

**THE CAUSES OF TEACHER STRESS FROM A RETIRED TEACHER'S  
PERSPECTIVE**

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## Dedication

### ADVICE TO PRACTICING TEACHERS

Teaching is a never ending job - know how to shut it off  
Work 8 hours, sleep 8 hours, and play 8 hours  
Take time when you need it  
Keep a balance

You can't be an island unto yourself  
Have the support of a significant other  
Surround yourself with positive people  
Colleagues are important  
Ask for help

Stress is hard to recognize  
If you see it in a colleague, take the time to care  
If you are excessively tired, ask yourself if it's stress  
Then take the time to really listen to the answer  
Look after yourself first

If you're a new teacher, seek out a mentor  
If you're a seasoned teacher, offer to guide and advise  
Treat everyone as an equal  
Be patient and tolerant  
Take the time to care about the people who surround you  
Love one another

Don't take yourself too seriously  
Establish trust with your students  
Participate in extra-curricular  
You'll find it will make a difference in your classroom  
Remember that teachers teach students, not subject matter  
Do what works with kids  
Enjoy the challenge teaching offers  
Change often  
Have fun with kids  
Laugh

Be a life long learner  
Work as a team with parents  
Be an effective time manager  
Prioritize  
Exercise  
Stay healthy, both physically and mentally  
Know and use every stress strategy that exists  
Don't sweat the small stuff

## Abstract

This project, "The Causes of Teacher Stress From A Retired Teacher's Perspective" explores the careers of three retired teachers, focusing specifically upon what created the most stress for each of them throughout their careers. The research techniques used with each subject consisted of a two hour long interview and a thirty question survey. The results showed that a lack of support from administrators and colleagues was the number one cause of stress for all three subjects throughout their careers, but many other causes of stress were also mentioned. The narrative form of this project was chosen to explicitly and personally demonstrate how stress affects teachers.

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## A TEACHING REALITY

BEEP            BEEP            BEEP

It was 6:30 a.m. and the alarm was interrupting her peaceful sleep, awakening her to yet another day. Judy groggily rolled over in bed, and hit the snooze button. *Just ten more minutes of sleep, I only need ten more minutes and then I'll get up.* Judy was finding it harder and harder to get out of bed on time these days. She was always exhausted, and often thought there must be something wrong with her immune system. She made a mental note to get into the doctor some time this week, for sure. She had been meaning to see her doctor for the last two weeks, but there was never enough time in a day to schedule an appointment for herself.

Again the alarm was sounding in her ear. Her husband called into the bedroom.

“Judy are you going to get up? What’s with you lately? Are you sick? You’re so tired all of the time. I have to be at work early today, and don’t forget that tonight my plane leaves at 4:30 p.m., so you have to pick me up at 3:30 p.m. to take me to the airport. Judy? Are you up yet? Are you even hearing one word that I’m saying?”

“Yah, I’m listening,” Judy yelled back as she tiredly stumbled out of bed and went into the bathroom to start running the shower. “I’ll pick you up at 3:30 in front of the office. See ya.” After she heard the front door slam she jumped in the shower, hoping that the water would wake her up. As she stood under the hot spray she began to think about the day ahead of her with dread.

*I wonder if Todd will come to school today? Who am I kidding, he never misses a day of school. It would be so nice if he were away more often. I can't believe he's in my*

*class without a childcare worker. I'll have to go down and talk to good old Bill again for the fifth time this year. I don't know how he ever made it to principal. Oh, this morning I have to remember to photocopy those sheets for Language Arts, and get the coloured paper for Art. I wonder if there is anymore glue hiding somewhere in the office? I'll check.*

Judy shut the water off, got out of the shower and hurriedly got ready for work. She was running fifteen minutes late already. She stared into her closet and took out a black pantsuit that needed ironing, but she didn't have time, nor did she care if it was wrinkled. On her way out the door she grabbed a dry bagel and a can of Coke that she would eat in the car, and her umbrella. The sky was cloudy, but the sun was trying to peek through. Somewhere in the back of her mind, on her way to work, she thought, *Here we go again, another day in the rat race.*

She arrived at school twenty minutes before the bell rang, rushing straight for the office. She needed to get her photocopying done, grab a package of the big sheets of coloured paper, and check for more glue. She was just about in the office when she was confronted with, "Mrs. Smith, Cody pulled my hair, and took my coat." Judy looked down at Sarah, a girl in grade 3 who was constantly tattling and whining about something.

*I don't have time for this,* Judy thought angrily to herself. She forced herself to take a deep breath as she squatted down to talk to Sarah. That situation took five minutes to solve and now Judy was really running late. She rushed to the photocopy machine and realized that there were three other teachers in front of her. *Shit! I'm never going to get this stuff copied before the bell rings.* She angrily put her stuff down in the line up, telling



the teacher in front of her in a cold voice, to make sure that no one butted in front, as she left for the supply room to look for coloured paper and glue. Of course there wasn't any glue to be found, and the only coloured paper that was left was brown, pink and orange.

*What kind of a welfare school is this? How am I going to do this art project with only five bottles of glue for thirty kids, and three ugly colours of paper?* Judy grabbed the paper from the shelf, and went back to the photocopier. She then saw that the photocopier was jamming, and two teachers were down on their knees with every door open on the copier trying to remove a jammed piece of paper.

“Ahhhh!” Judy exclaimed in a loud voice. “I’ve about had enough of this stupid machine, and the lack of supplies in this building!” The two teachers that were trying to fix the photocopier both looked up at Judy, but said nothing. Then the bell rang as Judy rushed to her classroom carrying the ugly coloured paper in her arms.

Her students were crowded outside her classroom as she rushed down the hallway, hurrying to open to the door. As she made her way through the group of children to reach the door, the constant chatter started.

“Mrs. Smith, I got a new puppy last night, you should see him, he is so cute...”

“Mrs. Smith, I didn’t get my math homework done because I forgot it at school.”

“Mrs. Smith, can I go to the bathroom, really quick?”

“Mrs. Smith, are we going to work on our book reports this morning, because mine’s at home on the computer so I don’t have anything to do.”

Judy knew that she should be answering each question with care, and responding to each student’s concern, but instead she just wanted the kids to shut up. *If I hear my*

*name called out one more time, I'm going to blow! Okay, deep breath, just get the door open, get the kids seated, and then they can read or write quietly for a few minutes, and that way I can have some time.*

“Okay class, this morning we are starting out with some quiet reading and writing time. If you don't have a book, you may borrow one from a friend or from the reading center, or you may work on your creative writing projects. Are there any questions?” The class soon settled down as Judy did the daily attendance, and put the slip outside her door. She had just sat down at her desk when Mr. Black the principal appeared at her door with a student following behind. He came bursting into the classroom with a loud, “Good morning class, how is everyone today?” Immediately the students were off task and chattering with each other. *So much for quiet time this morning* Judy thought to herself. *Thanks a lot Bill. I can't believe that he just comes into my class with his own agenda and interrupts the learning of 30 kids. He has no respect for the learning in my classroom. I wonder what he wants now?*

The principal continued talking to the grade four class. “I have a surprise for your class this morning. Your class is lucky enough to have a new student. I would like all of you to welcome Jason.” The principal finished introducing the new student then quickly turned to leave. Nothing had been said to Judy about getting a new student and her numbers were already high, especially with Mr. Johnson, the other grade four teacher, who only had twenty-four of the best grade 4 students.

“Excuse me, Mr. Black, um, before you leave can I have a word with you in the hall?” asked Judy nervously.

“All right, but make it quick,” Mr. Black replied to Judy in a gruff tone. Then Judy turned to her class and directed them to return to silent reading or writing, as she apprehensively stepped out into the hallway to talk to Mr. Black who was waiting impatiently.

“Okay Judy, what is it?”

“Bill, I knew nothing about getting a new student this morning, and are you aware that this will be 31 students in my grade 4 class now? What about Mr. Johnson’s class which only has 24 students in it?”

“Judy,” Bill replied in a condescending tone, “as the principal of this school it is up to me to place students where I think is best for the student. And after reading Jason’s file, I decided he would do well in your class. As for not knowing about getting a new student, I only found out yesterday at 3:00 p.m., and I looked for you, but by 3:30 p.m. you had already left the building.” Judy knew that last comment was a shot to her about not staying at school longer. Lately she just found herself needing to get out of the school as soon as possible.

“Um, okay,” Judy hesitantly responded.

“Now if that’s all, I have work to do, and I suggest you get back to your class. Oh, and you should also take some time to read Jason’s file, there are some things about that boy that you should be aware of.” With that Mr. Black turned abruptly and walked off, leaving Judy standing outside of her classroom, bewildered and upset.

*I hate that man. How am I supposed to handle having another ‘troubled’ student in this class? I can’t do it, I just don’t have the energy, and I can’t do it. But what choice*

*do I have?*

Judy took a deep breath, and noticed the rain beginning to fall outside, as she opened the classroom door and returned to the chaos. Jason, the new kid, was sitting on top of one of the other students, demonstrating a new wrestling hold. The rest of the students were gathered around cheering and yelling, and two other of the more difficult students were getting ready to jump into the middle of it all.

“Okay, students,” Judy yelled. “This is not the way we behave in this class. What are you supposed to be doing?”

“Did you get in trouble by the principal?” Tim asked in a concerned voice.

“No, I did not get in trouble. Mr. Black and I were simply talking,” replied Judy.

“Now class, it’s time for math, so back to your desks and get out your math workbooks.”

Judy had just taught a new math concept and it seemed like the students were beginning to understand it and working hard. Then another knock at the door. Judy stopped monitoring the students and went to see who it was. She instructed the students to continue working.

“Mrs. Smith, it’s time for Jen, Scott, and Aaron to go to the Resource Room for help,” the grade 6 student messenger at the door said.

“Can you please tell Ms. Jaques that we are right in the middle of learning division in math, and I will send them down in twenty minutes?” answered Judy.

“Okay.”

With that Judy turned back to the class which had erupted in chatter. With her class this year, she had to constantly be monitoring them and reinforcing the positive

behavior in order to keep the students on track and learning. After ten minutes she had the students back on task when there was another knock at the door. Immediately all 31 heads turned to see who it was, as Judy went to the door again. Judy was fuming. *How many interruptions in one day do I have to put up with! Can't anyone understand that I'm trying to teach!* As Judy answered the door again she saw Ms. Jaques the Resource Center teacher standing at the door with her hands on her hips. Judy could tell she was not happy. As soon as Judy opened the door Ms. Jaques began lecturing her.

“Judy, do you realize that I work with over one hundred students in this building and it is not up to you to decide when I can fit everyone in. All of the students have been scheduled for specific times to come down for help, and when you have the nerve to tell me that you'll send your kids down when it is convenient for you, well that just shows how inconsiderate you are to the needs of these children and me!” Ms. Jaques stood firmly, looking at Judy, waiting for a response or probably an apology.

By this time, most of the students were looking towards the door, waiting to see how their teacher was going to respond. The other students were busy making spitballs and trying to make them stick to the ceiling. Mrs. Smith, with tears filling her eyes, very calmly looked at Ms. Jaques, then closed the door gently in her face.

“Boy is she pissed at you!” the new kid Jason yelled out.

That was it. Judy turned to the class.

“Jason, get out! You are to go down to the principal's office immediately! The rest of you need to complete to question 28, and I don't want to hear a word out of anyone!” Mrs. Smith yelled at her class. Jason got up to go to the principal's office as he

slammed the classroom door as hard as he could behind him, and the rest of the students went back to their math workbooks without a sound. Judy walked over to the window, and stood quietly, staring at the downpour of rain falling endlessly on the pavement outside.

*What's wrong with me?* Judy thought to herself. *Why am I so close to tears and yelling at my students? I'm so tired all the time, and I don't feel like doing anything. I feel like I could use a week off to just sit and do nothing.* Judy sat behind her desk with her head leaning on her right hand. She couldn't wait for lunch time.

By recess, the rain still hadn't let up, so the students were given the option of staying inside. *Great, now I can't even get to the bathroom or down to the staffroom for a cup of coffee.* After recess, the students reassembled in their desks, and settled down quite quickly. Judy knew it was because of the mood she was in. The students could sense her mood so quickly, and that would set the tone for the class. The rest of the morning went smoothly with the exception of a few discipline problems, but nothing too serious. Judy was able to handle the problems on her own. She had Tom isolated in the corner so he could get some work done. Then another group had to be separated because they weren't doing their work. They were too busy talking about puppies and pets. Judy decided to not do the art project she had planned, so the kids continued with their Language Arts writing. By lunch time Judy was feeling a bit better, as she headed down to the staffroom at the other end of the school.

*Thank goodness MacDonald's cheeseburgers are being sold today, otherwise I'd be going without lunch, again.* She pulled some money out of her pocket, bought a Coke

from the vending machine, then went into the office and bought two cheeseburgers. As she casually walked into the staffroom, not one person spoke to her. Some of the teachers were engaged in a conversation about the hockey playoffs, which she didn't have any interest in, and another group of teachers were discussing when to plant their gardens. *How do people find the time to watch three hours of hockey at night or even think about planting a garden?* Judy quietly ate her lunch in silence, feeling very alone. She began thinking about how she had been feeling for the last month and decided she would phone and make an appointment to see the doctor after school today, right at 3:00 p.m. That way she could still pick up John, her husband, at the office and get him to the airport on time. She walked over to the phone in the staffroom and made the appointment. While she was on the phone, Bill, the principal, had walked through the staffroom and was standing over her, waiting for her to get off of the phone. After Judy hung up the phone, she excused herself as she walked past him.

“Judy! I’m waiting to talk to you,” Bill said insistently.

“Oh, sorry Bill, I thought you were waiting to use the phone.” Everyone in the staffroom had stopped talking and was listening to the two of them.

“I need to talk to you in my office right away.” With that Bill turned and walked through the crowded staffroom with Judy following closely behind. None of the teachers said a word as they all watched Bill rush out of the staffroom and into his office, with Judy at his heels, a worried look on her face.

*What does he want? What have I done wrong now?* Judy was actually feeling frightened as she sat down in the principal’s office. Bill gruffly told her to close the door

behind her. Judy closed the door softly behind her, and paused briefly, glancing out the window of the door, wishing she were anywhere else.

“I want to hear your side of what happened this morning with Jason. But before we begin I have to tell you that I am not impressed with your professionalism in this matter. Jason is a new student to our school, his first day, and you yell at him, simply because he pointed out the fact that Ms Jaques was angry with you. Which she has every right to be, I might add.” It quickly became very clear to Judy that Bill had no intention of listening to her side of the story, but she told it anyway.

“Bill, Marie Jaques started yelling at me first about how hard is to schedule students for the resource room. I didn’t want to get into a big fight, and that wasn’t the time or place to discuss the issue, and I was angry as well. So I gently closed the door and went back to my class. And, we were right in the middle of a math lesson. Then Jason says in a loud voice in front of the class that I had sure pissed off Ms. Jaques. That language is unacceptable in my classroom, so I sent him to the office.”

“That’s not the story Jason told me. He felt that you were angry with Ms. Jaques and you took it out on him. I’m sure you can expect a parent phone call on this one, and then you can explain your story to Jason’s mother. And as for you and Ms. Jaques, whatever is going on there I expect the two of you to sort it out. That is not an issue that I care to get involved with. That’s all Judy.” With that Bill turned to his computer and began working. She had been dismissed.

“Bill,” Judy quietly mumbled as she opened the door, “what was done with Jason?”



“Judy, nothing was done with Jason because I believe he is telling me the truth.

You can expect him back in your class this afternoon. Now, good-bye,” she was told in a strict tone.

Judy walked slowly out of the office feeling completely inadequate. She felt like a discarded rag doll. Then the thoughts of self-doubt began to run through her mind.

*Maybe I did just take my anger out on Jason, and it is his first day. I just haven't been myself. I know I'm not giving teaching my all. I used to really enjoy it, and the kids and I did such fun stuff. Now it's a huge effort just to get through the day. I haven't organized or done anything fun for so long with this class. What the hell is wrong with me? I think I need to get more organized and focused again. Maybe that'll help me out of this slump.*

Judy headed for her classroom, just before the bell was about to ring. *I'm so glad it's only P.E. this afternoon.* The students noisily came into the classroom, sitting in their desks, excited that they got to end the day with P.E. The class was in the middle of a softball unit in gym, and was excited about playing a game today. Judy lined them up and lead them to the gym where the teams where chosen and the game began. Throughout the course of the game, Jason again swore at a classmate for cheating, so he was sitting out. Judy didn't even bother to send him to the office again. Sue claimed she had hurt her finger catching the ball, so she was sitting out, and good old Todd thought it would be more fun to throw the softball at the batter's body, instead of over the plate. He had managed to hit Tim, one of the more quiet boys, in the stomach with the softball, knocking him to the ground in tears. And of course, the whole time Todd was claiming it

was an accident, after he had laughed at the crying boy, pointing out to the class what a baby Tim was. Judy wondered what it was that made children behave the way they did.

*Why was Todd so mean to the other kids? He always had to pretend that he was the toughest and the coolest, like he didn't care about anything or anyone. And then there was Jason. What kind of home has he grown up in if swearing is so much a part of his vocabulary? He must be hearing it from somewhere. And I'm sure the influence of the good old TV doesn't help these kids much either.*

It was 2:30 p.m. and Judy had had enough. The class brought in the bases, the balls, and the bats, and returned to the classroom. She helped the students get their homework ready to take home, as she anticipated the dismissal at 2:50 p.m. She had instructed Todd and Jason to stay in after the bell rang. Once the bell for the day had rung, and the class had emptied, she first turned to Jason to discuss his swearing.

“Jason,” Judy started in a calm voice, “do you understand that swearing is unacceptable in school?”

“So,” Jason replied in a cool tone.

“So Jason, what that means is that you have to try and control the words you choose to use at school.” Jason began fidgeting in his chair and was visibly getting angry.

“Mrs. Smith, you can't tell me what to do or how to talk, and my mom is waiting for me to get home, so I'm leaving and you can't do anything about it!” With that Jason got up, grabbed his coat, and walked out of the classroom, deliberately leaving his homework on top of his desk, and slamming the door for a second time that day.

Judy took a deep breath and walked over to the reading center where Todd was

waiting with a sly grin on his face.

“Todd, what happened out there on the softball field today? Why were you trying to hurt Tim with the softball?” Judy asked in a quiet voice.

“I told you it was all an accident. I didn’t mean to, I can’t pitch that good, the ball just went in that direction and hit Tim right in the stomach. I can’t believe that made him cry, I didn’t even throw it my hardest.” Judy knew there was no getting through to Todd. He was in denial about everything. Nothing was ever his fault, and he accepted no responsibility for his actions. Unfortunately, Judy was not going to be able to change this about Todd, she simply had to deal with it.

“Todd, I don’t believe you, and I will be phoning your mother again about this incident.”

“Okay, can I go now?” asked Todd.

“Good-bye Todd.”

Judy quickly checked her watch and realized it was 3:00 p.m. and she was late for her doctor’s appointment. The story of her life, being late. She quickly gathered up the marking she would have to complete tonight for report cards, which had to be into the office by Monday, and grabbed her coat. She made a mental note to phone Jason’s and Todd’s parents tonight, as she jumped in her car and sped down to the clinic. She noticed that the rain had started to lighten up a little.

Judy entered the clinic and checked in with the nurse at the front desk who immediately took her in to an examining room. Dr. Blus came into the room soon after.

“Hi Judy, what brings you here today?” Dr. Blus asked. She could tell from

looking at Judy that something wasn't right.

"I don't know if I'm just being a baby or what. I have been so tired lately that I can't get enough sleep. I don't have any energy, and I dread going to work everyday. Plus I don't go out with friends anymore because I'm so tired. Basically, I teach all day and come home exhausted. I just seem to be really worn down. I can't really put my finger on it."

"Okay Judy, I want to run a few tests." Dr. Blus took Judy's blood pressure which she discovered was very high, and ran a few blood tests which came back normal.

Twenty minutes later, after the doctor had talked to Judy about her life and job while waiting for the test results, she told Judy she had an idea about what was causing all of these symptoms. Judy sat tensed up, expecting to hear the worst.

The doctor looked Judy in the eyes and very gently asked, "Have you ever considered taking some time off from teaching?"

"What?!" Judy responded in a bewildered state.

"Judy, what you are describing to me are symptoms of stress. There is nothing physically wrong with you, except that your blood pressure is dangerously high. I would strongly recommend that you think about taking some time off from work."

Judy couldn't believe what she was hearing, she wasn't stressed. She casually glanced up at the clock on the wall and realized it was now 3:35 p.m. She was late again. She hurriedly stood up and thanked her doctor, as she explained she had to go because she had to drive her husband to the airport. As Judy ran out the door her doctor told her once again to consider taking some time off.

Judy sped to her husband's office where he was waiting impatiently on the sidewalk outside in the drizzling rain.

"I'm so sorry John. I was at the doctor's and it took longer than I expected," Judy started to explain. John's anger dissipated.

"Are you okay? I mean is everything all right?" questioned John in a concerned voice. He leaned over and put his hand on Judy's knee as they headed out of town to the airport.

"Oh yeah," Judy responded casually. "In fact, I think Dr. Blus has lost it. I explained all of my symptoms, like my tiredness and headaches and lack of energy, so she ran some tests, and told me I was stressed and that I should consider taking some time off. Can you believe that? I mean my blood pressure is a little high, but it's not stress." Judy chuckled after telling this to John. The car remained silent for a few seconds, as Judy glanced over at John. "What?" she asked. "Why aren't you saying anything? What is it? Say it if you have something to say," she told John seriously.

"Well, Judy," John began cautiously, "I think maybe you should think about what the doctor told you."

They pulled up to the airport as Judy parked the car and turned to look at John.

"You think I'm stressed? Do you think I'm a basket case, ready to have a breakdown at any second? Do you think I belong in the psyche ward? Is that what you think is wrong with me?" Judy said angrily to John.

"Whoa, just a minute. I didn't say any of those things. I am just saying that you should consider what the doctor told you. I don't want to fight before I leave."

“Okay, sorry. Anyway, you better get going and I’ll see you in a couple of days,”

Judy replied as she kissed her husband of five years. John got out of the car and grabbed his suitcase.

“Are you sure you’re going to be okay? I could postpone this trip,” offered John.

Judy simply nodded with a smile and waved at John as he headed into the airport waving back at Judy in the car.

Judy was too tired to cook supper that night so she ordered a large pizza to be delivered. She clicked on the TV and sat down for the first time that day. Outside, she noticed the sky had darkened considerably and the rain was really starting to come down hard. Soon her mind started replaying the days events in her head and she remembered she had to phone Todd’s and Jason’s parents. *I might as well do it now and get it over with and then I can enjoy the rest of my evening.* She pulled out the two phone numbers from her briefcase and dialed Todd’s.

She already knew how this phone call was going to go. She had phoned Todd’s mom at least a dozen times throughout the year. Todd’s mom was a single parent, who had just recently gotten divorced and the husband didn’t want to have anything to do with her or the kids. She was struggling with finances and knew Todd needed help, but basically didn’t had the knowledge or time to do anything with Todd.

“Hello Mrs. Kelp? This is Judy Smith phoning, Todd’s teacher? How are you? I’m phoning about an incident that happened today in class with Todd.” Judy explained what had happened to Todd’s mom and she apologized profusely and promised to talk to Todd about his behavior. Judy thanked her and hung up the phone. *I know nothing is*

*going to happen with Todd. She'll talk to him and Todd will give all of the right answers, and then tomorrow I'll be dealing with something else that Todd will have done to another student. Why do I even bother phoning? Okay, next call.*

Judy was a bit nervous phoning Jason's parents because she had never met them before and didn't know what to expect. She quickly went over what she was going to say as she dialed the phone number. After five rings a woman finally picked up the phone.

"Hello," announced the female voice.

"Hi, this is Judy Smith calling, is Mr. or Mrs. Rains there?"

"There ain't no Mr. Rains, so ya must be talkin' to Mrs. Who is this again?"

"Hi Mrs. Rains, this is Judy Smith calling, I'm Jason's new teacher. I'd like to talk to you about Jason's behavior...." Judy was rudely interrupted by Mrs. Rains.

"Are you the fucking bitch who is making up stories about my Jason, and causing all sorts of trouble for him on his first day of school? Do have any fuckin' idea how hard it is to get Jason to even go to school, and then you pick on him, and yell at him in front of the class, and send him to the principal's office. Who the hell do you think you are?"

Judy was in absolute shock.

"Um Mrs. Rains, please Mrs. Rains let me explain," Judy spoke calmly. As the swearing and verbal abuse continued Judy raised her voice sternly. "Mrs. Rains, I have had enough! You need to listen to me!"

"Now you think you're going to yell at me you bitch! I ain't got nothing more to say to you! Your principal and the school board are going to hear about all of this. I'm gonna have you fired!" Then Mrs. Rains slammed the phone down so hard, it hurt Judy's

ear.

Judy stood stunned, with the phone still in one hand. *What did I do to deserve any of that?!* The tears welled up again in Judy's eyes, as she began questioning her ability as a teacher. She slowly looked up the phone number of her principal, so she could tell him right away what had just happened. She dialed Bill's number, hoping he was at home. Judy was still shaking from Mrs. Rain's phone call as she spoke to Bill.

She explained the conversation to Bill, trying her hardest not to cry as she retold the phone conversation, but she knew her voice was shaking the whole time.

"And then she hung up on me," Judy finished.

"Well, Judy, I can't say that I didn't tell you so, but I did. I warned you were going to have an angry parent phone call after the way you yelled at Jason in class. You have to learn how to handle your emotions in a better way, Judy. Well, I'm right in the middle of something here at home, so I'll have to deal with this in the morning." Click. Bill had hung up the phone.

Judy solemnly stared out her kitchen window as the thunder began to rumble and the lightning lit up the black sky with a loud crack. Slowly she hung up the phone. In a daze she walked into her living room and sat down in the big blue chair. She put her head in her hands and began to sob uncontrollably. *I quit.*



## BACKGROUND/PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The preceding narrative, “A Teacher’s Reality,” is a combination of the information I gained from the three interviews. The teacher in the story, Judy Rains, is a fictional character whose teaching experience is a culmination of the three subjects who shared their teaching careers with me. The problem of teacher stress became very real to me as a teacher during the past three years of my teaching career. As I began my Masters degree I began to question what caused teacher stress, and why some teachers succumbed to it, and others seemed to be unaffected.

I have been teaching at the junior high level for the past seven years, and given the remarkable demands of the job/career, I lately began to question myself about my career choice of teaching. To me this revelation about questioning myself as a teacher was an indication that something was wrong. When I was six years old, in grade two, I announced to my family that I was going to be a teacher. From that day on, that is all I had ever wanted to do or be. As my peers in high school struggled to find a career that would be right for them, my mind was made up. Teaching was my calling, the only thing I wanted to do. That’s why I knew something subtle yet drastic had happened to me within the past seven years of my life that caused me to consider giving up teaching. After much soul searching and personal reflection, I decided it was the stress of the job that had made me feel this way. Now I am searching for specifics. As an educator I want to know how to relieve stress, if it is possible to avoid stress, how to live a more healthy life as a teacher, and how do I reconstitute myself into a teacher that cannot only survive, but thrive in the education world. Most importantly, I want to know what exactly causes teacher stress.

There are other personal reasons for my interest in the area of teacher stress - my dad. As a teacher, my dad is my mentor. In the last three years of his career, his health slowly deteriorated. He went from being a relatively young (in his early fifties) energetic, experienced teacher, to a very old, sick struggling teacher. His health finally forced him into retirement two years ago. What happened to him and why? My instincts tell me it is the stress of the teaching profession that took away his health. I need to know how this happened and why it happened to prevent myself and others from succumbing to the stress of being a teacher.

## PURPOSE AND FOCUS

The purpose of this project was to examine, in detail, the teaching careers of the three selected retired teachers concerning the stresses and challenges they faced throughout their careers. This study explores the careers of these teachers, and their state of wellness during their teaching careers.

There were three things I had hoped to discover as a result of this project. First, as a researcher I wanted to find out which parts of teaching the three retired teachers would identify as causing them the most stress. Second, I wanted to know if the four areas I thought would be identified as stressful, (increased discipline problems, a sense of powerlessness, the influence of declining social values on the school setting, and the expanding role of teacher), would in fact be mentioned. Finally, I wanted to know if these retired teachers would choose the career of teaching if given the chance to live their lives over, and the reasons for their choice.

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

As I began reviewing the literature on teacher stress and burnout, I was unable to find any studies on the topic that involved retired teachers. They seem to be a forgotten resource in the world of research. As I began reading the many studies on work place stress and teacher burnout, I realized that I needed to take my working hypothesis, retired teachers would identify increased discipline problems, a sense of powerlessness, the influence of declining social values on the school setting, and the expanding role of teacher as four of the major causes of stress throughout their careers, and divide it into smaller parts in order to extract the relevant information needed for my research project. I divided my topic into five common themes:

1. An exact definition of stress and burnout.
2. Increased discipline problems increase stress for teachers.
3. A sense of powerlessness is a contributing factor to teacher stress.
4. The influence of declining social values on the school setting causes teacher stress
5. The expanding role of teacher increases teacher stress

### A Definition of Stress and Burnout

With regard to defining teacher stress and/or burnout Friedman (1991) in his study mentions his working definition of stress, which is taken from Freudenberger (1974). He claims stress is, "...feelings of failure and being worn or wrung out, resulting from an overload of claims on energy, on personal resources, or on the spiritual strength of the worker." Brissie et al. (1988) cites Farber (1984) and Hoover-Dempsen (1982) definition

of stress which is more detailed than Friedman's. Brisse et al. defines burnout as, "...behaviorally manifested emotional and physical exhaustion deriving from stressful situational events not adequately met by effective coping strategies."(p.106). Truch (1980) offers a simple definition of stress that is to the point. He states that stress and burnout are physical, emotional, and attitudinal exhaustion. Paine (1982) includes a chapter in his book by Maslach (1982) who explains that there is not one clear definition for stress, instead she lists fifteen items that are all a part of the definition of stress. A few of them that are pertinent and relevant to my hypothesis are:

- Burnout is a progressive loss of idealism, energy, and purpose experienced by people in the helping professions as a result of the conditions of their work.
- Burnout is a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion marked by physical depletion of chronic fatigue, feelings of helplessness and hopelessness, and the development of a negative self-concept and negative attitudes toward work, life and other people.
- To burnout is to become debilitated, weakened, because of extreme demands on one's physical and/or mental energy.
- Burnout includes a condition produced by working too hard for too long in a high-pressure environment.

Ivancevich and Ganster (1986) define stress as, "the psychological state experienced by an individual when faced with demands, constraints, and/or opportunities that have important, but uncertain outcomes."(p.38). Lowe and Northcott (1986) have a technical definition of stress. They divide the term stress into stressor and stress reaction. A stressor

is an event or condition to which the individual reacts negatively, the cause of the problem. The stress reaction is the employee's negative response to the stressor. Then finally Selye (1976), one of the founders in the area of stress, offers another simple biological definition of stress. He states that stress is a non-specific body response to any demand made upon it.

#### Increased Discipline Problems Create Stress For Teachers

Roe and Gray (1998) quoted a study done by Manthei and Solman in 1988 in which teachers were asked to rank in order a list of stressors, and the number one stressor was pupil recalcitrance. The Manitoba Teachers' Society (1991) quoted a study done in New York State in 1979, in which teachers were asked to rank in order the times that were the most stressful to the least stressful. The most stressful was managing disruptive students. The Alberta Teachers' Association quoted King et al (1988, p.70) as reporting that teachers found discipline/attendance problems, and student confrontations as the second most frequently mentioned stressor. Huston (1989) states that non-motivated and unruly students are part of the stressful conditions of the teaching profession. Truch (1980) states in his book, "...that the stress and exhaustion a teacher feels at the end of the day are closely linked to the effort required to "keep students disciplined." (p.87).

#### A Sense of Powerlessness is a Contributing Factor to Teacher Stress

Many of the sources eluded to an increased stress level of employees in all types of jobs due to a feeling powerlessness. The Stress Homepage (Wednesday, February 17, 1999) states, "A feeling of powerlessness is a universal cause of job stress." It continues, citing a variety of examples and situations in which a sense of powerlessness creates

helplessness, hopelessness, and stress. Truch (1980) also discusses how lacking a sense of control is a cause of stress because employees feel their input is not valued, and it does not matter what the employees say or do, they are simply at the mercy of the boss. Paine (1982) includes a chapter by Carroll and White in which they describe a sense of powerlessness as one of the system factors that contributes to burnout. Lowe and Northcott (1986) discuss in their research an employee's position in an organization and the structure of the organization, as it relates to job stress. In hierarchical jobs, the employees that are at the top or close to the top of the hierarchy have less job stress caused by powerlessness because their input is valued and they have the power to make more decisions. The opposite is true for the employees at the bottom of the hierarchical structure. The Alberta Teachers' Association web page (October 1998) listed an interesting article entitled "Trying To Teach - What is the Present Situation?" One of the conclusions reached was, "There is a feeling of being powerless to control or even affect the impact of these changes (in the education system), in part because they (the decisions) are externally imposed, and hard to pin down in terms of source or rationale." This article stated that Alberta teachers had in some way given up trying to change the current education system because it was hopeless. These teachers felt their opinions and experience was discredited, and all of the decisions were being made from outside of the schools and the classrooms. Thus, they are employees with a silent voice, and this sense of powerlessness increases teacher stress.

## The Influence of Declining Social Values on the School Setting Cause Teacher Stress

Research to support this strand of my hypothesis is lacking, but as a teacher I know it exists. From my experience I know that as society declines, a teacher is forced to deal with more at school. For example, at the school where I teach, the rate and severity of violent acts have increased. Ten years ago when I was in school, a fight after school meant a yelling match usually followed by a few punches, and these fights were rare. Now, a fight after school, about 50 per cent of the time, will involve knives, or baseball bats, or some sort of weapon, and these fights are usually about once a month, on average.

Another example is that as a teacher, I have been told numerous times not to touch students in any way because this could be misconstrued as sexual assault. I am unable to effectively do my job without being able to touch students. As well, I have accompanied numerous female students to the doctor's because they are sure they are either pregnant or have a STD, and they are too frightened to tell their parent(s). The worst example is that in seven years of teaching I have had two students successfully commit suicide. Both of their suicide notes stated that the student felt they had no one to turn to and that no one understood them. This year alone, I have dealt with two female students with eating disorders, and two other students who are clinically depressed and both are suicidal. I am an English teacher, not a counselor, but as society declines I know my stress level increases.

Truch (1980) briefly touches on the area of societal breakdowns and its effects on children and consequently teachers. Hargreaves (1994) states that in Britain and North America the role of teacher is constantly being redefined, encompassing social and



emotional goals, as well as academic ones. As society breaks down, teachers and the education system are expected to pick up the pieces. This increases teachers' workloads as well as their stress level.

### The Expanding Role of Teacher Increases Teacher Stress

The article on the internet from the Alberta Teachers' Association (October 1998) made it very clear that the workload and jobs of a teacher are increasing and creating more stress. Friedman (1991) identified role overload as a source of stress among workers in an organization. Hargreaves (1994) discusses the changing compositions of classes each year to include more special needs students, and more students with varying degree of skills that add to a teacher's stress load. Paine (1982) includes a chapter in his book by Cherniss in which the whole picture of teacher workload is discussed. Cherniss discusses how teachers are puppets in the political, social, and economic world. A teacher's job is no longer simply to teach the subject matter. Teachers are now expected to be counselors, mediators, money managers, specialists, a parent to each child in their class etc. The list is endless, yet the training is not. Teachers are taught how to teach a specific subject matter at the higher levels, and specific grades at the elementary level. They are not taught how to intervene in a dysfunctional family, or how to talk to a suicidal teenager, or what to do with the various academic and social/emotional needs of each student within one class. The result is an increased stress level. As the role of a teacher expands to encompass every academic, social, emotional, and psychological need of each student in their classroom, it is inevitable that the stress level of teachers will also expand.

## METHOD

This project is qualitative in nature. The goal of this study is to holistically explore the causes of teacher stress from a retired teacher's point of view. The topic of teacher stress is an emotional topic, and therefore it is vital that the subjects have a chance to verbalize their feelings and thoughts, rather than simply filling in a survey or questionnaire. It is my opinion that it would be inappropriate to simply collect data and analyze it from a statistical approach when dealing with such personal and sensitive information. It was important that the subjects of this study be given the opportunity to voice their opinions and tell their stories about their stress as a teacher, in its entirety. Thus, the method of interviewing was the best vehicle to allow the subjects the freedom of expression. The interview (Appendix A) was used to openly explore the teaching careers of the subjects, and determine what aspects of teaching they felt were the most stressful. The survey (Appendix B) was used to collect sociological data.

The interview form consists of ten open-ended questions that the interviewee and I explored and discussed in detail, with each interview lasting between 90 minutes to 120 minutes. The survey consists of thirty questions. The first six questions are for information purposes to help describe the context and gather the sociological data about the participants of this study. Twelve of the questions are to determine if these teachers did feel stressed or burnt out during their careers. The remaining twelve questions are meant to determine if any of the four areas I identified in the hypothesis were found to be true by the selected subjects. Questions three and four of the interview were adapted from Huston's (1989) case study on teacher stress and burnout , and on the survey, questions

nineteen, twenty, twenty-one, twenty-six, and twenty-eight were adapted from Friedman's (1991) study on high and low burnout schools. The remainder of the questions, numbers one to eighteen, twenty-two to twenty-five, twenty-seven, and twenty-nine and thirty, I created based on the hypothesis.

This study was meant to explore the teaching stories of three retired teachers with a focus on what caused them the most stress throughout their careers. The intent of this study was not to make generalizations about retired teachers and the causes of their stress.

I first made contact with the three subjects for this project in April, 1999, and they were all eager to participate. Once the proposal had been approved I set up a mutually acceptable interview time for each of the three subjects, and the interviews all took place at the interviewee's homes. Before the actual interview I delivered to each subject the interview questions and the survey. I let the interviewees know that I did not want written rehearsed answers for the interview, but by giving them the interview questions before the interview, the subjects had a chance to think about some of their answers, thus providing more depth to the study. I also made it clear to each subject that each interview could take up to two hours. After the interview was over the surveys were collected from the subject, and they were told that after I had had a chance to listen to the tape recorded interviews and analyze the information, I would then contact them for a fifteen minute follow-up session. The follow-up sessions were used to ensure that as a researcher I had included all of the information each subject gave, and to also provide the opportunity for the subjects to make any deletions, changes or additions to the summary transcripts of their interview.

## DATA

Each of the three interviews (Appendix A) was tape recorded for the entire time the interviewee spoke. At the beginning of each interview the tape recorder was somewhat inhibiting, but after each interviewee became more comfortable, the tape recorder was soon forgotten.

After I had finished tape recording the interviews, I then listened to the recorded interviews repeatedly to discover the common and/or unique themes from each interview. As well, during each interview I wrote some field notes. Each of the interviews was then summarized in written form. After I had written the summaries from each interview, each subject was then asked to read the summary I had written of their individual interview, and make any changes they felt necessary.

I also have the data from the surveys (Appendix B) of the individual subjects. The information from the surveys provided me with sociological data, as well as a method to check for any commonalties of the causes of teacher stress between the subjects, with regard to my hypothesis (Appendix C). The raw data have for this study are the tapes of the three interviews, three surveys from the selected retired teachers, and the summaries of the three interviews.

## ED'S TEACHING STORY

I had previously arranged, by phone, to meet with Ed on Wednesday May 18th at 3:30 p.m. Ed is a retired teacher who taught for thirty-five years mainly at the high school level, teaching Technical Education and Computers/Technology. He has been retired for less than five years, and retired due to health reasons. Ed was very interested in the topic of teacher stress, and was honoured that I had selected him to be part of my project for my Master's Degree. On May 15th I had dropped off the interview and survey questions for Ed to look at, and instructed him to not prepare written answers for the interview, but to take some time and think about the questions. I also asked him if he could have the survey completed for May 18th, if possible. On the day of the interview Ed seemed very relaxed. I arrived at his house at about 3:20 p.m. and was warmly greeted outside by Ed as I stepped out of my car. Ed and his wife live about twenty minutes out of town on a beautiful acreage with a few animals and lots of flowers and plants. I was then ushered into the kitchen to sit down while Ed's wife offered us a choice of beverages and homemade cookies. She made us tea as Ed and I sat side by side at the kitchen table, in a brightly painted yellow country kitchen. We chatted about the weather, Ed's retirement, and how beautiful their place was for about thirty minutes while we drank our tea and ate cookies. At about 4:00 p.m. we were ready to begin the interview. Ed's wife excused herself to go downstairs and sew while Ed was interviewed, claiming she would not be able to keep her mouth shut if she stayed anywhere within hearing distance. She and Ed laughed as she headed downstairs, and I quietly turned on the tape recorder to begin.

Interview With Ed

Q1: Tell me about your career as a teacher

I taught 35 years, beginning in Chetwynd, BC teaching elementary school. A lot of music, then moved to junior high, then went back to university to become a shop teacher, then went back to Chetwynd to teach all the shop courses, 11 different courses. Then left Chetwynd after four years and came to Cranbrook, taught industrial science and power technology. Then moved to teaching metal, wood, then automotive for 18 years, then taught computers, and eventually moved to full time computers. In that time took a year off to go back to university to finish degree, then in the last five years went back and got my masters in Special Ed.

Q2: How did teaching change over last ten years of career?

It became more interesting. At start of career teachers were authoritarian and used the strap, they governed with an iron hand. It became better when teachers had to use their social skills to manipulate students, instead of using force. But with that comes more stress because it keeps you constantly with your sensors out over time. Teachers can make more mistakes, because if you don't have your sensors out and miss when a students has had enough, then there's trouble. I just think it became more interesting, and probably more enjoyable.

Me: Where you taught in teacher training to be authoritarian and use the strap?

Yes, you bet, you were there to teach and students were there to learn. If anyone was disrupting the learning situation, then you stepped on them and you stepped on them hard. You of course had the choice of whether to strap or not, and the choice of how you

treated kids within your own room, but you didn't have the choice of letting your students be noisy and disrupt another teacher's class. You had to be in control because a teacher who wasn't in control was not a good teacher. Control was the name of the game.

Me: How did you change? How did you go from being an authoritarian who strapped kids to gradually reasoning with kids?

Well times change. As they took the strap out, you had to use other ways to discipline. The strap went out rather quickly, it was government ordered, and other than that you didn't have the strap and what were you going to do. Some teachers really had trouble and others never used the strap so it wasn't a big deal. But we were never taught how to discipline without the strap once it was taken away.

Q3: Were you doing as good a job or better at the end of your career as you were at the start?

I was definitely doing a better job at the end of my career. At the start I was green as grass and didn't have any real understandings of kids and how they think or work or what makes kids want to succeed. Those are the techniques that a new teacher doesn't know. At the start of your career, there aren't any tools in your tool box and as you learn there are more. So I was definitely doing a better job at the end of my career than the start.

Q4: Did you ever wish you had chosen a different occupation?

No I was fortunate to get into a job that I have loved since day one, and I went on throughout my career enjoying it. As a shop teacher I always had the attitude and the skills to move out of teaching and find another job, if ever I stopped liking teaching. I could

have left as a mechanic or used my computer skills. I was never financially trapped in teaching, I stayed because I enjoyed it and wanted to do it.

Me: What was so rewarding that made you stay?

It was the challenge of the job, I never had the attitude that I was going to work. I got up every day knowing today was going to be different with something new, something challenging, there's something going on that wasn't going on before, every year there's a different group of kids, every class is different. I never wanted to become an administrator or to get out of the classroom because I enjoyed it. There are up and down days, when you wish you had a little more control, or things were different, but that's the same with every job. Teaching to me has always been a game, and I played the game. My feeling is that if you take teaching too seriously you can get yourself all bent out of shape and I never took it that seriously, I enjoyed going to work, for the kids. I could flip quarters with kids at lunch time or the start of class and at the same time I could show them how to solve a programming problem in C+ language and if I didn't feel the class was on task, or it just wasn't a working day, then we could have a philosophical discussion about where computers are going in the world, etc. and just talk for awhile. An education is not laid out in black and white, and that's why I like it.

Q5: Describe a typical day of teaching in the latter part of your career.

6:30 get up and shower, and run through what I am doing today, and where were things left from the day before because when I come home after school I shut off. I work 8 hours, play 8 hours, and sleep 8 hours whenever I can. So when I come home I don't carry my job home with me. I shut school down when I get home. But at 6:30 I start to



put together what's going to happen that day. I arrive at school and check in the office to find out about a staff meeting I had forgotten, then I head to the classroom and I know what I am doing with the grade 11s and 12s, the projects they're on. The daybook is just a note book for me where I keep track of what kids need, who was away, basically if I have a lesson to teach then I'll teach, but I found in the latter part of my career I needed to do less instructing and more individual one on one teaching and helping. My day started when I hit the deck at 8:30, so I mostly stayed in my room. At lunch hour I told the kids that everyone needs 20 minutes to eat and relax, and if any students put their name on the help board, I would take my 20 minutes and then come back. Mostly I encouraged the grade 12s to help out the grade 11s because they're in the computer room all of the time anyway. The lab was open until 4:30 and I tried to get out of there by 5:00 p.m. So I worked 8:00 to 5:00 or 4:30. I resented taking my job home with me after I had put in my 8 hours, so I put in my 8 hours then shut down until the next day. But I guess the things in my teaching day that disturbed me the most were administrators who decided what they wanted was more important than kids and the teaching, and the other thing that really bugged me was people that disrupted the learning environment. If anything caused me stress in teaching it would be those two things.

Me: How do you shut your day off at 4:30?

Well, my wife worked at Parkland school and we shared a vehicle, so she would drop me off around 7:45, then pick me up around 4:15 or so, and at that point I simply said that's it I'm leaving, and occasionally you can't. Report cards have to be done, etc. But generally I would leave and change my clothes and put my body and mind at some

other task and some other state. If I didn't do that all of the pressures and things I haven't accomplished that day would just keep on rolling around in my mind for hours and I would be dreaming at night and doing two days work in one. I had to turn it off. If I couldn't get it done in one day in 8 hours, then it wasn't going to get done. I have actually told kids that for the next hour I am not here because I have to get these report cards done, I need you to work on your projects, and leave me and my invisible office doors will be open in an hour.

Q6: On a scale of 1 to 5 how stressful was your career as a teacher?

That's a tough questions overall, because in my first years it was very stressful. I came out of university with only 10 months of training. Then I was teaching Math 30 and 31 and they were government examinable courses, and I had been trained as a primary teacher. I wasn't equipped to teach those courses. So the first part of my career was very stressful. Then the last two years of my career were very stressful because computers changed from programming to going to information technology. It was a totally new course outline and there wasn't any inservice provided. They just said these are the I.R.P.s for Info Tech and here you go. So I was working 12 to 14 hours a day in order to teach these courses because nothing in my filing cabinets worked anymore, none of my old lessons plan and so on. So the last two year were stressful from trying to learn and know the material and get a handle on what works with the kids and what doesn't. And I was the only teacher, with no one to talk to, so that was stressful But not the kids they were good.

Q7a: What are the most stressful aspects of your teaching career?

Administrators who lost sight of why they were there, thinking that meeting their deadlines and getting their agendas served, forgetting the teachers and students. When this happens pressure and stress are the result. The other most stressful thing was being union staff rep, people coming to me with problems that I have to take to the admin. and try to sort out on behalf of teachers. Things often didn't get resolved to anyone's satisfaction and that was stressful but I did enjoy being the staff rep.

Q7b: Do you think stressors have changed for teachers over the years?

Definitely. The first thing that happens now is kids who didn't stay in school 20 years ago they were out working on the farm or in the bush, etc. There were lots of jobs, that kids could leave school and make money, especially the ones whose school wasn't their bag. Then you had only the students who were able to handle it in large measure. Now every kid is in school. The student who really has no ability to handle the courses he's programmed for is still taking them, and he can't get out. And so those students quite often, through no fault of their own, become problems. It stresses teachers. So kids who stay in school now who didn't used to stay in school create stress on teachers. The other thing is the change in the nature of families. When I started teaching there was a mom at home with the kids, and now I think we have a whole lot of kids where both parents work and there's no one at home, or the parents are too tired to become involved with their kids and I think we are seeing a big change in society as a result of this two parents working and kids being left on their own to watch TV And of course this whole lot of TV. So the family unit has changed and kids staying in school who didn't used to stay in school have both added a whole new dimension that I didn't have when I started teaching. But the

other thing too when I started teaching I didn't have all of these resources available. There was no such thing as child care workers and counselors who helped and talked to kids, and you were lucky if you had one over head in the whole school, let alone in each classroom, that sort of things. So we have a lot of lesson aids and additional sources of help we never had before.

Q8: At any point in your career did you feel stressed or burnt out?

I think we all do from time to time For me there is the kind of stress that is harmful that ties your guts up in knots and you come home and your sick with worry and you don't know how to handle it and things aren't going well, that's the kind of stress that will get to you in time. I had some problems with the vertebrae in my neck and computers, and I went to work a lot of days in pain and then my sensors for kids is off, they were not working well, so I didn't sense when kids were equally stressed out or in pain so I started making mistakes with kids because you're just not listening to them. That in turn would backfire on me and I'd have to deal with situations that got beyond a point that I normally would not have let them get to and that stressed me out a lot. Then I had some intestine problems with my liver not functioning well in my last year. So I actually retired because my body was not allowing me to do as good as job teaching as I would like to have done, but I still think I did a pretty good job.

Me: Do you attribute any of your health problems to stress?

I don't but other people around me do, so, no I really don't. I think its as you get older your body isn't 20 years old anymore its 55 year old, so but then that's hard to say, because sometimes you don't see the forest because you're down in amongst the trees.

That's just hard to say.

Q9: Would you recommend the career choice of teaching to a grade 12 student?

Yes, and in fact I have. There are certain kids that have a talent for teaching, and the way that I taught was to have other kids basically help and teach each other and from time to time you come across a kid who is really a natural at it, a knack for explaining things better than I could. Those kids I have talked to and encouraged them to go into teaching. I think teaching can be heaven for the right people and it can be hell for the wrong people. And that's why you have to walk into it the way I did because I think some of my colleagues were in hell everyday. I guess the way to put it is this, what would you do if you won the 10 million dollar lottery, and my answer was always, well I'd keep teaching until I figured out what the 10 million was for. I'd buy my own school and get rid of the administration but other than that I would stay teaching.

Q10: What strategies did you develop to manage stress?

Well, as mentioned I shut the day off, and by keeping that balance I was able to survive. the other thing is your partner in life, your mate whatever has a lot to do with your ability to teach well. If you don't have that kind of support at home where you have someone who wants to talk about it, then teaching can be a really tough job. For me, I found that there are some very excellent teachers in all schools and those are the type of people I like to have lunch with or chat with, or just simply go by there room and pause at the doorway. Quite often I would envy these good teachers. I think being around colleagues like that are what help to maintain your strength. At the same time if you have negative teachers who are not doing a good job, spending a lot of time with them is

stressful and so probably your best not to do that, but yeah I think your colleagues can make or break you. You can't be an island unto yourself in a school of 600 people, you just can't be a loner you have to get your reinforcement from more than just your kids.

Q11: Anything more you'd like to share with me ?

I guess I would share a regret. I started off being a trained primary teacher teaching grade 2, and wound up being a computer teacher at a high school. Several times in my career I have requested a transfer back to elementary school, but because I was a trained specialist in mechanics and computers that never happened for me. but if I had one thing I would have liked to have done in my career was to move back to teach in an elementary school. But I never got there. And I guess as far as stress goes, I think the thing that you have to have is someone who can tell you you're stressed because for me I get in there and it's like running in a squirrel cage and I am getting worn down and I need someone to say to me enough, you need to slow down, you need to adapt, or you need to find some new tricks. But there are times when all of us get stressed, and when you get stressed you need someone who is willing to tell you. And one of the things that I found in teaching is that everyone is running inside their own wheel so fast that they don't even look sideways to see their colleague and there's very little help in the teaching profession from one colleague to the other. It's more like those chickens in our chicken house that one gets a spot a blood on her and the other will just peck her to death. So in teaching if you make a mistake or are stressed out you quickly find there is no one there and no help. For teachers who are stressed the attitude seems to be that if you can't take the heat get out of the kitchen, other than how can I help you to slow this thing down.

Me: Why do you think that is?

I think it's called vulnerability and each of us has a spot where we could say that could be me so I don't want to have anything to do with it. It is important to be good with kids because they only have one chance to get a good education and a teacher who is not fit to teach is a bad thing for kids, so I think teachers have an obligation to be top notch as much as they possibly can but in order to do that you have to have a heck of a lot of support from administration and your colleagues. But it's always been a stress to me that if I make a mistake I am on my own, but if I do well then everyone is there to pat my back.

Q13: What advice would you give teachers who are beginning their careers?

I'd tell them to look for the top notch teachers in their building and coax them and ask them if they would be their support, mentor, whatever you want to call it. I think a new teacher needs to be linked somehow with an old dog who is pretty darn good at their job. too often we take new teachers and we have trial by fire. They take on the whole world and they either get tempered or they get burnt. And that's wrong. There needs to be a mentoring program for new teachers. So if I was a beginning teacher I would say that if a mentoring program doesn't formally exist then create it yourself. Find somebody to be there for you and ask that person to drop into your classroom and meet with them every week to talk over how things are going. There has always been the attitude that you are a trained professional so get into your classroom and do your job, and if you are not a trained professional or you can't handle the job, then get out of teaching because you don't belong here. And that's a silly attitude. Imagine in industry and they take in a brand

new apprentice, they don't put him at a huge machine and tell him to do it right the first time or else he's fired. Instead he gets apprenticed to an old hand at it and he shows you the ropes. But teaching is different, I mean even doctors don't behave the way that we do to new teachers.

Q14: What advice would you give to experienced full time teachers?

Well number one, don't take yourself too seriously it's only a game, and you need to play it and you need to understand that you are not teaching subject material that in fact the stuff that you think is so important isn't going to make all that much difference anyway and so therefore take the time to get to know your kids on some level other than your subject material, talk to kids a little bit about what's happening in their lives because you need to establish some kind of a trust with them, But basically step back a minute, don't get too stressed and don't take your job too seriously.



### Summary of Ed's Teaching Story

This interview was very upbeat, and I felt this retired teacher had a very positive attitude toward teaching and stress. My concern is that this interviewee is a close relative of mine, and I am not sure the entire truth was told because of our close connection. Nonetheless, he did offer some very interesting insights into the world of teaching and stress. Throughout the interview Ed mentioned various things that caused him stress; a lack of support, a sense of aloneness, the changes in society with regards to parenting and students, and the constant disruptions to the learning environment.

Ed spoke highly about teaching, and enjoyed the challenge of it. He referred to teaching as a game, and gave the advice that teachers should never take teaching too seriously. He also offered the advice that teachers need to be around other positive teachers, and to avoid the negative teachers because their negativity will only breed more negativity. He also stated that teaching is not an isolated profession, that teachers need the support of their colleagues. Ed spoke very strongly about the treatment of new teachers. He said that even doctors have many years of internships before they are turned out alone to deal with patients, yet in teaching after five years of university, we assume that new teacher is a professional and should be able to teach like a pro. He talks about a mentoring program, and how if there isn't one in place, then the new teacher needs to seek out the master teacher in the school and ask them to be their mentor. He states that our mistreatment of new teachers is wrong.

Ed said that the thing that disturbed him most in his teaching day was the administration who had their own agenda, and thought their agenda was more important

than what was happening in the classroom. As well, various other disruptions in the classroom sent the constant message that teaching and learning was undervalued. Ed also admitted that teaching is a never ending job, and if a teacher does not know how to leave the job at work, or shut it off, then they are destined for burnout.

Ed identified the beginning of his career as one of the most stressful times, and then the end of his career as another stressful time. Both were due to a lack of support. He identified administrators who have lost sight of why they are administrators, who forget teachers and students, as the most stressful part of his teaching career. He also stated that the whole notion of being alone in failure increased teacher stress. He said he knew that when he did well with something in his class or in the community, everyone was standing there to offer praise and words of encouragement and congratulations, but if he made a mistake, he stood alone.

Ed had a very intriguing answer to how teaching has changed. He pointed out that today, all kids go to school, even the ones who don't succeed, and/or hate being at school. He stated that even 20 years ago, students who didn't succeed in school were out working on the farms, or logging, or in the mines, so the population at school consisted of the students who wanted to be there and excelled in the system. Nowadays, everyone goes to school until grade 12 and that has created a lot of stress for teachers. The diversity of the classroom is astounding, and those kids who 'hate' school, through no fault of their own, create a lot of stress for teachers. Ed continued to talk about how the nature of the family has changed. He discussed latchkey kids who are at home with the TV, and single parent homes, or homes with two parents working who are just too tired at the end of the day to

do any quality parenting. He also briefly mentioned the influence of television.

To reduce stress Ed said it was very important to have a strong support structure at home. His spouse was vital with regards to his stress level. He also mentioned how teachers who are having difficulties cannot always tell that they are feeling stressed, so it is important that the spouse or someone in the teacher's life take on that role. He used the analogy of not being able to see the forest for the trees. Ed also said that teachers need to understand that what they are teaching, the subject material, isn't going to make that big of a difference, so take time to get to know your students on a personal level.

At the end of the interview, once the tape recorder was turned off, Ed summed up a lot about teacher stress with one phrase, "But by the grace of God go I." This was very insightful because after interviewing the three subjects I discovered it is just luck that a teacher ends up with a supportive administration team, and/or a supportive staff, and/or a supportive spouse.

## TARA'S TEACHING STORY

I arranged to meet Tara on her day off, May 20th, 1999. Since retiring she and her husband have started a greenhouse business, and they both work very hard all summer. Tara told me May was a very busy time of month for her, but she was interested in the topic of the causes of teacher stress, and wanted to participate in the study. Tara taught at the elementary level for more than thirty years, and has been retired for less than five years. She told me to drop the interview questions and survey off to her on May 19th at the greenhouses, and then she would be able to meet with me for two hours only on May 20th at 4:00 p.m.

On May 20th, I arrived at Tara's house which was nestled in the back corner of her and her husband's property, behind the five huge greenhouses. It is a tiny log house that was scantily furnished. It was easy to tell that Tara preferred to spend a lot of time outside with her plants. Tara's husband showed me to the house, and announced my arrival to Tara who was in the middle of cleaning her kitchen, then he quickly excused himself to return to his work outside. She wiped her hands on a nearby towel that hung on the stove and welcomed me with a warm handshake. I thanked Tara in advance for her time, stating that I knew what a busy time of year for her May must be. After removing my shoes I followed Tara into the living room where she had her survey and notes on the coffee table, ready for the interview. Tara curled her legs up under herself as she sat on the blue leather couch under the big bay window, and gathered her notes. I sat in the soft blue recliner across from the couch, that looked out at the greenhouses in the distance, out of the bay window. I could tell Tara was anxious to get started, so I turned on the tape

recorder and began the interview.

Interview With Tara

Q1: Tell me about your career as a teacher.

I started teaching in Kitimat, then got married, then stopped teaching for awhile because back in those days you couldn't take a leave of absence, you had to quit, and then, like many small towns did, when I wanted to go back to teaching they wouldn't hire married women with children, because that was their bank of substitutes. That was very common. Women have been victimized at every job, but teaching especially. Anyway, they wouldn't re-hire me in Kitimat, they kept saying that had overhired from out of district, then I talked to a friend of mine in Surrey, where they were desperate for teachers. I phoned them up and we moved down to Surrey within three days. That was a big change. I taught at Kensington Prairie School then moved to Whiterock Elementary and taught there for thirteen years. Then I taught in Cranbrook for 22 or 23 years, all at the elementary level, except for when I was subbing in Kitimat, I did teach some secondary. I taught mostly in the intermediate grades, grades 4 to 7 and I taught quite a bit of art.

Q2: How did teaching change for you over the last ten years?

Well I had less energy, and I got a little more cynical about the way things were going. I don't know. I think parents were confused about a lot of the changes in education, uh, the new programs, but for me that was a life saver because I was getting bored with the old programs and the year 2000 program was the way I liked to teach. It sort of validated what I was doing, I loved it and at the same time I was finishing off my degree, so I was taking all of the courses to go with this new program. It breathed new life into what I was doing.

Q3: Do you think you were doing as good a job at the end of your career as you were at the beginning?

I think I was a better teacher at the end, but I don't know if I was better at everything. I know I didn't have the same amount of energy at the end to set up classroom displays, and stations and stuff like that, and I think I was frustrated by the fact that there were so many kids that needed so much extra that they just weren't getting. I don't know who it was that decided that inclusion should included everybody, and they did away with the learning disability classes where those kids got a lot of attention, and that's made a big difference. A lot of kids who went into those classes with the severe learning disabilities came out with better skills to cope. So we started getting a bigger range of kids, I found over the last few years there were a lot of really top kids, and a lot of low kids, and not many C+, the middle kids.

Me: Was there ever any inservice to help you to deal with the integrated students?

Well we talked a lot about it, but it never seemed to change the fact that the Learning Assistance teachers were doing their best. I mean an hour a day three times a week and the current trend to have administrators do learning assistance is really poor. That's happening a lot in the elementary school system, but it's easier for the admin. to be away and they don't have to plan for the three learning assistance kids, or they can take a phone call or deal with a discipline problem while the learning assistance kids just work quietly in the principal's office.

Q4: Did you ever wish you had chosen a different occupation?

On occasion. Yeah, once in a while, it gets overwhelming. I really thought about

going into law. Just after I came up here, I had a really bad year the first year I was up here, my principal took an instant dislike to me as soon as I walked in the door, and he harassed me just horribly. I went on stress leave for a year after that, and I guess it was just so different. I had always done so well, and got excellent teaching reports, and good reponse with the parents and the kids, and I got up there, and he just seemed to undermine everything I did, It was just horrible. Now I found out he had done that to other people as well, but at the time I felt like I was the only one. So I took a year off and really evaluated the situation and I took an accounting course, wrote some cookbooks, and took some other courses.

Me: What made you decide to stay in teaching and not go into law?

Well, my second idea of going into law came when I was doing a course through UBC when I was finishing my degree and I got a letter from the Dean of Law saying that I should go into law, that I had a very unusual approach to the law. But he probably didn't know I was 50, and it was probably too late, but, I like teaching. I think I am a teacher at heart, maybe it's genetic because my mother was a teacher and my grandmother was a teacher, and two of my cousins, and two of my sisters. Yeah teaching is in the family. I mean I have taught adult education too. I've taught night school cooking classes, and I do art workshop for teachers, and I do seminars for our greenhouses, so I am still teaching. And I've been going in to a local elementary school and taught grade 6 art just on a voluntary basis.

Q5: Please describe a typical day of teaching in the latter part of your career.

I'd get up at 6:30 have a shower and eat breakfast. I went to my room and did a



little work then went to the staff room and had a little coffee and stayed there until the bell rang, whereas earlier in my career I wouldn't have done that, I would have stayed in my classroom. But I spent less time in the classroom in my last few years. I think your energy was less, and if I stayed in my classroom at recess there were always problems to deal with, I couldn't just pretend that there wasn't. And I would teach all morning, and I usually stayed at the school for lunch, sometimes went out for a walk then taught for the afternoon, worked at school till around 5:00 or went to the CDTA office for a meeting. I was really involved with the CDTA. At elementary you're preparing all the subjects, and if you're not prepared you're dead. I always got better as the years went on, like others do, but I got bored very easily and I couldn't teach the same year after year.

Q6: On a scale of 1 to 5, overall how stressful would you rate your career as a teacher?

I don't know. I don't think I can characterize it because some years were wonderful and some years were terrible, like the year with that principal, that would have been a 5 plus, but then I've had years that would be a two. It really varied so much with the kind of class, the administrator, with the people you were working with.

Q7a: What would you say were the most stressful aspects of your teaching career?

Dealing with administrators and kids with behavior problems, probably those are the two biggies. I mean I felt really bad for kids who were struggling or having a lot of problems at home, I felt I got too involved emotionally involved in things like that.

Q7b: Do you think stressors have changed for teachers over the years?

Yeah, I think a lot. When I started teaching in Kitimat most of the kids I had were new Canadians, and the parents wanted their kids to have something better than they did,

so the parents were extremely supportive. And you just didn't have the discipline problems back then because the parents were right on them. They'd come for an interview and often didn't speak much English, so you did the whole interview in sign language. But now you get people phoning you and calling you a fucking bitch and saying that you're lazy and so on, and they seem to feel it's okay to do this, and the constant threat of. Last year I had kids tell me, "if you do that then my mom will sue you or you'll get reported to the school board." I had kids that would say, "I'm not staying here and taking this crap," and this was in a 5/6 split, and as I mentioned the other day, I felt that being a woman really put me at a disadvantage, that some of these kids were living with single moms and they were angry at life and I was just another facet of their life that they didn't like very much when I was trying to make them stay in for work after school. And when they went to see my principal, he always listened to the students very patiently and I always felt when he said, Jeff shared with me that this is what happened, like the kid was telling the truth and I wasn't, and that happened a number of time throughout the last year, and I would say, "But he's lying," and the principal would say, "Now that's a little strong don't you think." I would say no, the kid lies like a sidewalk. But I always felt with this principal that it was extreme lack of support, and especially with boys. I always felt that had I been a guy, it was so lenient with the kids. The VP tried hard but I never really trusted her. I guess I just never felt supported by my principal.

Q8: At any point in your career did you ever feel stressed or burned out?

Yeah, that one year when I took the year off, and then last year was really bad because my class was so difficult and it was a split class, and we always try to separate

certain kids, so they were fair, but we had a bunch of new kids come in over the summer with no information on them and they got slotted in, and we also had some kids separated for very good reasons, and the parents went in and put pressure on the principal, and he moved them. So you don't really feel, you try and set things up to make them work the best you can, but we didn't assign kids to classes with eenie meenie minnie moe. I mean we sat down and discussed which kids should be together and we talked about their personalities, and so on, and then a parent comes in and puts a little pressure on the principal. He always said he didn't give in, but he did.

Me: How did you know when you were stressed out? What were the signs?

I'm an insomniac, and the worse I got the less I slept and the more tired I was and it was just that cycle. I also have a lot of allergies and they got really bad. I was blaming the school, but I'm still having some problems with them so I guess it wasn't all that. But the wing I taught in had straw mats in the ceiling for insulation. We found that out when one year we had a leak in the roof and all of this brown foul stuff started running down the walls, and into the library. It was just horrible, and that's when the school board guys came in and said it was rotten straw in the roof. And I wonder how many kids were affected by that? There are at least three schools in Cranbrook that still have the straw mats. And as far as I know the leak was fixed, but the straw mats are still up there.

Me: Did your year off help? Were you ready to go back after some time off?

Oh yeah, very much so. It helped a lot. I also was having some problems with my kids that started in White Rock. My daughter went through a horrible couple of teenage years and she was just getting back on track and she was violently raped. And by the time

we found out who it was, he was already in jail for something else and then he was supposed to get out of jail and they wanted her to testify against him and she was fourteen when it happened. So about a year later he was to get out of jail and he had threatened to kill her if she told, and my son was in with a crowd I didn't much care for, and my husband had a chance to get a job near Cranbrook, so we decided it was time to get out of there. I didn't know if I would get a job here, but I did, sort of at the last minute. So I took that job, and had that awful year and that was it. And when I went to the doctor he said have you thought about taking a years leave and I just looked at him. I told him that I didn't think I needed time off, and he said I think you are so on edge that you're ready to shatter, and I hadn't even realized that. I didn't recognize it. I kept blaming myself saying if I did this better, if I only got more organized, but of course the more stressed I got the less I was able to sleep, and my allergies got worse and I felt so alone because I didn't know anyone yet, and how do you go to somebody and say well I've always been considered one of the best teachers in the school and now I am shit and I don't know who to talk to or who to go to and finally I went to the CDTA president because I was on the verge of getting a less than satisfactory teaching report and so she intervened there and then I went on stress leave.

Me: Were there any teachers that helped you or offered you support?

Nope. Well I shouldn't say that there were two that tried, but some of the other teachers were awful, I mean they were like picking at a chicken. There were some people that were supportive and others no. When I was down, nothing and I've never forgiven them for it, and I still see them walking around being nice to everybody and it's all an act,

I know what they're really like. But I have found myself in that position too. If there is someone on staff that's not doing their job and have been having problems year after year after year, and I'm teaching the kids the next year and have to deal with those problems, and yes I know that I've been unsupportive because you're trying to help them and no matter what you do, you can't do anything for them. I also blame the administrators.

When I was having problems my first year in Cranbrook the principal would come in and snipe at me all the time. One day he would come in and say that lesson wasn't good and the next day he would come in and criticize the way I had the table arranged or the display that was up a week too long. He never followed up on what the original problem was.

And he was evaluating me on the Madelaine Hunter model which I had never heard of. I didn't know what he was talking about and then he was blaming me for not taking that course and not knowing the stuff he was talking about, just like we were talking two different languages. So I think a lot of the problems teachers are having are because there's not effective administrative assistance. If you're having a problem with discipline for instance, if someone could come in and watch you and give you tips and pointers, instead of saying all of the things you're doing wrong, but to give you some helpful alternatives. The men don't do that, they just snipe. Whereas some of the female administrators have done a lot of work with teachers who are having trouble. But I haven't heard of any of the men administrators being helpful. It's like they don't want to be bothered undertaking an intense course to help somebody, but they also don't want to write them a bad report. There were teachers, that as an administrator I would have counseled to go and take some classes especially in special ed., because to me that's the

biggest problem, the lack of knowledge, not the how to teach. There needs to be some more options for teachers, so that teachers haven't been teaching for 25 years and are then told they are bad teachers. That's another problem I see upcoming is the new teachers coming out don't get a class of their own for year and years, so they learn survival skills, and they don't learn to be good teachers because they don't have a base to start from, and if you don't have that base, then all you are learning is how to put out fires, and ignoring the big picture.

Q9: Today would you recommend the career choice of teaching to a grade 12 student?

Under certain circumstances. If they were a specialist, if they were very very determined, and willing to go up north. I think a lot of people here who have had trouble getting on with a continuing appointment might have done better somewhere else.

Q10: What strategies did you develop to reduce or manage your stress?

Last year I took a .1 leave which entitled me to take 19 days out of the classroom. I found that taking courses really helped because it always gave me something to really focus on, especially taking courses in psychology or behavior management or courses like that because you could actually take some of those strategies and put them into use in your classroom and it was a constant reminder of techniques and things you needed to do, the good things you know that you forget to use when you're stressed. I think the people who are under a lot of pressure and stress should be getting some more education.

Me: What about other strategies your colleagues used?

Well some of them just gave up. Another thing that you need to do is see kids in other areas. I did a lot of drama and I coached a lot, not as much in the last few years, but

some. I think it's good to see kids in different areas. Sometimes kids that you coach go back into the classroom and are find, when before the two of you were just fighting constantly. And I sure found that with drama, just to see kids in a different light and encourage them to show some of their talents.

Q11: Is there anything else you would like to share with me about your career as a teacher or the stress you felt as a teacher?

I think one thing that is very important is the role of the union in trying to spell out that contracts are adhered to. I'm really worried that as us old farts get out of the way, the ones who have gone through all the problems and the younger people coming up who haven't experienced, I hope you're not going to have to learn those lessons over again. I think with provincial bargaining I think a lot of the local autonomy is lost and I don't think a lot of younger teachers see the union as something that is valuable or necessary. And I have seen the union so often come in and help protect teachers' rights, like they did with my situation my first year in Cranbrook, and I've sat on the executive ever since. I've been very involved because I think it's very necessary. I know what it's like to have no support, and it's really embarrassing when your competence is being questioned, and it's not something you talk about to other teachers. Teachers have to have somebody there to talk to. I think there maybe needs to be more of a system in schools, maybe the staff rep or another designated person is a supporter, a wellness person, because a good staff rep should notice what is going on in the schools and talk to people and give them some help and suggest some avenues, but some staff reps don't do that, in fact some of them are very judgmental. Some staff reps don't see their jobs as being advocates for the teacher. That's

an aspect that needs to be developed more. I think teacher wellness through the union is something that is going to have to happen more and more. I think a lot of the admin. are running scared because they are no longer part of the union and they don't have anyone behind them, like a team, and just knowing what some of these superintendents are like, the admin. only have contracts for a couple of years and they're scared of losing their jobs or being transferred to a smaller community up the valley.

Q12. What advice would you give to teachers beginning their careers?

It's so hard to say because most of them don't have jobs, they're on the sub list and may be there for several years. But I think it goes back to the question of what would you tell a grade 12 student. That they have to be prepared for not having a job for awhile and make sure that financially they were going to be, that they had something else to go along with it because usually they're not teaching enough to live on.

ME: What about teachers who have jobs that are just starting out?

Yeah, don't sweat the small stuff. First of all you have to understand that most parents want the best for their kids and it's a good thing to listen to what parents are telling you, because a lot of teachers don't really listen to what the parents are saying and, I think you need to respect what the parents are saying but you also have to be firm in what you're educational experience and goals tell you. You have to try and get the parents to support, but sometimes you can't, sometimes you just have to say fine then. Don't punish yourself, and try to do some things with kids that are fun. Most kids will come around if you are doing things that they're interested in, but sometimes it's hard to do that when you've got that huge range in a class.



Q13: What advice would you give to experienced teachers who are now carrying a full teaching load?

Try to plan activities that don't require too much marking. That there is more than one way to present a project, go more to things like poster and dioramas and things like that and talk to the class and explain what they've done, which gives the kids practice in public speaking which is really a necessary skill. It helps them to consolidate what they've learned, and typically to be honest, an awful lot of marking is just crap. It's a waste of time. And I think a lot of the emphasis is away from spelling corrections, so I'm not sure that a lot of the things that we spend an awful lot of time on were as valuable as maybe some of the other things we did. I'd rather see a kid reading a book than write spelling words 50 times each. I like the hands on, more discussion, and more emphasis on understanding the kids and integrating the subjects, it connects things for the kids.

### Summary of Tara's Teaching Story

There were many recurrent themes that came out of the interview with Tara, as well as some worthy insights about teaching and stress. It was an honest interview that was emotional and tense at times, especially when she was telling about her one year's leave of absence, and the discrimination she experienced as a female teacher. Tara emphasized the need for continuing education for teachers, in the form of university courses, to help combat teacher stress, and she also discussed the role of the teachers' unions in teacher wellness programs. She also talked about the vast needs of students in one classroom, the lack of support from parents, the lack of support from administrators.

Most of this interview revolved around one incident that happened towards the end of Tara's career, which caused her to take a year off on stress leave. She had a traumatic experience her first year in Cranbrook. Tara talked about a year in a new community in a newer school with a principal that took an instant disliking to her. He would come into her classroom and nit pick at every little thing she did, but offered no solutions or help. To make matters worse, he was evaluating her on a system that she had no knowledge of, and then he blamed her for not knowing what he was talking about. Tara went from being one of the best teachers in her previous schools, to a teacher who was about to receive a less than satisfactory teaching report. She talked about how she had no one to talk to or go to, until finally she turned to the local union. The president of the union intervened and Tara went on stress leave.

As well, before moving to Cranbrook, Tara had experienced some severe trauma with her two teenage children, and she said that was part of her stress. When asked about

teachers who offered support or help, she brought up the analogy of a chicken in a chicken house. She said there were two teachers that offered help, but others were just awful. She also, very strongly, blames the admin. Tara goes on to say that the reason for the problems teachers are having is due to the lack of effective administrator assistance.

Tara said she was frustrated with the whole notion of inclusion. She saw so many kids that needed so much extra, one on one time, and they just weren't getting it, and then the schools did away with learning disability classes where a lot of those kids got the time and attention they needed to succeed. This increased the huge range of abilities in one class, and over the last few years there were a lot of low kids, and a few high ones, but very few in the middle.

Tara also found parents and students changed with their attitudes towards teachers. She relates an incident in which a parent phoned her and swore at her and called her lazy, etc. "That," she said, "increases stress." Also, she has had students in the past few years threaten her with legal action, or tell her that they didn't have to take this crap, when she was simply trying to get them to do their homework, or stay in at recess for a detention, etc. Tara said that these things create stress-when parents, students, and teachers are not working together, and that parents seem to think it is all right that they swear at and degrade teachers.

Tara was a bit nervous in discussing the last issue that caused her stress- the discrimination she experienced as a female teacher. She felt that because a lot of kids are now living with single moms, and are angry or have little respect for these single moms, that kids are now transferring that onto her, because she is female. She also felt that her

last principal treated her differently because she was a female. She related stories about how a male child's story would be more carefully considered and weighted against her story of what happened whenever an issue was taken to the male principal. She stated that had she been male, she knows she would have been treated differently in various discipline situations involving male students. She also tells the story of how her principal would give in to parental requests, much to the disadvantage of the teacher and the rest of the class. She summed it up as an extreme lack of support by a male principal, especially with boys.

Tara discussed the cycle of stress and how it affected her. She was an insomniac and the more stressed she became, the less she slept, but she didn't recognize it as stress. So, she would blame herself for not doing better and being more organized and this created more stress, and then she got even less sleep and then her allergies became really bad. She talked about feeling very alone during all of this. She tells about how she didn't know anyone in Cranbrook at this time, and she felt she had no one to talk to.

Tara offered a unique solution that I hadn't thought of for helping teachers who are stressed. She sees it as focus for local unions. In B.C. we currently have a union staff rep at each school, and Tara suggested that there should also be a trained union wellness rep. at each school who is responsible for helping teachers who are struggling. This wellness rep would be the one to tell stressed teachers that they are stressed, or to simply present options to teachers who are having problems. She states that this is an aspect of teaching that needs to be developed more.

Tara strongly advocates university course work for teachers who are stressed. She said that when someone is stressed they forget to use all of the good techniques they

learned, and that getting some more education is the answer. She also talked about how doing course work really helped to alleviate some of her stress, especially courses in psychology or behavior management, that she would then go back to her class and apply the various strategies and techniques she had learned from class.

In closing, Tara offered some good advice to both new teachers, and teachers who have been in the profession for awhile. She said it is important to have fun with kids, and that kids will learn more if they are having fun. She also advised teachers to find different ways of marking, instead of always marking the written work. She suggested dioramas, or posters, or any different way of presenting a project. Her final piece of advice was don't sweat the small stuff, and try to get the parents on side with you as a teacher.

## DAN'S TEACHING STORY

Dan was ambivalent about participating in this study when I first approached him. He was not sure if he was ready to discuss the stresses of teaching that lead him to early retirement and a nervous breakdown. I had casually talked to Dan about the idea of a project on the causes of teacher stress sometime after Christmas 1998. He agreed it was an important topic that needed more attention. Then as April 1999 came around and I began looking for participants, Dan became less enthusiastic. At the beginning of May I cautiously asked Dan if he would be a participant, and I emphasized the need for teachers to tell their stories about stress in order to help the younger generation of teachers. Dan taught mostly at the elementary level for the majority of his career of 33 years. He retired due to medical problems. He reluctantly agreed, and we set the interview time for May 20th at 7:30 p.m. I gave Dan the interview questions and the survey at the beginning of May so that he would have a lot of time to think about his answers. I also reassured him that he only had to answer the questions he felt comfortable talking about.

I arrived at Dan's house at 7:20 p.m. on May 20th. His wife answered the door and began chatting to me about her latest house renovation project. As I entered the house, Dan said hi to me from the soft brown leather chair in the living room. Their house was filled with family pictures covering every inch of wall space, and interesting nick nacks filled every corner of the house. His wife insisted on showing me the bedroom she had been redecorating, so after saying hello to Dan I followed her down a narrow hallway to a beautifully painted and stenciled pink and white bedroom. We discussed how good the room looked, and how she had done all of the work by herself as we walked back

down the hallway into the kitchen. In the meantime, Dan had moved from his chair in the living room to the captain's chair at the head of the dining room table. I sat down to the left of Dan at the table, and commented on how nice the redecorated bedroom looked. His wife then stated that we had better get started with the interview and she excused herself to go to her piano lesson. I then reassured Dan that he only had to tell me what he felt comfortable talking about, and he nodded in response. I smoothly turned on the tape recorder and placed it off to the right on the table, then asked Dan the first interview question.

Q1: Tell me about your career as a teacher.

I started in a small town in the West Kootenays in 1964, grade 5 that year. I was only there for a year, that was my first year, and then I went from there to become a principal in a two room school in a nearby school district, with an enrollment of 65, then that school expanded to four rooms with about 120 kids at one point. There was always a lot of construction going on with the highway and stuff, so our numbers varied. I was an administrator for eleven years. And I was in another small community in the same area for 9, and then went to yet another nearby town for 2 years. I had my fill of admin. by the time I had taught for my first twelve years, but it was different than what I saw administrators here doing. Admin. here dealt with kids and other staff members, and I dealt with kids and parents because I only worked with one or two other staff. It was quite a different thing. My class in the third community I lived in, there had been some layoffs and cut backs, and I was supposed to have a grade 4 to 7 class with 27 kids, and I walked into a class of 42 kids that were really angry about all of the changes. It was really a zoo. They had got a new superintendent and he made up his mind to do cut backs, and surprise there were more kids than expected, and of course there was enough money to hire another teacher, but the superintendent wouldn't back down. This got worse and worse, but the community and parents really supported me. They pulled their kids until something was done about the situation, and they phoned the CBC and major newspapers. Anyways, the parents met with the superintendent in November, and by January they sent me a new young teacher right out of teacher's college. And the kids loved this guy. The



superintendent left the district to go to the coast, and his last act was to take this new teacher and transfer him out of that school.

I had no administration time, no secretary, I'd sit and write letters and do other admin. stuff while my classes were working. Then when I came down here, and I had commuted 56 miles a day, plus cross a ferry for two year, and twice a week I had to go to meetings and stuff like this, I was burnt. I came down here and moved into a 6/7 split and I thought I was in heaven. I had no administrative work, I just had my class to teach. It felt like this huge load had been lifted. I stayed at that school for six years, then I went to another new elementary school in Cranbrook and taught there for 9 years. It wasn't until about ten years ago at this one school when I started to feel any real burn out, but I had been there too long. Five to seven years is long enough. Teachers get taken for granted and anything you do starts to get accumulated, you know you get the same parents, or someone you've had a conflict with, and it adds up. And there's a certain faction of people that you're dealing with. I got along with most parents, and then there were one or two that were after my hide. I had one parent in particular who was out for blood because she felt I had treated her little darling so badly. I then finally got a transfer after asking for two or three years, because not many people were moving around, so I went over to another elementary school. The first two years there I had two fabulous classes both 3/4 splits, they were really superb. Those were probably two of the best teaching years I've ever had. And then I was there for about seven years. There was a couple of years after that when the classes were quite acceptable, but there were some strange characters in them. I was thinking of one of them earlier. He was one angry boy, and after watching

Colombine High, it just wouldn't surprise me if there was a shooting in Cranbrook by him. I've had some really bad guys, ones who would go downstairs in the washroom and light the paper towel on fire, and some who went out behind the school and lit the field on fire, then snuck back into class to watch the fire trucks come. Then it went on to the last couple years when I was out in the portable at Steeples and I had some real characters and it just got worse and worse. The principal was just hiding his head, and there was the other grade 4 teacher who couldn't get along with some kids, so they were just shipping them out to me in the portable and I was already at 30. And they had no concept that I was in there having trouble. It was awful, and there again were the likes of four or five parents lead by one couple who were after my hide, and the thing is they went to the school board and the school board put the pressure on the principal, so their solution was...and I was already off on sick leave. But they still called me down and said, "Well this is what's happening," and I said, "Well I'm not here," and then they went through the whole routine, I had a sub in there who managed to last thirty days, and they managed to get rid of him because they had a pet they wanted to put in there themselves. And every time I would go back to give any input about when I would be coming back to work I was getting bad vibes and I thought, "Well I can't come back to this," so finally in the end, after being off for two and something years with sick leave and long term disability I get permission to go back to work. Through the CDTA I said I want my job back, but I don't want to displace anybody, and the board asked if I was going to retire at the end of this year, and I told them yes, and they told me, "Fine, stay home," and they found some more sick leave. And I was willing to work. There were other things they could have done

without displacing a teacher, I could have been the roaming teacher who gave teachers their prep time or whatever. They would rather pay me to stay at home, rather than take the flack from one or two people up there, if they saw me at the school. That was really tough, a bad way to end a career, after being off sick for a couple of years and even after retirement which gave me a certain satisfaction it still is that lack of closure, it was really tough. Because we, most of us, take on a job and want to see it finished and not being able to finish off that year was hard. I think I am past that now unless I get to talking about it. But it still doesn't feel good and it isn't the way I wanted to finish my career. It was really tough because all that stuff happened starting the end of February, so I had all of that year that never had any closure, and I thought I was going back the following fall so I moved all of my stuff into a classroom out of the portable, so that someone could watch all the time, yet they wouldn't come near me if I asked anyone for help or anything. and it's after you crash that they pretend to want to help, but it was only to protect their own butts. There was no thought or anything. That same year another staff member went through the same thing. This teacher was found crying in the hallway, and another teacher notified the admin., and the admin. said, "So what do you want me to do about it?" I have worked for admin. who would never allow something like that to happen. One female principal I worked for really knew her people, when my mom died she sent me home and told me to go deal with funeral, etc. She and some other good admin. I worked for knew their staff, and they were aware of what was happening in their staff's lives, and it wasn't you're causing a big inconvenience get out of here. Out of that whole thing, a year and a bit later, after I had been out of the school at home, the then acting principal gave me a letter of

reprimand based on her interviews and her notes. I went down there with the President of the CDTA and she said there is nothing we could do about it, even though half of what was in the file was not correct, but it was politics, she (the principal) had been told by the board that in order to make these two or three parents happy this guy needs to be reprimanded, so write him a letter of reprimand. And of course I never went back to work. I took a look at this and said, "Man I'm not going to go back to work in this." That letter was still in my file until I retired. There may have been grounds from their point of view, but a person gets sick and has no support and then they write me a reprimand for raising my voice to children and all this stuff. It's just a kick when you're down, it really was. And I couldn't understand it, if I was to get this letter why didn't I get it a year and a half ago when I was still teaching with this particular class. I mean this is stupid. Nobody came near me, nobody came to my classroom. I couldn't get either administrator to come anywhere near my class. I had to practically beg to get one of them to come out and see any of the neat activities that were going on in there. They never ever came near me when I was having difficulty at school. Nobody ever said anything to me about complaints or parents, and I specifically asked. I said look I've been off sick and I come back and I'm getting these vibes from a sub that this and this and this went on, and the response was, "Don't worry about it, I'll talk to you about it later on." And there was never anything said, and all of a sudden I get this letter handed to me, and its all based upon, well I interviewed your class after I had been gone and there had been numerous subs in and out of that class. Half the stuff they had said I had never had anything to do with, but how do you prove it? I had nothing. But that's the kind of stuff that causes stress. When you're

told you have to have this kid and no you can't have a childcare worker, you know, it's stressful. Then I was put out in the portable, but that was just circumstances. In a previous year I had a kid in my class that had been diagnosed by the psychologist as severely troubled, and they wouldn't accept the psychologists recommendations, so I had this kid in my class until May before I got any help, because they wouldn't hire anybody or listen to the psychologist. Finally when it got to the point where this kid plus two or three others who were really really being disruptive in my class, I had someone in for May and June. It was ridiculous, it was too late by that time. I finally got help by May, I think, because I was being the squeaky wheel, constantly telling them I can't do this, this is wearing me out, this is ridiculous. There were too many politics going on, and that was the year I started feeling myself wearing out, and as it was I had 31 years in the classroom.

Q2: How did teaching change for you over the last ten years?

Particularly, you know the kids were tough, especially in the third community I taught in, and that was really stressful and probably just as bad if not worse than many of the things I had seen since. I don't know if it's the kids so much, but it's everything in between. I mean if you had problems with a guy you could hall him out of the class and talk to him in no uncertain terms and you had back up from the administration and parents, then all of that changed. Now admin. and parents take a teacher to task for talking to their kid in a loud voice. I have thought about it a lot in the last ten years that I taught, and the addition of more and more expectations all the time, and the pressure being on all the time if the kids weren't learning academically and yet there was a constant surplus; there were people coming to the door to pull kids out for gifted programs, there was all kinds of

programs that were really wonderful for anti-violence programs and all this stuff, and they had people coming into your classroom for plays and talks about racism, and it just went on and on and on, more and more and more in terms of what you are expected to produce with no more time, and yet you're getting flack because students can't read and write. And science programs are weak because I just can't fit it into the timetable, and then somebody else comes and says there has to be more time for kids in the gym and then as a teacher I am asking well how do I then get all of these other things in then? And I think as a teacher that was one of the things that really really ground along. I mean the year 2000 stuff is a perfect example. It was really stressful for a lot of people. I went through all the stuff and all the folders putting together new stuff. And then after all that money and time, it was dropped, the government has changed. Then there's the whole idea of you have to take your kids on field trips, you have to take them skiing, yet at the same time you have to maintain this level of academics, and fit it all in. And in the last couple of years it was all the pressure of the new reporting. I had been over 30 years in this business and report cards are the holy grail of education, we are never going to come up with the perfect one. In the final year I was there, I had no ideas how I was going to write these report cards, and grade four was really bad because these kids had been in primary, never having a letter grade in their life, I tried to be really conservative, also by first report card, I didn't have much info on these guys. And I had a parent come in and just grind on me because his kid deserved 'A's. This parent was just incensed, and this was two weeks before I finally crashed. And then he turned around and asked why I wasn't taking my class skiing this year. But that's the kind of stuff, the idea of change in your job and life is very stressful.

The concept that what you've been doing for the last ten years of your teaching career is all wrong and was really bad for kids, and we no longer can do that, and we've caused all of this harm to kids and we now must do it this way. That's really hard to deal with, and I felt that building and building more and more frustration that I couldn't spend the time with my kids, that they were getting shortchanged because my attentions and my efforts were being diverted all the time to things that didn't count. And teachers do it to themselves; there have to be all these special days like Winter Carnival and Activity Days, you know these all take from your classroom time, and you see your schedule, and you're trying to get through the curriculum and you're seeing the time being eroded and eroded and you say to yourself, you know what' the most important thing here, and what's the point of school - crafts or my math program that's not getting done? I saw that happening more and more over the last ten years, until it was just intolerable. If I can think of anything that got me, that was it. Plus our conflict with the school district that year we were on strike for class size, and then for two years after that it was a real struggle between teachers and admin. And after that they did anything they could to us, they told us we had to take pro-d days in our Christmas holidays, and this was on top of everything else, like cut backs on money, time and effort, and being told all the time that you're ideals and your worth is really nothing. All of this ads up, and then having the following year, the supervisor of education came in and told us that they are instituting this wellness program because they can't figure out why there were 2000 sick days this past year. Well, last year was the year the we were in this gigantic conflict. It was really just constant conflict, so if anything was really stressful it was all of that. I don't think it's so much the kids, with

everything being equal, they stayed about the same throughout my career, what changed was the way you were able to deal with them. Another factor of stress is age, you have a lot more tolerance for some of this garbage when you're young.

Q3: Do you think you were doing as good of job at the end of your career as you were at the beginning?

Not really, that was part of the stress was that you could sit and look at yourself and say, "I'm not doing as good of job now, I'm not doing the job I want to do." And you know it accumulates. The way I ended my career I wasn't doing a good job at all, I shouldn't have been there, I shouldn't have been there at all, but it was probably two months or so before I pulled myself out. But there was nobody there to say, "You're having a little difficulty with things, what's the problem." Teachers have all the caring in the world except for when it comes to each other. When I was out in the portable I had no neighbour asking me what was going on, but I have seen people who know the person next door is having a bad time, and that teacher will go and close their door so they won't have to see it or deal with it. I can remember sitting in the staff room, two or three weeks before I finally went off sick, at the end of the day sitting with my head in my hands, and two or three people would see me and walk out of the staffroom. I got more support from the secretary than I did anybody else. But as far as administration was concerned they refused to see what was happening because it was a problem and they were overwhelmed with their own troubles, and you know it always bothered me, and I did in the course of my career asked my colleagues what was going on with them, and talked to some who were about to crash and sometimes you got a good response and sometimes you got told



to get the heck out of there and quit bothering them. And that's part of it, because if you offer help and someone is rude to you once, then you're gun-shy to do it again. But I really blame the admin. for their lack of support.

Q4 Did you ever wish that you had chosen a different occupation?

I went into teaching in the first place not knowing if I was going to do it. I took a year off after high school, and was an assistant scout troop master, and it was a lot fun and something I liked to do, so I went into teaching. And over that period, in that first dozen years or so, one of things I didn't want to do was leave the Arrow Lakes, but my wife wanted to leave. I just about quit to go into a partnership in a hardware store, but that didn't work out, and I'm glad I kept teaching. When I left the Arrow Lakes area I had actually applied for apprenticeships, and other jobs, and part of it was because of being so tired from the administrative stuff, not having any admin. time, that was pretty stressful and I never realized how tired I was until I actually left. So here I am working for \$100 less as a teacher, and I had all of this time on my hands. I was so organized that at the end of the day I had everything done, but somewhere along the line that slipped. Then my first year in Cranbrook, my wife was still in Trail with our three kids, and we found out my son had CMT, so we were all over the place seeing neurologists, I mean talk about stress. The other thing I see is young people in the last couple of years, teach for ten years and then they're done, they are about as bad off as I was at the end of my career. I don't know how some of these people are going to last thirty some years. Also there are people in their thirties who are going into teaching and they don't have the intentions of teaching more than ten or twelve years. Lots of the people I started teaching with were just fresh out of

university and 20 or 21 years old and they teach 35 years and then retire at 55.

Q6. On a scale of 1 to 5 how stressful do you think your career as a teacher was?

Oh it depends where, overall stress was probably a 3 or a 4, but many times it would be at a 5 level. Teaching is a stressful job and I never realized how stressful until when I left at Xmas holidays and we'd drive to my in-laws I'd sleep for the first three days. And the same with Easter, and then June rolls around and that first week of July you don't want to go anywhere, you just want to sleep. So it was probably very stressful, it's just that kind of a job. It's the kind of job that you're dealing with people and if you're not 100% and you try to fake it then you've really loaded yourself up. Many many times lots of us guys had huge number of sick days, because they never took a day off. It wasn't something a teacher should do, and sometimes when you did take a day or two off because you were really sick, you'd come back and it would be more work than if you would have stayed at school sick, it just wasn't worth it. It's hard to say, but overall it was pretty stressful.

Q9: Would you recommend the career choice of a teacher to a grade 12 student today?

There have been different times in my career where I would have said to somebody don't go into teaching, and the bad part is really outweighed by all the good stuff. As down as I got, over the last three or four years, my wife would continually find good things that people had said, but I never got much of that feedback. Even if you get one or two parents or students that say something good to you or about you, then that's all you need. I've had that through my wife, she always is telling me these stories and really bolstering me once I started to believe her. Then there's some of them that you fail with,

and you realize in many cases there were kids looking for help and you didn't realize they were being miserable and awful and they needed someone to help them out. But we are not gods. I tended to concentrate on those little failures too much instead of looking at the big picture. So as far as telling somebody, go in with your eyes wide open and go in knowing it's a tough job, and I think teachers are better trained than I was. I used to watch the childcare workers and they were better prepared as Childcare workers than I was as a beginning teacher. They were just turning us out after a three week practicum. I would say the majority of new teachers are excellent and more mature because the new teachers aren't finishing university until they're 23, 24 or 25 years old where as we were in the classroom by 19 or 20. But stress management and awareness is something new teachers need to be taught

Q10: What are some of the strategies you had to deal with stress?

Exercise, I did a lot of skiing at least four times a week. But you begin to lose some of your strategies as you get more worn down. A lot of the strategies were to go fishing after school or get together with your buddies. It was tough in a small community with only one other teacher in the building. But a lot of the stress management stuff is forgotten. I asked the doctors and psychologist what I could have done to have prevented all of this and the depression and they said nothing. So you can do a lot of stress management stuff, and it's going to catch up with you so you better be able to recognize it and deal with it. And the people around you should recognize it and help you. but I mean I know from watching other people and my first bout with everything, I thought I had a handle on it, that I could manage it and I didn't go looking for assistance soon enough and

no one directed me. My wife mentioned it, but because no one at work was saying anything I thought I was fine. So we really have to watch each other, and mention it to colleagues, we are too busy working by ourselves, and a lot of people don't want to hear it. If someone has a big boil on the back of their neck or a broken arm, then that's fine, but if you say anything about someone failing mentally that's a real black mark.

Q12: What advice would you give to teachers beginning their careers?

Open your eyes, make sure that you pace yourself, because a lot of beginning teachers don't. They do too much and they soon find out that their not sleeping at night, and can't unwind and you can do that for so long but then it accumulates and things start to break down, and you'll crash. I've watched people I've worked with who are destined to this, they just crumble because they do so much.

Q13: What advice would you give to teachers who are now in teaching, carrying a full teaching load?

Look at ways to back off. Really really time manage what's important. I've often said there are so many things that I have put so much time into like curriculum committees, science fair committees, computer committees, extra things, that were so important and next year there not. You put all this time and effort into things and then there just gone. So really prioritize what's important, and when you're in teaching your class is first, and when you're taking time from your class, stand back and ask yourself if it's really that important because with the Ministry, things that are important now won't be important within a year or less. So prioritizing is important and it's tough to do, especially because your dealing with kids. Watch out, so you don't get too involved in all

of the extra things that are going around, but add it up and be aware of what it's doing to the stress load. And be careful of the new person that comes in and wants to change the school, so find that balance of what is really important to the kids in the class, what is overly important to the school and what is not, and that's a hard thing to do. When someone comes up with a tremendous idea of a winter carnival and everyone is voting for it and you are the one saying no way, it's tough. But teachers get sucked in to so much and we create it for ourselves, and teachers do it a lot of the time because it makes them look good and raises their profile, and a lot of teachers don't recognize that's what they are doing, but they are.

Q11: Is there anything else you would like to share with me about being a teacher?

Like I said, it's an overall, big sort of a, it isn't all one thing, it's a bunch of individual things that make a career. Also a mentor is a good thing to have as a beginning teacher. I had this old guy that would tell me stories and was a very good mentor to me. Also remember that education is cyclical. We go from standardized tests to standardized tests are bad back to standardized testing. And I look back on this and it's so true. Montessori was the same way, there are still some around but they are mostly gone, same with the Cuisinart math method, to phonics to whole language and back again in Language Arts. You have to do what works with the particular kid. It really bugged me when new programs came out and we had to teach that way, and I recognized it as the way I was teaching 25 years ago. It also bugged me the number of interruptions in the last few years, with teachers doing surveys, or kids being pulled out constantly, or parents that felt they could walk in whenever they wanted, it just seemed like what was happening in my

classroom was no longer valued.

### Summary of Dan's Teaching Story

During this interview, Dan really opened up to me about his teaching history telling many stories and anecdotes. The questions of the interview were covered in an indirect way, but not in any order. Dan retired from teaching after having a breakdown caused by stress. This is what most of the interview focused upon. This was a very honest interview that was filled with bitterness at times, but it was important to Dan to tell what had happened to him.

Dan started his career in the Arrow Lakes area and was a principal of a small rural school for twelve years. He states that he was burnt out after the twelve years there as an administrator because he was teaching full time and being an administrator full time without any extra time allotted for administration duties. He then came to Cranbrook to teach, and everything became much easier, and less stressful because he only had to teach. Dan said he didn't realize how stressed he felt until he left his position as principal. He taught for 15 years in Cranbrook as an elementary teacher. Then came the awful year.

He was teaching in a portable with a class of very difficult students, and the principal was hiding his head. Then the other grade 4 teacher was having problems with some students, so the principal simply moved them out into the portable with Dan's already problematic class. The administration had no concept that Dan was in trouble. Also, there were four or five parents lead by one couple that wanted to see Dan reprimanded or fired, and they went to the school board about it. This was very stressful for Dan, and he went on sick leave. But the principal still continued to harass Dan.

The principal would phone Dan at home and tell him what was happening with his

class, and every time Dan went in to the school to give the principal input about when he would be returning to work, he was getting bad vibes, which sent him back home only feeling worse. Finally after more than two years, Dan was ready to go back to work, but he didn't want to displace anybody from their job, and he voiced this concern. The school board and the principal asked Dan if he was going to retire at the end of the year, and Dan said yes. Then the board and principal told him, "Well in that case we'll find the extra sick days and you can just stay home for the remainder of the year."

Dan was completely devastated; they would rather have him sit at home and be paid, than to have him come back to work and be a roaming teacher who could give prep time to other staff members, or whatever. He felt that the principal didn't want to take the flack from one or two parents if they saw Dan at the school again. In short, there wasn't any support for Dan. He said it was a bad way to end his career, and although he says he is over it, I can tell there is still bitterness and resentment.

Dan continued to talk about how no one would come near him when he was in the process of falling, but once he had crashed, he felt the administration pretended to care only to save their own butts. He then related another part to this stressful story.

After he had been off for just over a year, the then acting principal gave him a letter of reprimand. Dan couldn't understand where this was coming from, especially since he hadn't been teaching for over a year. Dan went in to the principal's office with a union representative to discuss this matter and found that the incidents in the letter had been twisted and many of the statements were false. The union representative said there was nothing to be done about the letter, and that letter remained in Dan's file until he retired.



Dan was very bitter about the fact that he had gotten sick, had no support, and then was given a letter of reprimand. He also found it confusing that the reprimand was not given to him when he was still teaching this particular class, over a year ago. Dan sadly stated that no one came near him while he was struggling. He had to beg the administration to come out to the portable to see what was going on, and once there were complaints about Dan, no one offered any help or support of any kind.

Dan also stated how students with severe difficulties were placed in his classes over the years without any support or help. One year was particularly bad, and only because Dan kept nagging the principal for help, by May he finally got a childcare worker to help with this one student who had been diagnosed by a psychologist, as severely troubled. He stated that the year with this one student was the year he started feeling himself wear out.

Over the last ten years of Dan's career the biggest change he saw was not in the behavior of the students, but in the way that teachers were allowed to deal with the behavior. The other change Dan has seen is the increase in all of the extra activities that teachers are now expected to do, as well as the increased academic pressure for kids to succeed, but with less time. Dan said he has seen the academic time of students and teachers constantly eroded over the last ten years of his career.

He also discussed the changes in teaching methods and curriculum that teachers were forced to make as the Ministry came out with 'new ideas'. Dan said this always left him with the feeling that what he had been doing for the past few years was all wrong, and had caused a lot of harm to kids. He said that was very hard to deal with, and that he felt

the building of his frustration because his time was being taken away from teaching and spending time with his class, in order to learn and implement all of the 'new' strategies.

Dan also became fed up with the number of interruptions in the last few years of his career. Teachers with surveys would walk into a class and interrupt whenever they wanted, gifted kids were being pulled out to work with a specialist, or the special needs students were being pulled out for extra help, or parents would just drop in at anytime unannounced. Dan felt like the education that was happening within his classroom was no longer being valued. Dan also mentioned that age is another stress factor; a younger teacher has a lot more tolerance.

Dan admits to teaching poorly at the end of his career, and states that he should have quit sooner. He said that really added to his stress level because he could self-reflect and know he wasn't doing a very good job, which increased his stress. Again the cycle of stress. But, Dan also notes, there wasn't anyone there to tell him or help him with his crisis. Dan states that teachers have all the caring in the world, except for when it comes to each other. As for the administration, they just turned a blind eye, and Dan really blames them for their lack of support and care.

Dan did at one time consider a career change. He was going to be a business partner in a hardware store, but that didn't work out, so he stayed in teaching. Dan also had some personal problems at home with one of his children which caused him stress in his personal life, which affected his professional life. Dan makes an insightful comment during the interview, in which he says that if you, as a teacher, are not one hundred percent, then you've really 'loaded yourself up' for trouble. Dan stated that overall,

teaching was a pretty stressful job, and that the stress level varied from year to year.

The best strategy for stress for Dan was exercise. He skied at least four times a week, or went fishing after school, or got together with his buddies. But Dan also said that the more stressed out he became the less stress management activities he did. He said all of that was forgotten as his stress level increased. He also stated how important it was that the people around a tired, stressed out teacher be able to talk to him/her about it. Dan said he thought he could handle his stress, and he didn't go looking for help soon enough, but at the same time no one ever directed him. Dan thinks that teachers are so busy working in their own classrooms that they forget to look around themselves and help out a colleague. Dan also mentions the fact that if someone is physically ill, then everyone will talk about the accident or injury with the affected person; but if someone is mentally ill, then everyone ignores it, and no one talks about it. That needs to change.

Dan offers some good advice for teachers who are still teaching. He mentions that stress is cumulative and that a teacher needs to be very aware of not only their own stress level, but the stress level of their colleagues too. He tells new teachers to pace themselves and have their eyes wide open. He also emphasizes prioritizing what is important, which helps with time management. As a new teacher, Dan suggests finding a mentor to work with.

His final piece of advice was to do what works with kids, regardless of the latest teaching methods and strategies, because education is cyclical, and the old methods will soon be popular once again.

## PROJECT FINDINGS

There were many common themes and phrases that emerged after careful examination of the three interviews. Some were very obvious and others were found in the intonation and emotions of each interview.

The most obvious theme that emerged was the sense of aloneness and isolation that a teacher felt when they were in the process of 'crashing,' or feeling stressed. All three subjects mentioned repeatedly how they felt there wasn't anyone to talk to, and that no one really cared about what was happening to a teacher who was feeling stressed. There was also a strong blame placed on the administration for their lack of support for teachers. In all three interviews administrators were blamed for creating more stress for teachers, instead of helping to alleviate it. With Ed the constant interruptions by administrators with their own agendas was identified as one of the most stressful aspects of his teaching career. Tara gave the examples of two different principals who increased her stress load. One was constantly criticizing her teaching without offering any suggestions, and the other did not treat her as an equal because she was female. The worst example is with Dan. His administrator ignored the signs for help from Dan and instead kept increasing his class numbers without providing any help for the special needs students. The administration were also blamed for not being as caring about their staff as they could be, and for seeing a teacher in need of help and choosing to do nothing about it, until the issue was forced.

Another theme that was mentioned time and time again was the lack of support. This is directly related to the feelings of isolation and loneliness. The three interviewees

seemed to blame both the administrators and staff members equally. At all three interviews there were conversations and questions surrounding the topic of why teachers don't help each other. Many suggestions were offered. The three subjects mentioned that teachers don't notice other teachers who are stressed because they are too busy within the confines of their own classrooms. Another suggestion was that teachers don't want to see the weaknesses that stress creates, they don't want to face that vulnerability, so they distance themselves from it. What I found very interesting was the analogy of the chickens and the henhouse used by two of the subjects. They both stated that when teachers sense a weak spot, like stress, in other teachers they will gang up on the teacher and make matters even worse instead of offering a helping hand. I don't know why this is, and I find it very difficult to understand. Dan related a time when he was sitting on the couch in the staffroom after a hard day with his class, with his head in his hands. This was just before he had his nervous breakdown. Not one person asked him if they could help. I find this unconscionable.

All three interviewees also said that teachers do not have the ability to see when they are stressed, so it is important to have colleagues or administrators point this out. It is important that others in the profession help a teacher who is stressed before they have a nervous breakdown or are forced to take time off. It was also stated by the three subjects that stress is cumulative and cyclical; it isn't just one incident that creates stress for a teacher, it is the everyday stress that happens day after day, and is ignored. This is the type of stress that cumulates until a teacher is unable to function properly. This in turn leads to the cycle of teacher stress. The three retired teachers agreed that when stress is cumulating

the strategies that teachers know to combat stress are forgotten. As the strategies are forgotten, the teacher becomes more stressed, and their teaching suffers even more because they are not using the learned stress strategies. The stressed teacher realizes that he/she is not working up to their potential, and they blame themselves which puts even more stress on the teacher, and the cycle continues. This is the type of stress that adds up, until a teacher is unable to function properly. The three subjects did agree that the one major symptom of stress that could be noticed by the individual was the extreme tiredness and/or a lack of energy.

It is interesting to note that the three interviewees all suffered health problems that were related to stress, and that all three subjects had other stressful events happening in their personal lives, which contributed to the stress level in their professional lives. Ed had recently had neck surgery due to his job as a computer teacher that he was dealing with, and he tried to go back to teaching and soon developed intestinal problems. Since he has retired and his neck has healed, he no longer experiences intestinal problems. Tara openly discussed how her insomnia and allergies worsened the more stressed she became. Dan had a complete nervous breakdown and now suffers from clinical depression, which is getting better, the longer he is away from teaching.

To me, this is a frightening commonality amongst the three subjects because it tells me that stress isn't just mental pressure, that it manifests itself in very serious physical ways. Another scary finding that was mentioned by all three subjects was that the more stressed they became, the less they used stress management techniques, which lead to more stress for them because they knew they were not doing as good of job as they were

capable of. This thinking pattern would then create even more stress, then the physical manifestations of each teacher's stress would increase. The three subjects were describing to me a vicious circle of stress that doomed its victims to a breakdown.

There is hope. The three retired teachers I interviewed all had the opportunity to leave teaching at some point in their careers, but they never did. They all stated that they liked teaching, but that it was a very stressful, challenging job. They also agreed that something needs to be done with regards to teacher wellness. Tara, in my opinion, had a fabulous idea. She suggested that the union take over the area of teacher wellness, and that each school have a union rep to deal with the contractual issues, as well as a wellness rep that deals with the overall mental health of the people on staff. Dan also offered a useful suggestion, that stress management and the reality of teaching become part of the teacher training programs in universities all over the world. I think both of these suggestions would work well and are very pro-active.

There were also commonalties that arose from two out of the three interviews. Ed and Dan, the two male subjects, mentioned that the lack of respect for educational time in a classroom was very stressful. They felt that the constant interruptions increased in the last ten years of their careers, and these interruptions were seriously eroding the instructional time with students. Both also mentioned how important it is that teachers function at a 100% level all of the time, otherwise there will be trouble. In both of their careers they found that if they were functioning at less than 100%, then they were making mistakes that they wouldn't normally make, and the result would be situations that were unfavourable. The final aspect of teaching both of these men commented on was the

importance of a mentoring program for beginning teachers. Both teachers felt strongly that the way we treat new teachers is wrong. They said the teaching profession needs a mentoring program to help its new teachers succeed in the classroom, and that universities can only teach so much. After university the new teacher has a lot to learn on their own from new experiences, during their first year of teaching. It is vital that another experienced teacher is there to guide the new teachers.

Tara and Dan also shared similar ideas about their beliefs, careers, and the causes of teacher stress. Both teachers talked about the abuses of parents. I think this is partly because both had careers in the elementary grades where teachers work much more closely with parents than secondary teachers. They talked about how much power parents had over teachers, and that this was a major contributor to teacher stress. As well, both stated how stressful it was being doubted and questioned by administrators. Tara and Dan blamed poor administration as a large contributor to their stress breakdowns.

Both also discussed how change was important in their careers. Tara stated that five to seven years was enough in any one school and then it was important to change to another school. Dan talked about how she would become bored with units and ideas very quickly, so every year she had to change what she was doing in her classroom. I think both of these are strategies to stay fresh and energized as teachers. Both thought that at times teaching was overwhelming, and the way to help a person have less stress was to look at ways to do less. As well, Tara and Dan had stress related breakdowns, which caused them to take time off in their teaching careers. The uplifting note about Tara and Dan is that both considered giving up teaching for different careers at some point in their professional



lives, but both decided to stay with teaching.

There were a few commonalities between the interviews of Ed and Dan. Both agreed that society has changed and teachers are having to deal with these changes inside the classroom. Single parent families and working parents were mentioned by both. They also mentioned in each of their interviews that there is now a wider gap in the learning abilities of students within one class. They each talked about how there are more lower level learners than there used to be in the school system, and this creates stress for teachers. Both retired teachers agreed that they were better teachers at the end of their careers than at the beginning, because of all of the years of experience.

Ed and Tara both did a lot of university course work throughout their careers, constantly upgrading their skills and finding new things to learn about. Ed took a year off to go back to school and finish his Bachelor's of Education, then in the last five years of his career he completed his Master's Degree in Special Education. Tara was constantly taking courses. She took courses to finish her Bachelor's Degree, then throughout her career she enrolled in various classes. It was obvious that both of these teachers were learners as well as teachers.

It was interesting to hear both of these subjects use the analogy of the chicken and the henhouse when discussing how teachers treat other teachers who are feeling stressed. I think this is partly because both have experience with farming, but also because both are careful observers of people. The final similarity between Ed and Tara was that both commented on the importance of having fun with kids and getting to know the students on a more personal level.

I began the process of investigating the causes of teacher stress thinking that I knew the four main causes of stress for teachers. I hypothesized that the retired teachers I interviewed would identify an increase in discipline problems, a sense of powerlessness, the influence of declining social values in the school setting, and the expanding role of teacher as four of the major causes of stress throughout a teacher's career.

After interviewing the three subjects, and reading their surveys, I found that all three teachers identified increased discipline problems and the expanding role of a teacher as two stressors in their careers. Ed talked about how all students are now forced to participate in the public school system, whereas twenty years ago a lot of students who didn't fit the mold of the school system would leave to find work. His survey also indicated that throughout his career there was an increase in discipline problems, which created more stress for him in the classroom. With regards to the expanding role of teacher, Ed put in his survey that on a scale of 1 to 5, one the least amount of stress and five the most, that the increase of responsibilities for a teacher causing more stress is a four (Appendix C).

Tara discussed the wide range of student abilities within one classroom, which resulted in an increase of discipline problems. Her survey also indicated that students have changed throughout her career, and in the latter part of her career there were more discipline problems (Appendix C). Tara also discussed how the role of a teacher is constantly expanding. She made the comment in her interview that teachers are not simply in schools to teach subject matter, especially in the lower elementary grades. Dan talked about severely challenged behavior students being put into his classroom without a

childcare worker, and this increased his discipline problems. Also on his survey he indicated that discipline problems in the classroom were a major stress factor for him. He also found that discipline problems increased more towards the end of his career. Dan found the expanding role of a teacher to be very frustrating and stressful. He mentioned several times in his interview how teachers were expected to do more and more with less time, and still cover the curriculum adequately. Part of his advice to teachers still in the profession today was to learn how to say no to all of the extras.

Tara and Dan agreed very strongly that a sense of powerlessness created stress for them. In fact, both felt so powerless in their different situations that Tara took a year off on stress leave, and Dan had a mental breakdown. Both talked of administrators who had all of the power, and then used that power to push Tara and Dan into taking time off on stress leave. The two stories of how both of these teachers were treated before they left on stress leave is a prime example of a lack of power, and an abuse of power by administrators.

Ed and Tara were in agreement that the declining or changing social values created stress for them in their careers. Ed talked about the change in the family structure to more single parent homes, or homes in which both parents are tired after working all day, and how this affects students, which in turn affects teachers. He also spoke about the influence of television on students. His survey echoed both of these sentiments. Tara also talked about the number of single parent homes, and how this affects the way students react to her in the classroom. Her survey also showed this to be true (Appendix C).

With the hypothesis that increased discipline problems, a sense of powerlessness,

the influence of declining social values on the school setting, and the expanding role of teacher increase teacher stress levels, I did identify four areas that caused stress for these three teachers throughout their careers. But, I missed what I think is the biggest factor of teacher stress that was mentioned by all three interviewees, and spoken about very strongly-the lack of support from colleagues and administration. All three subjects felt that had someone cared soon enough, their breakdowns could have been avoided and their stress levels would have been lessened. The three retired teachers repeated time and again how important it is that teachers care about each other, and take the time to talk to one another, especially if they suspect that a colleague is struggling. Dan made the comment in his interview that if a teacher is physically injured, everyone will ask about the injury and check to make sure the physically injured teacher is looked after. But if a teacher is suffering from mental problems, like stress, no one will say a word, and even worse, other teachers will often avoid the teacher who is feeling overwhelmed. It is vital that teachers start caring more about each other, and not be afraid to show their caring.

There was also a lot of bitterness towards administrators that was expressed by all three subjects. Tara and Dan spoke strongly about this issue. They felt that had the administrators been more supportive, involved, and caring that neither of them would have been forced to take time off due to stress. Both stated that the administrators in their schools knew what was going on, but chose to do nothing, and to make matters worse, they actually increased the level of stress for these two teachers. Administrators also need to be made more aware of how to recognize stress in teachers, and then how to help teachers who are feeling stressed, before it is too late.

The three subjects offered many useful and notable suggestions to practicing teachers about stress. One that I think is very important is the need to add a wellness course to the teacher training programs at universities. New teachers need to learn about the stresses of teaching and how to not only avoid them, but what to do if they are feeling overwhelmed.

## SIGNIFICANCE/IMPLICATIONS OF THE WORK

As society changes, students change. The profession of teaching is losing teachers at an alarming rate due to stress and burnout. It appears that the causes of this stress need to be determined. It might be that the causes are different for each teacher, depending on their personality and attitudes. This is not my belief. Most teachers will agree that teaching is a stressful job. I think that there are definite aspects of the job that cause teachers the most stress. Once these stressors are identified, then teachers will have the opportunity to raise their awareness of how they are feeling, as well as invent a variety of needed strategies to deal with the stress of teaching. Also, it is my hope, that as more research is completed in the area of teacher stress and burnout, that the universities will respond by including more courses and education for student teachers about the stress involved with a teaching career and strategies for generatively managing this stress.

I have not discovered any research in the area of the causes of teacher stress from a retired teacher's point of view. Retired teachers are one of the best resources teachers have to access about the stress of teaching. They have the experience and knowledge of many years in the classroom and they are very willing to share it. Most importantly, they have the wisdom of an entire teaching career with the time for reflection because they are now retired. Retired teachers are also less threatened to discuss the stresses of teaching because they are not going to lose their jobs, and it is not admitting weakness because they are now out of the profession. In the future I would like to see more studies done about teacher stress and teacher stories from a retired teacher's perspective.

Teachers need to research and be informed about the subject of teacher stress for

two reasons. The first is that as a teacher, the stress level of this profession is perceived to be very high, and if one is going to survive in this career choice, teachers need to know the causes of stress and learn strategies to live more generatively in teaching. The second reason is that we need to care about teachers. As a group, I think teachers are involved in the most giving profession in the world. They give 100% of themselves every day to the young people of our future. While the teachers are looking after the future and our world, who is looking after the teachers?

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## Appendix A

### Interview Questions

The information you supply by answering the following questions and completing the survey will never be traced back to you. You do NOT have to put your name on anything and I guarantee you will remain anonymous. The information you give will be used to help me research some of the causes of teacher stress from a retired teacher's point of view as my final project for my Master's Degree through the University of Lethbridge. The results of the survey and interviews will be readily available to you once I have completed the study, if you are interested.

In advance, I would like to thank you for your time and co-operation.

1. Would you tell me about your career as a teacher.
2. How did teaching change for you over the last ten years of your career?
- \*3. Do you think that you were doing as good a job at the end of your career as you were at the beginning of your teaching career?
- \*4. Did you ever wish that you had chosen a different occupation? If so, what would be your choice and why? If not, what was so rewarding in teaching that would make you choose it again?
5. Would you explain a typical day of teaching for you in the latter part of your career.
6. On a scale of 1 to 5, one being no stress and five being extremely stressful, overall how stressful was your career as a teacher?
7. What would you list as the top five most stressful aspects of your teaching career? Do you think stressors have changed for teacher over the years? (That is, do teachers now

have other difficulties you didn't have earlier on in your career, or vice versa?).

8. For the purpose of this study, I have defined stress as an intense state of tension and burnout as prolonged stress characterized by physical, emotional, and attitudinal exhaustion. At any point in your career did you ever feel stressed or burned out? Please explain.

9. Today, would you recommend the career choice of teaching to a grade 12 student? Why?

10. What strategies did you develop to reduce or manage your teaching stress? Are you aware of other strategies your colleagues used to deal with teaching stress?

11. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about your career as a teacher, or the stress you experienced as a teacher?

12. What advice would you give to teachers beginning their careers?

13. What advice could you give to experienced teachers who are now carrying full teaching responsibilities?

\*Adapted from Huston (1989).

## Appendix B

## Teacher Stress Survey

This survey is being conducted as part of Barbara Eckersley's, 1999 project for my Master's Degree Program through the University of Lethbridge. Your name will not appear anywhere on the survey, and I guarantee anonymity. The results will be used to help me clarify some of the cause of teacher stress and burnout, and will be published and kept at the University of Lethbridge. I would be more than willing to share the results of my study with you once it is complete, if you are interested. Thank you for your time and co-operation in helping me to better understand some of the cause of teacher stress.

Please put an 'X' in the appropriate box to indicate your answers.

1. I taught for \_\_\_\_\_ years total.

- 10 - 15 years
- 16 - 20 years
- 21 - 30 years
- plus years

2. Throughout my career I mainly taught:

- Elementary School
- Junior High/Middle School
- High School

3. If you taught at a Junior High/ Middle School or a High School, which subject area did you teach for the most number of years?

- Math
- Science
- English
- French/German/Spanish
- Social Studies
- Home Economics (Cooking or Sewing)
- Technical Education (Woodwork or Metalwork)
- P.E.
- Business Education/Typing
- Computers/Technology
- Library
- Student Services (Learning Center, Alternate Program, Special Needs, etc.)
- Other (Please Specify) \_\_\_\_\_

4. What level of education did you have upon retiring?

- Teaching Certificate
- Bachelor's Degree
- Master's Degree
- Doctorate

5. For what reason(s) did you choose to retire?

- Medical/Health problems
- The stress was too much
- You had reached the magic number and were able to retire
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

6. I have been retired for \_\_\_\_\_ years.

- less than 5 years
- 6 - 10 years
- 11 - 15 years
- 16 years or more

Please answer the following questions by putting a circle around the appropriate response.

7. Did you feel your workload was too much as a teacher?

yes    no    sometimes

8. Did you find that discipline problems in the classroom were a major stress factor for you in your teaching career?

yes    no    sometimes

9. Did you find that later in your career students became more troublesome as compared to how students behaved early in your career?

yes    no    sometimes

10. Did you find that a sense of powerlessness caused you stress in your career?

yes    no    sometimes

11. Did you find that society's values declined, the impact of that on students and the school system caused increased stress for you as a classroom teacher?

yes    no    sometimes

12. Dealing with the hierarchy of the education system is stressful for teachers

yes    no    sometimes

13. Students today, in the 1990's, are more violent and bring that violence into the school setting.

yes    no    sometimes

14. Over the years, more and more responsibility has been added to the jobs of teachers, thus making the job more stressful

yes    no    sometimes

15. The students in the school system over the last ten years made my job more stressful than the students in the earlier part of my career.

yes    no    sometimes

16. Students today in the 1990's require more attention and discipline due to the lack of parenting in society.

yes    no    sometimes

17. Students today are less respectful than students were ten years ago

yes    no    sometimes

18. The increased hours students spend watching TV has had a negative influence on their learning.

yes    no    sometimes

Please rate the following questions on a scale of 1 to 5, by circling the number that corresponds with your answer.

- 1 = NEVER
- 2 = SELDOM
- 3 = SOMETIMES
- 4 = FREQUENTLY
- 5 = ALWAYS

\*19. Overall, I felt emotionally worn out from teaching

1      2      3      4      5

20. I felt/feel really burned out from teaching and working with students.

1      2      3      4      5

\*21. I feel exhausted after a career of teaching

1      2      3      4      5

22. Dealing with discipline problems was the most stressful part of teaching

1      2      3      4      5

23. Having no voice with Ministry initiatives is a frustrating part of teaching

1      2      3      4      5

24. I felt overwhelmed by the changes in curriculum, school and class organization, instruction methods, assessment techniques, etc. at some point in my teaching career.

1      2      3      4      5

25. As a retired teacher I feel that the effect of increased demands and decreased resources was a major factor in increasing my stress level.

1      2      3      4      5

1 =NEVER 2 =SELDOM 3 = SOMETIMES 4 = FREQUENTLY 5 =ALWAYS

\*26. I feel that teaching is a job that required too much work.

1      2      3      4      5

27. Teaching is a job typical of too much to do and not enough time to do it in.

1      2      3      4      5

\*28. Throughout my career I often felt frustrated, tense, and tired at the end of the school day.

1      2      3      4      5

29. As a teacher I felt I was expected to do far more than simply teach my subject area or the basics. I had to be a counselor, a career advisor, a mediator, etc.

1      2      3      4      5

30. I felt I had no input into what was happening in the education world. I simply had to do what the Ministry or my principal told me to do.

1      2      3      4      5

Please feel free to comment below on any other areas of teacher stress that were not covered in the survey.

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\* Adapted from Friedman (1991).



## Appendix C

## Survey Results

The information from the surveys was used to support what each teacher had reported in their interviews. Questions 1-6 of the survey (Appendix B) were basic sociological data that was used to determine how long the subjects taught, how long they have been retired, the subject matter and grade level taught, the level of education they achieved upon retirement, and the reason(s) they chose to retire. The following is a chart of each interviewee's response to the survey questions.

● - Ed

■ - Tara

▲ - Dan

	YES	NO	SOMETIMES
7. Did you feel your workload was too much as a teacher?			● ■ ▲
8. Did you find that discipline problems in the classroom were a major stress factor for you in your teaching career?	▲		● ■
9. Did you find that later in your career students became more troublesome as compared to how students behaved early in your career?	● ▲		■
10. Did you find that a sense of powerlessness caused you stress in your career?	▲	●	■
11. Did you find that as society's values declined, the impact of that on students and the school system caused increased stress for you as a teacher?	● ▲		■

● - Ed

■ - Tara

▲ - Dan

	YES	NO	SOMETIMES
12. Dealing with the hierarchy of the education system is stressful for teachers.	● ▲		■
13. Students today, in the 1990s, are more violent and bring that violence into the school setting.	▲		● ■
14. Over the years, more and more responsibility has been added to the jobs of teachers, thus making the job more stressful.	● ■ ▲		
15. The students in the school system over the last ten years made my job more stressful than the students in the earlier part of my career.	● ▲		■
16. Students today in the 1990s require more attention and discipline due to the lack of parenting in society.	● ■ ▲		
17. Students today are less respectful than students were ten years ago.	▲		● ■
18. The increased hours students spend watching TV has had a negative influence on their learning.	●		■ ▲

● - Ed

■ - Tara

▲ - Dan

	1=Never	2=Seldom	3=Sometime	4=Frequent	5=Always
19. Overall, I felt emotionally worn out from teaching.			● ■	▲	
20. I felt/feel really burned out from teaching and working with students.		●	■	▲	
21. I feel exhausted after a career of teaching.		●	■ ▲		
22. Dealing with discipline problems was the most stressful part of teaching.		●	▲	■	
23. Having no voice with Ministry initiatives is a frustrating part of teaching.		■		● ▲	
24. I felt overwhelmed by the changes in curriculum, school and class organization, instruction methods, assessment techniques, etc. at some point in my teaching career.		■		▲	●

● - Ed

■ - Tara

▲ - Dan

	1=Never	2=Seldom	3=Sometime	4=Frequent	5=Always
26. I feel that teaching is a job that required too much work.		■	● ▲		
27. Teaching is a job typical of too much work to do and not enough time to do it in.				● ■ ▲	
28. Throughout my career I often felt frustrated, tense, and tired at the end of the school day.		●	■	▲	
29. As a teacher I felt I was expected to do far more than simply teach my subject area or the basics. I had to be a counselor, a career advisor, a mediator etc.				●	■ ▲
30. I felt I had no input into what was happening in the education world. I simply had to do what the Ministry or my principal told me to do.	● ■			▲	