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AN ANALYSIS OF DIALOGUE FOR UNDERSTANDING EDUCATORS' STRESS:  
IMPLICATIONS FOR VOICE, LISTENING AND LEADERSHIP

by

Joanna R. Doonan

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

University of San Diego

1998

Dissertation Committee

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## ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

### AN ANALYSIS OF DIALOGUE FOR UNDERSTANDING EDUCATORS' STRESS: IMPLICATIONS FOR VOICE, LISTENING, AND LEADERSHIP

Research indicates that educator stress is a widespread phenomenon that not only impacts the educational community, but society at large. This being the case, there is an urgent need to consider this phenomenon within responsible school leadership. In particular, understanding what creates stress for educators, and learning more about leadership responses that would support educators under stress, are critical to more holistic school leadership, and for enabling teachers to envision a viable future for themselves. Thus, the purpose of this study is to examine how school principals and colleagues might respond to educators coping with professional stress, so that they can concomitantly support the educators' needs, the needs of the educational community, and the society at large. Clearly, educator stress is not simply a local issue for a particular teacher, at a particular moment in time, but for the whole of a career.

Problems of educator stress affect the community of students, staff, parents, and the educator's family. Educator stress has a debilitating effect on the educator's personal well-being, performance in the classroom, and the process of education. Much has been written about various

aspects of the teaching environment considered fertile for producing stress. Quantitative studies have examined job-related stressors for teachers, linking organizational variables with the experience of stress. However, a qualitative study, such as this, with the intent of developing understanding of the leadership wisdom which might be gleaned from the stories of teachers who have coped well with stress, may enrich the existing research.

This research is a qualitative, phenomenologically-based interview study of six experienced public school teachers reporting to have undergone a prolonged time of workplace stress, to understand their responses to stress. This research discovers what factors they believe enabled them to triumph over stress. As such, this research examines their relationships with school principals or significant colleagues in order to determine if these relationships exacerbated or alleviated their stress.

The findings of this study reveal the critical importance of school leaders establishing trusting, caring, and supportive relationships with educators so that educators are able to give voice to their experience. Thus, dialogue is key for building collaborative educational communities that flourish. Furthermore, school principals need to recognize, encourage, and empower educators in their work. Moreover, in order to manage workplace stress, educators need to balance their workplace needs with their personal life, and maintain a healthy mind, a healthy body,

and a healthy spirit to address stress. The findings of this study offers leaders and educators new awarenesses that might be useful in building school communities in which both children and teachers might prosper, and in which teachers would better sense a viable future in their work.

DEDICATION

TO MY FAMILY

STEWART WAYNE AND JOEL LORNE, MY HUSBAND AND SON

LORNE SR. AND JOHANNA NADIGER, MY PARENTS

LORNE JR. AND PATRICIA, MY BROTHER AND SISTER-IN-LAW

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express heartfelt gratitude to my dissertation committee for their unwavering support and encouragement. For Mary Jo Abascal-Hildebrand, Johanna Hunsaker, and Ray Latta, I offer my most sincere appreciation for your generous and salient guidance throughout the Doctoral program in Leadership Studies. All of you have awakened my curiosity, inspired me, and blessed my travels throughout this journey. I am privileged to have been guided in my scholarship by you. I most sincerely thank each of you.

I am eternally grateful to my family, Stewart and Joel, my parents, my brother and sister-in-law, as well as my friends, for their caring and prayers throughout this academic endeavor. Your unwavering confidence and love for me surely gave me the strength and faith to complete this journey.

Lastly, I am deeply grateful to the persons who shared their stories in this study. Their experiences reflect profound wisdom and insight, and I am humbled by their trust in me. Their narratives disclose lessons that must be shared with the educational community in order to achieve excellence. Thank you for your vulnerability and willingness to express the truth. Most of all, thank you for your stories of wellness. Bless you!

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## CHAPTER I

### THE PROBLEM

#### Statement of the Problem

Research indicates that educator stress is a widespread phenomenon that not only affects the educational community, but society at large. This being the case, educator stress, as a phenomenon, ought to be seriously considered within responsible school leadership. Hence, it behooves us as educators to become more aware of the causes of job stress, become more astute in self-care, be able to recognize colleagues' stress in order to offer beneficial support, and to engage them in envisioning viable futures.

Thus, it is vitally important for educators to develop relationships with school principals that are both supportive and nurturing. These relationships may be critical to more holistic leadership. In addition, experienced teachers may be an appropriate group to study this problem of educator stress, as they have developed substantial skills and expertise through years of experience in their profession, and thus may be able to reflect upon and describe their experiences deeply, with hope and insight. These teachers may also be able to project their

solutions onto a future sense that there are still several years remaining in their careers.

Therefore, the intent of this study is to examine how school principals or professional colleagues might appropriately respond to other educators coping with professional stress. Such leadership ought to be both wise and prudent, enabling leaders to concomitantly respond to educators' needs, the needs of the educational community, and the society at large. Clearly, educator stress is not simply a local issue, for a particular teacher.

#### Background of the Problem

That educator stress in an occupational "health hazard" is evident throughout the literature (Rogers & Dodson, 1988). Many physical ailments have been correlated with teacher stress: hypertension, heart attacks, strokes, colitis, ulcers, constipation, skin diseases, and other disorders. Furthermore, psychological and nervous conditions such as anxiety attacks, insomnia, headaches or migraines may be attributed to stress (Friesen, 1989).

Ostensibly, educator stress impacts the community of students, faculty, parents and the teacher's family. Thus, teacher stress not only has a debilitating effect on teachers' personal well-being; but erodes performance in the classroom, and the process of education. When energy and enthusiasm are replaced with fatigue and demoralization, the

climate for creative endeavor in the classroom undoubtedly suffers. Thus, the students in the classroom may not be receiving the quality of educational instruction that leads to academic success. Clearly, the cost of teacher stress in human and economic dimensions is considerable (Otto, 1986).

Indeed, much has been written about various aspects of the teaching environment considered fertile for producing stress. Schwab (1986) makes a strong case for concern over teacher stress, citing poorly defined organizational goals as an accurate predictor for stress. There are many contributing stressful factors existent in our present educational system.

Additionally, researchers identify a lack of power in setting meaningful limits in their work environment as stressful (Friesen & Williams, 1985). If teachers experience conflictual demands and pressures, feel unable to make substantive contributions to their job, and lack balance between professional expectations and realistic goals; stress may occur. Feelings of entrapment result when teachers remain in the profession only for financial remuneration (Lutz, 1990).

Teacher attrition concerns researchers (Weber & Haskvitz, 1989). Although many factors may be responsible for teacher attrition, educator stress may indeed be one cause of this serious phenomenon. Farber (1991) reports that twenty-six percent of all current teachers are

seriously considering giving up teaching as a career within five years (Farber, 1991, p. 1). Furthermore, Farber contends that attrition rates for new teachers during their first five years on the job range from forty to fifty percent (p. 2). When the cumulative nature of stress exacts such a personal and professional cost that teachers leave the profession, it becomes imperative to examine the sources of educators' perceptions and responses to stress.

Moreover, there are critical implications for leadership when teachers exit their profession due to stress. Teacher attrition may be an extreme and serious consequence of teacher stress; learning proactive strategies to manage and support teachers in stress is a crucial part of holistic leadership.

#### Importance of the Study

Quantitative studies have examined job-related stressors for teachers, linking organizational variables with the experience of stress. However, few qualitative studies exist with the intent of developing understandings of the leadership wisdom which might be gleaned from the stories of teachers who have coped well with stress (Doonan, 1997). Tesch (1984) suggests that phenomenological research should address the important topic of teacher stress, in order to uncover deeper and fuller understandings of the experiences of teachers. Therefore, this qualitative

research, with its phenomenological approach, ultimately, may benefit the educational community with additional insights regarding the issue of teacher stress. Moreover, public attitudes and confidence of educators, according to Farber (1991, p. 2), has seriously declined in recent years. He states that forty-nine percent of teachers believe that the morale within the teaching profession has substantially declined.

In addition, there is limited public understanding of what enables educators to cope effectively with professional stress. Hence, it is critical for principals and colleagues to acquire an understanding of the experiences of educators in order to develop more appropriate and beneficial styles of support for stress-laden educators. Educators with years of experience in their career may provide more data about stress because they are more able to reflect and offer deeper insights (Neugarten, 1968), from their journey through a time of professional stress. These teachers may also offer insight for the future years remaining in their careers.

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to analyze and evaluate the responses of experienced teachers in order to contribute data and information that may be utilized to attend to the issue of educator stress.



Interviewing is an appropriate methodology for this study in several ways. Firstly, dialogue as a diagnostic tool enables the researcher to understand more fully the nuances and feelings of the participants. Secondly, as Seidman (1991) states, dialogue is a way of knowing; a meaning-making process. Dialogue is composed of experiences and reflections, and are ordered by the teller. Thirdly, interviewing allows the researcher to put a context on their experience, and thus understand behavior and actions. Interviewing is a powerful way to gain insight into educator stress through understanding the experience of individuals through language (Seidman, 1991). Thus, I believe that interviewing experienced teachers with the intent of understanding their stories, through analysis of their dialogue and meaning-making processes of their language, will enable me to gain insight into the coping strategies that assisted these teachers.

Therefore, key research questions will be used to guide an interview process with experienced teachers to uncover particular aspects of the educational environment they found stressful, as well as to learn their strategies for stress management. Analysis of their experiences will offer new awarenesses into the phenomenon of educator stress. Through the insights gleaned from addressing these key research questions, school leaders may be able to assist their stress-laden colleagues in a helpful manner.

Thus, the goal of this research is to explore which stress factors may be responsible for causing teachers problems, and to offer insights for educators generally about what school principals and colleagues can do to mitigate the stress factors, while supporting the educator on behalf of the entire community.

### Research Questions

The key research questions addressed in this study are as follows:

1. What is the relationship between teachers' experience and stress in the workplace? What behavioral changes are manifested in experienced teachers as a result of workplace stress?
2. How do experienced teachers respond to stress as a phenomena?
3. How might relationships with school principals and/or significant colleagues exacerbate or alleviate their stress? What are the implications for leadership?
4. How are stress and leadership interrelated and/or interdependent?

### Assumptions of the Study

The major assumption of this study is that leadership wisdom can be gleaned from the stories of experienced teachers who coped well with stress, through the methodology

of a phenomenologically-based, in-depth interview study. Accordingly, I am assuming that all experienced teachers have known some level of stress within the workplace, and will be able to reflect upon these experiences, and portray how they created a future for their careers, and for themselves.

#### Delimitations of the Study

This study is delimited to public school teachers in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia, Canada. It is delimited to investigating and examining individual teacher's perceptions of stress enacted within the workplace. Further, it is delimited to experienced teachers with a minimum of five years of teaching experience, because experienced teachers as a group may be able to reflect upon their experiences and gain insight into their coping mechanisms for stress. They may also be able to project their solutions onto a future sense that there are still several years remaining in their careers. Therefore, this study will not select or examine substitute teachers, teacher trainees, or teachers beginning their professional career, or very near retirement.

In addition, this study will not categorize gender differences of participants or specifically examine political, cultural, or religious influences contributing to

teacher stress. However, related issues are addressed, given however the data may cluster.

### Limitations

The interview questions may not reflect all the areas of professional stress that concern teachers. Teachers may hesitate to be forthright and present all factors or situations that cause them stress, or to disclose sources of stress affecting their teaching role.

### Specific Terminology

The key terms in this study are defined as follows:

dialogue: conversations that are differentiated from discussion by Senge (1990), who states that dialogue goes beyond any one individual's understanding in order to gain insights that cannot be achieved individually, such as by an interviewer who controls a set of questions. These conversations explore the full depth of people's experience and thought, moving beyond individual views. Hence, reflection is a key component of dialogue.

experienced teachers: teachers who have passed the novice or beginning stage of teaching, with a minimum of five years teaching experience.

mid career teachers: teachers who have been teaching for many years, making contributions to their

profession, but are still years away from retirement.

For the purposes of this study, these teachers will have a minimum of fifteen years teaching experience.

stress: when an individual's ability to adapt and cope with demands is overextended or overwhelmed;

professional stress: stress enacted within the workplace;

stress-laden: the condition of being overwhelmed or incapacitated by dysfunctional stress, frequently defined as 'burnout' throughout the literature on teacher stress.

#### Background of the Researcher

I am a secondary school counselor with seventeen years of experience. Throughout this time, I have counseled many faculty members who struggle with stress on the job. I have developed an appreciation for their sensitivity, vulnerability, and openness in attempting to honestly deal with their painful work stressors. Moreover, I believe that supportive relationships with significant colleagues may be healing; through practicing Ricoeur's concept of solicitude there may be healing for these educators facing stress.

I have also been a Christian Education Director, Youth Group Director, Sunday School Superintendent, Day Care and Preschool Director, Pre-marriage and Marriage Counselor, and Consultant. I traveled to Haiti for foster care services

for children, working with village women in health care, and spoken to Haitian high school students, through the services of a translator, about pursuing their dreams for an education. I believe I am a life-long learner; learning and growing never ceases. Formally, I have a Masters of Ministry degree in Pastoral Care and Counseling from Trinity Western University, a Masters of Arts in Education degree from San Diego State University, and am presently completing my Doctoral program with the Canadian cohort group, at the University of San Diego, in conjunction with San Diego State University.

Addressing the issue of researcher bias, Merriam (1988, p. 39) reminds us that "All research has its biases." Moreover, she contends that a good qualitative researcher is able to tolerate ambiguity, is a sensitive listener and analyst, and is a good communicator. Because the primary instrument in qualitative research is human, Merriam states that ". . . all observations and analyses are filtered through one's worldview, one's values, one's perspectives" (Merriam, p. 39). Accordingly, Guba and Lincoln (1981, p. 140) state that outstanding qualitative researchers are able to communicate warmth and empathy in their relationships with participants.

As a qualitative researcher, I know I have biases. I believe in the dignity of each individual life, the capacity for life-long learning, and the ability for each individual

to strive for full potential. I further believe that each individual has the resources to personally and professionally grow in order to adapt to the various stresses encountered in the workplace. Moreover, I also believe that stress is an integral part of life, and learning to manage stress can be a productive and constructive learning experience.

### Organization of the Study

Chapter I contained the statement of the problem of the phenomenon of educator stress, the background of the problem, the importance and purpose of this qualitative study, and the four key research questions guiding the study. The biases and background of the researcher concluded this chapter.

Chapter II includes a review of the literature on stress, and the relationship between leadership and stress for this phenomenologically-based, in-depth interview study.

Chapter III includes a discussion of the methodological overview of phenomenology, the interview research design for the study, selection and protection of participants, data collection, data analysis steps, pilot study, and summary.

Chapter IV includes the presentation and analysis of the findings according to the four key research questions, personal profiles of the participants, a composite profile of the participants, and the dialogic analysis according to

the research questions of this study. Implications for leadership practice are included. A metaanalysis concludes the chapter.

Chapter V includes a summary of this study on educator stress, implications and conclusions for leadership practice, and recommendations. Recommendations for further research concludes this study.

The appendices include a sample of the consent form, a selection criteria assessment form, the guiding questions for the interviews, and a letter of appreciation for the participants in this study.



## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### Introduction

The review of literature is divided into sections examining the phenomenon of educator stress. I define stress, identify distresses for teachers, and discuss the effects of stress on educators. In addition, I also discuss mechanisms for coping with stress, including the need for teachers to establish healing relationships with principals and significant colleagues, as well as giving voice to their concerns. I discuss and overview the writings of pertinent leadership scholars to complete this chapter reviewing the literature on educator stress.

Much research from the 1980's builds a conceptual framework, and shapes our understanding of the phenomenon of educator stress. Throughout the 1980's, researchers examined many contributing stressful factors existent within the educational system causing distress for teachers. Moreover, researchers claim that the teaching environment is indeed fertile for producing stress. The 1990's brought additional research clarifying these job-related stressors.

## Stress

### Definition of Stress

In order to fully comprehend the insidious nature of stress, it is necessary to first trace the antecedent role of stress through definition and causal factors. Hans Selye is considered one of the first authorities on the subject of stress. He defines stress as the ". . . the nonspecific response of the body to any demand made upon it." (Selye, 1974, p. 14). "Distress" is unpleasant stress while pleasant stress is "eustress." Stress must be understood and managed, but not entirely eliminated because a complete void of stress would result in death. Thus, eustress is a desirable and integral part of living (Friesen, 1989, p. 6). Distress and eustress is part of our everyday life experience. However, Selye states, that ". . . it is immaterial whether the agent or situation . . . is pleasant or unpleasant; all that counts is the intensity of the demand for readjustment or adaptation" (1974, p. 15). Thus, excessive individual demands, whether daily or intermittent, may deplete resources needed for a readjusted or adapted response to the stressor, which may be welcomed or unwelcomed.

Any stress response may be automatic or a learned behavior. Also, our stress response - readjustment or adaptation - is in three stages: alarm, adaptation, and

exhaustion: the cumulative nature of the response may manifest in serious illness. For example, a person who ignores the first stage of alarm, and continually suppresses any reaction, adaptation becomes more difficult. If a person does not adapt to the continual daily stressors encountered, a depleted state of exhaustion may occur. Hence, it is critical for educators to recognize these stages in order to respond effectively.

### Individual Perceptions of Stress

The effect of stress on an individual is complex. Otto describes stress as an "inner state of a person, which involves both an experience of a tension-producing situation as well as a psychological response" (1986, p. 34). In other words, stress arises in the interaction process between the person and the environment. Furthermore, societal demands and constraints are viewed differently by every individual, causing varying degrees of personal stress. Thus, a critical discrimination in individual differences must be made; the individual's expectations and resources affect the perception, assessment, and response to stress (Kyriacou, 1987). Each person's stress threshold is unique and probably determined by genetic factors, values, environmental or leadership support, and personal well-being. Stress, therefore is generated when external

stress overpowers internal resources, threatening our equilibrium.

The effect of chronic, sustained disequilibrium is destructive. The duration and intensity of external stress coupled with the internal anxiety produced in this interaction may well erode physical, emotional and mental well-being. Researchers express concern with this state of stress overload harmful to educators (Farber, 1991; Friesen, 1989; Jenkins & Calhoun, 1991; Smith & Bourke, 1992).

### Predictors of Stress

"A disease of over-commitment" (Cherniss, 1980, p. 16), stress exists as an insidious threat to professional communities. High-achievers employed in the helping professions are likely candidates for stress, (Freudenberger, 1980) due to the emotional strain of working with intense people-related problems (Rogers & Dodson, 1988; Maslach & Jackson, 1982). Nurses, doctors, teachers, counselors, social workers, and child care workers are examples of such professionals. Chronically stressed high-achievers - idealistic and hard working - eventually learn to anaesthetize their feelings and become more mechanical in their treatment of people (Freudenberger, 1980). In the education profession, the emotionally taxing nature of teaching as well as the stress involved in creating and maintaining the network of relationships, may

produce unrealistic personal demands which drain energy and vitality for work. Feelings of failure, frustration and guilt can consume the idealistic mind, causing interpersonal classroom relationships to become marked by tension, anxiety, hostility and fear (Maslach & Jackson, 1982).

Freudenberger (1980) defines stress overload as exhaustion from excessive demands on energy, strength, and resources. Likewise, Maslach (1982) speaks of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach & Jackson, 1982). Emotional exhaustion refers to "psychological resourcelessness"; an empty, depleted energy state, whereas "depersonalization" refers to negative, harsh, or hostile attitudes towards others. The MBI Form Ed (Schwab, 1981) measures stress experiences unique to educators. Low personal accomplishment is a critical measurement for teachers. "Most teachers no longer feel they are accomplishing this, there are few other areas on which they can focus to receive rewards" (Schwab, 1981, p. 19). Therefore, the benchmark for stress appears to be an educator's self-knowledge that substantive contributions are no longer being made to the educational community.

Hence, these feelings of reduced personal accomplishments may signal warnings to educators indicating stress is accumulating and not being diffused. Extreme cases of stress may cause the teacher to experience

emotional exhaustion and depression (Burke, Greenglass, Schwarzer, 1996). Moreover, a loss of self-confidence and of a sense of humor may lead to personality changes. A loss of optimism may mark the failure of personal resources to counteract stress and cause negative personality changes that may become unattractive to the stress-laden teacher's students, family, as well as colleagues.

### Organizational Variables Causing Stress

Researchers measure the strength of occupational stress in teachers (Fimian & Fastenau, 1990). In ascending order to the impact upon educators, the following factors cause stress: time management, work-related stressors, discipline, and motivation. Further, other research has shown the following sources of stress cause distresses for teachers: lack of time for relaxation and preparation, inadequate salary, teaching poorly motivated students and the sense of their personal life being shortchanged (Vance, Nutter, & Humphreys, 1989). Moreover, class size is identified as an issue for elementary teachers (French, 1993). Borg & Riding (1993) report educator stress relates to pupil misbehavior, poor working conditions, and poor staff relations.

In addition, Schwab (1985) cites lack of participation in decision-making, inappropriate job expectations, punishment unrelated to job performance, and poorly defined

organizational goals as critical to a teacher's stress level. With one thousand teacher/student daily interactions, teachers clearly need continual affirmation and peer support.

Furthermore, Sparks & Hammond (1981, p. 4-8) categorize stress enacted in the workplace as follows: (a) poor quality relationships; (b) sense of isolation; (c) role conflict; (e) time management problems; (f) life changes and stages; (g) institutional policies; and, (h) public criticisms of teachers and schools.

Likewise, King et al. (1988, p. 86) report that there are ten stressful aspects of being a teacher. This study cites time demands as the most stressful problem for educators. In addition, student apathy and colleague's negative attitudes are reported to drain teachers of their vitality. Lack of support for discipline issues, resources and equipment, public criticism and ministry changes are also very stressful.

Clearly, these stressors encompass many aspects of the teaching environment including relationships with both administrators and colleagues. Teachers may feel powerless to control these stressful factors, thereby affecting their ability to make substantive contributions to the process of education.

Equally important, Conley et al. (1989) state that role ambiguity is one variable indicative of teacher

dissatisfaction at both secondary and elementary levels. Other significant variables explaining career dissatisfaction are: absence of positive supervision models, student behavior problems, routinization, class size and lack of administrative or colleague support. Furthermore, role ambiguity is cited as a powerful cause of teacher distress and dissatisfaction.

In addition, Dworkin et al. (1990) contend that unsupportive principals cause stress induced illness among teachers (1990). Supportive colleagues cannot totally mitigate the effects of stress for teachers. Administrative support is outlined as critical for teachers (King et al., 1988). Dworkin (1990, p. 61) states, "The prolonged, constant and intensive interaction that typifies classroom teaching in emotionally charged urban public schools prove a fertile breeding ground for stress." He further correlates the number of teacher absenteeisms with stress induced illness behavior. Dworkin believes that principal support is a key to counterbalancing this stress for classroom teachers.

Counselors are susceptible to stress through the caring nature and high ideals they bring to the profession (Parr, 1991; Kesler, 1991). Mixed messages and confused signals from administrators, parents and the community cause stress for counselors (Parr, 1991, p. 222). Counselors need empowerment and clearly delineated lines of support from



these groups, in order to be effective helping professionals. Problem students need therapeutic intervention requiring commitment and time. Hence, the role of a school counselor is not a "quick fix artist"; clearly articulated expectations need to be communicated for counselors.

Another perception of stress reported by classroom teachers includes role overload (Pierson and Archambault, 1984). Specific stressors include: grading, lesson preparation, marking, exam preparation and marking, behavior problems and confrontations, time pressures, meetings, supervision concerns, and professional development time. Classroom teachers are continually drained by the overwhelming demands and pressures they daily face in their work.

In particular, teachers in special education areas (Zabel & Zabel, 1980; Frith & Mims, 1985; Weiskopf, 1980; Bradfield & Fones, 1985; Fimian & Blanton, 1986; Hollingsworth, 1990; Luckner, 1990) cite a variety of organizational stressors as troublesome. Special education teachers are a unique group who are dependent on material resources and others' cooperation for supporting special needs students. Lack of time, lack of resources, lack of substantial administrative support, may undoubtedly cause them continual frustrations and stress.

Additionally, Dedrick and Raschke (1990, p. 35) emphasize the need for improved room accommodations, better working relationships with regular education teachers, more planning time, and a critical need for time to relate with knowledgeable and helpful support services and administration. These distresses cause irritation and frustration for special educators. The pressing need to document learner progress, demonstrate professionalism with difficult students, and sustain motivation through a challenged learning environment are typical of the complex demands on special education teachers.

In fact, Bradfield and Fones (1985) found special educators report the greatest job stress in relationships with parents of students in their classrooms. The inability to communicate with unrealistic or demanding parents, or parents that are needy for companionship, causes great anxiety. Clearly, special educators have a multitude of stressors with both relationships and organizational variables in the school system.

#### Some Effects of Stress

Problems of teacher stress affect the community of students, staff, parents, the teacher's well-being, and the teacher's family. Teacher stress has a debilitating effect on teachers' personal health as well as the relationships within the classroom, and the process of education. Stress

may be an insidious threat for educational communities, at all levels of the educational system, from kindergarten to universities.

That educator stress is an occupational "health hazard" is evident throughout the literature (Rogers & Dodson, 1988). Hypertension, heart attacks, ulcers, colitis, constipation, skin diseases, insomnia, anxiety, and headaches or migraine have all been correlated or attributed to stress (Friesen, 1989).

Excessive stress is further correlated with personal and family dysfunction; marital conflict; addictive behaviors with drugs, alcohol or food; and high work absenteeism due to stress related illness (Kesler, 1990; Watts & Short, 1990, Long & Gessaroli, 1989). Fatigue, irritability, boredom and depression may characterize the teacher's attitudes towards work (Burke, Greenglass, & Schwarzer, 1996).

The teacher's family equally suffers with the changes in the teacher suffering from extreme stress. If relationships at home become marked with tension, hostility, or even impatience, then the climate in the home may not be conducive for healthy interactions. The teacher may then feel even more isolated, unable to receive any available support. If problems at home are carried to the work place, then the effects of stress may become exacerbated (Bradfield & Fones, 1985).

Additionally, personality changes may result from stress and include negative expressions of self-worth through self-deprecating remarks; the loss of self-confidence, a sense of humor, and a balanced perspective. The loss of optimism may mark the failure of personal resources to counteract stress. Negativism in speech and behavior, lack of respect for the dignity and leadership of others, and a complaining attitude may remove the attractiveness of a teacher.

Furthermore, the students in the class may suffer from the teacher's stress. If positive relationships, patience, and a sense of humor are no longer evident in the class, the climate in the classroom may not be conducive for healthy interpersonal relationships or academic excellence.

Stress-laden teachers may experience exhaustion, fatigue, depression, estrangement from work, powerlessness, alienation, depersonalization and purposelessness (Dworkin et al., 1990). Furthermore, teachers may become impulsive and rash in decision-making, and become uncaring, inept, or haphazard in their work. Research shows that irrational beliefs held by teachers correlates with the experienced level of stress (Zingle & Anderson, 1990; Forman, 1990).

Additionally, Lemphers (1989) contends that professionals feel hopeless and trapped when stress becomes acute. Complaining, negativism and compulsive talking rather than action may characterize a stressed worker.

Lemphers further states that when feeling stressed due to overwork, many individuals begin to withdraw from their stress by neglecting their work duties and thereby reducing time and energy committed to the job.

Lastly, the growing phenomenon of teacher attrition may be an extreme consequence of teacher stress. Lutz (1990) measures teacher stress related to reform mandated accountability with Texas teachers, indicating stress is attributable to increased paperwork demands and reform mandates. Teaching to compulsory state exams caused teacher resentment, and frustration.

In summary, entrapped teachers lacking validation and affirmation exodus the profession for non-monetary reasons. The harsh realities of valuable experienced teachers exiting their career indicates a critical need for redistribution of values and priorities to prevent excellent educators from leaving teaching (Weber & Haskvitz, 1989). In order to retain valued experienced teachers, leadership must address and alleviate the issue of teacher stress and teacher attrition.

### Coping with Stress

Adams (1978) claims that many approaches to stress management do not identify the origins of the stress. He understanding the sources of stress is a vital prelude to developing a plan for effective stress management. Adams

(1979, p. 165) states that a systems approach might be called "holistic" if it attends to a physical, psychological, and spiritual balance in consideration of stress.

Although it is important to concentrate on individual capabilities of withstanding stress, Adams states that organizational sources of stress must be identified before attempting to remove the stress. He develops a four category typology of stress: Type I, Type II, Type III, and Type IV. Type I stress sources are derived principally from recent events or changes on the job. They are episodic and may be treated with "full two-way communications" (p. 175). He states that the more information we have about an event will eliminate the surprise factor and thus reduce stress. Hence, Adams is referring to major organizational changes in personnel or work distribution, increases in work load, or a major reorganization of work in this category. Type II stress includes recent events away from work such as a death, illness, or marriage. Type III stress becomes problematic in that it may be considered chronic stress. This category includes on the job pressures such as too much work in too little time, conflicts between departments, and unclear responsibilities. With identification and agreement by all co-workers in an organization that changes need to be made to address this stress, organizational techniques such as conflict resolution training or forming ad hoc

committees, are suitable to deal with stressors in this category. Type IV stress includes nonwork pressures such as environmental pollution, noise, financial issues or family problems. These stresses need a personal management style to effectively address them.

Adams contends that once stress has been categorically diagnosed and analyzed as episodic or chronic, then appropriate mediating influences may be determined. These mediating influences include evaluation of the personal characteristics of the individual as well as available situational factors and support. Ongoing training and monitoring in stress management is recommended to be beneficial for all individuals suffering from stress. Adams found five effective coping strategies for stress listed as follows:

- (a) build resistance through a healthy life style;
- (b) compartmentalize work and home life;
- (c) engage in regular physical exercise;
- (d) talk problems through on the jobs with peers;
- (e) withdraw physically from the stressful situation.

To summarize, Adams cogently states that increasing the awareness of what the stress is, diagnosing where it comes from, and what can be done about it, is a critical step in designing a holistic approach to stress management.

Additional researchers frequently cite the importance of strict attention to health as a factor in managing stress

(Sparks & Hammond, 1981; Kesler, 1990; Lemphers, 1989). Monitoring eating habits, sleeping patterns, relaxation, exercise routines, and time management are noted as imperative for maintaining health. Kesler (1990) addresses the issue of support groups, peer support and group involvement activities as essential to well-being.

Likewise, Bertoch, Nielsen, Curley, & Borg (1989) submit a plan for remediation of teacher stress with a complex multifaceted treatment package containing strategies for twelve two hour sessions. Discussions and presentations on the various following topics are thought to be helpful for stressed educators. Mediation, relaxation, breathing, stretching, counseling strategies, self-talk, nutrition, and substance abuse are components of developing holistic and stress free living.

In particular, the importance of laughter and a good sense of humor in maintaining equilibrium is presented by Leone, (1986). Laughter is our friend and healer. "Laughter can be the best way to relieve stress and put a person into a fresh frame of mind . . . laughter is the positive side of the emotional continuum" (1986, p. 139). Indeed, laughter may be a healing tool that educators can use for emotional stability.

Researchers focus on stress management techniques as priority setting, time management skills and developing assertive behavior on the job. For example, Lemphers (1989)



includes personal assessment and evaluation, and the development of long and short term goals. He further recommends use of lists, organizational techniques and management strategies to dispense appropriate energy, while being realistic with oneself, and accepting unalterable life situations.

Networking, creative problem solving, goal setting, time management, self-talk, time allocation analysis, and cultivating stress hardiness are worthy suggestions for stressed educators (Dedrick & Raschke, 1990). A positive attitude and perseverance in the face of adversity enables teachers to withstand the daily stressors encountered in their job.

Smith & Bourke (1992) advocate offering counseling services for stressed educators citing the need for healthy peer relationships, peer counseling, peer supervision models, team teaching, and peer networking as valuable strategies in managing educator stress. Training programs to develop these programs are key for maintaining health.

Equally important, Kesler (1990) offers a comprehensive multimodal approach for stressed counselors. The excessive demands experienced on a daily basis that may be emotionally and physically overwhelming for guidance counselors may be attended to through peer validation, as well as administrative intervention and support. Kesler recommends strongly that educators pay attention to their personal

needs, and restructure thought processes in order to employ skills for survival.

Protective strategies such as restructuring thought processes and renewal through collaboration, are likewise addressed by Parr (1991) in order to cope with professional stress. He further offers the concept of peer support through groups, recreation and socialization, as valuable for the educator. Moreover, McCreary-Juhasz (1990) illustrates the need for positive self-esteem for teachers, in that teachers are often neglected, forgotten, and are in need of personal and professional validation. She describes the link between low self-esteem and stress, stating that teachers have deep needs to be appreciated, valued and validated for the selfless contributions they make to education. Warmth, caring respect, and connectiveness form the core of healthy interpersonal relationships healing for educators. That a nurturing approach to inspire humaneness in teaching would reduce teacher stress is certain according to researchers (Fimian & Blanton, 1986; Trendall, 1989).

Clearly, we must develop healthy relationships with others in order to withstand stress in the workplace. Our interactions and relationships with others may be a source of both healing and beneficial support for stressed educators, perhaps especially by those who generally control teachers' resources, and professional opportunities - school leaders.

## Leadership and Stress

One scholar who offers a compelling perspective on leadership is Robert Starratt (1994, 1996). Starratt believes that school leaders are secular pastors, whose mission is to create moral communities through the ethic of care, ethic of justice, and ethic of critique. He offers an architectural blueprint for building these moral communities through nurturing autonomy and connectedness for teachers as well as students. Furthermore, he posits that moral communities may be built through sharing conversations about visions which lead to a moral learning environment.

Likewise, Senge (1990) establishes community as a learning environment, by promoting organizational change through a process known as visioning. In particular, he posits that the leader is responsible for creating policy, purposes, strategies, and core values. Personal visions must be encouraged for all members of an organization because shared visions emerge as a process from personal visions. Moreover, through dialogue and shared vision, a community is established. Senge believes that visions become a living force when people truly believe they can shape their future.

Block (1996) argues that a leader can promote a concept of stewardship which has the potential for revolutionizing the patterns of life within our educational institutions.

Through collective action, self-governance with team learning and action, educational communities can effectively move towards partnerships and empowerment of all individuals within the organization. Block poses that collaboration in establishment and maintenance of ruling structures is the way of the future. This is supported by Chrislip and Larson (1996), Berquist (1993), as well as Lappé and Dubois (1994), who also offer collaboration as answers to the complex challenges the educational community faces.

Moreover, according to Chrislip and Larson (1996), collaborative leadership is built on four significant principles. The task of leadership is to build broad-based involvement; lead as peer problem solvers; inspire commitment and action; and sustain hope and participation. Starratt (1996) reminds us that hope may be the antidote to the pessimism and stresses we encounter within the educational community.

If our educational communities are to enhance Bellah's (1991) notion of the good life, leaders must encourage all to strive for the common good, with and for others, in just institutions (Ricoeur, 1992). Postmodern leaders must abandon any competitive philosophies (Kohn, 1992) and move towards teacher empowerment. This is supported by a parade of leadership scholars such as Heifetz (1994), Senge (1990), Sprague (1992), and Starratt (1991, 1996). In addition, Blase & Blase (1994) contend that it is necessary to provide

leadership that is facilitative and democratic in order to empower teachers. They cite the following empowering behaviors essential for leaders: modeling, supporting innovation, sharing governance, encouraging risk taking, praising teachers, and practicing effective communication skills with openness and trust. Furthermore, these authors contend that effective leaders personify hope, tolerate ambiguity, value and reward work, facilitate through encouragement and dialogue, and provide opportunities for collaborative problem solving. Thus as Sprague (1992, p. 199) comments:

Empowerment is defined as enabling teachers who have been silenced to speak; as helping them to develop a sense of agency, become challengers, and take initiatives; and as investing them with the right to participate in the determination of school goals and policies and to exercise professional judgment about what and how to teach.

Clearly, empowerment involves the encouragement and support of the expansion of power for each teacher or group within the educational forum. According to Blase & Kirby's (1992) study of influence behaviors of effective principals which bring out the best in teachers, praise or encouragement is the most significant finding. Their data show that the following behaviors by effective principals

do indeed influence teachers: praising; conveying high expectations; providing teachers with autonomy; supporting teachers with resources, professional development and discipline issues; nudging teachers to alternative solutions; judicious use of the power of authority; and consistent modeling of effective practice. Hence, leaders are a powerful influence for encouraging and influencing excellence in our educational communities.

In summary, postmodern leaders, faced with complex challenges and pressures, can build moral and excellent learning communities through visioning, dialogue, collaboration, empowerment, promoting autonomy and connectedness, and lastly inspiring hope for teachers. Furthermore, leaders need to be able to both foster and nurture innovation and give praise (James, 1996, p. 176). It is within these excellent moral learning communities that teachers may indeed feel validated and hopeful, and form healing relationships with others.

### Relationships

One author, Paul Ricoeur, in writing Oneself as Another, (1992) gives us insight into the dynamics of healing relationships for leaders. He offers us the idea of selfhood being completed through another. His view of oneself as another leads us to see that we, indeed, are not complete by ourselves, but that others are completed through

us, and we in them. Therefore, we are able to provide for ourselves, in that we provide for others. Ricoeur powerfully states that we are not complete, nor can we be happy without friends, without others.

Perhaps Ricoeur's ideas call us to the purposes of mutually creating meaning in our lives and directing our thoughts to the idea of community. Moreover, solicitude, as Ricoeur states, gives us the impenetrable bond for communal living. Thus the rightness of our relationships with those educators who are suffering from stress is grounded in the philosophical framework of aiding others in their journey of who they want to be, while we are also becoming more of who we want to be. Through this act of giving over to others, we thereby become more of who we ought to be. Furthermore, Ricoeur says that we gain self-respect when we enable another to feel as if they are understood. Thus, the importance of a dialogic exchange wherein one is truly listened to, without judgment, cannot be understated.

Thus, as leaders, our relationships must be philosophically grounded in an ethic of care. As Noblit (1993) reminds us, an ethic of care may be constructed as power. Caring becomes a powerful agent for change. Furthermore, Noddings (1984) offers the view that we, as humans, are obligated to others through caring relationships. Caring is tied to an act of commitment through either thinking about what we ought to do, or

responding with the action we feel we ought to do. Noddings contends our decisions ought to be ethical ones, born of natural caring through our thoughts about relationships with others. Noddings (1984, p. 24) tells us that "caring involves stepping out of one's personal frame of reference into the other's."

Noddings claims that far from being romantic, an ethic of caring is both practical and tough. Caring is a relationship, an ethic built on its other-regarding. Her idea of caring, similar to Ricoeur's solicitude, is other-serving, while also self-serving. Our self is ennobled through the act of caring for another. Truly, we become more of who we desire to be, when we aid others in their journey in growing into more of who they desire to be. If we are drawn to be a colleague of the other, we are also called to nurture and protect the other, in the sense we are thus being the initiator and chooser of our own acts. We thereby act in accordance with, instead of by avoidance of, our own moral principles and obligations.

Ethical care depends therefore on the development of an ideal self rather than upon rules. This ideal is developed through one's best remembrance of caring (1984, p. 94). Noddings further suggests that we are fulfilled in our efforts to care for another when we see that we have influenced the lives of the others we have been caring for. We seek to obtain for ourselves the sense that we are not



only able to give to others; but, we may be the one through which caring is enacted in and for the others. We grow, as complete individuals, through our giving and caring for others.

Miller (1984) offers us a compelling view of growth-fostering relationships which lead to increased vitality and zest for the participants. She states that growth-fostering relationships connect us to others, empower both parties in the relationship, and give us a greater sense of worth.

Therefore, from these relationships, we see a more accurate picture of ourselves and are empowered to act. Miller posits that mutual empathy, created by both participants, is the greatest source of energy and vitality we can experience. Hence, how can leaders form these growth-fostering relationships with educators, especially those educators who are suffering from stress in their career?

Leadership then, is challenged with forming healing relationships with educators who may be struggling with stress. It is vital that school leaders are able to nurture these educators. Educators, as Starratt claims (1996) must be valued for who they are, rather than what they do. Moreover, as postmodern leaders, human relationships must be viewed as sacred, and be the foundation for building moral communities.

## Voice

Carol Gilligan's (1982) ideas on voice may offer further wisdom for understanding the nature of healing relationships. She powerfully presents the notion of the expression of voice as crucial to one's well-being, both emotionally and psychologically. When a person does not give voice to real feelings and ideas, a dissociative split may occur in the personality. Implicit in this need for expression of voice, is the need for dialogic relationships with attentive listeners.

Applying these ideas to our treatment of stressed educators leads us to the idea that the act of listening may indeed be healing. Encouraging stressed educators to give voice to their concerns without fear of reprisal, may be an initial step in the management and alleviation of their stress. Indeed, providing a safe forum for expression ought to be a high priority for the leader in the school. Heifetz (1994) reminds leaders that it is vitally important to not only make room for, but protect, the dissident voice. Clearly, our philosophical convictions about the integrity of our collegial relationships, as well as our attentiveness to those educators encountering stress, shapes our responses to others and thus forms the basis of our interactions with them.

### Summary

Stress is very much present in teachers' lives today. The notion that educators may be a high-risk group for job-related stress is indicated throughout the literature. Researchers cite highly stressful factors for educators including: role ambiguity; unclear expectations; unsupportive administration; time demands; increased paperwork; and lack of recognition with minimal appreciation for their work. Smith & Bourke (1992) summarize the difficulties by stating that few rewards exist for the extreme pressures teachers encounter. They contend that ". . . providing adequate rewards and recognition, using collaborative methods of decision-making, recognizing individual teacher needs, providing an appropriate pace for change, and providing clear job specifications for teachers" (1992, p. 46) are critical tasks for school leaders. Teachers may be susceptible to stress overload due to exhaustion from changing expectations and pressures from within and without the educational institution. Clearly, educators suffer from aspects of their career they are powerless to change alone; ever increasing educational demands may cause stress to play a dominant role in an educator's life.

Moreover, postmodern leaders are faced with the challenge of creating excellent educational communities

Moreover, postmodern leaders are faced with the challenge of creating excellent educational communities through empowerment, visioning, collaboration, dialogue, and by inspiring commitment and hope in teachers. Through an ethic of caring, leaders can both influence, motivate, and encourage teachers towards excellence. In addition, the importance of beneficial healing relationships with others, as well as the need for educators to give voice to their concerns, are cogent ideas presented for leadership to alleviate educator stress.

Lastly, James (1996) offers the notion that leaders for the future need to be able to foster and nurture a work environment which energizes both teachers and students. Energy is built, within, intrinsically. Stress lowers ones' energy level and thus, change and insecurity result. Hence, stress levels must be controlled as "Tension shuts down the mind and heart . . . the ability to keep your body and mind in balance is essential to keeping your perspective clear" (James, 1996, p. 39). Accordingly, educational leaders of the 21st century need to create an atmosphere of security and energy that "increases self-confidence and optimism about the future" (James, p. 178).

Chapter III contains the methods and procedures of this study.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

Qualitative researchers focus on meaning which is embedded in people's experiences and mediated through the researcher's own perceptions (Merriam, 1988, p. 19). In addition, qualitative research is concerned with process and the passage of time, in order "to uncover and understand what lies behind any phenomenon about which little is yet known" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 19); or it can be used to gain "fresh slants on things about which quite a bit is already known" (p. 19). Moreover, qualitative research is richly descriptive, inductive and interpretive; and may be used to guide practitioners' everyday practices.

Max van Manen (1990, p. 11) states that phenomenology attempts to explicate the meanings as lived in the everyday world, our life world, so that we might be more hopeful about projecting what we realize about our past onto what we can come to believe about our future. Furthermore, lived experience translates into essence, and thus gives meaning to the researcher (van Manen, 1990, p. 36). Wolcott writes that qualitative research is an art whereby fieldwork

involves the study of multiple meanings of human beings in social interaction (Wolcott, 1995). In order to artistically accomplish fieldwork, the researcher must be sensitive and responsive to the context as well as the individuals being studied. Indeed, the researcher, according to Merriam (1988, p. 19) is the primary instrument in qualitative research.

Moreover, phenomenology enables the researcher and participant to examine the nuances in life experiences, and see what makes individual experiences different from others' life experiences. Thus phenomenological inquiry enables each person's particular experience to be named by themselves, rather than a prescriptive label being added by another.

John Cresswell (1994) states that phenomenology is consistent with a qualitative research paradigm, as it ". . . is designed as an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem" (Cresswell, p. 1). In addition, Victor Frankl (1969) contends, "Phenomenology, as the philosophy of essence, is the descriptive analysis of subjective processes" (p. 57). It is my purpose in this study, therefore, to present a descriptive analysis of the dialogue of educators who successfully coped with workplace stress, from which wisdom for leadership studies may be gleaned.

This chapter delineates the proposed methodology, discusses its application to this study, and details the processes for collecting and analyzing the data. The chapter concludes with a summary.

### Methodological Overview

The basis of this study is an in-depth interview process with a modified phenomenological approach. Max van Manen (1990, p. 11) states that "Phenomenological human science is the study of lived or existential meanings; it attempts to describe and interpret these meanings to a certain degree of depth and richness." Therefore, phenomenological research is descriptive in nature, and investigates the inner experiences of persons, and the manner in which meaning is created in their lives. Thus, phenomenological research follows subjective inquiry processes through examining the meaning that persons attach to their experiences in life. Moreover, in this approach, it is imperative to make sense of relationships among aspects of experiences, rather than analyzing parts, such as our sense of future, which is but another dimension of experience.

In-depth phenomenologically-based interviewing (Seidman, 1991) with open-ended questions, was the chosen methodology for this research examining dialogue. According to Senge (1990), dialogue allows an individual to uncover

meaning in order to gain insight and understanding of experiences. Dialogue offers greater insight, into an experience, that can be gained individually (Senge, 1990). Through the analysis and discussion of the participant's language, and through dialogue, this study will uncover wisdom that may be utilized to attend to the issue of educator stress. Seidman writes, "the purpose of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (1991, p. 3).

The phenomenological interview immerses both the interviewer and interviewee in intense reflection. The goal is to draw forth richness from human experience and involve the participants as co-researchers. Therefore, through dialogue, the participants engage in introspection which allows for more fuller learning about the phenomenon for them, (Giorgi, 1985) as well as for the researcher.

The researcher's beliefs and values undergirding this study are that all human beings are of worth, have valuable insights to offer the community, and through their use of language, it is possible to make meanings of their experience. The research design of this study attempted to explore and uncover personal meanings with experiences of educator stress, in order to develop wisdom for appropriately coping with stress.



Concerning validity and reliability, Guba and Lincoln (1989) offer credibility as a parallel criterion in judging adequacy of qualitative research. Credibility can be verified through the following strategies such as prolonged engagement - the substantial involvement in the interview process; persistent observation - the sufficient observation to enable researchers to add depth and scope of research and identify relevance to the issue; or, through peer debriefing - engaging a disinterested peer to extensive discussions of the findings. Guba and Lincoln offer multiple levels of strategies in order to enhance the validity of qualitative research for this study.

In addition, Maxwell's ideas on validity as understanding (1992) are useful guidelines for qualitative research studies. He poses that descriptive and interpretive validity may be met through agreement by both researcher and participant on the content and descriptions of the interviews.

#### Research Design

Based upon the guidelines stated in Seidman (1991) and van Manen (1990), I employed the following research design strategies. I began the interview process with a general question asking them to tell me about their educational experiences. I asked for their personal background to establish rapport, and lead them comfortably into

examinations of their experiences of stress enacted in the workplace. Moreover, I then asked three to four guiding questions to continue the interview process. (See appendix for copy of guiding questions). The questions were open-ended with the intent of eliciting the participant's stories concerning their experiences and their coping strategies with stress (Seidman, 1991). The questions were designed to be explorative in nature, causing reflection, and hind sight, based upon their personal experiences (Giorgi, 1985; van Manen, 1990). Other probing questions arose out of the conversations with each participant. Each interview was unique and the ideas flowed and were exchanged between the participant and the researcher.

I evaluated, analyzed and interpreted the contents of each of the six participants' interview, coding the transcripts, and creating personal profiles of each participant in order to write the findings (Seidman, 1991; Giorgi, 1985). All six participants were given access to their transcripts to edit or make any changes to the information from the interviews (Seidman, 1991). Accordingly, in keeping with the spirit of the research process, each participant was involved in the analysis of their data, thus also enhancing the validity and reliability of this study (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

The data generated from the interviews were analyzed according to the following four research questions which guided this study:

1. What is the relationship between teachers' experience and stress? What behavioral changes are manifested in experienced teachers as a result of workplace stress?
2. How do experienced teachers respond to stress as a phenomena?
3. How might relationships with school principals and significant colleagues exacerbate or alleviate their stress? What are the implications for leadership?
4. How are stress and leadership interrelated and/or interdependent?

#### Data Collection

I collected the data gleaned from two interviews with each of the six participants, over a six week period. Each interview was approximately sixty to ninety minutes in duration and audiotaped with participant permission, in order to transcribe the proceedings (Seidman, 1991). I took extensive field notes observing non verbal behavior during the interview. These field notes were compiled with the typed transcript at the end of each session (Wolcott, 1995).

### Entry to the Population

Through verbal referrals, I drew upon the populations available throughout school districts in the lower mainland of British Columbia for September, 1997. These districts included: Vancouver, New Westminster, Burnaby, Coquitlam and Port Coquitlam, Surrey, Langley, as well as North Vancouver and West Vancouver. I gave my telephone number where I could be reached during the day or evening to interested participants. As I was on a sabbatical leave from my own school district, I was available to take these phone calls readily.

I accepted referrals from educators and administrators who were aware of my research plan and suggested I meet with a person they have identified as meeting the selection criteria for the purposes of this study. Two participants, after an initial meeting where I explained this study, referred names of colleagues from other school districts who might be interested in this research. As I have been counseling for seventeen years in the lower mainland of British Columbia, and I regularly attend a variety of professional conferences where I meet many educators, I had a resource pool of contacts readily available via both referral and by word of mouth advertising. I followed up on any referrals offered by a colleague for participation in this study.

### Selection Criteria

Upon recommendation by the Committee For The Protection Of Human Subjects, I devised a simple self-assessment questionnaire that enabled the participant to self-assess their emotional well-being. This allowed the researcher to also diagnose the suitability of an interested participant for this study. The devised questionnaire asked ten questions concerning self-care. The answers received a numerical value. (See appendix for copy of selection criteria form). For example, each participant gave a numerical rating for their assessment of how frequently they cared for themselves in areas of exercise, good nutrition, and sleep as 'always', 'frequently', 'sometimes' or 'hardly ever'. If a participant scored 'always' or 'frequently' for the majority of the questions, and thus had a numerical score of sixteen or better, I considered them emotionally healthy and eligible to participate in this study.

### Interview Procedures

The initial interview established rapport with the participant. I completed the signed consent form with explanations of the interview process, and began the questioning process with open-ended questions. Further, I conducted a brief history of their teaching career, in order to obtain a broad picture of their experience. Seidman

(1991) advises that it is important to establish how they came to be a teacher in order to place a context on their experience. Also, we determined and planned the entire schedule of interviews in this initial meeting.

The second interview focused on each participant's experiences with stress within the workplace, and elicited details as to how they coped with their experience of stress. In this interview, both the researcher and the participant mutually analyzed and clarified their experiences, while exploring the significance of their ideas.

Additionally, I had showed them their transcripts, or mailed it to them for their perusal, for the purpose of ensuring understanding of the meaning of their experiences. This clarification process was useful in checking Guba and Lincoln's (1989) notion of credibility, thereby further enhancing validity and reliability.

### Selection of Subjects

The selection criteria for participants included the following: "experienced" meaning a minimum of five years teaching experience; elementary or secondary teaching experience in a public school setting; teachers who acknowledged undergoing a time (months or years) of stress in the workplace; teachers who acknowledged having effectively coped with this stress. For the purposes of

thematic saturation (Seidman, 1991), I interviewed six participants as an appropriate number for this study. Five of the six participants were mid career teachers with a minimum of fifteen years teaching experience. One teacher was in her sixth year of experience. I included her in the study because her reflections were very profound and wise. Hence, her insights contributed greatly to the findings of this study.

I discussed the study in detail with each prospective participant, either by phone or in person. I faxed or mailed my abstract to every interested participant. When any prospective educator stated their willingness to volunteer for this study, I offered to meet with them, in order to explain the research design in detail. On several occasions, this discussion was held by telephone. Two participants offered the names of several other educators who might be interested in participating in this study.

For the interview process, I met with each participant either in my home office, their home, or an agreed upon quiet place conducive for the interview such as their classroom. The location was comfortable for the participant, and suitably private without interruptions. I requested permission to audiotape the interviews, and had extra tapes and batteries available to ensure ease of data collection. I made every effort to ensure each participant was comfortable throughout the interview process.

I provided beverages to drink, offered use of restroom facilities, used soft lighting in the interview room, provided pillows and tissue for comfort, and generally attempted to be sensitive to the needs of each participant.

#### Protection of Subjects

I ensured each participant's anonymity, identity, and confidentiality of responses. I utilized a signed consent form for each participant, as well as masked the identity of each of the participants, along with their school district and home school, in order to ensure no risk of exposure. For coding purposes, I ascribed a number to each participant rather than using names. Materials and transcripts were coded and maintained in my home, in an appropriate locked filing system. All materials were confidential and not shown to others. I destroyed the audio tapes after I transcribed the interviews. I will destroy the transcripts when I have finished with them at the conclusion of this research.

I invited interview participants to review their transcripts and reflect upon my analysis of their material (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). I offered a summary of my preliminary assumptions and reflections about their interview to see if they agreed with my assumptions. I changed anything they were uncomfortable with, in order to be respectful of their feelings and input, and increase the



credibility of this study. All participants edited their transcripts, and I corrected their changes accordingly.

Throughout the interview process, I gave each participant the option of "passing" if there was any question that caused them discomfort. I attempted to make the interview process comfortable, not difficult in any way for the participants. Through smiling, eye contact, and attending non verbal behavior, I closely listened to each participant. I was warm in my manner, and welcoming of each person's contributions, thus respectfully treating them with dignity and appreciation for the time they sacrificed to participate in this study. In addition, I mailed each participant a thank you letter at the conclusion of the study, and offered to meet with them in a follow-up time to review the data collected.

I made certain that each participant clearly understood their option of withdrawing from this study at any time they may have wished to. As I did not interview teachers I had a close working relationship with, or from my home school, I felt comfortable that there was no coercion involved in this research study. In particular, as each participant edited their own transcript, I felt confident each one was comfortable with the written information used in my study.

Moreover, upon suggestion by the Committee on the Protection of Human Subjects, I had referral cards on hand from three or four registered counselors from a local

counseling agency. I previously discussed the objective of my study with these counselors, prior to interviewing, in order to familiarize them with my research. I planned to make arrangements for any participant who wanted to meet with them to discuss feelings arising from this study, without delay, at no financial cost for the initial interview. None of the participants in this study expressed a desire to speak with a private counselor.

I felt confident in being able to meet the needs of any participants in this study because of my background. I am a trained counselor with seventeen years of counseling experience in both a high school setting, as well as in a community counseling center. I have a Masters of Ministry degree in Pastoral Care and Counseling, and have had wide opportunities to counsel not only adolescents, but adults and families. I was confident I had the requisite skills necessary to protect and ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants in this study, and diffuse any feelings of nervousness should the research exchange provoke any anxiety. In addition, as I am a trained counselor, I was willing to informally see any participant who wished to discuss personal feelings which might have arisen from this study. At the limit of three such meetings, I would refer that participant to a counseling agency for follow-up sessions. Although several participants indicated that it was "healing" and "beneficial" for them to discuss their

work related stress with me, none of the participants wished further informal counseling sessions. I felt that the interview process was a positive experience for both the participant and this researcher.

### Pilot Study

I ran a pilot study with two participants to refine my interview technique and further develop probing questions designed to elicit greater depth and understanding. Each practice interview lasted sixty to ninety minutes, and was confidential. I elicited feedback from these two people, and found their insights very helpful for my study.

### Data Analysis

A phenomenological approach to data analysis enables the researcher and participant to examine life experiences from another's perspective. This is a subjective and descriptive process that looks towards essence and meaning in life. Thus, phenomenological inquiry allows each individual to self-reflect and name their own experience, rather than a prescriptive label being named by another. A phenomenological inquiry may be accomplished through dialogic analysis of the language that communicates to another. Dialogue goes beyond any one individual's understanding in order to gain insights that cannot be achieved individually (Senge, 1990). Hence, dialogic

analysis is the study of language as a vehicle that communicates meaning, nuances, and life experiences one to another. Dialogic analysis looks to the future, since it looks at the way people come to understand themselves and one another, and looks at the subtle meanings of words, as well as interpretations of what is said. Meaning is enhanced in the flow of language, from one to the other.

Based upon the guidelines stated in Seidman (1991), van Manen (1990), and Giorgi (1985), I utilized the following data analysis steps. The data were analyzed, coded and synthesized according to the stages outlined by Seidman (1991) and van Manen (1990). The data analysis was the process of identifying themes as suggested by the interview data. This process was detailed and exhaustive. The data were analyzed according to how it clustered. The clusters formed by the coding led to the following themes concerning educators and stress: conflictual relationships; encouragement and empowerment; balance; letting go of stress; and leadership wisdom.

The coding followed a series of steps. The initial analytical step was to thoroughly read each entire transcript several times for a holistic sense of meaning (Giorgi, 1985). It was critically important to be immersed in the interview data to achieve a whole sense of the participant's experiences. At this stage, I developed preliminary assumptions about the content of the first

interview by writing a statement for each participant to be returned to them, in the second interview with the original transcript for their editing comments. I was very tentative and not presumptuous with this statement. Throughout this process, any extraneous material from the interview was set aside and not used for data analysis (van Manen, 1990).

Secondly, I reduced the text by marking with brackets the interesting and compelling passages (van Manen, 1990, Giorgi, 1985). This was not an attempt to edit, but simply a reduction of the text (van Manen, 1990).

Next, I reviewed the text line by line in an attempt to eliminate any repetitive phrases, and discover what each statement revealed about the topic. This was a step in framing the themes of the study (Giorgi, 1985).

I then created profiles of individual participants, based upon their words, because we learn from hearing and studying what participants themselves say (Seidman, 1991, p.91). These profiles were a critical component of the study because they served to build understanding of the meaning of the experiences of the participants (Giorgi, 1985). Based upon analyzing the individual profiles, I then created a composite profile of an experienced teacher who coped successfully with workplace stress.

Further analyzing the interview data according to the guiding research question of this study, I made thematic connections by searching for patterns amongst categories

(van Manen, 1990). These themes included: conflictual relationships; encouragement and empowerment; support balance; letting go of stress; and leadership wisdom. Analyzing the language of each participant, I included their narrative as it responds to each of the research questions of this study. Hence, the four research questions framed the structure of the data analysis and presentation of findings.

Moreover, the thematic connections and patterns found by comparison of each of the participant's dialogue, were analyzed in light of leadership studies. In particular, through the notion of voice, the theoretical positions generated by the work of Gilligan (1982), and Miller (1984) were helpful. Further, I found the work of Blase and Blase (1994), Blase and Kirby (1992), Noddings (1984), Ricoeur (1992), and Starratt (1991, 1996) vital for developing the concept of healing relationships for stressed educators. In Chapter IV I will address how these theories were helpful. Lastly, implications for leadership practice were developed from the data gleaned through this study.

#### Summary

Qualitative methodology in the form of in-depth open-ended interviews gives ". . . a deeper understanding and appreciation of the amazing intricacies and, yet, coherence of people's experiences . . . Interviewing has provided . . .

a deeper understanding of the issues, structures, processes, and policies that imbue participants' stories" (Seidman, 1991, p. 103). Interviewing gives a full view of people's experiences from their viewpoint, and offers us insight into their world of meaning.

Furthermore, phenomenology enables each person's particular experiences to be named by themselves, rather than someone else being prescriptive. Nuances in our life experiences are what makes our experiences different from other's life experiences. Phenomenology is an appropriate inquiry which reveals these differences, and attaches meaning to the lived experience of others. Thus, phenomenology also enables us to project what we realize about our past onto what we can come to believe about our future. Dialogue of the participants is a rich source of descriptive data for this study.

Therefore, this study examines stories of experienced educators, who have undergone a prolonged time (months or years) of workplace stress, but have enough career years remaining that they have learned to project a sense of hopefulness for the future. Through the in-depth phenomenologically-based interview sessions, the researcher and participant become co-researchers and authors together in the unfolding drama of their stories, thereby adding richness and depth to our understanding of educator stress.

Thus, this qualitative study adds new awarenesses and insight to the literature on educators and stress, and offers those in leadership positions proactive tools that will assist them to deal with teacher stress more effectively, for a more hopeful future. Moreover, school leaders will be enabled to empower an experienced cadre of teachers for the future of our educational communities.

Chapter IV contains the results and findings of this study.



## CHAPTER IV

### PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE FINDINGS

#### Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to analyze the dialogue created by the interviews of six experienced teachers who believe they successfully coped with a period of stress in the workplace, and offer insight for school leaders. This chapter presents implications for leadership practice from the data in these interviews. The data are organized and presented around the four research questions guiding this study, which refer to the experience of stress and how leadership relations might exacerbate or alleviate stress.

#### Data Presentation

Five of the six participants could be classified as mid career teachers with a minimum of fifteen years teaching experience. One participant had five years of teaching experience, but could not be considered a novice teacher. Although Jane was in her sixth year of teaching, she is included in this study because she articulated perceptive and wise reflections about the impact of stress on educators, and leaders' responsibilities to educators

suffering from stress. The powerful insights occurring from our dialogic exchange are essential to this study.

Dialogue is a language interaction between people that includes self-reflection, and clarifies meaning one to the other. According to Senge (1990), dialogue goes beyond any one individual's understanding in order to gain insights that cannot be achieved individually. Moreover, dialogue explores the full depth of people's experience and thought. Dialogic analysis not only analyzes language, but also meanings and nuances communicated to others. Thus, the dialogic analysis in this study also enables the researcher to understand how the participants created a future for their career, and for themselves.

The data are presented according to these key research questions addressed in this study:

1. What is the relationship between teachers' experience and stress in the workplace? What behavioral changes are manifested in experienced teachers as a result of workplace stress?
2. How do experienced teachers respond to stress as a phenomena?
3. How might relationships with school principals and/or significant colleagues exacerbate or alleviate their stress? What are the implications for leadership?
4. How are stress and leadership interrelated and/or interdependent?

The analysis of the dialogue from the two interviews with each participant offers a rich source of descriptive data that sheds light upon the issue of educator stress. Therefore, this chapter begins with a personal profile of each participant in this study. A composite profile of an experienced teacher who managed stress well is offered. Excerpts from the narratives of each participant frame a response to the four key research questions guiding this research study examining educator stress. I use a pseudonym to mask the identify of each participant. A metaanalysis concludes this chapter, and serves as a transition to the implications found in Chapter V.

### Personal Profiles

In order to establish rapport with the participants, I asked background questions about their education and training, professional experience, attitudes and values, and lifestyle. The information in the following personal profiles was obtained through our dialogic exchange.

#### Diane

Diane is a cheerful and enthusiastic elementary school teacher with eighteen years of experience. She is a sunny and engaging person, with a lovely smile. She openly welcomes visitors to her classroom, and proudly displays student work on the walls of her classroom. The children had posted exuberant drawings of themselves on the bulletin

board. Diane also showed me some of the children's work from their most recent project.

Diane says she loves teaching, and that she finds personal joy in rich relationships with her students. As she is such a positive person, she finds something to affirm in each child. She believes that affirmations are a powerful way to develop a positive sense of self. She practices these affirmations with her children.

Diane has had extensive Sunday School experience, day care experience and has raised children of her own. Diane recalls her own personal childhood experiences in education as painful. With a learning problem caused by poor vision, she struggled with seeing the blackboard, being able to participate in lessons, and thus lacked self-confidence. She entered education as a profession because she felt she could teach and assist special needs children far better than how she was taught. Diane is a compassionate and caring teacher.

### Jane

Jane is a vibrant and attractive secondary school teacher in her sixth year of teaching. Her teaching background includes physical education, humanities, and business. She enjoys teaching, and the students enjoy being in her classroom. She states that teaching was a natural choice for her. She always knew she would enter teaching as a profession. She supervised a wide range of recreational

activities working with children and youth while in university. Jane speaks about being called to teaching.

Jane has a wealth of experience working with students, both in the classroom and on an extra-curricular basis. Jane actively supports student activities through club sponsorship and coaching responsibilities. She participates in many committees within the school and her school district. She is committed to professional growth and life-long learning, presently pursuing a graduate degree.

Although Jane has only six years of teaching experience, she is surprisingly mature and perceptive in her assessment of the responsibilities and difficulties teachers encounter in the workplace. Jane is a dedicated professional who takes teaching very seriously. Her future career goals include plans for administration.

### Joy

Joy is a pleasant and helpful kindergarten teacher who is committed to the well-being of the children in her care. She has over twenty years of teaching experience. She recalls early yearnings to enter teaching as a profession. Growing up on the Prairies, Joy speaks of a male teacher as a wonderful inspirational role model who influenced her in her career choice.

In all her professional responsibilities, Joy accomplishes her goals with determination. Raising several young children while attending university part time for her

certification was a daunting task. She ultimately received her credentials and entered teaching when her youngest child was in school. Joy enjoys her career, and has numerous letters of appreciation from children, parents, and administrators documenting her work with the students.

Joy is efficient and effective in the classroom. Methodical and thorough planning has enabled her to be highly successful in meeting her objectives. Joy presently assists the new teachers on staff when they encounter difficulties.

Joy is actively involved in various hobbies and activities in the community. She enjoys being busy and is an avid quilter. She has numerous friends and appreciates their company and support. Joy also enjoys being a grandmother, spending quality time with her grandchildren.

### Lily

Lily is a former middle school counselor, with twenty-three years of diversified secondary school teaching and counseling experience. Her university background and training was in the area of physical health and counseling. Lily is dedicated to professional development for teachers. She is a life-long learner, who continually upgrades her qualifications with university courses. She is trained in peer counseling and peer mediation skills. She has had extensive experience in these areas. With a keen interest

in fitness, nutrition and wellness, Lily is an expert in lifestyle planning.

Lily is popular with the students, and is extremely busy with student appointments in her capacity as counselor. She maintains positive relationships with students, staff, and the parents in the community. She contributes to a positive climate in the school. Personally, she is extroverted, energetic, articulate, and a lively conversationalist. In recent years, her personal life has been fragmented through an unpleasant divorce, and the difficulties involved in sharing custody with her ex-spouse in raising several teenagers. Lily remains a positive individual, and is a survivor.

#### Raoul

Raoul is a bright and articulate young man with approximately twenty-four years of experience in secondary school alternate programs, as well as career preparation programs. His extensive range of experience also includes programs for prisoner education in the federal prison system. He has been the manager or director of many educational initiatives within the school system.

Raoul is perceptive and astute about the political nature of teaching, and has served as a school board trustee for many years. He is currently sitting on many committees within the school, as well as seeking funding for several

initiatives he is responsible for. Raoul is energetic and capable of handling many responsibilities simultaneously with a creative flair.

On the school level, Raoul coaches, sponsors clubs, supports student activities, and spends much time with students on an extra-curricular basis. He is currently pursuing a post graduate degree in education, and attends many professional development conferences around the world. Raoul travels widely. He is committed to education.

Although his family life has been shattered by an unexpected divorce, Raoul is actively involved in parenting his children. He assists his teenage children in selecting post secondary education appropriate for their abilities, and financially supports them in their endeavors.

Raoul has tremendous energy, keeps physically fit, and remains cheerful despite the myriad responsibilities and difficulties incurred by his involvements. Raoul is a prolific reader, highly knowledgeable, and a popular presenter at many conferences.

### Robert

Robert has over twenty years of elementary school experience within the same school district. He is an active coach for various sports teams within the school. Highly popular with the students, Robert devotes a tremendous amount of time to volunteer student activities on an extra-curricular basis.



Robert is a fun loving individual with a good sense of humor. He loves animals, loves children, loves sports, and loves teaching. The children respect him, and he enjoys positive relationships with them. He feels the hours he dedicates to coaching are repaid with deeper and more meaningful relationships with students within his classroom. He says that he likes to have fun with the students, and tries to make learning an enjoyable activity. He reports that the reason he went into teaching as a career was because he was having so much fun at school, and at university, and wanted to continue to have fun.

Robert is committed to family life, is raising a teenager, and has two dogs. He is physically fit, energetic, and a positive thinker.

#### Composite Profile of Participants

Based upon the two interviews with each participant, common personal traits and attitudes form to build a composite profile of the participants in this study. I discuss these traits according to education and training, personality factors, attitudes and goals. It is important to develop this composite profile because it enables us to further analyze how some experienced educators successfully cope with stress in the workplace.

Clearly, all the participants had the requisite university education and training to teach either at the elementary or secondary level. However, each participant

appears to go beyond the required certification, and engage in continuous professional development, post graduate degrees, or life-long learning through a variety of pathways. Each participant appears to value education, and recognize the value and meaning of education for students. Moreover, it appears that these participants could be classified as master teachers, or teachers who have extensive experience and credibility not only with students and parents, but with colleagues.

In addition, common personality traits appear to emerge from these interviews. First, positive thinking and the ability to form positive relationships with students are a high priority for these educators. Second, each educator attempts to build these positive relationships with students through a variety of extra-curricular activities, at a cost to their own time. Volunteering appears to be second nature to them. Furthermore, the ability to have fun and maintain a good sense of humor appears to be a common trait among all participants. Third, none of the participants engage in negative complaining, but focus on the positive aspects of their role. All of the participants hold a positive view of the world in which they live, and portray this same positive view of the future.

Moreover, each participant senses the vital importance of maintaining a healthy lifestyle and being physically fit. Attitudinally, each participant appears to strive towards being a balanced and healthy person. Further, a variety of

activities and involvements both at the school and district level for all participants, implies that each person is busy, energetic, involved, and committed to education. These are high energy individuals. Hence, the common goal that emerges from the profiles appears to be that each participant, through the enactment of their role, strives for excellence in their relationships and responsibilities as educators.

Each participant could be classified as a healthy, balanced, committed professional. Each individual respects children, enjoys positive relationships with them, and loves teaching. Indeed, they are willing to invest personal time in building solid relationships with students within the classroom and through extra-curricular activities. Moreover, they perceive their career as an educator to be worthwhile and valuable, and thus are dedicated to being the best they can be for the children.

### Dialogic Analysis

Dialogic analysis is the study of language as a vehicle that communicates meaning and nuances from one to another. Hence, dialogic analysis looks to the future since it looks to the way people come to understand themselves and one another. In the flow and exchange of language, interpretations of what is said adds clarification and deeper understanding for the participants. Dialogue explores the full depth of peoples' thoughts and

experiences. Moreover, in a true dialogue exchange, there is reflective judgment. Thus, dialogue may be healing for educators because it is reaffirming and encouraging. Analyzing the dialogue of the participants in this study offers rich insights into the phenomenon of educator stress.

### Relationship Between Teachers' Experience and Stress

The data generated from the interviews are presented, analyzed and discussed according to the key research questions guiding this study. The first question asks about the relationship between teachers' experience and workplace stress. In addition, behavioral changes manifested as a result of this workplace stress are discussed. As I present selections from each participant's narrative in response to each research question, Diane's story begins our examination of the first question.

#### Diane

Diane describes a troubling situation in her present school that lasted over two years. Previously not encountering any serious difficulties in her teaching career, I sense she was unprepared for, and subsequently devastated, from the intensity and duration of stress that arose from a conflictual relationships with her principal. Diane's voice quavers as she recalls the painful incidents that accumulated with fury. She begins her narrative by reflecting that the principal was making unreasonable

demands upon the school secretary. Being called in to the principal's office, and asked to give additional work to this secretary, Diane refused. Instead, she responded favorably about the work the secretary had completed for her, and also told her that this particular secretary was a personal friend and she would not say anything damaging about her work performance.

Diane recalls:

From that point, the principal got very angry that I had stood up for this person. Our secretary was a flashy dresser, and I really felt she was jealous of the way she looked, and that she was respected and loved by all the students and the entire staff. For two reasons I wouldn't play this game - she was trying to undermine her - I said I wouldn't go along with that. I guess I said too much, and I said that I wouldn't suck up. If she was looking for someone to tattle tale about people - I wasn't the person to get to do that. She seemed to be jealous of many of her staff. She would find a golden haired child and give that person special privileges. If anything was said behind her back, this person should take it right to her. It was a divide and conquer kind of thing where she wanted to know everything that was happening. One time

she said to me, with a very threatening voice, "I see everything." I thought well - what is it, that, as a person, she felt some sort of inadequacy that she should have to have people behind the scenes finding out for her what everyone was thinking? Maybe we were just normal people thinking about our own lives, and not over-actively thinking about the principal at all, but she seemed intent on finding bad things people were thinking and saying about her. This was the beginning of her harassment - she didn't like me standing up for someone she had taken to be a victim. It got so bad with the secretary, that the secretary became ill and had to retire. This was completely attributed to the way she was treated as a person by the principal.

Diane continues to recall the frightening aspects of the two year long harassment by her principal. She describes the principal's continual visits to the classroom, sitting and taking notes for an extended period "where it became uncomfortable." Constant criticism for a program that the parents were supportive of, constant notes in her lettertray about innocuous items, public criticisms in front of parents and colleagues, and unpleasant confrontations out in the hallways, drained Diane of energy and resources. She

felt she was on a continual firing line. "The secretary and I were the first ones outside the office - my classroom and the secretary's space were just outside her office. So she would come in and blow up at her or at me - we were in the most direct line of fire."

Diane claims that after two full school years of this treatment, many staff members transferred from the school. She felt that she was totally alone on staff. Diane states, "They all chose to leave - but, then they were really kind of forced out by cruelty." Diane felt she lost any support among the remaining staff members, who were afraid to visibly stand with her, for fear of reprisal. She recounts the devastation to her morale, her health and her confidence:

If it hadn't been for my strong will, and the people who were praying for me, I would have had a complete breakdown.

In a way I did, health wise, because a lot of things fell apart . . .

I started getting diarrhea, all the time, I was taking Imodium all the time, it was a common thing. Everytime I saw her, or saw a car that looked like hers - my stomach would start churning. I wasn't sleeping - when I did sleep I was having nightmares and was afraid of going to sleep. Now since, in my reading, I have

found that is called hypervigilance where you try not to let down your guard. Everyone who dealt with her said the same. They were on guard all the time because even in her own words, she was out to get people. I was afraid to go to school, every day when I woke up. If I did sleep - I was afraid to go to work, because you didn't know what tactic she would try next. Her meanness, everything you said to her as a friend, she somehow learned to turn that around against you. At the time, I worried I would have a stroke. I worried about not sleeping, I was worried about the diarrhea and losing weight. Sometimes it got to the point that I thought I was going to crack.

Diane's experience with stress was devastating to her morale and her confidence as an effective teacher in the classroom. The cost to her physical health and well-being was enormous.

### Jane

Jane recalls her experience with stress as an emotional response to a building of commitments, and feeling overwhelmed with a myriad of responsibilities outside the classroom. She was not on good terms with several colleagues. In particular, she had an unpleasant



relationship with a male staff member, and referred to it as harassment. She believes her year of stress was the hardest year of her life. She reflects upon her struggles during this year with clarity and insight.

Jane recalls:

There was a teacher on staff who was sexually harassing me. He ended up losing his job for an incident with a student. It was weird he should have that impact on me, I wasn't comfortable. I was on edge the whole time. He threatened me a couple of times because I was an achiever - perhaps his personal life was going downhill. He wasn't doing his job at work, and I took over. He wasn't doing an adequate job and I went over his head a few times. He put me in my place and said, "I'll get you." My naiveté at that time said to me, that he could do it, and I was really uptight. Very uptight. I felt I wasn't working with competent people - that's frustrating when you consider yourself fairly competent. That stands out as stressful. The harassment was never discussed - I confided in a girl friend. I knew this particular teacher was guilty because of what I experienced. I felt conflicted - I didn't want to jeopardize

the kid's situation, or my career. I never ever talked about it. I never will. It is over and done with. He is out. I lost my relationship in the process. I was a little frustrated! That was stressful. Stress is a horrible thing. We are only on this earth once, life is too short. If you don't sleep well, your eating patterns change, your quality of life changes - you break out, I lost my hair for seven months. Clumps of hair would come out. I couldn't figure out why.

She considers:

I took on everything. I am a "yes" person instead of a "no" person. I had a relationship that was demanding a lot of my time. I actually ended up getting hives that year. For seven months, I didn't know what caused it. I actually thought that it was a food allergy. Two days after summer vacation started, it went away. It was all stress related. There were clumps all over my body. It was the weirdest experience of my life. I had no idea until the break started what it was. I went away at spring break, and in two days it cleared up - but I came back to school and broke out in hives again.

Jane describes the escalating consequences of stress:

I was at a point where I was crying for no reason. My relationship broke up. Lack of sleep, I was very busy. I devoted way too much time to school. I expected a lot of myself, my students - I was putting in fifteen hour days, but I thought it was OK since I was single then. That summer I hit the wall, and then I realized I needed a break.

Jane's experiences with stress left her physically ill, emotionally weakened, and resourceless. Fear of the consequences of speaking out about the harassment kept her silent and afraid. She felt personally devastated by this stressful experience. In the workplace, she felt she had to compensate for the inadequacies of her colleagues, and she was burning out from the exhaustion of demands upon her. Sadly, she did not feel she could voice her concerns, for fear of reprisal.

### Joy

Joy recalls a painful scenario many years ago that caused her tremendous stress. The entire school year she suffered with tension, and the result was she almost broke down. At the commencement of the interview, it took her several moments to begin. She had some difficulty recalling the exact details of the incidents. She feels that the

incident was so devastatingly painful, she may have blocked out some of the details in her memory. As she begins her narrative, the words become more fluid, and she recalls the picture vividly.

She reflects:

The reason I had such a hard time was because I had two kindergarten classes. The morning class in September had a large number of students from a local day care, who were brought by bus, by the day care staff to the school. They were a powerful unit, in the classroom, on the bus - very disruptive on the buses, everywhere.

Because of their power as a unit, they were extremely difficult to handle - extremely difficult is an under-exaggeration.

Because of the disruptive, violent, and dangerous nature of their behavior - of the children towards each other, and towards the other children on the playground, and towards me - kicking, pulling each others' hair, causing their heads to bleed, really horrible things they were doing.

Joy continues:

They decided not just to hire an aide, but to hire another full time teacher. Of course, this situation was so bad that by

the time it (the solution) took place I was exhausted, burned out. This situation was really bad. There was a lot of bad feeling because of the way the kids were behaving and treating others. The parents of the good children were complaining, and it all came back to me . . .

It was a really difficult situation, and then when they hired the person they did hire, she was a very authoritarian kind of a person, and some of the parents pulled their kids out. They didn't like the solution to the problem.

It was over-whelming . . .

I was so vulnerable and I was so weakened by the whole situation, that I guess they thought they needed someone like that.

And, I did, and I didn't . . .

Do you know what I mean? In some ways it was good - but in others it wasn't.

Because she was so strong and authoritarian, she took over too much. That didn't do much for my self-esteem. Even though I needed support, I didn't need my authority taken away. That's kind of what happened - she was a little too powerful.

Joy considers the solution established at the school level was a "band-aid" fix that did not really solve the problem. Although the administration set up a time-out room in the office for the acting out students, she reflects that this was not really meeting her needs. She was very frustrated with the situation.

She explains:

And although the principal set up a place where I could bring them, . . .

I mean it was very difficult for me to bring them. While I am bringing them, the rest were acting out in the classroom, killing each other and wrecking things, putting poisonous substances in the fish tank, pulling each others' hair out, boys looking under girls' skirts. They were doing all kinds of stuff. They were emotionally needy children.

Joy further describes the effect of this stressful chronic situation on her health and her life.

She remembers:

I used to find I would fall asleep from sheer exhaustion, and wake up when my body had a little rest, and not be able to sleep for the rest of the night. I was physically exhausted, mentally exhausted, and emotionally exhausted. I lost a lot of weight. I wasn't sleeping

well, or not at all. I was having a hard time keeping up with my family life with children of my own. I am sure your effectiveness is affected when you are not sure you are doing the right thing. You just have no confidence left.

This experience of stress was devastating for Joy on a professional and personal level. The lack of a viable solution left her feeling bitter about the administration's lack of caring for her situation. Her voice was not heard clearly by the administration, and their support was inadequate and superficial. Clearly, Joy needed to be listened to with empathy in this situation.

### Lily

Lily never suffered from workplace stress until a new principal recently was appointed to her school. Unfortunately, the relationship that developed between her and the principal was tense and stressful. Previous to this conflictual relationship, Lily claimed she had experienced very little stress in her career. She states that she had always thought stress was constructive and productive until this year long experience with the new principal. In her mind, the scenario she remembers was very painful. She recalls:

In my last school, I had already worked with students for years and knew them really well.

If I were a new principal, the first thing I would do, would be to meet with all my departments to get a perspective on what the school is like, what my job was, and what are the kids like. Where are the difficulties, what is your role? How can we as administrators support you, and work together? That's what I would be thinking. That's not what occurred. In fact, parents phoned and the principal made decisions on two students in particular. She made decisions that were really detrimental, and she did not come to see me about the background information on these students. In fact, she became a participant of the very difficulties these students and families already had. The real needs of the students were never sought or addressed. She wasn't an honest person. She would fabricate lies, in order to hold her position. Then she would also use dictatorial lines. She made decisions without consulting me. Here is her line, "I reserve the right, as principal, to make decisions without your consultation, as often as I need to." This is true, I understand this. But there are times when you need to make decisions



after you find out all the information. My difficulty was that she made those decisions without all the information. Where this backfired and caused stress for me, is she would make the decision, which affected the students and teachers. She would make the decision, and then teachers would come to me, angry and upset, and I was caught in the middle. What was I to do about that? I found it difficult to do my job effectively, when we are not consulting one another . . .

When I went to speak to her about it, she felt very threatened by the fact I approached her to discuss it.

Things went from bad to worse, I found she spoke to me so rudely. She would come charging into my office, and make a statement - I just looked at her and I stopped her. I said, "Wait a minute, this has nothing to do about this, this is about you and I." Of course, she denied it.

Lily proceeds to describe the escalating stress that occurred when the principal conducted a formal evaluation of her teaching and counseling responsibilities. Lily was worried that the evaluation process would neither be fair nor favorable, because of their conflictual relationship.

She remembers:

I was really uncomfortable with her doing the evaluation, because I did not feel she could be objective. I felt there was personal stuff going on here. I had not trusted her from September from the way things were handled with the kids. As far as someone working together - I did not trust her, she told numerous lies, and I knew she would not listen. This was apparent to the students I worked with. They would come and complain to me that she did not listen. So I knew I wasn't alone in what I experienced . . . So I was really very uncomfortable with her evaluating me.

But she insisted and I thought all right. I felt confident in my role as teacher and counselor, and thought, what do I have to lose? Well, I had lots to lose as the year progressed, it turned out.

She wrote in the most subjective, critical language I have ever heard. Very belittling, and had to do with personality clashes.

There was no counseling data. So is this stress? This is the whole year. Beginning in September, and ending on the last day, the last hour. At that point I started looking

for a new job. I had never experienced stress in the workplace until that year. Never.

Lily then describes the deterioration of her health due to this stress. She thinks that she suffered more ill health in this year, than ever before.

She considers:

I had more migraines than ever. I used to get by on one package of medication given for a three month period. I was going through it in one month. I was having, six, maybe eight, migraines a month. That's two a week. That's where I noticed it. It was coming out physically for me.

I remember discussing with my doctor - I was also going through separation and divorce with my husband - I don't understand while I am in the midst of a crisis, I don't have a headache. She said, "Of course not, that's not how migraines operate. Your body reacts a couple of days later." It's true, I would have a tense time with her - and a day or two later I would have a migraine that seemingly went away, but never quite went away. A day or two later, it was back. I never took time off. I never took school days off around this stuff. I would be fearful around taking any time off.

Lily speculates that this year was the hardest year of her teaching career, as well as her life. She felt devastated by the negative and conflictual relationship with her principal. Her voice was continually shut off from the decision-making process. She was not consulted. In fact, she had little autonomy and less freedom to complete her responsibilities in the fashion she thought appropriate. Lily did not feel listened to; her voice was not heard.

### Raoul

Raoul recounts a year of stress in regards to getting release time and a salary from his school district in order to attend post graduate work at a university in a different city. After arranging a creative and complex system of approved leave of absences from teaching duty, the paper trail is subsequently lost. Consequently, there is no forthcoming pay check, his reputation is in jeopardy, and his formerly supportive principal becomes an antagonist. His stress is increased dramatically as he attempts to deal with the pressures in this situation.

Raoul explains:

The initial position I put to my principal was I wanted to be off for several months to attend this program. So, I counted up those days and I was figuring I would return on spring break. It came to seventy odd teaching days. I had asked the principal if

I could put that at professional growth, at cost of substitute. The personnel department at the board said it was not part of the contract, so I can't do that. I figured out a plan B. I'll put together department head days, lieu days, and I'll take a leave of absence for the rest of the time. I met with the personnel officer, proposed I would take thirty-nine days leave without pay, and that was approved. I put it back to the officer with a memo reiterating our discussion. She signed off on it, and I got my copy. Then I have a period of time to figure out how to get a leave for the remaining days. I put through a request for a conference for six working days. That was approved. I put in a request for a series of department head days, and that was approved. The district owed me for four lieu days. All the paperwork went through and was approved for these days. It was assumed I would be flying back to my home school, show up and work on Friday and Monday, then back on my department head days. On one occasion I wanted to be back (home) so that was one plane fare. On another occasion, I had to return for a court case, so that was another plane fare. Those were

locked in. I had a school team going to championships, so that was another fare. I had a bonus week where I had to do a presentation, and I hopped a plane to return home that weekend . . .

It looked like it would be perfect.

I am back at work, and say to the clerk in our office, "Here is the fax number where I can be reached out of town."

She had a question she couldn't answer, so she faxed me questions out of town, wrote up answers and returned them. So the secretaries see that I am out of town, but I am on professional development or department head leaves, but "He, (me, Raoul) is faxing from out of town."

Then I get a fax back saying they can't find my leave days, and what am I doing out of town because I am not on leave? We are reporting you absent, without pay, and probably subject to disciplinary action every day you are away. So I phoned my secretary and found there was gossip in the school. Luckily, I had put my leave papers in a specific drawer, in case there were problems. I told her to go to that drawer, and take all the leave papers out and xerox them to give them to the lady

in the front office. The claim was, this lady (the school secretary responsible for keeping the binder with all the leaves) has lost, misplaced, my papers . . .

When I returned, everybody is saying, "You're in trouble." I met with the principal with my copies of the leaves that were signed.

The personnel officer said there was no way I had approved department head days. The principal said there was no way I had approved department head days. I said, not only did I get approval, I had two copies of their approvals, xeroxed copies of it all, and gave it to them. I had also memoed him prior to taking time for the four lieu days, and luckily I had that still "dated request" in my computer. I pulled out these copies and gave it to them.

Raoul further describes the turmoil and stress ensuing from this misunderstanding. Gossip about his situation occurs in his school. Severe consequences were emerging for him, personally and professionally.

He reflects:

Basically all the paperwork had been done right in the first place. The secretary panicked, because she lost or misplaced all the paperwork. She then goes to the principal.

Meanwhile there's starting to be turmoil in the office because I am gone away for four days approved, and now he (me, Raoul) is gone away for fourteen. Um, is he going to be fired? Will there be disciplinary action? I don't know for sure, but I hear rumors when I got back. As one of the counselors described to me, "all shit hit the fan when you left here . . ."

Anyway, the principal wrote a memo to the personnel officer, basically, disavowing any knowledge of my being able to be away from the district for all these days. It was therefore his understanding that I should be docked pay for the additional days.

He wrote that letter to personnel, and when I got back it was in my box.

Raoul continues to describe a series of tense encounters with the principal to clarify this situation. He states that "the principal was put in the position of wanting to act as a decisive leader. Not necessarily intelligent, but decisive." The ensuing result was that the principal eventually wrote another memo back to personnel asking them to please disregard his previous memo. In this memo, he states that he is apparently in error in regards to Raoul's leaves. However, when Raoul returns to his school, he finds the personnel officer is off for several weeks, out



of the country. Thus, his situation and lack of pay could not be resolved until the spring. Many memos between Raoul and the board office were exchanged. Confusion reigned. For Raoul, having no paycheck while attending a post graduate program in another city, was certainly stressful. He contemplates:

This situation was something that was agreed to, and then parts of the agreement (the paper trail associated with the agreement) disappeared. When it disappeared, so too disappeared the agreement. What happened was the agreement is gone, and my reputation is on the line.

Raoul, also going through an stressful divorce at the time, is commuting from work to his program, and is being audited by Revenue Canada. His life is in turmoil.

He describes:

I had so much stress going on in that period. There was no question, it was stressful. I was going through a divorce at the same time. Revenue Canada is auditing two companies I own. These were extensive audits going on for months. In the one company, I had to pay \$35,000 in back taxes. In the other company, \$10,000. I was writing 75 page responses to Revenue Canada, as to why they were wrong.

Raoul's stress pervades every aspect of his life, personally and professionally. His reputation is "on the line." He has no paycheck. He is attempting to attend classes and pay tuition as well as living expenses, while commuting to another city. Returning to his job, he finds his relationship with the school principal very tense.

He recalls:

There was a point when the principal involved took it personally. It was like I screwed him, and I had gone out of my way to screw him. He is a very competitive and aggressive person, and he was going to come back to make sure that he did the same to me. He was at the point when I went back to his office, that I could see he was clearly choked. I mean the body language!

Raoul states that the effects of his stress caused him to "spin off in several directions." He claims that he reverted to smoking, a habit abandoned eighteen years earlier, but which he returned to easily.

Raoul considers:

I quit smoking in January, 1980. I probably smoked most of last year during my graduate program. I stopped when I got back to school, then smoked July and August. I have been off cigarettes for one month now. But yeah, I started smoking when I hadn't been smoking for 18 years.

On a personal level, Raoul experiences feelings of being a failure because of his divorce. Divorce and ensuing issues with custody of his children caused him extreme emotional pain and stress.

He reflects:

I think one of the things that happened when I was getting divorced, was, ultimately a feeling a failure. So, I don't think I had a lot of control of the events surrounding that. But for me, as I grew up in sort of a Nelson family, there's a sense that marriage is good - flowers and daffodils - and that it's forever. I asked other men about it too, but men are not very forthcoming about anything. But there is some sense of yeah, that's right, when I ask men if they feel that divorce was ultimately a failure. That somehow you messed up, big time, and my sense is that I get a positive response from men when I say that.

Raoul is insightful about difficulties that some men experience in attempting to communicate honestly in regards to their feelings. Stress affected Raoul's sense of self, his relationship with his principal, his health and well-being, as well as his effectiveness as a student in his post graduate program.

Robert

Robert recalls a troublesome relationship with a principal that caused him stress. He describes this administrator as unsupportive and meddling. Although this relationship occurred several years ago, Robert to this day is confused and unclear in how the principal was attempting to communicate with him. Never having encountered previous difficulties with an administrator, Robert was dismayed at their relationship.

He recalls:

Our present principal is fine, but the past one was not very supportive. In fact, he was, a lot of the time, an adversary. Looking for problems, looking for things to nit pick about - which is a result of these people not having much to do. There's a lot of time on their hands. This person was very picky, and would go around trying to find something to criticize about you. I think it was a power thing. Short guy - probably a short man syndrome. We had one run in - I could never figure out what he was talking about. To this day I don't understand what he was talking about. I walked out, and told him, I don't understand what you are talking about. I said, "I know it's some kind of

criticism - can you explain it to me? If you can't, I am leaving." He said, "Don't go away mad." I said, "That's exactly what I am doing, because I don't know what you are talking about." It was weird. This incident - it was about something that wasn't my job. The whole thing became a muddle of confusion for me. I really didn't know what was happening. He wasn't communicating clearly. I felt it was an attempt to be really critical of me, yet I really didn't know what he was being critical about. And I asked. He had very poor people skills. Terrible people skills. He was a guy in the wrong job. Didn't particularly like kids - he should be in a job where he doesn't have to deal with people. I found it ludicrous he would tell me what to do. I knew how to do my job a lot better than he does. He was very hard to communicate with. Very hard to communicate with.

Robert describes lack of sleep, lack of concentration, and feelings of anger as by-products of this stressful situation. His acidic comments on the principal's leadership style reflect his belief that the principal did not have the students' well-being, or staff support, a high

priority in his leadership role. Robert did not feel he had a voice in this relationship. He did not feel listened to, nor did he feel he was able to understand his principal's reasoning.

To summarize, all participants in this study felt they did not have a voice, and were not listened to with empathy by either their principal or colleagues in the workplace. They felt helpless to control their own professional responsibilities. Moreover, the conflictual relationship that developed caused them severe stress which drained them of vitality and confidence. The debilitating effect of this chronic stress played havoc with their physical, mental and emotional well-being. These educators felt professionally ineffective.

#### Educators' Responses to Stress as a Phenomena

The second research question examines the responses of experienced teachers to workplace stress as a phenomena. A phenomenon is a central event or happening about which a set of actions is directed at handling or managing (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). In this research question, I am examining the participants' responses for handling workplace stress. Each participant expressed unique coping mechanisms for handling workplace stress. Again, the language and narrative of each participant frame a powerful response to this question.

**Diane**

Diane's experience with stress was so severe, she sought medical assistance and counseling. Her physician prescribed a medication to calm her nerves and assist her in sleeping. She states she learned to cut back on the amount of medication she was taking, as she became emotionally stronger. She was extremely careful with the medication. She kept in frequent touch with her doctor, but also tried to create a healthier lifestyle through frequent exercise and a nutritious diet.

She recalls:

I started doing aerobics every day. I started trying to walk and found that walking was really wonderful - especially to take note of the scenery. I tried to walk where it was scenic, not just walking in traffic with noise. I went to find a quiet and scenic place, at times when leaves were falling, or when bulbs were sprouting, in nature. I found that gardening was really good, and now I make a point of gardening with my class . . .

I tried to watch my diet a lot better to make sure I was eating really healthy things, and drinking eight glasses of water daily.

I kept in touch with my family doctor, any time I was really stressed. I learned to

use humor - to watch funny movies, to look for fun. To be able to laugh at myself, to look for something funny rather than to over-react . . .

I kept a journal, a good things and a bad things journal. I also kept a list of the highlights of my life - the very best things that ever happened to me in life. When I felt depressed, I could take out that list, and relive those happy days. I felt that was really helpful, to look back and see it wasn't always like this. There would be celebrations again, where things will be happy. Not to dwell on the down.

I went for counseling service and that was helpful. I think mostly books helped me. There's a lot of good literature out there to help you get through these kinds of experiences. That's another thing, getting a book and following step by step activities was good. One of the activities was having a golf watch. Giving yourself a point when everytime you gave yourself negative self-talk. I consciously trained myself to replace the negative talk with good self talk. That's something I have also brought into my class. Everyday I do an affirmation with them.



I found being able to plan was really important. If I felt a panic attack coming, or feeling stressed - if I could plan an activity I could focus on something. Planning is really important. I learned to appreciate cooking, following a recipe which kept you focused in on each step. Things I didn't really enjoy before, cooking and baking, I learned to like. One Christmas my family said - "You've never baked so much before." I never had to knead dough before!

Diane realized that she needed support to cope with this situation. She refers to the teachers' union as her sole source of support during this conflictual relationship with her principal. She said that through their mentorship and assistance, she learned to dress in bold colors, use open body language, be assertive, and hold her own when a verbal attack would occur from the principal. At her request, a union representative sat in every meeting with the principal, and gave her feedback about how she handled the interviews.

Lastly, Diane speaks about how nature was healing for her. "I think the cycling in nature - hope - was healing. You need hope, you can't live without it, the belief it's going to get better." She speaks of her Christian faith as a source of comfort and strength during the times of battle with her principal.

She acknowledges:

Thinking about new beginnings for me was really good. As a Christian person, I think of the Resurrection. This becomes a daily thing for me. Right then I was being crucified, but it's not always going to be like that. We'll start anew.

Diane's willingness to seek help and develop her own resources for handling stress show an inner strength of character. Her Christian faith also strengthened her during the battles with stress, although she acknowledges that God doesn't just take all human problems away. Diane was highly motivated to do whatever she could to eliminate the devastation of stress.

### Jane

Jane speaks about the importance of eating well, sleeping well, and maintaining a healthy lifestyle in combating workplace stress. Moreover, she contends that self-reflection is a vital process in maintaining health.

She asserts:

Be a person in balance. Healthy body, healthy soul and healthy mind. Is my personal and professional life balanced? If they are, I feel pretty good. If they are not - something will be affected. If I am working too hard my personal life will be affected. If I am

having too much fun, my professional life will suffer and I won't achieve as well. You need time to think about you. I've had a lot of time for introspective thought, and you have to look out for yourself, and create a healthy position for yourself. Look in the mirror and see if you are healthy. Am I going in the right direction? With all the changes, we need to talk about ourselves. We need to focus on things that are important about ourselves. It's an issue - taking care of self, with all the changes we endure - we need to take care of ourselves. Take a year out - sabbaticals are important. Take time out if you are stressed to rejuvenate yourself. Every five years take a leave of absence. If you want to get out, get out. Break that treadmill.

Jane also stresses the importance of seeking professional assistance in the form of counseling. She believes a professional "can dig a lot deeper." She claims she has recommended counseling to friends. "You need a different perspective outside the support of your friends and family."

Jane says she worried that admitting she sought help might show up in a personnel file. It was hard to admit to herself she needed help. "It took nine months to go myself. We take two seconds to pick up the phone for any car

problem, but resist personal help. I got my grounding and footing back, and am a better person from going for counseling." Counseling is one road to reestablishing mental and emotional health.

Jane also states that she is a "grounded person" with an excellent family background. She believes that is one source of strength for keeping her grounded, and assisting her in her battles with workplace stress. She acknowledges that "not everybody has that." Family support has been a source of inner strength for her.

### Joy

Joy claims that self-care is vital to stress management. She asserts that caring for personal needs, as well as seeking support from friends, are vital to maintaining a healthy lifestyle, as well as mental and emotional well-being.

She recommends:

Get exercise, find time for it. Talk with people. Use the people that care about you as listeners. Keep on doing the things you like to do, even if it means the papers aren't all marked for the next day. Go to your quilting club, or your curling club, or whatever it is you like to do. Have fun. Be a participant. Keep up your own life. There's a life outside the classroom. Keep a balance. Learn how to

cope, in different ways. I do think it is important to try to keep up your own enjoyment of life. Exercise and fresh air.

Joy maintains that the only person who is able to deal with the problem, is the one who is suffering from the problem. She recommends that educators become proactive in stress management, and separate workplace stress from home life.

### Lily

Lily feels she has grown in maturity and wisdom since her stressful year at school. The lessons were difficult, but she received assistance through professional counseling, family and friends, and through prayer.

She affirms:

I knew I was not alone. There was support. I have a very strong family and friends support. My sister has a strong Christian faith, so there was a lot of support to turn this over to God. They were praying for me as well. I belong to a cell group, a home group, and being able to talk about this situation and get feedback and support helped. I think in part I read more Scripture and recognized that God doesn't always make our life easy. Our path is not always smooth. You can't keep replaying these scenarios over and over in

your mind. It's senseless. Things become inaccurate when you replay them. Any time I would replay the scenarios with my principal, I discovered maybe there was nothing I could do. What should I have done? God provides us with lessons that are not just for our learning. Maybe I was the sandpaper for her - maybe she was to learn a few things. I don't know, but all I had to do was a horrific amount of trusting in God. He knows the final outcome. I don't. I just participated in the process. Made myself accountable for my own behavior, my own words, what I did. I couldn't control what the principal said or did. If I take a Christ-centered approach, it calmed me and allowed me to look for the positives in the situation, not live in the negative. I would go to bed praying for peace of mind. I would pray for her as well. I think my faith has kept me in line.

Lily summarizes the valuable lessons she learned through her faith, and going for counseling assistance. Although not an easy task, she found resources to assist her in coping with workplace stress. She actively worked at growing in maturity and wisdom, and learned not to dwell on her problems.

She reflects:

I went for counseling through our employees' assistance plan, and I had a wonderful guy who said there are just some people you can't negotiate with. It doesn't matter what is going on, it is non negotiable. The hardest thing that year was I never clearly understood the frame of reference to operate with her - it was ambiguous, inconsistent and unpredictable. She was definitely threatened by organized professional women who had a sense of control, who had an understanding of their own job. I realized you could ruin your own life by getting caught up in these situations. The stress comes in here. You cannot control another person. You realize these experiences are invaluable. I realized I needed to let go, pray about it, take a holiday and enjoy my summer. I cut my hours at work. I am not going to come in from 7 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. I realized it is irresponsible to worry. I don't have to do it all. There is something greater beyond me. I have to let go. I learned to be clear about my values. I learned not to people please. I also

learned to slow things down and not jump to conclusions and be judgmental.

I would try not to read into other people's behavior. I have always reacted and not responded. I need to step back and think about the larger context, be more thoughtful. You have to be thoughtful, instead of reactive. The counseling helped me.

Lily's journey to wellness began with the realization that she was only responsible for herself. Her inner strength grew in relationship to her insights and wisdom gleaned from this experience. She also attempted to separate workplace stress from her personal life, and take control of her time.

### Raoul

Raoul speaks about the need for handling stressful events in a sequential manner, focusing on one issue at a time. He also needed to separate his stress into categories in order to cope. A colleague advised him to let others know about the stress he was dealing with.

He states:

As long as I could deal with stress sequentially I was coping. I would write a note to Revenue Canada saying I need six weeks to respond to you. Then I would deal with school. Everything sequentially. I also started telling a few



others about my situation. I wrote a letter to my professors about my court case (divorce). I didn't give them much information, it was a technocrat letter. A friend of mine said I needed to let people know what was happening because otherwise people would provide their own interpretation of what I was doing.

I was spinning off in several directions.

Raoul recognizes when he is stressed, and attempts to deal with that stress wisely. He tries to maintain a positive perspective during episodes with stress. Raoul is creative in developing coping mechanisms. As an adventurous, energetic individual, he finds activities that absorb him, and consequently take his mind off his troubles. He explains:

I have many coping strategies. I play a lot of chess on the computer. At the current time, I have a really difficult program, Chess Master, and the computer beats me. Every once in a while, it's nice to win! I also play solitaire on the computer. I went between chess and solitaire. I play the guitar a lot . . . I like to go dancing. I like to meet many different people, talk to people. On my travels, I meet interesting adventurous people. I like to socialize with people.

Going to a bar and chatting with people is like an adventure for me. I met a man about 57, who for 40 years of his life played steel guitar in Nashville. He was just a hoot. He played in the background of many popular songs. Played with Conroy Twitty and Roy Orbison. Marvelous story!

In addition to these unique coping strategies, Raoul concentrates on maintaining physical well-being as paramount to handling stress. Asserting the importance of physical exercise, Raoul outlines his varied daily regime.

He describes:

Number one, I work out in a gym on a real regular basis because I like that. I like pushing weights. I do a balance between weights and circuit training. I do a lot of leg lifts and push-ups balanced with pushing weights. So, I do a circuit of twelve - six are weights, six are not. It's physically demanding . . . I'm not a real jogger actually, but I do jog. I guess I did the jogging because I was really pressured . . . I like jogging at the beach, that's great. If I had my choice in terms of an aerobic exercise, I would be swimming. I am a really good swimmer. I do ten laps, crawl; ten laps, backstroke; ten laps, breaststroke;

ten laps, sidestroke; so you do your forty laps which is about a quarter of a mile. That would equal five miles jogging. Exercise really helps with the stress levels.

### Robert

Robert speaks about the necessity of "keeping your energy up" in order to combat stress. He also keeps active through a variety of activities. Robert believes that lack of sleep exacerbates stressful situations. He believes rest is important in handling workplace stress, and attempts to proactively take care of his physical needs.

He reflects:

I usually find it stressful when I get tired. I get tired from all the coaching. I am pretty well in charge of basketball, the whole thing - it gets tiring. When you are a teacher it's important to have a good energy source. You have to match those kids' energy, and when you can't do that, it's stressful.

Robert also comments on the necessary attitude essential for combating stress. He believes a positive attitude is key for successful stress management in the workplace. Moreover, he attempts to maintain positive relationships with others. He has a positive outlook for the present as well as the future.

He remarks:

I think you have to approach the job with a really positive attitude. I think you have to have a real sense of humor. We have lots of fun in my class everyday. Relax. Be considerate. Keep a healthy lifestyle with good sleep, exercise, a positive attitude and enjoy the students.

Clearly, Robert attempts to deal with stress proactively. He utilizes these skills under episodes of severe stress such as the conflictual relationship with a former principal, as well as daily practice in maintaining health.

In summary, each participant sought to maintain a healthy mind, healthy body, and healthy spirit. Each sought to be balanced, noting physical exercise and sleep to be critical. Each was motivated to seek counseling assistance when they needed it. Each individual recognized the need for separating workplace stress from their personal life.

#### Relationships with School Principals or Colleagues

The third research question in this study examines the relationships between school leaders and significant colleagues and educators under stress, and develops implications for leadership. This question seeks to determine whether a relationship with significant colleagues, as well the school principal, exacerbated or alleviated the stress for each participant in the study. In

order to respond to this research question, a discussion of each participant's dialogue follows. In some situations, the participant idealizes how a relationship with a principal could be both positive and affirming. Implications for leadership are drawn from each participant's contemplations about how a school leader can be supportive and encouraging.

### Diane

As described earlier, Diane's stressful situation in the workplace involved a conflictual and negative relationship with her principal. Diane felt her problems started because she wanted to do what was right, and thus refused to criticize the school secretary. Hence, Diane felt she was being harassed, and unfairly punished for attempting to stand up for a colleague and a friend. She describes lurid details of daily insults, demeaning remarks, and criticisms given in front of colleagues or parents. She further details how her confidence suffered, and she felt afraid to go to work. She felt "undermined," and "purposefully humiliated." She describes events such as the principal hiding behind doors and eavesdropping. Therefore, her relationship with the principal excruciatingly exacerbated her stress.

Although support from the teachers' union and from family and friends eased the pain of her situation, she painfully recalls that teachers on staff were unable or

unwilling to support her, for fear of recrimination by the principal. Since many teachers transferred from the school, the remaining staff became silent. Many counselors came and left the school, and were not able to assist her in her stressful situation.

She recalls:

All the people of integrity left except me, and I know I should have left. The people who stayed said everybody takes care of themselves. If you can't take care of yourself, that's too bad but don't expect anyone to stand up for you. So, then I knew if anything happened, I was truly on my own.

Diane continues:

In my situation, everyone was afraid for themselves - so I was the only one who had the nerve to stand up for anyone else. Everyone else, as soon as they saw that one was targeted, they fled. Don't call on me, I don't want to be any part of this, I don't want this to happen to me. I was always saying to them, if we got together, stood together, went to the board together, something could be done about this. The rest of them - you take care of yourself, I'll take care of myself. They were doing the pleasing thing, but you could never please her. She

was totally inconsistent. It wasn't the way you were doing something. She wanted to be manipulative, she wanted to control. If she had been really interested in the children, I would have done what she said. I couldn't, as a person of good conscience, just do what she said and be the obedient person. I had to do what I know was right for my students. I found the school counselors helpful, but they didn't stay around either. They were more knowledgeable about these things than teachers were. We went through many, many counselors in two years. I guess the counselors could see how unbalanced she was, and didn't want to stay, although we as teachers and students needed them very badly because they knew the situation was sick.

Diane expresses a bitter-sweet remembrance of one teacher who tried to show empathy and understanding for her struggles. She speaks of a kind lady who gave her a beautiful plant as a gift, but with it put restrictions on their relationship. Although grateful for the gift, Diane felt that these restrictions removed the feeling of comfort and support extended by a caring colleague. Diane feels that caring for others who are stressed may be significant to their well-being and future abilities to cope with stress in the workplace.

Diane explains:

She made it clear it was private. To go out for coffee after school, we would have to leave in separate cars and meet privately. She said whatever you say to me will be kept confidential, and I knew I could trust that. That helped, but what really hurt was the fact she had to do this so secretly. It couldn't be an open friendship . . . I was supported only privately, not publicly. It helped in one way, but in another it didn't.

Diane reflects that she needed caring from colleagues. She speaks about the power of listening as key to establishing support and understanding. Empathic listening is a component of unconditional acceptance.

She states:

The secretary who had retired, I could call her and talk anytime, she understood. One of the counselors who left - I knew I could call her, and she would listen and understand. I think the role of listening was really important. Even to say I can't really help, but I care. Reflective listening was helpful . . . I am sure I drove people bananas, but it was so important to have some one to listen. A teacher in another school gave me a card



that was really beautiful, almost Biblical.

Listening is the key. Unconditional love is what you really need.

Diane expresses the deep need to be listened to, and accepted unconditionally. She hoped that she would receive support from the school counselors, believing that support could alleviate her stress. Unfortunately, that support was not available on a continual basis. She sought personal counseling to support her struggle with stress. Friends and family were vitally important to her well-being.

#### Jane

Jane speaks about the power of trust, and the need for listening in a relationship with a supportive principal and a supportive counselor in the school setting. However, she also believes in seeking counseling when suffering from chronic stress as stated in her earlier narrative.

She remarks:

Stress is relieved by trust. I don't trust my present principal as much as I trusted my last one. He always made a point of asking, "How are you doing"? It felt like a family. We had fifty odd people on staff, and we were like a family. It was an incredible dynamic whole group. Those years I didn't feel stress because you always had support. It was like "How are you feeling"? and letters of

appreciation in my box, and asking, "How can I help you"? Recognition was there. All of a sudden my job was not a meaningless void - every once in a while a student would show appreciation and say thanks. Presently, there are two staff members I can go to and talk to, they are incredible, approachable human beings. They are both counselors. They listen and care if you have a bad day. They can read your face when you walk by their office. It's a matter of listening, not even helping. It's the key . . .

A principal who listens is better than a principal who has his hand in every single pot out there . . .

He doesn't trust us that we can take off with an idea and follow through with it. That's the worst feeling. Why would you want to work with someone like that?

Why would you put your all into it, if you aren't going to get your name on the project? That's tough . . .

A lot of people can relieve stress through their significant others. That helps a tremendous amount, but for the most part our profession is highly involved, and you spend a lot of time helping people.

Jane reiterates her deep need for recognition and appreciation for her hard work by leaders. Jane expresses a need for encouragement by leaders. This is consistent with the work of Blase and Blase (1992), as well as Blase and Kirby (1994) on teacher recognition and encouragement. These researchers contend that educators consider encouragement and praise foremost in effective leadership behavior. Furthermore, Jane values being listened to by a significant colleague, such as a school counselor. She believes that reflective listening is key to maintaining emotional well-being.

### Joy

Joy states that the principal, during her episode with stress, was the weak link in the support system. She feels that a positive relationship with a principal, who will act quickly and automatically to bring in sources of both school and district support, will alleviate stress. According to Joy, principals ought to be teacher advocates. In addition, she states that rest from workplace stress is crucial for stressed teachers. Joy voices strong opinions about the role of the school counselor.

She asserts:

The principal at my school was not -- he was getting close to retirement and spent a lot of time with racing forms spread out on his desk. Betting forms. So probably the

key weakness in the chain around me was the principal. If he had acted sooner on my behalf, the teachers wouldn't have had to bring the grievance. Because of who he was, they had to. So I got a lot of support from the teachers. One of the teachers said to me, "You have to take time off." Her suggestion was I teach in the mornings and take the afternoons off for two or three weeks. Get some rest. That's when I got back on my feet emotionally. I did that. I took her advice and I revere her to this day because she saved my mental and emotional health by that suggestion.

Joy reflects upon how an open and trusting relationship with a principal can minimize teacher stress. As a teacher, she establishes a need to be listened to by those in authority. She also feels it is critically important for principals to be in the classroom frequently. Principals need to be available to assist teachers. They need to be familiar with the instruction and children in the classroom. She recommends:

If I were principal I would have a talk with that person, say, "I have been in your room so much, I know what is going on. I know you are doing everything you have always done. It's worked before, but is

not working now on this mix of children.

It's not your fault." It would be something we could deal with together.

Joy ponders:

In regards to school counselors, is their role to counsel needy teachers? I think the counselors are stretched beyond human endurance already, but I do think emotionally healthy teachers make for emotionally healthy classrooms. So I think the counselors should have, as part of their job description, support for the teachers. You should feel you can go to the counselor and talk, confidentially. Some teachers do it, others don't because they don't know if they are supposed to. Is it the role of the counselor or not? It's not a requirement of your position, your definition of your job, but I think it should be.

In addition, Joy speaks about principals who have attempted to encourage her through notes and letters of appreciation. She keeps each letter, and has a scrap-book that helps her to "remind herself she is doing a good job." These tokens of appreciation help reduce her personal stress.

Moreover, Joy believes that listening is healing for stressed educators. She says that teachers need someone who cares enough about them to let you talk, no matter what you say or even if they disagree. Even if they are exaggerating or stretching the truth, these listeners never make you feel bad for sharing. "Total acceptance" is vital to well-being. In addition, Joy firmly believes that the kindness and friendship extended to colleagues, simply through the act of listening and caring, does indeed alleviate stress. She believes that school principals need to be quick to respond to educators with classroom problems, and offer reassurance and encouragement.

### Lily

Lily's stress was caused by a conflictual relationship with her principal. She reflects upon the integrity of that relationship, and is critical of the principal's leadership style. Lily felt that she had no personal power in this relationship, and was constantly undermined.

She recalls:

I never understood the context I was operating in with my old principal. I never knew what would happen from day to day, I was constantly walking on egg shells. My confidence was undermined, and I perceived the principal did not have the best interests of the students at heart. In this particular case, they were

more concerned about what the public would think. What would the school board think? Was the school running smoothly? Come hell or high water, she was going to have it run smoothly, according to HER plan. If you didn't fit into her plan; no, if you questioned her plan, she saw you as an adversary, rather than a colleague. I don't think she thought of me as a colleague, I was her subordinate. I'm not certain what kind of respect this woman had for me. You have to TRUST the people working for you that they can do the job competently.

Lily contends that a supportive, caring, and open principal could alleviate teacher stress. Moreover, she believes that listening is a powerful tool in that relationship. In Lily's estimation, it is impossible to form a trusting and open relationship with a colleague or administrator that does not listen.

She states:

We're vulnerable human beings and we should be allowed to make mistakes. Part of making mistakes is about learning. We learn about life through making mistakes. Administrators need to have faith and trust in what's valuable. They need an open door, take the time, and not interrupt me when I speak, be reflective. Listening to what the other person is saying

and respecting what you have to say is important. That's what happened with that principal, she never respected what I had to say as important. That leads to self-doubts, and that disturbed me the most.

Lily's journey to wholeness, after a devastating experience with stress, is strengthened by support from friends and family. She felt comfort and strength from their prayers. In her role as a counselor, she assumed she had all the counseling and negotiation skills to develop positive relationships with others. It was shocking to her that her relationship with the principal could cause so much stress and self-doubt. She felt utterly unable to form a positive or trusting relationship with this principal. Hence, she felt devastated, alone, and undermined in the school setting.

### Raoul

Raoul describes the relationship with his principal as tense during the disappearance of the paper trail of his approved leave of absences. In an attempt to defuse any residual anger from this situation, Raoul took the initiative to approach his principal, and seeks to clear the air of misunderstandings. He begins by clarifying his motives, and reassuring his principal that his actions were not intentionally manipulative. Initially, Raoul felt he was only listened to superficially. He had to return to his



principal, and begin to dialogue again, in order for rapport to return to the relationship. Why did Raoul have to take that initiative? In his own words, Raoul comments that "the telephone rings both ways." Why did his principal not initiate these conversations?

Raoul elucidates:

To an extent, my principal was in a bad position. He has a person who is out of the building, on an approved time period of roughly six days, and suddenly that person is gone, faxing items from out of the city. He's not sure, couldn't find his memos and the secretary couldn't find her approved copies. Nobody in an organization likes making mistakes, and being caught making mistakes. There was a point when I came into his office first, where he had his formal file, he was prepared to do battle and call me on this. I tried to defuse him on it. I can't remember exactly how I did it, but I consciously went into his office and knew by his body language I had to defuse him right away. I realized there was a lot of tension. We had a conversation that was rational and affable. But I (later) heard from others that the tension was still there, so I went back and spoke to him again. I said "Look, I know you think what I did was done

to personally anger you." He said, "Yes, I was mad. You were screwing me around." I said that the reality is, I didn't do a good job of cross-checking before I left. I didn't go back and sit with him in a meeting. I should have done that. I should have reminded him that I was off. I should have clarified everything. I was busy, he was busy. We never had that conversation. If we had that conversation prior to my leaving, this situation would never have happened. I reminded him that what happened was my attempt to deal with my own life, and solve my own problems. I reminded him that I wasn't trying to create problems for him. All the personal rapport we had for several years came back into it. But he - he is a pretty good administrator who tries to do a good job.

Raoul believes that the "penny dropped at that point" and the former relationship based on respect resumed. Hence, Raoul is a strong advocate of confronting administrators by speaking the truth, and clarifying motives. He emphasizes the need for having a voice which is heard and listened to by others. However, Raoul contends that there may be long term effects from the experience of being in a conflictual relationship with those in authority.

Raoul muses:

I found the long term effect of the lack of communication, when you have an employer and employee relationship, or when you have an ordinate subordinate relationship, when something goes awry, you have to then fix it. What is not fixed is your access to mobility within your career. However, I think my principal still likes me. I think he knows I am more competent than he is, in a number of areas. He needs my expertise in his job in a number of realms, and he calls on that on a regular basis. He puts me in positions where I have to cover him in areas he can't cover himself. But ultimately, I think, probably he would, if asked for a recommendation, would give a good one. Then he would say "but", and that would be based on this interaction. It will follow you. Maybe that's fair, who knows?

Raoul believes there may be serious repercussions from his situation; consequences that may limit his mobility within the district. Although the error of the "lost" paper trail is corrected for him, what may be the long term result? What is remembered about this situation?

Raoul acknowledges the power of a person in a leadership position to limit career mobility for an educator within a school district.

Raoul contends:

From the principal's point of view, what he'll remember, was something I did was done so poorly that he was seen to be ineffective in his role. What the personnel officer will see, is someone who manipulated the system, and needs to be watched carefully. From her perspective, part of that is true, and part of that is not. They signed off on all the leaves. But junior people who "play the system" do, I think, affect their position - in the sense that they are barred from promotions.

Raoul identifies the critical need for trusting and open relationships with administrators. Dialogue and honest communication must be the fabric of these relationships (Senge, 1990). Integrity in relationships between principals and educators is crucial for achieving excellence in our learning communities (Starratt, 1996; Heifetz, 1994).

### Robert

Robert speaks insightfully about his episode with stress. He frames his comments with the statement that support is critical for a principal or counselor to establish with a hurting teacher. Although he did not

receive support from his previous principal, Robert now speaks glowingly of his present administrator. Robert believes that principal support and a positive relationship with a principal can alleviate stress.

He contends:

When you are stressed, you need a person who you can take a problem to, and have it dealt with quickly and efficiently. My present principal does that - he's really good at it; whereas the principal I was talking about before would hem and haw, sometimes phone the board for advice. Couldn't make a decision without asking, "What should I do"? If you are in a conflict with parents, you would automatically expect support. I certainly have to say, that's why I have been at my school so long, we have excellent support, overall. That really reduces stress. You expect the principal to stand behind you.

Essentially, Robert voices his concern about support. He believes that the principal has the mandate as well as the power to support you, and teachers desperately need that support.

In summary, each educator felt a critical need for principal support, and support from significant colleagues such as school counselors during their time of workplace

stress. In addition, each educator felt that relationships with the principal could exacerbate or alleviate their stress. In most cases, the unfortunate truth of the principal being a primary player in causing stress, exists. However, these educators firmly believe that leaders can assist stressed teachers by listening, by dialogue. Hence, listening and encouraging teachers to have a voice in their professional duties is a critical form of support for educators suffering from stress.

#### Interrelationship of Leadership and Stress

The fourth research question asks how stress and leadership is interrelated and/or interdependent. Each participant's dialogue offers insight into the importance of empowerment, and the ethic of caring enacted in healing relationships by those in leadership positions. Each participant would state, a leader can cause stress by being controlling, or can eliminate stress through empowerment and granting autonomy.

#### Diane

Diane felt alone in her struggles. She describes the effect of the principal's negativity on her self-worth. She longed for those in leadership positions to affirm her, and encourage her. She wistfully ponders what aspects of leadership support would have been helpful for her during her stressful episode.

She explains:

Telling me I was OK - giving me affirmations, instead of my having to make my own affirmations. In the books they say your self-worth shouldn't depend on other people, but when you are getting "hit" daily by negative words, it makes a difference to have someone say something nice to you, or about you, or that you are doing a good job. Deep down inside, I knew I was doing a good job, but I couldn't overcome the negativity that was coming from the principal. Deep down, it was buried like a little crocus bulb, it was there, but you couldn't make it blossom with all negativity.

Diane's words echo Blase and Kirby's (1992) findings that teachers desire recognition and praise in their work. They need to be affirmed, by leadership, for the selfless work they do in, and beyond the classroom. Their work needs to be recognized as professional. Teachers need and desire encouragement that nurtures (James, 1996).

Diane continues:

Administrators should know that as people we always try to do our best. They should know that we all make mistakes - but it's OK to make mistakes. That's how we learn - they shouldn't expect us to be perfect. As

teachers, we have such high expectations for ourselves. We end up beating ourselves up, if administrators set more expectations on us. They should give us our autonomy, it's as simple as that. Studies have been done that say that the bosses who allow their workers to set their own goals and work limits, get a lot more out of their employees than bosses who impose their standards on to the workers. If principals gave their staff freedom to set their own limits, the level of productivity would go way up. Teachers set very high goals for themselves. I think we need freedom, we don't have to be closed in to say you have to do this, you have to do that. We are all well trained, and we will choose what's best for our students, and what's the best way to do our teaching. I think most teachers are conscientious and don't abuse freedom. Who of us would choose teaching if we were going to take an easy way out?

Diane concludes her thoughts by saying administrators have to be honest, non-manipulative, and build trust with teachers. Truly, she is echoing Blase and Blase's (1994) work on empowerment. Diane is an advocate for leadership to form empowering relationships with teachers in order to create learning communities that flourish. She recognizes



that empowerment allows educators to feel they have part in working towards the vision of the school. Lastly, she believes that leaders must form healing relationships, according to Ricoeur's solicitude, with others. Moreover, Diane contends that "Leaders should not be cause of a staff member's stress. If a teacher has home problems, make allowances; don't be demanding. Allow family to come first." Is this not Starratt's concept of leaders being secular pastors? Is it not critical for leadership to view human relationships as sacred?

### Jane

Jane speaks about the power of healing relationships for leaders. She values recognition and encouragement from administrators. She calls teaching "quite a profession - I don't think many people understand what we go through." Leaders can empower or destroy teacher initiative.

She ponders:

I know you can be a leader that can soar, collaborate, and get people on board. Other forceful leaders sit there and say you have to do it this way. Leaders can be in four categories: I call them trailblazers, settlers, pioneers, and saboteurs. There are less and less pioneers and trailblazers - but more and more saboteurs. No, No, No. I am not going to do it. Why are you here?

I don't know why you are here! Yes, you have a steady paycheck and are secure for the rest of your life. But, why are you here?

Jane states that leaders should try to break down the barriers between teachers and themselves. She believes that a leader should notice when you become stressed, or if your work is not at par. She believes that leaders and teachers are simply colleagues together. She reflects upon how she would assist a stressed colleague.

Jane muses:

So, the first thing I would do, if I sensed a teacher was stressed, would be to suggest dinner but not in the school environment. "Do you want to go out for a bite to eat"? I'd ask on my way out. But I think it would be wrong to do it in the school setting . . . then I would approach the person, just informal chatting, asking them how they are doing. What's going on in their life? How are they feeling? Making it formal in the school office, wouldn't work. All of a sudden, people would react differently. Walls go up - who are you to talk to me? Who are you to tell me what's wrong with me? I believe you should approach people having problems like that, not in school,

not in someone's office. Once the ground was broken, perhaps once a week or month, I'd ask, "How is it going? Have you gone to see anyone for help? Have you made any efforts"?

Jane concludes:

I'd establish a relationship and make a suggestion to go for help. Sometimes, it takes a lot more times to make a person go for help. Be a friend to them. Go out for a drink, just be there.

Jane articulates the need for building growth-fostering relationships (Miller, 1984) that bring greater vitality and zest to the participants. Through an ethic of caring (Noddings, 1984; Gilligan, 1982), Jane wishes for leaders to value human relationships and thereby help reduce stress.

### Joy

Joy states that if she now sees a teacher in difficulty, she gets immediately involved to "push and push" for support, to try to get assistance for that teacher. She says, "I know what it is like." If difficulties arise, leaders can actively intervene and find appropriate ways to offer support for the stressed educator. Support needs to be both personal and professional. Joy believes that leadership has the responsibility to encourage and empower teachers to do their best.

She explains:

Like I already said, they have to get into that classroom, and participate with what's going on. Because, if they know, they can advocate for the teachers. If they know, it's more powerful than saying, I am told. They can say, I have been in the classroom, and this is what is happening. Sometimes, having these problems, you are afraid to admit to them. You want to prove how good you are, not admit you can't manage.

Joy believes that leaders need to role model effective practice (Sprague, 1992), empower and support teachers (Blase and Blase, 1994), and form healing relationships (Ricoeur, 1992) with teachers based on trust.

Lily

Lily feels that shared vision (Senge, 1990) is key to establishing a flourishing learning community for educators and students. She feels that consultation is vital. Furthermore, Lily believes that through empowerment, granting autonomy, and trust, leadership can alleviate stress and create communities where leaders and educators collaborate (Chrislip & Larson, 1994).

She contends:

If I was going into a new school, each school has its own climate and culture

with students, kids, and parents -  
how are you going to interact with the  
programs developed over a period of  
years? Some people really like it the  
way it is, while other people may want  
change. It's really difficult when a  
principal comes in and doesn't get an  
overall feel for programs, and for what  
is already working. How in fact can  
they, as a new administrator (where their  
strengths are coming out), how can they  
draw out others' strengths? As opposed  
to coming in with a set program. For  
example, what worked at my previous  
school should work here too. That just  
isn't going to work. You will get a  
degree of rebellion . . .

If I were a leader, I would think I would  
come in slowly, learn what is going on  
in the school. Things spelled out in  
professional development days should be  
addressed, not ignored. You need to address  
them with the staff as a whole. You can't  
ignore consultation, rules that are created  
by the whole staff. You need to get a  
sense of each department, what the school  
is like. You need to care about the kids.

You need to make decisions according to the needs of students and staff, not according to being in the limelight . . .

Trust as a professional, respect, and autonomy is critical. You have to trust the people working with you, that they can do the job competently. You have a role as an administrator - in that role you oversee others and help them fulfill their role, but you don't control it all. It's about trust. It's really about trust.

Lily echoes the notion of forming caring relationships with leaders, teachers, students, parents and the community. If leaders would work for change (Belasco, 1990), and encourage broad-based participation in decision-making, then our educational communities will undoubtedly prosper. The key ingredient in this process, Lily believes, is trust and autonomy for educators.

### Raoul

Raoul believes in the power of dialogue (Senge, 1990) and the importance of striving for excellence in the educational community through partnerships and collaboration (Block, 1996, Starratt, 1996). He stresses the importance of communication between leadership and the community of teachers, students, and parents. Listening and dialogue are key to establishing flourishing educational communities.

He contends:

A good principal dialogues, is a good communicator. As a principal, you want to know what the program is doing for the school, for the kids. You spend a lot of time, talking back and forth, some time talking specifics while some times you talk philosophy. Communication and putting together excellent alternative programs are key. Communication is a two way process.

Reflecting about the relationship between stress and leadership, Raoul believes that a good leader has to have the resources to deal with stress, personally and professionally. Leaders need to be able to reduce and manage stress in the workplace. Raoul believes that leadership and competency are interrelated.

Raoul contemplates:

I would think your ability to accommodate stress allows you to exercise leadership. If you can't accommodate stress, how can you demonstrate leadership? A good leader has to be able to accommodate stress, in order to provide leadership. If you can't put aside the churning and spinning of stress, and get on to the setting of goals, then you can't get on to good leadership. That makes sense to me. You can't talk about good or bad

leadership. If there is leadership, by definition, you are talking positive. You can talk about people who are incompetent or competent at what they do. If they are incompetent, you could never talk about leadership.

Raoul continues to reflect upon the role of leadership in striving to create an excellent learning community. He strongly offers his opinion that leaders must stand behind educators, and run interference for them at the district level, as well as within the school.

He asserts:

Number one - the role of a leader is to ensure that teachers are able to do their job by running flack at the district level. I know of a principal who got in trouble with his staff at one point, because he was spending so much time at the school board. The trustees were intent upon impacting the curriculum that was delivered at the classroom level. This principal took the position that his job was to make sure the trustees were not able to influence the curriculum that was in his classroom. He became a buffer between the political role and the teachers' job. In doing that, he was away from the school a lot. He thrust



himself into every committee at the secondary level. At the end of the day, the teachers in the building felt he wasn't in the building enough. He was under a lot of pressure at the school level. But I think he had to be that buffer and run that flack for his teachers.

Secondly, principals need to encourage people who have good ideas. The key thing - the crucial thing is not to kill them . . . Administrators often kill good ideas, they refuse to accept them. They say no, you can't do that, period. People propose a course, and it's rejected. The principal rejects the proposal. They don't even have to encourage innovative thinking, they just have to receive it openly. They don't even have to encourage. There's a ton of innovative thinking out there. In most cases, the principal rejects it because it creates problems for them. It's not as though we are in a system where teachers have no ideas and all the ideas come from the principal . . .

Thirdly, principals need to find the money to support those ideas.

Lastly, a principal needs the incredible ability run flack for teachers. That is more than

taking heat for them. I think a good principal is one who, when you are doing an innovative program, is able to cover off with those above who may not understand the potential.

Clearly, Raoul's ideas on collaboration (Chrislip & Larson, 1994 & Lappe & Dubois, 1994) are clearly outlined in his reflections. He believes that an excellent leader is one who attempts to define a learning community that has opportunities "for all sorts of individuals, and is open to, and encouraging of, others."

#### Robert

Robert believes that leadership has the mandate to create excellent learning communities (Starratt, 1996) through caring relationships and modeling effective practice. Robert views leadership in terms of establishing positive relationships in the learning community.

He clarifies:

I think a good administrator really works at getting everything you need to run successful programs. Be really good at getting the right facilities, the right equipment, things like that. A person you can take a problem to, and have it dealt with quickly and efficiently.

Good people skills . . .

Keep everybody happy, as much as you can.

This principal we had was just a natural for doing that, he was a real person. Totally disorganized, his tie might have food on it, but he always had us laughing. The kids adored him. A good sense of humor is important. You can go in any time and talk. It's the atmosphere you create. Show them you think they are important. It will usually be returned to you . . . Relax.

Clearly, Robert values the caring atmosphere in the learning community. He feels that leaders need to treat both teachers and students with dignity and respect. In essence, Robert's views support scholars who contend that if leaders can inspire commitment in teachers and students (Chrislip & Larson, 1996), then through collaborative efforts, this learning community will be one that may be built on the sacredness of our human relationships (Ricoeur, 1992).

#### Significance of Dialogue

All of the participants in this research study acknowledged the value and significance of dialogue in their professional lives. They believe that stress is relieved by empathic listening. Accordingly, they also contend that good leaders dialogue openly and honestly with their staff.

Raoul states:

A good principal dialogues, is a good communicator. As a principal you want to know what the program is doing for the school, for the kids. You spend a lot of time talking back and forth, sometime talking specifics while sometimes you talk philosophy. Communication . . . is key. Communication is a two way process.

Additionally, Lily contends that administrators need to trust in their staff, have "an open door, take the time, and not interrupt me when I speak, be reflective. Listening to what the other person is saying and respecting what you have to say is important." Joy believes that leaders should spend time in classrooms, and talk openly with teachers. If she was a principal, and saw a stressed educator, she would get involved and say, "I know what is going on. I know you are doing everything you have always done. It's not your fault." Joy believes that reassurance would promote honest dialogue. She also thinks "you should feel you can go to the counselor and talk, confidentially." Joy also says, "talk to people. Use the people that care about you as listeners."

In addition, Jane feels that approachable human beings "take the time to listen and care if you have a bad day. It's a matter of listening, not even helping. It's the key. A principal who listens is better than a principal who has his hand in every pot out there." Also, Diane spoke about

the importance of having someone listen to your troubles. She said, "I think the role of listening was really important. Even to say I can't help, but I care. Reflective listening was helpful. Listening is the key. Unconditional love is what you really need." Robert asserts that a good leader is someone who can "listen and communicate clearly with his staff."

In summary, dialogue and listening are critical to an educator's well-being. The educators in this study acknowledge the power of listening as healing because it is reaffirming and encouraging. Listening must be empathic and genuine. Reflective listening is a building block towards true dialogue. Moreover, dialogue in the educational community builds healthy relationships, removing fear of judgment.

#### Metaanalysis

Phenomenological research, according to Max van Manen (1990) is richly descriptive, inductive and interpretative. van Manen asserts that phenomenology attempts to explicate the meanings as lived in the everyday world, our life world. Furthermore, our lived experience translates into essence, and thus gives meaning also to the researcher. Accordingly, the data that emerges from this study reflect an interpretative and descriptive attitude for both the participant and researcher.

Thus, a good qualitative researcher, according to Merriam (1988) is sensitive, able to tolerate ambiguity, and is a good communicator. "A good communicator empathizes with respondents, establishes rapport, asks good questions, and listens intently" (Merriam, 1988, p. 39). This process is essential for deep reflection and a rich dialogic exchange. Hence, the researcher enters the lived experience of another through the creation of an atmosphere and forum for true dialogue. Dialogue, according to Senge (1990), goes much further than individual insights can attain. Reflection is a key component of dialogue.

A dialogic exchange wherein each one is truly heard, reserving judgment, is the basis for reflective, healing relationships. Ricoeur (1992) offers us the insight for nurturing and empathic relationships that attend to the needs of others. Noddings (1984) and Starratt (1996) encourage leaders to continually examine their actions and establish empathic caring for others within the educational community. Empathy with others is a key ingredient in establishing honest dialogue. Moreover, dialogue and listening are vitally essentially for successful leadership.

The dialogue of the two interviews with the participants in this study may be a model that leaders need to create among themselves and teachers. In addition, leaders need to be emphatic in their professional relationships. Through an ethic of caring, leaders may be

able to establish an open and trusting forum wherein true dialogue takes place.

I found that the narratives of the six experienced teachers who successfully managed stress in the workplace reveal much wisdom for leaders. The data generated from this study contain common threads woven through the variety of stressful experiences described by the participants.

### Conflictual Relationships

Significantly, each educator's experience with stress was exacerbated by a conflictual relationship with either a principal or colleague. This conflictual relationship depleted them of their creativity and confidence. Furthermore, it gravely affected their physical, mental and emotional well-being. Diane claims "if it hadn't been for my strong will, and the people who were praying for me, I would have had a complete breakdown. In a way I did, health wise, because a lot of things fell apart." Moreover, many of these educators began to question their competence. They felt "undermined" and "harassed". Many felt their relationships were in a "muddle of confusion," as Robert states. Lily perceived that she never really understood the framework of her relationship with the principal. She never truly understood the dynamics of "where she stood." She felt her interactions with the principal were negative and unhealthy. Raoul was the only educator, who through dialogue with his principal, was able to diffuse the

negative energy in the relationship and return to a position of rapport. The opportunities for rich dialogue, and being listened to by school leaders, were missing from their narratives.

### Encouragement and Empowerment

In addition, through the reflections and dialogue in this study, these educators expressed a genuine sense of despair at the lack of autonomy and respect they were granted by those in leadership positions. Rather, these educators desire encouragement for their innovative programs and teaching practices. They want leaders to recognize and affirm their competence and professionalism. They desire integrity in their relationships with leaders. Indeed, many participants spoke of trust as an integral part of a healthy relationship between leaders and teachers.

Lily states, "Trust as a professional, respect, and autonomy is critical. You have to trust the people working with you, that they can do the job competently." Jane claims that "stress is relieved by trust." Diane believes that "They should give us our autonomy . . . Teachers set very high goals for themselves. I think we need freedom, we don't have to be closed in to say you have to do this, you have to do that. I think most teachers are conscientious and don't abuse freedom."

Moreover, each educator in this study desires collaboration and consultation, as well as being part of the



vision of the school. Accordingly, they want to be listened to with empathy. Leaders must profit from knowing that Gilligan's work (1982) asserts that each voice in an organization must be expressed and heard. They might also benefit from Heifetz (1996) who reminds leaders that the dissenting voice must not only be heard, but be protected.

### Support

Although the data in this study reveal that each participant coped with their stress in a unique manner, many were honest enough to state that they were motivated to seek professional and colleague counseling assistance when they realized they needed it. They recognized when they were no longer able to control the symptoms of stress in their lives, and sought effective ways of managing that stress. Lily, Jane and Diane all found counseling beneficial.

Moreover, all educators disclose an appreciation for a supportive network of friends and family in combating stress in the workplace. Lily commented "I knew I was not alone. There was support. I have a very strong family and friends support." Jane believes she is a "grounded person" because she has a caring and supportive family background. In addition, Jane, Raoul, and Diane informally talked with school counselors, and found that support beneficial.

The findings indicate that family and friends are able to establish healing relationships with stressed educators, through an ethic of caring. Are leaders able to do the

same? Indeed, Starratt reminds us that school leaders are secular pastors within the educational community.

Furthermore, educators want principals to give immediate support when they are in trouble. Joy contends that intervention and support has to be "immediate". Robert remarks, "When you are stressed, you need a person who you can take a problem to, and have it dealt with quickly and efficiently . . . If you are in conflict with parents, you would automatically expect support. That really reduces stress. You expect the principal to stand behind you." In addition, Raoul claims "Number one - the role of a leader is to ensure that teachers are able to do their job by running flack at the district level." He concludes his thoughts by saying, "Lastly, a principal needs the incredible ability to run flack for teachers. That is more than taking heat for them. I think a good principal is one who, when you are doing an innovative program, is able to cover off with those above who may not understand the potential." Robert echoes these thoughts by stating, "I think a good administrator really works at getting everything you need to run successful programs."

### Balance

The data gleaned from this study point to the critical importance of a life in harmony. All participants acknowledge the vital importance of maintaining physical health and a balanced lifestyle. In particular, sleep and

exercise are noted as critical to withstanding stress. Each participant now exercises on a regular basis to proactively deal with stress. Each participant has made changes to their lifestyle in an attempt to deal proactively with workplace stress. Jane says, "Be a person in balance. Healthy body, healthy soul and healthy mind. Is my personal and professional life balanced"? Joy and Raoul both assert that each person must find hobbies or creative interests that are absorbing enough to take your mind off workplace stress.

Diane and Lily found gardening and being in nature, healing. Robert speaks about a successful attitude:

I think you have to approach the job with a really positive attitude. I think you have to have a sense of humor. We have lots of fun in my class everyday. Relax. Be considerate. Keep a healthy lifestyle with good sleep, exercise, a positive attitude, and enjoy the students.

### Letting Go Of Stress

Each participant, either through expressions of their faith or in attitudinal changes, acknowledges the need to let go, and separate workplace stress from their personal life. Two of the participants, Lily and Raoul, spoke of family stress, in the area of divorce, as contributing to their existing workplace stress. Jane lost a relationship

during her episode with stress. Undoubtedly, personal or family stress exacerbates the experience of workplace stress.

From analyzing the participants' interviews, I recognize and acknowledge that these participants have strong personalities with many inner strengths and resources. Each intelligently sought to minimize the effects of workplace stress on their personal life, and be more resilient. Although feeling undermined and insecure of their capabilities during the stressful episode, each participant resumed a strong position back to their professional responsibilities. A love of their work characterizes each of them. As Diane comments, who would enter teaching, knowing of the inherent stresses in this occupation, without loving it?

#### Leadership Wisdom

What wisdom may be gleaned from the dialogic exchange in this study? What lessons may be learned? First, teachers want to be empowered to do their job well. They want collaboration and consultation. They want their autonomy, and want to be trusted as a professional. They want a voice in not only their duties, but in the type of support they receive. In particular, they want to be listened to with empathy. When troubles arise, they want those in leadership positions to offer immediate and visible signs of support, both at the school level and the district

level. This is consistent with the work of a host of leadership scholars who write about empowerment for teachers within the educational community.

Second, these teachers desire recognition for the selfless work they do. Furthermore, they desire unconditional acceptance, affirmation, and respect from leadership for their contributions to education. They want to be treated as colleagues, rather than subordinates. They want to be treated humanely. I believe that those in leadership positions can begin to accomplish this task through the formation of healing and nurturing relationships with educators. Practicing Ricoeur's solicitude, through an ethic of caring, leaders can dialogue and heed the voices of educators struggling with stress in the workplace. They can affirm and encourage these educators.

Jane offers these thoughts:

I know you can be a leader that can soar, collaborate, and get people on board. Other forceful leaders sit there and say you have to do it this way. Leaders can be in four categories: I call them trailblazers, settlers, pioneers and saboteurs. There are less and less pioneers and trailblazers - but more and more saboteurs.

Raoul believes that ". . . your ability to accommodate stress allows you to exercise leadership. If you can't accommodate stress, how can you demonstrate leadership? A good leader has to be able to accommodate stress, in order to provide leadership." Indeed, a good leader brings out the leader in each community member, which is self-empowerment.

Moreover, a good leader enables all teachers to envision a viable and hopeful future for the remaining years of their career. Indeed, teachers need to be able to manage workplace stress in order to move towards this future. Hence, leaders need to create an environment wherein teachers are able to deal with stress proactively. Teachers need to give voice to their ideas and experiences, and be listened to in formulating their futures. Clearly, it is vitally important that teachers are able to portray a hopeful future for themselves if our educational communities are to continue to flourish.

Chapter V contains the summary, implications and conclusions, as well as the recommendations.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Summary

In this chapter I summarize and conclude this qualitative study on the phenomenon of educator stress. The major assumption of this study was that leadership wisdom can be gleaned from the narratives of experienced teachers who coped successfully with stress in the workplace. The following four key research questions guided and provided the framework for this study on educator stress:

1. What is the relationship between teachers' experience and stress? What behavioral changes are manifested in experienced teachers as a result of workplace stress?
2. How do experienced teachers respond to stress as a phenomena?
3. How might relationships with school principals and significant colleagues exacerbate or alleviate their stress? What are the implications for leadership?
4. How are stress and leadership interrelated and/or interdependent?

Thus, these questions created the structure of this phenomenologically-based in-depth interview study with experienced teachers. Five of the six participants could be classified as mid career teachers, with a minimum of fifteen years of experience. One participant, included in this study for her insightful responses, was in her sixth year of teaching experience. All teachers met the criteria of being experienced, having passed through the novice stage of teaching, with a minimum of five years of experience. These experienced teachers could portray how they created a future for their career, and for themselves. Four women and two men are the participants of this study. They are all public school teachers, have either elementary, middle or secondary experience, and teach in various districts in the lower mainland of British Columbia.

Each teacher participated in a minimum of two audio taped interviews of sixty to ninety minutes duration. The audio tapes were transcribed, and given to each participant for review and editing. The participants and researcher thus engaged in a mutual interpretative and descriptive process of reflection about their experiences with workplace stress. Hence, the researcher and participants became co-authors together in the unfolding drama of this research. Accordingly, the data generated from this study reflect a subjective and participatory nature. Through a rich dialogic exchange, valuable insights about relationships



were gleaned concerning implications for leadership practice.

The participants' experience with workplace stress was the focus of the interviews. In particular, two participants commented about divorce as a personal stress that exacerbated their stress on the job. Another participant lost a romantic relationship during an episode with stress at work. All participants reflected about their relationships with school principals and/or significant colleagues.

Narratives were selected from the transcripts to pose a response to the four research questions framing this study. The words of each participant were so rich that I made no attempt to dilute the power of their verbal statements. Through intense dialogue with reflection, the participants and I examined the phenomenon of educator stress in depth.

The data were analyzed into common themes that emerged through the interview process. These themes discuss conflictual relationships, empowerment, support, balance, and letting go of stress. These themes were then analyzed in light of the theoretical positions generated by the work of Gilligan (1982) and Miller (1982) concerning voice. Ricoeur (1992), Senge (1990), Starratt (1991, 1996) and others were important for the analysis of developing healing relationships. Lastly, the work of Blase and Blase (1994)

and Blase and Kirby (1992) were significant in examining and discussing the notion on teacher empowerment and collaboration.

#### Summary of Findings of Research Questions

The findings of the first research question which seeks to determine the relationship of teachers' experience and stress are summarized by stating that conflictual relationships with others in the educational field drain educators of their confidence, vitality, and effectiveness. In particular, conflictual relationships with school principals are devastating to educators when they escalate to a negative spiraling of a "lose/lose" situation. When communication between teachers and principals failed, educators felt helpless and powerless to control their professional responsibilities. Moreover, these educators did not feel listened to, nor did they feel they had a voice in formulating their futures. Hence, the debilitating effect of chronic stress from this conflictual relationship played havoc with their physical, mental and emotional well-being.

The data generated from the second question which examines the response of experienced teachers to stress revealed that these educators sought to live a life in harmony and balance in order to cope. The importance of a "healthy mind, healthy body, and healthy spirit" was

emphasized in combating workplace stress. In particular, each individual recognized the need for separating workplace stress from their personal life, and seeking counseling services when requiring professional assistance.

The third research question examined the relationship of school principals and significant colleagues to a stressed educator, and looked at implications for leadership. To summarize, each educator felt a critical need for principal support, and moreover, recognized the influential power of a school principal to exacerbate or alleviate their stress. The unfortunate truth of a principal being a primary player in causing workplace stress was revealed throughout this study. Essentially, the role of a school principal is powerfully influential. However, this power can be beneficial if principals are willing to engage in empathic listening and dialogue. Then educators will be encouraged to voice their ideas, be innovative, and be part of the vision of the school.

The fourth research question sought to examine the relationship of leadership and stress. In summary, leaders within a school system have such influential power; they can create an environment where educators excel or crumble. Leaders for the 21st century, according to James (1996, p. 176) ought to "Nurture ideas from within, encourage innovation, accept mistakes, give praise." Indeed, the educators in this study clearly state they desire support,

encouragement, recognition, and affirmation for the work they do. They want leaders to recognize their competence and professionalism. They want to work in trusting relationships with leaders. They demand autonomy and respect. Moreover, they desire empowerment, collaboration and consultation. Accordingly, for this to happen, their voice must be heard; they must be listened to. Empathic listening and dialogue are the keys to establishing healthy relationships in our educational communities.

#### Implications and Conclusions

The writings of many leadership scholars were important in the analysis of the experiences of educators suffering from workplace stress. These scholars give us the practices that leaders ought to be engaging in within the educational community. Moreover, they give us the insights for establishing excellent learning communities by establishing relationships that allow us to be colleagues to one another. However, these insights have not been addressed by them in exploring stress.

The findings generated from this study are consistent with the research on effective leadership practice. A parade of leadership scholars affirm the importance of collaboration and empowerment in the educational community (Blase and Blase, 1994; Blase and Kirby, 1992; Chrislip and Larson, 1994; Heifetz, 1994; Senge, 1990; Starratt, 1993,

1996). In essence, the data emerging from this study point to the critical need for school leaders to listen with empathy, and to give voice to teachers. School leaders must create an environment where educators can be empowered.

Moreover, educators have many needs for recognition and appreciation for the work they do. They desire autonomy, and want to be recognized as professionals. They want to be supported at the school level, as well as the district level. They want to be consulted. Primarily, they want to be able to express their ideas, thoughts, and concerns without fear of reprisal. They want to be able to engage in true dialogue with those in leadership positions. When stressful episodes occur in the workplace, they want to be able to freely discuss their issues. The dialogic exchange experienced in this study could be considered a prototype for the necessary exchange between school leaders and educators, especially those who experience stress.

Dialogue is central to positive healthy relationships between leaders and educators. Dialogue, reflection, and clear communication, without being judgmental, is the foundation of the work we do as educators. Noddings (1984) offers us an ethic of caring that extends ourselves to others, without moral pre-judgment. In addition, Ricoeur (1992) contends that we become more of who we desire to be when we aid others in their life journey, and enable others to envision a positive future for themselves. Our self is

ennobled through our attention to assisting others. In order to be colleagues to one another, and in order to create moral communities within our educational system, leaders and educators must partner together. This may be achieved through dialogue. A rich dialogic exchange between and among educators in general can bring a sense of hope for the future. It is vital that school leaders take a nurturing stance in their professional responsibilities and relationships if they wish to build school communities in which both children and teachers prosper.

#### Recommendations

For educational leaders working in the school system, I recommend the following goals and programs be established in each school, within their particular school district.

1. Create both a school and a district support group for teachers to be able to network with others, learn effective stress management strategies, and build personal resources in order to cope with workplace stress.
2. Allocate time and resources for school counselors to counsel teachers who are stressed, on a confidential basis.
3. Establish a mentorship system for experienced teachers to assist novice teachers during episodes of workplace stress. The experienced teacher could be

assigned at the beginning of the school year in order to facilitate a smooth transition into teaching. A monthly mentorship group for novice teachers could offer guidance, social and emotional support, and information from guest speakers.

4. Establish professional development workshops discussing the phenomenon of educator stress, and the management of stress for all school personnel.

5. Create a conflict resolution training program for both school principals and educators. Professional development committees could request speakers from the Justice Institute to make presentations and run workshops on professional development days for all staff members.

6. Create a training program for school principals in the area of human relationships, counseling skills, leadership styles, mentoring, active listening and communication skills, personality types, and leadership styles. This may also be addressed by the professional development committees in each school.

7. Create a school professional growth library which houses readings from such leadership scholars such as Gilligan, Noddings, Ricoeur, Starratt, Senge and a host of others, for professional development. Each principal should be required to read and personally respond to these authors.

8. Create opportunities for recognition and affirmation of educators. School leaders, both publicly and privately, ought to acknowledge and encourage teacher contributions with meaningful rewards.

9. Establish an open forum for the purposes of dialogic exchange between leaders and educators. Both informal and formal opportunities for this exchange may be beneficial. For example, the school principal could set aside every Friday lunch hour for staff members to drop-in and share any concerns. In addition, an open forum for voicing concerns could exist one hour after a monthly staff meeting.

10. Recognize and affirm opportunities for dialogue in the school and in the district as an essential task of flourishing learning communities striving toward excellence.

#### Recommendations for Policy

I recommend the following requirements be adopted into the hiring practices for school leaders:

1. Require a personality inventory, such as the MMPI, for all prospective leadership candidates, to be administered and debriefed by a registered clinical psychologist.



2. Require a personal statement of leadership philosophy by all school leaders.
3. Require yearly in-service training for school leaders as part of their contract for service.
4. Require all leaders to survey the educators within their school for feedback concerning their leadership.

#### Recommendations for Further Research

I recommend that this phenomenological interview study be conducted with men, in order to elucidate further understanding about whether they may have unique experiences with stress. My sense is that women may have an easier time identifying emotions and feelings, whereas men may have a more difficult time expressing those feelings, even in a safe environment. As Raoul commented, "I don't find men are very forthcoming about anything." Two men participated in this qualitative study out of a possible six. Further exploration into the experiences of male teachers suffering from workplace stress may prove insightful for increasing our understanding of the phenomenon of educator stress.

Secondly, I recommend that this study be conducted with school principals in order to clarify their workplace stresses. Furthermore, it is important to prevent principals negatively responding to educators because of their own workplace stress. As school leaders are essential

to the support of teachers, it is vital to find areas of appropriate support for them.

Lastly, I recommend that a study be conducted to examine the gap between theory and practice in leadership positions in the school setting. As post secondary institutions are educating prospective leaders to face the myriad challenges of the 21st Century, these leaders need to be proactively working within the educational community, enacting change.

From the data generated in this study, it appears that many leaders are not "walking the talk" in the school system. Indeed, it appears many school principals are perceived to have negative leadership styles which cause tremendous stress for educators. School principals hold tremendous power for the potential of greater good, or greater ill.

Therefore, it is critically important that our university leadership programs prepare nurturing and supportive leaders who are able to listen with empathy and dialogue with educators. Those in leadership positions must enable teachers to give voice to their experiences. Indeed, school leaders must create an environment in which teachers can be empowered. Therefore, I recommend that a qualitative research study be conducted to examine this gap between the perceived reality of what is taught in post secondary

leadership programs, and what appears to be missing in the educational community.

I am committed to "walking the talk", and conducting myself as a positive and supportive school leader. "When you are secure, you reduce energy-stealing anxiety and increase self-confidence and optimism about the future" (James, 1996, p. 178). Moreover, as Starratt (1996) reminds us, hope may be the answer to the complex struggles of educators and those who are in leadership positions, since implicit in their relationship is the duty to support one another's work.

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## Appendix A

## CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH STUDY

Joanna Doonan, a doctoral student in the School of Education at the University of San Diego, is conducting a research study to find out more about how experienced teachers effectively deal with professional stress throughout their teaching career.

If I agree to take part in the study, I will be asked to participate in two audiotaped interviews of about 60 to 90 minutes in duration, over a period of approximately six weeks.

I understand that little risk or discomfort is anticipated other than any feelings that may surface through recalling experiences. One possible benefit I may derive from participation in this study, may be to enhance my understanding, and gain insight through my reflections, on the management of professional stress.

I understand that participation in this study is purely voluntary and I may withdraw at any time, without risk or penalty to me. I understand that all research records will be kept completely confidential. My identity or position will not be disclosed without my written consent. I understand that all descriptive information will be masked to preserve anonymity.

A pseudonym will be used for all participants, schools or districts in this study. I further understand that I will be given all verbatim transcripts to review or edit as I wish. There is no agreement, written or verbal, beyond that expressed on this consent form.

Joanna Doonan has explained this study to me, and answered all my questions. If I have other research related concerns, I may reach Joanna Doonan at (604-521-7122).

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 Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Witness

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix B

## SELECTION CRITERIA ASSESSMENT FORM

KEY:    A FOR ALMOST ALWAYS        3 POINTS  
           F FOR FREQUENTLY            2 POINTS  
           S FOR SOME TIMES            1 POINT  
           H FOR HARDLY EVER           0 POINTS

3	2	1	0
A	F	S	H

1. Communication with others is open, honest and clear.
2. I get the emotional support that I need.
3. I take care of my needs for good nutrition, exercise, proper sleep.
4. I relax and enjoy my leisure time.
5. I am a positive thinker.
6. I am satisfied with my teaching career.
7. I have good relationships with those around me.
8. I enjoy teaching.
9. I am better able to identify and deal with stress more proactively now.
10. I now view stress as a healthy and necessary part of life.
11. I no longer adopt other peoples' problems as my own.
12. I feel comfortable discussing stressful situations in both my private and professional life.



## Appendix C

### Guiding Questions

The interviews were conducted with open-ended questions designed to elicit information about each participant's education, professional experience, relationships, workplace stress and coping mechanisms. The questions were designed to be explorative in nature, causing reflection.

1. Could you tell me about your educational background and training?
2. Could you tell me about a time that was stressful during your career as an educator?
3. How did this stress affect you physically, mentally, and emotionally? Your family?
4. What did you do to cope with this stress?
5. Can you describe your relationship with the school principal during your episode with stress?
6. Did the school principal exacerbate or alleviate your stress?
7. Were there any significant colleagues that assisted you during your stressful time?
8. What differentiates a good administrator from a poor one?
9. What kind of assistance would have been helpful?
10. What have you learned from this experience?
11. What insights could you share with school leaders?
12. What recommendations would you make for leadership to support stressed educators?

Appendix D  
Letter of Appreciation

Date:

Name:

Address:

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

Thank you for your participation in my research study on educator stress. I am deeply grateful for your trust in me, your vulnerability, your sacrifice of time, and your willingness to share the truth. Your experiences reflect profound wisdom and insight, and disclose lessons that must be shared with the educational community in order to strive for excellence.

Most of all, thank you for your stories of wellness!  
May your career as an educator continue to flourish.

Sincerely Yours,

Joanna Doonan