Whatever it Takes: The Need for a Strong Partnership Between the Government and Teacher Unions in Ontario

By

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Abstract

There is no easy way to define the relationship between the government and teacher unions in Ontario. While they both have a mission to improve the quality of public education for students across the province, they have, at times, had differing visions and approaches to achieving their goal. This has led to periods of labour unrest in which student success is ultimately affected. This research study tracks the relationship between the government and teacher unions since the election of Premier Mike Harris in 1995, citing the factors that have contributed to an effective and ineffective partnership. Using a wide range of scholarship and three qualitative interviews, it is clear that a strong partnership is based on many factors including, but not limited to, a respect for teacher agency, an understanding of the complexities of the profession, and multiple opportunities for teachers’ voices to be heard. By learning from the past, including periods of success and failure, the government and teacher unions can strengthen their relationship and ensure all students reach their full potential.

Key Words: Government of Ontario, teacher unions, partnership, labour unrest, collaboration
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Lastly, I would like to acknowledge the teachers, administrators, school board officials, union leaders, and professionals at the Ministry of Education who have committed their lives to enhancing Ontario’s public education system. This paper is meant to support the continued development of a strong partnership between the government and teacher unions. It is not meant to disrespect all the contributions that stakeholders have made towards the success of the education system to date. With mutual support and dedication to sustained improvement, I have great hope for what lies ahead.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Research Context

Teachers in Ontario have always played an instrumental role in shaping the way future generations think, feel, and act. The subject matter, working conditions, and responsibilities have certainly shifted over time, but whether a teacher is standing inside a one-room schoolhouse or standing in front of a Smart Board, their mission to educate children has remained the same. And regardless of the location, size, or student needs, an effective public education system in Ontario has necessitated an elaborate partnership between all stakeholders. This includes, but is not limited to, teachers, administrators, school board officials, union leaders, and professionals at the Ministry of Education. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2011a) ranked Ontario’s education system among the highest performing jurisdictions in the world. McKinsey & Company (2010) identified Ontario as being in the “final frontier of school improvement;” what they deem as “the journey from great to excellent” (p. 50). While Ontario’s education system has been heralded as a model for excellence, improvements are still necessary to ensure all students reach their full potential. For example, the recent report by the Education Quality and Accountability Office of Ontario (EQAO) (2016) cited that “the proportion of students improving to meet the [mathematics] standard in Grade 6 actually decreased by 7 percentage points, from 20% to 13%, over the past five years” (p. 4). In addition, McKinsey & Company (2010) recommended that Ontario’s public education system foster greater support for creativity and innovation among both students and teachers. Brickner (2016) highlights another pending issue in the province. She argues that there is a need to reconcile the resource discrepancies across school districts and boards that are shaped by systemic classism, sexism, and racism (Brickner, 2016, p. 18).
Much of the success of Ontario’s public education system is predicated on the existence of a strong partnership between all stakeholders. In their report, *Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario* (2014), the government committed itself to “cultivate and continuously develop a high-quality teaching profession and strong leadership at all levels of the system” (p. 1). However, in the past 20 years, there have been many instances where the partnership between the Ontario government and the teacher unions has been unstable and ineffective. The formation of new policies and curriculum have at times resulted in labour unrest throughout the province. This includes the content of various policies, in addition to the motivating factors and the process by which they were enacted. And regardless of the underlying issue, when the government and teachers are unable to work together, students suffer. For example, in the four years prior to the release of McKinsey & Company’s report (2010) the school system had lost 26 million student-days due to work stoppages (p. 55). The strength of the partnership between the government and teacher unions that is necessary to deliver high quality education cannot be underestimated. The OECD (2011b) report for the first International Summit on the Teaching Profession argued, “…many of the countries with the strongest student performance also have strong teachers’ unions, and the better a country’s education system performs, the more likely that country is working constructively with its unions and treating its teachers as trusted professional partners” (p. 238). This research study will examine teacher perspectives on how the relationship between the government and teacher unions has both supported and hindered educational progress. I will examine these factors and then outline the importance of learning from the past to ensure Ontario’s public education system can excel in the future.
The teaching profession has often struggled to receive the level of respect it deserves. Historically, “…a teaching post was commonly regarded as the last refuge for the incompetent, the inept, the unreliable” (Althouse, 1967, p. 5). Citing current international tendencies, Apple (2013) claims that “the loss of respect for the professionalism of educators is striking” (p. 925). Teachers have long fought to receive greater recognition for the work they do. Through the efforts of their unions, teachers have sought greater job security, higher wages, access to resources, funding for school improvements, and the right to strike. And while they have achieved much success, there is a persistent concern for the conditions of teaching (Bascia & Rottmann, 2011). At times, the presumed need for uniformity of a teacher’s working conditions neglects distinct variations in the needs of classrooms, schools, and communities across the province (Bascia & Rottmann, 2011, p. 788). Successive Ontario governments have responded to union demands in a multitude of ways depending on their priorities and public pressure. The passing of Bill 100, the School Boards’ and Teachers’ Collective Negotiations Act, in 1975, afforded teachers the right to legally strike. It ushered in a period of relative stability in union-government relations. During the era of Bill 100, teacher salaries improved significantly, there were major improvements in workload-related issues such as class-size, and there was greater joint decision making responsibility (Rose, 2012). Teacher strikes and dispute rates were low, and many settlements were reached during the direct bargaining process (Rose, 2012). Teachers had the statutory right to bargain and boards had to negotiate in good faith (Richter, 2007). And while other issues such as pay equity would dominate the next decade, Bill 100 was viewed as very progressive for its time (Richter, 2007, p. 7).

Long before he became premier, Mike Harris believed in a “back to basics conservatism that emphasized lower taxes and smaller government” (Ibbotson, 1997, p. 47). In the face of a
major deficit due to a recession in the early 1990s, Harris, like other provincial governments, was
determined to reduce public sector spending (Wallner, 2008). Dubbed the “Common Sense
Revolution,” his 1995 provincial campaign proposed tax cuts, spending cuts, deficit reduction,
and welfare reform (Ibbitson, 1997). Many senior members of the Harris government, including
Harris himself, “were convinced Ontario’s education system was rotten...they were determined,
not to reform the system, but to dismantle and recreate it” (Ibbitson, 1997, p. 222). New
education legislation included, among other things, the repeal of Bill 100 and the placement of
teacher bargaining under the Labour Relations Act (Wallner, 2008). Another major change was
the elimination of independent taxing powers of school boards, which was replaced with
centralized educational finance (Wallner, 2008). The reforms also included a reduction in the
number of school boards, an outcomes-based curriculum, and proposed a teacher-testing
program of newly trained teachers (Wallner, 2008). Harris was deeply concerned that despite the
fact that Ontario was matching or exceeding every other province in education spending “student
performance wallowed in mediocrity” (Ibbitson, 1997, p. 223). He blamed the relationship
between the school boards and the teacher unions, claiming that they sensationalized labour
unrest in order to advance their own interests (Ibbitson, 1997, p. 224). The passing of these
educational reforms fostered intense resentment and strengthened the distrust between the
government and the unions. While the content of the reforms certainly sparked enormous uproar,
it was the government’s approach—the speed at which changes were enacted, the absence of
adequate consultation, and the sharp lack of respect for teachers—that fostered a vicious public
debate and led to the largest teachers strike in North American history (Wallner, 2008; Rose,
2002).
This was not the first time, nor would it be the last time, spending cuts would be necessary to curb a provincial deficit. However, as a former Ontario principal articulated in an interview with Jennifer Wallner (2008), “We [education professionals] recognized the need for change and improvements to accountability, but Harris blamed the education system” (p. 432). Rose (2002) characterized this period as one of “anti-union sentiment” and described the government’s approach as “vindictive” (p. 108). The hostility between the government and teacher unions remained for the duration of the Conservative government’s tenure. In fact, in 2010, eight years after Premier Harris stepped down, Nipissing University’s decision to name a library and confer an honourary degree to Harris was vehemently condemned by the Ontario Teachers Federation (OTF) (Jerema, 2010).

In 2003, the Liberal government campaigned on a promise to restore the government’s relationship with the teacher unions. Years of mistrust and labour unrest was replaced with greater cooperation between all stakeholders. In order to counteract the dramatic shift toward central control over education, the Liberals sought to restore a higher degree of local influence that had been lost. They sought to create more avenues for collaborative discussion. This came in the form of a “provincial dialogue” with teachers’ federations and school boards’ associations that sought to align “the centralized funding model with decentralized bargaining structures” (Rose, 2012, p. 212). “The provincial dialogue effectively created a two-tier bargaining system in which system-wide issues (e.g. percentage increase in salaries) were agreed to by the Ministry of Education and provincial bodies representing teachers and school boards, thereby establishing the basis for local issues at the school board level” (Rose, 2012, p. 212). The government was encouraged by the success of their first round of bargaining and sought to repeat it four years later (in 2008) with a few adjustments. A more formal and open approach was taken to ensure
that bargaining guidelines, including the split between local and central issues, were more clearly defined (Rose, 2012). While there were disagreements between the Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario (ETFO) and the Ontario Public School Boards’ Association (OPSBA) over teacher preparation time, the new two-tiered model appeared to be a promising new development in union-government relations. However, concerns were raised that its success was due, in part, to a set of specific circumstances tied to that particular round of negotiations. This includes generally favourable economic conditions; the government’s funding commitments, and Education Minister Gerard Kennedy’s active involvement in the process (Rose, 2012, p. 215).

Issues of decision-making control over education policy have remained a central issue in dictating the strength of the partnership between the government and teacher unions (Rose, 2012). While Premier Dalton McGuinty showed greater respect and understanding for the challenges teachers faced in their profession, tensions over decision-making control surfaced in the 2012 round of collective bargaining. The Drummond Report (2012) stressed the dire need for greater economic efficiencies in Ontario given the rising provincial deficit and grave uncertainty of the world economy (MacNeil, 2013). Teachers voiced strong opposition to the government’s efforts to align school priorities with their own financial and policy priorities. Nevertheless, the government made it clear that the unions should expect a mandatory wage freeze within their collective agreement in 2012 (MacNeil, 2013). As Rose (2012) predicted, when the government was more financially restricted, consultations under the two-tiered model were not as successful as they had once been. The unions were resistant to the government’s austerity agenda, while the government remained committed to their initial proposal. This commitment, and the fear of dead-end labour negotiations, led to the passing of Bill 115, the Putting Students First Act, in the fall of 2012. If agreements were not reached by December 31, 2012, this act would suspend the
teachers’ right to strike for two years and give the Education Minister exclusive authority to impose contracts on local school boards (MacNeil 2013, Thomas & Tufts, 2016). While there were certainly major concerns with the salary freeze, it was the erosion of the teachers’ right to strike that appeared to ignite the fiercest criticism; much like with the passing of Bill 160 fifteen years earlier. This bill challenged the notion that the government and teacher unions were “partners” in the education system. Both the government and teacher unions blamed one another, invoking the notion of the “privileged public sector worker” and “the threat to the democratic rights of Canadians,” respectfully (Thomas & Tufts, 2016, p. 221). Michael Barrett, president of the Ontario Public School Boards’ Association called Bill 115 “a dark period in teacher board and ministry relations” (Rushowy et al., 2016). Bill 115 was later repealed and in the spring of 2016, it was deemed unconstitutional for the limitations it placed on meaningful collective bargaining. That said, the discontent that the bill originally ignited did not fade quickly.

The most recent round of collective bargaining was conducted by Premier Wynne under a new framework enacted through the passing of Bill 122, the School Board Collective Bargaining Act, in 2014. In response to the tensions that arose in 2012, the Act formalized the two-tiered bargaining framework that had been used during the McGuinty government (Brown, 2014). The new law attempts to clearly outline the roles of the government, the unions, and the school boards during negotiations, including the elements that are to be bargained centrally and locally (Morrow & Alphonso, 2014). This round of bargaining highlighted issues with compensation, class size, and sick leave within the government’s “net-zero” mandate. This mandate required that any negotiated wage increase would need to be offset by savings elsewhere. Negotiation impasses, caused in part by the net-zero mandate and a complex new bargaining system, sparked work-to-rule action across the province in the fall of 2015. The ability to create a bargaining
structure that balances effective and efficient dialogue between the government and teacher’s remains a concern in anticipation of the 2018 round of collective bargaining.

1.1 Research Problem

In the government’s renewed vision for education in Ontario, the Ministry of Education (2014) argues that “vibrant communities and a prosperous society are built on the foundation of a strong education system” (p. 1). Education has the potential to significantly contribute to the advancement of a nation’s economy, the ability to create a society that values diversity, and an enhanced capacity for the youngest generation to address the world’s most pressing problems through innovation. In Ontario, this commitment is crucial, as roughly 40% of the country’s school aged children go to public school in the province (Ministry of Education, 2016b, Statistics Canada, 2012). A strong partnership between the government and teacher unions is essential for an education system to be able to meet these goals. There are several factors that can contribute to the strength of a union-government partnership that include, but are not limited to, respecting teacher agency, understanding the complexities of the teaching profession, and providing multiple opportunities for teachers’ voices to be heard. Despite research that supports the importance of these values, including perspectives from teachers currently in the field, these values have, at times, been neglected. As this paper will show, the government and teacher unions cannot ignore the lessons learned from the past. They must use these lessons as an opportunity to further strengthen their mutual goal of delivering the highest quality education to students in Ontario.

1.2 Purpose of the Study
During the most recent round of labour negotiations, I asked myself, “Why is there such hostility between the government and teacher unions? What caused this? Has it always been this way? Is there a path forward?” The goal of my research is to analyze the factors that have contributed to an effective and ineffective partnership between the government and the unions. It is my hope that by highlighting these factors, both parties can better understand what needs to be done to create a strong system moving forward. Much of the research on union-government relations highlights the mistakes of the past, but fails to offer meaningful suggestions for how both parties can move beyond historical wrongs and develop a renewed approach to engagement. This research study will examine academic literature and explore the perspective of three teachers to determine how best to create a more effective government-union partnership in Ontario.

1.3 Research Questions

What are the factors that have contributed to an effective and ineffective partnership between the government and the teacher unions?

- What level of consultation exists between the government and teacher unions during the development of curriculum and policy? What factors contribute to this?
- How has this level of consultation impacted the teacher as a professional and their ability to meet the needs of all students?
- How does the collective bargaining framework, including the role of the government and the teacher unions, facilitate or prevent meaningful opportunities for teachers to share their opinion?
Do teachers feel that their concerns are being reflected in the actions undertaken by the government and their unions? Why or why not?

1.4 Reflexive Positioning Statement

I have always had a passion for education. After the first week of kindergarten, my dream was to become a teacher. That said, as my career aspirations have taken hold, I have been dismayed by what appears to be a hostile relationship between the government and teacher unions. While I know both parties have a vested interest in the success of the public education system, reports in the news and anecdotal conversations with those in the field have made me concerned for how students are being affected by the current relationship. Is there a root cause to the disagreements? Is so, what is it? And can we fix it? My interest in politics developed in university and I am eager to learn how the government has helped or hindered progress within the sector. I am also interested in how the role of the teacher unions has developed and how they effectively respond to teacher concerns. I am particularly motivated to determine how the factors that have contributed to an effective and ineffective partnership between the government and teacher unions. As a history major, I believe that society must learn from the past in order to inform the future. I believe that we can learn from the periods of success and periods of failure that have characterized the relationship between the government and teacher unions to determine how best to address the challenges of today.

1.5 Preview of the Whole

To respond to the research questions, I conducted a qualitative research study using purposeful sampling to interview three teachers; two teachers who are currently in the classroom...
and one who is now an educational administrator. They expressed their views on the relationship between the government and teacher unions, with specific reference to the level of consultation that exists during the development of curriculum and policy and how this consultation has impacted the teaching profession and their ability to serve the needs of all students. They also discussed how the collective bargaining framework has facilitated and prevented meaningful opportunities for teachers to share their opinion and whether they feel their concerns are taken into account by both the government and the union. In chapter 2, I review the literature on the factors that have contributed to an effective and ineffective partnership between the government and teacher unions in Ontario. This includes how curriculum and policy is formed, conflicting visions of education, the collective bargaining framework, and the dominant voices within the teacher unions. In chapter 3, I describe the research methodology and include information about the participants, methods of data collection, and limitations of this study. In chapter 4, I report my research findings; discuss their significance in light of existing research literature, and outline common themes that emerged throughout each interview. In chapter 5, I identify the implications of the research findings for my own teacher identity and practice, along with implications for the educational research community more broadly. Finally, I propose recommendations that could strengthen the relationship between the government and teacher unions and in turn, improve the quality of public education in Ontario.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

I begin this chapter by outlining perspectives on the level of collaboration between the government and teacher unions in the development of new curriculum and policy. I analyze how the government’s approach, including their perceptions of the teaching profession, have impacted teachers’ receptions to the curriculum and policy being introduced. I then explore the impact of meaningful communication and the myriad of consequences that can result in its absence. I examine the research that demonstrates how conflicting visions of education can create divisions with respect to the direction of curriculum and policy. I address the factors that have contributed to whether collective bargaining reform has facilitated or prevented effective avenues for dialogue. Finally, I review the literature citing the importance of the teacher unions being representative of their entire membership and why, or why not, teachers choose to become active members. In all, this chapter will emphasize what factors have contributed to the current state of relations between the government and teacher unions.

2.1 The Formation of New Curriculum and Policy

The emergence of any new piece of policy, educational or otherwise, is destined to have those who support it and those who do not. However, when there is tension between the government and teacher unions, the root cause is more complex than simply the content of the policy itself. The strength of the partnership between the government and the unions often depends on the way in which the policies were put forward, including the emphasis placed on meaningful collaboration and the respect afforded to the teaching profession in this process. One reason why union-government relations during the period of Bill 100 (in the 20 years prior to the
Harris government) were strong was because the assignment of bargaining rights “was a unique Ontario construct reflecting historical patterns of teacher self-organization dating back to WWI” (Shilton, 2012, p. 224). By acknowledging the strong history of teacher’s advocacy, the government sought to develop a respectful relationship with the unions.

Policy creation is complex. In order for policy to be successful, the problem must be clearly identified and consultation needs to be widespread. Short and long term ramifications need to be addressed and a variety of proposals need to be developed, challenged, and ultimately implemented. Unfortunately, the inability to facilitate all parts of this process effectively leads to an erosion of public policy legitimacy (Wallner, 2008). This is what happened in Ontario under Premier Harris. At the onset of the Common-Sense Revolution, Zeichner (1995) outlined how “many academics in colleges and universities dismiss[ed] teacher research as trivial, atheoretical, and inconsequential to their work” (p. 153). There was little acknowledgement for “teacher generated knowledge” as a contributor to research on strategies for improved teaching and learning (Zeichner, 1995, p. 154). The Harris government took a similar, hierarchal understanding of how to solve issues with the efficient and effective delivery of education. The government used much of the Paroian Report (1996) as a basis to overhaul the system. According to Rose (2012), “Rather than providing a comprehensive review aimed at seeking consensus on labour relations issues, this cursory report sought to advance the government’s agenda of reducing education expenditures and exercising greater control over education” (p. 206). Believing that professionalism and collective bargaining were incompatible, the report dismissed teachers as having an “adverse” impact on education, highlighting the need to strip the teachers of their right to strike and restore management rights in order to “safeguard the public interest in a quality education system” (Rose, 2012, p. 207). In essence, the report supported
what the government had already decided. The government sought to change the system through unilateral decision making. The desire to view education reform holistically through meaningful collaboration was discredited.

Wallner (2008) compares the educational reforms of Alberta and Ontario in the 1990s, where both Conservative governments proposed similar legislation for an overhaul in education governance, finance, curriculum, and teacher professionalism. Premier Ralph Klein in Alberta successfully implemented the majority of his policies while retaining substantial support from the public (Wallner, 2008). In Alberta, input from all education stakeholders was solicited and the government’s policy agenda was able to evolve without losing its core purpose (Wallner, 2008, p. 428). Premier Harris also implemented the majority of his programs, yet did so with considerable erosion of teacher’s trust and the public’s patience (Wallner, 2008). Unlike the Klein government, the Harris government criticized teachers for the problems within the education system (Wallner, 2008). He attributed the weak financial situation to their inefficiencies, alienated teachers from the development of new reforms, and used combative strategies that showed a complete lack of respect for teacher professionalism (Wallner, 2008). One former union leader recalled how, “The previous NDP government used to consult with us…but Harris declared war on the teachers” (Wallner, 2008, p. 435). This relationship appears to have played a significant role in shaping the skepticism and combative relationship that can exist today in Ontario between the government and teacher unions.

As the individuals responsible for the wellbeing of children, teachers bear a huge responsibility to the public. That said, “although teacher professionalism is premised on high expectations, that same professionalism has not translated into the commensurate respect and autonomy afforded to other professionals” (Sitch, 2005, p. 140). When the government does not
prioritize genuine collaboration, built on a desire to understand the complexities of the teaching profession, they lose the trust of teachers. Teachers have emphasised how their professional efficacy is largely related to the likelihood that they will actively engage in classroom and school improvement initiatives (Leithwood et al., 2002). Reflecting on the Harris years, Sitch (2005) argued that many teachers were unwilling to accept accountability measures due to their distrust of the government’s intentions. Unfortunately, almost 10 years after his article was written, a disregard for teachers’ opinions continues to permeate the system. Bascia and Rottmann (2011) argue that, “In Canada and the US, educational decision makers tend to dismiss teachers’ concerns about their working conditions, not understanding them as relevant to the quality of teaching and learning processes” (p. 788). “It is remarkable,” they write, “how many of the working conditions that troubled teachers over 100 years ago remain or recur as concerns” (Bascia & Rottmann, 2011, p. 791).

Campbell, Lieberman, and Yashkina (2016) show how the government and teacher unions have sought to address the underappreciation of teachers’ professional capabilities. Using Ontario’s Teacher Learning and Leadership Program (TLLP) as a backdrop for their study, Campbell et al. (2016) identified where teacher agency has been encouraged, valued, and supported. The TLLP funds approximately 100 teacher-led projects each year, on everything from engagement in mathematics to the support of at-risk youth and the promotion of digital citizenship (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2017). Campbell et al. (2016) demonstrated how greater teacher involvement in the development of educational policy has not only benefited teacher professional efficacy and student learning, but also on the sector wide partnerships. The TLLP is a joint initiative between the Ministry of Education and the Ontario Teachers’ Federation. Most notably, one government official commented, “It’s worth mentioning that it
wasn’t just a change in policy, but it was also change in how we do policy” (Campbell et al., 2016, p. 227). The new approach, along with the content of the TLLPs, has proven to be effective at establishing a culture of mutual respect between all education stakeholders.

Many teacher union leaders believe that if “senior administrators would treat teachers like professionals by releasing them from tight oversight mechanisms; teachers would have the necessary professional autonomy to contribute to educational improvement in their classrooms, schools, and districts” (Rottmann, 2012, p. 193). In Singapore, the “Professional Learning Communities” resemble Ontario’s T LLP. One system leader explained that, “As the skills of our educators rose, we needed to change our approach in how we managed them. We could no longer prescribe what they did, we had to treat them like professionals who had good judgement, knew their students well, and who could make their own decisions” (McKinsey & Company, 2010, p. 60). Bascia, Carr-Harris, Fine-Meyer, and Zurzolo (2014) conducted a study in Ontario on how teachers have been at the forefront of curriculum innovation and policy formation. The authors claim that “the common narrative about the influences on curriculum development may characterize teachers as comprising one of many different interest groups and having a muted voice at best” (Bascia et al., 2014, p. 231). Teachers have in fact been actively developing new material on their own; taking into account what works best for their school and their students. Using their professional and personal experience, teachers have been able to create locally developed courses that cater to their students’ interests including “Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity” and “Women in Society” (Bascia et al, 2014). Not only have teachers found this work to be incredibly rewarding, the opportunity to have students take an active role in their learning has forced scholars to rethink how they engage in curriculum reform (Bascia et al., 2014, p. 244).
“The idea of ‘teacher as leader’ has not only gained widespread popularity in recent years, but has also become gradually embedded in the language and debate concerning organization change and improvement” (Harris, 2005, p. 203). The was illustrated in Rottmann’s (2012) study on social justice unionism with the British Columbia Teacher’s Federation (BCTF). Teachers within the BCTF have initiated widespread changes to address racist, sexist, and homophobic practices within their schools. When educational improvement is treated as a “tapestry” of efforts, there is a greater chance that reforms will be successful (Rottmann, 2012, p. 211). As it stands currently, the contribution that teachers have already made in spurring educational change often goes unrecognized, largely because of a lack of respect or value for stakeholder engagement. It was another example of the potential that can be created when the system is treated as multi-layered, multi-agent, and context-sensitive (Rottmann, 2012, p. 211). This same principle can, and should, be applied to change initiated throughout all schools in Ontario.

2.2 The Importance of Meaningful Consultation

Without genuine respect and collaboration during the development of curriculum and policy, a number of what Fink (2003) described as “unintended consequences” can develop. While it is inevitable that every policy will yield some unpredicted outcomes, this likelihood is greatly reduced when problems the policy seeks to address are viewed holistically, long-term, and with the insight of those most affected by the change. The Harris government’s “interventionist approach” was “at odds with the historical record” (Rose, 2012, p. 216). A lack of respect for the importance of consultation led to a number of unintended consequences. Two examples stem from the government’s decision to implement a more centrally controlled and
standardized curriculum, along with the removal of principals from the Ontario Secondary Schools Teachers’ Federation (OSSTF). While a comprehensive consultation process might not be politically expedient, consequences of not having one have shown to severely effect the goals of the new policy and the strength of the government-teacher union partnership altogether.

The Harris government sought a massive overhaul of the curriculum, citing that the current “child-centered” approach to learning, with its lack of benchmarks and standardization, was graduating students who couldn’t read, write, or calculate (Ibbitson, 1997, p. 224). Within a few years of the release of the revised Ontario curriculum in 1997-1998, the ETFO identified a number of concerns. While greater standardization might have made student expectations more clear, some teachers claimed it limited their professional agency to teach in a way that emphasized creativity and diversity (McAdie, 2003). In fact, the government’s effort to improve school standards through standardization had the opposite effect:

With decreased educational funding and government policies that have become more technical in their orientation, opportunities for teachers to engage directly in curriculum development have been replaced by detailed “teacher-proof” curricula…that leaves little time, scope or opportunity for intellectually informed professional judgement and reflection. In many parts of the world, in other words, governments have sought to raise student standards by dumbing down their teachers (McAdie, 2003, p. 4).

For many schools, the erosion of local control over the curriculum in the 1990s eroded their ability to be innovative (Fink, 2003). In Fink’s (2003) study on the “real” cost of top-down reform, one teacher summed up her feelings by saying, “the creativity is gone” (p. 112). McKinsey & Company (2010) argued that there “is a strong correlation between a school system’s improvement journey stage and the tightness of central control over the individual
school’s activities and performance” (p. 34). More advanced school systems, with higher skilled educators, tend to provide only loose central guidelines in order to encourage peer-led creativity and innovation inside of schools (McKinsey and Company, 2010, p. 34). The push for greater standardization across the province appeared to erode the level of creativity at the administrative level as well. In response to the changing expectations and the speed at which the change was occurring, the opportunities for principals to work on school-wide initiatives became extremely limited (Fink, 2003). One teacher claimed that robust external mandates forced principals and vice principals to perform largely managerial functions, reducing their capacity to be “innovators” (Fink, 2003, p. 114). This can hinder the ability for system-wide improvement to be self-sustaining (McKinsey and Company, 2010).

The unintended consequences surrounding creativity that arose in the 1990s are still being discussed in today’s educational environment. The development of student creativity “has been, and continues to be, one of the most one of the most important educational goals in the world” (Pang, 2015, p. 122). Creativity, according to Turner (2013) “can unlock young people’s potential, leading to personal fulfillment, as well as contributing to the artistic, scientific or technological achievements that help shape and influence wider society” (p. 23). One of the ongoing debates surrounds the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO). The EQAO was conceived by the NDP government under Premier Bob Rae and implemented by Premier Harris in 1996. It currently oversees mandatory student testing across the province. The standardized EQAO test has been the target of teacher complaints since its inception for the fact that it “narrows” the curriculum and has resulted in less classroom time for subjects its tests do not emphasize (Pinto, 2016, p. 105). According to Pinto (2016), schools find themselves emphasizing certain practices, while detracting from the educators’ autonomy to make choices
they believe would better serve the needs of students (p. 105). This was a concern that first arose with the release of inflexible curriculum goals; where teachers felt they had less time to fulfill students’ emotional and personal needs (Sitch, 2005). Sitch (2005) wrote, “It is so difficult to distinguish between preparing students for learning and providing them with instruction because that distinction is a fabrication – a political and then legal fiction that arises from a conservative, results-oriented approach to education” (p. 151). In 2014, the Ministry of Education published, Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario. Within the report, they committed to integrating both the foundational skills for academic achievement (reading, writing, and mathematics) along with creativity, critical thinking, and communication skills. Given that the consequences of educational decisions will have ramifications for decades to follow, the importance of meaningful, comprehensive consultation between all education stakeholders cannot be underestimated.

The adoption of Bill 160 in 1997 led to another unintended consequence. The bill was designed by the government to “ensure the highest quality of education in the most cost effective manner” (Spencer & Freeman, 2009, p. 24). The bill included numerous, unconnected provisions that many argued were hastily prepared without a full view of their implications. The removal of administrators from the OSSTF had a number of unintended consequences, namely the erosion of a “culture of collaboration” in schools. Spencer & Freeman (2009) argued that this “facilitated a shift in their role from that of leader toward that of manager and had, moreover, altered school relationships and culture” in a negative way (p. 26). The authors reported that an “us vs. them” culture developed in schools where administrators felt they were no longer interacting with students (Spencer & Freeman, 2009, p. 36). They had been “kicked off their school’s educational team” (Spencer & Freeman, 2009, p. 47). Hattie (2009) explains how “the biggest effects on
student learning occur when teachers become learners of their own teaching” (p. 22).
Collaboration between teachers and school leaders is built on a similar understanding. The effect of this policy has been of particular concern given the pressure on school principals to balance multiple accountability systems (Pollock & Winton, 2016). The obligations of a principal are carried out “within a context of increased awareness of student diversity, an accelerated utilization of information and communication technology, a push for increased parent and community engagement, and changes in educational agenda, professional discourses, labour relations, and perhaps most acutely for many, school accountability” (p. 323). This ever-expanding set of mandates necessitates opportunities for principals to collaborate with colleagues in order to achieve the best outcome for the school.

Harris (2005) emphasised the importance of professional learning communities for educational improvement. Teacher leadership rests on the ability of strong mentoring and professional development (Harris, 2005). The Harris government’s decision to adopt earlier retirement provisions and reduce the number of superintendents “eroded the system’s mentoring traditions and isolated younger and more vulnerable school administrators” (Fink, 2003, p. 113). Fantilli and McDougall’s (2009) study supported the importance of mentorship, sighting that in its absence, teacher satisfaction is lower and dropout rates are higher. This might be a significant factor in determining whether or not they remain in their chosen career (Fink, 2003, p. 125). While the government’s decision might have been based on increasing efficiency and reducing costs, it’s important to note that there is a long-term cost of low job satisfaction among young teachers. Fantilli and McDougall (2009) found that creative and talented teachers who find their work frustrating and unrewarding have a higher risk of becoming a “casualty of the profession”
(p. 814). With a comprehensive understanding of the challenges new teachers face, and how more senior teachers could support them, the unintended consequences could be avoided.

2.3 Conflicting Visions of Education

The decisions the provincial government makes regarding the direction of curriculum and policy is rooted in their vision for an optimal education system. In order to fully understand the complexities of their relationship with the teacher unions, it is important to know where, and for what purpose, these visions originate. Many scholars have recognized a shift, for better for worse, in what educational policy has valued in term of the structure, content, and learning outcomes of the classroom.

Bruno-Jofré and Hills (2011) argued that there were “changing visions of excellence” by making explicit comparisons between two of Ontario’s major educational policy documents: Living and Learning (1968) and For the Love of Learning (1994). They argued that Living and Learning (1968) sought to value the individual potential of any child (Bruno-Jofré & Hills, 2011, p. 340). They claim it viewed education as a “transformative emancipatory tool” and “drew attention to the importance of such qualities as self-realization, security, decision making, social responsibility, public service, adaptability to change, and the ability to work and get along with others” (Bruno Jofré & Hills, 2011, p. 340-341). These qualities continue to be emphasized by many education advocates today. As Brickner (2016) argued, “To care for the development of the whole student requires a public commitment of resources as well as a recognition that caregiving labour is a necessary component of educators’ work – and one that cannot be easily measured” (p. 12). That said, when For the Love of Learning (1994) was written 25 years later, the notion of “excellence” had changed. Bruno Jofré and Hills (2011) explain how there was a
shift to viewing schooling more as “an engine of the Canadian economy;” where there was greater value in teaching students the skills perceived to be advantageous for a globally competitive world (p. 344). *For the Love of Learning* (1994) encouraged greater standardization of instruction and assessment, a recommendation for an accountability office, and an “evaluation driven view of education” (Bruno Jofré & Hills, 2011, p. 346).

Scholars have been critical of the shift they witnessed, arguing that schools are increasingly dictating the skills students must employ to survive in a global capitalist world, instead of equipping them with the values needed to be a responsible citizen. There has been concern for how much of a government’s education agenda is being influenced by corporations’ intent on creating schools that serve the global economy (Majhanovich, 2002). Martin (2012) provided evidence to how the curriculum changed during the 1990s to reflect an increased emphasis on corporate skill development, where the values of a neoliberal workplace transcended into the classroom. “The ethos of primary, middle, and secondary education,” she wrote, “soon absorbed the mantras of global capitalism through comprehensive reforms to the curriculum and its delivery” (Martin, 2012, p. 264). She argued that an emphasis on career education became more prominent in the curriculum. For example, grade one students were asked to identify jobs in the community related to their school subjects and grade seven students were expected to spend time classifying regional economies and their place in the world (Martin, 2012, p. 267). Martin (2012) claimed that the half credit careers course in grade 10 was designed in cooperation with the Conference Board of Canada, where there was a narrow set of employable skills discussed. These skills “raise questions concerning the privileging of private, corporate interests as core values” (Martin, 2012, p. 271). It is interesting to note that the co-chair for the Royal Commission on Learning who published *For the Love of Learning* (1994)
confirmed 20 years later that there were political motives behind the recommendation for greater standardized testing (Pinto, 2016, p. 97). While the argument in favour standardization cannot be discredited on the basis of this account alone, it does fuel the argument that there are ulterior motives to the government’s emphasis on standardization that may go against what is best for student learning.

Majhanovich (2002) claimed, “the conflicting viewpoints are not easily resolved…as long as the debate continues with each side presenting merits of its vision, such discussions can be healthy and contribute to the development of understanding education in the context of the modern world” (p. 160). In their report, Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario (2014), the government appeared to want to integrate the visions laid out in both Living and Learning (1968) and For the Love of Learning (1994). Their mission is to “…lead [students] to become personally successful, economically productive, and actively engaged citizens” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 1). The Wynne government views it as their responsibility to help transition students into the workforce. The document’s repeated emphasis on fostering more young entrepreneurs, ensuring students are exposed to emerging forms of technology, and that they develop strong financial literacy exemplify this commitment (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014). At the same time, the government has also prioritized developing student well-being, which includes not only academic achievement, but also cognitive, emotional, social, and physical well-being (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014). In their analysis, Bruno Jofré and Hills (2011) argued that Living and Learning (1968) failed to recognize the distinct needs of different groups in society, including women of colour and Indigenous peoples (p. 342). Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario (2014), written almost 50 years later, has sought to fill this gap. The government explains that
schools should value diversity and all students should “see themselves reflected in their learning” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 8). This is of particular importance for students who may be at risk of not succeeding, including Indigenous students, students with special needs, recent immigrants, and children with families in poverty (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 8).

To Majhanovich (2002), the question is simple: “Education for life or education to make a living?” This question highlights a fundamental difference between how many in the education sector, then and now, view the purpose of education. In the context of developing effective future curriculum and policy, the strength of all visions need to be reconciled.

2.4 Collective Bargaining Reform

The Harris, McGuinty, and Wynne governments approached collective bargaining differently. Each government introduced legislation that impacted the balance of power, and ultimately the level of collaboration, between provincial and local decision makers. Their successes and failures are detailed below.

Joseph B. Rose (2002), an expert in collective bargaining and dispute resolution, wrote a piece detailing the hostility and disrespect that defined Harris’s educational reforms. During the period of Bill 100, the government and teacher unions experienced high settlement rates and low strike rates. Almost 60% of settlements were reached at the direct bargaining stage and the strike rate hovered around 2% (Rose, 2012, p. 210). Nonetheless, the government under Premier Harris sought an overhaul of the collective bargaining framework through Bill 160. In 1998 and 1999, settlement rates by the direct bargaining stage dropped to approximately 40% and strike rates rose to almost 25% (Rose, 2012, p. 210). Rose (2002) argued that “the impetus for change,
including the repeal of Bill 100, had more to do with cutting education costs than deficiencies in the labour relations framework” (p. 101). He claimed that “collective bargaining was simply seen as an impediment to reform, and consequently the Harris government demonstrated a willingness to dismantle the system of bargaining to achieve its reforms” (p. 107). Meaningful communication appeared to be at a historic low, with the government showing little desire to work with the unions on balancing labour and fiscal priorities. Rose (2002) praised previous provincial Conservative governments that favoured a “pragmatic approach to labour policy based on compromise and consensus” (p. 107). The lack of respect for the framework that appeared to effective for many years, was a motivator for teacher’s distrust and resentment toward the government. In addition, given the fact that Bill 100 was the result of decades of struggle for greater teacher professionalism, it made its abolishment all the more painful for teachers. Rose’s (2002) piece was rich with emotion and the visceral tone allowed the reader to understand, in part, why relations between the government and teacher unions continue to be strained today.

Whereas Bill 100 was characterized by joint decision-making responsibility, the Harris government’s Bill 160 gave the provincial government greater control over education reform and funding while severely reducing the influence of local governing structures. The centralization of control over education spending reduced the role of the school boards in deciding how to best serve their local communities (Shilton, 2012). The vast regional differences between school boards often necessitate unique support and attention from the communities they serve. However, the ability for school boards to raise their own revenue to support local education initiatives from local property tax was now removed and determined by the government (Rose, 2012). The Harris reforms changed “the extent to which collective bargaining could be used effectively to give teachers a meaningful voice in establishing their terms of conditions of
employment locally” (Shilton, 2012, p. 221). The movement towards greater centralization also restricted the union’s capacity to regulate the teaching profession. In addition, while top-down reform transferred accountability from the government to local school boards, local authorities had little say in the content of new policy (Horsley, 2009). When accountability is not paired with transparent policy development, it “discourages, or even prohibits, bottom up communication regarding the challenges of implementing policies at the local level” (Horsley, 2009, p. 8). The diminished role of the school boards ignored what McKinsey & Company (2010) determined as one of the chief functions of the “mediating layer” in system improvement. For Ontario, this layer is the individual school boards. The boards act as a buffer between “the center” [the government] and the individual schools. Here, they have interpreted messages and managed resistance, while also encouraging collaborative exchange (McKinsey & Company, 2010, p. 93). The near-elimination of opportunities for collaboration between the localities and the government was one of the most significant consequences of the Harris reforms.

The centralization of collective bargaining in Ontario disrupted local relationships, creating a more political and divisive environment, while igniting questions about teacher agency (Sweeney, 2013). Premier McGuinty’s Liberal government was elected in 2003 with a promise to “stabilize education sector employment relations and improve the performance of Ontario’s publicly-funded schools” (Sweeney, 2013, p. 125). Their approach would emphasis consensus and cooperation through continuous provincial dialogue with teacher’s federations, and school board associations (Shilton, 2012). This dialogue, taking the form of “provincial discussion tables” (PDTs) sought to address the difficulties unions and school boards faced negotiating agreements under centralized funding systems (Sweeney, 2013, p. 125). In effect, this created a two-tiered bargaining system, whereby system-wide issues (e.g. salary increases) were decided
by the Ministry in collaboration with provincial bodies representing teachers and the boards, and allowing local issues to be discussed at the board level (Rose, 2012, p. 212). The PDTs were generally well received, yet there remained a concern of the erosion of local relations and the decreased importance of non-monetary concerns (Sweeney, 2013). The Liberal government utilized the PDTs again in 2008, yet this time the government took a more active role “through financial incentives that encouraged school boards and unions to reach an agreement on province-wide issues by imposed deadlines (Sweeney, 2013, p. 126). The same concerns existed, namely the agency of the local school boards, in addition to a larger fear that centralized bargaining was built on coercion and ultimatums by the government (Sweeney, 2013). The success of the PDTs and the “ad hoc” two-tiered bargaining system helped calm the previous tumultuous relationship between the government and teacher unions. However, Shilton (2012) argued that instabilities in the system would be inevitable. This includes, but is not limited to, legal and political challenges that arise when power is at the center and responsibility is at the local level, the lack of a formalized list of central and local topics, and the lack of continued cohesion between the province’s four distinct school systems (Shilton, 2012, p. 237). In addition, Rose (2012) argued that “two-tier bargaining benefited from favourable economic conditions and funding assurances” (p. 217). As witnessed a few years later, these factors had a significant impact on the future success of this arrangement.

The concerns that Rose (2012), Shilton (2012), and Sweeney (2013) identified as challenges with the two-tiered bargaining framework were confirmed during the 2014 round of negotiations. The government sought to formalize the structure through Bill 122, the School Board Collective Bargaining Act. While they attempted to clarify central and local bargaining issues, the optimism that this system had once bestowed began to fade. The ease and pace in
which agreements were made became an issue, particularly with the governments mandate to offset any financial increase with savings elsewhere. During negotiations, it was clear that both parties agreed that changes needed to be made. Paul Elliott, president of the OSSTF, expressed, “We are into the 18th month now, and it will probably be another six months until all deals are done. Something needs to be done about the efficiency of this” (Rushowy, 2015). In the fall of 2016, Education Minister Mitzie Hunter confirmed that the government will fulfill that expectation before the next round of bargaining in 2018 (Rushowy, 2016). Without a mutually agreed upon bargaining framework, one that prioritizes avenues for clear and effective negotiations, it will be challenging for collective bargaining to strengthen the partnership between the government and teacher unions.

In a rare bout of optimism on this topic in the literature, Levin (2007) wrote, “A growing body of knowledge suggests that it is possible to have large-scale education reform that does make a difference for students, does generate public support, and does engage teachers and other educators in a positive way” (p. 324). While it is important to understand the history behind the divisive relationship, Levin’s piece emphasizes the importance of learning from the past. None of the literature I read suggested that educational reform should not be pursued. Rather, it was the importance of meaningful communication through professional capacity building, strong leadership, targeted resources, and effective engagement of parents and the broader community that should be at the heart of this goal (Levin, 2007). Moving forward, the literature clearly indicated that any reform strategy must prioritize collaboration before, during, and after policy implementation. Given that collective bargaining provides an opportunity to engage in productive dialogue over the priorities for strengthening the education system, it is essential that the framework facilitates effective avenues for communication. The framework must allow for
all parties to appreciate the scope and complexity of their responsibilities and make it possible to harmonize priorities when the issues are separated into two-tiers.

2.5 The Voice of the Teacher Unions

Given that every teacher in Ontario belongs to a union, it is important to examine how the union advocates on behalf of its members. Are problems and priorities effectively communicated within the union so that bargaining between the union and the government can be as effective as possible? Bascia (2005) wrote, “Teachers organizations need to work on multiple fronts, demonstrating that the range of members’ interests are being recognized” (p. 6). While it is important to have a strong and coherent message when working with the government, that message must seek to recognize the diversity of the union membership (Bascia, 2005). Many governments perpetuate a falsehood that teachers are a “homogeneous mass” (Bascia & Osmond, 2013, p. 13). Given that this view has been shared by governments, media, and the public in the past, unions need to ensure that their advocacy is legitimized through broad base of support from their members. When teacher unions understand that their members have a diverse set of professional needs and wants, “they can greatly increase the power of unionism for teachers and the power of unions in their advocacy for teacher’s aspirations within the larger educational infrastructure” (Bascia & Osmond, 2013, p. 13).

Research indicates that the way the union advocates for teachers might not always take into account the vast array of perspectives that exist. Popiel (2013) conducted a study on teacher union legitimacy; an interesting perspective given Wallner’s (2008) discussion on the legitimacy of the government and its policies. While the study was based in the United States, the findings indicated that “…there is a need for teacher union leaders to better understand and address issues
that members value most in order to strengthen the union’s moral legitimacy…” (Popiel, 2013, p. 496). The idea that a teacher’s “voice” may not be accounted for in union decision-making was a major factor dictating whether or not teachers were active or inactive with their union (Popiel, 2013, p. 491). Teacher unions have a long history of advocacy in Canada. The role they have played in shaping legislation has waxed and waned over time, while the methods they have employed to achieve their desired results are mixed. The different patterns of involvement, according to Nina Bascia (2000) stem from the perception of union advocacy being directed by a relatively small group of teachers unresponsive to concerns of the majority. A younger generation of teachers no longer identify unions with critical advocacy (Bascia, 2008). One reason stems from the fact that many unions have been driven by the needs and interests of one particular group of like-minded educators, while ignoring another (Bascia, 2003). Decision-making that is highly centralized in a union tends to serve as a disincentive for teachers to engage with their union. The union needs to continually adapt to a growing membership whose views might be different than their older colleagues (Bascia, 2003).

Among the areas where teachers felt the union should promote and protect more than they currently do include collaboration among colleagues and collaboration between teachers and administrators (Popiel, 2013, p. 487). According to one participant, frustrated by the lack of administrative response to student discipline, “Either we do this, really, where teachers are working collaboratively with administration to work things out or what’s the point?” (Popiel, 2013, p. 492). It is clear that in order for the union to effectively communicate with the government, they need to have a strong base of support from their members. Bascia (2000) proposed that teacher unions take a critical look at their organizational capacity and find ways to strengthen member engagement. This will create a stronger base for engagement at the provincial
level and yield greater policy success. If “teachers spend most of these days being talked at rather than working together,” this goal will be difficult to attain (Bascia, 2000, 389). “Although it is unreasonable to insist that teachers’ organizations attempt to compensate for all the problems of the larger educational system, it is equally unreasonable to assume that they cannot or should not challenge narrow, traditional conceptions of teachers’ purview” (Bascia, 2000, p. 396). Teacher unions must strive to be more creative in their response to member demands, and unify across unions where possible. This is especially important, given that many educators are concerned that there would be ramifications should they speak out within their union (Brickner, 2016). With more opportunities for collaboration on problems, ideas, and strategies for improvement, there will be a higher chance that all parties can work together to address the challenges at hand.

2.6 Conclusion

In this literature review, I have examined the importance of having meaningful collaboration between the government and teacher unions when seeking to reform elements of Ontario’s public education system. The government’s approach to the formation of curriculum and policy, including the pace, justification, and willingness to view issues holistically, is significant. This also includes affording respect for teaching professionalism. It is clear that a comprehensive consultation process is important, given the number of unintended consequences that can develop. Many of these consequences have had a long-standing impact. Conflicting views of education over the last 50 years highlights the difficulties in reaching a consensus on educational reform. The collective bargaining structure has undergone vast change over the terms of Premiers Harris, McGuinty, and Wynne, and yet a framework that effectively meets
central and local needs through meaningful communication is still pending. Finally, scholars have suggested that there needs to be a revision on how unions engage with their members to ensure their advocacy efforts reflect the diversity of the organization’s membership. This research project will analyze teachers’ perspectives on the topic, using a qualitative research study, as outlined in chapter 3.
Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction

This research paper, which analyzes the factors that have contributed to an effective and ineffective relationship between the government and teacher unions, is based on a small-scale qualitative study. In this chapter, I describe the research methodology, including the rationale behind conducting a qualitative study and semi-structured interviews. I outline my general approach, along with the research procedures and methods of data collection. The criteria for participant selection will be outlined and a short biography for each participant has been included. The data analysis procedure and special ethical considerations will also be presented. Upon reflection, I have outlined the strengths and limitations of my methodological approach.

3.1 Research Approach and Procedures

This research paper is a qualitative study grounded in a wide range of scholarly literature and information gathered from semi-structured interviews with three teachers. Popular media, including newspaper articles, and reports published by the Ontario Ministry of Education and Ontario teacher unions were also referenced. Leko (2014) outlined the benefits of qualitative studies, noting that they “allow for systematic, in-depth, holistic examinations of phenomenon in natural settings with participants’ voices at the forefront of the study” (p. 276). Qualitative studies are particularly effective when analyzing complex issues (Leko, 2014). There are a myriad of responses that could explain the factors that contribute to a strong partnership between the government and unions and the consequences that stem from it. In order to fully comprehend the diversity of opinions, particularly ones that carry a lot of emotion, a qualitative study is most advantageous. Ivey (2012) wrote, “Qualitative approaches provide not only answers to the
researcher’s questions, but also the participants’ feelings, perceptions, experiences, and thoughts about the question’’ (p. 319). When discussing the relationship between the government and teacher unions, particularly historical and present challenges, participants needed to convey their opinions freely, without being restricted by rigid questionnaires or surveys. The participants have all been impacted by the creation of new curriculum and policy and have seen first-hand how strong communication, or lack thereof, affects the teaching profession and student learning. A qualitative study facilitates an opportunity for participants to explain their views in great depth.

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

The sole instrument for collecting data was the semi-structured interview. Interviews are used for a variety of purposes, often to gather opinions, perceptions, and attitudes or to gather background information and expert knowledge (Harrell & Bradley, 2009). During the interview, a guide was used with a set of questions and topics that needed to be covered. When the participants had more experience or stronger opinions in one aspect of the paper, I inserted a few targeted follow-up questions. The semi-structured interview struck a balance between loosely controlled and rigidly controlled interviews. I strived to engage with all participants using a conversational tone. I did not want the questions to be overly prescribed so the participants felt they could not fully share their opinions on a particular topic. That said, I had to be cognizant to adhere to my list of pre-set questions so that each respondent had an equal opportunity to comment on each of the main subject areas.

3.3 Participants
Selecting appropriate participants was an essential component of this qualitative study. A detailed list of criteria used to determine each prospective interviewee is outlined below, along with the final selection process. Short biographies of each participant have also been included.

3.3.1 Sampling criteria

Given the breadth of issues discussed in this paper, it was important that I interviewed teachers who had a wide range of experience. When selecting participants, the following criteria was taken into account:

(1) Years and Location of Service

- All interviewees must have had a minimum five years teaching experience
- All interviewees must have been practicing teachers for a minimum of one labour negotiation with two different premiers
- Together, the interviewees must have been practicing teachers or educational administrators from across the three most recent provincial governments (Premier Harris, Premier McGuinty, and Premier Wynne)
- A range of school boards experience amongst the three participants was necessary
- Both elementary and secondary school experience amongst the three participants was necessary

(2) Range of Leadership Responsibility

- A range of leadership responsibility, including, not limited to classroom teacher, department head, and school administrator amongst the three participants was necessary
- A range of leadership responsibility outside of the school environment, including, but not limited to a school board, the Ministry of Education, or an independent education organization amongst the three participants was necessary.

(3) Level of Engagement in the Union

- A range of involvement in the teacher unions, including, but not limited to being a school’s union representative, reading union communications, and being active in the collective bargaining process amongst the three participants was necessary.

3.3.2 Participant recruitment

As the sampling criteria illustrates, it was critical that the three interviewees had a breadth of experience in fulfilling various roles within their schools and/or the education sector more broadly. While this research study discussed issues many teachers could have had an opinion on, the interviewees needed to have a deep understanding of the complexities of the topic (Creswell, 2012). I utilized purposeful sampling in order to ensure that the participant criteria were met. The criteria necessitated different participants who would reinforce and challenge each other’s perspectives (Creswell, 2012). This allowed me to gain a more complete understanding of the topics discussed and develop solutions that were grounded in reason, foresight, and experience.

To recruit participants, I first looked at the connections I had made personally and then determined if some of my immediate contacts had further connections I could utilize. I brainstormed the names of teachers and administrators I had worked with on my teaching placements, teachers I had as a student, professors who taught me at university, and friends who had teachers in their family. I took special note of educators who have a broad range of
experience in the field. I researched education professionals I have heard present at conferences, while also those who have written influential papers that have contributed to my research study.

3.3.3 Participant biographies

Amy has worked as a teacher for over 15 years in a number of elementary and secondary schools, with particular experience at the intermediate level. She has worked with the Toronto District School Board and small independent schools. Amy supports teacher professional learning in nurturing quality thinking across Canada through her work at an outside educational organization. She has written extensive resources effective classroom pedagogies and supporting global citizenship and sustainability. She recently served a two-year term as her school’s union representative.

Sandra went into education later in her career and has worked as a teacher for over 10 years. She has primarily worked in an elementary school in the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board. Within that time, she has spent a number of years working in a special education class. She currently serves as the lead teacher for her grade level, representing her colleagues to the school’s administration.

Victor began his teaching career in the early 1990’s. He taught at all elementary grade levels and took on a variety of leadership roles. After serving as a Vice Principal and Principal, Victor worked in the Ministry of Education. He now works as an administrator within the Toronto District School Board.

3.4 Data Analysis

I analyzed my data with the utmost care and precision. First, I transcribed my interviews. As recommended practice, I then read the transcripts in their entirety multiple times before
dividing the content into various themes (Creswell, 158). I strived to construct a general impression the participant had on the topics discussed, along with the feelings they elicited, before I analyzed individual components of their responses. I then coded each transcript individually and identified categories of data and themes within categories. There were three main categories for my interview questions: (i) teacher’s perspective on the relationship between the government and teacher unions (including the level of collaboration and the factors that contributed to this), (ii) the impact, both positive and negative, that new curriculum and policy has had on their teaching practice and student learning, and (iii) the challenges they have faced in their job and the level of support they have received by the government and/or teacher unions. Upon analyzing my data, I took note of the interconnectedness between the participants’ responses and my categories. I paid close attention to the frequency of a particular response or the citation of a similar incident or challenge. I examined how one interviewee’s unique experiences influenced their outlook on the issues discussed. In addition, I made note of any assumptions I made throughout my research that was not consistent with the participant’s responses (Creswell, 159). Finally, it was also important that I identified the information that was not most relevant to my study. Through this, I developed three new themes that better reflect the sentiment of my interviewee’s responses.

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

In any qualitative research study, it is important to take great care in drafting the ethical considerations. My research paper explored the complex relationship between the government and teacher unions, notably the level of meaningful collaboration in the development of curriculum and policy. This topic can be particularly sensitive for some teachers given their
previous experience, current employment, and future ambitions. My interviewees’ responses to particular questions illuminated ardent convictions and strong emotions, emphasizing the need for a strong ethics review process. Bowtell, Sawyer, Aroni, Green, and Duncan (2014) stressed the importance of “mindfulness” in qualitative studies. According to the authors, mindfulness “is characterized by a nonjudgmental attitude and by cultivating an open-minded awareness of each successive moment of experience and perception” (Bowtell et al., 2014, p. 654). I was cautious to embody this principle when conducting my interviews and literature review. Furthermore, I adhered to the following procedures:

- All participants have been assigned a pseudonym and they were notified of their right to withdraw from participation at any stage of the research study.

- There were minimal risks associated with participation in this study. Some participants were initially worried about disclosing their opinion on sensitive material, particularly one that has become engrossed in a public debate. I minimized this risk by reminding participants that all their responses would be confidential and used solely for the purpose of research. I also sent the interview questions to the respondents ahead of time so they can prepare their responses in advance.

- Participants had the opportunity to review the transcripts and to clarify or retract any statements before I conducted data analysis.

- All data (audio recordings) has been stored on my password protected laptop and will be destroyed after five years.

- Participants were asked to sign a consent letter (Appendix A) giving their consent to be interviewed as well as audio-recorded. This consent letter provided an overview of the study, addressed ethical implications, and specified the expectations of all participants.
3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

To conduct a successful qualitative study, “the researcher needs methods that will allow for discovery and do justice to [the participants’] perceptions and the complexity of their interpretations” (Atieno, 2009, p. 16). A strength of this qualitative study is that participants were able to fully express their opinion no matter the complexity of their response. Unlike a rigid survey or questionnaire, the semi-structured interview allowed for this content to be shared in a way that was unique to each participant. Participants put emphasis on certain issues or stances, particularly ones where they had a greater depth of experience. Alternatively, they provided less analysis on issues deemed less important or where they had less knowledge. All told, a qualitative study allowed me to have a more robust understanding on how teachers perceived the relationship between the government the teacher unions and the factors that foster it. Atieno (2009) wrote, “Qualitative methods have in common the goal of generating new ways of seeing existing data” (p. 16). This qualitative study allowed for participants to provide their own ideas for how communication between both parties can be strengthened and ultimately improve the effectiveness of new curriculum and policy.

The main limitation to this study was the fact that only three interviewees could be chosen. Given the complexity of the research topic, it would have been beneficial to have a greater number of participants. As a result, there is a risk that the results of this study may be perceived to make assumptions that are not reflective of the majority of Ontario teachers. Unlike quantitative approaches, qualitative approaches cannot be extended with the same degree of certainty (Atieno, 2009, p. 17). A limitation of this study also includes the fact that interview questions, including any follow-ups, may have led to bias. All efforts were made to avoid any bias during the interview and subsequent analysis.
3.7 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a thorough outline of the research methodology used to facilitate three semi-structured interviews for this research study. Understanding the relationship between the government and teacher unions necessitated an interview strategy that was flexible enough to gather a wide ranging and detailed perspective on the topic. A qualitative interview allowed me to determine which of the teacher responses supported or challenged the literature reviewed. Given the fact that I could only interview three teachers, the conclusions drawn cannot be used as representative of the majority of teachers in Ontario. That said, the diversity of my interviewees’ experiences has ensured I can have the most comprehensive set of opinions possible under these constraints. In chapter 4, I will use three major themes to encapsulate these conversations.
Chapter 4: Research Findings

4.0 Introduction

Within each interview, I bore witness to a dedicated, compassionate, and selfless educator. On certain topics, their opinions diverged from their colleague’s view, my view, or what was written in the literature. Yet while their opinions may have diverged, their commitment to education and their cautious optimism for what lies ahead was universal. In addition, they each recognized the significant impact a strong government-union relationship can have on the profession and the students. Their views clearly demonstrated that a strong partnership relies on respecting teacher agency, understanding the complexities of the profession, and providing opportunities for teachers voices to be heard. The details of our conversations and how their responses compare to the literature are outlined in this chapter.

4.1 Teacher Agency

During each interview, I was reminded of the importance of teacher agency; where teachers are given the autonomy to contribute to the way education is delivered. Each interviewee stressed the importance of ongoing learning and their approach to their job reflected this belief. Despite the diversity of their experiences, it was instructive to see the commonalities in their responses. Their individual approach to using new policy and curriculum in the classroom and their support for more meaningful professional development showcased the respect they have for the profession.

4.1.1 Ongoing professional learning

Each interviewee firmly believed that a successful teacher must always be learning. The passion they each had for their profession was palpable and their desire to strengthen their
practice was extraordinary. “You have to be hungry to learn,” said Amy. She discussed the importance of being reflective, humble, and willing to improve. When asked about the direction of government policy, she explained, “I’ve more often than not actually been quite pleased with the direction of government policy because they were things I was committed to early in my career.” This includes more inquiry-based learning and the inclusion of environmental sustainability and reconciliation in the curriculum.

Amy’s commitment to improve her own practice and that of her peers has translated into a second job outside of the classroom. In this secondary role, she publishes research on effective classroom pedagogies. Amy is the type of teacher Bascia et al.’s (2014) study sought to recognize. The study countered the narrative that teachers passively implement curriculum, rather they actively shape the curriculum through research, advocacy, and collaboration with their colleagues (Bascia et al., 2014). Amy’s commitment to analyzing and sharing effective classroom pedagogies supports Rottmann’s (2012) argument that teachers have the capability to “contribute to educational improvement in their classrooms, schools, and districts” should they be given the opportunity (p. 193). The success of the TLLP is grounded in this belief. The program, a joint initiative between the Ministry and the OTF, respects the value that teachers can have in shaping the future of educational policy. By providing teachers the opportunity to meaningfully contribute to educational research and initiatives, a culture of sustained improvement can develop (McKinsey & Company, 2010). Placing a value on collaboration helps to shift “the source of a system’s improvement away from central leadership to the educators themselves” (McKinsey & Company, 2010, p. 89). When teachers have had the opportunity to contribute to government policy, they are reassured that their unique insight into classroom realities have been taken into account. They are also motivated by the impact of their work and
in turn, are more likely to embrace new policy and encourage others to do the same (McKinsey & Company, 2010).

“[Teachers] are to be continual learners,” proclaimed Sandra. Sandra emphasized the need for a teacher’s lessons to be real and authentic, while being flexible and responsive to their students’ learning needs. As a result, she does not save classroom material from one year to the next. While she keeps “ideas”, “[she] expects to do it all over again in a new way with a new group of people.” Sandra has enrolled in numerous online courses in order to continuously educate herself. Sandra expressed frustration at her colleagues who are not willing to adapt and instead simply complain about their students’ lack of engagement. In 2001, the Harris government passed legislation that would impose a program of mandatory recertification every five years and a mandatory teacher evaluation program every two years (Shilton, 2012). This was met with harsh resistance, with many people arguing that it disregarded teachers’ professionalism. Sandra disagreed. In fact, she was bewildered at why teachers would not be interested in taking courses that would help their professional development. She encouraged the Ministry to offer courses on a variety of subjects where teachers could choose the courses most applicable to them. “I just don’t know how you can be a teacher and not be interested [in continuous learning],” she explained.

Victor quoted Roland Barthes who said, “A good school for me is a place in which everyone is teaching and everyone is learning - simultaneously, under the same roof. Students are teaching and learning; principals are teaching and learning; teachers are teaching and learning…” Victor shared Sandra’s frustration. When he was hiring teachers as an elementary school principal, he asked candidates to explain how they would address behavioural issues that would arise in their classes. Victor claimed that their instinct response was, “I would implement
a behaviour management system of checkmarks on the board.” To Victor, this demonstrated their lack of ability to analyze how student behaviour could be a reflection of their teaching practice. Victor admired the candidates who said, “I’d look at my program. Because clearly what I was having the kids do was not engaging them.” Amy and Sandra’s desire to always be learning resembles the type of teacher Victor believes should be in front of a class.

The importance of teachers taking responsibility for their own professional growth was evident across all three interviews. Continuous learning was not merely a quality that defined a good teacher; it was of the utmost importance to be a successful educator.

4.1.2 Use of policy and curriculum

Schools are expected to look after the academic and social well-being of all students. Their responsibilities extend far beyond teaching the fundamentals of calculus or the theme of Shakespeare’s Hamlet. The Ontario Ministry of Education (2014) has committed to ensuring that all schools are promoting student well-being in the form of mental health support, safety from bullying, diversity awareness, and strong emotional intelligence. The drive towards a strong 21st century education system has forced teachers to have an increased focus on personalized teaching strategies, inquiry-based learning, and a student-directed curriculum. Throughout my interviews, the importance of these new responsibilities was never called into question. Notwithstanding the process by which it was created or approved, or whether it can be realistically accomplished, Amy and Sandra supported the content of new government policy and curriculum.

The Common Sense Revolution sought to create a more robust and standardized curriculum. Believing that the curriculum was partly to blame for Ontario students’ poor performance on international testing, the government rejected the “child-centered” learning that
differed according to each jurisdiction (Ibitson, 1997, p. 224). Some teachers claimed that
opportunities for teacher creativity were reduced with a more standardized curriculum; believing
that there are fewer opportunities for teachers to exercise their own professional judgement
(Fink, 2003; McAdie, 2003). Sandra and Amy have welcomed more standardized curriculum
documents; ones that include greater learning expectations and suggestions on how to teach the
content.

Amy and Sandra emphasized their support for classrooms that are “assessment rich,”
where there is an increased emphasis on timeliness, authenticity, and reflection in a way that
contributes to a student’s ongoing learning. A more standardized curriculum has forced them to
think more critically about how to use the material in a meaningful way. Amy and Sandra
believe that a more robust curriculum allows teachers to engage more deeply with the content.
Amy welcomed policies and curriculum that were researched-based; research conducted in both
formal settings and on the front lines of education. Given that this does not always happen, Amy
and Sandra have had to decide how to use the curriculum in a way that balances the demands of
the government with the realities of the classroom. Recognizing the extreme number of
expectations, Amy and Sandra treat the curriculum as a “guide” and not a rigid checklist. This
way, they can develop programming that meets the provincial standards but is also purposeful
for their group of students. In addition, Sandra believes that the increased number of expectations
outlined in a more standardized curriculum might actually be beneficial to make teachers who
usually “skim the surface of the curriculum” more accountable. By using the overall expectations
of the curriculum, combined with the Ministry of Education’s report, Growing Success:
Assessment, Evaluation, and Reporting in Ontario Schools (2010), Amy has been able to develop
effective pedagogy where creativity, critical thinking, and deeper disciplinary thinking are
paramount. These teachers did not look at new policy and curriculum as a barrier, rather used their years of experience to define how it could best enhance the work they were already doing in the class.

4.1.3 Professional development

Amy, Sandra, and Victor had different views on how to improve teacher professional development. The actions of both Amy and Sandra suggest that teachers have a desire to learn, but the support from the Ministry is lacking. Amy expressed her belief that the Ministry needs to do a better job supporting the implementation of its proposed initiatives, including teacher training. She said that the Ministry needs to create the conditions whereby the new policy and curriculum, some of which can be intricate and sensitive, can be successfully enacted. The education system, according to Rottmann (2012) needs to build a “capacity for change,” which involves treating new initiatives as multi-layered and long term (p. 211) Sandra believes that teachers need to have more of a say dictating what professional development opportunities are available. She expressed how she would like professional development (PD) sessions that actually help her in the job of teaching, such as new techniques to teach primary school math or behaviour management. Unfortunately, she said, a lot of PD sessions focus on how teachers should behave in school and “what not to do.” Instead, she feels that teachers would be more open to engaging in PD when it’s directly related to teaching students. Campbell et al. (2016) supported this view by arguing that “professional development is often insensitive to the complexities of teaching” (p. 220). By not valuing what teacher’s want out of PD, it has the potential to limit its effectiveness. One of the core drivers for raising performance in Ontario schools is to have loose central guidelines over the teaching and learning processes (McKinsey &
Company, 2010). Allowing teachers to have more input into their PD sessions would therefore be advantageous.

Sandra acknowledged that not all teachers take the initiative to effectively engage in PD. She expressed disappointment that many of her colleagues were unaware of resources that exist to support their instruction. She has taken the initiative to continually educate herself through additional qualification (AQ) courses and as a result, is aware of new resources. She complains, “[The Ministry] is paying very learned people a lot of money to make these things and we aren’t using them.” Victor’s analysis of teacher PD points to teacher resistance or neglect, rather than a lack of Ministry initiative. From his point of view, the unions have shown a reluctance to have the school boards dictate what teachers should be doing during their professional time. This limits opportunities for training and formal support. He explains, “So it’s a bit of conundrum because as a school district, what do we do to improve learning?” In order to address this deficiency, Victor described how teachers have been “released” and their classes are taken over by a supply teacher so they can engage in professional development. The problem with this strategy, however, is that it costs more money in a system where funds are already limited.

It was encouraging to hear that there were no disagreements on the importance of teacher professional development. However, it is imperative that PD remains timely and relevant to the needs of teachers. The role that teachers, the government, and the unions play in its delivery needs to reflect what is best for the system as a whole.

4.2 The Complexity of the Teaching Profession

The complexity of the teaching profession was evident as the interviewees spoke about the challenges of implementing new government policy and curriculum. They argued there are a
wide range of responsibilities that are not always acknowledged in the face of new demands. A lack of acknowledgement contributes to eroded teacher efficacy and compounds the pre-existing belief that the teaching profession is not respected.

4.2.1 The daily demands

Amy emphasized a sentiment that many teachers have felt through the implementation of new government policy and curriculum. “Your work,” she explains, “makes you feel like you are an accountant of expectations.” She argued that there is not an appreciation for the complexity of the relationships that must be developed and preserved between the teacher and student. In addition, there is an incomplete understanding for the wide range of classroom and extracurricular responsibilities. As Bascia and Osmond (2013) wrote, “Any genuine desire to improve teaching and learning must necessarily be concerned with the environment in teaching occurs” (p. 8). Amy acknowledged the importance of efficiency, but explained how the ultimate goal is not efficiency; it is the well-being of students. This belief aligns with Bruno Jofré and Hills (2011) claimed was a priority in Living and Learning policy (1968): the individual potential of the child. In addition, Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario (2014) committed one of its four main goals to “promoting well-being.” Measuring growth in a student’s confidence or their improved social cooperation cannot easily be measured in a quantitative way (Brickner, 2016). This can prove challenging when the government wants to measure student success quantitatively against national or international standards.

Amy explained that in the most recent round of labour negotiations, the unions actually listed the policies and programs teachers were now expected to implement. This included, but was not limited to, daily physical activity, mental health awareness, environmental education, and the integration of First Nations, Metis, and Inuit (FNMI) perspectives in the curriculum.
Reportedly, she said, “the ministry representatives were sort of in shock.” “There is a profound initiative fatigue,” Amy explained, particularly because the initiatives are sometimes not accompanied by the appropriate funding, training, or time allotment. The debate is not whether these policies are important. Rather, it’s about how schools should be adequately supported in the implementation of these policies. The same frustration appears to have existed 10 years ago, when Levin (2007) reported, “Despite improved morale Ontario educators are feeling that they are being asked to address many initiatives at the same time. Even though most people are positive about the elements of change, putting them all together has brought stress…many teaches, and especially principals, feel overloaded” (p. 333). Amy is optimistic about the content of new government policies, yet is weary of their effectiveness in the face of so many demands.

In the wake of Ontario’s 2016 budget, the Fraser Institute published an article challenging NDP Leader Horwath’s accusation that the government is not spending enough on education (Eisen and Van Pelt, 2016). The article claimed that between the 2003/2004 budget and the 2012/2013 budget, education spending increased 50% to close to $25 billion (Eisen and Van Pelt, 2016). When asked where the Ministry has been ineffective, Amy claimed that “at the core, education is not funded the way it needs to be funded in this province.” She said the lack of funding prohibits teachers from being able to successfully do their job and supports an ill-informed argument that teachers are overpaid. Taking into account the views of both Amy and the Fraser Institute, it appears the discussion should be whether the funding has kept pace with teachers’ responsibilities. Amy spoke of the complexities in the teaching profession and how the public does not have a realistic understanding of what’s actually involved. Many scholars have also cited the fact that the public falsely believes they fully understand the teaching profession because they were once in school. John Snobelen, Education Minister under Premier Harris
concurred. When discussing his reforms with the rest of the cabinet, Snobelen reportedly said, “Everyone has an opinion about education, because everyone has been to school” (Ibbitson, 1997, p. 229). Amy and Sandra argued that a detachment between the Ministry and the front line of education has lead to a “series of policies that are great theoretically but are not realistic given the everyday constraints and realities.” These “constraints and realities” are often synonymous with time and money. “Trying to fit it all in, in a reasonable amount of time is difficult,” explains Sandra. Even with an appreciation for the fact that work should be done outside of school hours, it remains challenging for teachers to fulfill all the requirements that are expected of them.

Victor recognized that a teacher has a range of responsibilities and has to adjust to a multitude of unforeseen demands on a daily basis. That said, he is frustrated when teacher unions complain about their working conditions, namely salaries and preparation time. First, he cited that 87% of his budget is spent on salaries. As such, he is limited on how much can be spent on giving teachers further “prep time” or additional classroom resources. He argued that there is a difference between “working conditions” and “the control over one’s professional life,” arguing that the unions have pushed for the latter. Victor took issue with the accusation that time and training prohibit some teacher from embracing new policies. From his own experience, teachers do not always respect the use of designated professional time. He said that the challenges of the teaching profession are appropriately acknowledged within the collective agreement. He argued, “Look, let’s face it, teachers have a very well bargained agreement. It’s an effective agreement. I would challenge you to find a better working group in terms of salary, benefits, vacation, working conditions, safety at work.” He went on to describe how top teachers earn close to $95,000 per year, are only required to work 9:00-3:00pm with 15 minutes on each end, receive 12 weeks vacation, and almost a cumulative one full day of preparation time per week. Victor
believes that the demands of a teaching profession are appropriately realized within the agreement.

Sandra had an interesting perspective. She argued that the daily demands of the teaching profession are not always understood or acknowledged. She routinely works outside of school hours, respecting the fact that a teacher’s job does not end at 3:00pm. Even with this understanding, it can be difficult to devote the time she feels is required to do her job effectively. She did agree with Victor on how some teacher complaints have no basis. Sandra had no complaints about her pay, believing “I am paid well for what [I] do.” When discussing salaries, Sandra stressed the fact that teachers have “an incredible amount of job security, [something] that most people in Ontario don’t enjoy.” Sandra does not agree with how often teachers are using sick days, claiming “it’s beyond belief.” When it came to the amount of preparation time, Amy believed that teachers don’t receive enough, while Sandra said the issue was not simply the amount of time, but how it is structured. For example, she wishes that her union would advocate for one full day of prep each month that would give her time to catch up on paperwork without interruption.

Regardless of the decisions that are made surrounding teacher salaries, prep time, sick days, or the mandate of new curriculum and policy, an understanding of the daily demands of a teacher is necessary should the benefits of education reform be realized.

4.2.2 Unintended consequences

During the interviews, the significant role of the Ministry in delivering high quality public education was never challenged. When asked about the main role of the Ministry of Education, Victor proudly stated that “[The Ministry is] one of the leading educational bodies in the world. They are seen internationally as being one of the forefront educational
organizations…because of their plan of building capacity, doing field research, and turning it into a significant strategy.” Sandra and Amy concurred. That said, they also believe the lack of communication between those who create policies and those responsible for enacting them can create unintended consequences including the sense of “initiative fatigue” and teacher job satisfaction.

Amy believes there are a number of teachers who are dissatisfied in the profession because they never feel they have the ability to meet all of the different expectations forced upon them. This includes both curricular responsibilities and mentorship roles outside of the class. “Evidence suggests,” according to Leithwood, et al. (2002) “that one’s perceived sense of control (ability to make sense of a policy) influences one’s emotional state positively and negatively” (p. 98). In addition, “teachers’ beliefs about their individual professional efficacy are significantly related to the effectiveness of their classroom practices, student learning, and the likelihood that they will engage in classroom and school improvement initiatives” (Leithwood et al., 2002, p. 101). Amy was adamant that “you can’t put out a new curriculum and not support its implementation and support teachers in their learning…a lot of these changes are important and necessary but will take time.” Fantilli and McDougall (2009) indicate that novice teachers in particular are more susceptible to internalizing feelings of guilt or inadequacy given their struggle to meet the demands of the job. These feelings, plus a sense of stress, demotivation, and insecurity has already “led to large proportions of the teaching population exiting the profession after a few years” (Bascia & Osmond, 2013, p. 12). Sandra identified how teaching can be very isolating, particularly when a teacher feels as though they must meet all of these increasing demands on their own. Amy emphasized there is a need for teachers to feel more empowered to be effective advocates for their profession. In this case, a comprehensive consultation strategy
during the development of any new policy could help proactively address teacher concerns. When teacher unions can effectively provide feedback on the “actual” conditions of teaching and learning, the reforms are likely to be more effective (Bascia & Osmond, 2013, p. 34).

Policies can have unintended consequences for the culture of a school. This is a critical factor, as the culture of a school is synonymous with the student learning environment. For example, Victor believes that when secondary school teachers in the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) were permitted to stop performing school supervision, it had a negative effect on the school culture. He claims that a student’s interaction with their teacher is now limited to the classroom and thus, their relationship has become more formalized and distant. Regardless of what the change sought to achieve, Victor believes it had a significant negative impact on the ability for students to develop strong relationships with their teachers. To Victor, a collective, supportive learning environment depends on teachers engaging with their students outside of the classroom. This assessment drew parallels to changes in school culture that arose when administrators were removed from the OSSTF through Bill 160. While it was intended to create a more accountable and better-managed school system, it actually created a less collegial atmosphere (Spencer & Freeman, 2009). A school culture that instills a shared educational responsibility between teachers and administrators is said to positively impact the success of school improvement initiatives (Harris, 2005). In addition, Campbell et al. (2016) recognized that one of the benefits of strong teacher collaboration is improved student engagement and attitude toward learning (p. 230). An effective school culture necessitates continued interaction between, and among, students, teachers, and administrators.

When policies do not undergo effective consultation, resources to support the implementation of these policies are typically not appropriately allocated. This breeds a sense of
resentment from teachers who feel they are expected to contribute their personal resources to government-mandated initiatives. Sandra illustrated this as an emerging problem with the use of technology in schools. According to Sandra, the government worked directly with her school board and selected certain schools to base decisions on resource allocation. In the end, there was a misrepresentation on the ability for all schools to integrate new technologically-reliant programs effectively. Sandra believes that her board identified the schools that were more technologically equipped. As a result, new classroom directives did not take into account the vastly different resources available to schools across the board. Until recently, Sandra was expected to use her own technology (e.g. her iPhone) instead of the technology provided in the school to fulfill government-mandated initiatives. Sandra believes this not only limits the effectiveness of the program, but breeds additional discontent. Without adequate resources or time, teachers are unprepared to accept new policies (Leithwood et al., 2002). While Sandra was willing to use her own technology, not all of her colleagues were willing to do the same.

I was surprised at the breadth of consequences one piece of policy can create. The solution to one problem will undoubtedly cause other issues to arise. While the consequences will not always be widespread and severe, it is important to anticipate these issues by examining the full effect of the policy. One way to do this is through significant consultation with all those who will be affected. This has the potential for teachers to advocate for what they know has the greatest chance of success. Using their own incubator projects as an example, one representative with the Alberta Teachers Association (ATA), explained, “Instead of saying, this is what we believe, we can say we’ve tested this and we know it works” (Bascia & Osmond, 2013, p. 26).

4.2.3 Respecting the teaching profession
I expected each interviewee to heavily criticize the education reforms of the 1990s and blame Premier Harris for creating higher levels of teacher dissatisfaction, resentment, and the lack of trust for government reform. Rose (2002) sharply criticized the Harris reforms, calling them a “deliberate assault on the collective bargaining structure through strong anti-union sentiment” (p. 108). I predicted all three interviewees would share similar negative opinions on the Harris reforms and their legacy. Even Victor, who has since assumed a management role, predicted that Amy and Sandra would voice vehement opposition to the Harris government’s tenure.

To my surprise, Amy and Sandra focused less on Premier Harris and his specific reforms, but instead on the fact that since that period, the public’s respect for teachers has eroded. During that time, Fink (2003) quoted one teacher who illustrated the impact of the “naming, shaming and blaming” within Ontario’s education system (p. 123). He confessed, “[It is] a lot more stressful now. After a while, when people keep telling you ‘you’re bad, you’re bad, you’re bad,’ eventually you start to believe it and you do start to take it personally…” (p. 123). Sandra acknowledged there are certainly teachers who have refused to be innovative or who do not approach the job with the level of vitality it demands. Nonetheless, she is deeply hurt with the pervasive “badmouthing of teachers” that often accompanies collective bargaining. There are many teachers, she explained, who work extremely hard in the job and are willing to do everything it takes to help their students. Amy also expressed concern for how, in the years since Premier Harris, “teacher bashing has become a bit of a public sport.” Amy and Sandra did not speak about the specific reforms the government was trying to enact or the problems they were trying to solve, rather the government’s approach to working with the teachers. For them, the lack of respect and professionalism afforded teachers during the Harris years has not ended,
despite the fact that almost 20 years have passed. Articles entitled “Back to the classroom, back to teacher complaints” and “What makes ETFO so special? They’ll tell you later” dominated the news cycle during negotiations in 2015 (Yakabuski, 2015; Urback, 2015). Amy and Sandra did not appear to be angry or judgemental, rather were simply disappointed that the profession they love could, at times, be treated with such a lack of respect. They felt a collective desire to improve this perception through their work both inside and outside of the classroom. In Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario (2014), the government indicated that they are committed to restoring public confidence through “increase[ed] public awareness and understanding of the innovation and learning taking place in schools” (Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 19). It is important to note that within the same report, there was a noticeable absence of “improving government-union relations” as a necessary factor to restoring public confidence. However, in May 2016, the Ministry of Education released a policy/program memorandum (PPM) entitled “Collaborative Professionalism” that clarified the importance of sector-wide engagement. Here, there was direct mention of the need to establish a trusting relationship with union leaders for the sake of student achievement and the well-being of both students and staff (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016a).

4.3 Opportunities for Teachers’ Voices to be Heard

A common theme throughout every interview was how well teachers were able to voice their opinions on education reform. The teachers’ views on the collective bargaining framework and the performance of the unions is shared below. Their responses highlight a need for the unions to better engage teachers in collective bargaining and to be more responsive to the diverse
opinions of their membership. Each interviewee also acknowledged there are many voices that must be accounted for when making a decision that affects the entire public education system.

4.3.1 Collective bargaining

Amy and Sandra were limited in their ability to comment on how the collective bargaining framework has facilitated or restricted the level of meaningful communication between the government and the teacher unions. Nonetheless, their experiences serve to enrich the discussion on whether the voice of the teacher is heard during collective bargaining. Their experiences could suggest, for example, that the increasingly prominent role of provincial union staff over local personnel has restricted teacher engagement (Sweeney, McWilliams, and Hickey, 2012). Amy praised the unions action against Bill 115 which she called “one of the most regressive pieces of labour legislation to be introduced in the province,” but was unable to comment on whether teachers’ voices are effectively heard at the bargaining table. She acknowledged that the federation had improved their member communication during collective bargaining and stressed the importance of being an informed and engaged member.

Sandra was extremely frustrated with the labour negotiations in the fall of 2015. For her, work-to-rule only caused her grief in her job as the issues the union was fighting for remained unclear. She believed that during bargaining, the union can lose sight of how the teaching profession compares with other jobs in the province; namely in terms of the benefits and job security teachers enjoy. The union representative for Sandra’s school was ill-informed and unavailable for support. Sandra had a lot of questions that continuously went unanswered.

Victor’s experience working in a school, the Ministry, and the school board allowed him to provide an in-depth analysis on the level of collaboration that is facilitated within the collective bargaining framework. Victor acknowledged that the current collective bargaining
framework does not give all stakeholders the opportunity to meaningfully contribute to the negotiations. In particular, he noted how the school boards, including the trustees and board representatives, have less responsibility than they once did. He said that boards don’t have independent taxation power for their funding. Shilton (2012) confirmed that the two-tiered bargaining framework has undermined the power of the school boards and forced the unions to work directly with the government. “It left [the boards] in a difficult and vulnerable position,” (Shilton, 2012, p. 212). McKinsey & Company (2010) explained that the eroded power of the school board has eliminated their ability to be a conduit for collaboration between “the center” [the government] and schools. This role, balancing the interests of both the government and teachers, cannot be underestimated as a means to support system improvement (McKinsey & Company, 2010). While the current bargaining framework has made bargaining “ridiculously challenging because all the ‘cooks are in the kitchen,’” Victor asserts that neither the Liberal government or NDP critics have suggested that the localities should have greater control over their budgets. Victor claims that the Liberal government is not interested in giving taxation power back to the local communities. Shilton (2012) agrees, writing “…the McGuinty Liberals have shown no interest in repealing the keystone of the Harris-era centralization reforms: the central control of education funding” (p. 235). “The fundamental tension between local responsibility and central control therefore remains embedded in the legal framework for collective bargaining” (Shilton, 2012, p. 235).

Victor believes that the government and the teacher unions have the potential to successfully work together when given the proper collective bargaining framework. In response to what he deemed the “overly complicated” two-tiered bargaining system used in the most recent round of labour negotiations, Victor suggested a revised approach. He said, “There has to
be an acknowledgement that on some issues; salary, benefits, etc., we’re going to bargain hard, but on other issues like workplace culture, workspace professional learning; there needs to be a much more collaborative conversation.” The fact that some issues will inevitably be contentious was predicted 25 years ago when Downie (1992) wrote, “PTR [pupil-teacher ratio], class size and workload will continue to be major issues throughout the province in future negotiations. There is always the potential for an ongoing battle with respect to each of these as ‘principle’ is involved” (p. 163). However, there is no reason that all issues need to be negotiated in the same fashion. Victor’s idea upholds the two-tiered system, as formalized with Bill 122, but emphasizes that it is not a change in the structure, but a change in the approach to negotiations that is of the utmost importance. This idea recognizes the benefits of the collegial nature of provincial discussion tables. It uses the same format, but instead of it being solely an avenue for discussion, it could be a place where formal agreements could be made on certain topics. This addresses one of the concerns the OSSTF expressed during 2008 round of bargaining. The union respected the purpose of the PDTs, but questioned its purpose when no agreement (on any topic) could be created at that table (Sweeney, 2012). This affected how seriously they engaged in this part of the process. Using a collegial environment to solidify agreements could truly capitalize on its advantages.

4.3.2 The union agenda

Amy felt that she could appropriately contribute to the creation of union priorities and praised the union’s improved approach to communicating with its members. The union reps she has worked with approached their job with sincerity and a willingness to engage with all colleagues. Sandra had a strikingly different analysis compared to Amy. Before she explained, she clarified that she is “not overly involved” in the union. Popiel (2013) argued that a major
factor dictating whether a teacher became an active member of their union was whether they felt their voice was heard. Sandra considered herself “in the minority” when discussing her colleague’s opinions on union related issues. When asked whether she feels her voice is included in the annual union agenda, she responded, “I’m not on the popular side of issues. So, it’s like voting in an election; like my voice is heard, but unless my party wins, then I don’t have my views represented.” When the unions are viewed as the “purview of a select few,” those who feel excluded “perceive the organization as ‘not theirs’” (Bascia, 2005, p. 7). In turn “the organization has difficulty being able to assert that it understands and represents the full range of teachers’ concerns and interests” (Bascia, 2005, p. 7). This is a concern for the union’s ability to legitimately advocate for government reforms that speak to the diversity of their members.

Sandra’s union rep was so ill-informed that it only heightened Sandra’s belief that her union was acting on their own terms and her opinion did not matter. It is important to note that while there are surveys distributed to members, Sandra feels the unions only ask the questions that gather the information that they want; not allowing for a diverging opinion to be shared. While a direct correlation cannot be made between Popiel’s (2013) conclusion and Sandra’s level of involvement, it sends a message to the union on the importance of taking meaningful interest in all of their members’ opinions.

The problem with Sandra’s belief is compounded when I asked whether she shares her “unpopular union opinion” with others. She responded, “I certainly wouldn’t share my opinion if it wasn’t in the majority…most people who are on the pro-union side are very vocal about it and I have to work with them after.” Victor explained how, in any group of staff, you usually have about 10% of people who are ‘dye in the wool’ union people and about 10% of people who are ‘I don’t care what the union says at all.’ You then have about 70-80% in the middle who are non-
He believes that while the union does not encourage the “fear of consequences” teachers are made to believe exist should when they disagree with the union; it certainly does not discourage it. This pattern, or even something remotely like it, “can lead to the perception that the union is a cabal, driven by the agenda of a discrete group of teachers and inaccessible and unresponsive to anyone else” (Bascia, 2000, p. 398). Victor expressed concern for where the union actually gets the mandate for their bargaining agenda, suggesting that a large percentage of union members do not see their priorities reflected anywhere. It is imperative that unions pay attention to which, and whose, priorities are taken seriously and which ones are not (Bascia, 2000). In order to influence the direction of government reform in a meaningful way, “teacher unions must ensure they keep their organizational ears to the ground with respect to teachers’ issues and concerns” (Bascia & Osmond, 2013, p. 34).

4.3.3 Appreciating all stakeholder interests

I was impressed with the interviewees’ comprehensive analysis when asked about the issues facing the government and teacher unions. This is encouraging, given that whole system improvement necessitates an understanding the role each stakeholder plays in its success (McKinsey & Company, 2010). It is important to recognize that “the close relationships between government and teacher union officials mean that in negotiations, each party has a working knowledge of and must respond to, the other’s perspectives and constraints” (Bascia & Osmond, 2013, p. 14). Amy acknowledged that when the public votes in different governments, they come complete with different priorities, visions, and initiatives. This includes governments of the same party. For example, Amy referred to the tumultuous period for education under the Conservative government of Premier Harris and then gave credit to the Conservative government under
Premier Davis who established the world acclaimed Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. Regardless of who is in power, the teacher unions have to be willing to work with the government of the day. The union’s objective is to determine how to articulate teachers needs in a way that can be effectively addressed by the government. Amy is realistic in her analysis of collective bargaining: “It’s a negotiation…you have some common objectives and you have different objectives, so there is going to be tension and conflict regardless [if the structure is most effective].” Amy does not view the relationship as hostile, as she is aware that the Ministry of Education has numerous well-intentioned executives who are trying to engage in policy and enact change.” The problem as she has articulated, is that the proposals for change must be accompanied by the conditions to make them happen. Amy recognized that “various needs are being addressed in a democratic society,” yet reserves the notion that education is not funded the way it needs to be in Ontario.

Sandra demonstrated an appreciation for the government’s position when bargaining with the unions. She claims, “I believe that government, understandably, has to worry about money…they have a fixed amount and they have to try and make it go further.” She believes that “teachers need to wake up and understand the pie is not getting any bigger in Ontario.” She said, “I think we should be aware of how good we do have it. For example, I realize we have more behavioural issues in the class, but we all have jobs. And good, secure jobs.”

“Compromise doesn’t mean you get what you want. It means you get what you can live with,” Victor proclaimed. His emphasis on compromise reinforces the idea that government, the unions, and teachers themselves must be willing to set aside their differences in order to be leaders in education (Campbell et al., 2016). With this recognition, combined with a high level of trust, the government and teacher unions could both achieve a “workable result” (Bascia &
Osmond, 2013). Despite showing staunch disapproval for both the content and approach of the union’s advocacy efforts, it was clear that Victor nonetheless had a respect for the role unions play in the public education system. “I mean personally, do I think that teachers should stop and be happy for a little while?” Victor asked. “Yes. But one of the union’s main functions is to protect teachers…so they have a duty and they can be charged or taken to task on the Employment Standards Act if they don’t do that.” During collective bargaining, Victor also showed an acceptance of the fact teachers have the right to go on strike. Despite the upheaval a strike may cause administrators, the board, and the Ministry, teachers are, at times, in a legal strike position. “And it’s really hard for parents to understand that that’s ok with us,” Victor explained, “We don’t like it, but that’s our collective bargaining process.” Victor also recognized the importance of not describing all teachers as one unified group. “Most of [the teachers],” he said, “know that they get paid well, have good benefits, and are happy.” Victor acknowledged that teachers are professionals and whether or not he agrees with them on all issues, their concerns have merit and are worthy of the government’s attention.

4.4 Conclusion

Amy, Sandra, and Victor provided valuable insight into the factors that have contributed to an effective and ineffective union-government relationship. Their experiences are not universal; nor can they be used to draw concrete conclusions on how all teachers view this relationship. However, their perspectives make it clear there is a need for the complexity of the teaching profession to be understood and respected when drafting new curriculum and policy. This is supported by literature outlining a number of unintended and long-standing consequences. The benefits of teacher agency, for both the profession and students, were also
evidenced through the work of the teachers I interviewed. Their past experiences also demonstrated the need for greater opportunities to have teachers’ voices heard in all forms of negotiation. As expected, the interviewees did not agree on all issues, but their dedication to their profession, and the students that stand to benefit, was universal. In chapter 5, I will also outline the broader range of implications these findings have on the educational community. I will also provide recommendations to strengthen union-government relations that will require system-wide cooperation.
Chapter 5: Implications and Discussion

5.0 Introduction

I remember being six years old standing in the playground, watching as dozens of teachers marched by the black rod iron gates of my elementary school. With signs held high above their heads, they were chanting “We won’t back down.” Unaware of what was going on, when I caught sight of my librarian, I began shouting, “Mrs. Deaver! Mrs. Deaver!” hoping that she would look my way. It was the fall of 1997 and without being fully aware, I was witnessing the largest teacher strike in North American history. In the 20 years that have followed, I’ve witnessed a number of labour disagreements between the government and the teacher unions; all with claims that they are “working in the best interest of students.” I chose to examine the history of their relationship because, I questioned that if all parties are indeed working in the best interest of students, why does there appear to be continuous unrest? I quickly learned that there is no simple answer to this question. The complexity of the relationship between the government and teacher unions prevents me from declaring a root cause of this unrest and providing one clear recommendation moving forward. That said, throughout my research and my interviews, I noticed patterns that contributed to an effective and ineffective partnership. In this chapter, I will share these findings and offer implications and recommendations for the educational community. It is my hope that this study, however limited in its scope, can meaningfully contribute to the development of stronger government-union relation in the years to come.

5.1 Overview of Key Findings and their Significance

Teachers across Ontario have taken a more active role in shaping their own professional development. My interviewees clearly demonstrated a commitment to ongoing learning. They
were often discouraged by colleagues who resisted efforts to engage in the same practice. In contrast to some, my interviewees openly embraced the challenge of bringing creativity and novel ideas to a more standardized curriculum. They exemplified the belief that teachers have the capability to meaningfully contribute to educational improvement in their community (Rottmann, 2012). Their efforts reinforce the crucial function of the Ontario TLLP where teachers are given the opportunity to collaborate with colleagues and implement new educational initiatives.

While many teachers are optimistic about new policies that outline expanded forms of assessment, support for students with special needs, or the integration of FNMI perspectives in the classroom, to name a few, they also warned against “initiative fatigue.” While the initiatives could have a transformational impact, they each require an enormous amount of energy to complete. When there is a lack of understanding for the complexity of the teaching profession, teachers can begin to feel overworked and underappreciated. One interviewee expressed how “Your work makes you feel like an accountant of expectations.” The consequences of any new policy decision can be widespread and long lasting, citing the needs for comprehensive consultation. Leithwood et al. (2002) explain how “teachers’ beliefs about their own professional efficacy are significantly related to the effectiveness of their classroom practices” (p. 101). When policy decisions do not value collaboration among teachers and administrators, it can negatively affect the school culture and the student learning environment (Spencer & Freeman, 2009, Carol et al., 2016).

Throughout this study, the importance of creating meaningful avenues for teachers to express their opinions was evident. My interviewees recommended that the collective bargaining process have a more defined and collegial structure. In addition, teacher unions were called upon...
to better reflect the diverse opinions of their members. The interviewees acknowledged what Bascia (2000) claimed to be a problem with the unions: “a perception that the union is a cabal, driven by the agenda of a discrete group of teachers and inaccessible and unresponsive to anyone else” (p. 98). Teachers have felt hurt by the lack of respect for their profession, but continue to appreciate the multitude of perspectives and demands that are involved in making sector-wide education decisions.

5.2 Implications

5.2.1 The educational community

This study reinforced the idea that when teachers are viewed as “shapers” of education and not simply “implementers” of curriculum and policy, there is improved job satisfaction and performance. As Rottmann (2012) writes, “If the education system is treated as an intricate, multi-layered, multi-agent system, long-term, and context-sensitive, teacher friendly change is more likely to take place” (p. 211). This has implications for how decision makers use teachers’ professional judgement to enhance policy initiatives and program implementation. At the end of the Common Sense Revolution, Sitch (2005) wrote, “although teacher professionalism is premised on high expectations, that same professionalism has not translated in to the commensurate respect and autonomy afforded to other professionals” (p. 140). The unanimous belief from each of my interviewees that teachers are to be “continual learners” demonstrates, in part, how they are eager to be held to a higher standard and welcome greater autonomy to achieve it. It would be best practice to encourage more opportunities for the government and teacher unions to work together. The TLLP, and the endorsement of the Ministry, the OTF (including all four unions), and the OPSBA, has shown the possibilities of broad sector
commitment. Teachers have cited a wide range of benefits to TLLP engagement, including expanded knowledge on instructional practice, but also on self-efficacy and the energy and inspiration they bring to their roles (Campbell et al., 2016, p. 230). Campbell et al. (2016) cited how “enabling and valuing teachers’ professional judgement and influence is powerful for individual and collective profession learning…” (p. 233). This has the potential to transform the ways we seek to strengthen our educational system in the future.

Changes in educational policy are designed to improve the structure and function of Ontario’s schools. Unfortunately, “large-scale reforms may be rolled out without sufficient concern as to how new policies and practices will interact with, and impact on, local context factors” (Bascia & Osmond, 2013, p. 12). Given that teachers are on the front line of education, in charge of academic delivery and student well-being, any policy change will impact them. It is imperative these decisions are made with an understanding of the complexities of the profession. When this understanding is absent, my interviewees explained, it leads to a “series of policies that are great theoretically but are not realistic given the everyday constraints and realities.” The implications of this can lead to the erosion of respect teachers have for the government, while also limiting the effectiveness of the new policies.

Despite common rhetoric in the public or in the media, there exists a great deal of respect for the role that teachers, administrators, the government, and the teacher unions all play in the pursuit of a strong public education system. In order for education reforms to have a long-lasting positive impact, top-down directives need to be replaced with collaborative practices, where trust between all parties is paramount. As reported by McKinsey & Company (2010), “In general, collaborative practices shift the drive for change away from the center to the front of schools, helping to make system improvement more self-sustaining” (p. 28). The decision to remove
administrators from OSSTF severely restricted the level of collaboration that takes place in schools (Spencer & Freeman, 2009). The idea that administrators had been “kicked off their school’s educational team” not only lessened their job satisfaction, but negatively impacted the students’ learning environment (Spencer & Freeman, 2009, p. 47; Carol et al., 2016). The emphasis on greater school accountability did not take into account how collaboration with colleagues contributes to a strong school culture and learning environment.

There remains a concern for how the diversity of stakeholder opinions is represented in decision-making. Establishing and maintaining a collaborative relationship helps to ensure that teachers’ voices are valued, which in turn can dictate the level of teacher engagement in future educational reform. The two practicing teachers I interviewed had different experiences with collective bargaining over the years. One of them found their voice to be adequately represented in their union’s position as there was significant consultation with their union representative. The other teacher did not agree with the union’s position on a series of issues, nor did she feel her opinion was valued or respected by the union representative. Consequently, she chose not to engage with the union. Poor engagement with the union is often the result of whether teachers feel their union is responsive to the majority of members and encourages differing teacher viewpoints (Popiel 2013; Bascia, 2000). I cannot confidently draw a direct correlation between this argument and the experience of my interviewee; however it does highlight the need for teacher unions to ensure their advocacy positions reflect the diversity of their members. This need is reinforced upon hearing that the administrator I interviewed believes that the union receives its directive from only about 10-20% of its members. He expressed concern over the legitimacy of their advocacy positions.
The complex collective bargaining system has not allowed for meaningful collaboration between all stakeholders. In recent years, the collective bargaining structure has become more centralized, leaving the school boards and unions in “a difficult and more vulnerable position” (Shilton, 2012, p. 212). The administrator I interviewed explained how the diminished responsibility of the school boards has made the trustees feel powerless. He believes this has severely restricted the ability for the diversity of local needs to be addressed.

5.2.2 My professional identity and practice

It is imperative that I stay engaged with how various educational stakeholders can support my development as a teacher. The school administration, the school boards, the Ministry, and the teacher unions all have a role to play. I must learn what each of their responsibilities entail, the logic behind their decisions, and the various avenues in which I can provide my input. My research demonstrates that an effective partnership rests on the ability for all parties to understand the complexities of each other’s position. This does not mean I will always agree with everyone’s decisions. That said, I must show respect and a continual willingness to engage on the issues being discussed. As I begin my professional career, I must be informed. It is important I take the time to read various publications, attend information sessions, network with colleagues, submit recommendations, and participate in online surveys.

The possibilities of enhanced teacher agency was a recurring theme within my research. The work that teachers have undergone with the TLLP has encouraged me to think about ways I can contribute to the broader educational community. I was inspired to learn about teachers who have taken the initiative to create programs that benefit their colleagues. This research has reminded me to stay motivated and engaged in ongoing learning. When new policy documents or curriculum changes challenge my thinking, I should use it as an opportunity to grow rather than
immediately resist the adjustments that I am being asked to make. If I notice an issue or see an opportunity worth pursuing, I will be an active voice within my school community.

This research has ignited my commitment to develop meaningful, collaborative, and respectful relationships with my colleagues. I want to be available to support the work of my colleagues and know that I can turn to them for guidance as well. Teaching can be an isolating job, particularly in the first few years when you have not established a professional network. While teachers are surrounded by people on a daily basis, a teacher carries enormous pressure to be responsive to the diverse needs of all of their students. The challenges teachers face in a day are often unpredictable and the consequences of their actions, or inactions, can be far-reaching. At times, I have felt that leaning on my colleagues for support is a weakness. My research showed me otherwise. A collaborative environment can benefit both job satisfaction and professional growth. I will strive to develop a respected partnership with all of my colleagues that will ultimately make us all more influential educators.

5.3 Recommendations

In May 2016, the Ministry of Education released a policy/program memorandum (PPM) that clarified “a shared commitment of stakeholders to building a culture of collaborative professionalism in Ontario’s education system” (p. 1). The PPM emphasizes the necessity of building trusting and respectful relationships where all voices are valued (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016a). Notably, the memorandum launched the Provincial Committee on Ministry Initiatives that will allow all stakeholders to “conduct an ongoing review of inventory and the status of Ministry of Education initiatives/strategies to make recommendations about next steps” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016a, p. 4). This committee is intended to monitor the timing
and pacing of initiatives, consider the sector-wide impact, take into account pre-existing demands of teachers, and ongoing evaluation of projects (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016a). This committee offers enormous potential for stronger union-government relations. I would highly recommend all stakeholders meaningful engage in fulfilling the committee’s mandate.

This study revealed the importance of having the government and teacher unions respect the valuable role they both play in the development of high quality public education in Ontario. In order to do this, they need to comprehend the complexity of their responsibilities and the unique pressures they each face. This understanding needs to translate into the development of curriculum and policy that is both innovative and bold, but also mindful and realistic. As such, I recommend that representatives from the government “shadow” teachers on a few days throughout the year. Their experience would then be shared with their colleagues in the form of a report and webinar. This does not replace formal consultation sessions in the development of curriculum and policy. Rather, the first-hand experience would allow decision makers to have a deeper appreciation for how their initiatives would translate into the classroom. Similarly, I recommend that representatives from the teacher unions be offered a visit to the Ministry of Education on a few days throughout the year to better understand the process by which decisions are made and the multitude of bureaucratic and political considerations that have to be taken into account.

I recommend that both the government and teacher unions do a more effective job at soliciting a diversity of opinions on their legislative agenda, their bargaining position, and the sector-wide initiatives they hope to implement. In order to quell any disgruntlement, I would advise that the outcome of the consultation process be more effectively publicized. The union should also explain in detail why they did not support stances that some members were in
agreement with. The union should encourage people to challenge their thinking and be open to criticism. With respect to the government, it is my hope that any revision to Bill 122, the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act, emphasizes collaborative discussion as a means to formalize an agreement on certain issues, such as professional learning and workplace culture. Wherever possible, opportunities to engage in conversation on bargaining issues outside of formal negotiations should be pursued.

I recommend that initiatives that support teacher agency, such as the TLLP, should continue to be jointly sponsored by both the government and teacher unions. Best practices from other programs with a similar goal, including the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement and Singapore’s Professional Learning Communities, should be analyzed. More programs that emphasize teacher collaboration across all educational fields should be supported. In order to have the greatest chance of success, the directives of any new policy must also include resources to support a teacher’s ability to implement them. The model of the TLLP presents an interesting opportunity. When the government introduces a new policy on special education, for example, they could ask a wide variety of teachers to help develop the professional development sessions that accompany the policy. This might present a unique opportunity to collaborate with teachers in other provinces who are being expected to do the same thing. Teachers could have the autonomy to develop a session that best reflects the policy directives with an acute understanding of how best to educate teachers. It is also advised that teachers be entrusted to craft yearly professional development sessions they deem relevant.

5.4 Areas for Further Research
This research study provided an overview of the factors that have contributed to an effective and ineffective partnership between the government and teacher unions. This topic has been the basis for dozens of research studies exploring each of the subthemes in greater detail. For example, the value of the government consultation process could be further examined, along with case studies on how specific policies or curriculum revisions were successfully implemented in the classroom. The role of politics and the media, along with perspectives of the public, are also topics of further research interest. Other studies might explore the effectiveness of various collective bargaining frameworks, with specific analysis on how the outcome of each round of negotiation changes according to the level of local consultation. And finally, research studies could include an analysis of the teacher unions’ abilities to garner strong support, with a comparison between the four unions in Ontario and those across Canada.

5.5 Conclusion

Any cursory look at the relationship between Ontario provincial government and its teacher unions strongly suggests we must learn from our past to meaningfully shape the future. This understanding propelled me to research what factors, if any, have historically contributed to an effective and ineffective partnership between the government and teacher unions. It is imperative that the past factors that contributed to a strong, courageous, and visionary partnership be celebrated so they can be maintained. It is also equally important that the factors that contributed to a weak, volatile, and destructive partnership be examined to ensure those factors are not repeated. As Bascia and Ormand (2013) argued, “positive teacher union-government arrangements are fragile” (p. 33). It will take leadership from both sides to uphold the values that they seek to impart on the students they serve. When striving to create something
as important as a world-class education system, there are bound to be controversial discussions
and heated debates. That will not change. But what can change, is the strength of the partnership
between the government and teacher unions as they seek to provide Ontario with the most
renowned education system in the world.
References


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Appendix A: Letter of Signed Consent

March 30, 2016

Dear _______________________________,

My Name is Philip Lloyd 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 the partnership between the government and teacher unions. More specifically, I will explore if an absence of meaningful communication through curriculum and policy development and within the collective bargaining structure could be preventing a number of educational advancements. I am interested in interviewing teachers who have a breadth of experience, serving multiple different roles within schools and the education sector more broadly. 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. I may also present my research findings via conference presentations and/or through 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. Any information that identifies your school or students will also be excluded. The interview data will be stored on my password-protected computer and the only person who will have access to the research data will be my course instructor. 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 during the interview. 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 to participation, and I will share a copy of the transcript with you shortly after the interview 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,

Philip A. Lloyd

Course Instructor: Dr. Rose Fine-Meyer
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 Philip Lloyd 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: Interview Protocol

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study and for making time to be interviewed today. This research study aims to learn how the absence of meaningful communication through curriculum and policy development and within the collective bargaining structure could be preventing a number of educational advancements. This interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes, and I will ask you a series of questions focused on how you characterize the relationship between the government and teacher unions, what you believe to be the reasons behind their success or failure at meeting their mandate, and how this has benefited or challenged you as an educator. I want to remind you that you may refrain from answering any question, and you have the right to withdraw your participation from the study at any time. As I explained in the consent letter, this interview will be audio recorded. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Personal Questions:
- Can you share with me your educational career thus far? Where have you worked and what positions have you held? What were your main responsibilities in these roles?
- What inspired you to go into education? Was there a defining moment or issue that facilitated this?
- What three qualities do you believe define a good teacher?
- How would you characterize your engagement with the work of the teacher unions and/or the government with respect to education?

Teacher Perspectives/Beliefs
- What do you believe are the two main functions of the teacher unions? Do you believe they have been successful at meeting this mandate? (Follow-up, if applicable: is there a difference between teacher unions?)
- What do believe are the two main functions of the Ministry of Education? Do you believe they have been successful at meeting this mandate?
- What three words would you use to describe the current relationship between the government and teacher unions? Has this changed throughout your time in the field? Why or why not?
- Do you believe that teacher’s voices are effectively heard at the collective bargaining table? Does the current framework facilitate or prevent this?
- Do you believe that current government and teacher union priorities are compatible? Why or why not?

Teacher Practices
- How has your teaching practice changed due to the implementation of government policy?
- How have you and your students benefited or suffered due to the implementation of government policy?
- Have you been consulted in the implementation of government policy?
- To what extent do you read, follow, and incorporate the curriculum in your classroom? How have you and your students benefited or suffered due to more robust curriculum documents?
- How have you collaborated on the development of new curriculum?
- Describe the extent of your involvement, either formally or informally, during collective bargaining throughout your career.
- What primary concerns have you hoped would be resolved through collective bargaining? Were they effectively addressed?
- What have you done to learn about the issues facing the government and teacher unions specifically?

Supports and Challenges

- In what ways have you felt supported by the government and the teacher unions throughout your career?
- How have you approached the challenges that have arisen between you and the government and/or you and the teacher unions?

Next Steps

- What steps will you take to help the government and teacher unions more effectively meet your professional development goals?
- What steps will you take to help the government and teacher unions more effectively serve the students of Ontario?

Thank you for your participation in this research study.