Stress in Elementary School Teaching

By

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Abstract

Through a literature review and two interviews with teachers, I look at the cause and effects of stress in elementary school teaching. Specifically the literature review discusses the negative side effects of extreme stress not just on teachers, but on administration and students including burnout, high turnover rates and lower academic achievement. Interviews revealed insight into the importance of supportive colleagues and administration as well as attitude and perception for minimizing and mitigating teacher stress. Further discussion touches on what teachers, school level administration, school boards and teacher education programs can do to help lessen the stress experienced by teachers. These recommendations include de-normalizing extreme stress and creating positive work environments.

Key Words: Teacher stress, burnout, mental health
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Research Context

In the last five years alone the Ontario Ministry of Education has published: Health and Physical Education Curriculum (2015), Creating Pathways to Success: Policy and Program Requirements (2013), Environmental Education: Scope and Sequence of Expectations (2011), Financial Literacy; Scope and Sequence of Expectations (2011), First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Connections – Scope and Sequence of Expectations (2014), Growing Success: Assessment, Evaluation, and Reporting (2010) and Ontario Schools Kindergarten to Grade 12: Policy and Program Requirements (2011). These are simply the most recent publications and do not include the fundamentally changing implementation of Daily Physical Activities in School (2005), EQAO testing (1998), Ontario Student Record (OSR) Guideline (2000), and Individual Education Plans: Standards for Development, Program Planning, and Implementation (2000) as well as countless other documents and policies. Not only is the Ontario Ministry of Education providing plenty of policy documentation and expectations for teachers, but so is the community. The popular information videos called TED talks have posted several videos surrounding education including “Let’s teach religion – all religion – in schools,” “How schools kill creativity,” “Mindfulness in Schools,” and “Promoting Motivation Health and Excellence.”
CBC radio has even posted a talk on self-regulation called “Neuron Therapy.” These policies and strategies range from the importance of teaching holistically to creating inclusive environments to preparing students for standardized testing.

In and of itself, each of these alterations and suggestions are intent on improving the education system and the learning of the students. That said, while the benefits of each new implementation may be clear to those demanding them, they are lost when teachers are not properly trained, do not have enough time, and lack the proper resources and support to implement them. The implementations that should have created a positive and productive learning environment are creating a work environment fraught with confusion, frustration, and stress. The rate of burnout among teachers is on the rise and the teachers are citing constant change, lack of support, feelings of inadequacy and feeling overwhelmed and overworked as just some of the reasons that could be summed up as persistent and intense stress (Jenkins, S., & Calhoun, J. F., 1991; Kyriacou, C., 2001; Nair, Dr. M.A, 2015; Rogers, B., 2011).

1.1 Research Problem

Teacher stress is not a new phenomenon, and, in and of itself, is not an overlooked issue. The true problem arises with the increasing rate of burnout among teachers. While Evers and Welko (2003), have demonstrated the importance of self-efficacy in order to minimize the likelihood of burnout, the research has also stated that reducing external stressors is highly effective (Evers & Tomic, 2003; Jenkins, S., & Calhoun, J. F., 1991; Kyriacou, C., 2001; Pas, E. T., et al., 2012). Despite the research supporting the importance of reducing stressors, the majority of focus is on coping mechanisms and increasing self-efficacy (Evers, W. J., & Tomic, W., 2003; Kamphaus, R.W., et al., 2010; Kyriacou, C., 2001; Tsouloupas, C. N., et al. 2010).
While these are important techniques, how is policy implementation affecting teacher stress and are they being supported?

1.2 Purpose of the Study

In view of this particular issue, my purpose is to shed light on the outrageous external stress that is being put on our teachers. I wish to underline the expectations that teachers are expected to meet, and the lack of support, resources and training that is available to help them meet these expectations. Overall, my goal is to pull away from coping mechanism for the individual and, instead, examine the implementation of policies and the availability and effectiveness of teacher support. I wish to examine what resources, support and training would help to reduce the external stress placed on teachers.

1.3 Research Questions

What resources, support and training can school administration put in place to help minimize the stress caused by rapid and ever-changing policies in elementary school teaching?

1.3.1 Subsidiary Questions

What external stressors affect teachers stress levels the most?
How does the availability of resources and support help reduce stress in elementary school teaching?
How do teachers alter their teaching style in order to cope with external stressors? How do these alterations affect student learning?
How are new policies and regulations being implemented? How can these policies and regulations be better implemented to reduce stress among teachers?

What resources and support can be made available to help minimize external stress in elementary school teaching?

1.4 Background of the Researcher/Reflexive Positioning Statement

Firstly, I must acknowledge that I come from a position of privilege in Canada. I am an Anglophone Canadian citizen, who is cisgender, straight, and white. I have also had the privilege of being raised in an upper-middle class household. From this lens, I will speak to my personal experiences regarding stress and mental health, but I do not and cannot speak for others. As a woman who has experienced mental illness through childhood, adolescent and now adulthood, I see extreme and persistent stress as a gateway to severe mental health issues. In teaching, extreme and persistent stress leads to burnout. I am approaching my topic of external stress in teaching with the preconceived notion that teachers, who continue teaching through extreme stress and possibly burnout, are hurting themselves and their students (Evers & Tomic, 2003; Beausaert et al, 2013).

Through my own struggles with mental health, I have come to believe that support is not as prominent, readily available or easily attainable as we are led to believe by the media (hotlines, hospitals, universities etc). I spent years suffering from severe anxiety without being able to identify the issue. Throughout high school and university I attempted to talk to friends, doctors and family, but they all simply did not understand or recognize the symptoms. It was only after a mental break down and subsequent hospitalization that I was finally diagnosed with Generalized Anxiety Disorder.
To this day I have had doctors tell me that I could not possibly be in a Master’s program if I had anxiety, and friends tell me that my anxiety issues were just weakness. I say these things, not in order to garner sympathy, but to shed light on the reality of the situation: mental health is only addressed when it becomes severe enough to warrant extreme measures (Canadian Mental Health Association, 2014; Lilienfeld et al. 2011; Lefton et al., 2005).

I see burnout among teachers as stress that has become so severe it causes mental health issues. I firmly believe that the issue of stress among teachers can and should be addressed before it reaches the severity of burnout. Instead of diagnosing the symptoms, I believe we need to address the problem itself: external expectations are inconsistent, erratic, perpetually changing and impossible to properly implement without support, resources, and proper training.

My hope in writing this research paper is to emphasize the gap that exists in current dialogue surrounding education: the reality of the implementation of constantly changing policies and expectations for elementary school teachers. I wish to look into the cause of teacher stress and how teachers can better be supported in order to help reduce stress and burnout in elementary school teaching.

All of my beliefs, assumptions and queries came together when I spent time in the classroom of one of my former teachers. I remember this teacher as being kind and patient; I remember this teacher using fun activities and plenty of creative projects. After spending a few days a week for the semester in this classroom, I realized that her entire style and personality seemed to have altered. I do acknowledge that distance, growth, education and age are definitely factors that affect my perceptions. That said, I noticed a lack of patience, an easy frustration, and an overall sense of fatigue which are some symptoms of burnout (Canadian Mental Health Association, 2014; Lilienfeld et al. 2011; Lefton et al, 2005; Evers & Tomic,
2003; Kyriacou, 1986). I am not certified to diagnose and certainly do not have enough information to completely understand this teacher’s scenario. I can only say that it upset me to see what I felt was a drastic change in the teaching style that I would attribute to potential burnout.

While I greatly believe that mental health should be a much larger priority in terms of education, access to services and reducing stigma attached to seeking these services, it is also important that solutions be sought for the root of the issue. Due to my personal relationship with mental health as well as my belief that teaching has become oversaturated with opinions and suggestions from the community, parents, administration, the Board of Education, and the Ministry of Education, I believe that the external factors leading to teacher stress and burnout have reached unattainable proportions. Policies and regulations need to be implemented with more intention, support, resources, and man-power or rather teacher-power.

1.5 Overview/Preview of Whole

In order to respond to my research questions, I will be conducting three semi-structured interviews. I hope to interview several teachers without professional or educational knowledge surrounding mental health and stress in order to garner a picture of stress in teaching through a more personal lens. These interviews will be transcribed in order to conduct a qualitative research study of the answers.

In the second chapter, I will review the literature currently available on the topic of stress among teachers. I will examine policy documents, the Education Act, as well as peer reviewed articles on the topic. I will also include other applicable studies and literature; such as, the causes of stress in teaching, the implementation of new policies, support availability and
In the third chapter I will elaborate on the design on my qualitative study, by including my research questions and the way in which the research questions were facilitated. I will articulate the questions that I will ask my interviewees as well as include short biographies of the interviewees.

In the fourth chapter I will provide my analysis of the responses given by the interviewees. By analysing the transcriptions of the interviews, I will articulate relevant data and highlight specific points. I will also carefully review the transcript to reflect on any further analysis that can be made.

In the fifth chapter I will discuss my findings and the connections I have made. I will state and elaborate on the conclusions I have drawn surrounding teacher stress. Throughout this discussion I will articulate the significance of my research and findings in relation to the literature as discussed in chapter two. I will also indicate the implications for my career in the teaching field, and any desired application of my findings to a real life setting.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

In this chapter I will be discussing the literature surrounding teacher mental health. In particular, I will be discussing the job demands and pressures that teachers experience. I will survey the existing literature surrounding stress and how it is connected to mental health, as well as the literature surrounding ways in which to cope with stress. I will define what is meant by stress and mental health. I will then expand my literary study by specifically discussing the stress experienced by teachers in their field, including, external and internal stressors, burnout, prevention strategies and coping.

2.1 Defining Stress

Stress has been defined in many terms across varying sources (Bakker, A. B., & Demerouti, E., 2007; Jenkins, S., & Calhoun, J. F., 1991; Kyriacou, C., 2001; Lilienfield, 2011). I will draw on Lilienfield’s definition as a basis for beginning the discussion: “stress consists of the tension, discomfort, or physical symptoms that arise when a situation or stimulus in the environment […] strains our ability to cope effectively” (2011, pg. 505). Although Lilienfield’s definition specifies physical symptoms, other sources also included psychological and emotional strain (Bakker, A. B., & Demerouti, E., 2007; Kyriacou, C., 2001). Stress is considered to be physiological, psychological and emotional strain. This strain comes from our own perceptions of external factors and our personal beliefs about our ability to cope; in other
words, when we perceive that our jobs are demanding a lot, but feel that we cannot handle these demands we become stressed (Bakker, A. B., & Demerouti, E., 2007).

2.2 Repercussions of Stress

Stress is a common occurrence in the majority of our lives. We are often unaware of how resilient the healthy human mind and body are when it comes to coping with stress (Lilienfield, 2011). We see major life events such as, the death of a loved one or a divorce, as clear causes of severe stress, but we underestimate the toll that consistent intense stress can have on our mind and body (Bakker, A. B., & Demerouti, E., 2007; Jenkins, S., & Calhoun, J. F., 1991; Kyriacou, C., 1987; Lilienfield, 2011). Physical repercussions of consistent and severe perceived stress can not only aggravate pre-existing conditions, but can also increase heart rate and blood pressure (Lilienfield, 2011). Teachers who reported feeling overloaded were more likely to report symptoms of fatigue, headache, and problems sleeping (Jenkins, S., & Calhoun, J. F., 1991). Psychological repercussions of perceived intense stress over a prolonged period of time include depression, anxiety, hopelessness, hostility and burnout (Jenkins, S., & Calhoun, J. F., 1991, Lilienfield, 2011). It is this aspect of stress that I will be focusing on; the effect of stress on teachers’ mental health.

2.3 Stress in Teaching

Despite reporting feeling satisfied with their profession, many teachers also report high levels of stress (Kyriacou, C., 1987). This may seem oxymoronic, but teacher’s roles go far beyond preparing and enacting lessons. In Ontario, a teacher’s role extends well beyond merely
teaching. According to the Education Act of Ontario, duties of teachers include: supervising duties as assigned by the principal, assisting in community co-operation, ensuring safety procedures are carried out, maintaining consistent discipline in co-ordination with the principal, creating report cards, administrating EQAO testing, meeting regularly with parents/guardians and performing the duties associated with graduating pupils (Government of Ontario, 1990). This list of duties does not include the requirement for teachers to: create Teaching Learning Plans (TLP) annually, undergo New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP) for teachers in their first two years of employment, receive Teacher Performance Appraisals (TPA) which take place approximately every five years, and the implementation of New Curriculums (Government of Ontario, 1990). In an effort to understand high turnover rates, Jenkins and Calhoun 1991, conducted a study in which 67% of teacher participants stated that their number one stress at work was overload.

2.3.1 External Factors of Stress in Teaching. Many studies surrounding teacher stress noted overload and pressure among reasons that teachers experience stress in their workplace (Jenkins, S., & Calhoun, J. F., 1991; Kyriacou, C., 2001; Rogers, B., 2011). These stressors are not, however, the only external factors that play a role. External factors are stressors outside a person’s individual locus of control. The school environment often contributes to stress levels. These external factors include: classroom management and discipline, time pressures, unrealistic expectations, administration and management, ambiguity in roles or expectations, feeling a lack of control, role conflicts, pace of change and interpersonal conflicts (Jenkins, S., & Calhoun, J. F., 1991; Kyriacou, C., 2001; Nair, Dr. M.A, 2015; Rogers, B., 2011). While some of these pressures are inescapable in teaching, many can be minimized through better policy implementation and clarity of expectations from administration.
According to Rogers, “student behaviour is the major cause of excessive workload and stress” among teachers (2011). Sarros and Sarros, however, highlight the importance of administrative management, stating that principals play a key role in teacher stress by contributing to overload, feelings of lack of control, role conflict and the implementation of change in an unreasonable amount of time without the proper training and support (Jenkins, S., & Calhoun, J. F., 1991; Sarros, J. C., & Sarros, A. M., 1992). The Government of Ontario’s implementation of new curriculums, NTIP, TLPs and TPAs may also play a role in contributing to this rapid expectation of change and the general external stress that teachers experience on a regular basis (Government of Ontario, 1990). Basically, teachers are facing stress in every aspect of their professional life: from students, to fellow teachers, to Principals, to the Ontario Board of Education. This is not even taking into consideration the stress that an average person feels in their daily home life (Jenkins, S., & Calhoun, J. F., 1991).

**2.3.2 Internal Factors in Stress in Teaching.** Adding on to the environmental factors is the generalized belief that personal factors such as, attitude, perception and personality traits, may also contribute to the perceived amount of stress a particular teacher may be experiencing (Jenkins, S., & Calhoun, J. F., 1991; Pas, E. T., et al., 2012; Rogers, B., 2011; Tsouloupas, C. N., et al. 2010). These personal factors include, feeling inadequate, unsatisfied, feeling a lack of control, and seeing seeking help as a sign of weakness (Jenkins, S., & Calhoun, J. F., 1991; Kamphaus, R.W., et al., 2010; Rogers, B., 2011). Learned helplessness was also cited. Learned helplessness refers to when a person perceives themselves as incapable, despite their true ability (Kamphaus, R.W., et al., 2010; Rogers, B., 2011). The general consensus among the sources consulted is that a teacher’s perception about their own abilities to cope with environmental factors of stress is very important in predicting how they cope in reality (Jenkins, S., & Calhoun,
Without confidence in their ability to cope, the stress that a teacher experiences has a greater toll on their mental health leading to more intense stress (Fernet, C., et al. 2012; Kyriacou, C., 1987; Pas, E. T., et al., 2012; Rogers, B., 2011; Tsouloupas, C. N., et al. 2010).

**2.3.2.1 Social Factors Contributing to Stress in Teaching.** Within external factors, there is also the importance of social factors. In particular, the culture of accountability that currently exists. This issue being that teachers are being held responsible not for their teaching, but for how well their students perform on standardized tests including EQAO and Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (Government of Ontario, 1990; Sockett 1976).

This combined with calls from the media to make teachers even more accountable for student learning, pushed the Government of Ontario to pass the Student Performance Act in 2006 which included the requirement for all teachers to successfully complete the NTIP (Anonymous, 1999; Teacher Accountability, 2000; NTIP, 2010). The program requires teachers to receive two satisfactory performance appraisals within their first two years of teaching (NTIP, 2010). TPAs and TLPs were implemented in 2007 in order to monitor teacher performance after their first two years (Government of Ontario, 1990). The rapid change of policy and implementation of teacher accountability regulations has teachers experiencing stress that had previously not existed.

**2.4 Teacher Burnout**

Prolonged intensive stress is also referred to as burnout. Teacher burnout is defined as
emotional exhaustion which is a result of chronic stress (Kyriacou, C., 1987; Rogers, B., 2011; Tsouloupas, C. N., et al. 2010). Burnout is the toll for extended and consistent teacher stress. This is especially true for teachers who feel inadequately trained and prepared to cope. Initially stress causes us to feel alarm, resistance and exhaustion; generally we react by working harder (Lilienfield, 2011). In the case of burnout, we have experienced too much of this stress cycle and begin to feel apathetic, fatigued, overwhelmed or completely disinterested, and experience a general lack of motivation (Lilienfield, 2011).

2.4.1 **Cause of Burnout among Teachers.** Despite studies that have argued that new and younger teachers experience greater numbers of burnout (Sarros, J. C., & Sarros, A. M., 1992), burnout is now believed to be due to feeling a lack of self-efficacy; teachers who burnout are more likely to feel unprepared and inadequate. Burnout, despite previous beliefs, varies over time and depending on the person (Fernet, C., et al. 2012; Kyriacou, C., 1987; Pas, E. T., et al., 2012; Tsouloupas, C. N., et al. 2010). The focus of burnout has, therefore, pulled away from biological factors such as race, sex, and age and begun to focus on external and personal factors, such as school environment, management, student discipline, preparedness, and social support (Evers, W. J., & Tomic, W., 2003; Fernet, C., et al. 2012; Kamphaus, R.W., et al., 2010; Pas, E. T., et al., 2012; Tsouloupas, C. N., et al. 2010).

The major underlying theme is that a teacher’s perceived ability to cope with external factors plays a huge role in predicting burnout (Fernet, C., et al. 2012; Pas, E. T., et al., 2012; Tsouloupas, C. N., et al. 2010). Pas et al. (2012) determined that while burnout increases rapidly if left untreated, feelings of confidence and assuredness take much longer to develop. Burnout can, therefore, affect anyone, but especially those who harbour feelings of inadequacy and
unpreparedness.

### 2.4.2 Effect of Burnout among Teachers

When left untreated, this rapidly increasing sense of inadequacy and apathy not only affects the mental health of the teacher, but creates a cyclical effect by interfering with a positive school environment which, in turn, further strains teachers' mental health (Evers, W. J., & Tomic, W., 2003; Hughes, R. E., 2001; Kamphaus, R.W., et al., 2010; Pas, E. T., et al., 2012; Tsouloupas, C. N., et al. 2010). Burnout has been linked to turnover, job performance, student discipline and student achievement (Hughes, R. E., 2001; Kamphaus, R.W., et al., 2010; Pas, E. T., et al., 2012; Tsouloupas, C. N., et al. 2010).

In a study conducted by Hughes (2001), 67% of the 500 teachers polled, stated that they had thought about leaving the profession; of that, 64% stated that they were unable to leave for varying reasons. In general Hughes (2001) found that teachers suffering from burnout reported a need to escape from their current situation, but many were unable to actually leave the profession. Teachers experiencing high levels of stress are continuing to teach despite an unhealthy state of mind. Evers and Tomic (2003) determined that students are not only aware of their teacher's burnout, but are actually reliable predictors of burnout among their teachers. Students know when their teachers are experiencing symptoms of burnout. This begs the question: how is burnout affecting teachers' ability to effectively teach?

Kamphaus (2010) studied how teachers discipline is affected by their burnout and determined that students were less likely to receive an out of school suspension if their teacher had a high level of burnout. Are teachers with burnout more likely to recommend students to be suspended or less likely to report incidences in which suspensions should be enacted? No matter
the answers, teacher burnout is not only affecting the mental well-being of the teacher, but leading to turnover in the profession, affecting teacher job performance, and affecting student discipline and learning (Jenkins, S., & Calhoun, J. F., 1991; Hughes, R. E., 2001; Pas, E. T., et al., 2012; Tsouloupas, C. N., et al. 2010).

2.5 Prevention of Burnout

By working backwards through the causes and effects of teacher burnout, suggestions for prevention include, increasing resources and access to resources for coping with stress as well as decreasing job demands (Fernet, C., et al. 2012; Hughes, R. E., 2001; Jenkins, S., & Calhoun, J. F). There does, however, seem to be a greater focus on ways to alter our perception of self-efficacy to decrease the impact of stress rather than a push to minimize the external stress that teachers experience (Evers, W. J., & Tomic, W., 2003; Kamphaus, R.W., et al., 2010; Kyriacou, C., 2001; Tsouloupas, C. N., et al. 2010).

2.5.1 Prevention of External Stress. In Ontario in 2015, Teacher Qualification Programs were officially extended to two years, which may help incoming teachers improve their feelings of preparedness (Government of Ontario, 1990). A study done in the United States, showed that the implementation of Positive Behavioural Intervention and Support (PBIS) may help to improve schools overall Organization Health Inventory (OHI) (Bradshaw, C. P., et al. 2008). In other words, by implementing a more positive environment in the school, teachers were able to view their environment in a more positive light and, therefore, experience less of a struggle with burnout (Bradshaw, C. P., et al. 2008). There has not been a major focus on preventative techniques, but instead a suggestion that further techniques for prevention should be explored
2.5.2 Prevention of Internal Stress. Teacher perception of their ability to cope has been highlighted in the sources studied as a major contributor to teacher stress and burnout (Evers, W. J., & Tomic, W., 2003; Jenkins, S., & Calhoun, J. F., 1991; Kamphaus, R.W., et al., 2010; Rogers, B., 2011; Pas, E. T., et al., 2012; Tsouloupas, C. N., et al. 2010). This perception is being referred to as self-efficacy which translates to perceived ability to cope rather than actual ability, which is much harder to measure. Improving teacher sense of self-efficacy is vital to the decrease of stress and burnout among teachers (Evers, W. J., & Tomic, W., 2003; Hughes, R. E., 2001; Kamphaus, R.W., et al., 2010; Pas, E. T., et al., 2012; Tsouloupas, C. N., et al. 2010). By allowing for continued self-improvement and by keeping a positive attitude, teachers are able to reduce their perception of stress and increase their sense of self-efficacy (Evers, W. J., & Tomic, W., 2003; Tsouloupas, C. N., et al. 2010).

That said the way in which teachers cope with stress can actually affect their perception of that stress (Jenkins, S., & Calhoun, J. F., 1991; Kamphaus, R.W., et al., 2010; Rogers, B., 2011; Kyriacou, C., 2001; Lilienfield, 2011; Sarros, J. C., & Sarros, A. M., 1992; Tsouloupas, C. N., et al. 2010). In this, stress actually becomes cyclical, highlighting the importance of focusing on the way in which teachers cope as a preventative measure for burnout, rather than as a preventative measure for stress, since it is impossible to eliminate all stress. It is interesting to note, however, that despite the large amount of external factors facing teachers, there has been a focus on greater ways to alter our perception of stress rather than reducing the external stress that exists.
2.6 Methods of Coping with Teacher Stress

The way in which teachers choose to cope with stress plays a large role in helping to reduce their stress and increase their perception of self-efficacy (Jenkins, S., & Calhoun, J. F., 1991; Kyriacou, C., 2001; Lilienfield, 2011; Pas, E. T., et al., 2012; Tsouloupas, C. N., et al. 2010). Interestingly, a study done by Tsouloupas et al. (2010) found that perception of stress did not seem to be affected by teachers’ attitude towards the stress; teachers with a positive attitude were just as likely to report feeling high levels of perceived stress as teachers with a negative attitude. Methods of coping can be divided into three different categories: direct, indirect and social support. Many sources used similar categories in terms of description, but may have referred to these categories under different titles (Jenkins, S., & Calhoun, J. F., 1991; Kyriacou, C., 2001; Lilienfield, 2011; Pas, E. T., et al., 2012; 2010Sarros, J. C., & Sarros, A. M., 1992; Tsouloupas, C. N., et al.).

2.6.1 Direct Method of Coping with Stress. Direct method of coping is best described as problem-focused coping (Lilienfield, 2011). It includes directly confronting the issue and going through necessary steps to alter the cause of stress, better known as the stressor (Jenkins, S., & Calhoun, J. F., 1991; Kyriacou, C., 2001; Lilienfield, 2011). Direct method may include forming what Jenkins and Calhoun (1991) refer to as “quality-circles,” where problems in the environment are identified and cost effective solutions are brainstormed. In this context it would mean that a teacher is approaching and attempting to reduce the external stressor itself. Teachers appear to find the direct method the most impactiful as it directly reduces, or aims to reduce, the cause of their stress giving them less stress in which they must actually cope
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(Jenkins, S., & Calhoun, J. F., 1991; Kyriacou, C., 2001; Pas, E. T., et al., 2012). Surprisingly this area of research seems to be lacking, and what is available is somewhat outdated.

2.6.2 Indirect Method of Coping with Stress. Indirect method refers to focusing on how to lessen the impact of the stressor on our emotional, mental and physical wellbeing. It revolves around changing personal perceptions of the stressor and becoming more positive about personal ability to cope (Jenkins, S., & Calhoun, J. F., 1991; Kyriacou, C., 2001; Lilienfield, 2011; Tsouloupas, C. N., et al. 2010). It may also be referred to as emotion-focused coping as it centers on personal emotions relating to the stressor (Lilienfield, 2011).

This method tackles the idea that different people interpret and perceive stressors differently; what one person finds intensively stressful, another person sees as minimally stressful and vice versa. Perception of self-efficacy and improving self-efficacy in order to decrease stress and burnout is an example of the indirect method. The idea behind the nature of self-efficacy is, therefore, that if teachers feel increased self-efficacy, then they will be able to more effectively cope with greater amounts of stress (Bakker, A. B., & Demerouti, E., 2007).

2.6.3 Social Support Method of Coping with Stress. The final method of coping is the use of social support in order to cope, however this has only briefly been discussed in the literature (Jenkins, S., & Calhoun, J. F., 1991; Lilienfield, 2011; Pas, E. T., et al., 2012; Rogers, B., 2011; Sarros, J. C., & Sarros, A. M., 1992). A lack of social support from management, colleagues and the community has been listed multiple times under contributing factors to stress, but it is rarely discussed in terms of how positive social support may be beneficial (Jenkins, S., & Calhoun, J. F., 1991; Pas, E. T., et al., 2012; Sarros, J. C., & Sarros, A. M., 1992). In fact, Sarros & Sarros (1992) go so far as to suggest that seeking social support may actually
cause a cycle of unproductive complaining and increased perception of stress, but lending social support to others may be beneficial. Pas et al. (2012) also recognizes a negative aspect of social support; initially teachers’ involvement in their school community reported less incidence of burnout, but once they experienced burnout it increased more rapidly than teachers who were not involved in the school community. That said, friendliness among teachers and a generally positive feeling in the school environment may help reduce stress among teachers, but further research into this area is required (Bradshaw, C. P., et al. 2008; Pas, E. T., et al., 2012).

2.7 Conclusion

In short, there is extensive research done upon stress and burnout among teachers. There is ample literature suggesting the need to improve self-efficacy in order to increase the amount of stress with which teachers feel they can cope (Evers, W. J., & Tomic, W., 2003; Jenkins, S., & Calhoun, J. F., 1991; Kamphaus, R.W., et al., 2010; Rogers, B., 2011; Pas, E. T., et al., 2012; Tsouloupas, C. N., et al. 2010). The question that arises is, how much stress are teachers expected to cope with realistically?

Instead of asking teachers to learn how to cope with growing external stressors, perhaps we should be looking at way to reduce the stressors in which teachers are expected to handle. Where the literature appears to be lacking is in the specific pressures that teachers are experiencing that do not directly relate to their training or job description. The literature vaguely lists external factors such as administration and management, parental involvement, rapid and unpredictable change, and overload, but then quickly moves on (Jenkins, S., & Calhoun, J. F., 1991; Nair, Dr. M.A, 2015; Rogers, B., 2011). The discussion focuses on the
teachers themselves instead of the environment in which the teachers find themselves.

The research specifically focuses on the amount of administrative work teachers are expected to complete, such as progress reports, report cards, independent education plans (IEPs) and ALPs. Extracurricular responsibilities, integrating technology into learning, encouraging an ecofriendly school, field trips and supervising are also part of the expectations of teachers. Many of the classroom expectations exceed their training and skill set such as, teaching students with physical and/or mental illness, teaching students with anger management and other intensive behavioural issues and integrating ESL (English second language) learners.

I hope to fill in the gap by further discussing the external demands placed upon teachers from the Ontario Board of Education, the community and administration. Specifically, how these demands are affecting their mental health and effectiveness in a classroom. Most importantly, I wish to discuss how management administration can better implement policies and regulations, provide greater support and provide greater access to resources to help reduce the external stressors placed on teachers.
Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter I describe the research methodology. I discuss the general approach, procedures and data collection instruments. I then specifically discuss the participants including how and why they were recruited. I outline the data analysis procedures used. I then discuss the ethical aspects that needed to be taken into consideration. I examine the methodological limitations of the study as well as the strengths of the methodology. I end this chapter with a brief summary of the key methodological decisions and the reasoning behind these decisions. Specifically, I address how these methodological choices were made given the research purpose and questions.

3.1 Research Approach & Procedures

This is a qualitative research study investigating strategies used by three educational professionals to help teachers cope with and reduce teacher stress. Qualitative research can be debated in that it is subjective based upon not only the subject, but the researcher (Collins, 2007). That said qualitative research is about better understanding and establishing the complexity of issues that expand beyond quantitative data (Creswell, 2013). It allows the researcher to focus on and provide a voice for specific individuals (Ibid, 2013). Through this collection of data, the researcher may begin to recognize patterns and establish theories that may be more generalizable (Creswell, 2013; Collins, 2007; Wengraf, 2001).

In this research I conducted a literature review establishing stressors faced by teachers and how these stressors affect their health and their students’ learning. I wanted to learn more
about coping mechanisms used by teachers and administrators to help reduce stress among elementary school teachers. In order to garner a better understanding of the issue of stress in teaching and how teacher stress may be affecting students, I chose to conduct a qualitative study. I conducted a semi-structured interview with three educational professionals in order to begin to establish patterns.

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews are helpful in beginning to establish theories, recognize patterns and identify issues based on patterns present in the interviews (Wengraf, 2001). These interviews tend to be less structured which allow for a broader collection of data (ibid., 2001). The interviewee is better able to determine the participants meaning as the discussion is more open than in a fully structured interview, or in other forms of data collection, such as surveys (Creswell, 2013). The broader information allows for analysis to find patterns in the data collection in order to create theories, as well as identify patterns and issues, instead of testing theories that have already been formulated (Creswell, 2013; Wengraf, 2001).

This method of data collection is appropriate for the purpose of this study as I can begin to better understand the issue of stress in teaching based on the personal experience and history I garnered from the teachers interviewed. Furthermore, the semi-structured interview gives the interviewees a voice to state not only how they see the issue of stress in teaching, but what changes can be made to minimize the issue according to their experience and perspectives (Elliot, 1994; Zeichner, 1995).
3.3 Participants

Here I review the sampling criteria I established for participant recruitment. I have also included a section to introduce the participants once they have been chosen.

3.3.1 Sampling Criteria. Sampling criteria is essential in research as it allows researchers to purposely select participants who will provide the most accurate overall view of the whole (Barker, 2002). Because this study is extremely small, sampling criteria is mostly used to establish participants who may provide the most data to inform the research (Creswell, 2013).

- Teachers will have a minimum 10 years of experience in a public school. This criterion is in place in order to be able to distinguish the stress from inexperience of a new teacher from the average stress of an experienced teacher. This will also allow them to compare their experience with stress over the course of their career. It is also to compare and contrast previous feelings and coping strategies from current ones. Lastly this criterion may help to examine how the public school environment has changed over the past decade.

- Teachers will have worked at a minimum of 3 with a maximum 5 different elementary schools in the past 10 years. This criterion will enable the data to become slightly more generalized as it enables the interviewee to compare the resources and support from different schools and administrators. The maximum criterion is to provide some assurance that the stress the participant is experiencing does not relate to their consistent changing environments.

- Teachers will not have professional or educational experiences with mental health. They may, however, have had personal experiences surrounding mental
health and stress in the workplace.

This criterion is to find participants who represent a teacher without professional or educational knowledge regarding mental health in order to examine how they inform themselves and cope with stress in their teaching. I wish to examine how stress is perceived and coped with in a teacher without professional or educational knowledge as the majority of teachers do not have professional or educational backgrounds in mental health or stress.

3.3.2 Participant Recruitment. Due to the nature of the ethical protocol approved for the Master of Teaching Program, I am only able to interview teaching professionals. I will rely on several types of sampling procedures in order to find participants: convenience, criterion and purposive.

Purposive sampling will allow me to select participants based on how they may purposefully contribute to the research (Creswell, 2013). While this may appear to cause a certain bias in the research, it also limits other biases by creating a profile in order to better inform the research (Barker, 2002). In order to assure purposive sampling I will ensure that each participant fits the sampling criteria as listed above.

The criteria listed above falls under criterion sampling, which has researchers choose participants based on several criteria (Creswell, 2013). These criteria allow for the greatest purposeful information with the least amount of bias (Barker, 2002).

Lastly, as I have worked and volunteer for several years in the teaching community, I will lean on some convenience sampling to find participants (Creswell, 2013). This sampling is simply based on access: participants who are available to the researcher due to circumstances (ibid.).
For the purpose of my research, I will reach out to schools in my area via email and in person, to request participants who have demonstrated a commitment to mental health and would be willing to participate in my research study. Specifically, I will be looking for teachers who are willing to talk about their experience with stress in teaching, but do not have specific professional or education backgrounds related to mental health. I will include my criteria and provide my contact information so that potential participants do not feel pressured (Creswell, 2013).

I will also contact teachers who I have previously volunteered or worked with and who may be interested in participating in the study (Creswell, 2013). Once again, I will send my contact information and request that they contact me if they are interested. I will address the email formally so that convenience connections do not feel pressured to participate due to personal relations.

3.3.3 Participant Bios. My participants included two teachers from Windsor, Ontario: Mary Smith and Bill White.

Mary Smith is a French immersion elementary school teacher. She has been teaching for 19 years in four different schools and has taught almost all the elementary levels. She has been teaching at her current school for four years and describes it as “very multicultural” with a “social-economic status [that] is very low.” While she has personal experience with mental health, she is not a professional in the field.

Bill White is a retired teacher currently working at a post-secondary institution in teacher education. He taught at three secondary schools over a span of 34 years and has been a sessional instructor at a post-secondary institution for 11 years. He has taught grades 9 through
OAC, and currently works with teacher candidates going into the intermediate/senior stream. He is not a professional in the field of mental health.

3.4 Data Analysis

In order to analyse the data I will have transcribed and coded my interviews using my research questions as an interpretive tool in order to search for themes, consistencies and inconsistencies (Bazeley, 2009). I will transcribe and code each interview separately and later bring them together in order to identify themes and begin to categorize the information (ibid). Throughout the analysis process I will continue to be reflexive in my understanding of the data by recognizing that meaning and truth are not static, but often subjective (Elliott, 1994; Potts, 2005). I will identify divergent data as well as themes, and ask the question, “what is not being said?” (Bazeley, 2009).

I will attempt to make the data relevant in the teaching community by communicating meanings, establishing real-world implications and asking questions that may provide a basis for further research (Bazeley, 2009; Elliott, 1994; Zeichner, 1995). I will work towards creating an analysis that is both academically relevant and useful in real-world application (Elliott, 1994; Potts, 2005)

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

There are many aspects that have gone into the ethical procedures related to this research project. In the first chapter I included a personal statement about myself that states my
personal commitments, goals and history (Creswell, 2015; Gilbert, 512; Potts, 2005). The participants will be asked to sign a consent letter (Appendix A) prior to the interview explaining the risks involved, the expectations of the participant and an overview of the research project (Creswell, 2015). I will inform the participants of the general themes of the questions prior to the interview so that they may establish whether or not they feel comfortable participating. The letter will also provide consent to having the 45-60 minute interview audio-recorded as well. All of the recording will be stored on password protected electronic equipment and will be destroyed after 5 years according to the University of Toronto policy. I and my MTRP supervisors will be the only ones with access to the recordings.

In order to protect the privacy of the participant and provide a more power equal environment, all participants will be assigned a pseudonym and they will be notified of their right to withdraw from participation in the study at any stage (Foucault, 1982; Potts, 2005; Zeichner, 1995). All participants will remain confidential and any identifying markers related to their schools or students will be excluded from the project.

There are no known risks to participation in this study. There may be minimal risks associated with participation in this study given the topic of stress in teaching. There may be questions that trigger an emotional response from a participant either inciting difficult memories or making them feel vulnerable or uncomfortable. I will minimize this risk by assuring participants of their right to refrain from answering any questions with which they are not comfortable and re-stating their right to withdraw (Creswell, 2015). I have attempted to level the power relationship by being upfront about my personal motivations and providing the participants with a chance to read the transcripts and clarify or re-tract information before the
process of data analysis (Bazeley, 2009; Creswell, 2015; Foucault, 1982; Zeichner, 1995).

3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

There are several strengths and limitations to the chosen methodology. In particular, the sample size is too small to be able to make generalizations or recognize patterns in stress in teaching (Collins, 2007). There is also the fact that the University of Toronto only has ethical approval to allow its Masters of Teaching students to interview teachers. This limitation is two-fold: students cannot be interviewed, and observation is not possible (Creswell, 2015). Qualitative research also faces many questions regarding credibility, confirmability and generalizability; because it is centered on a few individuals, it is not possible to speak for the entire group (Collins, 2007). Furthermore, it is criticized for being too subjective and, therefore, not confirmable (ibid).

While the limitations are clear, there are also several strengths to this particular methodology. This research empowers teachers within the system by giving them a voice to express their experience (Elliott, 1994; Potts, 2005; Zeichner, 1995). By allowing the teachers their chance to speak, the research is also legitimizing and valuing the in-class experience by putting it on par with academic research (Creswell, 2015; Elliott, 1994; Potts, 2005; Zeichner, 1995). Furthermore, through these types of collaborative research, we can begin to bridge the gap between academic research and practice in pedagogy (Zeichner, 1995). Lastly, this research can help to the participant teachers to reflect on their practices and can help to inform my own teaching practice (ibid.)

3.7 Conclusion
Chapter 3 examines the research methodology used in this study. In particular it discusses the research procedure and approach, specifying the use of qualitative research. The instruments of data collection are in the form of three semi-structured interviews that are transcribed and analysed. Both procedure and instruments of data collection have been pre-approved by the University of Toronto and, as such, were mandatory to be used in this study. I have listed my participants and explained the criteria used to choose these participants as well as how they were located. Next the participant biographies were written to provide background information on the participants chosen. Afterwards, I explain that the data is analysed through transcription and coding of the interviews. I then proceed to discuss the ethical aspects taken into consideration including privacy, the possibility of emotional responses and the right to withdraw from the study. Lastly I discuss the strengths and limitations to the methodology. In chapter 4, I report the research findings.

Chapter 4: Research Findings

4.0 Introduction

In this Chapter I highlight the findings of my interviews and begin to address my research question: What resources, support and training can school administration put in place to help minimize the stress elementary school teachers’ experience? In order to protect my
participants’ identities and privacy, I will refer to them as Mary and Bill. This chapter is organized based on the themes of Internal Factors in Coping with Stress in Teaching, External Factors in Coping with Stress in Teaching and the Effects of Teacher Stress. Within External Factors in Coping with Stress in Teaching I will address the sub-theme of Social connection in teaching as a factor for coping with stress in teaching. Using citations from my participants and my personal examinations of the interviews, I will further examine these themes with reference to my Chapter 2 Literature Review. This Chapter will discuss my initial reactions, expectations and surprises. In conclusion, I will summarize my key findings in preparation for Chapter 5 which will discuss the implications of my findings and further required research.

4.1.0 Theme 1: Internal Factors in Coping with Stress in Teaching

Internal factors for these purposes include anything within an individual’s locus of control. The theme of internal factors in coping with stress in teaching is the least surprising theme I underlined in the data, mainly because this theme has been discussed thoroughly throughout the literature already reviewed. My findings supported the information discussed by the previously reviewed literature. Mainly, that attitude and perception are important factors in predicting a teacher’s abilities to cope with stress (Evers, W. J., & Tomic, W., 2003; Jenkins, S., & Calhoun, J. F., 1991; Kamphaus, R.W., et al., 2010; Rogers, B., 2011; Tsouloupas, C. N., et al. 2010). Overall the internal strategies for effectively coping with stress in teaching seem to be to keep a positive attitude, love what you're doing, be confident if your abilities and keep balance.
4.1.1 Attitude as a Mitigating Factor in Teacher Stress

Much of what the participants stated in terms of internally coping with stress was in line with what had already been reviewed in the literature. Mary discussed how as a new teacher she felt a large amount of stress due to the fact that "I felt very uncertain about what I was doing and whether what I was doing was correct." In the literature this uncertainty was referred to as self-efficacy and was an accurate predictor of teachers' perception of stress and their ability to effectively cope (Evers, W. J., & Tomic, W., 2003; Tsouloupas, C. N., et al. 2010). This idea marries with Bill's discussion of the importance of viewing the stressors in teaching as challenges; that is looking at each new expectation or implementation as an obstacle to overcome rather than as another burden.

While Bill viewed his first years of teaching as a less stressful time in his career, he did discuss the importance of attitude, specifically stating "If you don't love what you're doing you'll get burnt out." This statement coincides with the literature as well. Much like self-efficacy, attitude may affect the amount of stress any particular teacher may feel and their likelihood of experiencing burnout (Jenkins, S., & Calhoun, J. F., 1991; Pas, E.T., et al., 2012; Rogers, B., 2011; Tsouloupas, C. N., et al. 2010).

4.1.2 Perception of Balance and its Effect on Teacher Stress

The importance of balance came out early on in both interviews starting with the definition of stress. Bill views stress as "pressure to get too much done and not enough time to do it" while Mary views it as "a heightened sense of not [...] being in control so when you feel
there's more things to do than there's time to do it.” Upon analyzing the data, I came to understand that stress, according to my participants, is caused by feeling imbalanced; there is simply too much to do and not enough time to do it all. This data coincided with the literature; teachers named overload, having too much to do, as their number one stressor (Jenkins, S., & Calhoun, J. F., 1991).

The reverse of this imbalance is coming to a "personal understanding that I can only get done what I can get done within a day” or granting yourself permission to have a balanced life. Basically, the solution I deduced according to my participants is that as teachers, stress is going to affect your teaching and your life at times, but the key is to be kind and forgiving to yourself while working towards striking a balance in your life. This means "taking time...setting realistic expectations" and, of course, creating "balance with your work life and your personal life."

**4.1.3 Healthy Lifestyle as a Mitigating Factor in Teacher Stress**

Finding balance externally according to my participants means "maintaining your life outside of school" and striking a balance between "teaching like that was my life" and having a personal life such as a family. Mary accredited a former principal for helping her to find that balance by insisting that "'this weekend you need to go home and do no, nothing related to school. Just enjoy your time, enjoy your time with your family'.” Bill cited the importance of participating in extracurricular activities as a way of gaining a new perspective on students in order to help reduce stress.

Both participants also discussed how exercising has helped them mitigate their stress
and cope more effectively. Interestingly, the importance of physical activity was not discussed in the literature despite the implementation of Daily Physical Activity in the curriculum for students in 2005 (Government of Ontario).

Through interpretation it seems to me to be important to have a variety of activities in order to create a more balanced perspective on the stress that accompanies teaching. So, instead of viewing teaching as your life, view it as one aspect of your life. Once again, this idea of a balanced lifestyle was not discussed in the literature; however, there was some discussion about how teachers who are involved with extracurricular activities may initially feel less stress (Jenkins, S., & Calhoun, J. F., 1991).

4.2.0 Theme 2: External Factors in Coping with Stress in Teaching

For these purposes external factors include anything outside of an individual’s locus of control. External strategies for effectively coping with stress included administration, and the teaching magazine "Professionally Speaking.” Bill also mentioned that reading literature surrounding teaching can be helpful as “what other people have experienced I think is very supportive.” Mary cited the New Teacher Induction Program and Bill mention a mentoring program as a potentially stress reducing program made available to new teachers by the Ministry of Education.

External factors in effectively coping with stress have increased along with external stressors in teaching according to both participants. Bill cited rapid change, specifically computerization of the education system, as a major source of stress for some teachers, while
Mary cited Ministry of Education Policies. Administration was cited by both participants as important factors for effectively coping with the stress in teaching. While administration was discussed in the literature as a cause of stress, it was not discussed as a potential mitigating factor of stress. Perhaps this is because the stress is being viewed as a binary instead of a spectrum; it either exists or it doesn’t. The reality is that stress fluctuates depending on a wide range of factors.

### 4.2.1 Administration and Colleagues as a Mitigating Factor in Teacher Stress

Mary and Bill both pointed to board offered counselling services as an available resource, but underlined the importance of supportive administration as an important resource for effectively coping with stress. Interestingly the literature often mentioned administration as a potential source of stress, but rarely referred to it as a potential factor for minimizing teacher stress (Jenkins, S., & Calhoun, J. F., 1991; Nair, Dr. M.A., 2015; Rogers, B., 2011). Over the course of his career Bill has seen social improvements in administration; essentially principals going from less of a boss to more of a supportive colleague. Mary seems to be in agreement as she specifically stated how her relationships with her principals have helped her to find greater balance in her career and life. As previously stated, the literature has discussed the negative impact of administration, but discusses little surrounding the positive impact that administration can have on teacher stress (Jenkins, S., & Calhoun, J. F., 1991; Sarros & Sarros, A. A., 1992).

A positive environment as set out by the administration was also a factor in helping to manage stress. Both Bill and Mary told specific stories relating to how their administration had
helped establish a better school environment whether through reminding the staff of the importance of having fun or adhering to an open door policy. This positive environment was briefly reviewed in the literature as a possible way of helping to reduce the amount of and intensity of stress that teachers feel (Bradshaw, C. P., et al. 2008; Pas, E. T., et al., 2012). Overall, according to my participants a positive school environment and a good administration are important factors in helping to mitigate and minimize stress in teaching. This data is supported by the literature.

4.2.2.0 Social connection in teaching as a factor for coping with stress in teaching. The sub-theme of social connection in teaching as a factor in coping with stress arose from the recurring code of relationships that consisted of relationships with students, colleagues, administrators or family and friends. As a researcher I noted the pattern, especially since the literature had very little to say about the importance of social connection as a mitigating factor of stress (Jenkins, S., & Calhoun, J. F., 1991; Lilienfield, 2011; Pas, E. T., et al., 2012; Rogers, B., 2011; Sarros, J. C., & Sarros, A. M., 1992). The only discussion is that a lack of or a negative perception of social connection is often listed as a contributing factor to stress in teaching (Jenkins, S., & Calhoun, J. F., 1991; Pas, E. T., et al., 2012; Sarros, J. C., & Sarros, A. M., 1992). That said, my participants noted that social connection also plays an important role in the reduction of their stress in terms of feeling valued, asking for help and "commiserat[ing] with one another.”

The sub-theme of social connection was the most surprising for me and the most underrepresented information in the literature. I expected to hear that there was simply too
much in terms of external stressors, but instead I heard about the importance of social support in helping to effectively cope with stress in teaching. Not only did Mary outline how her first years of teaching were stressful because "I didn't feel like I had really a network of people to um talk to," but both Bill and Mary felt that administrative support is key to helping teachers effectively cope with stress. Mary highlighted the importance of being able to approach administrators with issues especially as a new teacher, while Bill believed that "administration has been much better in in recent years" in terms of "being supportive as resources."

4.2.2.1 Colleagues and administration as mitigating factors of stress in teaching. Both participants viewed "being collegial" and being able to "support one another" as key factors to helping mitigate stress in teaching. While this is not surprising to me from a logical standpoint, it was not clearly discussed in the literature beyond the potential importance of a positive working environment (Bradshaw, C. P., et al. 2008). Both participants mentioned social outings with other teachers as a great way of helping to minimize and mitigate stress as well. Essentially as a researcher I began to grasp the idea that other people were a huge resource in helping teachers to effectively cope with stress. That said, as Mary reminded me, they can also be a cause of stress when "teachers just end up unloading on other teachers all this anger and frustration."

Both participants mentioned several times the importance of "being collegial with your […] peers" and that “once you have your people […] then you know those are the people you go to. That, is definitely helpful”. Mary even discussed how her first years of teaching were difficult as she felt that she didn't have other teachers within her school to turn to.
4.2.2 Personal relationships as a mitigating factor of teacher stress. Bill also emphasized his personal relationships specifically citing his spouse and "supportive family" as important factors in helping him to minimize his stress. While Mary pointed to spending time with friends and building "connections with people who, you know, they’re not in it so they don’t understand it, but maybe can give you a different perspective,” as stress relievers. Once again these personal supports were not discussed in the literature, but appear to play important roles in helping teachers alleviate and reduce their experience of stress.

4.3.0 Theme 3: Effects of Teacher Stress

Burnout is often discussed in the literature as an extreme effect of teacher stress resulting in teachers feeling overwhelmed, apathetic and fatigued (Kyriacou, C., 1987; Rogers, B., 2011; Tsouloupas, C. N., et al. 2010). Neither of the participants identified as experiencing burnout in the interviews, but Bill discussed how “stress did affect a fair number of teachers in many ways.” According to the literature, students are aware when their teachers are experiencing stress (Evers, W. J., & Tomic, W., 2003). While Mary affirmed that students recognized when their teachers are experiencing stress, Bill stated that students “might know that there’s something not right or that there’s something wrong but um they may not recognize it as stress.”

4.3.1 Teacher Reaction to Stress
One of the key factors in coping with stress seems to reflect a level of personal understanding as Mary states that it is "ok not to know everything" and it's important to be open and feel valued as a teacher. This theme seems to also fall within what the literature refers to as self-efficacy; a person's perceptions about their own abilities (Jenkins, S., & Calhoun, J. F., 1991; Pas, E.T., et al., 2012; Rogers, B., 2011; Tsouloupas, C. N., et al. 2010).

Bill discussed how he is more likely to react to stress by "bott[l]ing everything up inside" and "not be[ing] as open as a teacher.” Mary felt that stress affected her level of patience not just at school, but in her personal life as well. Basically, both participants felt that stress has a negative impact on their personal interactions and connections with others including their students.

**4.3.2 Effects of Teacher Stress on Students**

Both participants believe that students know when a teacher is experiencing stress, though they may not be able to recognize it as stress. This aligns with the literature which noted that students are good predictors of burnout in their teachers (Evers, W. J., & Tomic, W., 2003). Unfortunately according to Bill and Mary, students are the ones who deal with the repercussions of teacher stress. When my participants were stressed they stated feeling less patient, less flexible and less open to spontaneous learning experiences which, according to Bill, "it's those teaching moments that students will remember more than anything else".

Both participants discussed the pressure of "trying to meet the needs of every student" and Mary specifically cited that “I do get very stressed for my students […] so when I know they’re going through those difficult times, that that stress carries on to me as well.” They also both touched on Ministry and Board level expectations as added stressors as well. While
students as stressors were apparent, building relationships with students was also key to helping to mitigate stress.

Specifically cited was the importance of building relationships with students through good morale in the classroom and extracurricular activities. Both participants felt that "the important thing [...] is your relationship with your students" and "it's the relationships with the students that can make it just so great". Overall it seems important to not lose sight of why you became a teacher and to keep balance in your life. This balance may not only help you remain a good teacher, but will help you to be a better role model for your students.

4.4 Conclusion

Stress in teaching is a complex and intertwined issue; that said, so is coping with stress in teaching. Through my interviews I’ve learned that while there are many stressors in teaching, there are also many resources for coping. Interestingly, many of the stressors and resources overlap. My participants highlighted the need for a supportive administration, a positive atmosphere and a love for teaching. More than that, however, they insisted that balance is the key for mitigating and minimizing stress in teaching.

In both interviews, the participants specifically cited the importance of balance within a teacher’s life. This theme recurred several times throughout the interview with the actual word “balance” cited in a response 4 times with Mary and 7 times with Bill. While sources certainly examined the direct and indirect methods of coping with stress, none of them addressed the importance of a balanced lifestyle as an effective method of reducing and coping with stress (Jenkins, S., & Calhoun, J. F., 1991; Kyriacou, C., 2001; Lilienfield, 2011; Pas, E. T., et al., 2012; 2010Sarros, J. C., & Sarros, A. M., 1992; Tsouloupas, C. N., et al.). Yet the participants
deemed it to be “… very important to have some balance with your work life and your personal life” and emphasized the importance of “Keep[ing] balance in your life.” In chapter 5 I will further examine these findings and discuss next steps for research into stress in teaching and especially the importance of social connection with administration and colleagues.

Chapter 5: Implications

5.0 Introduction

In this chapter I will reiterate why I chose to research stress in teaching and attempt to
answer my research question: What resources, support and training can school administration put in place to help minimize the stress elementary school teachers’ experience? Mainly I will be discussing the importance of administration and collegial support. After summarizing my findings, I will discuss the implications for my research both for the educational research community and for my own professional identity and practice. In this section I will reiterate the importance of a supportive administration and positive working environment. I will also emphasize the importance of maintaining a healthy and balanced lifestyle. The chapter will then discuss my recommendations and areas for further research. Ministry of Education and School Board hiring practices will be highlighted as well as teacher education programs that emphasize the importance of life-balance. Areas of further research may include the normalization of stress in teaching, teachers as role models for students coping with stress and burnout prevention.

5.1 Research Topic and Positionality

I chose to study stress in teaching due to my personal struggles with mental health. I struggled with anxiety for many years before I was hospitalized and finally diagnosed with Generalize Anxiety Disorder. Mental health issues in terms of burnout are prevalent in teaching according to my research (Hughes, R. E., 2001; Kamphaus, R.W., et al., 2010; Pas, E. T., et al., 2012; Tsouloupas, C. N., et al. 2010). Furthermore, the research indicates that students know when their teachers are experiencing stress and that teacher discipline is affected by burnout (Jenkins, S., & Calhoun, J. F., 1991; Hughes, R. E., 2001; Pas, E. T., et al., 2012; Tsouloupas, C. N., et al. 2010). In other words both teachers and students are affected by teacher burnout.

Now that I am going into teaching, I fear the mental repercussions of stress associated
with the profession. In simple terms, I want to avoid burnout. Teacher burnout is defined as emotional exhaustion which is a result of chronic stress (Kyriacou, C., 1987; Rogers, B., 2011; Tsouloupas, C. N., et al. 2010). Burnout has been linked to turnover, job performance, student discipline and student achievement (Hughes, R. E., 2001; Kamphaus, R.W., et al., 2010; Pas, E. T., et al., 2012; Tsouloupas, C. N., et al. 2010). As a teacher candidate, I have often been told that teaching will be stressful, especially in the first couple years. I want to know how to better cope with this stress in order to avoid burning out.

My research aimed to examine resources, support and training that school administration can put in place to help minimize the stress elementary school teachers’ experience. Inevitably, the research discusses internal factors in coping with teacher stress as well. Internal factors in coping with teacher stress, refers to anything within an individual teacher’s locus of control; external factors in coping with teacher stress, refers to anything outside of an individual teacher’s locus of control.

5.2 Implications of Teacher Stress

Occasional stress can be considered very common place in most professions and even a healthy motivator; stress generally ebbs and flows depending on many factors (Bakker, A.B., & Demerouti, E., 2007; Jenkins, S., & Calhoun, J.F., 1991; Kyriacou, C., 1987; Lilienfield, 2011). Teacher stress, however, can be seen as more constant or persistent than in many other professions. The implications for teacher stress refer to the implications for long term intensive stress. The results of this long term intensive stress are severe mental conditions such as depression and burnout (Jenkins, S., & Calhoun, J.F., 1991; Lilienfield, 2011). Symptoms of burnout include apathy, fatigue, disinterest and lack of motivation (Lilienfield, 2011). This
means teachers are not as effective with their teaching, discipline or engagement (Kampaus, 2010; Lilienfield, 2011). Furthermore, the research has shown that many teachers continue to teach despite their burnout which means they are continuing to affect their students’ success and achievement (Hughes, 2001).

5.2.1 Implication of teacher stress for the Educational Research Community. In this section, I will discuss the implications of teacher stress on the Educational Research Community. Specifically, I will focus on the effect of teacher stress on teachers, students and administration.

5.2.1.1 Implications of teacher stress for teachers. The implications of teacher stress for teachers are health issues both mental and physical. While stress can incite or aggravate mental health issues such as depression and anxiety, the major implication in my research has been burnout. The result of burnout is teachers wanting to leave the profession, but often being unable to for various reasons (Hughes, 2001). This means teachers who are apathetic, disinterested and lacking motivation. Simply put, teachers who are unable to adequately and effectively perform their duties as a teacher. Burnout when left untreated increases rapidly over time meaning that teachers cannot simply overcome burnout on their own (Pas et al., 2012). Physically, stress can aggravate pre-existing conditions and result in aches and pains (Lilienfield, 2011). Furthermore stress results in difficulty sleeping which amplifies the stress (ibid).

5.2.1.2 Implications of teacher stress for students. Due to the symptoms of burnout it is likely that teachers who are experiencing burnout and continuing to teach are far less concerned with student learning and achievement as they are with simply making it through the day. In
turn, students are likely less co-operative, less engaged and less likely to be learning. In other words, the major concern with teacher stress is that it affects student learning and achievement. Furthermore, students were less likely to receive an out of school suspension if their teacher was experiencing burnout (Kampaus, 2010). It is unclear if this is because teachers experiencing burnout were more likely to recommend students be suspended or less likely to report incidences that would result in suspension. No matter the explanation, teachers experiencing burnout are not effectively coping with student discipline issues.

**5.2.1.3 Implication of teacher stress for school administration.** Implication of teacher stress for administration according to the research are job turnover, job performance and student discipline issues (Jenkins, S., & Calhoun, J.F., 1991; Hughes, R.E., 2001; Pas, E.T., et al., 2012; Tsouloupas, C.N., et al. 2010). Burnout causes teachers to either leave the profession, which means administration must re-hire, or it causes teachers to be less effective in their jobs. Teachers being less effective means administration must supply more resources and support to aid this teacher. Administration must also take the time to evaluate the teacher and assure that they are improving their practice. Furthermore, teachers experiencing burnout are not as effective at coping with discipline issues which means discipline issues are passed along to school administration.

**5.2.2 Implications of teacher stress for my professional identity, teaching philosophy and teaching practice.** The section discusses my personal connection with teacher stress and its implications for my professional identity and practice. I will focus on my concerns and fears in entering the teaching profession.

**5.2.2.1 Implications of teacher stress for my teaching practice.** My teaching practice will
perhaps be affected to the greatest extent by stress. In particular feeling overwhelmed by School Board and Administration expectations. I imagine that when stressed, I will rely much more on textbook lessons, worksheets and individual work. I will likely avoid planning elaborate lessons or engaging in thoughtful and meaningful conversations with my students. All these strategies are being used as a way to decrease my stress levels. While worksheets, textbooks and individual work have their place in a classroom, collaborative learning, group work and interactive activities must also be present to provide a well-balanced curriculum.

I cannot imagine feeling capable or motivated to plan and execute the types of activities that involve high teacher involvement and student interaction when I am fatigued, apathetic or overwhelmed. While I would like to think that I would take a mental health day to recover, I know the reality is that I would likely feel anxious about taking time off, especially as a new teacher. Furthermore, taking a sick day or mental health day means having to prepare supply lessons, falling behind in the curriculum expectations and having to reorganize and re-plan upon return.

**5.2.2.2 Implications of teacher stress for my teaching philosophy.** While the core of my teaching philosophy may remain the same, the implementation of this philosophy I imagine would change drastically under stress. My philosophy centers on the importance of making mistakes, students mental, emotional and physical health and fostering a love of learning. I would imagine that my philosophy applied means a lot of community building, encouragement and support, hands on inquiry and collaborative learning.

This philosophy is difficult and hypocritical to implement when I am under extreme stress. I cannot preach the importance of a balanced and healthy lifestyle when I am exhibiting
symptoms of extreme stress such as fatigue, apathy and feeling overwhelmed. Therefore, while my teaching philosophy at its core may not change, I can see myself becoming cynical and jaded. I can see the lack of application of my philosophy as causing me to feel more stress and guilt as well for not providing the students with the learning I believe is so important.

5.2.2.3 Implications of teacher stress for my professional identity. My professional identity is already being affected by stress. I am already becoming more reserved and cynical about the application of much of what I have learned in teachers’ education. The truth is “the teacher” is talked about as having to always implement these ground breaking lessons while being completely inclusive, involved in everything and supporting each student in every way. From my limited experience as a teacher, I can already see the issues with this view; there are too many students, too little time and I am one person with limited knowledge, limited experience and limited ability to constantly juggle all of the expectations while maintaining my own life and health. I fear burning out within my first couple years of teaching. I question my career choice not because I don’t love teaching, but because I feel as if I am being asked to surrender my life and my health, or else I will not be an effective or successful teacher.

5.3.0 Recommendations

In this section I will discuss my recommendations for minimizing and mitigating the extreme stress that many teachers experience. I will not only talk about what a teacher can do personally to off-set this stress, but also what school administration, the School Board and Teacher Education Programs can do as well. I will emphasize the importance of administrative support, life balance and de-normalizing teacher stress.

5.3.1 Recommendations for the school boards to mitigate and minimize teacher stress.
There are two main recommendations I have for the school board in terms of helping to reduce teacher stress; school administration hiring practice and caps on class sizes. My research has led me to believe that school administration is vital to helping teachers mitigate their stress. I would recommend that school boards adapt their hiring practices to value the creation and maintenance of a positive school environment, encouragement of Professional Development surrounding teacher health and open door policies. By searching for these types of qualities in school administrators, the school boards can help to foster positive schooling environments where teachers feel comfortable approaching administration with issues and are encouraged to maintain a healthy and balanced lifestyle.

Secondly I would recommend that school boards push towards capping class sizes. According to my participants, class sizes contribute greatly to teacher stress. By encouraging small class sizes and pushing the Ministry of Education towards legislation that would officially cap class sizes, school boards can help their teachers not only reduce their stress, but become more effective. With a smaller class size, teachers are able to provide much more individualized attention in the classroom, in lesson planning and in assessment and evaluation. This allows teachers to better implement already present expectations such as differentiated instruction, inclusion of students with special needs and inquiry based learning.

5.3.2 Recommendations for school administration to mitigate and minimize teacher stress. School administrators play a key role in helping to reduce teacher stress. By fostering and maintaining a positive and cooperative school environment, administrators can help their teachers be more effective. My research is supported by the literature in suggesting that a positive school environment and a good relationship with colleagues help to reduce teacher stress significantly.
Administrators can foster this positivity by having an open door policy, where teachers are encouraged to express frustrations, confusion or suggestions. By creating a more open dialogue between administrators and teachers, teachers can better understand the reasoning behind policy implementation, sudden changes or administrative decision which helps to reduce resentment, frustration and stress.

Furthermore, administrators can help build a school community by encouraging teacher gatherings; for example, potlucks within the school to entice teachers to socialize in the staff room. They can also organize or encourage afterschool outings whether it is for a drink or dinner. Staff parties for holidays, picnics, and teacher appreciation days are all wonderful ways to encourage a school community that helps to reduce teacher stress.

Lastly, administration can implement Professional Development that centers on teacher well-being as well as student well-being. Professional Development can also be used to help teachers improve teacher self-efficacy which will help them reduce their own stress levels. While potentially more reactionary than preventative, administrators may also provide resources and supports to help teachers better cope with stress. Mostly, however, an administrator can help teachers mitigate their stress by remembering and reminding them that they cannot be their best when they are mentally, physically or emotionally exhausted. By encouraging teachers to balance their life and work, administrators can possibly improve the effectiveness of their teachers, decrease sick days and turnover, and reduce the disciplinary issues in which they must intervene.

5.3.3 Recommendations for Teacher Education Programs to mitigate and minimize teacher stress. My major recommendation for teacher education programs is to stop normalizing
teacher stress and burnout. While this suggestion may seem straightforward it has severe repercussions in the teaching profession. From my own experiences, teacher candidates are taught that it is normal to feel overwhelmed, exhausted and stressed. This translates into teachers who believe that feeling overwhelmed, exhausted and stressed means they are effectively doing their jobs. The repercussions are teachers burning out, breaking down or leaving the profession. Teacher education programs need to focus not just on student well-being, but on teacher well-being as well. Teachers cannot be effective and cannot help their students be successful, if they are not well. Teachers are responsible for helping students to be successful in their lives, not just in the classroom; this means teaching them the life skills they need such as balancing work and life, coping with stress and living a healthy lifestyle. How can teachers be expected to teach something they are discouraged from practicing?

5.3.4 Recommendations for teachers to mitigate and minimize teacher stress. My recommendations to help teachers reduce their own stress include finding life/work balance, living a healthy lifestyle, seeking support and staying positive. Through my research I've learned that balance between teaching and home life is crucial for keeping stress levels down. From my understanding this balance helps not only to put teaching into perspective, but allows teachers time to regroup, rest and relax. Balance means leading a healthy lifestyle including exercise, eating well and sleeping properly. It is also important that teachers seek support from administrators, colleagues, family and friends even if it is simply to commiserate; knowing others are experiencing the same issues helps to mitigate stress. That said keeping an overall healthy and positive attitude helps teachers to combat stress as well.
5.4 Areas for Further Research

While there are many avenues for research from the perspective of teacher stress, a focus on the effects and causes of teacher stress would be beneficial for inciting change. Specifically the effects of the teacher as a positive role model for student perception of stress and mental health. It would also be beneficial to study the effect administration can have on creating a positive school environment thereby helping to reduce teacher stress. The area, however, that I find needs to be researched and analyzed is the normalization of stress in teaching and teacher education. Specifically how is this normalization harming our teacher candidates, teachers and students and what can be done to help change it?

5.5 Conclusion

Teaching is a profession that truly has the opportunity to change lives, foster lifelong learners and provide true satisfaction. Every teacher can talk about a moment that changed who they were, as a teacher or as a person. It is hard not to love the profession when you sit back, look around your classroom and see students excited, engaged and actually learning! Then there are the moments when photocopying a worksheet is the best a teacher can muster after having spent the night before writing report cards, corresponding with parents and trying to teach themselves all the parts of a cell.

While each profession carries with it its own stressors, stress is a term seemingly synonymous with teaching. Teachers face rapidly changing policies and regulations, expectations of school administration, school boards and parents as well as large class sizes filled with students of all different backgrounds, levels and abilities. Teachers are trained to differentiate instruction, create inclusive classrooms, cater to each student's individualized
needs and learning styles, provide multiple options for assessment and never to turn away a student who asks for help or who may need support. It is like juggling, except every time you throw the ball it splits into two, and if you drop one, one of your students won't be successful.

I chose to talk about stress, because it is my greatest concern going into the teaching profession, that I will burnout which, to me, feels like saying I will be a failure. My research has brought me to a realization that burning out is not failure on the part of the teacher, but rather failure on the part of the education system. If a flower doesn’t grow, you don’t blame the flower, you change the environment. The Ministry of Education, school boards and school administration have been asking teachers to change their student’s environment to foster better learning and success, but have failed to see the importance of doing the same thing for their teachers. Teachers are not at their best and cannot provide the best for their students when they are run-down, exhausted and overwhelmed.

Teacher education programs need to stop overtly and covertly telling their teacher candidates that if they are not stressed, they are not working hard enough. School boards need to push for smaller class sizes for the benefit of their teachers and therefore their students. School administration needs to encourage the importance of health and balance through Professional Development and leadership. Teachers need to stop telling each other and themselves that fatigue, overwork and extreme stress are indicators of a successful teacher. Seven hours a day, five days a week, 10 months a year, teachers are responsible for the wellbeing and education of the next generation. Would we rather those teachers be caring, present and focused on their students or apathetic, exhausted and overwhelmed? At the moment, the answer seems to be the latter.
References


Appendix A – Interview Consent Letter

Date:

Dear ______________________________,  

My Name is Kimberly Auger and I am a student in the Master of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). A component of this degree program involves conducting a small-scale qualitative research study. My research will focus on teachers’ experience of stress in elementary school contexts. I am investigating successful strategies used by teachers and principals to help elementary school teachers better cope with stress. I am interested in interviewing teachers who have worked in an elementary school for at least 10 years, have worked at a minimum of three different elementary schools and a maximum of 5 different schools in the past 10 years, and have demonstrated a commitment to mental health. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

Your participation in this research will involve one 45-60 minute interview, which will be transcribed and audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient for you, outside of school time. The contents of this interview will be used for my research project, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates and/or potentially at a research conference or publication. You will be assigned a pseudonym to maintain your anonymity and I will not use your name or any other content that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information will remain confidential. This data will be stored on my password-protected computer and the only people who will have access to the research data will be my course instructor Dr. Angela MacDonald-Vemic. You are free to change your mind about your participation at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may also choose to decline to answer any specific question. I will destroy the audio recording after the paper has been presented and/or published, which may take up to a maximum of five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks or benefits to participation,
and I will share with you a copy of the transcript to ensure accuracy.

Please sign this consent form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. I am very grateful for your participation.

Sincerely,

Kimberly Auger

Phone Number

kimberly.auger@mail.utoronto.ca

Course Instructor’s Name: Dr. Angela MacDonald-Vemic

Contact Info: angela.macdonald@utoronto.ca

Consent Form

I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw from this research study at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by Kimberly Auger and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described. I agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

Signature: ________________________________________

Name: (printed) ______________________________________________

Date: ____________________________
Appendix B – Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Thank you for participating in this research study. The aim of the research is to learn about coping with stress in teaching. The interview should last approximately 45-60 minutes and I will ask you a series of questions focused on stress in elementary school teaching. I want to remind you of your right to choose not to answer and question and to withdraw from the study at any time. Do you have any questions before we begin?

1 Background Information

1.1 Can you please state your name for the recorder?

1.2 How long have you been teaching?

1.3 What grades have you taught?

1.4 What grade are you currently teaching?

1.5 How many schools have you taught in over the span of your career?

1.6 Can you tell me more about the school that you currently teach in (e.g. size, demographics, program priorities etc.). How long have you been teaching in this school?

1.7 In addition to being a teacher, do you have any other roles/titles/responsibilities within the school? (e.g. coach, counsellor, advisor, instructional leader, union rep etc.)

1.8 What has been your experience, to date, with stress in the teaching profession?

2 Beliefs/Values (Why?)

2.1 What does “stress” mean to you?

2.2 What causes and symptoms of stress do you believe are prominent in the teaching
profession? What aspects of teaching do you find to be most stressful / stress-inducing?

2.3 Do you believe that teachers can be effectively prepared to cope with the stress that accompanies teaching? If yes, how? If no, why not?

2.4 Do you think other teachers experience similar amounts of stress? What strategies do you believe other teachers employ to cope with stress?

3 Teacher Experience and Practices (What/how?)

3.1 In what ways, if any does stress affect you personally and professionally?

3.2 In your experience, do you believe that students are aware of when their teacher is stressed? If yes, how do you think this affects them? Can you give an example?

3.3 What strategies do you use to cope with stress in teaching? What are the benefits of these strategies? Do you find these strategies effective?

3.3.1 Is this more of a personal endeavour, or have you found that the education system also provides support to minimize the stress that accompanies the teaching profession?

Support, Challenges, and Next Steps

1.1 What range of factors and resources support you when coping with the stressors that accompany teaching?

1.1.1 What personal or professional support or resources have you used to cope with stress? How effective do you find this support or resource?

1.2 In your experience, have you found that administration is helpful in reducing or helping teachers to cope with stress?

1.2.1 If yes, how do they reduce and help their teachers to cope with stress? If
not, what implementations do you believe would be helpful?