily basis? (list them)
2. What are my internal responses, feelings, judgements, and thoughts about these behaviors?

3. How does this response serve me? My students?  
What does it help me get, help me avoid,  
protect me from?
4. What price do I pay for acting this way?
5. What are all of the different responses I might  
"try on"? (Bimes, 1981, p.5)

Kobasa (in Latack, 1981) describes "hardiness" as the ability to see change events as opportunities rather than inconveniences. Teachers need help to think in new and creative ways about their work with students and with colleagues.

#### The Role of the Principal

In their review of the literature on stress and coping, Hoover-Dempsey and Kendall (1982) note that gaining the support of the school administrator is "a most significant means of coping with stress in teaching" (p.90). "Administrative interventions may be critical in helping teachers cope with stress, but are themselves possible perhaps only with great care in planning and implementation" (p.94). A sensitive and responsive principal can do much to help the teacher alleviate distress. He or she can assist in modifying school structures or schedules, provide breaks in times of high stress, clarify role expectations, and provide

feedback, encouragement, and constructive criticism. The principal is the key figure in establishing a collaborative, participatory community within the school, one that provides for collective coping interventions and shared decision-making. This "nourishing environment" (p.92), can significantly affect the teacher's longevity and effectiveness. The leadership of the principal in providing and communicating a sense of purpose, and the opportunity to achieve consensus on clearly defined priorities is also important in establishing a positive school climate. "Participation in decision-making considered important by the individual (my boldface) is strongly related to job satisfaction; participation and power-sharing are linked with greater commitment to organizational goal attainment; opportunities for interaction with co-workers increase job satisfaction" (p. 92).

For Sarah, the support and leadership of her first principal was a significant factor in keeping her in teaching. She felt that he was accessible, visible, and approachable, and had a strong sense of commitment and purpose. He provided a role model for Sarah which gave her a foundation for learning how to teach. Most important of all to Sarah, he "listened, and listened, and listened" (3-26). Effective communication is

essential, particularly if teachers are dissatisfied, or if the school as an organization is under stress. Phillips, Hellwig, and Tubbs (1983) found that employees with low job satisfaction tended to make greater use of the informal communication networks, while those with high job satisfaction tended to make greater use of the formal communication network. They conclude that a dissatisfied employee might rely on informal channels of communication in order to find out what is "really going on" in the organization. They also speculate that an employee with low levels of ambiguity tolerance might seek out as much information as possible, supplementing "formally received equivocal messages with information from the informal network" (p.8).

Sarah places very high importance on accurate, up-to-date information. She likes to be "in the know" about what is happening in the school, and is frustrated by incomplete or after-the-fact information. At the same time, she resents and mistrusts the underground information networks, preferring to receive information directly. Her lack of self-esteem and respect for authority are sometimes inhibiting factors in requesting information or voicing concerns, as she perceives that she may be "out of line". This acceptance of male authority has been a traditional

female attribute, and one that, for most of the last century, has been particularly valued in teachers. Sarah continues to find "speaking up" difficult, in spite of extensive advocacy on behalf of her handicapped son.

Part of my development as an individual has been having to fight so many battles on behalf of Andrew. . . . so I've had to become a very strong advocate, and I've had to learn to go and meet people that I would not normally talk to, and I've had to go in and be aggressive, which has been really scary, but it's really made me think about what I believe (6-8).

#### Implications for Teacher Preparation and Professional Development

Much can be done to assist teachers in their preservice and inservice development that will enable them to become powerful and collaborative professionals. Teachers need to understand the school as a bureaucratic organization, with a thorough explanation of its structures, roles and procedures (Schlechty, 1976). Sarah recalls some early negative experiences which were the result of her lack of awareness of the key roles played by the secretary and the caretaker in a school setting. Once the principal



explained the unofficial power structure of the school, she was able to develop more satisfactory relationships with both individuals. These "two very important little pieces of information" (6-38) could be included in preservice coursework that would help beginning teachers in learning to work within the school organization.

Student teachers, having examined school problems from a sociological perspective, will be less traumatized by the "unknown" forces they confront during their first teaching experience. As they remain in the classroom, an understanding of role conflict will enable them to be aware that the debilitating problems and tensions they experience are not due solely to their own personal weaknesses or inadequacies. (Edgerton, 1977, p. 122)

We need to provide teachers with the skills that will enable them to engage in effective interaction, and, when necessary, effective confrontation. They must learn to identify positive and negative signals in their own behavior and in the behavior of others, avoiding self-defeating behavior, such as brinkmanship (Scaros, 1981; Stapleton, 1979), magnification of problems or self-deprecation.

Lortie (1974) stresses that teachers' major satisfaction is derived from psychic rewards: the subjective valuations derived from positive experiences in the classroom. Teachers therefore need to refine their abilities to pick up informal indications of student achievement and satisfaction. They also need learn how to accurately assess their own accomplishments, and enjoy the sense of accompanying pride and satisfaction. Teachers should be able to identify why the accomplishments that they identify are important: were they things they achieved for themselves, for their students, for parents, administrators, for the "system" or did they straddle several categories? (Jorde, 1982).

Teachers often seem hesitant to share their excitement about their achievements or the achievements of their students with their colleagues. Sarah felt that public relations was an important role of the principal, because teachers find it difficult to "blow their own horns". Teachers should have a repertoire of "socially acceptable" methods of sharing their feelings of success. They also need to learn how to share in one another's success, without the usual defensive or resentful feelings.

We have to be willing to accept that there are going to be a fair number of failures, and we have

to talk about those too, because that's the other side of the coin, and not have people possibly rejoicing in your failure (6-41).

In order to deal effectively with their colleagues and students, teachers must own and practice effective group process skills. Preservice teachers might acquire more of these skills if university instruction depended less on the use of the formal, traditional, independent-learner model. I recently spoke with several mature, experienced graduate students who were experiencing their first attempt to jointly construct a paper. They were excited about the process, noting that it was making them into much better listeners, and that they were benefitting from the exchange of ideas. Through practical experience, teachers can not only begin to appreciate the benefits of cooperative learning and sharing, but acquire the skills which will enable them to use cooperative approaches with both colleagues and students.

There is a tremendous range in philosophical orientation, role expectation, teaching style, and teaching strategies within the teaching profession. It is important to recognize that one teacher cannot be everything to everybody, nor can the teacher do all things with equal ability. If teachers, teacher educators, administrators and policy makers come to

appreciate the importance of personal history and style in teaching and learning, they will have come a long way towards creating a supportive environment for schooling.

Using many teaching skills effectively in order to meet a range of student needs or objectives is both reasonable and supportable. Unfortunately, it is impossible. . . . A limited but realistic repertoire of teaching methods will result in better teaching than a multitude of inappropriate ones (Zahorik, 1986, p. 50).

While both preservice and inservice activities can extend the teacher's repertoire of specific teaching strategies, simply supplying the teacher with a potpourri or grab-bag of activities will confuse students and prevent the teacher from developing a sense of professional identity. Selection of appropriate strategies should be based on strong philosophical precepts, as well as an awareness of the demands of the content area, the needs of the students, and the teacher's own quest for a rich and varied teaching style (Strong, Silver & Hanson, 1986).

Teaching style grows organically out of years of experience and reflects the teacher's personal history, memories of lessons won and lost, and individual value system. It is nothing less than

a way of seeing and making judgements about the world of the classroom.

. . . It is the teacher's professional identity and deserves to be protected and defended by teachers, administrators, and others who seek to provide staff development resources. (p. 53)

At the same time, teachers need to be given opportunities to clarify and articulate their beliefs and values. Teachers need to be asked what it is that they believe about children and their learning, and why they are using a particular approach. Their knowledge, expertise, and judgement must be respected, and they must be allowed to select strategies that work for them and their students.

A part of teacher preparation must attempt to deal openly with the stresses and frustrations of being a teacher, perhaps through case studies or ethnographic projects. It must be acknowledged that at least some of the stressors in teaching are situational in nature, and that all teachers can expect to encounter varying degrees of distress at different points in their careers. Teacher preparation must include training on how to identify and cope with these stressors. Teachers also need a basic understanding of the process of adult development. At the moment, most university courses deal only with child development. While this

knowledge is essential to teachers in understanding the children whose learning is being guided, it does little to help teachers understand the changes that they are experiencing during their progression through various transitions in both their personal and professional life. One solution might be the inclusion of a course on Teacher Career Development in graduate level course offerings, as modelled by the University of Houston (Newman et al., 1980).

Finally, there must be, at some point in preservice or inservice training, an attempt to deal with the fact that there are some problems

inherent in our society, our profession, or our work environment [that] are beyond our control for the time being. That is not the same as saying that we should resign ourselves to certain injustices forever. It does mean that for the present we must focus our energies where they will do the most good, accepting what we cannot change and changing what we can. (Jorde, 1982, p. 82)

Setting priorities, managing finite resources such as time and energy, and ensuring that there is time for personal and professional renewal are critical to continued success in an increasingly demanding profession.

### The New Consciousness

Women today are beginning to awaken to a new consciousness, an understanding of the restrictive and often oppressive nature of societal realities, and many are experiencing a profound change in their attitudes toward themselves. Many women are increasingly unwilling to accept "their traditional and inferior status as somehow natural and right" (Zaret, 1975, p. 41). Personal-private solutions, or achievements of exceptional women are no longer enough.

We want to explore the myths and reconstruct, step by step, the historical bases for the emergence of women as an oppressed class. . . . And we want our schooling restructured to help us uncover the myths, disclose the realities, and create the conditions in which girls and boys, women and men can engage in cooperative reflection and action for transforming the objective conditions of the society in which we live (Zaret, 1975, p.40-41). For women educators, special challenges exist, for we must recognize that the school and the educational establishment not only replicates the societal power relationships, but enlists women themselves, as teachers, in perpetuating the existing structure. Women themselves provide role models which become instruments for maintaining the myths of women's

inferiority, in continuing to perpetuate gender differences in expectations and treatment of children, in accepting the disproportionate number of female administrators, and in "buying into" the patriarchal decision-making systems in education, as "complicitors in our own domination" (Harrison, 1974, in Zaret, 1975).

Zaret (1975) advocates three phases in developing a new direction for schooling: articulation, awareness, and affiliation. Through articulation, women can be encouraged to share their personal meanings, their experiences, and the continuing contradictions that are part of being a woman and an educator. Awareness evolves as women become cognizant of the contradictions and ambiguities in both their personal and professional lives, and in the larger society. Schools are places where conformity is valued (Zaret, 1974; Bowles & Gintis, 1976). The question that Zaret places before women is "How do we break out of that mode [conformity] to provide leadership for others?" (Zaret, p. 46). This task is difficult because women educators "simultaneously occupy antithetical positions of power and powerlessness (p.47). Zaret also notes "the conflicting orientations (and pressures) of pursuing a career to the fullest in the face of the stereotype that equates ambition with unladylike aggression"



(Zaret, 1975, p. 47). Both Zaret and Lightfoot (1975) recommend further study to determine the impact of cultural stereotypes on the teacher's conception of her professional role. Zaret warns that there can be no resolution of the exposed contradictions "until these insights are expressed in some form of constructive action in one's own immediate context" (p.47).

Although Zaret sees the school as a place where a search for meaning can occur, she notes that schools often block the search for meanings, particularly if the new meanings disrupt the status quo, as schools have an investment in perpetuating the social order "as perceived, structured, and defended by the dominant group" (p 38). Heubner (1975) agrees, in that he perceives that the fundamental problem lies not with the existence of the bureaucratic school, with its "defined expectancies and roles" (p. 28), but in the investments that people have made in maintaining the school and its supporting mechanisms and ideologies. The conflict is a basic human tension "between the new, manifest in the lives of the young, and the old, manifest in the already established" (p.31). Huebner denies that men, women, and children have a "nature". "They have only a past and a future which collide in the present. The consequences of that collision are limited by the way power is distributed, exercised in

human relationships, and controlled in custom and law" (p. 31). Zaret envisions that, through a conscious redefinition of those power relationships, the school can become a liberating force, in that it can provide for ongoing cooperative, and critical analysis of the meanings of our culture, and also promote the creation of new cultural meanings.

#### Personal Meanings

Being a teacher in today's world is a difficult role. For women teachers many of the challenges and the conflicts remain unrecognized and unresolved. We seldom acknowledge women's lack of power, or acknowledge the communication patterns that we have established as a society, and the resulting barriers to women finding a "voice". We rarely acknowledge the role ambiguity that is magnified for women because of the coincidental role conflicts in other parts of her life.

This study of Sarah has been an attempt to understand how one woman has tried to bring meaning, stability, and peace of mind to her life as a mother, wife and teacher. For both of us, the study resulted in a growing awareness of the significance of being a woman in teaching. For Sarah, teaching is not a career. Her commitment to her family overrides

concerns about her teaching, though she continues to implement new curriculums and tries to keep abreast of trends and new ideas in her profession. But for Sarah, teaching is a "job". We talked about the negative connotations of that descriptor, and the common assumption that teaching should be a vocation, the belief that the "real" teacher lives for her work. For Sarah, teaching "has to be just a job. I think it's possible to do a reasonable job of teaching" (6-19). We wondered if it is easier for men to make the distinctions between a job and a career because they often don't make the major commitments in other areas of their lives. Their primary commitment is often to their work outside the home.

Sarah also must measure herself against the myth of the grade one teacher.

People always say, "Oh, you teach grade one!" as if -- "You don't look like a grade one teacher", and I don't! . . . and I stand out as not being a part of that myth, and I'm sure that's part of my problem too. Parents come in with an idealized view of a grade one teacher, and here's this person with a very strong personality (6-36).

As a result, Sarah struggles with external and internal expectations that are often inconsistent with the major goals that she has set for herself. She has

established her priorities, tested them against the realities of her life, and gained a little more peace of mind, but she often must settle for Arnot's (1981) "teeth-gritting harmony".

I made external changes before I accepted them myself, emotionally. I sort of stated, "Family is going to come first," but I didn't really accept that emotionally for some time. . . . And probably the same with other things . . . like my community involvement. . . . I said, "I'm not giving it up!" and eventually I guess it was accepted . . . . So I had to be pretty stubborn about a few things, and then I had to make sure that the issues I was taking a stand on were worth taking a stand on. . . and some of the battles I just stopped fighting (6-3).

For now, however, Sarah feels that she has achieved a balance in her life. She feels that she has gained some insights and feels more hopeful about the future.

The process that Sarah and I shared has enriched and challenged both of us as we reflected on our experiences, shared our responses and puzzled over their meanings. Coming to understand Sarah has helped me to appreciate the diversity of individuals within the teaching profession, to believe more in the person and less in the myth of the teacher. Sarah can best be

understood by exploring the contexts of her life, with its demands, frustrations and rewards. As she gives her words and actions meaning, she becomes empowered, and "gains her voice". As I talk with her and write about her, I also find my voice.

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## APPENDIX ONE - CONSENT FORM

I, \_\_\_\_\_, have read a description of the prepared research project and have been able to discuss with the researcher the full implications as to what is required of me, what role the researcher and her advisor will play, and how the data will be gathered and analyzed. Any questions I have had regarding the study have been clarified. I have had the opportunity to make requests for extra safeguards regarding privacy and confidentiality. I understand that transcripts of the interviews will be prepared and presented by the researcher and that only myself and the researcher's advisor will have access to this data. I also understand that I have the right to examine the selection of excerpts, as well as descriptions, interpretations and analyses that the researcher makes in the final report. I understand that I have the right as co-investigator to suggest and negotiate changes to the report and veto any material that I do not want made public.

I also understand that I may further define my role in this study by selecting from the options which follow:

- A. I have chosen to -  remain anonymous in the report  
 not remain anonymous in the report
- B. I have chosen to -  be a co-author  
 not be a co-author

I may wish to renegotiate this role as the study progresses, and understand that I have the right to withdraw from the study without prejudice at any time.

\_\_\_\_\_  
 (date)

\_\_\_\_\_  
 (signature)

\_\_\_\_\_  
 (address)

\_\_\_\_\_  
 (phone number)

You may contact me at 321-4521 or 327-1886 with any questions. You may also contact any member of the Human Subjects Research Committee at the U of L. The chairperson is Myrna Greene, at 329-2424.

\_\_\_\_\_  
 (researcher)