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THE EXPERIENCES OF MID-CAREER
ELEMENTARY TEACHERS

by

Susan H. L. Johnston

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education

University of San Diego

March 22, 1996

Dissertation Committee

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ABSTRACT

The demographics of the teaching population in British Columbia indicate a significant number of teachers in mid career. Their cares, concerns, and interests dramatically influence educational activity in the province. The experiences of these educators lie within a context of major restructuring of the entire provincial school system and substantive educational change mandated by the government of British Columbia. Using a phenomenological approach, this study explores the experiences of seven, mid-career, elementary school teachers in one British Columbia school district; investigates how these teachers experience system-wide, mandated, educational change; and suggests implications of these understandings for leadership practice.

During three, in-depth, semi-structured interviews, the participants reconstructed their educational, family, and teaching experiences. The researcher used an inductive approach, designed specifically for phenomenological research, to identify and analyze key themes that emerged from the individual narrative created from the interview data.

This study provides an understanding of the experiences held by elementary teachers in mid career and elucidates their perceptions of educational change. These experiences, although personal and varied in detail, portray several common attitudes and dispositions. The study identifies nine themes that provide information for mid-career teachers as they seek to understand this phase of their work life. The seven major themes are connection, self-knowledge,

growth and development, balance between work and home, demands of teaching, professional well-being, and time as a measured commodity. The two minor themes are a renewed commitment and insecurity. This understanding is important for other teachers, administrators and leaders in education because it communicates the issues and concerns of teachers in mid career. Educational change was an issue in the participants' lives, but only as it affected their personal teaching situation. They did not focus on the educational changes and restructuring imposed by the government. The understandings of this study suggest that leaders in education can support and nurture mid-career teachers by encouraging and sustaining genuine collaboration and collegiality, acknowledging personal experiences and individual backgrounds, providing opportunities for professional development, encouraging and supporting risk-taking and sharing information.

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Lastly, heartfelt thanks to my Mom and Dad for their unwavering support and encouragement. They have always believed I could do anything I set my mind to. Their unconditional love and faith in me fortified my spirit, and enabled me to push on in times of doubt and discouragement. I am exceedingly fortunate to have the love and support of such wonderful parents!

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Chapter 1

STATEMENT OF THE ISSUE

Introduction

Over the past seven years the education system in British Columbia has sustained dramatic changes in direction and mandate, in leadership, and in organizational structure.¹ The significant event that triggered many of these changes was the release of the report of British Columbia's third Royal Commission on Education on August 4, 1988.² This report, *A Legacy for Learners*, culminated a province-wide inquiry into all facets of the education system. The report contained 83 recommendations that covered a variety of educational issues including curriculum, teaching, and finance.

The provincial government of British Columbia adopted a majority of the recommendations contained in the Commission's report.³ Updated policy documents, legislation, and mandates were issued to support the new directions.⁴ The report, *Policy Directions: A Response to the Sullivan Royal Commission on Education*, and its companion *Year 2000: A Framework for Learning*, provided the impetus and focus for all subsequent provincial educational activity.⁵ These documents became the touchstone for anyone who wanted changes in education in British Columbia, at the Ministry of Education, at the school district office, and at the schools. These publications also became the

lightning rod for those who were disenchanted with the directions of educational change which included a child-centered curriculum, authentic assessment, anecdotal reporting and greater autonomy for teachers.

The call for systemic educational change throughout the province lies within a historically unique demographic context. During the early 1970's, British Columbia's school system experienced unprecedented growth. For approximately five years, school districts throughout the province hired many young teachers to accommodate the burgeoning student enrollment. This dramatic increase in teacher demand occurred during the same years that birth rates decreased. As a result, five years later, there was a subsequent decline in the need for new teachers.

Since 1980, the average age of teachers in British Columbia has gradually increased.⁶ In 1989, the average age of teachers was 41 years, with increasing numbers of teachers in the 35 to 45 year old range group.⁷ By 1994-95, the largest number of teachers was in the 40 to 49 year old range group. Figure 1 shows this large bulge of older teachers bracketed by a declining number of new teachers and retiring teachers. Figure 2 indicates that the greatest proportion (57%) of teachers in British Columbia are middle aged and in mid career. Their attitudes, perceptions, and expectations greatly influence, overtly and covertly, the direction of the education system in British Columbia. With very modest growth in the demand for teachers predicted for the next five years, this bulge will continue through the years.⁸ This situation prompts many questions: What does it mean to be a teacher in mid career? What is the experience of being a teacher in mid career during a time of sweeping change in education? How do mid-career teachers perceive the call for systemic educational change? How does the mandate for educational change affect mid-career teachers? To address the needs of these teachers as they mature and to attend to the call for systemic

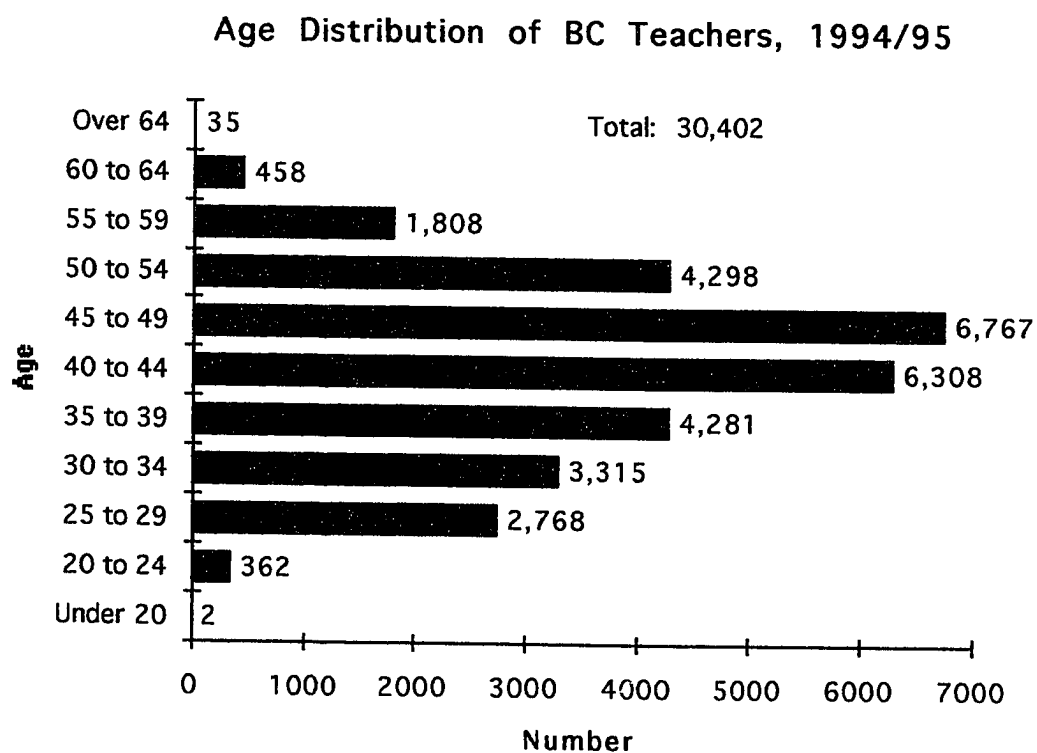


Figure 1. *Age distribution of BC Teachers (School Staff), 1994/95*

Source: *Ministry of Education Standard Report 2059*
 Victoria, B.C.: Queen's Printer for British Columbia

Percentage of BC Teachers by Age, 1994/95

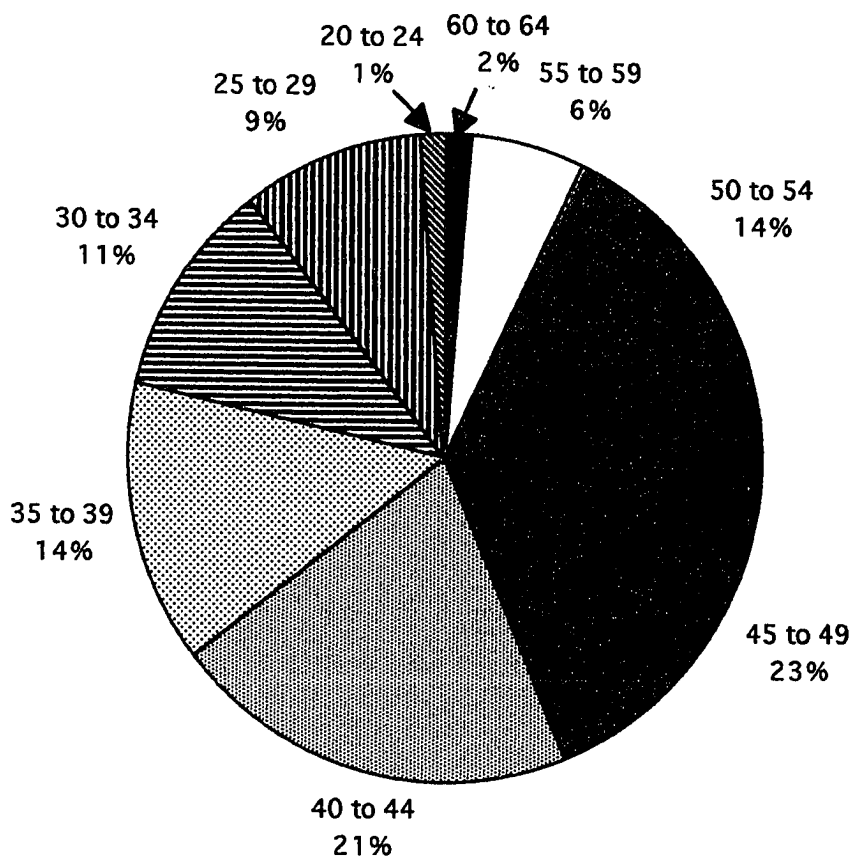


Figure 2. *Percentage of BC Teachers (School Staff) by Age, 1994/95*

Source: *Ministry of Education Standard Report 2059*
 Victoria, B.C.: Queen's Printer for British Columbia

educational change, it is important that school leaders understand the characteristics associated with this age group and how they perceive the experience of mandated change.

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this research was to explore and describe the experiences of teachers in mid career. The demographics of the teaching population in British Columbia indicate a substantial number of mid-career teachers. The collective action, or inaction, of this large group of educators dramatically influences educational activity in the province. Therefore, it is important to identify the experiences of these mid-career teachers, to discern their cares and concerns, and to unearth what is important and what is unimportant to them.

A second purpose of this study was to relate how mid-career teachers experience mandated educational change. Since a large proportion of the teachers in British Columbia are in mid career, the implementation of change, innovation, and new directions are affected by their attitudes, skills, and knowledge. By considering mid-career teachers' experiences of change, those who are responsible for the implementation of new programs may enhance the chance that the innovations will be embraced.

The third purpose of this research was to describe the implications for leadership of a "graying" teacher population in a period of systemic educational change. An understanding of how mid-career teachers experience change may help school leaders to address the needs of these educators as they mature, while continuing to heed student needs and school goals.

Research Questions

The following research questions provided the foundation for this study:

- 1) What are the experiences of teachers in mid career?
- 2) How do mid-career teachers experience system-wide, mandated educational change?
- 3) What are the implications for leadership practice from this study?

Importance of the Study

The importance of the study was three-fold. First, this study added to the knowledge base of research on the lives of teachers. Although some studies eloquently address the lives of teachers, and others focus on the specific experiences of elementary teachers, there is a paucity of research on the experiences of elementary teachers in mid career.⁹ This research filled that niche as it is a qualitative study that focuses specifically on the experiences of mid-career teachers in an elementary school setting. This study related the participants' cares, concerns, feelings, and thoughts about teaching in mid career. It was contextually grounded in a time of systemic educational change as teachers and schools are flooded with revised curricula, contemporary materials, and new methods. This research offered the perspectives of mid-career, elementary teachers during a period of mandated educational change.

Second, this study provided an opportunity for mid-career teachers to share their experiences in education and develop deeper insight into these experiences. Hall's study indicated that participation in research projects is a valuable experience for teachers.¹⁰ Van Manen suggested, "For example, intense conversational interviews may lead to new levels of self-awareness, possible changes in life-style, and shifting priorities of living."¹¹ The participants are, in a

real sense, co-researchers. As they reflected upon their experiences, the participants engaged in a process of creating an increased understanding of their experiences, and in turn, they contributed their unique understanding to the human experience.

Third, this study provided valuable insight for the practice of leadership. The average age of educators in British Columbia has increased yearly since 1980/81.¹² With a decrease in the demand for new teachers, this trend is expected to continue as the majority of educators progress through the middle years of their careers. This demographic course, coupled with pressing demands for educational change mandated by the government of British Columbia, presents unique challenges for leadership practice in schools. School leaders must consider how to engage a graying staff in systemic change. This study explored how mid-career teachers experience educational change and related its effects on the lives of those teachers. An awareness of these experiences can guide school leaders as they seek to implement the mandated changes.

Definition of Terms

The following terms will be referred to and used throughout this study:

Bracketing. The process of setting aside, without editing, any part of the interview transcript that attends to the research topic and the research questions. The remaining information is set aside and the research process is focused on the portions of the transcripts that have been bracketed.

Horizonalization. The process of identifying the horizons of the experience.

Horizons of the experience. The key phrases, expressions, and statements that specifically address the experience. They are identified by sequencing each sentence from the information bracketed from the interview transcripts.

Invariant constituents of the experience. The phrases, expressions, and statements that remain after the repetitive, vague, or overlapping phrases, expressions and statements are eliminated from the horizons of the experience. The elements of the experience that are necessary for understanding the phenomenon.

Mandated change. Change that is sanctioned, supported, implemented, and enforced by a governing body.

Mid-career teacher. A person who has been actively employed in the teaching profession for at least 15 years.

Mid-life, middle years, and middle adulthood. The period of life from 40-55 years of age.

P.A.C. Parent Advisory Council. An organized group of parents elected to represent the concerns of a school's parent community.

Province. A political and administrative unit that has jurisdiction over public education.

Seconded. The process of loaning school district personnel, teachers or administrators, to the Ministry of Education to assist with the development, implementation, assessment, and evaluation of provincial education programs and materials.

Limitations and Assumptions of the Study

Limitations

This research was a particularistic study which sought to understand the lived experience of mid-career teachers during a period of substantive educational change. The purpose of the research was to develop an understanding of the experience and therefore is not generalizable to other groups, situations, or populations. This research does not attempt to answer

questions of comparison or prediction, to create models or lists, or to develop theories or constructs.

This study was also limited by the degree to which the participants recall and share their personal experiences. The participants have the choice whether to share, or not to share, their perspective. In addition, each participant brings his or her own perceptions, life history, and experiences to the questions.

In addition, the study was limited by the researcher's ability to guide and interpret the stories shared by the participants. It is necessary for the interviewer to facilitate the interview flow without framing the direction of the narrative. Also, when interpreting the interviews, it is necessary to unwrap the participants' experiences methodically while being cognizant of the participants' voices, and at the same time the researcher must be aware of the influence of her experiences upon her interpretation.

Assumptions

The primary assumption of the study was that the participants would openly discuss their experience of being a mid-career teacher since each volunteered to participate in the study.

Second, it was assumed that the guiding questions posed during the interview series would enable, not hinder, the participants to relate their experiences as a mid-career teacher.

In addition, it was assumed that the researcher would be responsive to the involvement of the participants and would encourage and support their participation. The researcher would not intentionally limit or restrict the participants' recollections.

Chapter Summary

The first chapter introduced the focus and scope of the research study. The research issue focused on an exploration of the experiences of mid-career elementary school teachers during a period of mandated, systemic educational change. The three purposes of this study were: 1) to describe and explore the experiences of teachers in mid-career; 2) to relate how mid-career teachers experience mandated educational change; and 3) to examine the implications of a graying teacher population in a period of systemic educational change for leadership practice.

The research questions addressed within the study included: (a) What are the experiences of teachers in mid-career? (b) How do mid-career teachers experience system-wide, mandated educational change? and (c) What are the implications for leadership practice from this study?

This research is important for three reasons. First, it serves to add to the knowledge base of teachers' experiences. The experiences of mid-career elementary teachers during a period of systemic educational change does not seem to be represented in the literature. Second, the participants develop an understanding of their experiences and expand their knowledge about the human experience by being actively engaged in the research process. Third, in the demographic context of British Columbia where mid-career teachers form the majority of the teaching population, a study of the experiences of mid-career teachers offers school leaders a valuable perspective of a group of educators that form a large portion of many school staffs.

The study limits its parameters to: (a) an emphasis on the qualitative nature of teachers' experience; (b) an awareness that the participants have the choice whether to share, or not to share, their perspective; and, (c) the researcher's interpretation of the stories shared by the participants.

The assumptions of this study included: (a) the participants would fully and openly discuss their experiences as mid-career teachers; and (b) the guiding questions asked during the interviews would enable, not hamper, the participants to recount their experiences.

The next chapter, Chapter 2, reviews the research literature related to this study. Three areas of literature are of importance: adult development, teacher development, and change.

Notes

1. See the following annual reports from the British Columbia Ministry of Education: British Columbia Ministry of Education, *Annual Report: Ministry of Education, July 1, 1988 to June 30, 1989* (Victoria, B.C.: Queen's Printer for British Columbia, 1990); British Columbia Ministry of Education, *Annual Report: Ministry of Education, July 1, 1989 to June 30, 1990* (Victoria, B.C.: Queen's Printer for British Columbia, 1991); British Columbia Ministry of Education, *Annual Report: Ministry of Education, July 1, 1990 to June 30, 1991* (Victoria, B.C.: Queen's Printer for British Columbia, 1991).
2. British Columbia Ministry of Education, *A Legacy for Learners* (Victoria, B.C.: Queen's Printer for British Columbia, 1988).
3. British Columbia Ministry of Education, *Policy Directions: A Response to the Sullivan Royal Commission on Education* (Victoria, B.C.: Queen's Printer for British Columbia, 1989).
4. For a list of publications see appendix A.
5. British Columbia Ministry of Education, *Policy Directions: A Response to the Sullivan Royal Commission on Education* (Victoria, B.C.: Queen's Printer for British Columbia, 1989) and British Columbia Ministry of Education, *Year 2000: A Framework for Learning* (Victoria, B.C.: Queen's Printer for British Columbia, 1989).
6. British Columbia Ministry of Education, *Annual Report: Ministry of Education, July 1, 1988 to June 30, 1989* (Victoria, B.C.: Queen's Printer for British Columbia, 1990), 108.

7. Ibid., 108.
8. Wayne Hoyle, "Supply Side Analysis - Draft: Teacher Supply and Demand Committee" (Ministry of Skills, Training and Labour, Universities and Provincial Institutes Branch, Province of British Columbia, November 10, 1993, photocopy).
9. Some examples include: Ivor F. Goodson, ed., *Studying Teachers' Lives* (Columbia University, NY: Teachers College Press, 1992); Alan J. C. King and Marjorie J. Peart, *Teachers in Canada: Their Work and Quality of Life, A National Study for the Canadian Teachers' Federation* (Ottawa, Ont.: Canadian Teachers' Federation, 1992); Dan C. Lortie, *Schoolteacher: A Sociological Study* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press 1975); Susan M. Johnson, *Teachers at Work: Achieving Success in Our Schools* (New York: Basic Books, 1990); John Godar, *Teachers Talk* (Macomb, Ill.: Glenbridge Publishing Ltd., 1989); Daniel A. Lindley, *This Rough Magic: The Life of Teaching* (Westport, Conn.: Bergin and Garvey, 1993).
10. Susan Hall, "On What is Known and Seen: A Conversation with a Research Participant", *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 23, no. 5 (1991): 423-28.
11. Max Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy* (London, Ont.: The Althouse Press, 1990), 163.
12. British Columbia Ministry of Education *Annual Report: Ministry of Education, July 1, 1988 to June 30, 1989* (Victoria, B.C.: Queen's Printer for British Columbia, 1990), 108.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Three areas of literature are intimately interwoven to produce the contextual fabric of this research. Theories of adult development provide the touchstone for understanding the experiences of middle-aged people. Models of teacher development furnish the foundation for examining patterns of growth of mid-career teachers. In addition, two specific areas in the literature about change and the change process are pertinent to this research: (a) personal change, which elucidates how people individualize the change process, and (b) educational change, an overview of the mandated changes effected by the provincial government in British Columbia.

Adult Development in Mid-life

For the purpose of this study, it is crucial to understand growth and development in middle adulthood. This understanding can provide important insight into some of the challenges and opportunities that middle-year adults face as they continue to mature. Levine emphasizes that the use of an adult development framework "helps to clarify how adults are thinking and feeling and suggests developmentally appropriate responses."¹

There are many varied theories of adult growth and development.² This literature review focuses on the works of four prominent theorists, Erik Erikson, Daniel Levinson, Roger Gould, and Bernice Neugarten, whose theories offer insights on adults in mid-life. Each author presents a different, although instructive, perspective on a number of important dimensions of adult development. An examination of their contributions provides insight about the lives of maturing adults.

Erik Erikson

Erikson's model of psychosocial development was the first comprehensive theory of adult development. Strongly influenced by Freud, he proposed that psychosocial development evolves through the entire life span, and results from the interaction between inner instincts and drives, and outer cultural and social demands. Erikson suggested there are eight stages of individual development and each stage presents a specific developmental crisis or dilemma. The basic issue underlying each stage is the definition and redefinition of one's personal identity. To develop a complete, stable identity, a person must move through each stage and resolve the challenges or dilemmas. Erikson emphasized that: ". . . each step (even wisdom) is grounded in all the previous ones; . . ."³

Table 1 briefly outlines Erik Erikson's stages of development. The first four stages closely parallel a Freudian scheme of child development. The last four stages describe the dilemmas and arenas of focus in adulthood.

The teaching population under consideration in this study falls into Erikson's seventh stage. In this stage there is an emphasis on care for a new generation and the regeneration of society. Generativity refers to the contribution, through parental obligations and/or occupational achievements, that outlive a person. Okun described this period in life by explaining that individuals want:

to be helpful to others for the purpose of serving society rather than for obtaining recognition or material reward. In this stage, the person reaches the peak of productivity and contributes greatly to his or her sense of meaning and self-fulfillment in life. Stagnation, the negative resolution, can manifest in boredom, over concern with physical or psychological decline, and feelings of worthlessness and impoverishment.⁴

Table 1. *Erikson's Stages of Development*

Stage	Approximate Age	Dilemma/Crisis	Arena of Focus
I - Infant	0-1 years	Basic trust versus mistrust	Mother
II - Early Childhood	2-3 years	Autonomy versus shame and doubt	Parents
III - Childhood	4-5 years	Initiative (ego ideal) versus guilt (conscience)	Nuclear Family
IV - School Age	6-12 years	Industry versus inferiority	Neighborhood and School System
V - Adolescence	13-18 years	Identity versus role confusion	Peers, Leaders, and Heroes
VI - Young Adult	19-25 years	Intimacy versus isolation	Partners
VII - Adulthood	26-50 years	Generativity versus stagnation	Care for new generation
VIII - Maturity	50+ years	Ego integrity versus despair	Mankind

Developed from: Erikson, E. H. 1982. *The Life Cycle Completed: A Review*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

Erikson contended that if individuals do not satisfy the need to be generative, there will be a tendency toward *rejectivity*; "the unwillingness to

include specified persons or groups in one's generative concern--one does not care to care for them."⁵ Since teaching is a caring profession, it is essential that educational leaders understand the ramifications of *not* engaging educators in opportunities to express their generativity. Disenchantment, boredom, and fatigue are signs of stagnation.⁶

Within ten years a large number of the teaching population will enter Erikson's eighth stage of development, facing the dilemma of ego integrity versus despair. As the last stage, it is a time for personal review and assessment. It is the acceptance of one's own mortality and a realization that each person's life is his or her own responsibility. Bee suggested that:

this issue of integrity must be built upon the foundation of successful resolution of all the crises and dilemmas that came before. Those adults who cannot achieve a sense of integrity, perhaps because they carry forward a residue of distrust, guilt, diffusion, isolation or self-absorption from earlier stages, experience a sense of despair. They feel that time is too short, or that their life has been a failure, or that they wish they had it to do over again.⁷

Erikson claimed that the sequence of identity formation followed by intimacy may not be true for many women, for whom the identity may be created in a network of relationships. Erikson emphasized:

the fact that a woman, whatever else she may be, never is not-a-woman creates unique relations between her individuality, her somatic existence, and her social potentials and demands that the feminine identity be studied and defined in its own right.⁸

Still, he does not elaborate upon gender differences within the frame of adult development he develops in *The Life Cycle Completed: A Review*. Even with this caveat, however, his model provides a worthwhile frame to explore an

overarching understanding of adult development and identifies some issues that educational leaders should attend to in working with adults.

Daniel Levinson

Levinson based his adult development theory on intensive interviews with forty men, ages 35-40, during the late 1960s and early 1970s.⁹ The men comprised four distinct subgroups: academic biologists, blue collar workers, middle-level executives, and novelists. These groups were diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, religious background, marital status, and education level. The researchers conducted twenty-four hour individual interviews focusing on each man's life choices and how he coped with those choices in terms of his family, marriage, and occupation. Levinson found that:

The life structure develops through a relatively orderly sequence of age-linked periods during the adult years. The sequence consists of an alternating series of structure-building and structure-changing (transitional) periods.¹⁰

The structure-building periods are relatively stable and designed to form a life structure and develop a life within it. These periods overlap and intersperse with periods of less stability when structures are changing (transitional periods). Levinson emphasized that "almost half our adult lives is spend in developmental transitions."¹¹

Levinson's six developmental periods are:

- 17-22 Early Adult Transition
- 22-40 Early Adulthood
- 40-45 Mid-life Transition
- 45-60 Middle Adulthood
- 60-65 Late Adult Transition
- 64-80 Late Adulthood.

The largest group of British Columbian educators ranged from the Mid-life Transition, through Entering Middle Adulthood, into the Age 50 Transition. The Mid-life Transition is the bridge from early to middle adulthood. Levinson stated that individuals begin to review the early adult period, modify unsatisfying aspects of life structure, and adjust psychologically to the final half of life.¹² This intense re-examination may or may not involve a "mid-life crisis." At ages 45-50, Entering Middle Adulthood, individuals begin to create a new life structure. This period is a time of choices and may involve a change in work life, a new job, or a new marriage. During the Age 50 Transition there is a minor adjustment to middle adult life structure. Levinson contended that if no crisis occurred at Mid-life Transition, one is likely to occur now.¹³

Levinson emphasized that all these stages hold for all adults. He believed:

everyone lives through the same development periods in adulthood, just as in childhood, though people go through them in their own ways. Each individual life has its own unique character. Our theory of life structure does not specify a single, 'normal' course that everyone must follow. Its function, instead, is to indicate the developmental tasks that everyone must work on in successive periods, and the infinitely varied forms that such work can take in different individuals living under different conditions.¹⁴

Levinson's initial work was confined to men between the ages of 35 and 45. However, Levinson indicated that further studies suggested that women go through the same periods as men in early adulthood, but there are important differences in the issues they face and the ways they traverse the periods."¹⁵ He did not elaborate upon the differences.

Roger Gould

Roger Gould viewed adult development as the evolution of adult consciousness through challenging major false assumptions developed during childhood. He stated that we develop from dependent children to independent adults in four phases over the ages from 16 to 50.¹⁶

He labeled the ages 35 to 45 as the "mid-life decade." The mid-life decade brings the pressure of time emphasizing that whatever one wants to do in one's life must be done at this time. There is a inner drive to act. Gould pointed out that:

mid-life is the time for resolution; we abandon old conspiracies, overcome remaining internal prohibitions and correct whatever distortions, misperceptions and misunderstandings that have prevented us from becoming authentic, whole people.¹⁷

During the mid-life decade we confront the final major false assumption: "There is no evil or death in the world. The sinister has been destroyed."¹⁸

Gould suggests that:

this is most effectively challenged during our late thirties and throughout our forties, when time pressures mount, others die, parents become peripheral and children are ready to graduate from the home. At this time we must dig deep inside, where the monsters are supposed to live. We must touch our own inner core to release the power that will rescue us from stagnation without destroying the valuable and dear parts of our life.¹⁹

Table 2 compares the stages of adult development outlined by Erikson, Levinson, and Gould.²⁰

**Table 2. Comparative Stages of Adult Development,
Erikson, Levinson and Gould**

Erikson	Levinson	Gould
Intimacy vs. Isolation (19-25)	Early Adult Transition (17-22)	Leaving Family (16-22)
	Early Adulthood (22-40)	Occupation, new roles, important events (22-28)
Generativity vs. Stagnation (26-50)		Lack of clarity, goal diffusion (28-34)
		Need for work success (35-40)
	Mid-life Transition (40-45)	
	Middle Adulthood (45-60)	
Integrity vs. Despair (50+)		Turning inward, move toward authenticity and generativity (50)
	Late Adult Transition (60-65)	
	Late Adulthood (65-80)	

Adapted from: Leslie Shelbourne, workshop handout at National Staff Development Council Annual Conference, Anaheim, California; November 27-December 1, 1989.

Bernice Neugarten

Bernice Neugarten accentuated the integrated nature of the life cycle and pointed to the variability of the social, and psychological, as well as, the biological phases of life. She studied groups of males and females between the ages of 54 and 94 over a seven year period during the late 1960s and early 1970s.

She focused on the psychology of life events and included gender, age, and social-class differences in the sample. Although Neugarten's study was biased to white, middle-class individuals, it was extremely valuable because it is one of the most comprehensive, longitudinal studies that includes both genders.²¹

Neugarten claimed that the salient issues of adulthood are: issues which relate to the individual's use of experience; his structuring of the social world in which he lives; his perspectives of time; the ways in which he deals with the major themes of work, love, time, and death; the changes in self-concept and changes in identity as he faces the successive contingencies of marriage, parenthood, career advancement and decline, retirement, widowhood, illness, and personal death. These issues take different forms at different age periods in adulthood.²²

Neugarten found that middle age is a period of personal reflection, reassessment, and insight. Table 3 outlines five salient features that Neugarten characterized for middle age.

Neugarten's study indicated that adults view middle age as a distinct period of life, the bridge between youth and old age. Middle aged adults tend to have a greater connection with elder individuals rather than youth. Although time is seen as finite, time-left-to-live rather than time-from-birth, middle age is viewed as a period of confidence, high capacity, and expertise. Middle aged adults have the experience and the energy to pursue their interests.

Neugarten identified significant gender differences. Women tend to see middle age as a time of freedom, whereas men are caught up in the pressures of their career and may experience stress or conversely, boredom. In addition, she found that health changes are more of an age marker for men than women. Neugarten indicated that many men have a heightened awareness of their

Table 3. Neugarten's Features of Middle Age

Features	Description
The Delineation of Middle Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • middle age perceived as a distinctive period • look to position within life contexts--body, career, family--rather than chronological age for their primary cues • differential rhythm in the timing of events
Distance From the Young	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • middle age viewed as the bridge between the generations • sense of differentiation from both the younger and older generations • aware of emotional, social, cultural distance from young • closer connection with elders
Differences Between Men and Women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • women tend to define age status in terms of timing events in the family cycle; men perceive a close relationship between life-line and career-line • health changes define age more for men than women • women indicate sense of freedom; men report increased job pressures and job boredom
The Changing Time Perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • new difference in the way time is perceived • time seen as time-left-to-live rather than time-after-birth • time seen as finite
The Prime of Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • seen as period of maximum capacity and ability to handle highly complex environment and a highly differentiated self • heightened sense of self-understanding • sense of expertise

Developed from: Bernice L. Neugarten, "The Awareness of Middle Age," in *Middle Age and Aging*, edited by Bernice L. Neugarten (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 93-98.

biology and describe bodily changes as the most salient characteristic of middle age. They sense the vulnerability of their physical health and are aware of the efficiency of their body. Although women experienced bodily changes during middle age, they refer to health issues less frequently.

Teacher Development

Traditionally, teacher development has been viewed as two distinct stages: preservice teacher education at a university or college and inservice teacher education lasting throughout a career in the school system.²³ Inservice education often focused on the content of a new curriculum or the intricacies of a new teaching methodology. The focus was upon expanding the professional repertoire of the teacher. There was little recognition of the change and transformation that teachers experienced personally during the course of their career.

Fessler and Christensen provided a summary of the history of the development of teacher career cycle models. They found that the studies completed prior to the 1980s did not differentiate the experiences of teachers during their career. Teachers were categorized as preservice, beginning, or mature teachers. There was no recognition that teachers may differ in their perceptions and their beliefs as they mature. They concluded that: "[T]he view that experienced, mature teachers continue to grow and change was not present in the works of these early theorists."²⁴

Fessler and Christensen concluded their examination of teacher career development models by summarizing the work of two European researchers: Vonk and Huberman. Using information from an unpublished paper, they outlined Vonk's seven stage model. Pertinent to this study are the three stages in a teacher's mid career:

- *The first professional phase, when the teacher demonstrates the accomplishments, skills, and mastery of an accomplished professional.*
- *The phase of reorientation to oneself and the profession, during which time the teacher may question and doubt his/her commitment to teaching. This is sometimes associated with mid-life crises. Some teachers may drop out of teaching at this point; others may continue but with less energy and enthusiasm than before.*
- *The second professional phase, when some teachers re-energize themselves and continue on to further professional accomplishments.*²⁵

Huberman presented several multifaceted models of teacher career stages. These models were generated from research on the experiences of secondary school teachers in French-speaking Switzerland. The teachers had between 5 and 40 years of experience. The models outline a series of paths or options that occur during teachers' careers.²⁶ He presented one model that connects years of teaching with themes or phases:

- Years 1-3: Survival and Discovery
- Years 4-6: Stabilization
- Years 7-18: Multiple Streams:
Experimentation/Diversification, or
Stocktaking/Interrogations
- Years 19-30: Multiple Streams:
Serenity, or Conservatism
- Years 31-40: All paths merge at Disengagement which can be:
Serene, or Bitter

Huberman claimed that adopting a life cycle orientation might influence the way school administrators work with teachers. For example, when planning grade changes, leaves of absence, or retraining, he suggested a person's career trajectory might be considered, rather than unilaterally implementing an impersonal policy.²⁷

Both Vonk and Huberman's models strongly parallel the adult development theories previously outlined. They emphasized the turbulence of life for people in their mid-career.

During the 1980s, Fessler and Christensen collaborated with Burke to develop the Teacher Career Cycle Model.²⁸ This model was one of the first attempts to look at different categories of mature teachers.

The basic notion underlying this model was that the teacher career cycle is influenced by external environmental factors, some from the teacher's personal environment, others from the organizational environment. Rather than a linear progress from one stage to the next, the model presented the view that environmental influences create a dynamic ebb and flow, and teachers respond by moving up, down and through various stages.²⁹

The specific stages of the Teacher Career Cycle Model included:

- Pre-Service
- Induction
- Competency Building
- Enthusiasm and Growth
- Career Frustration
- Career Stability
- Career Wind-down
- Career Exit

The personal environment of the teacher includes key factors such as family support structures, positive critical incidents, personal or family crises, individual dispositions, avocational interests, and life stages. The organizational environment is represented by such factors as school regulations, management style of administrators, the atmosphere of public trust, societal expectations, activities of professional organizations, and the union atmosphere.

Fessler and Christensen emphasized the dynamic nature of the Teacher Career Cycle Model by accentuating that:

a dynamic ebb and flow is postulated, with teachers moving in and out of stages in response to environmental influences from both the personal and organizational dimensions.³⁰

The Teacher Career Cycle Model offered a frame for examining teacher development and growth needs. It also provided an explanation for the differentiated perceptions of teachers when they are faced with external pressure for change.

A comprehensive survey was conducted for the Canadian Teachers' Federation in 1992 by Alan King and Marjorie Peart.³¹ They surveyed over 17,000 teachers throughout Canada by questionnaire and interviewed 223 teachers. The study found that:

Although beginning and experienced teachers have the same responsibilities and the same degree of autonomy in the classroom, there are clear stages in a teaching career. Teaching methods and management skills are honed in the first few years, in large part, by trial and error. During the fourth or fifth year teachers begin to have a firmer sense of control over all aspects of teaching and a greater capacity to use their teaching/learning strategies and to anticipate and prevent problems. For some teachers there is a third

stage in which, to maintain their interest, they challenge themselves by learning new methods or by teaching different subjects or grade levels. Just prior to retirement, when reviewing their careers, teachers typically look back on their professional lives with a sense of accomplishment.³²

This finding supported aspects of the models of teacher development outlined by Huberman and also by Fessler and Christensen.

Change

The focus of this study was the experience of mid-career teachers in a period of mandated change. Although many authors have examined the change process and development of teachers in the school system, the focus has been on achieving the outcome of school improvement. While recognizing that school improvement is a valuable on-going goal, this study focused on the personal experience of the teacher in the midst of change. Toward that end, this portion of the review of the literature will look at research that addresses the person and his or her connection with change and the climate of educational change in which the participants in the study are immersed.

Personal Change

One of the first models to address the personal needs of the teacher during the change process was the Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM), originally proposed by Hall, Wallace, and Dossett in 1973. The focus of the Concerns-Based Approach is on the personal side of change.³³ Two important assumptions guide this approach: the first assumption recognizes that change is a process not an event, emphasizing the intricacy of implementing change over time; the second assumption recognizes that the individual is a critical consideration when changing an organization. It is individuals, working together, that make the

organization effective. CBAM utilizes the idea of a change facilitator who is trained to identify seven levels of concern that appear to be typical of educators implementing new initiatives.³⁴

<u>Stages of Concern</u>	<u>Expressions of Concern</u>
6 Refocusing	• I have some ideas about something that would work even better.
5 Collaboration	• I am concerned about relating what I am doing with what other instructors are doing.
4 Consequence	• How is my use affecting kids?
3 Management	• I seem to be spending all my time getting material ready.
2 Personal	• How will using it affect me?
1 Informational	• I would like to know more about it.
0 Awareness	• I am not concerned about it (the innovation).

This model has been used by researchers in a variety of ways: to help understand the change process; and to investigate how teachers' concerns influence the adoption of innovations. Using the Concerns-Based Adoption Model, Vandeberghe analyzed the teacher's role in educational change and focused upon teacher concerns about innovations.³⁵ He explored the factors which emerge during the implementation stage of an innovation and made recommendations for developing inservice training programs that will encourage teachers to participate in educational change.

Darryl Conner developed a model of educational change that involves a process of moving first contact to internalization. Connor's model highlights the

importance of believing in the need for the change. He emphasized that a key factor to initiating a change is to create a "burning platform" to provide incentive for people to move forward.³⁶

Connor's model has three phases which are augmented by eight different stages. These are:

PHASE I preparation	Stage 1	CONTACT (We first hear about a change or even the possibility of one.)
	Stage 2	AWARENESS OF CHANGE (We now know a change will/may occur.)
PHASE II acceptance	Stage 3	UNDERSTANDING IT (We understand the nature and the intent of the change and develop our view.)
	Stage 4	POSITIVE PERCEPTION (We decide the change is important to implement.)
PHASE III commitment	Stage 5	INSTALLATION (The change is implemented and becomes operational.)
	Stage 6	ADOPTION (The change in use, working well and spreading to other areas of the organization.)
	Stage 7	INSTITUTIONALIZATION (The change is formally incorporated into the organization and its infrastructure.)
	Stage 8	INTERNALIZATION (The project vision has become ours.) ³⁷

Evans investigated how the school climate and the psychological state of teachers affect the way they accept and implement innovative ideas. Evans stated that teachers operating in more democratic school settings, and at higher psychological levels, utilize the greatest number of innovative educational ideas.³⁸

Other researchers have described efforts to enhance the change experience for teachers. Schuman described a professional development effort designed to revitalize, remotivate, and reactivate an experienced staff of teachers.³⁹ Time and space are provided for teachers to engage in personal learning activities actively that can be translated to the classroom. Henson suggested that teachers resist change out of fear, habit, and a sense that change is futile.⁴⁰ He outlined several ways that principals can enhance the change process for teachers: timing innovations appropriately, involving all those affected by the change, persuading those involved that the change is theirs, and demonstrating serious commitment through adequate support.

In an ethnographic study, Erickson examined teacher perspectives and educational innovation. In his study, the teachers believed the change was beneficial, however, the creation of new materials was time-consuming and they felt they were made to feel like failures by the administrators if they admitted they were having trouble coping with the change. Erickson concluded that innovation can only succeed in an environment conducive to change.⁴¹

Bridges, Sherman, and Brill and Hayes are a few authors that focused on the individual making sense of life's changes.⁴² They investigated the transitions that people face during their lives and provide strategies for coping with these changes. Their work provided a foundation for understanding the pervasive ramifications of career, personal, and organizational change for the individual.

Andy Hargreaves reviewed the role of teachers, how teachers and teaching have changed, and scrutinized the changes teachers will confront in the future.⁴³ He claims that:

Teachers know their work is changing, along with the world in which they perform it. As long as the existing structures and cultures of teaching are left intact, responding to these complex and accelerating changes in isolation will only create more overload, intensification, guilt, uncertainty, cynicism and burnout. . . As schools move into the postmodern age, something is going to have to give. It might be the quality of classroom learning, as teachers and the curriculum are spread increasingly thinly to accommodate more and more demands. It might be health, lives and stamina of teachers themselves as they crumple under the pressures of multiple mandated change. Or it can be the basic structures and cultures of schooling, reinvented for and realigned with the postmodern purpose and pressure they must now address.⁴⁴

The British Columbia Teachers' Federation surveyed the attitudes, beliefs, and opinions of its membership in May and June of 1993. The Teachers' Federation surveyed 2,000 teachers in British Columbia, with a recorded response of 735, and generated a number of reports from this survey.⁴⁵ One of the overall conclusions related to this study was that:

Teachers understand that change is required but feel that before [we start] overhauling the system there is a number of things that schools are doing well and these should be carefully considered before they are lost in over-zealous response to public opinion surveys.⁴⁶

This finding is compatible with the literature on the change process. A person must understand the nature and the intent of the change before the change will be accepted and adopted.

Mandated Change in British Columbia

In 1987, the government of British Columbia appointed a Royal Commission, under the direction of Barry Sullivan, to study schooling in the province. This study was the first comprehensive examination of education since the Chant Royal Commission Report of 1960. Major shifts in British Columbia society since the 1960's prompted the government to examine the goals and direction of education in the province. The mandate of the Commission was to:

1. report on the state of British Columbia schools today in both public and non-public sectors;
2. identify areas of difficulty or concern as part of an assessment of the present and future needs of the system;
3. identify the kinds of preparation programs school graduates will require to meet the challenges of the next two decades;
4. determine what school programs and administrative processes should be implemented to deal with current and emerging problems; and,
5. recommend some responsible paths of action based upon comprehensive understandings of the system's characteristics, priorities, and the social and economic contexts in which schools operate.⁴⁷

The Sullivan Royal Commission offered 83 recommendations to the government in the areas of curriculum, teaching, finance, and support systems. The government adopted the majority of these recommendations and initiated changes in education that affected all dimensions of the system, from the offices

in the Ministry of Education, to the district offices, schools and classrooms throughout the province.

The government amended, revised or rewrote legislation pertaining to the teaching profession, public and independent schooling, and education finance and resource allocation to reflect the new mandate. The Ministry of Education restructured to reflect the priorities of the government's response to the Sullivan Royal Commission. Branches within the Ministry of Education seconded educators from around the province to shape, elucidate and develop the recommendations. These educators formed three program teams and were directed to draft a Primary Program, an Intermediate Program, and a Graduation Program that reflected current research findings in education and the government mandate.

The Primary Program mirrored the activities and directions of primary educators throughout the province and was heartily embraced by an overwhelming majority of teachers and administrators. Implementation of the Primary Program began in 1991. Educational researchers and educators outside British Columbia enthusiastically endorsed the Primary Program and education jurisdictions outside the province adopted the Primary Program for implementation in their regions.⁴⁸

The fate of the Intermediate and Graduation Programs followed a much different course. The process of development, implementation, and adoption was precariously slow. A myriad of roadblocks forced a cautious, dilatory journey. The Program teams drafted and amended many versions of the Intermediate and Graduation Programs before the government adopted a skeletal version of the original drafts. The Intermediate Program implementation began in 1994. The government required the revised Graduation requirements to be in place in the fall of 1995.

The effects of the Sullivan Royal Commission were far reaching. At the outset the mandated implementation of new programs required that educators reflect upon their practice and adopt changes in curriculum, methodology, assessment, and reporting. A backlash from vocal groups of parents, educators, and community members forced the government to evaluate the directions of educational reform and revise their rhetoric. The Ministry of Education rescheduled implementation dates to incorporate ongoing program revisions. Educators endeavored to implement the revised changes mandated by the government.

Curriculum revision is ongoing. In the 1995/96 school year, the Ministry of Education presented elementary schools with two revised curriculums, Mathematics and Science, and a new curriculum, Personal Planning. Other curricula, including Social Studies and Fine Arts, are in the revision process. In addition, schools have new reporting guidelines and mandated French language instruction for the Intermediate grades. The cycle of change is ongoing as mandated curriculum changes overlap required changes in assessment and evaluation which also superimpose changes in methodology.

Chapter Summary

Erikson, Levinson, Gould, and Neugarten offer different, but parallel and instructive views of adult development. Erikson emphasized the sequential resolution of internal crises as individuals develop through prescribed stages. Levinson focused on the evolution of an individual life structure and personal development through growth and stable periods with attending transitions and relative plateaus. Gould viewed adult development as the evolution of adult consciousness through challenging major false assumptions developed during our childhood. Neugarten accentuated the integrated nature of the life cycle and

points to the variability of the social, the psychological, as well as, the biological phases of life.

All four theorists assumed that although one has experienced childhood and adolescence, one does not simply "become an adult." Adulthood requires continuous growth and change. As one matures, one will experience different phases, crises, or transitions. These experiences are opportunities for emotional, psychological, and social growth.

Although theorists differ on a specific age designation for middle age, the popular consensus is that middle age begins around 40 years. Erikson, Levinson, Gould, and Neugarten all view middle age as a time of confidence, industry, and reflection. It is a time when individuals take stock, look back and assess what they have done and where they have been. It is a time of acknowledging one's physical vulnerability, but still having the health and vigor to pursue interests and dreams. All theorists view it as a time of peak productivity. For those that have not resolved major issues from their youth, it can also be a time of personal crisis, a time of remorse and uncertainty.

Adult development theorists identify middle age as a definite phase in life. They contend that middle aged people often reflect upon meaning and fulfillment in their lives. They are in their years of peak productivity and see themselves as the bridge between the youth and the elders. Middle age can also be a time of crisis when individuals face job burnout and seek to modify life expectations and deal with dissatisfactions. Although some gender differences in the middle years were noted by Neugarten, this topic must be addressed in greater depth in order to outline the ramifications of gender differences in the workplace.

Adult development provides the theoretical base for understanding the experiences of middle-aged people. These theories are paralleled by the teacher

career cycle models which emphasize varied patterns of growth and development. As with the adult development theories, there is no one sequence of teacher development. The pattern of teacher career development is interconnected with the personal and organizational environment and remains as individual as the teacher.

Both the adult development research and the teacher development research emphasize that teachers in mid career are often in a time of personal and career change. The literature on personal change is very extensive as researchers look at how the needs, concerns, and expectations of individuals can be met during periods of transition. A limited number of studies focus on the role and perceptions of the individual during the implementation of innovations. These studies tend to concentrate on factors that encourage or discourage teacher engagement in the adoption of an innovation. Provincially mandated educational change in British Columbia began with the report of the Sullivan Royal Commission in 1988 and is ongoing as curriculum, methodology, and the assessment, evaluation and reporting processes are revised to reflect the goals and priorities of the government.

The next chapter, Chapter 3, presents the research design, procedures and methodology used in the study.

Notes

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14. Levinson, *Life Structure Development*, 289.
15. Levinson, *Conception of Adult Life Course*, 277-78.
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17. Ibid., 293.
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Association, Washington, D.C., April 20-24, 1987) (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 289 846).

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Chapter 3

RESEARCH DESIGN, METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Introduction

The intent of this study was to develop a fuller, more meaningful understanding of the experiences of mid-career teachers as they live in the midst of educational change, and to outline the implications of these experiences for leadership practice. The investigation addressed the following questions:

- 1) What are the experiences of teachers in mid-career?
- 2) How do mid-career teachers experience system-wide, mandated educational change?
- 3) What are the implications for leadership practice from this study?

The purpose of this study and the associated research questions determined the scope and method of the inquiry.¹ The most appropriate method of inquiry for this study was a qualitative approach because qualitative research:

... assumes that there are multiple realities--that the world is not an objective thing out there but a function of personal interaction and perception. It is a highly subjective phenomenon in need of interpreting rather than measuring. Beliefs rather than facts form the basis of perception. Research is exploratory, inductive, and

emphasizes processes rather than ends. In this paradigm, there are no predetermined hypotheses, no treatments, and no restrictions on the end product. One does not manipulate variables or administer a treatment.²

More specifically, this study combined life-history interviewing with a focused, in-depth approach based upon tenets of phenomenology.

Phenomenological Approach

Phenomenology is a qualitative research approach that seeks to understand the world as people experience it, rather than as people conceptualize, categorize or theorize about it.³ Phenomenology probes the human experience to illuminate the complexity of individual perception.⁴ In his exploration of various qualitative approaches to evaluating education, Fetterman described phenomenology as the mapping of the qualitatively different ways people experience and think about phenomena.⁵ Phenomenology holds that reality is socially constructed and many truths will ensue from a single phenomenon. "The phenomenologist examines how the world is experienced. For him or her the important reality is what people imagine it to be."⁶

The phenomenological approach to research embodies the following tenets:

- (a) An attempt to penetrate the *essence* of a phenomenon be it learning, behavior, social process or interpersonal relations.
- (b) A founding of research on the primacy of experience...
- (c) A critical perception adopted toward all existent theories and a refusal to employ these theories as techniques.

- (d) One must be "led by the things themselves" (Husserl) in the treatment of the material. i.e. the *subject* of investigation must prescribe the method...
- (e) The phenomenological method involves the process of intuition, reflection and description. Process rather than product is emphasized.
- (f) W/man [sic] can only be understood from w/man [sic]--from the phenomena and actions of human life itself--which is an open existence. Hence one's point of departure must always be w/man [sic] in h/his [sic] totality in a world relatedness. This implies intentionality, a project for being, and a situatedness in the world involving choice and responsibility.
- (g) W/man [sic] cannot be treated as the passive object of research, for phenomenology is a theory of encountering subjects.⁷

Like all qualitative approaches, the phenomenological method rests on making sense of relationships among aspects of experience rather than observing discrete parts. A phenomenological approach focuses on detailed rich description and subsequent inductive interpretation to arrive at an understanding of the human experience.

Significant Issues

Background of the Researcher

One area that is important to note in a research study is the researcher's background. In order to expose any preconceived notions or ideas that may influence the study. Toward this end, it is appropriate to indicate that my interest in this study evolves from work with educators throughout British Columbia during the initiation of the provincial change effort. For four and a

half years, I was intimately involved with designing, planning, and initiating the provincial-wide change efforts.

During my tenure at the Ministry of Education in British Columbia I was a member of one of the three program teams, the Intermediate Program Team, that was responsible for designing the educational program for students in public and independent schools in British Columbia. One of my specific responsibilities was to plan, initiate, and present the new program to educators throughout the province. This experience afforded me a very superficial glimpse at how educators experience provincially mandated change. I wanted to develop a deeper understanding about how teachers experience these changes and how they manage the external demands for change. I am specifically interested in teachers in mid career as they are the majority of teachers in the province.

Generalizability

This research is a particularistic study which seeks to understand the lived experience of mid-career educators during a period of substantive educational change. The purpose of the research is to generate an understanding of an experience and therefore is not generalizable in the orthodox sense of the word. As Janet Ward Schofield explains:

The goal is not to produce a standardized set of results that any other careful researcher in the same situation or studying the same issue would have produced. Rather it is to produce a coherent and illuminating description of and perspective on a situation that is based on and consistent with detailed study of that situation.⁸

Qualitative research does not attempt to answer questions of comparison or prediction, to create models or lists, develop theories or constructs. Merriam points out that:

Qualitative research assumes that there are multiple realities--that the world is not an objective thing out there but a function of personal interaction and perception. It is a highly subjective phenomenon in need of interpreting rather than measuring. Beliefs rather than facts form the basis of perception. Research is exploratory, inductive, and emphasizes processes rather than ends.⁹

Reliability

Statistical measures of reliability refer to the consistency of the research, the ability to provide similar results under different conditions. Stephen Tagg argues that: "Researchers should not be concerned with the reliability of life story methods in abstract but rather should ask what the plausible rival explanations are, for example, forgetting or retrospective reconstruction, and what defenses are possible against such interpretative competition."¹⁰

During a series of interviews, the participant may recall the identical event, but with varying detail. The details are as important as the event. Also, the details elicited may be a function of the questioning, the emotional state of the participant, or various triggers not understood by the researcher or the participant. In addition, an identical form of questioning may evoke different responses with different participants.

Seiber suggests that in qualitative research:

Certain kinds of reliability must be intentionally violated in order to gain a depth of understanding about the situation (i.e., the observer's behavior must change from subject to subject, unique questions must be asked of different subjects). . . there is inherent conflict between validity and reliability--the former is what fieldwork is specially qualified to gain, and increased emphasis on reliability will only undermine that unique function.¹¹

Validity

"Validity in qualitative research has to do with description and explanation, and whether or not a given explanation fits a given description. In other words, is the explanation credible."¹² To assure that the information in a study is "credible", Lincoln and Guba recommend that the research be cross-checked through member checks.¹³ A member check refers to the participant's review of the information that he or she has contributed to the study to confirm the content and accuracy.

The participants in this study reviewed their interview transcripts and made appropriate deletions or additions to ensure clarity. The transcripts were edited as required. In addition, each participant read a draft of the findings to ensure that all the information was accurate.

Research Design

Protection of Participants

The researcher explained the purpose of the study to each participant, the time commitment required for participation and the precautions that would be taken to protect the identity of the participants. A pseudonym was assigned to each participant, each school, and each district. Participants had the opportunity to ask questions and seek clarification before agreeing to participate. Each participant then signed a copy of the informed consent form (see appendix D). Participation in the study was completely voluntary and the researcher informed participants that they could withdraw from the research at any time.

All interviews were audio taped and transcribed by the researcher. Each participant received a copy of his or her own interview transcripts to edit and amend for clarity. In addition, the researcher provided each participant with a

copy of the findings in order to check that the information was accurately portrayed.

Pilot Study

After the school district granted permission to conduct the study and the Human Subjects Committee of the University of San Diego approved the research the researcher conducted the pilot study in January 1995. The pilot interviews followed the protection process outlined for all participants. The researcher used the pilot study to examine the clarity of the interview questions and interview procedures.

The researcher asked the participant to provide feedback about the language and protocol and to make recommendations for improvement of both the guiding questions and the interview process. The researcher monitored the length of the interviews to ascertain if suggested time for the interviews was appropriate. Based on feedback from the participant in the pilot study, the researcher refined the research protocol before initiating the study.

Participant Selection

The participants in this study were members of a cadre of elementary mid-career teachers in a medium-sized (27,000 pupils) urban district in British Columbia. The researcher selected this school district because it is demographically representative of the general teaching population in British Columbia. The researcher contacted the research department of the school district during the proposal stage of this study. The head of the research department indicated interested in the study and granted consent for the research.

The researcher followed the selection criteria suggested by Clark Moustakas for locating and selecting research participants. The participant:

- has experienced the phenomenon

- is intensely interested in understanding the nature and meanings of the experience
- is willing to participate in a lengthy interview process
- grants the investigator the right to tape-record the interview and,
- grants the investigator the right to publish the data in a dissertation and other publications.¹⁴

All participants met these criteria. The researcher contacted the principal of a school, described the research, and asked to present the study to the staff. The researcher asked staff members to approach her at the conclusion of the staff meeting if they had an interest in participating in the study. Six teachers self-selected based upon the presentation of the research proposal at the staff meeting. Colleagues of the researcher suggested the seventh participant as a potential participant in the study.

Prior to the first interview, the researcher made an initial visit to each participant to ensure understanding of the commitment to the research process, willingness to participate, and to create the beginnings of a relationship between the researcher and the participant.

Interviews

Structure of Interviews

This research followed a phenomenologically-based interview approach designed by Dolbeare and Schuman, and refined by Seidman, that combined focused, in-depth life-history interviewing informed by assumptions from phenomenology.¹⁵

The phenomenological interview is more than a question and answer session, rather it immerses both the researcher and the participant in the experience.¹⁶ The participant in the study is valued as a co-researcher. A set of

guiding questions developed by the researcher from information gathered during the literature review and the pilot interviews is included in appendix B. They were not designed to be a rigorous protocol or to be followed lock-step. By asking open-ended questions the researcher sought to build upon and explore the participants' responses as the interview unfolds.

Duration of Interviews

The research consisted of a series of three audio-taped interviews with each participant. Permission to audio-tape the interviews was granted during the consent process.

At the initial meeting the tentative meeting dates were planned. The interviews were scheduled a minimum of three days apart to a maximum of seven days apart to allow time for the participant to think about the interview, and yet not having too much time lapse so as to lose the continuity of the interview process. The longest period of time between interviews with a participant was fifteen days. This increased duration was due to illness of the participant. No apparent problems were associated with this extended interval.

Each participant was contacted in advance of the proposed interview date and a mutually convenient interview time was scheduled for 90 minutes. Seidman recommends 90 minutes as the optimal time, as one hour does not allow for flexibility and two hours is too long to sit at one time.¹⁷ The interview period ranged from approximately 60 minutes to 120 minutes.

Participants selected the most comfortable convenient location for them. Some choose the school location, others choose their homes.

Sequence of Interviews

At the outset of the first interview, the researcher reviewed the intent of the study and outlined the purpose of the first session. In addition, the participant completed the formal consent form. The first interview was a focused

life history. The participants were asked to tell as much as possible about themselves in the context of their teaching. They were asked to reconstruct their early experiences in teaching, in university, with their family, with friends, and in the community. Seidman suggests that by asking how they came to be a teacher, we can reconstruct a range of events that will place their experience in a context.¹⁸

The second interview focused on the specific details of the participants' experience as a mid-career teacher in the midst of change. At the outset of the interview, the researcher asked each participant to comment on the information from the first session. This acted as a springboard to focus the second interview. In addition, the researcher asked each participant to reconstruct a teaching day from the time they woke up until the time they went to bed. The researcher also asked the participants to share stories of their experiences at school. The intention of this interview was to elicit the detailed experience of being a mid-career teacher.

The third interview began with a discussion of the previous interviews. This session was a time for the participants to reflect upon the significance of their experience as a mid-career teacher. The third interview built upon the foundation of the first two interviews. It was the time for participants to make sense of how the elements in their lives have intersected. "The combination of exploring the past to clarify the events that led participants to where they are now, and describing the concrete details of their present experience, established conditions for reflecting upon what they are now doing in their lives."¹⁹

During all the interviews the researcher followed guidelines for structuring the questions. She attended to the form of the questions, the style of the follow-up inquiries, and the structure of additional probing (see appendix C).

Analysis of Interviews

The purpose of reflective interpretation of lived experiences is to try to grasp the essence or the essential meaning of an experience. The researcher transcribed all interviews verbatim and then reread the transcripts to get a holistic sense of emerging themes. She analyzed the interviews for emerging themes and patterns using inductive techniques described variously by Moustakas, Seidman, Denzin, and Van Manen and modified by the researcher.²⁰ The analysis process followed the steps listed below.

Step 1 - Bracketing

First, the text of each interview was bracketed. Moustakas explained bracketing as a process "in which the focus of the research is placed in brackets, everything else is set aside so that the entire research process is rooted solely on the topic and question."²¹ All information extraneous to the purpose of the study was put aside.

Step 2 - Horizontalization

The researcher highlighted key phrases, expressions, and statements that "speak directly to the phenomenon in question."²² In addition, the researcher highlighted any part of the interview that was interesting or caught the researcher's eye. There was no attempt to edit the selection at this stage.

Step 3 - Determine the Invariant Constituents

The researcher tested each key phrase, statement, and expression for two requirements:

- a. Does it contain a moment of the experience that is a necessary and sufficient constituent for understanding it?
- b. Is it possible to abstract and label it?²³

If these criteria were met, the expressions were labeled as 'horizons of the experience.' The researcher reviewed the transcripts on the computer and

removed any other phrases or statements that did not meet these requirements. In addition, the researcher also eliminated any expressions that were repetitive, vague, or overlapped other statements. The remaining horizons were the 'invariant constituents of the experience.'

Step 4 - Clustering and Thematizing

The researcher reviewed the edited transcripts line by line and asked the question: What does this statement reveal about the topic? Through this repeated questioning, the themes were teased out. These became the themes of the experience. The researcher then clustered the invariant constituents of the experience into the themes.

Step 5 - Validation

The researcher checked the invariant constituents and the associated themes against the complete transcripts of the participant to discern if they were explicitly expressed in the transcript, or if they were compatible with the transcript. If they were not expressed explicitly, or were not compatible, or they were not pertinent to the participant's experience, they were withdrawn.

Step 6 - Incubation

During this step, the researcher studied the themes and invariant constituents for "what they reveal about the essential, recurring features of teachers in mid-career"²⁴ Questions asked at this time included:

- a. Is there part of the talk that is evocative of the essence of the experience?
- b. Can the description be reworded to retain the meaning of the statement while getting deeper than the specific example?
- c. Are the themes creating a sense of unity of the experience?

Step 7 - Personal Descriptions

The researcher developed a personal description of each participant's experience in mid-career using the relevant, validated invariant constituents and the associated themes. The narrative was highlighted by verbatim examples drawn from the transcripts.

The researcher completed steps 1 through 7 for each participant before engaging in the final steps of the analysis.

Step 8 - Interpretation

The researcher interpreted the meaning and essences of the experience by analyzing the themes derived from the seven personal descriptions. Following Seidman's frame for interpretation, the questions during this phase of analysis included:

- a. What were the connections among the experiences of the participants?
- b. What is understood now that was not understood before the interviews were initiated?
- c. What surprises have there been?
- d. What confirmations of previous instincts?
- e. How have the interviews been consistent with the literature?
- f. How inconsistent?
- g. How have the interviews gone beyond the literature?²⁵
- h. In what ways did the interviews vary?

Step 9 - Researcher Reflection

In the final phase of the analysis, the researcher reflected upon what the research process meant to her. Seidman suggested that the researcher has a responsibility to examine what the research experience meant to him or her, and to ask the question: "What was the experience like, how do I understand it, make

sense of it, see connections in it?"²⁶ He emphasized that this may lead to additional connections among events, structures, and roles.

Chapter Summary

This investigation was a qualitative study that used an in-depth, phenomenologically-based interview approach. The researcher chose a phenomenological approach to address the essence of the experience of elementary teachers in mid-career who face wide-spread mandated change.

The second part of the chapter outlines the research design. At the outset of the project, the researcher conducted a pilot study. The pilot study provided important guidance regarding the equipment setup and the clarity of recording and also indicated minor adjustments to the phrasing of the guiding questions. After the researcher incorporated the changes to the researcher protocol, she interviewed seven elementary mid-career teachers in an urban school district in British Columbia. The interview schedule included three in-depth sessions, each approximately sixty minutes in duration.

1. The first interview was a reconstruction of early experiences including remembrances of early schooling and high school, university courses, beginning teaching, and the influence of family, friends and community.
2. The second interview was the participants' description of his or her experience as a mid-career teacher.
3. The third interview provided the opportunity for the participant to reflect upon the significance of the other interview sessions and to begin to make sense of their experience as a mid-career teacher.

The researcher analyzed the interviews using a nine step process that included:

1. Bracketing
2. Horizontalization
3. Determining the Invariant Constituents
4. Clustering and Thematizing
5. Validation
6. Incubation
7. Personal Descriptions
8. Interpretation
9. Researcher Reflection

The next chapter, Chapter 4, presents the findings of the research and answers the research questions. The researcher profiles the background of each participant, outlines the mid-career experiences of the participants and provides an in-depth interpretation of these experiences.

Notes

1. Lucy J. Shulman, "Disciplines of Inquiry in Education: An Overview," *Educational Researcher* 10, no. 6 (1981): 5-12, 23.
2. Sharan B. Merriam, *Case Study Research in Education: A Qualitative Approach* (San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1988), 17.
3. There is a detailed explanation of the nature of phenomenology and human science in chapter one of Max Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy* (London, Ont.: The Althouse Press, 1990).
4. Renata Tesch, "Phenomenological Studies: A Critical Analysis of Their Nature and Procedures" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, La., April 1984) (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 268 122).
5. D. M. Fetterman, "Qualitative Approaches to Evaluating Education" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Washington, D.C., April 1987) (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 284 874).
6. Robert Bogdan and Steven J. Taylor, *Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods: A Phenomenological Approach to the Social Sciences* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1975), 2.
7. Valerie Suransky, "Phenomenology: An Alternative Research Paradigm and a Force for Social Change," *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 11, no. 2 (May 1980): 170.
8. Janet Ward Schofield, "Increasing the Generalizability of Qualitative Research" in *Qualitative Inquiry in Education: The Continuing Debate*, E. W. Eisner and A. Peshkin, eds. (New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 1990), 203.
9. Sharan B. Merriam, *Case Study Research in Education: A Qualitative Approach* (San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass Inc., Publishers, 1988), 17.

10. Stephen K. Tagg, "Life Story Interviews and Their Interpretation," in Michael Brenner, Jennifer Brown, and David Canter, eds., *The Research Interview: Uses and Approaches* (London, England, 1985), 189.
11. S. D. Sieber, *A Synopsis and Critique of Guidelines for Qualitative Analysis Contained in Selected Textbooks* (Project Social Architecture in Education) (New York: Center for Policy Research, 1976): 596, quoted in Audrey Collin and Richard A. Young, "Career Development and Hermeneutical Inquiry, Part II: Undertaking Hermeneutical Research," *Canadian Journal of Counselling*, 22, no. 4 (October 1988): 197-8.
12. Valerie J. Janesick, "The Dance of Qualitative Research Design: Metaphor, Methodolatry, and Meaning," in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, eds. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE Publications, 1994), 216.
13. Yvonna S. Lincoln and G. E. Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry* (Beverly Hills, Calif.: SAGE, 1985).
14. Clark Moustakas, *Phenomenological Research Methods* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE Publications, 1994), 107.
15. I. E. Seidman, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research* (New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 1991), 10.
16. Renata Tesch discusses this area in her paper, "Phenomenological Studies: A Critical Analysis of Their Nature and Procedures." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, 23-27 April 1984, at New Orleans, La.
17. Seidman, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research*, 13.
18. Ibid., 11.
19. Ibid., 12.
20. Each of these authors offers a useful and informative perspective on the analysis of phenomenological data. I found the outline for the method of analysis presented by Clark Moustakas in *Phenomenological Research Methods* (120-121) to be the most helpful as he provides several examples of each phase of the analysis process. Other authors who also provided

valuable direction were: I. E. Seidman, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research* ; Valerie J. Janesick, *The Dance of Qualitative Research Design: Metaphor, Methodolatry, and Meaning*; and Max Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy*.

21. Clark Moustakas, *Phenomenological Research Methods*, 97.

22. Moustakas, 121.

23. Ibid.

24. N. K. Denzin, *Interpretive Interactionism* (Newbury Park, Calif.: SAGE Publications, 1989) quoted in Valerie J. Janesick, "The Dance of Qualitative Research Design: Metaphor, Methodolatry, and Meaning," in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, eds. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE Publications, 1994), 215.

25. Seidman, 102.

26. Ibid.

Chapter 4

FINDINGS

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this investigation was twofold: first, to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences of mid-career teachers as they work in an environment of continuous educational change; second, to examine the implications of these experiences as they relate to leadership practice. The research addressed the following questions:

- 1) What are the experiences of teachers in mid-career?
- 2) How do mid-career teachers experience system-wide, mandated educational change?
- 3) What are the implications for leadership practice from this study?

This chapter provides a background profile for each participant and then addresses the research questions through an examination of the themes generated from the participants' interviews. The personal profiles establish the context for the experiences portrayed in the themes and the themes provide an informed perspective of the phenomenon of the lived experience of a mid-career teacher.

Personal Profiles

Barbara

Barbara, in her late forties, is candid and friendly and spoke openly about her personal background and teaching history. Born in the United States, she traveled extensively as a child and lived in many different countries, including Germany and Japan. Her passionate interest in languages and different cultures began during these early years.

Barbara's entrance into the teaching profession was serendipitous, rather than by design. She described her career focus:

Actually I didn't originally start out with the idea of teaching as a career. I was just going along getting my degree in French. French was my major, and I just knew I'd always been interested in languages.

With a desire to teach English as a second language (E.S.L.), Barbara graduated with a degree in French in 1969. Too few spaces in the E.S.L. program thwarted this desire, so she decided to continue her language studies. She enrolled in French language methodology courses, which she thoroughly enjoyed. Her experiences during these years brought maturity, and a reinforced desire to teach: "I could start to picture myself, finally, as being a teacher." Her studies were also the gateway to extensive travel and learning opportunities in France, which expanded her personal and professional horizons.

Upon returning from France, Barbara married and with her new husband, moved to Canada. She immediately enrolled in the professional year of education at the university to meet the requirements for residency, "mostly as a foot in the door." She entered the professional year and teaching profession with some circumspection. She described her teaching experience this way:

When I first started teaching I was very young looking. . . I always

wore high-heels to look older. . . I was lacking in security, so I wanted to make a statement that I'm older and more official than you are. . . I found I was dressing for battle on those days. . . I put more hair spray on. I thought it looked like a helmet.

Her first assignment, teaching high school French and German, proved to be a very rocky experience:

After three years, I just couldn't take it anymore. I was just getting too, [pause] too frustrated and not enjoying it. Really hating my work, dreading it, having more absences.

Barbara resigned from teaching, but soon returned to teaching to ease the financial pressure on her family. Barbara began to teach as a substitute at the elementary school level and, much to her surprise and pleasure, found she thoroughly enjoyed it. She recalled saying to herself: "Yah! This is better."

This experience gave Barbara the confidence to work as an itinerant French teacher. She then catapulted into a job as a district helping teacher. She explained her rapid career shift:

They wanted to institute a [French] program for elementary schools. And I was asked if I would help them set up the program. Well, this was scary. But, I did and I found another area of strength that I didn't know I had and that's in leadership. . . I found I really enjoyed that. . . That program lasted for five years. It was very successful.

When lack of funding led to the cancellation of the program, Barbara felt very frustrated and upset:

It made me feel like a failure in a way. It wasn't my fault, but I felt that people might somehow associate the fact that the program was canceled with me, because I'd been involved in it from day one. It

was my baby, you know, and my baby was gone.

Over the next couple of years, Barbara moved through a number of French immersion positions at the elementary school level. With the birth of her second child, she found it extremely difficult to cope with the challenges of managing a home and the constant demands of young children at school. She moved to a late immersion class of grade six students, but continued to experience a roller coaster of emotions.

At this time Barbara sought professional assistance and was diagnosed as having a bio-chemical imbalance. After stabilizing her condition with medication, Barbara could not believe the improvement in her attitude and disposition: "I feel like a different person. I feel like I could take on some of the things that I found really, really hard before." Feeling more confident, Barbara took a position as a learning assistance teacher. She also began attending courses at a university to pursue her latent desire to obtain certification as an English as a second language teacher.

Barbara's early years as a teacher were tumultuous, but she prevailed. She has taught, with short periods of time out, for 22 years, and her teaching experiences have been varied and challenging: English, French and German at the high school; French immersion and learning assistance at the elementary school; E.S.L. at the elementary and secondary schools; and helping teacher for French programs at the district office. At present she is an itinerant E.S.L. teacher and divides her time between three elementary schools.

Barbara is a friendly, open person with a casual style that often belies her deep feelings toward many heart-felt issues. From the very beginning of the interview process she expressed her keen interest in the research topic. During the interviews, she was eager to share her experiences and relate her feelings about her life experiences.

Carl

Carl is in his early forties and has taught for 17 years. He is a relaxed and friendly person, has a buoyant sense of humor, and is very easy to talk to. From the beginning, Carl expressed genuine interest in participating in the study.

Born in the Caribbean, the fifth of nine children, he remembered his early school experiences as unpleasant and uninspired:

My learning as a kid from one through eighteen was just rote learning. Just to pass. I wasn't knowledgeable of what I was learning, just having the desire just to pass, never to fail. You know, it's the pass/fail situation that really gets to me. I didn't do very well in my elementary school years. What I remember was the spanking. I remember the teacher being in charge. I saw myself as very insignificant. The system was such that. . . you just wanted to get out of school because it was totally barbaric.

Carl came to Canada at the age of eighteen to attend university. He completed a degree in sociology at the University of British Columbia and then enrolled in law school at the University of Calgary. After experiencing a personal crisis early in his first semester, he left law school and returned to British Columbia. Wanting to continue his schooling, he inquired about programs at the University of British Columbia that he was eligible to apply for. He recalled:

At that time I didn't want to waste a year at home doing nothing, so I went up at campus at UBC and figured out what program could I get into. The only one I could have gotten into was teaching. And I was told if I was going to be involved in the program, the elementary, preferably the intermediate program would be best for me. And that's to be honest how I got involved. But it wasn't

something I could really always aspire to. I aspired to be a lawyer.

Although he had no previous thought of becoming a teacher, once enrolled in the program Carl derived much personal satisfaction from working with students, and he became committed to a teaching career:

Once I decided to go into teaching, I began to see the benefit. I began to see how this was the job for me. This could be, where I as a human being, could influence kids, and lead them and direct them in some other way which I never saw before. So once I got into it, I really liked it.

Unfamiliar with the Canadian education system, Carl found the practicum experience a "tremendous adjustment." Nevertheless, the enjoyment of teaching young people spurred him on and he worked hard to ensure a successful practicum. During this year of teacher education, Carl met his future wife. She was also a student teacher and gave him much support and encouragement:

I think that her strength and her connection and our relationship and being in the same profession was influential and forced me to carry on. I could speak to someone about my every day tasks at the job. That was very encouraging, and still is.

When Carl graduated from the education program in 1978 there were few teaching jobs available. Unable to secure a position in the public school system, he accepted a position in the Catholic school system. Carl found teaching at the private school both satisfying and enjoyable. He felt that his experiences in the Catholic school system helped him grow personally and professionally:

The relationship with the teachers was more than just religious and academic, we had fun doing things together outside school time. We were like an extended family. Everyone was looking out for

each other and trying to help each other. It was an extension of the religious link we had. I found that very beautiful.

Although Carl thoroughly enjoyed his work in the Catholic school, the public school system offered better wages and benefits, so a few years later Carl moved to the public school system as a music specialist. During his first year of teaching in the public school system Carl conducted the school band, directed the school music program, and enrolled a grade 6 and 7 class. Although hectic, Carl found the year personally rewarding because the school staff and the parent community supported the band and music programs. The following year Carl's musical talents were in demand at a number of different schools. After protracted negotiations, Carl divided his time among three elementary schools, where he taught music, band, and a variety of other subjects. The pace was frenetic and the schedule was grueling, as Carl emphasized:

That's constant pressure. I had to leave one school, go to another. I was eating my lunch while I was traveling from Cape Redon to Groven and in the afternoon back to Port Alsafe. It was really weird. And I did that for about four years until I decided I want to move. I wanted to get out of there.

Tired of the constant shunting between schools and the demanding timetable, Carl applied for a transfer to work at a single school:

It just seemed that the transfer system in those days, when you could get a transfer easily, is when you had a specialty. And if I wanted to get a transfer quite easily, I had to declare music. So I declared music. But I made a condition, that if I'm doing music for the school, it has to be within school time. I set down the criteria under which I would work. Because I realized again, they needed me. So if you need me, these are the conditions you have to meet.

Even under these conditions, Carl found the combined demands of the music program, the band program, and enrolling his own class, a "burnout situation." He tried for a number of years to change his job assignment so he would not have to teach band. After nine years at Silver Stream, he transferred to Green Grove where he has enrolled a grade four class for the past two years and has no responsibilities to teach music.

Carl has taught in a suburban community for 17 years. He has been a music specialist, an intermediate teacher, and a late primary teacher. Carl's eyes shone with excitement when he spoke about teaching as a profession and working with students. He happily shared his personal experiences in education and found participation in the study "a real joy."

Faye

Faye is a confident person with a warm smile and sparkling eyes that impart her ebullient nature. She is 42 years old and has taught for 21 years. She loves animals and, as a young child she wanted to become a veterinarian. Her career choice changed in high school when she came face-to-face with a teacher that she had difficulty learning from. She vividly remembered the experience:

He seemed to belong in a university and he had a hard time explaining things down to the level of the students. I thought, ". . . I would like to be able to teach and get down to their levels." I guess that's what sort of spurred my interest in teaching. I also was interested in helping children with special needs, like handicapped children because my sister has a son who is mentally challenged and that too influenced my decision to go into teaching.

Faye attended the University of Alberta and completed a Bachelor of Education degree, majoring in special education and physical education.

Although her experience at university was very positive, she found her practical teaching experience were a better introduction to the rigors of teaching. She emphasized the importance of student teaching: "That's where you really learn what teaching is all about [small laugh], rather than just a lot of courses and instruction."

At the end of her final year of teacher education Faye moved to British Columbia to be nearer to her boyfriend. Faye applied for teaching jobs throughout the lower mainland. While waiting to obtain a teaching position, she worked in the occupational therapy department of a large urban hospital. After four months of working at the hospital, a rural district offered her a teaching job and she moved to a farming community in the Fraser Valley.

Faye began teaching in September 1974. Although she was qualified to teach special education the district had no openings in that area, so her first teaching position was grade two. She remembered the classes as being large and very structured:

I remember our classes were quite large. I had, I think, 34 grade two students, but in those days, the classes were much more structured. And you had your three reading groups and you basically followed guides; you followed the math guide, the reading guides. Those were the two things I really relied on and of course with spelling, those were very important parts of your curriculum. I relied heavily on those. We had a lot of workbooks which went along with your guides and we followed those. I think that helped us to survive.

Faye recalled that her first teaching assignment offered many challenges. In retrospect, she remembered that as valuable as her practicum experiences

were as an introduction to education, they really didn't prepare her for the nitty-gritty specifics of her own classroom:

That was the major step, having your own classroom. There were some things. . . that I didn't really experience in my practicums. . . [things] that I found out when I started teaching. I remember distinctly remember one was the register [emphatically stated], how to fill in a register [laughs] and I soon learned [laughs].

Faye remained at this school for four years. Her relationships with the staff and the administrators were very collegial. They were a "very helpful group." She remembered the support she received from other teachers:

Actually, thinking back now, my first year, this particular teacher who helped me out in the very beginning, towards the end said, "You've just become a cracker jack teacher." Cracker jack was the word she used [laughs] and I guess comments like that sort of gave me the incentive to go on and made me feel good about what I was doing with children.

But after four years Faye felt she was "ready for a change," so she transferred to another school in the same community. She felt very confident and sure of her teaching abilities. Faye taught at this second school for two years, then moved to a suburban school district to be with her new husband:

I was very excited about it, I was just thrilled to be in the city and quite anxious to see what challenges would be coming up. I'd always wanted to get into the city so, my dream had come true.

Faye's experiences in Sunshine district were very satisfying and personally enriching:

My first year in Sunshine was really quite rewarding and I had a very good principal and vice-principal. The staff that I was on was

really quite wonderful too. We were quite like a family and certainly made to feel welcome and very helpful.

Faye remained at this school for seven years before transferring to another school in Sunshine district. Faye has taught at this present school for eight years. This year she is teaching grade two.

Throughout the interview Faye expressed joy and satisfaction about being a teacher. She emphasized:

There are things that really make me feel good about my chosen career. I enjoy working with the kids. I love doing things with the children. [slight pause] Some days I wonder, but on the whole [laughs] I'm glad I went into teaching.

Faye's teaching career has been quite stable. Although she changed districts and schools, the focus of her teaching career has remained the same since she accepted her first teaching assignment. She has taught primary children throughout her career. Faye exuded confidence in herself as a teacher. She demonstrated a keen sense of humor and was able to laugh at her personal foibles. She was enthusiastic about participating in the research study.

Grace

Grace is 48 years old and has been teaching for 26 years. She is a quiet thoughtful person who speaks succinctly and directly. Throughout her school years Grace was very involved in athletics. After high school Grace attended the university in her home town. She recalled her reasons for choosing an education major at university:

I wanted to go to university with my friends and you had to register in something, so I registered in education. I was always involved in sports, so P.E. was an interest. But I never followed it up. I just registered in education.

Grace's experience at university was positive and enjoyable. She specifically remembered her practice teaching experience as supportive and nurturing:

I remember really enjoying practice teaching and I can't remember who the faculty advisor was, but really enjoying her and she was really good to us. I think that really made me decide to stick with it. She was just very supportive and always saying, "Well, you're doing great." So we thought we were. You know, so many other people have said they've hated student teaching and they quit. But I remember the people I was with, we really enjoyed it.

At the end of her third year at university, Grace applied for, and received, a teaching internship in a small rural school district on Vancouver Island.

Grace took the internship on the guarantee that she would return to teach in the district the following year. Her position was in a small close-knit coastal community where she taught twelve seventh grade students. Grace thought that her experience "was great" and recalled the ramifications of living and working in small community: "I remember I was still playing ball, so I was playing on the same team as the mothers. So that was interesting [laughs]. You see things from a different point of view."

Grace enjoyed working in the small community so she requested to teach at that particular school the following year. In September, the principal assigned Grace to the only class available, a group of eight and nine year old children. Grace remembered:

When I think back, it must have been terrible. And being a small town, there was nothing much to do, I worked at school work almost 24 hours a day it seemed. I must have done a horrible job, because I mean all the things I didn't know. But there was a really

[emphasis] good grade two teacher, I remember that helped. So we (her husband worked on the weather ships or something, he was always out of town), so at night we would get together over a kitchen table and do it. Sounds terrible now [laughs] but it helped me survive the year.

The following year Grace transferred to a school district adjacent to the provincial capital. She lived in the city and commuted to her school. Grace enjoyed the advantages of living in a large center, but she also derived the benefits of teaching at a rural school because the district maintained its rural nature as it was located in an area designated as an agricultural land reserve.

After two years in Baker District, Grace took a job in central Canada. She moved from a rural elementary school to an inner city school in the provincial capital. Here she faced quite an adjustment in working and learning conditions:

It was quite an experience. I really enjoyed it. [But there was] a lot of alcohol and drugs. It was right downtown, right beside the police station. I really had my eyes opened to things I didn't even know existed. . . It was grade two or three, I can't remember again. I sort of got stuck there [in primary]. The adjustments, I guess just the economic conditions and the kids. We set up a breakfast program for them. I never had to work so closely with human resources before. I remember one lunch time actually going into this skid-row pub to get this lady out, to take her daughter home to feed her lunch. Because they had an hour and a half for lunch, and I couldn't find the mother or anybody anywhere and the girl told me she'd be in there. I went in and there she was [chuckle]. And I don't know where I got the gall from to tell her she should go home and feed her girl, but I did. And she did.

The situation forged a common bond between the staff members. Grace remembered the experience of working in the inner city school with enthusiasm:

I found that we were a much tighter group there. I think it was just . . . stress and much younger staff. . . It was just a regular Friday after work to go to the pub together, it was almost as if you had to unwind together before you could go home and carry on with a normal life, which made us really quite tight. We had an hour and a half for lunch and we would often go out for lunch together, just to a little greasy spoon, but I think we needed each other.

After teaching in inner city school for three years, Grace felt compelled to return to British Columbia. The number of teaching jobs in the province was declining and the window of opportunity for employment as a teacher was rapidly closing. When asked how long she stayed at the inner city school, she replied:

Three years. I really liked it, but I started to, find it a little depressing. And people were starting to say, if you don't come back to B.C. you're not going to get back in.

Set on returning to British Columbia, Grace organized a number of interviews during her spring break:

I came out at spring break. I had a whole bunch of interviews lined up and Sunshine District was first. And they said. . . "Sign here, and you have to notify your district within 24 hours that you've accepted." And so I did. They were first. It was the first interview, they gave me a job, so I took it.

The district assigned Grace to teach grade three at Greenview Elementary School. She found her new school a dramatic contrast with the inner city school from which she had moved:

Oh, this was like heaven. 'Cause the school was pretty new. It had been open five years. . . the area had nice houses and the kids were squeaky clean. People here often talk about this being a deprived school and deprived area, but I found it just bizarre that they would think that!

Grace has taught at Greenview for the past 19 years. Her teaching assignments have varied from grade two through grade five. Currently she is teaching grade five.

Nicole

Nicole is a buoyant energetic person with an engaging smile and sparkling eyes that reveal her good sense of humor. She is 42 years old and has taught for 19 years. Nicole has two young sons who attend elementary school. Nicole desired to be teacher from an early age. She emphasized that she has never wavered from this goal:

I wanted to be a teacher even before I went to school for some reason. Maybe it was from going to kindergarten. I went to a church kindergarten. By the time I'd finished with that, I'd already decided I was going to be a teacher. I wanted to be a teacher from the word go and I never changed.

After graduating from high school in 1971, Nicole attended the University of British Columbia enrolling in the Faculty of Education. She commented on her decision to declare education as her major:

I decided to go into education right away. At that time you could take . . . an Arts degree and then do education. But I thought they only had one year of education. . . I thought it would make more sense, since I was bound and determined I was going to be a

teacher, I had no other interest in anything else, so I thought I'm going to go straight into education.

Nicole started her education program with the intention of teaching intermediate students. After her first practical teaching experience she quickly changed her mind and decided that primary education was her calling. She laughed about her first practicum:

I was going to be an intermediate teacher. . . They gave me grade seven at a school in East Vancouver. It was a tough school. Anyway, these grade seven kids terrified me. I couldn't believe it, they had those long combs in their back pockets that looked like knives and the janitors used to help the teachers get to their cars at night. It just scared the living daylights out of me. I thought, "What am I doing?" So, I decided to back pedal, and I went to UBC, and I said, "I'm really not happy with the intermediate, I think I really want to be a primary teacher."

After changing focus, Nicole audited the core primary courses that she missed. The extra workload paid dividends as Nicole remembered her final practicum with obvious pleasure: "I had a grade two class. . . That was really nice. . . I really enjoyed it. Got along well with the kids and I said, "This is the place for me!"

Upon graduation, Nicole accepted her first teaching assignment in a small, rural farming community in the lower Fraser Valley. She recalled being thrilled and excited to begin this new phase in her life:

It was really exciting to have my own room. I threw myself into this. That whole first year, well, longer than that, I spent every night until at least one in the morning doing my school work. I had

a key to the school so I used to spend all day Sunday doing school work.

After three years of working in the rural school district, Nicole longed for a more exciting personal social life so she applied to all the urban and suburban school districts in the lower mainland. She got a grade three teaching job in a medium-sized suburban district. Nicole recalled her feelings when she transferred school districts:

Boy, that was a shock to my system! . . . I went from this easy [emphasis] going, we ring the bell when we want to ring the bell and . . . bus kids. I mean there'd be no kids on the playground, and then the buses would come and the kids would come in. . . after school, they all had to leave at a certain time because they all had to catch their bus, and then they'd all be gone. I came to Boyd and here's this monstrously huge school . . . at that time Boyd had four classes per grade. It was hard [for me] to imagine, that when you needed a film projector or anything, you had to sign it out! . . . At the other school you just took what you wanted and it was very easy going about supplies and things. Here you had to be accountable for what you took and when you're going to take it back and times had to be precise with gym. I was really happy to be at Boyd, but it was a little intimidating. I was like a country bumpkin and then I arrived at the big world. That was hard.

Nicole has remained at Boyd Elementary School since moving to the district. During this time she has taken a one year leave of absence during which she moved with her husband to the interior of British Columbia and worked as a substitute teacher. Nicole returned to the district when her leave of absence was

completed and resumed her grade three teaching position at Boyd Elementary. Nicole also took a brief period of time out from teaching for maternity leaves.

Nicole highlighted that she has thoroughly enjoyed her teaching job at Boyd Elementary and has no interest in changing schools:

I don't know how many jobs there are in the world that you're content, that you like everybody, and you feel comfortable with everybody and that if you're having a problem with a child in your room, they're sympathetic to you and understanding, and you get support and laughter. . . I know not all schools are like that, so why should I leave? Anyway, the years at Boyd have sort of flown past. I've never, ever, ever had any desire that I was going to another school. I've never once applied. I've never put in an application. I've never, I've never even read [emphasis] the book that comes around for what opportunities there are. I've never had any interest to even see what's out there. I don't have any need or wish to go elsewhere.

Nicole was energetic and enthusiastic throughout the interview process. She was keen to share her perspectives and her experiences.

Olivia

Olivia is a calm thoughtful person who exudes confidence. She has a good sense of humor and laughs easily at her foibles. She is 52 years old, married, with two grown daughters.

After graduating from high school, Olivia attended Arillia College. Her choice of teaching as a career followed a progressive culling of jobs she was uninterested in:

When I was about nineteen I went to first year at Arillia College, which was the University of Arillia, but a college at that time. I had

three very close girlfriends that were all going into nursing and I really thought that it would be great to go with them. But I couldn't stand the sight of blood needless to say or anything like that. My dad wanted me to be a secretary, and I thought in my mind, "What else was there for a women to do at that time?" My cousin was going to be a botanist. But I couldn't see that, so I thought teaching would have to be the other thing.

Olivia remembered teachers' college as quite a "bewildering" time. She had made the decision to become a teacher but she was unsure of what that really meant:

I can remember a lot of it being really, not boggling, but sort of, I was not really in tuned to what I was actually doing, I don't think at the time. . . I really had a lot to learn. I made this decision to be a teacher. I think it was quite bewildering. I think I must have been quite bewildered because some of the things I learned didn't really click in my head until a couple of years later, when I would think back and think, "Oh yah." [laughs]

After completing teacher education, Olivia went to the University of British Columbia to pursue a degree in special education. Upon graduation from the university, Olivia taught grade two in a small urban district in the lower mainland. She remembered her first year of teaching as being:

. . . one huge amount of work. There were 39 kids in the room. . . It was wall to wall desks. There really wasn't much room for the reading corner. . . It was hard to even keep things on the wall because kids brushed against the ends of the wall. There were a lot of kids, but I really enjoyed it. I don't remember the awful things. I don't remember doing 39 report cards [laughs].

Olivia taught grade two for two years and then took a teaching job at the special education school in the largest metropolitan school district. She taught at the special education school for one year and then moved, with her husband, to a small rural mining community in the interior of British Columbia.

Soon after moving to the interior she was hired by the local school district to teach children with learning disabilities. In this position, she worked closely with an expert in special education who had moved from New York. Olivia recalled the benefits of working with the specialist:

I started teaching children who had learning disabilities in Laird. There was a man there that was the supervisor of special education and he was from New York. . . He knew a lot more about learning disabilities than most people in the province did at that time. . . He was very keen to get a program going in Laird. . . I ended up teaching in a classroom that was the 'classroom of the day' and incorporated all of the very modern ideas of teaching learning disabled kids at that time. There was a lot of money spent on setting up the classroom.

Olivia taught in Laird for three and a half years, then left teaching to have her first child. Olivia stayed at home with her family for ten years. During that time she had a second child and her family returned to the lower mainland.

After a ten year hiatus she was ready to return to the classroom:

So after ten years I decided I was going to go back to work. Well, that I needed to start to think about going back to work. I did want to go back to teaching, so I felt that at that time I need to get myself busy about doing that.

Shortly after she started substitute teaching in a large suburban district in the lower mainland, her husband was transferred to a rural community in the central interior:

I went substitute teaching about three times and then my husband was transferred to the Sonoka, to Pullet. And so I went up there and felt kind of down, thinking I was dragged all over the place [laughs].

Olivia volunteered at various schools during the first year and then the following year taught kindergarten half-time. At the end of the second year, her husband was transferred back to the lower mainland, so Olivia packed up the family and returned to the coast.

After settling the family in their new home, Olivia applied for a teaching position in the local school district. She recalled that there was a mail strike at that time and she reasoned she had an advantage getting a job because she could respond to advertised positions in person. The school district hired Olivia to teach a special education class for learning disabled children.

Olivia taught an intermediate class for learning disabled children for four years and then transferred to a similar position in another school closer to her home. After teaching in her new school for one year, the class was moved to Fairview school because the classroom space was required to accommodate increasing enrollment in French Immersion.

Olivia taught at Fairview school for seven years and then took an eighteen months leave of absence to go to South America with her husband. Upon returning from her leave, the special education teaching position was unavailable, so Olivia made the choice to return to "regular education." She outlined the difficult decisions she had to make:

I couldn't get the special ed[ucation] job back again because Elva took my job. I would've gone back into special ed[ucation], that would've been my first choice. . . Then I thought of learning assistance, but when I came back last year. . . there just weren't the jobs. I really liked Fairview School, and I thought I would like to come back here and instead of taking an unknown I thought I'd come back and take the regular job here. So that was kind of a scary experience, coming back last year.

Olivia returned to the regular classroom September 1994. She found the year challenging and yet very rewarding, as it reintroduced her to another perspective of education:

I started off in regular ed[ucation] and really I wouldn't have gone back into regular ed[ucation] had it not been that we had that travel experience and then I couldn't get my job back. . . Now I think I won't go back into special ed[ucation] for a while anyway because I want to do regular education for a few years and feel that I can do it again and do a good job at it. [slight pause] But I feel good about it and I guess I didn't realize how good I would feel about it.

Olivia enjoys her job, but she also sees opportunities to pursue other interests in the future:

My husband travels a lot and at one point I think maybe I'd like to do some traveling with him. So I don't plan to teach until I'm 65. I'm going to continue on and feel good about the job that I'm doing right now. . . Then I might take a leave of absence. I wouldn't retire right off the bat, but I'd take another leave of absence, and then see how I felt.

Olivia is a confident, self-assured teacher who spoke with commitment and dedication to teaching. Her calm matter-of-fact manner inspires confidence. She enjoyed participating in the interview series and willingly answered all follow-up queries.

Sarah

Sarah was energetic and buoyant during the interviews. Her enthusiasm for life is infectious. She is 52 years old and has taught for 19 years.

Sarah was born in Saskatchewan and grew up in a rural farming area. She attended the parochial elementary school that her father went to. She remembered her early school experiences as being very challenging:

In grade one I almost failed. . . I really wasn't a very good student. I was the youngest in the class. I wasn't a very good student. I got into grade two, almost failed. I just couldn't learn to do math, I wasn't learning to read. Hardly made my first communion. . . We had to memorize all the questions. For three months my mom would stand and she'd iron, and she'd ask me the questions.

After graduating from an all girls high school, Sarah went to the University of Saskatchewan for one year and then transferred to a teacher's college. Sarah remembers always wanting to be a teacher: "I can't remember when I first decided to become a teacher. I have no idea. I just always wanted to be one ever since I can remember."

Sarah's first teaching job was in a remote community in northern Saskatchewan. She thoroughly enjoyed her year in the north, but she wanted more guidance and support to develop her teaching talents. She moved south to Regina and taught in a private Catholic school. This year was a time of exceptional professional growth for Sarah:

There was a nun, Sister Mary, who taught grade one. And I remember one of the first times I got there, I was putting up this beautiful bulletin board. . . She walked in and she said, "What's that bulletin board for?" I said, "The kids." She said, "Well, why aren't they doing it?" Like, why are you doing it? So, she was good, she really helped me see a lot. That was a good year, I really learned a lot.

The experience at the school was very rewarding, but Sarah missed the north so she and her girlfriend applied for teaching positions in the Yukon Territories. Their applications were accepted and they moved to a very remote mining community where Sarah and her teaching partner worked hard and played hard:

You were single up there, and your personal life was as important as the teaching. So you would work really hard with those kids, you would really try to meet their needs in school. But, you didn't come home and work for hours and hours and hours. I didn't do a lot of professional reading at that time.

From the Yukon Territories, Sarah moved to northern Alberta and taught in a small farming community for two years. She remembered her initial teaching experiences as very positive and rewarding:

I guess the schools that I taught in were small enough, it became part of everything, it became part of my personal life. . . The school wasn't a place I went to, it was part of me you know. . . It was a fun place to be, we wanted to be there. It was just kind of part of our lives and it was a positive part and [pause] a really good experience.

Sarah moved to the city to live with her sister while her sister attended university. During this year Sarah married. The following autumn, she attended the University of Alberta enrolling in courses in early childhood education to complete her third year of university. Her daughter was born at the end of that year.

Over the next couple of years Sarah attended the university part time to complete her Bachelor of Education. In addition, when she and her family moved to a suburb of Edmonton, the municipality administrator enticed Sarah to teach pre-school for two days a week. With the birth of her son in 1974, Sarah related:

I got my BEd. I went to the hospital and had Mark. I didn't think that I would ever teach again. I never intended to teach again. I just thought that I would stay home forever.

Fate would have it otherwise. The municipality administrator cajoled Sarah into coordinating the pre-school program part time. She was the pre-school coordinator for a couple of years, then she returned to the classroom part time. She continued to teach school for the next three years until she and her family moved to British Columbia. Again, Sarah decided she would not teach:

I didn't want to work. We lived in Nerlad. Bob went off to work in Branberg. The kids were going to school in Swain. And I thought, "There has to be someone to have a home base for everybody." I didn't want us all scattered. So I decided I wouldn't work. I would stay home and get everyone organized and have a home base for them.

The move to a new community and a new province took its toll on Sarah. She missed her friends and her work:

I missed teaching second to missing my friends in Spruce Grove. I missed teaching something awful. I had no idea I would miss it as much as I did. But you know I would leave my home, and go teaching, I would leave one family and go to another family. . . I didn't think I was depressed, but, looking back, I mean if you don't get dressed until two and you sit and watch TV all that time. . . I was depressed.

The family moved closer to the school that the children attended so that the family schedule was not so disparate. To pull herself out of the doldrums, Sarah volunteered at her children's elementary school. This was the beginning of a new journey in her teaching career.

After volunteering for a short while, the teachers at the school convinced Sarah to apply for a teachers' assistant's job. Sarah applied and worked with the learning assistance teacher and the English as a second language teacher. Aware of her credentials, the district office staff suggested she take a couple of additional courses so she could be hired to teach learning assistance. Although Sarah enjoyed teaching learning assistance, she was keenly interested in teaching English as a second language. She completed the credentials she required to teach English as a second language and the school district hired her to teach a language enhancement program for kindergarten children who had little or no English. After working in a couple of different schools, the district assigned Sarah to one school to teach kindergarten in the morning and language enhancement in the afternoon. She has taught in this school for two years.

Sarah has had an eclectic teaching career. She has taught in a number of jurisdictions and in varied situations. Sarah remembered her early teaching experiences as positive and life-enhancing. She recalled fondly:

The experiences in the past, I love thinking about them and I have all my pictures. . . It was just good times, excellent. Really, really good times, all those years. Everyone accomplished a lot. But you felt good about it. There were good vibes about the whole thing. I can't remember any really negative situations, or negative feelings. The parents were great. Everybody had a good time. They were good years then.

Sarah has always maintained a link to the teaching profession. Even when she took some time out to raise her children, she was completing course work at the university or volunteering at a school. Sarah is an enthusiastic, optimistic person who willingly participated in this research study and openly shared her teaching experiences.

Research Questions

Each participant came to the research process with a unique background and varied experiences in education. The personal profiles of each participant portray this rich diversity. The personal profiles set a context for the findings related to each research question. The themes depict the experiences of the participants and identify the commonalties and anomalies among the experiences.

What Are The Experiences Of Teachers In Mid Career?

Although the experiences of the participants were personal and varied, a series of common threads ran through the interviews. The following themes emerged from the interview data. Each theme is illustrated by representative quotations from the narratives which were written during step 7 of the analysis process.

Major Themes

The major themes identify the analogous and diverse experiences of a group of mid-career educators. They represent experiences that were discussed by the majority of participants more than once during the interview series. An examination of the commonalties among the experiences of the participants enabled the researcher to answer the research questions. The following discussion outlines and elaborates the themes gleaned from the participants' interviews and their description of their experiences in mid-career.

Connection

All participants related the importance of connecting professionally and personally with colleagues and administrators as an aspect of their mid-career teaching experience. In mid career, the role of colleagues became increasingly important for most of the participants. Participants placed great importance on the value of supportive friendly colleagues. Colleagues filled a niche that other friends and family did not.

Faye noted that family and friends are sympathetic to her concerns, but her colleagues are empathetic to her needs and problems. Her colleagues relate to her situation. This empathy extends beyond the professional purview of curriculum, methodology and student issues to personal issues of home, children and family. Faye explained that colleagues also provide emotional support. She reiterated that honesty, openness and approachability dosed liberally with humor forged a strong bond among staff members. Over time, her colleagues have become an extended family:

I really love my staff here. We're like a big family and we work so well together, there's no cliqueiness [sic]. [slight pause] And the staff is, the administration too, is quite open to listening to you.

Participants emphasized that colleagues offer professional support by extending ideas, sharing materials, offering praise, and actively listening to problems and concerns. For example, Carl emphasized that colleagues provided a supportive professional network that enhanced the quality of his teaching environment; "The highlight of my work right now is having a very supportive staff that I work with. People who support you all the way." Sarah also expressed enjoyment over interactions with her colleagues and commented on how much she looked forward to coming to school just to see everyone:

It's still fun to come and see everyone, even though people are too busy just to sit around and chat as much as they used to. There's always someone that you can talk to, someone you meet in the hall. I think just because of the fact that people who go into teaching are usually people persons, that they set the atmosphere for the school and it is a fun place to be. So I look forward to coming.

Other participants have learned to settle in with a staff. At the outset of their careers, Barbara and Olivia felt outside the staff. Both participants related the recent development of a feeling of belonging and connection with colleagues. Olivia mused that her role as a special education teacher had kept her separate and apart from other teachers:

This has been a really big year for the role of colleagues for me because I've gone back into regular education. So I've got support from a lot of people teaching at my grade level, in a lot of ways. I've found that people have been really, really caring and really helpful and most willing to give whole units of things and share their time, and really willing to explain things. I've really appreciated it and I've also really enjoyed it. Because as I mentioned I always felt that I lacked that in special education.

Carl also underlined that his need for colleagues and the professional support they provide has developed over time:

When I first started working as a teacher I didn't see the need to be that sociable or mingle with the staff as I do see it now. I did not see the staff room as an extension of my teaching at all. I saw it totally as a place where you would go there and [pause] be non-productive as far as I'm concerned. Whereas now, in that particular aspect, I am out there by five past twelve. . . I look forward to going to the staff room. That's the need I have.

The staff room seems central in helping develop connection among colleagues. It is a forum for discussion and debate about educational issues as well as an arena for socialization. Recess time and lunch time were seen as sacrosanct, a time to relax and chat with colleagues. Carl's comment related sentiments common to all participants:

I just look forward to it [recess and lunch] as a time to just talk to the staff and relax . . . I want someone to talk to, you know what I mean [laughs]. Especially if it's a time I need to talk about a problem. I guess I'm always looking to get some either reassurance from them, or reinforcement of what I'm doing, or help me out with a kid that is, you know, socially ill-adjusted kid. It is still part of the classroom, an extension of the classroom in the staff room. . . The need is always there, to share, at least for me, personally.

Although connection with colleagues was important to all participants, not all participants experienced *greater* connection with colleagues in mid career. Grace thought about the role of colleagues and contrasted the past with her contemporary situation. She felt that colleagues were still very important

professionally, but her personal and professional lives were separate. She remarked:

But I think maybe when we were younger, then everybody was young and people weren't tied down with their own families and things. So I think we spent a lot more time together as friends, as personal friends. And now I think everyone is just so busy with their own commitments that now it's more just a working colleague.

Closely associated to the importance of connection with colleagues, several participants related a change in their perception of the role of administrators. The subordinate relationship experienced with administrators at the outset of their teaching careers has evolved into a collegial, supportive educational partnership. Administrators are viewed as colleagues and provide input, assistance and encouragement. Grace suggested: "I think earlier you just kind of accepted the fact that they were there and they were your boss. Now, it's more of more of a partner."

The connection with students was imbedded in all of the participants' interviews as each participant referred to students in his or her stories. The participants' experiences in the classroom were illustrated by highlighting specific episodes with students. Sarah emphasized that the children in her care were her primary focus and that she was in the classroom "to meet the needs of the kids."

Barbara articulated the connection with students, colleagues, administrators, and parents as a sense of belonging to the school. Although other participants did not phrase their sense of connection in this manner, their relationships with colleagues and students did exemplify a sense of belonging. Faye referred her colleagues as being "like a big family."

In describing their mid-career experiences most participants underscored the notion of the importance of connection. The increased connection extended to administrators. Administrators were viewed as colleagues, not superiors. The formation of a bond with teachers, students, administrators and the school was very vital to a sense of belonging. This point was emphasized by the participants who came from a background of varied teaching experiences outside the regular, mainstream classroom as they expressed their sense of frustration of not having a sense of belonging in a school. Whether the teacher was isolated within the school by the kind of program she or he was teaching or if it was an itinerant teaching position which forced movement from school to school, the isolation was real. The classroom teachers reiterated the importance of connecting with colleagues to discuss the episodes of the day. Two participants planned to change their work situations so they could intensify the connection with their colleagues. One was planning to teach with a partner, the other was moving her classroom so she could plan collaboratively with a teacher that taught the same grade.

Self-knowledge

Another theme in the participants' interviews was an increased sense of self understanding. Self-knowledge includes an understanding of who they are, what they are able to do, and what their limitations are. This theme reflected the participants' development of a deeper understanding of themselves as teachers and as human beings now that they were established in a career. The participant's professional and personal experiences helped each one to define his or her personal and professional parameters. This development of a sense of self by teachers in mid career is articulated in Bernice Neugarten's study of middle age and her description of a heightened sense of self-understanding. Faye typified this experience:

I've grown. . . improved, and I actually feel better about myself as a teacher because I've learned to anticipate problems and anticipate where children are likely to need help, [slight pause] and I think too, I've grown in learning about myself and what I can handle, what I can tolerate, and how I can help children.

Woven throughout the tapestry of Barbara's mid-career experience is a sense of self. She feels comfortable with herself and relishes this time of her life. She stated confidently:

I feel like I've come into a space where I feel good in my own skin and I'm comfortable with what I am doing and I'd like to carry on that way. . . I'm finding other aspects of my personality that I didn't know were there, because I was working so hard for survival in teaching before. . . Now I feel I can just be, it's okay to just be.

Faye and Grace described how their teaching experiences have increased their knowledge and understanding in a general way. Over the years their teaching experiences have provided a broad foundation upon which to evaluate new situations. The scope and length of their professional tenure formed a pool of resources that was extensive and varied. Faye explained:

I guess maybe when I was first starting to teach, you're new at the game. . . You're learning all the time and you don't know all the little problems that can occur, and now having had all this background experience, you start to worry more about little things. . . some of these things never occurred to you. But now, with this background information and so on, I find I tend to worry more. I think I may worry unnecessarily sometimes. I guess maybe I have a much more, I don't know, I think I have a more serious attitude about it [teaching] than when I first started. It seemed . . . almost

more light-hearted in teaching. Whereas now, it's very serious and the situations that come up . . . dealing with parents and the problems that they have carries over to the children, and it affects their learning. Sometimes I find it can be depressing . . . you just wonder if you're doing enough for the children.

Other participants spoke about how their teaching experiences have developed specific aspects of their self-knowledge. Grace and Olivia reflected upon how they have developed an understanding of their personal limits. They know what they can accomplish and consequently try to set reasonable goals. They also know what demands and expectations are personally unrealistic and work to alleviate those pressures.

Carl and Barbara commented specifically on the development of an increased understanding of their teaching styles. Each related a deeper comprehension of what makes a comfortable teaching situation for him or her. Barbara is keenly aware of the situations when she is most effective and when she is less effective:

I'm not one of those people that can handle ten different things at once. So when I'm working for half an hour I do very, very intense work with my students, and very focused on one task. And I can do that, and I can remain focused.

Carl commented about the evolution of his teaching style and explained that he has confidence in his ability as a teacher to meet the needs of his students:

It's a different style I have right now, a different style. For some reason I'm getting a lot more patient [laughs]. . . So I'm teaching a little smarter, and trying to make sure that the kid understands, yes, but not come what may, at any cost. I find myself looking at

the sort of developmental stage of some kids. So my teaching is changing a bit in that sense.

A number of participants also related an awareness of personal health issues and the importance of staying healthy. Sarah commented on the consequences of not having energy and vitality to do her job. Although she considered the significance of ill health, she didn't dwell on the negative aspects. She adopted a very pragmatic attitude:

We are all getting older. I know I'm tired. I get more tired. My husband has health problems so that causes certain feelings. . . I suppose you could say it was because I'm in mid-career that we have those kinds of things, but it's nothing I really dwell on or even think about. You know, they're just there, you just go. Each day is fun and exciting.

Although Grace, at 48 years old, is not the oldest participant in the study she acknowledged that she was in the final phase of her career and she thought about retirement:

Ten years from now I'll be retired for sure [laughs]. Certainly, in the back of my mind, it's on the down [inaudible section]. It's time to move on to something else. But I don't know what that something else would be.

The realization that she is in the twilight of her career affected some of her educational decisions. She decided to complete a diploma course so she could "go up in salary" but she didn't want to pursue a Master's degree because she thought: "I don't have that many years left to teach. It would cost me more, I think, to take it than I would ever get back." Grace viewed her career as slowing down and commented that it was time to move on to new challenges.

Each participant spoke about the increase in self-knowledge in a specific way. They were aware of what contributes to and what detracts from their personal sense of well-being in the classroom. Participants indicated that increased self-knowledge was one of the benefits of longevity in the teaching profession. They related a deeper understanding of who they were as teachers and could readily identify their professional strengths and weaknesses. Some elucidated a clearer understanding of their teaching style. Others reflected upon their knowledge and a recognition of their personal limits. Over time each participant's professional and personal experiences have contributed to a deeper awareness of his or her capabilities, limitations, likes and dislikes. The specific understandings of each participant were varied, but the development of a deeper sense of self-knowledge in mid-career was at the heart of the experience.

Growth and Development

Every participant related the importance of ongoing professional growth and development. All participants engaged in some form of professional development whether it was reading professional journals, attending conferences, participating in district workshops, or attending university courses. Carl felt so strongly that professional growth was critical to being a good teacher that if a teacher could not adapt and incorporate new ideas then "there's no point in being a teacher."

Grace noted that she is always learning and growing. Every day brings new experiences which expand her understandings. Grace recognized that she has not remained static as a teacher, her repertoire continues to expand and develop daily:

I'm sure I thought that I was a wonderful teacher in my early [years], but I probably wasn't. I'm sure I thought I was doing just fine, but when I think back now to either things that I wasn't doing

and didn't do. . . Now, I think I'm doing just fine, but I'm sure there's lots of things I could be doing now. . . There's always room to improve or change.

Nicole commented that professional development is an important facet of teaching and viewed professional development as providing stimulation and new ideas. She believes it should be an integral component of every teacher's career:

I think it's the freshening that everybody needs. It wouldn't hurt to have at least two of those conferences every year that everybody has a chance to try out other new things . . . to talk to colleagues and to learn things. It would be nice if there was some sort of rotating . . . if you wished to go back to school that you were somehow compensated. . . I think that anybody who has taken any classes, afterwards feels that it's a tremendously worthwhile experience and that it's worth the time and money and effort. . .

Although you don't have to throw everything away, I think gleaning new tidbits can't help but be valuable.

Nicole and Olivia viewed professional development as one of the avenues open to explore professional interests and opportunities of their own choosing. They consciously separated professional development from staff development and mandated educational change. Nicole professed:

I think that the professional development is an important part of it all because it's a revitalizing of your own self, it's not what the district says you have to do, that's exciting too, but the other part of it is what you're choosing to do.

Professional development days were identified as an important vehicle for program updates and professional renewal. In addition, the participants noted

that these days provided a unique opportunity for extended professional dialogue with colleagues.

Barbara, Sarah, Grace, and Carl completed university courses beyond their initial teaching credentials in the evenings during the school year, or during the summer. These participants cited that their initial motivation for pursuing additional post-secondary courses was to upgrade their credentials and obtain a pay increase; however, they all stated that the benefits derived from the university courses eclipsed the monetary gains. The courses provided an opportunity for professional reflection and a venue for probing and understanding their classroom experiences.

Sarah expressed a sense of responsibility to stay current in her teaching area. She voluntarily attended inservice opportunities and workshops. She also read journal articles, newsletters, and magazines to keep abreast of new research and recent developments. Sarah elaborated:

I read at night constantly. I'm always reading. I would say most of my professional development comes through reading. And not reading lengthy books, but reading journal items, or just reading newsletters or reading different articles pertaining to something that I am really interested in the time and something I think I can act on and you know, improve even the next day.

Nicole and Olivia mentioned the importance of regularly attending education conferences as the multitude of diverse conferences provided an opportunity to pursue a new subject or to nurture an ongoing interest.

All participants viewed professional development as a vital component for continued growth as a teacher. They saw professional development as a personal and professional responsibility and acknowledged the value of reading journals and monographs, and attending educational seminars, workshops,

university courses and professional development days. The participants noted that the pursuit of professional development activities also contributed to the development and sustenance of connections with colleagues in other schools and other jurisdictions. This enabled them to extend their professional horizons beyond the local school community.

Balance Between Work and Home

Participants emphasized the importance of balancing the demands of work and the home. Many participants related that early in their careers teaching was their life and their passion. They worked long hours during the week and often spent the weekend preparing lessons for the following week. The participants emphasized that teaching is a job that never really ends because you can always find something else that needs to be done. They noted that one must learn to set limits on the work schedule so that school work did not usurp personal time.

Barbara recalled how fixated she was on teaching. Her life was focused on her work and it affected her sense of well-being. Now she strives for a balance between work and home, and between family and self:

I had my whole life wrapped up in my work, in teaching. . . I just felt clenched all the time, from the minute I woke up, to the time I got home and went to bed. I never felt really relaxed. . . I couldn't think about anything else. It was always in the back of my mind. Always. Now I feel free. I have a life to live. . . You know, "Get a life!" I've done it! . . . But the biggest change in my life is that I no longer let teaching, my work, drive the rest of my life, whereas I did that before. . . I think the main thing, if I had to underline anything, now my own life comes first and I will try to accommodate and do the best job I can.

Sarah stressed that she considered her job a critical component of her life, but she further emphasized that at this time of her life her home and her friends take precedence over her work:

Now teaching to me is a job. . . I love doing it. It's a job, it's my hobby as well as my job. It's my only creative outlet, but nevertheless it's a job and my family and friends are number one. . . So if I spend all my time, or a lot of my time at school, then I don't have time for family and friends.

When Nicole started teaching, her work was her life. When she got married and had her children, her priorities changed. Teaching is no longer the primary element in Nicole's life. She emphasized that her children are her central focus and her teaching job is secondary:

So how do I feel about teaching now? I feel quite comfortable and satisfied about it. It's no longer, it's still no longer the end all, or be all of my existence. I would have to say my kids are, the end all and be all. I really enjoy teaching, but my kids would come, my own family would come first and then would come the school.

Nicole and Barbara both reiterated that teaching was very important, but their family responsibilities and obligations outweighed any allegiance to their job. They worked hard when they were at work, but they also worked smart so that they could spend time with their families.

Grace also emphasized the importance separating home and work. She has made a conscious attempt to accomplish this. A physical illness forced her to realize that teaching is an open-ended job and the job is never done. She explained her change in attitude:

I got mono[nucleosis] one time and the doctor said, "You know, you've brought it on yourself with schoolwork." And he said,

"Don't do that." So I tried not to do that. . . sometimes you have to, of course, report card time and things, but I try and just keep it completely separate.

Grace thinks of teaching as a job. She has a set personal routine for the school day. She consciously leaves her job at school:

I think after a while you take it more as a job. . . you've done all you can for today, stop now and go home and do. Carry on with the rest of your life and then start again in the morning. At least I try to think of it that way.

Grace carries this separation between school and home over to her relationship with colleagues. She mentioned that the importance of colleagues has diminished through the years. Although she claimed her colleagues are still vital to a collegial work environment, they do not have the same importance in her personal life. Earlier in her teaching career her colleagues were also her close friends. Now there is a differentiation between colleagues and friends. While her earlier colleagues remain her friends, she noted the friendship with her current colleagues does not extend outside the school:

I think it [colleagues] was probably much more important . . . earlier when you're pretty new at it. . . You needed the support more, or you felt you did. [pause] Of course, it was really important too in Winnipeg, not just because of the school, but also not knowing as many people there. . . Actually when I first came to Sunshine, we were probably pretty close too. We did a lot of socializing and even we curled together. I remember that. But then I don't think it's near, near as important now. At least personally. You know, it's not a priority at all.

Faye feels much differently. She noted that work at school and her home life are interrelated, and she declared that the kind of day she has in the classroom directly impacts her home environment. She emphasized that she needed time to debrief the day's events with her husband. She also asserted that she needed to consciously set time aside for her family as school work could nibble away at her personal time:

You go home thinking about it. . . That's my time driving home, thinking about that and it's not easy to just sort of turn it off [slight laugh]. If something really horrendous happened at school, you think about that same thing and you mull it through your mind all the time. [slight pause] I guess it just depends on the seriousness of the problem [laughs], go home and talk it out with your husband [laughs]. Yak, yak, yak, it can affect your peace of mind too at home [laughs].

Carl accentuated the blurring of the distinction between his personal and professional lives because his wife is also a teacher and their lives center on the teaching profession:

My wife also gets the other part that I don't share with the staff [laughs]. So when you leave the classroom, and you leave the school, you still have the need to speak with someone about, and my wife being a teacher, she can identify with it. So we talk at dinner time, or just peeling carrots together, we talk about a particular incident in the day that you have on your chest. . . She does the same as well, from planning field trips to how much it costs to go to the IMAX theater for the kids again you know. It's really school, school, school, school.

So interrelated are home and school that Carl said that he has to make a conscious effort to separate the incidents of his personal life with his children from the episodes of his professional life with his students:

There are certain instances in which I don't seem able at times to separate my discipline of my kids, my own personal kids now, to that of the classroom. . . I may sometimes, unawaringly [sic], say things to my boy like, "Will you please get off the desk?" [laughs] when he's on his chair. . . Even the phrases you use in the classroom to the kids, it just seems to be the same thing you're using at home, in your own personal life. . . Of course my kids identify with that, "Oh, there goes the teacher, you know." It was funny, I went to a friend's wedding and he asked me to be the MC, a spokesperson for his wedding, and I never realized that teaching had this great an impact on me. I was trying to get the audience to be quiet because he wanted to make a speech and I said, "Boys and girls." [laughs uproariously] This was not done purposefully, no, it was, just that's it. You saw that audience as a classroom [continues to laugh].

Stages in life cycle seem to influence the balance between school and home. Participants who did not have young families were able to be more flexible than those who had to maintain a fixed schedule to accommodate young children. The cycle of the family directly affect the time each person could spend at work. Sarah summarized: "I had more time to spend at school at the beginning of my career when it was just me. Then I had less time when the kids were little and now I have medium time."

All participants remarked that they consciously tried to maintain a healthy balance between their professional and personal lives. This was not an easy task

though, as the events of the work day easily flow into their home life. Because of this, everyone agreed that personal time must be vigilantly guarded.

Demands of Teaching

Participants asserted that teaching is a very demanding profession. They perceived an increase in expectations from parents, the Ministry of Education, the school board, and the public. In addition, they perceived the school as having an increasingly greater responsibility for social and personal development. They asserted that teaching is greatly affected by social conditions in the home and the neighborhood. Nicole expressed the sentiments common to most participants:

I've always been an educator, that's a given. But I seem to spend a lot more [time] in nourishment and encouragement as far as family problems and sort of almost like a psychologist, besides being a nurse of course. You always were a nurse. But it's like the teacher is supposed to do, it's more than just teaching about academics. It's so much more than just academic subjects.

The pressure of multi-faceted demands was evident in the strain of participants' voices as each related the frustration of trying to fulfill many diverse roles. One participant expressed the feelings of the others:

I still enjoy it. I think it's much more frustrating now than it ever was. I think the kids are much different. I sometimes think we're expected to do too much. . . We're trying to be social workers, we're trying to be nurses, we're trying to be everything.

Participants acknowledged that the traditional academic curriculum has expanded to include subjects such as personal planning, child abuse prevention and family life. They emphasized that these subjects have been added to a finite

school year while the other curricula remain intact. Grace commented that the prescribed curricula have more depth and breadth:

I think the curriculums are much meatier. There's an awful lot more, and you could do a lot more with them, if you tried. I mean every, every [emphasis] curriculum is so much more than there ever was. . . I just think it really is more. I think that there's more in every curriculum and then there's more extras.

Participants underlined that teachers are under constant pressure to try to accommodate the burgeoning demands of an increasing curriculum load and yet they have to make appropriate choices that will meet the needs of their students. Carl has adapted to the demands from the various educational jurisdictions by adjusting his expectations of himself and his students.

So you got the Ministry, you've got school board directives, you've got principal directives, you've got school direction, you've got even, you know when you've got kids in the classroom, all put together it's a load, it's quite a bit. . . so what I find myself doing is trying to teach smarter. By that, I pace myself. A lot more pacing. Not as determined at all times that a child must learn these concepts or else the world will turn over and die and everybody is going to go to hell. I am not that way anymore.

Carl felt that outside demands detract from his ability to teach. He felt frustrated by the multitude of directives from various jurisdictions.

Personally I find there are too many committee meetings here, but again that's how we operate. . . I just wish they would just leave me to teach. I mean, just let me do my job, you know, and work with the kids. Just leave me alone, let me teach.

Participants mentioned that parental expectations have increased during their tenure. They commented that parents are more vocal about the demands for their children. Faye related: "There's a lot more parents in the school. I think that parents are certainly being more assertive than they used to be, [slight pause] and they are quite outspoken."

Nicole observed that parents are more vocal about their child's educational rights and opportunities. She stated that parents do not hesitate to comment or criticize if they believe something is unfair or unjust for their child:

I think the worse problem is there is more fear of parents breathing down your neck and them criticizing you. . . Whereas I guess before you felt more, as I said, more revered. That reminds me of the problem of somebody getting run over in the middle of the street, and do you run over to involve yourself with them, or do you leave it be? . . . You're sort of on dicey ground. The same with the kids. . . there's one of those today, this year. I very politely mentioned to the mother that perhaps the behavioral problem should be investigated and that there are various possibilities of what was wrong with, or what could be. She started yelling and screaming at me that I was a total, a total fool and I was the one with the problem. Well, anybody could watch this child and see what was going on. . . Should I bring it up, or should I just leave it? It's sort of a sensitive thing. Whereas before I don't think I would have worried as much about mentioning it. They probably would have thanked me for my input.

Grace remarked that some parents appear more forward and vocal in their dealings with the school:

I know it bothered me a couple of days ago when a parent was able to come in and yell and scream at another teacher. . . It's never happened to me and I keep thinking, "What if it ever did?" I don't know how I would take that. I think that we're getting dumped on a lot more than we ever did, through media, through whatever.

A few participants discussed how the social context affected their role in the classroom and their perception of their job. Carl talked about the impact of the encroachment of social issues in the classroom. He commented that the social context outside the classroom affected the parameters of the activities in the classroom. He related a story about a child who had witnessed his mother's beating and reflected how this affected the child's education and the tone and tenor in his classroom:

But what I find super frustrating to me right now, is the social problems that the kids bring to the classroom [bangs table]. I had an example today as a matter of fact, in which one child came to school, late [emphasis], very tired looking. I said, "What's your problem?" "Oh, I couldn't sleep last night. My dad, he beat up my mother real [drawn emphasis] bad. Banging her in the face, punching her out there. And I just could not sleep all night." I mean, her whole behavior in the classroom today was out of it. Last week, the same thing happened. Another child again. Parents split up, fight. The kid hasn't caught himself yet. He's still berserk. So, those kind of things put together is frustrating. . . You just don't seem able to teach in isolation from the social problems. It seems that you have to develop a sort of understanding that this kid's mom and dad just split up last night and therefore your teaching strategy for that kid should be modified to meet the needs of the

kid. . . Even the curriculum, what they're asking us to do as teachers right now, like fix all the problems, from *Feeling Yes*, *Feeling No* to [pause] What other programs we have for social behavior? I mean, there's a lot. And parents' demands right now. They're making demands that you have to deal with the kids other than just basic education. I have a parent who gives her child Tylenol tablets every day to put in my drawer, so that when she's got a headache I get it out. There are parents who say, "Okay my child doesn't eat breakfast, so at lunch hour could you make sure that he or she eats?" or "My child should see a counselor because we just had a break up in relationship with my husband. Could you make sure that my child sees the counselor to solve this problem?" And it goes on and on. . . I find myself having to do all these fixes. [pause] And again that can be frustrating, very, very frustrating. . . I see those needs and sometimes they're there because of social problems. So again, that adds a lot more to the job and they get a lot more burdensome. It makes retirement seem very rosy [laughs]. It does at times. . . Very appealing [laughs].

Two participants felt that they must continuously defend teachers and the education system. Both stated that they do not admit they are educators in a public gathering because they do not want to have to deal with the issues that inevitably ensue. Grace stressed how the constant barrage of criticism directed at the school system has put teachers in the position of having to defend education, the school system, and themselves:

You're always hearing, "schools should be doing this" or "this is the fault of the [emphasis] schools" or "juvenile crime, that the school's fault" . . . I think that we're constantly having to defend ourselves.

Grace described how the social and political contexts have changed her feelings of pride in her job:

I don't bother telling people I teach. You know, at parties and things, I don't bother saying anything. Because you don't want to get into political discussions or whatever . . . you used to be quite happy to say that's what you did.

Non-educator's perceptions of teachers and teaching acutely affected Carl's pride in teaching as a profession. He feels pressured to defend his job and his career:

I do find that if my wife and I go to any function in which people know we're teachers we're really under the gun for asking questions. They really ask a lot of questions. I don't know if because in B.C. the climate in education is so political, but once you say you're a teacher, in any social gathering, you certainly begin to answer a lot of questions about your job, about what you do, where is education going today and all that kind of stuff. Sometimes it's almost nice to say you're not a teacher [laughs] because you do get the questions all the time. . . If there's a low point at all [pause] is the impact that teacher bashing had on me and my colleagues. The public slaughter, if you want to call it, of teachers, money we are making, the holidays we are getting, kids not producing, not showing results, as they see it. Those are low points and I wonder, "What am I doing this for?". I mean it, it gets to me at times, but I just have to cope and go along with it and just brush it off.

Both Grace and Carl agree that now, more than ever, the social environment envelops the school. Teachers do not work in isolation from the community. Educators must deal with the repercussions of family violence,

child abuse, and other social problems in their classroom. There are demands for the education system to address these social issues. These participants felt forced to defend themselves and the job that they are doing.

Social conditions, demands by the government, changes in curriculum, and increased expectations from parents have decreased the participants' sense of control of their job and increased their frustration as they realize they cannot accommodate the plethora of demands. In addition, participants are also experiencing less respect from parents.

Professional Well-being

The theme of professional well-being encompasses three interrelated areas: first, confidence in one's ability to do a job well, second, pleasure in performing one's job, and third, feeling valued for the work one does.

The majority of participants expressed confidence in their teaching abilities. They perceived themselves as capable knowledgeable educators. They brought extensive professional and personal experiences to the classroom. These experiences were the touchstone of ongoing decision-making. Continued successes the classroom added to a solid foundation of experience and, in turn enhanced self-assurance. Barbara reflected: "My own confidence is growing as I mature. . . I figure if I've lived through that, I can get through anything! . . . So there's part of that inner strength that developed from both personal instances and also from teaching, you know, trial by fire."

Faye related that her tenure in the teaching profession has given her the background and personal understanding to have the confidence to assert her views and opinions.

Today teachers are much more outspoken too, and I guess too,
having more experience. . . that you've accumulated over the years.

. . you don't feel hesitant to voice your opinion or say, "Hey, I don't agree with that."

Nicole agreed, "I see myself as being more confident, more capable." She stated that, unlike the beginning of her career, she does not seek the approval of colleagues, rather she seeks input from her colleagues and makes her own decisions based upon her experiences and professional knowledge:

When I got to Boyd, the very first year there's four grade 3 teachers. And the three teachers were all very, boy, did they have ideas and they were a very domineering type of people. . . I was sort of like the wimp. . . I would say the first few years I was sort of soaking it up. I'd appreciate people's help and ideas. But I don't think I really gave that many of my ideas back. I felt sort of intimidated, what could I think of that would improve upon what they were doing or how could possibly suggest that something should be done differently when they had done it that way for years. . . Here I'm the newcomer, and I'm going to change them? So that did not seem to be the role. So I was watching and listening and learning, but I didn't turn any heads and I certainly didn't try to force anything down any body's throat. . . I don't know when, [pause] it started changing. I think when the old people all sort of left, one by one and I became the lady of experience and these little greenhorns came to the school that were suddenly younger than I was and asking for help. . . My role changed. . . all of sudden I went to taking everything in to suddenly being the one to distribute ideas or to talk about things. . . I suppose that happens with time. . . You start feeling quite confident about what you're doing and I stopped seeking people's ideas out. I mean, I was happy if somebody

wanted to talk about it, but I could figure out things for myself and if something didn't work, I could see for myself why it didn't work and what I would do next time differently. I didn't need to hold onto anybody else's hand. I could think for myself. But the new ones would come along and they would need a little assistance as to how to do something. So it sort of changed. I just felt more self-confident I think.

Olivia expressed that her experience and longevity in the teaching profession provided a pool of understandings. She spoke confidently in her ability as a teacher:

I know that I can teach. I think that I'm not a bad teacher. I think I'm probably, well, this has been a challenging year and I've had my doubts at times, but there are other times in my recent past where I've said to myself, "Hey, you're talking to a teacher." . . . I could say that to a parent that disagreed with me, "Hey, like I know my job." I think that's experience. There were times in my life where I felt I had to stretch and bend and give, "Am I doing this right?" Now I feel differently, I feel a lot more confident.

Sarah also related that her teaching experiences have become a reservoir of strength. She does not let obstacles or setbacks deter her. Sarah viewed problems as a chance to learn and grow:

This month my themes just really totally bombed. . . So that's okay, I'm not upset about it or anything. Certainly forty years from now because the kids didn't have a good theme, I know it's not going to bother them one iota. So it's just fine, I still feel really good about everything. Whereas, maybe if I was just starting out and it didn't work I'd think, "Oh God, I can't plan themes." You sort of berate

yourself. But when you're older, [slight pause] you just chalk it up to experience and you know that you've met the kids' needs, it keeps coming back to meeting the kids' needs and I don't care what theme you're teaching, I know that the theme doesn't matter. It's how you teach the theme, how you worked it with the kids and [slight pause], so probably just have the confidence and knowing, having all those years of success behind you, is probably the best thing for me right now.

Carl spoke with self-assurance about his teaching abilities. He emphasized that he teaches the way he believes is best for his students. He commented, "I am now teaching how I think is best, not guided by what the book says."

Many participants described a sense of joy and excitement about the teaching profession. They derived personal satisfaction from their job. All enthusiastically described the great pleasure they experience when working with students. Sarah happily explained that she derives a "great deal of enjoyment" from her interactions with the students and the staff.

Coming to school is fun, and I'm always up for it. . . I love to see the kids first thing in the morning. And as much as seeing the teachers, it's the kids, like I love being with them.

Grace commented on the feeling of delight she has when her students return year after year to keep her informed of their accomplishments.

This year for example, a couple [of students] have come in. One was playing in the National Football League last year. So he came into to tell me he got dropped by the Philadelphia Eagles or something like that. And what's he, 23 now or something? And over the last couple of years he's come in so I've known that that's

where he's headed. On Sports Day a girl came in and had a little baby and showed me her picture of when she was in grade two. Faye received much enjoyment from seeing children learn and develop:

I enjoy that, to see that the children are learning. . . When they've finally have caught onto something and their improvement too. When you think back to September and what they can do now and how much they've learned. That makes me feel good. When you share that information with a child, and they know that they've improved, and. . . they feel good about themselves . . . when children enjoy what you're teaching, what they're learning and they find things at home and they bring them to school or they've found something in the library about what you're studying and they bring it to you and are so anxious to share it with you. That really makes my day too, that they're keen. Sometimes even the most stubborn little ones, they're improving too and are sort of loosening up and coming around, that also is rewarding.

After struggling personally and professionally for a few years, Barbara's enthusiasm for teaching has returned. She described her renewed optimism about teaching:

I have my enjoyment of teaching back again. . . I enjoy myself. . . Just like everybody else I look forward to holidays, but I don't look forward to them with desperation as I did before. Then I'd go back, "Oh, I didn't get enough time." (Now) I go back, "Oh that was a nice break, but gee it's kind of nice to be back." And that's a big, big difference for me.

Some participants focused on the notion of feeling valued as a professional. Carl and Olivia appreciated the recognition of their experience. They felt their efforts were valued. They could speak with authority on most topics and others would listen.

Carl stated that his age and his varied teaching experiences have increased his credibility as a teacher with his colleagues. His teaching experiences have also increased his confidence in his ability to make judgments about the fit of various curricula and teaching methodologies:

As you grow older in the profession . . . you gain seniority and you gain maturity, there's almost a freedom, you get to say "I know it" and "listen to me" and "maybe this different approach could work" . . . You get that license to speak. . . I have license to speak because I'm speaking from a background, from experience as well. And I kind of enjoy that. I kind of enjoy being the grandfather [laughs] in the group [continues to laugh].

Carl spoke about his feelings of authority:

I feel that I have more authority as a teacher, speaking from experience and doing things from a diverse point of view. I mean being able to change, to see the changes taking place in myself, to look at my different method of teaching, and gaining strength from it, and understanding from it, and seeing how I grow. So I feel I'm a better teacher now than I was, of course, years ago based upon the rugged terrain that I passed through, if you want to call it that.

Olivia emphasized the importance of being appreciated for her efforts.

She related:

It makes you feel good. . . when you know there are people that appreciate you. . . I guess we all feel like that because we can only

go along for so long without pats on the back. . . Knowing that some parents have said positive things that makes you feel really good and those are little highlights. When you get a little letter at the end of the year from someone that says you've done a good job and you've made their family feel good, that makes you feel good.

Barbara was frank about her need for professional validation. It is important for her to be recognized as a contributing professional in the school. She perceived that her position as an itinerant English as a second language teacher did not offer her the same professional status as the classroom teachers. She found it upsetting and demoralizing when others viewed her position as auxiliary, less important or easy. She struggled for authenticity:

It's important for me to know that what I do is accepted as being valuable. . . That's why it bothers me so much when I feel that people think. . . what I do is less important than what they do. . . Professionally I have a great, great need to feel like I am accepted for what I do and valued for what I do.

The participants exuded confidence and self-assurance in their teaching abilities and had a sincere love of their work. The relationships they developed with the staff and the students enhanced their feelings of professional well-being. They also indicated the importance of feeling valued as a professional. Recognition from peers, parents and administrators enhanced their feelings of well-being. Participants stated that professional confidence was built upon a foundation of extensive teaching experiences. These experiences formed a reference set which they used when planning and making decisions. Teaching experience, however, did not automatically bring a feeling of professional recognition or status. One participant felt she did not garner the same respect as other teachers because her assignment was outside the classroom. All

participants expressed a sense of professional well-being and joy about the work they do.

Time as a Measured Commodity

A majority of participants related the finite nature of time as an important concern in their personal and professional lives. Participants viewed time as precious resource, and were frustrated trying to juggle the multiplicity of demands at the workplace and in the home.

Time was a precious commodity for Nicole. Trying to balance family responsibilities, work time, and time for herself was an ongoing challenge. The responsibility of organizing two young children in the morning pressure her. Her morning routine was fixed and allowed for little flexibility:

We always leave in a panic [laughs] every morning. . . we streak off down the road, late always. And then I drop off. I drop off David at his school first, and then I drop off Peter at his baby-sitter and then I usually get to school at ten to nine. My typical day, I arrive at ten to nine. Just before the bell. Sometimes when we're really late, I arrive at the bell, very professional [said disparagingly]. This is typical. . . I have everything done the night before. There is nothing to do in the morning because I'm there until six o'clock at night. So I arrive and my work is run off, my day book is done. Everything is totally done, everything is done. I just walk in, I hang up my coat. I might do a little errand or two and I am ready to teach.

Nicole emphasized that she enters the classroom at high speed, and has little time to gather her thoughts and slow down before the school day begins. She preferred a more stable routine in the morning:

I sometimes I feel like I've had a whole day before I even get to school. Especially if the kids didn't get up properly or they were fighting in the car. Sometimes you feel totally exhausted before you even begin. And I find I'm not really favorable to a change in routine first thing in the morning. So if I answer the door and somebody is standing there with a pet dog that nobody had warned me was coming, I'm not exactly over enthused that anyone would just bring the dog along. But I go along with it, and I make jokes and sound pleased that the pet has arrived.

Faye also viewed time as a limited commodity. She felt mounting pressure both at home and at school as she tried to complete a daunting list of daily activities:

I just find it's a rat race. . . When I get home . . . it's time to get supper going, get the little one bathed, sit down and have our meal, and story time and off to bed [laughs] and then cleaning up and having some rest time. It just seems that the time that was spent in recreation is certainly diminished compared to years back.

Faye emphasized that the demands of the job directly affected the time she spent with her family at home:

I find that sometimes a lot of time on the weekends can be taken up in school planning, report cards, which are very time consuming. I find, sometimes find, that I don't have the time or the energy to spend with my new little girl. Which bothers me. I like to be able to do all these things that mom's do with their little ones and also have time to go out with my husband and do things that we enjoy. There's just so many hours in a day.

Conversely, commitments to home and family placed subtle pressure on Faye to complete jobs expediently at work:

I find I don't have a lot of time to socialize with teachers . . . because of the time factor and family obligations I use my spare time at school . . . preparing my work and getting things done, and [slight pause] I would like to have more time to talk with my colleagues, but because of the time pressure I find I don't get around to doing that, and I feel it's important, I enjoy it.

Faye emphasized that she doesn't have the personal time that she once enjoyed.

Her commitments to family, friends, and work consumed most of her time:

I find I don't have the spare time I used to have before. . . I find that I don't get out to do all the things I'd really like to do [pause] spend more time in the yard, and gardening, and maybe just sitting down and putting my feet up and reading a book. It's . . . getting all these things get done first, that, you know, are a priority. And last of all, it's . . . the odd thing I'll do for myself.

Comments about the availability and use of time infused Sarah's interviews. Sarah viewed time as currency, and purposefully allocated time according to her priorities:

I have my husband to go home to, so I don't have as much time. I had more time to spend at school at the beginning of my career when it was just me. Then I had less time when the kids were little and now I have medium time.

Sarah commented on the changing nature of the school day. She expressed frustration with the number of issues and events that encroached upon classroom time. She explained that continuity of themes or projects was often interrupted and the flow of the teaching day was stifled. The finite element of

time in the teaching day combined with an ever-increasing number of additional demands caused Sarah some frustration. Sarah reflected that in the past the role of the teacher was to teach the same group of children for the whole day uninterrupted. She emphasized that in the 1990's there are more demands upon teachers and yet sustained, uninterrupted periods of time for learning activities has diminished. She elucidated a multitude of programs and other issues encroached upon the teaching day:

Like now, you come in today and you look at your daybook and you think "Oh yah, so and so's coming to speak today. Oh yah, they've switched this to that. Oh yah, I forget we were going to do that." You don't often have the continuity. I know when I'm doing my themes, I sometimes have a difficult time with the continuity of the theme and getting it finished because there are so many other things that are happening that I just don't have time. . . I know the other things are important but my theme is important too and I either have to water it done slightly or just cut out some of the activities that I wanted to do. It seems like there is just no time.

In addition, Sarah found that an increase in administrative work interferes with the cohesiveness of the teaching day:

. . . For me, there's much more going on. Way, way more paperwork. I don't ever remember handing out as much paper as we do. So that's time consuming as well, handing it out, remembering to hand it out. Then you have to do something with it when it comes back, even if you are not ultimately responsible for it, you have to do something with it, so that takes time. So I really notice, lots and lots of what in some cases could be called interference, with teaching that we never had before.

Barbara also viewed the availability of time as a critical component of her life. She worked hard to adjust her teaching schedule so she could manage her school time. However, she felt she had more personal time at home because her children were older and were taking on more responsibilities in the home. By defining her job to suit her, Barbara was able to accommodate more personal time:

I finally got to the point where I could go, "Ah-h-h!" and sit back and relax. I'm not bringing home piles of marking. I'm not writing report cards for four days at a time, locking myself in a room. I have free time to myself . . . I'm not a young chicken anymore and as I go into my middle aged years, it's really nice to go home and be able to read the paper while dinner's being made or while I made it and don't feel frazzled. Not wanting to kill my own children because I've been yelling at other children all day. I'm there for them more. . . I'm there for my husband more. I have more time now to read, to meditate if you want to call it that. I get better sleep, . . . I get more exercise, I just feel healthier and happier.

Time was a central issue in the lives of these participants. They viewed it as a limited commodity and adjusted their schedules to reflect their priorities. Participants felt frustrated when they believed family or work demands outstripped the available time.

Minor Themes

In addition to the seven major themes that emerged from the analysis of the interviews, the study identified two minor ones. These themes are important because they represented the experiences of more than one participant, hence they provide additional insight and depth to the mid-career experience. These

themes were described as a renewed commitment to teaching, and insecurity about the future.

Renewed Commitment To Teaching

Some participants indicated a revitalized involvement with teaching. To some, this is directly related to life cycle. Their children are older and have left home, or require less supervision, and so they are able to devote more time and energy to their job. Olivia commented that now her children are grown she is able and willing to bring school work home with her. She has the time and the energy to devote to projects that she would not have considered when her children were younger. Her willingness to extend her work day also applied to work during the summer vacation. She commented: "Something I want to do this summer is to work on figuring out my method in regards to what Ministry guidelines are for reporting."

To others, though, renewal came from an enhanced, more secure, self image. Barbara indicated that she has wrestled with the teaching demons that once plagued her and she is proud to be a teacher. A strong sense of personal contentment infused Barbara's narrative. Although she experienced minor anxiety and frustration, she knew what she wanted and she had a clear sense of who she is. She expressed a strong sense of satisfaction with teaching.

I'm a teacher, I know that. . . I've freed myself from all this anxiety, I have more energy, so I'm looking forward at things. . . I have to spend another 15 years doing this stuff, so if I'm going to do it, I have certain standards for the way I'm going to do it. . . I feel like, at a different point in my life if I hadn't stuck it out, I never would have seen all this change and growth. . . I think I could have felt like a failure. But because I did come back to teaching for financial reasons mainly, but then found I came to enjoy it again. I think it's

made me a better person, a stronger person, and it's made me a better parent I think too, in that when I see my children's frustration, I realize it's a bad year, but you'll have a different teacher next year. . . When I retire I can look back on my career and be proud of it. Whereas at one point I was embarrassed to even say I was a teacher. If I was in a group, a public situation, a party, I would never admit I was a teacher . . . I just feel stronger now in, I don't have to argue it, justify it, I'm a teacher [emphatic].

Sarah also related a sense of contentment and commitment to her teaching career:

I don't have any other lofty plans of continuing any kind of schooling and I don't have lofty plans of changing grades. Now my family life is different and teaching now is just a fun place to come to. . . I would just be tickled pink, if someone came in and . . . they said to me, "You can teach kindergarten until you are 65 and you retire." I would just be so content with that.

Changes at home allowed some participants the opportunity to reassess their priorities, as a consequence many revived their commitment to teaching, dedicating more time and energy to their job.

Insecurity

A few participants indicated that they were insecure about the future of their teaching position. Sarah's sense of contentment with her teaching position and her general well-being was overshadowed by the fact that she was new to the district and had little seniority. She did not know from one year to the next whether she would retain her teaching position.

So if I couldn't teach, it would be too bad. That's the worst time in my life now. . . with layoffs. 'Cause I have no seniority and there's

a really good chance that I'll get laid off. I think, "Oh that's just horrible because at this point in my life, I've got time to work. I've got all kinds of time to devote to it and I don't really have any outside pressures or anything." And I think, "Oh, please just let me keep teaching, because if I didn't teach . . . I don't want to retire. I don't want to do anything else." So if there's any downside to mid-life career, and not having worked all those years, with no seniority, it's just thinking that there's a chance that I might not be able to teach. That would be absolutely devastating for me. It's not because of the money that it would be devastating, everybody can use more money. But it would just be the fact that I would have no idea what to do.

Nicole expressed insecurity about the future of education as she knows and understands it at the present. She observed the speed of the influx of the personal computer and expressed how technology was revolutionizing the education system. She extrapolated the rapidity of these changes into the future and voiced concern about the effect these technological changes might have on her teaching career. She feared that in the near future classroom teachers may be redundant and she may possibly be phased out of her job.

I enjoy teaching. I see myself as continuing teaching. All though I keep [sigh] hearing all these things that soon teachers won't be needed, so that's just a little bit stressful, isn't it? Something about the children turning in the TV set to get their schooling. Oh, there's all sorts of new technology that's planned for us teachers to be out of work. There's talk about students being home-schooled. The majority of kids being home-schooled and learning from the TV set, or computer set up. There is talk about privatization of things. So

that we would be employed by say, Pepsi-Cola or some other big companies and that there would be a massive drop in salary and working condition et cetera, et cetera. There's discussion of all sorts of different changes in teaching that I find quite scary as far as I'm not willing to give up my livelihood. And even though we train our students nowadays that they should be very flexible. That their job choices, I can't remember what the story is now, but it's amazing number of times they think that a person growing up today will have to change their work, their professional choices. They have to be really flexible. I'm not willing to be flexible for myself [laughs]. I'm told it's coming. And you know how rapid the technological changes are coming nowadays. I think they said there has been more done in the last ten years than there had been in hundreds of years. It goes to show how today we go to school for our teaching and in ten years, or fifteen years, it'll be done in a different manner. It's not any different from . . . having a computer that would fit into a whole room to one that sits on our laps. I'm sure when the computers first came out no one would ever have believed that there would be a time where it would sit nicely on your lap. We can't conceive of that and it scares me with teaching because I [laughs] don't want to lose my job. . . By then I'll be pretty old.

Sarah and Nicole delineated concerns about their job security. Their insecurity stemmed from perceived threats to the loss of their jobs. Although they did not dwell on the feeling of insecurity they each expressed concerns over the tentative nature of the future and the unknown.

Summary of Themes

The connection among colleagues, administrators, and the school community overwhelmingly influenced the participants' mid-career experience. Participants related the necessity of connection among their peers and with the administrators. These connections were vital to a sense of belonging in the school community. Some participants noted a shift in the relative importance of colleagues as they matured in the profession. Participants indicated that at the outset of their careers the friendships they developed with their colleagues extended outside the school environment. As they became more established in their career, and within their communities, they developed interests external to the workplace. This did not, however, diminish the importance and necessity of the development of strong bonds within the workplace. The necessity of connection with colleagues and a school staff was highlighted by those participants who had teaching experiences outside the regular education classroom. These participants related feelings of exclusion. A former special education teacher explained it this way: "I've always felt quite alone in a school. I suspect that most of the special ed teachers in our school do feel alone." She added, "I never really felt on a staff. You always felt that you were kind of a separate entity." The experiences of these participants highlights the importance of establishing and maintaining a network of support, genuine sharing, and collaboration within the school for all teachers. Participants remarked that it was pivotal for a sense of personal and professional well-being to communicate openly with their colleagues.

The participants emphasized the importance of ongoing opportunities for professional development to increase their repertoire, their self-knowledge and personal understanding. These professional development opportunities must be relevant and personalized to gain the maximum benefit for teachers and their students.

The number of new initiatives proposed by the Ministry of Education overwhelmed the majority of the participants. They devised different strategies for coping with the demands for change. Some participants ignored the directives and had a wait and see attitude, some implemented what they thought to be viable and beneficial to their students, and others adopted the initiatives slowly and methodically over time.

Mid-career teachers are in different phases of family life. Some have young children at home, others have grown children that have left home or who may still be at home, still others are on their own or with a partner. Many of the participants expounded that it was necessary to maintain a balance between work and home. Mid-career teachers need to be acknowledged for the phase of life that are in and their expectations of themselves should be adjusted to accommodate their choices in life.

Many of the participants expressed how the changing societal structures has affected the classroom climate. Mid-career teachers need to be advised of the support services in the school and the support agencies in the community that are available to assist their students so that they can seek advice from these agencies and diffuse some of the pressures in the classroom.

In order to sustain the development of teacher confidence and self-assurance that the participants described, mid-career teachers require a school environment that encourages and supports risk-taking. Pushing forward and extending professional boundaries leads to new experiences which contribute to the pool of personal understandings that each person has developed over time. As teachers stretch their limits their level of comfort for change and innovation increases and their confidence in their abilities also develops.

Many of the participants indicated feeling overwhelmed by the number of initiatives that require their attention. Mid-career teachers need to be keep

informed and updated about imminent changes. The perceived pressure of the demand for educational change often evaporates when timelines are elaborated and information about new programs is shared openly. The unknown often breeds fear and frustration. Knowledge brings understanding. Teachers can set priorities and make informed decisions if they have accurate, up-to-date information.

How Do Mid-Career Teachers Experience System-Wide, Mandated Educational Change?

The issue of mandated educational change was not central to the participants in this study. Although all participants related experiences about mandated change, and the stresses associated with it, these experiences were a small component of the larger teaching experience. Issues that were school based, and directly affected the daily interaction with students in their classes, were more pertinent and important.

Most participants reflected a measured, cautious approach to new programs, methodologies, and curricula. They were wary of provincially mandated changes, and were content to sit and wait to see if the changes were implemented. Only one participant expressed a positive attitude toward mandated change. She viewed change as a revitalizing process.

Experience has reinforced the notion that proposed changes are usually recycled changes. Nicole expressed skepticism that proposed change means real change:

Some people say give whatever the thing is five years and by then it will be gone, or changed or whatever. 'Cause most of the new ideas it's a five year cycle and by the end of the five years, it's leaving and going away and then something else is coming. And it's the same. The only difference is that they change the name

every time. It's always important to change the name. So some of the other techniques through the years are rehashed, given a different name, a few changes and then they're presented again.

Nicole also felt that mandated changes are not often thoughtfully considered changes. They are made by people who are out of touch with the classroom. She mused:

Sometimes I think they just want curriculum changes for the sake of change. A lot of things come around and come around and then, then it's gone and something else is in. . . Some of the things are in and out so fast that, that if you didn't have time to read it, who needs to, because it's gone anyway. That's the way I feel with a lot of stuff. . . I think a lot of times things are planned by people who aren't in the classroom, or who have been out of the classroom for a long, long time, and they have this optimistic, dream [emphasis] idea of what goes on and how much time things take and how things will work. It's totally unrealistic and sometimes almost laughable at how ridiculous some of the ideas are, that are totally impractical, impossible.

Nicole emphasized that she is open to trying out new ideas but she does not want to be told she must adopt a specific methodology:

Somebody told me that an experienced, confident teacher reads through the new information, takes what they think is worthwhile, adds it to their repertoire, but doesn't really change what they're doing because they're doing a good job, they're doing their best. And so they improve on what they're doing, but they don't throw away what they are doing. And that's basically the philosophy that I try to follow.

She elaborated: "I still think that teaching styles, that you do teach the way that you feel most comfortable, and I think if you're comfortable, you're going to be successful and the kids are going to learn from you."

Sarah also approached educational change with wariness. She stated emphatically that she did not implement any change unless she felt it would benefit her students:

I see a lot of changes or some changes as political changes and I just ignore them. If there's no pressure on me to make those changes, I don't. . . I look at them, if it will benefit the kids and if it benefits the kids, right on. But if it won't, I just choose to ignore them. . . For me a lot of them are kind of subtle changes, and a lot of them aren't even changes, we've been doing them anyway. I think if they want to call them a different name, fine let them go ahead and if they think it's a big deal, I don't care. So the changes, they don't really bother me much at all, 'cause I just ignore them, either because I don't think they're pertinent or I don't think they're relevant or for many different reasons.

Barbara perceived the demands for change as additional pressures on an already saturated schedule. She spoke with frustration about the way programs are implemented, often with little collaboration and inadequate support to maintain the initiative. To protect herself, she adopted the changes she could, but she no longer fretted over changes that seemed unreasonable, impossible, or unstructured:

Too many things being put on us at a time, with too little consultation. . . That's stressful for teachers. Here we've got to do this new report card this way and we're going to introduce French by this timeline and then we're going to do this. It's just too many

things coming in, too many changes too quickly. I think that people are used to change but they expect it to happen more slowly and I think that's a lot of what's happening. Too many changes, too fast. . . I think that's why the stress level is high, part of it. I was speaking to the president of our association today and she said she has never seen such high stress levels in teachers. . . We were just sort of speculating on what caused that . . . People are juggling. . . Working along at the Year 2000 thing and now it's changed and it keeps changing all the time. . . It wears you down. It just makes you feel like, well, you can't get whole-heartedly involved in it. . . I don't even take it very seriously.

Faye's strategy was to take a long calculated look at any proposed change and slowly adjust her teaching practice to integrate the changes if she felt the change to be worthwhile and beneficial for her students. She acknowledged that she needed time to discuss the proposed change with colleagues and time to practice the new methodologies before they became part of her repertoire:

At times it's been difficult, and for me it's been gradual, and that's the way I can handle it. I sort of find my comfort zone and once I've achieved that and I feel I can try something new, I'll go on. . . I know I'm the kind of person, I have to do it gradually, I just cannot change *holis bolis*.

She emphasized that when changes were introduced without support she was resentful:

I think when they first brought that [whole language] in, I just found it was overwhelming and it just seemed they wanted us to change quite rapidly. . . I thought, "Hey . . . we've all come through the school system with this style of teaching and approach to

education, and we're all doing just fine." It was almost kind of a resentment too. Like why are these people telling us what to do. . . It was almost like, hey, don't they know what's going on in the classroom? [laughs].

Carl also indicated a sense of frustration when educational changes were introduced without sustained support. He related a need for continuity in the change process. The disintegrated implementation process of new initiatives frustrated him. Continuously shifting priorities and a lack of sustained support for the proposed changes, squelched his desire to adopt new initiatives:

I actually have seen all these different changes and how those changes are not stable, what they may recommend this year, two years from now, and if any other government comes into power, they can change it all. It certainly destabilized [sic] my whole feelings. I feel right now that, what should I teach? How should I teach? Is this going to change? I almost want to develop, at this stage, my own independent way of teaching. Which I think is not necessarily the right thing to do, but because of the instability, politically, it makes me feel very frustrated.

Carl continued to describe his frustration:

Like I'm walking on slippery ground and that frustrates me, really frustrates me. Because I like to know we have a set direction and we stay that way, give and take here and there. But at least we can work for five, six years on a set program. . . I don't find that, and again, that's very frustrating. It kinds turns me off sometimes. And I think about what's best for the kids. In other words, there's too much politics in education. Really, too much politics, and it is frustrating.

Grace mentioned that part of what has made teaching more demanding are the number of changes that are implemented at any particular time. She felt the implementation process did not address educators need for time for reflection and planning within their schedule:

I think it's frustrating. . . trying to keep up with all the changes. Maybe there's a better way, I don't know. I don't know what it would be. But I think it's hard to try and learn all about all the new things and be teaching day to day at the same time. It's almost like we need, again if we could work for four years or something and then have a year off to work on new curriculums and learn about them and really know them properly and then come back and teach again for another four or five years.

Olivia embraced the opportunity to change, grow, and develop. Change had been an integral part of her personal and professional life. She commented on the role of change in her career:

To tell you the honest truth, I've been a person that's done a lot of different types of teaching and somebody that's taught the same grade for twenty-five years might complain about all of those things. But it doesn't really bother me because I've done a lot of different things and I've stopped and started and changed and switched and I've moved from one school to the next school. . . I've packed all my stuff in boxes and shifted it again the next year and moved from one classroom to the next classroom, and I've done the same thing with my house. And it's change! [laughs] Part of life. So there are times in my life where I think, wait I'm on overload, but I'd be really bored if I kept on doing the same thing for ever and ever. I like the same thing [only] for a few years.

Not surprisingly, Olivia expressed a very positive attitude toward change. She regularly adopted changes into her classroom teaching, and she viewed educational change as exciting and interesting:

I think that it's good to change your style of doing things. And when you're doing things for so many years as a teacher, that it's a good thing to totally be revitalized and change your methods because it makes you a more interesting person, aside from the fact that it might be of more, or greater benefit to the kids. But it is kind of exciting to change your style of teaching and do something different.

Although she is comfortable with change, Olivia acknowledged that change can be overwhelming:

I can only get on top of so much at a time, and I guess it depends on what's happening in my life at the time as well, at home, as well as school. . . Again, it's just sort of saying to yourself, this is what I can handle this year and that's what I'll do, and another year that's what I can handle.

Olivia acceptance of change came from a sense of control over the changes confronting her. Unlike the other participants she did not indicate any feelings of being overwhelmed or under pressure to conform to external expectations for change.

Many of the participants in this study were wary of the demands for system-wide, mandated educational change. They experienced previous provincial change efforts and recollected the demise of many of these initiatives. Their enthusiasm for adopting the initiatives waned as the initiatives were changed, and changed again. One participant noted:

Sometimes I think they just want curriculum change for the sake of change. A lot of things come around and come around then, then it's gone and something else is in. And some of the things are in and out so fast that, that if you didn't have time to read it, who needs to, because it's gone anyway.

The participants developed various strategies for attending to the mandated changes. Some participants ignored the initiatives if they could not derive the benefit for their students. One participant stated: "I look at them [the changes], it will benefit the kids and if it benefits the kids, yah! right on! But if it won't, I just choose to ignore them." Other participants slowly eased into the changes, taking small bites, savoring the flavor and then taking another small bite. Faye described one of her strategies:

At times it's been difficult, and for me it's been gradual, and that's the way I can handle it. [slight pause], and I sort of find my comfort zone and once I've, I've achieved that and I feel I can try something new, I'll go on.

Another participant noted her frustration as she tried to address the myriad of changes:

I think it's frustrating again trying to keep up with all the changes. Maybe there's a better way, I don't know. I don't know what it would be. But I think it's hard to try and learn all about all the new things and be teaching day to day at the same time. It's almost like we need, again if we could work for four years or something and then have a year off to work on new curriculums and learn about them and really know them properly and then come back and, and teach again for another four or five years.

None of the participants in this study were against change per se. They were willing and keen to pursue professional development opportunities to cultivate their personal professional interests. Mandated curriculum changes, on the other hand, were considered to be imposed by jurisdictions external to the school. Most of the participants noted that they accepted and implemented the changes that they believed to be beneficial for their students. Mandated educational change, though, was not seen as a positive force for many of the participants. They were leery of large scale government change because experience showed previous initiatives to be fraught with insufficient funding, nebulous goals, and inadequate technical support. Many participants indicated they did not want to implement educational changes that were not proven to be worthwhile, or that lacked longevity. One participant relished the opportunity to adopt new programs and accepted change with alacrity. She had a history of many personal changes. A few participants thought that political agenda initiated some mandated educational changes. Another commented that the people responsible for initiating and designing new programs were removed from the realities of the classroom.

The participants in this study did not emphasize the implementation of educational change. Although some participants expressed frustrations with the number of initiatives, most were confident in their abilities as teachers to accommodate the changes they considered to be worthwhile for their students.

What Are The Implications For Leadership Practice From This Study?

Leaders set the tone of a school. They are the architects of the school's social structure. The findings of this study suggest that leaders can support and nurture mid-career teachers by: 1) supporting genuine collaboration and collegiality; 2) acknowledging personal experiences and individual background;

3) providing opportunities for professional development; 4) encouraging and supporting risk-taking; 5) sharing information. These elements are all part of a school climate of respect, trust, and understanding that must be modeled, encouraged, and supported by the leader.

Support Genuine Collaboration and Collegiality

Throughout the interview participants indicated the importance of connection with students, colleagues, and administrators. Leaders can promote a collaborative culture within the school by encouraging and supporting teachers to work together. To enhance collaboration, leaders can provide time for teachers to work together and to discuss educational issues and concerns. Leaders must guard against imposing collaboration. Instead, they must be flexible and support collaborative efforts that are teacher initiated and teacher directed.

Acknowledge Personal Experiences and Individual Background

Mid-career teachers bring a wealth of personal and professional experiences to the classroom. Leaders can acknowledge the diversity of these experiences and encourage teachers to share their expertise and their knowledge with their colleagues. Leaders should also consider the career cycle of teachers when planning staff development, grade changes, or school organization. Energy level, interest and commitment can vary during different stages of a career.

Leaders must also be aware that the family life cycle may affect the amount of time and energy mid-career teachers can devote outside the classroom for extra-curricular activities. Participants in the study with young children had a fixed schedule that allowed for little flexibility; however, participants with grown children noted a willingness to devote more time and energy to extra-curricular projects.

Provide Opportunities for Professional Development

All participants in the study were excited about professional development. They believed professional development activities were a critical and vital component for growth as a teacher. Leaders can support teacher development by providing time and support for professional development activities such as conferences, workshops, and meetings. A list of these, and other professional development opportunities, should be visible and easily accessible.

Discretionary funds could also be allocated to provide financial assistance to teachers. In addition, the school could subscribe to professional journals and these could be made available to the teachers on a sign-out basis. Leaders should encourage teachers to share information gleaned from conferences and workshops with their colleagues. Time could be set aside at a staff meeting to facilitate the sharing of information.

Encourage and Support Risk-taking

The participants in the study were confident in their teaching abilities. They had a pool of experiences upon which to draw whenever they encountered an obstacle. These experiences were an evolving reference set. By continuing to expand and broaden their experience base mid-career teachers extended their knowledge and understanding and nurtured confidence in their teaching abilities. Leaders could encourage mid-career teachers to expand their repertoire by fostering a school climate that encouraged and supported risk-taking. By modeling risk-taking behavior leaders could demonstrate that others could risk failure without ridicule or repercussion.

Share Information

The participants in this investigation indicated high levels of frustration when they were asked to complete tasks or implement curricula without consultation. Lack of adequate reliable information often contributes to anxiety

and distress. Leaders could alleviate some of these stresses by sharing information and timelines with teachers. By creating and supporting an open, collaborative culture in the school, leaders support and respect the professional autonomy of mid-career teachers. Teachers would have accurate information to make informed professional decisions.

At the heart of the implications for leadership practice is action. Leaders can support mid-career teachers by being supportive and understanding of the teachers in the school and modeling trust, respect, and consideration.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a description of the personal experiences of seven mid-career teachers and answered the research questions posed at the outset of the investigation.

At the beginning of the chapter, a personal profile of each participant set the context for the discussion of the themes gleaned from the participants' interviews. Direct quotations from the participants' interviews illustrated the personal profiles and the themes.

The participants' experiences provided a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of being a mid-career teacher. Nine themes, seven major and two minor, form the common experiences of the participants. The majority of participants in the study refer to the topics depicted by the major themes. The major themes are:

1. Connection,
2. Self-knowledge,
3. Growth and development,
4. Importance of balance between work and home,
5. Demands of teaching,

6. Professional well-being,
7. Time as a measured commodity.

Minor themes refer to the experiences of more than one participant but were not mentioned by the majority of the participants. The minor themes drawn from the participants' interviews are:

1. Renewed commitment,
2. Insecurity.

Although mandated educational change was not a central issue for the participants in this study, all participants related experiences about provincially mandated change efforts. These experiences, though, were a small component of the teaching experience. The issue of mandated educational change was often combined with the topic of change generally.

The findings of this study suggest that leaders can support and nurture mid-career teachers by:

1. Supporting genuine collaboration and collegiality,
2. Acknowledging personal experiences and individual background,
3. Providing opportunities for professional development,
4. Encouraging and supporting risk-taking,
5. Sharing information.

The final chapter summarizes the research methods, discusses the findings and connects these findings with the research literature. In addition, chapter 5 outlines the significance of the research and lists considerations for future study.

Notes

1. I. E. Seidman, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences* (New York, NY: Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 1991), 12.

Chapter 5

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Summary of Research Problem

This investigation focused on an exploration of the experiences of mid-career elementary school teachers during a period of mandated, systemic educational change. The three purposes of this study were: (a) to describe and explore the experiences of teachers in mid-career; (b) to relate how mid-career teachers experience mandated educational change; and (c) to examine the implications of a mid-career teacher population for leadership practice.

The research questions addressed within the study included:

- 1) What are the experiences of teachers in mid-career?
- 2) How do mid-career teachers experience system-wide, mandated educational change?
- 3) What are the implications for leadership practice from this study?

Summary of Methods

This qualitative study used an in-depth, phenomenologically based interview approach. In this method "interviewers use, primarily, open-ended questions. Their major task is to build upon and explore their participants'

responses to those questions. The goal is to have the participant reconstruct his or her experience within the topic under study."¹ This approach was chosen to address the experience of elementary teachers in mid-career who taught in a climate of mandated educational change.

At the outset of the project, the researcher conducted a pilot study. The researcher reviewed the data gathered from the pilot study to refine the interview questions and the interview procedures. The pilot study resulted in minor changes to the phrasing of the guiding questions and the placement of the recording equipment. The researcher refined the research protocol to reflect those suggestions before initiating the study.

After incorporating the information gleaned from the pilot study, the researcher interviewed seven elementary mid-career teachers from an urban school district in British Columbia. The interview schedule included three in-depth sessions: during the first interview the participants reconstructed early experiences including memories of university courses, student teaching practicums, and first years of teaching; during the second session the participants described the experience of being a mid-career teacher and related specific anecdotes to illustrate their narratives; and during the final interview the participants had the opportunity to reflect upon the significance of the other interview sessions and make sense of their experience as mid-career teachers.

The researcher analyzed the interviews for emerging themes using inductive techniques described variously by Moustakas, Seidman, Denzin, and Van Manen and modified by the researcher.² The nine step process included: 1) bracketing - setting aside all information that was relevant to the research topic; 2) horizontalization - highlighting key phrases and statements of interest; 3) determining the invariant constituents - testing each key phrase or expression for relevance and pertinence to the research topic; 4) clustering and thematizing -

drawing themes from invariant constituents; 5) validation - confirming the compatibility and accuracy of the themes with participants' transcripts; 6) incubation - studying and reflecting on the themes; 7) personal descriptions - developing personal profiles and detailing each participant's experiences in mid-career; 8) interpretation - identifying the meaning and essence of elementary teachers' mid-career experience from the key themes; and 9) researcher reflection - the researcher's personal examination of what the research experience meant to her.

Summary of Findings

All participants related many varied and diverse stories about their experiences in mid career. The personal profiles attested to the rich, unique background of each participant. Although each participant experienced mid-career in a personal manner, the analysis of the participants' interviews revealed descriptions that represented similar themes. The consistency of these themes enabled the researcher to address the research questions.

What are the Experiences of Teachers in Mid Career?

The study participants shared many personal stories and experiences which illustrated seven major themes. Major themes referred to topics that every participant addressed more than once during the interview series.

1. Connection. Participants related the importance of connection with students, colleagues, and administrators. This bond provided a supportive professional and personal network and was considered vital to developing a personal sense of belonging to the school. Participants indicated that connection among colleagues and long term association with the school fostered dedication and allegiance to the school community.

2. **Self-knowledge.** All participants expressed a deeper understanding of who they were as teachers and as people. They perceived themselves as capable, knowledgeable teachers and emphasized that their professional and personal experiences helped them define the parameters of their work and their personal priorities. Some participants described how their teaching experiences have provided a pool of understandings that act as a reference set for ongoing decisions about their teaching practice. Others emphasized the development of specific aspects of self-knowledge, such as understanding their teaching style, preferring certain classroom management techniques, or recognizing personal limits.

3. **Growth and development.** Every participant commented on the necessity of ongoing professional growth and development. They all engaged in some form of professional development whether it was reading professional journals, attending conferences, participating in district workshops or attending university courses. Professional development opportunities were deemed essential for growth as an educator. Participants also underlined that the pursuit of professional development activities contributed to the development and sustenance of connections with colleagues in other schools and other districts which enabled them to extend their professional horizons beyond the immediate school community.

4. **Balance between work and home.** Most participants expressed the desire to maintain a healthy balance between work and home. Participants reiterated the necessity to manage their work schedule so that school work did not usurp personal time. Some participants were more successful than others at maintaining this balance. The cycle of the family appeared to directly affect the time each participant could spend at work. Those who did not have young families were more flexible than those who had to maintain a fixed schedule to

accommodate young children. Participants concluded that it was essential to establish and maintain personal priorities.

5. Demands of teaching. The majority of participants asserted that teaching is a demanding profession. They stated that there was an increase in the number and scope of curricula, that parents are more vocal, that social issues demanded more time and energy in the classroom, and that there was generally more to accomplish. The participants portrayed these changes as pressures upon the classroom teacher. They perceived these external conditions as diminishing a teacher's sense of control over his or her teaching day.

6. Professional well-being. The majority of participants expressed confidence and self-assurance in their abilities as educators. They perceived themselves as capable, knowledgeable educators. They felt they brought extensive professional and personal experiences to the classroom. These experiences formed the touchstone for ongoing decision-making. Continued successes in the classroom added to a solid foundation of experience and, in turn, enhanced confidence in teaching practice. The participants exuded confidence in their teaching abilities; they knew they could do the job well. They also described the feeling of success when working with students who are learning and growing.

7. Time as a measured commodity. Many participants viewed time as a finite resource that had profound consequences on their life. They felt there was never enough time to pursue all the activities they believed they should be completing. Whether at work or at home, trying to balance a multitude of demands within a set time frame was an ongoing challenge. Participants stated the job of teaching was never complete because there was always something else that could be attempted.

Minor themes were considered significant for several participants, but were not mentioned by each participant also emerged from the analysis of the narratives. Minor themes were areas mentioned by few participants as significant to them but were not identified by every participant. These themes offered additional insight into the experiences of mid-career teachers, but cannot be construed as common experiences. They included:

1. Renewed commitment to teaching. Some participants indicated that shifts in priorities afforded them additional time to revive their commitment to teaching. They had time to reflect upon their teaching practice and to engage in extra projects they found interesting and relevant. These participants viewed teaching as a vocation.

2. Insecurity. Personal insecurities developed when the participants felt their job was threatened. One participant, low in seniority because of movement between school district jurisdictions, was acutely aware of the ramifications of lay-offs due to a decrease in pupil enrollment. While others in her age bracket had years of seniority and did not face losing their job, the threat of lay-off caused her consternation. Another participant saw the rapid increase in the use of technology and the rate of development of new computer applications as threatening her occupation. She saw the future possibilities of technology and worried that teachers, herself included, may become redundant.

How Do Mid-Career Teachers' Experience Mandated Change?

The participants made a distinction between mandated, system-wide educational change and locally initiated or personal change in educational practice. The issue of mandated educational change was not a central issue which the participants in this investigation deliberated upon at great length. They directed many of their comments to the process of change and their feelings about changing their teaching practice.

The majority of participants were wary of mandated educational change and they nurtured a robust skepticism because they had witnessed a myriad of failed initiatives which were once touted as critical, important, and essential. The corporate memory for implementation misadventures appeared to be quite tenacious. The disintegration of the implementation process through lack of inservice support and inadequate funding caused frustration and disillusionment. In addition, some participants expressed the belief that many of the changes proffered by the government were recycled from old initiatives under the guise of a new label. These presumptions led participants to take a long calculated look at any proposed changes before making adjustments to their teaching practice.

All participants devised strategies for coping with the demands for change. Some participants ignored the directives, some implemented what they thought to be of benefit to their students, and others adopted the initiatives slowly over time. The strategies for confronting the mandated change efforts were specific to the participant, but most participants commented that any educational change had a much better chance of being implemented if it was adequately supported over time through sustained inservice and sufficient funding.

Participants had a positive attitude toward locally or personally initiated change. They felt that it was necessary to keep informed of current trends in educational research and to adopt changes in methodology and program that were meaningful to their students, and relevant to them. Many participants sought out professional inservice opportunities and read educational journals, books, and articles. The participants indicated that they wanted to set their own priorities and timelines for making changes in their professional practice.

Implications for Leadership Practice

The implications for leadership practice outlined in this study reflect the common experiences of the research participants. They indicated several needs and expectations as mid-career teachers which suggest areas of consideration for leaders. These suggestions for leaders may help to ensure a supportive working environment. They included:

1. Supporting genuine collaboration and collegiality. The participants indicated the necessity of a collegial and collaborative work environment that supported open communication. They stated that their colleagues were a pivotal support network. As complex social issues continue to impact the day-to-day operation of the classroom, they need the reassurance and support of their colleagues to cope with emerging concerns. The participants also articulated the need to discuss professional issues with colleagues. Leaders can provide time for teacher groups to meet and discuss curricular developments and other issues by scheduling collaborative time in the timetable. They can also make arrangements for a suitable meeting place and access to appropriate resources.

2. Acknowledging personal experiences and individual background. The participants' narratives highlighted the variation in professional experience, background, and stages of family life. Teachers bring a vast array of talents and experiences to the teaching profession. The participants indicated that they like to be acknowledged for their experience, background and professional expertise. Leaders can acknowledge the talent pool in the school and encourage the teachers to act as resources in their areas of expertise.

3. Providing opportunities for professional development. Professional development opportunities were highly prized and deemed vital by participants as a vehicle for continuous growth and development. They suggested that teachers need the opportunity to pursue their personal professional interests

beyond the classroom. Leaders can support mid-career teachers in their professional interests by encouraging attendance at professional conferences and also by supporting funding assistance through the district and the teachers' organization. Other avenues for professional development support may include purchasing school subscriptions to educational journals and adding an educational research information update at staff meetings.

4. Encouraging and supporting risk-taking. The participants described high levels of self-assurance and confidence in their abilities as educators. They suggested that a school environment which encouraged and supported risk-taking enhanced their sense of confidence and their professional well-being. They felt they could try new methods, and risk failure, without losing credibility. Leaders can advocate and support risk-taking by acknowledging teachers' attempts to expand their repertoire and encouraging them to share their experiences with other staff members.

5. Sharing information. Many participants felt overwhelmed by the number of new initiatives that were being introduced. Although they did not dwell on the issue of mandated initiatives they were cognizant of demands from the Ministry of Education. The participants indicated that current accurate information enabled them to make informed decisions and set professional priorities. The sharing of information is a double-edged sword as an unfettered flow of information can lead to immobilization, yet when information is withheld it can breed frustration and mistrust. Leaders can support teachers by sharing the information they receive through providing information highlights, synthesizing the details, and suggesting realistic implementation timelines that support the school goals. Teachers must be informed so they can act, but not overcome by a myriad of superfluous detail.

Discussion of the Findings

The participants in this study were elementary school teachers in middle adulthood between the ages of 40 and 55 who had at least 15 years of teaching experience. Their profiles closely paralleled the adult development theories of middle age.¹ The participants indicated a clear delineation of middle age. They looked at their life position within life contexts rather than chronological age.

Family structure was used to delineate different career phases:

I had more time to spend at school at the beginning of my career when it was just me. Then I had less time when the kids were little and now I have medium time.

The participants also had an elevated awareness of maintaining good physical and mental health. Some participants stated an awareness of their physical vulnerability. They indicated feeling "more tired" and one participant commented, "We are all getting older. I know I'm tired. I get more tired." Another suggested, "I'm not a young chicken anymore." Even though some participants expressed fatigue, they felt they were at the height of their careers. They had an understanding of the teaching profession and they believed in their abilities as teachers.

The experience of the participants supported Neugarten's features of middle age.² She suggested that one of the salient features of middle age is an awareness of being in the prime of life which includes a heightened sense of self-understanding, a sense of expertise, and it is also seen as a of maximum capacity with the ability to handle a highly complex environment. The participants in this study were confident and self-assured in their abilities as teachers. They understood the expectations of their profession and enjoyed their professional accomplishments. They also exhibited a strong sense of self, recognizing their capabilities and their limitations. Neugarten also indicated that middle aged

adults have a changed time perspective, viewing time as finite and time-left-to-live rather than time-after-birth. Many participants gauged their time in the profession by how many years they had left before retirement. Time, therefore, was a precious resource. There was never enough time to complete all the tasks they wanted to and they did not want to waste time on jobs that were unimportant or irrelevant.

The participants in this study represented distinct aspects of the teacher development models. Vonk outlined three stages in a teacher's mid-career: 1) the first professional phase, when the teacher demonstrates skills and accomplishments of a professional; 2) the phase of reorientation to oneself and the profession, during which the teacher may question his or her commitment to teaching; and 3) the second professional phase, when some teachers re-energize and continue on to further professional accomplishments.³ The participants in this study described qualities associated with two of Vonk's three stages of mid-career, the first stage and the third stage. All of the participants were confident in their abilities as teachers and they expressed self-assurance and pride in their accomplishment. A few participants, while still maintaining confidence in their teaching abilities, indicated a revitalization and a renewed interest in teaching. They showed interest in pursuing personal professional goals. No participants indicated doubt or lack of commitment to teaching, but because they volunteered to participate, based on interest in the research project, it is possible that those teachers who have less energy and enthusiasm would not decide to participate in a research study.

The mid-career teaching experiences of the participants also supported aspects of Huberman's life cycle orientation to teacher career stages.⁴ Although this model reflected the experiences of secondary school teachers in French-speaking Switzerland, the model offered further information to consider when

analyzing the experiences of the mid-career teachers. Huberman connected years of teaching with themes or phases. In years nineteen to thirty, he suggested that there are different streams, teachers either exhibit serenity in teaching or they exhibit conservatism. The majority of teachers in this study indicted a strong sense of serenity with the job of teaching and were happy in their role as teachers. They felt less vulnerable to the opinions of others, although they did express dismay at having to defend the teaching profession to the public. The participants continued to challenge themselves through professional development activities, but they did not voice any desire to change their job. Although some participants described dissatisfaction with aspects of teaching, none chronically complained. Huberman associates conservatism with less motivation, complaining, and lack of risk-taking.

The Teacher Career Cycle Model developed by Fessler and Christensen is flexible and fluid and includes eight separate phases: pre-service; induction; competency building; enthusiasm and growth; career frustration; career stability; career wind-down; and career exit. Many of the experiences of the participants indicated strong association with the stage of career stability. The participants were confident in their abilities, they had tenure, they felt they could state what they believed, and others came to them for information and assistance. One participant did not securely connect with this category, for although she was content, confident, and enthusiastic about her job, her lack of seniority in the school district precluded a sense a job security which in turn introduced instability into her life.

The attitudes of the participants toward the change process supported the literature on personal and educational change. Participants acknowledged that change is a process.⁶ Michael Fullan suggested that there were three distinct and important phases in the change process: initiation; implementation; and

continuation. In the first phase, initiation, the vision is communicated, modeled and supported: "Ideally, the best beginning combines the three R's of relevance, readiness, and resources."⁷ Implementation, the second phase, is a long complex process during which educators search for personal meaning in the change and the final phase, continuation, depicts the internalization of the change. The participants in this study did not see the personal relevance of many of the large scale, mandated changes, so perhaps the vision of the change was not adequately communicated. They also emphasized that a large number of initiatives were poorly supported, citing a lack of funding and inadequate resources. The participants attitudes towards the adoption of change supported the Concerns-Based Adoption Model developed at the University of Texas in Austin. Many participants viewed change as a necessary inconvenience. They posed questions about the necessity for change, the relevance of the change, the management of the change, and the affects of the change. This model was a valuable tool for examining the participants' connection to a change.

At the core of the implications for leadership practice is the establishment of a collaborative school culture that is based upon trust, respect and consideration. Andy Hargreaves emphasized that a collaborative working relationship among teachers and their colleagues tends to be spontaneous, voluntary, development-oriented, pervasive across time and space, and unpredictable.⁸ He cautions against forcing the issue as contrived collegiality, collegiality that is administratively regulated, compulsory, implementation-oriented, fixed in time and space, and predictable, will not achieve the desired connection.⁹ Roland Barth also suggested that,

Individuals enter into collaborative relationships only after they come to realize that they cannot achieve what they want to achieve acting alone. . . Principals alone cannot "inservice" teachers any

more than teachers can ensure that all their students will be voracious learners. Principals, teachers, students, and parents working together, on the other hand, can create within their schools an ecology of reflection, growth, and refinement of practice—a community of learners.¹⁰

The participants indicated their preference for school situations where teachers, students, parents, and administrators were working together towards the same goal. Leaders must be encouraged to build "a community of learners."

The interviews presented a detailed, rich perspective of the experience of being a mid-career teacher. The findings in this study were consistent with the information gathered during the literature review. There were no contradictions with past research and the narratives of the participants added texture and detail to the abstract models of teacher development.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study was threefold. First, the study contributed to our understanding of the lives of elementary teachers in mid career. It provided information about their cares and concerns and elucidated their feelings, thoughts, and perceptions about teaching in mid career. Contextually grounded in a time of mandated, educational change, it also depicted the participants reaction to systemic change.

Second, this study provided mid-career teachers with the opportunity to share their personal experiences in education and to develop a deeper understanding of these experiences. The participants in a qualitative study are co-researchers and as they engage in the research process they are contributing their unique understanding to the human experience. The participants in this study had time to reflect upon their professional practices and to engage in a

process of self-examination. They expressed an appreciation for the opportunity to make greater sense of their experiences as they reflected upon the questions. They noted that this led to greater self-awareness and a chance to assess, and perhaps change, their behavior and personal priorities.

Finally, this study provides insight for the practice of leadership. The demographics of the British Columbian teaching force indicate a bulge of teachers in mid career. This demographic trend, along with mandated educational change, presents many challenges and opportunities for leadership practice in schools. This study offers school leaders practical suggestions to address the needs and concerns of mid-career teachers and to improve their working environment.

Researcher Reflection

The research process was a long, but fascinating journey that left me with a deep appreciation for the subtle nuances of the qualitative research process. This research followed a detailed process that required patience and tenacity. The time, energy, and effort expended during the process was insignificant when compared to the rich, meaningful information gleaned from the participants' narratives.

The research process was a learning process. I learned to refine my interview techniques, incorporating wait time and various, appropriate levels of questioning. I learned to appreciate and trust the qualitative research process. When the volume of narratives seemed overwhelming, strict adherence to the process enable me to overcome feelings of frustration and doubt. This study also increased my understanding of myself and my teaching practice. I saw immutable connections with other teachers. The interest and concern for children and the value of education was consistent through the narratives. I

learned how other teachers cope with the challenges of contemporary social issues in their classrooms. Their experiences and perceptions invited me to reflect upon my own teaching practice and how I approach these issues.

I was genuinely surprised by the openness and willingness of the participants to share their experiences. Not only were they candid and friendly, they were also understanding and accommodating. They rearranged schedules and meetings so they could be interviewed. Each participant expressed interest in the research topic and was keen to be involved. They were pleased to share their stories and their experiences.

The number of commonalities among the experiences of the participants was unexpected. I did not anticipate the degree of similarity that evolved. I expected the themes to be more disparate and less cohesive because I thought that the demands outside the school environment would impinge more emphatically upon work life.

For me, the qualitative research process was like panning for gold. One sifts through volumes of material to search for the nuggets. When these nuggets are finally separated, the gold from the gravel, the contrast is brilliant. Similarly, as I sifted through the volumes of narrative description, the key phrases shone through the extraneous text as the nuggets of the mid-career experience.

Recommendations and Considerations for Future Study

1. The use of three, in-depth interviews to address the experiences of teachers in mid career was useful and informative. It was beneficial to schedule the interviews over a period of three weeks to provide time for the participants to reflect upon the interview and to bring additional insights to the following session. To encourage participant reflection, researchers should consider augmenting the interview data with reflective writing by the participants

between interview sessions. The use of a reflective journal may assist the participants to clarify their thoughts and feelings about the interview process and may provide additional insight into the experience being investigated.

2. This study focused on the experience of mid-career teachers in the elementary school system in one urban district in British Columbia. There were many commonalities among the experiences of these teachers. Many of these common experiences may exist because of the geographic location. It would be interesting to study the experiences of teachers in remote, rural communities to increase understanding their situation. Do the experiences of rural educators parallel the experiences of their colleagues in the city? What are the challenges of teaching in a remote district?

3. Although this study focused on the experience of mid-career teachers, administrators are also an integral part of the school community. Many administrators are in mid career as a function of the requirements of their position. It would be interesting to investigate the experiences of mid-career administrators and elucidate their cares and concerns. What are the experiences of mid-career administrators? What are the challenges facing administrators in mid career? How do they perceive their position in relation to teachers?

4. This study did not address the issue of gender. Noddings, Gilligan, and Miller suggest that males and females approach life experiences in a different manner.¹¹ Huberman, Grounauer, and Marti address the differences between the teaching experiences of males and females in high school, but do not attend to the experience of teachers in the elementary level.¹² Research might consider the mid-career experiences of males and females in the elementary school setting.

5. Teachers in mid-career reflect all phases of the family cycle: some have young children, others have teenagers, still others have grandchildren or no

children at all; there are single parents, singles, extended families, and blended families. Participants in this study indicated that the phase of family cycle impacts their work routines. Further investigation is required to explore the relationship of the family cycle to the experience of teaching in mid-career.

Notes

1. See the following publications: Erik H. Erikson, *The Life Cycle Completed: A Review*. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1982) and Daniel J. Levinson, "A Theory of Life Structure Development in Adulthood," in *Higher Stages of Human Development: Perspectives on Adult Growth*, eds. C. N. Alexander and E. J. Langer (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 35-53; Daniel J. Levinson, "Toward a Conception of the Adult Life Course," in *Themes of Work and Love in Adulthood*, eds. N. J. Smelser & E. H. Erikson (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980), 265-290; D. J. Levinson, C. N. Darrow, E. B. Klein, M. H. Levinson, and B. McKee, *The Seasons of a Man's Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978) and Roger Gould, *Transformations: Growth and Change in Adult Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978) and Bernice L. Neugarten, "The Awareness of Middle Age," in *Middle Age and Aging*, ed. Bernice L. Neugarten (Chicago, Ill.: The University of Chicago Press, 1968), 93-98; Bernice L. Neugarten, "Adult Personality: Toward a Psychology of the Life Cycle," in *Middle Age and Aging*, ed. Bernice L. Neugarten (Chicago, Ill.: The University of Chicago Press, 1968), 137-147.
2. Bernice L. Neugarten, "The Awareness of Middle Age," in *Middle Age and Aging*, ed. Bernice L. Neugarten (Chicago, Ill.: The University of Chicago Press, 1968), 93-98.
3. R. Fessler and J. C. Christensen, *The Teacher Career Cycle: Understanding and Guiding the Professional Development of Teachers* (Boston, Mass.: Allyn and Bacon, 1992), 28.
4. Michael Huberman, "The Professional Life Cycle of Teachers," *Teachers College Record* 12, no. 1 (1989): 31-57. For a more detailed examination of the life cycle of teachers refer to: Michael Huberman with Marie-Madeleine Grounauer and Jurg Marti, *The Lives of Teachers*, trans. Jonathan Neufeld (New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 1993).

5. R. Fessler and J. C. Christensen, *The Teacher Career Cycle: Understanding and Guiding the Professional Development of Teachers* (Boston, Mass.: Allyn and Bacon, 1992).

6. Michael Fullan is attributed with coining the phrase, "Change is a process, not an event." For a detailed examination of the educational change process see: Michael Fullan, *The Meaning of Educational Change* (Ontario: OISE Press/The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 1982) and Michael Fullan and Suzanne Stiegelbauer, *The New Meaning of Educational Change*, 2nd ed. (New York: Teachers College Press, 1991).

7. M. Fullan and S. Stiegelbauer, *The New Meaning of Educational Change*, 2nd ed. (New York: Teachers College Press, 1991), 63.

8. Andy Hargreaves, *Changing Teachers, Changing Times: Teachers' Work and Culture in the Postmodern Age* (New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 1994), 192-3.

9. *Ibid.*, 195.

10. Roland S. Barth, *Improving Schools from Within: Teachers, parents, and principals can make the difference* (San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1991), 162.

11. These authors address women's development: C. Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993); J. B. Miller, *Toward a New Psychology of Women*, 2nd ed. (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1986); N. Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics & Moral Education* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1986).

12. M. Huberman, M. Grounauer, and J. Marti, *The Lives of Teachers*. Translated from the German by J. Neufeld (New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 1993).

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

MINISTRY PUBLICATIONS

MINISTRY PUBLICATIONS

Mandate for the Education System

- The Report of the Royal Commission of Education: A Legacy for Learners: Summary of Findings, 1988
- Policy Directions, A Response to the Sullivan Royal Commission on Education, 1989
- Mandate for the School System

Resource Allocation

- School Finance '90: Changes to the School Finance System
- Bill 11: *School Amendment Act* 1990. Highlights of School Finance Legislation 1990
- Education Funding in British Columbia 1989/90
- Public School Finance

Legislation

- *Teaching Profession Act*
- *School Act*
- School Regulations and Minister of Education Orders
- *Independent School Act*
- Independent School Act Regulations

Education Principles

- Year 2000: A Framework for Learning
- Highlight Year 2000: A Framework for Learning
- Primary Program: Foundation Document
- Primary Program: Resource Document
- Intermediate Program Document (Draft)
- Graduation Program Document (Draft)

Implementation Guidelines

- Working Plan

Source: British Columbia Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, *Annual Report: Ministry of Education, July 1, 1988 to June 30, 1989* (ISSN 0711-9151) (Victoria, B. C.: Queen's Printer for British Columbia, 1990), 111.

APPENDIX B

GUIDING QUESTIONS

GUIDING QUESTIONS

The following questions are a general guideline to ensure that all participants are asked the same kind of questions during the course of the interview series.

INTERVIEW ONE

1. Can you tell me how you became interested in teaching as a career?
2. Can you tell me about the people that influenced your decision to become a teacher?
3. How did your friends, family, community, and educational experiences influence your decision to become a teacher?

INTERVIEW TWO

1. Do you have any questions or comments about what we talked about in the first interview?
2. Can you tell me what a 'typical day' for you is?
3. What activities do you do within the context of your job? How have they changed throughout your career?
4. What has been your experience with the provincial change effort?
5. Can you tell me any stories about your experiences with change in your classroom? your school? your district?

INTERVIEW THREE

1. Do you have any questions or comments about what we talked about in the second interview?
2. How do you feel about your career in the context of the educational changes that are happening in the province?
3. What have been the most memorable experiences of your career?

APPENDIX C

GUIDANCE FOR INTERVIEWS

GUIDANCE FOR INTERVIEWING

1. Listen more, talk less.
2. Follow up on what the participant says.
3. Ask questions when you do not understand.
4. Ask to hear more about a subject.
5. Explore, don't probe.
6. Avoid leading questions.
7. Ask open-ended questions.
8. Follow up, don't interrupt.
9. Ask participants to talk to you as if you were someone else.
10. Ask participants to tell a story.
11. Keep participants focused and ask for concrete details.
12. Do not take the ebbs and flows of interviewing too personally.
13. Share experiences on occasion.
14. Ask participants to reconstruct, not to remember.
15. Avoid reinforcing your participants' responses.
16. Explore laughter.
17. Follow your hunches.
18. Use an interview guide cautiously.
19. Tolerate silence.

Condensed from: I. E. Seidman, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences* (New York: Teacher College Press, Columbia University, 1991), 56-70.

APPENDIX D

CONSENT FORM

University of San Diego

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH STUDY

Susan Johnston, a doctoral student in the School of Education at the University of San Diego, is conducting a research study to find out more about the experience of mid-career teachers.

If I agree to take part in the study, I will be asked to participate in three audio-taped interviews of about 90 minutes over a period of approximately six weeks.

I understand that little risk or discomfort is anticipated other than those encountered in daily life. A possible benefit I may derive from participation in the study may be to clarify and enhance my understanding of the impact of educational change on my life.

I understand that participation in this study is purely voluntary and I may withdraw at any time without risk or penalty.

Research records will be kept completely confidential. My identity will not be disclosed without my written consent. A pseudonym will be used for participants, schools, and districts.

There is no agreement, written or verbal, beyond that expressed on this consent form.

Susan Johnston has explained this study to me and answered my questions. If I have other questions or research related concerns, I may reach Susan Johnston at (home number) or (school number).

I, the undersigned, understand the above explanations and, on that basis, I give consent to my voluntary participation in this research.

Signature of Participant

Date

Location

Signature of Principal Researcher

Date