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## **Professional well-being and learning: a study of administrator-teacher workplace relationships**

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The study of workplace relationships in schools has been important since the phenomenon of school organisational climate was first identified in the 1960s by Halpin and Croft (Halpin 1966). They developed a reliable and well-respected instrument for describing and measuring climate called the Organizational Climate Descriptive Questionnaire (OCDQ). This was based on teachers' perceptions of eight types of peer and administrator/peer interactions, different combinations of which constituted six categories of climate from 'open' to 'closed'.

A number of studies using this instrument showed relationships between climate, student learning and teacher professional development. For instance, open climate schools were shown to be related to student creativity. The subtest of 'Thrust', related to a principal's behaviour, was shown to have a positive relationship with student creativity. The subtest of 'Production emphasis', the opposite of 'Thrust', was found to be negatively related to student creativity (Butt 1972, 1973). Marcum (1968) and Johnson and Marcum (1969) found that schools with high measurements in teacher innovation (hence teacher experimentation and learning) had open climates as measured by the OCDQ and, consequently, those open climate schools tended to be more innovative. Fieldvebel (1964) found that 'Production emphasis' was also negatively related to student achievement. The subtest of 'Consideration', which refers to a principal's tendency to interact with teachers in a caring, humane and sensitive fashion, was positively related to achievement.

Later, various other researchers, who took the notion of climate to extend beyond the school staff to other stakeholders, showed a relationship between climate and achievement (Phillips & Rosenberger 1983; Troisi 1983). Other factors related to achievement included parent involvement, relationships with students and - most

pertinent to the study reported in this article - professional collegiality (Murphy & Hallinger 1985).

Similarly, teacher learning appears to be influenced by administrative behaviour and collegiality, for instance principals being role models (Barth 1990), providing administrative support (Berman & McLaughlin 1978) and establishing norms of collegiality and experimentation (Little 1981). Administrators who provide a continuing context of support, encouragement and timely feedback (Fullan & Miles 1992; Joyce & Showers 1983; Miles & Louis 1987) with a balance of challenge and support (Airasian 1987; Huberman & Crandall 1983) have also been shown to aid professional learning.

The focus of more recent research in this area has shifted to the leadership behaviour of school principals (eg Day et al 2000; Leithwood et al 1999) and teachers' workplace learning (Retallick 1999; Retallick & Groundwater-Smith 1999). Both of these research agendas are raised in the present article and further demonstrate the importance of positive administrator-teacher relationships for teacher growth and development.

Our main aim in writing this article, then, is to report an in-depth exploration of the essential structures and processes (see Dilthey & Husserl in Polkinghorne 1983, pp 27, 205) of teachers' experiences of workplace relationships with school-based administrators. Themes discerned from the interpretation of autobiographical data taken from the professional life stories of teachers, with regard to both positive and negative relationships, will be used to identify which leadership initiatives and actions the teachers perceive to lead to professional wellbeing and learning

## **Methodology**

This study is part of an ongoing project that was initiated in the early 1980s (Butt 1984). The methodology has evolved over a number of years (Butt et al 1988, 1990, 1992a, 1992b; Butt & Raymond 1989; Raymond et al 1992) as part of a broader methodological and substantive movement (Butt et al 1990, Pinar et al 1995, pp 515-564) in the use of biography and autobiography to provide qualitative data to understand teachers' professional lives and careers. The initial purpose of the project was to discern and represent teachers' voices concerning how they experience their working realities and the nature and formation of their personal professional knowledge. The inquiry was designed to yield data on the lived realities of teaching, perceived at the time to be missing from debates on many educational issues. In particular, it was thought that the research would provide insights into the failures of efforts at educational reform, change and professional development. In this article, we investigate a major theme identified in the data in relation to teachers' sense of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with their worklives. The most prominent theme in the worklives of most teachers' was that of intercollegial relationships with peers and administrators.

There are several reasons why this particular theme intrigued us to undertake further inquiry and research. Firstly, over the years, from the day-to-day experience

of both teachers and researchers, it has become clearer that school-based collegial relations are extremely important and affect many educational phenomena, including teacher and student learning. Secondly, it identifies and illustrates the link between professional wellbeing and professional learning - that a focus on one necessarily affects, and involves, a focus on the other - and that the conditions that hinder and help both are quite similar, if not identical. Thirdly, research often informs us of desirable states that might exist within educational phenomena in a gross sense, but seldom do we reveal the rich detail of these phenomena or, just as important, how we might create the desired state. The nature of autobiographical research is phenomenological; the essential processes and the grain and detail of lived experiences that illustrate them reveal what works and what does not and, in this case, how administrators can lead a school staff to professional wellbeing and learning.

The theoretical and methodological rationale for the use of autobiographical data from teachers' professional life stories and the method of collaborative autobiography are detailed at length elsewhere (Butt et al 1988; Butt & Raymond 1989). Our approach to collaborative autobiography involved organising a group of experienced teachers to work together through four phases of activity and writing. These included: a depiction of the current context of working reality; description of current pedagogy and curriculum-in-use; reflections on aspects of past personal and professional life that might facilitate understanding, and a presentation of professional thoughts and actions; and, finally, a projection into preferred futures through a critical appraisal of the previous three phases.

Only after each participant had an opportunity to draft and redraft an autobiographical account did we as *co-researchers* enter into a discussion and interpretation of *autobiographical substance*. In this process, the major initial onus for the interpretation of qualitative data lay with the autobiographer. The identification of initial patterns, issues, events, sequences of events and their meanings was *his* or *her* prerogative. In this sense, each autobiographer, with the researcher as facilitator, expressed his or her own voice and professional life story.

For the purposes of the study reported here, data from the first phase of collaborative autobiography was used, wherein teachers responded to the invitation to express a variety of feelings with regard to their worklives, depict events which gave rise to those feelings and reflect upon why they felt that way. This provided a portrayal of what this group of teachers found satisfying and dissatisfying about their working realities. Although the initial focus of autobiographical writings was on their working realities at the time of participation, individual themes identified were further illustrated by retrospective accounts, especially if a teacher had worked in the same school with the same administrator for a number of years.

The autobiographical data on which this study is based was gathered from twenty-nine teachers during one year in the late 1990s. Themes interpreted from this data were validated by a group of twenty teachers in the year 2000. Seventeen of the twenty-nine were working in elementary schools and twelve were working in grades 7-12. Twelve teachers were female and seventeen were male. The teachers

represented twenty-nine different school cultures and working realities in rural and urban contexts in Alberta, Canada. For the purpose of this study, bearing in mind Barbara Tuchman's (1979) assertion that within one unique person's story we can find the universal, we feel that these individuals are typical and representative of teachers who worked in the context of Alberta at the time this data was gathered. Their collective experiences, then, as derived from the data and represented in the thematic structure presented here, would be representative of many, if not most, teachers' experiences who work in similar contexts.

### **Interpretation of data**

As noted earlier, because the stories were autobiographical in nature, each teacher was the first interpreter of the meaning of, in this case, feelings of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with his/her worklife. The second level of interpretation, that of identifying themes across teachers' stories, was made through group oral storytelling, where researcher and teachers identified common patterns in the data. The third level of interpretation involved the researchers engaging in multiple readings of teachers' written stories while making theoretical memos and marginalia (Glaser & Strauss 1967).

Using this process and taking into account common issues/phenomena identified by the teachers themselves, commonalities were initially mapped. Then, a second layer of interpretation was made by identifying clusters of issues/phenomena associated with each other as sub-themes. The same process was employed to identify clusters of sub-themes, enabling us to name the themes. Themes were often bipolar, especially when, in this case, we took the criteria of job satisfaction or dissatisfaction to stimulate autobiographical reflection. We used the presence of positive or negative themes to search for mirror images in the data, bearing in mind that the absence is as important as the presence of a mirror image. The thematic nature of the data was then portrayed using anthologies of illustrative anecdotes and phrases from teachers' stories for each sub-theme and theme. We then checked the thematic structure and narrative to make sure it included the original common issues and phenomena identified by the group of teachers involved in the study.

The thematic structure and the data were then re-examined for metathemes and important details or 'traces' to help us better understand leadership initiatives to encourage professional learning and wellbeing.

### **Results**

With regard to their relationships with administrators, 43% of teachers' comments were negative and 57% were positive. In an attempt to assess the satisfaction/dissatisfaction balance in administrator-teacher relationships by individual, the data was categorised three ways: mostly (>50%) positive comments, mostly negative and equally positive and negative (24%, 38% and 38% respectively).

The qualitative data revealed that teachers' experiences of relationships with administrators clustered into three themes with related sub-themes. A first theme, 'Climate', related to the teachers' experiences of the general context within which they worked. A second theme was 'Collegial communication'; a generic and generative set of processes of verbal interaction between administrators and teachers. A third theme, 'Facilitation of workplace learning and career development', related to experiences of particular events of a substantive nature that focused on individual and collective professional learning.

### **Positive climate**

Where teachers perceived positive relationships with their administrators, the working context was best described by the pervasive theme of 'Positive climate', characterised by the combined nature of three sub-themes: 'Support'; 'Recognition, respect and trust'; and 'Caring role model'.

#### ***Support***

The following excerpts from the life stories of the teachers illustrate the sub-theme of support.

The staff is very supportive and so is the principal. There is a good atmosphere in the school.

"X" was always the humanist who had a "down home," "folksy" way which endeared him to all. He had a style that effectively bridged the gap between administration and staff. Ever supportive and encouraging, his style was typified with unique and creative administrative techniques.

Where a school staff had not previously experienced this type of positive, supportive and encouraging behaviour from an administrator, there was the potential to open up the school climate and change the attitudes of teachers.

He has changed the whole atmosphere of our school, and thus, the attitude and rapport of our staff has improved greatly.

### **Recognition, respect and trust**

Some teachers expressed very positive feelings with regard to their experiences of administrators' recognition of expertise, respect for professional judgment, autonomy and trust.

He (the principal) had faith in people and as a teacher I always felt trusted and respected for my expertise, advice and opinions.

In response to the question of "What makes you happy and gives you satisfaction as a teacher?" - The principal asking and taking advice makes me happy.

When these values, attitudes and behaviours were mutually reinforced by a teacher's peers, the resulting synergistic impact could be profound.

One further advantage of major importance to my pedagogy is a "progressive" principal and staff, who are willing to trust my professional judgement on many issues that effect [sic] them and some of the children they teach. This has had an inestimable effect [sic] on my own self-concept (after some experiences of a contrary nature) and has had a positive effect on my creativity in the classroom.

## **Caring role model**

The administrator attributes of being positive, supportive, encouraging, trusting and respectful were seen to carry through into active caring for individuals and their development as teachers.

Another interesting aspect is that this ... (principal's) ... encouragement was very meaningful, most likely due to my perception of him as an authentic and genuine human being. His support and guidance were extended at a time when I was very much ready to listen.

Experience with administrators in the first years of teaching could leave a long lasting impression.

"X" was my first Principal and a very important part of my life thereafter. "X" made me want to do my best and because of his encouragement and support I strived to become a teacher we both could be proud of.

I must mention the principal at this school. For me he was the best administrator I worked under for several reasons. He gave me support in all matters. He was willing to help me as much as he could (he was extremely busy) and had things been different (smaller staff, more time) he probably could have been a mentor of a sort for me.

Some administrators challenged teachers to take risks and provide the necessary support

My supervisor was very supportive as she encouraged me to explore new ideas, while at the same time remaining purposeful in the everyday world. ... I always felt uplifted by her support and encouragement.

They could become role models:

... I realised how lucky I had been with administrators thus far in my teaching career. They were supportive, open to innovation, excellent organisers and concerned about the well-being of their staff. These people became positive role models for me for the future.

Besides being role models for young teachers, administrators could also model caring with and for teachers in other stages of their careers.

"X" taught me many things about relationships between people. ... I watched him as he empathised with the physically impaired teacher who had to teach seated all day long. He helped her make it work while others felt she should take an early retirement.

The caring side of this teacher's principal has remained strongly in her mind. She recalled a time when a retiring teacher began to behave irrationally and told of her principal's response.

He (Principal) called a few of us together to help us understand why the teacher was behaving as she was. He asked us to help her for her remaining three months. "X" cared about all of us, personally and professionally. We felt like part of his family.

### **Collegial communication**

The second major theme, which carries the values of (and creates) a 'Positive climate' and its related sub-themes, is 'Collegial communication'. This style of communication, when initiated and sustained by an administrator and reciprocated by the school staff, is 'horizontal' not 'vertical' in nature, where power and expertise are shared.

I felt I could walk into his office any time and have a chat. "X" always encouraged and praised me. He is responsible for my increase in self-confidence as a teacher.

The most outstanding quality about this woman was her ability to communicate with others, which in turn helped them to grow.

These excerpts from teachers' stories richly colour the different but complementary characteristics of 'Collegial communication' - approachability, effective interpersonal/intercollegial communication, non-judgmental acceptance and intuitive interventions. These sorts of interactions were observed to facilitate self-confidence, growth, problem-solving and success. They could also be utilised for mediation and conflict resolution.

He would simply talk with people and take a potentially volatile situation and resolve it with care and understanding.

### **Facilitating workplace learning and career development**

The context of 'Positive climate' and the process of 'Collegial communication' were carried through into professional growth as teachers' greatest satisfaction came from administrators facilitating their professional learning and career development. In this data set, the administrator/teacher interactions occurred mostly during the teachers' ongoing day-to-day worklife. They did not particularly result from organised professional development sessions. Hence, we named this data set 'Facilitating workplace learning and career development'.

There appeared to be four sub-themes within the data related to both substantive focus and process: 'Challenge and support'; 'Role model/coach/mentor in teacher development'; and 'Career development and teacher's advocate in the resolution of difficulty'.

### ***Challenge and support***

The process of challenging individuals and whole school staffs to take risks and be creative, while providing support, encouragement and a safe environment, is reflected in the following moments in the stories of teachers.

At the end of his first year at “X” (School) he challenged the staff to do something about the generally poor levels of achievement ... and offered to support the staff in any way possible.

The staff jointly decided to emphasise academic achievement throughout the school year, each department developed growth objectives that were designed to promote higher levels of student achievement.

The administrator provided help for novices:

As a beginning teacher, I grew in the guidance and support of “X” who created a safe environment for me to unfold. He provided the solid background that a novice needs as well as the understanding to help the beginner accept their weaknesses. He was there to help; always approachable and very much the expert ...

and catalysed the cycle of self-initiated professional learning.

He encouraged me to take risks which in turn allowed me to be creative and to grow. Because of him, I looked for new challenges.

### ***Role model/coach/mentor in teacher development***

I learned several of my own discipline techniques through trial and error ... although I believe the majority of my successful methods were picked up later ... (from “X”).

The important factor in those years was “X” ... one of his greatest pleasures was to teach. He considered young teachers his students and taught them well ... “X” taught by example ... if the situation presented itself he would take over the class to show me how something could be done ...

As shown above, administrators who demonstrated and coached were highly valued, as were exemplary role models.

Since I wanted to be so much like “X” I tried to imitate his style. I never became as good at it as “X” (I gave too much advice) but I did make gains ...

The impact of such exemplary role models is not just a significant moment in an individual’s growth as a teacher; it can guide her/his professional practice and development for many years. A role model may remain a ‘mental mentor’ inside a teacher’s head and heart throughout his/her career.

He was an extremely powerful man in his field, an exceptional leader for a school ... Working with “X” for my first years as a classroom teacher had a great affect [sic] on me. The standards I learned to set at that time have remained fairly constant since then. My belief in firm, fair discipline, although stemming from my father, was reinforced in a big way by watching “X” teach and (organise) his school.

“X” has been retired for 10 years now but part of “X” is still in every class I teach and in every relationship I am part of. I have tried to adopt many of his fine qualities. ... He provided a strong role model to strive toward and he guided and supported me along the way.

### ***Career development***

A strong sub-theme running through the data with regard to sources of teacher satisfaction with worklife is related to the ways in which administrators have encouraged or facilitated career aspirations and development, as the events portrayed below show. This sub-theme picks up on and expands the earlier sub-theme of ‘Respect and trust’.

My principal’s positive comments have made me feel as though I have administrative potential, as well as making me feel that I’m doing a good job in work assignments, giving me a feeling of success.

My current principal is concerned with efficiency and rules and regulations but not at the expense of educational goals. He has been imbued with the Special Ed. philosophy and is supportive in my efforts to establish a multi-faceted Resource Room.

Administrators also assisted teachers in commencing careers or changing roles.

During my first years ... in junior high ... I regularly had students come to talk and visit, and some came to talk about problems they were experiencing. The principal ... saw this and asked if I would like to work with students in counselling.

I had been substituting for several long stints ... when the principal ... came to me and said, “We have an opening in Language Arts, would you like the job?” ... I stuttered and stammered for a few seconds finally blurting out an ecstatic “yes”. He congratulated me on being a member of his staff and went on his way.

### ***Advocate for teachers in resolution of difficulty***

At some point in every career an individual can make mistakes, things can go wrong and self-doubt can insidiously begin to undermine his/her confidence. These crises in a teacher’s career can be disastrous or softened considerably by a few positive words or - indeed, they can be resolved, with the help of a caring administrator. One teacher’s experience illustrates this. He was responsible for a class in which his students were seemingly bored and apathetic. As a result he began to feel the same way and started to view his teaching as ‘dull and uninteresting’. He was losing interest in teaching.

It was at this time that my principal became involved in the situation. Once I opened up to her she was able to help me to put many things into proper perspective. My classroom didn’t change, but I did. I accepted the fact that every class that I taught would not be a ball of fire. I also learned that I was the person who was in control and that I had the power to place things into a format that would work for me. This is an important learning since it was the combination of frustrations that almost made me leave the teaching profession.

Other situations illustrate the nature of this sub-theme further.

When I had problems with students he (the principal) stood right beside me through it all. One day after school, I took a boy in for smoking on the grounds. His friends came to my house later and threatened me. I went to the principal. He listened and then he phoned the superintendent insisting that these boys be expelled. They were and there was a meeting at the Board Office with their parents before any of them were reinstated into the school.

Continuing her praise of the principal, the previous teacher related an emotional incident in her first year of teaching involving an irate parent of high standing in the community. She fondly recalled her principal's response to the situation –

When "X" arrived he captured the essence of the situation very quickly and ushered us both to his office and out of the hearing range of my children. Then "X" did what he always did. He began a non-threatening search for the facts behind the incident. ... Once it was determined that no negligence had taken place "X" really went into action and he gained my respect and affection forever. He reminded ... (the parent) ... that his behaviour in the classroom was not appropriate nor acceptable and that NO ONE, not even ... (a man of his position) ... had the privilege of conducting himself in such a fashion in his school. ... His courage to stand by his convictions and by me in this instance, meant more to me than I can express. Because of that experience I set out to show "X" just how worthy I could be of his support.

## **Negative climate**

Where teachers perceived their relationships with their administrators as negative, the working context was best described by the pervasive theme of 'Negative climate', characterised by the sub-themes: 'Lack of support'; 'Lack of recognition, respect and trust'; and 'Lack of caring'.

### ***Lack of support***

Administrators who were perceived as creating negative relationships were unable to prioritise the time to work with teachers.

I was often helpless with little support from the principal.

It's a good thing there's so much satisfaction in the classroom because there isn't much support from administration. It seems, at this time of year (Spring), it's one thing after another.

One teacher approached her principal regarding an innovative project she and a group of colleagues were planning to initiate; a second tells her story of administrator 'absence':

The principal has given his go ahead, "Go for it." We've invited him to our meetings and sent him literature concerning the approach but he's not available. I am frustrated by this but continue as though I don't care.

He (the principal) has developed a reputation among staff of taking the glory but not helping to do the work. The Christmas Concert is a major production at our school. All staff are involved except the principal. He does not help with the set up, the costumes, directing, music or any of the other hundred things to do. Yet come the night he M.C.'s the event and basks in the glory of it all. This has led to some staff resentment. ... We have had various work bees to build new playground equipment. The principal comes, but never "lifts a finger" to help. He talks to the parents, visits and then leaves. Sometimes he doesn't even attend at all.

### ***Lack of recognition, respect and trust***

I am a trained music teacher. ... But in nine years my services have only been required once for a Remembrance Day choral selection. ... They have never had music for graduation although I have publicised my availability.

This same teacher was turned down when he offered to organise a musical stage production for the high school. Another teacher who had won an international award said 'there was no local school recognition of the achievement'. He called it the 'final irony' adding, 'it says something about the isolation of the classroom teacher'.

Lack of respect and trust characterised many negative relationships.

I had seen him (administrator) act distrustfully when one of my colleagues tried to order magazines for her class, but I had not yet identified his lack of support for teachers to order supplies as a standard trademark of the administrative "bullshit" which everyone had to fight through. In other words, I discovered that I wasn't the expert for what I needed in the classroom - the principal thought he was the expert.

A teacher had to struggle with the administrator to obtain permission to use the office computer printer. The principal was initially indecisive but later he gave his consent -

... and so I proceeded to pack the printer. Then I got the lecture on "be sure to be careful with it, etc." For me that was an insult. There is an old military expression which the Canadians inherited from the British. Don't remind an officer of his duty. I live by that expression. Talking to a forty year old experienced teacher in terms which might be appropriate for a seven year old was an insult.

A teacher's desire for autonomy was often in conflict with a need for accountability by administration. The existence of such a conflict is clearly expressed in the following excerpt.

... problems have begun when questions have been asked of what or why or how I am doing something, or when I have been asked to defend proposed actions. The situation has been particularly touchy when I have been challenged repeatedly and repetitively to defend adventurous undertakings that someone else thought were unnecessary and too expensive.

### ***Lack of caring***

The following short excerpts from teachers' stories aptly describe the variety of ways in which administrators were perceived to be uncaring and insensitive.

I found the principal so over involved in science, politics, and education that he could not relate to the needs and pressures of daily life.

The present administrative team does not socialise with staff. One of them isn't allowed to and the other doesn't care to. Social events just don't happen. They're usually so under-patronised that they have to be abandoned. ... Perhaps leadership from the administrative team might help.

Administrators expecting teachers to be able to teach anything without taking the individual's preferences into account. I consider this oversight to be the main contributing factor for two nervous breakdowns on staff. ...

### ***Poor communication***

In contrast to the important interpersonal relationships established by administrators who practiced good communications, the opposite occurred when administrators neglected or had poor communication skills. The following excerpts characterise poor communications and their impact.

The administrators do not make sure that the complete staff knows what is going on.

Because of the way he uses power, it is sometimes hard for teachers to talk honestly with him. This was part of the problem I had in trying to communicate my needs; I wanted my books ordered on one hand, but I also wanted to stay on his good side. After all, what happens to me if we don't agree on matters?

First year teachers often need both affirmation through supportive conversation as well as sensitively delivered critical feedback. Unfortunately for this teacher, the principal's only classroom visitation involved just a competency checklist and she received little feedback. This sort of lack of communication can have a long-term impact on a teacher's career.

The principal wasn't someone I could really talk to either, so I just let it pass and did the best I could. Unfortunately, the result of this. ... set me up for a difficult time ahead.

### **Lack of facilitation of workplace learning and teacher development**

In contrast to the theme of 'Facilitation of workplace learning and development' characteristic of well-regarded administrators, the polar opposite was true of poorly respected administrators. The theme of 'Lack of workplace learning and development' was differentiated into the sub-themes: 'Threat and lack of support'; 'Career threat'; and 'Lack of teacher advocacy in dealing with difficulty'.

#### ***Threat and lack of support***

In this era of 'government accountability', the data from competency tests can be abused.

... now that the Canadian Achievement Tests and the Alberta Proficiency grade level examinations are compulsory, the test results can leave either a positive or negative impression. Often the raw data is examined without taking into consideration other factors, such as, that our school population comes from lower socio-economic homes, so that we may compare unfavorably with schools at the other end of the spectrum ... my own principal, who generally exhibits an open mind, surprised me when he questioned the adequacies of a colleague on the basis of test results from the Alberta Proficiency examinations. I know of at least three other principals in our system who have used these types of test results to arrive at some questionable conclusions about teacher effectiveness.

### ***Career threat***

In contrast to emphasising career development, poorly regarded relationships with administrators were characterised by the perception of unfair decisions.

Last year a teacher got his walking papers at the end of his probation. I thought he was doing an okay job so I cornered the principal and asked what was going on. To my horror and amazement, one of the reasons the principal gave was that the teacher was not sociable. Blazes, he was always sociable with me!

In another example, a teacher's negative encounter with his principal during his first year of teaching could have easily ended his career. He arrived as an admitted idealist and nonconformist and was also experiencing personal problems at the time.

The principal, who sensed some of my confusion, saw an opportunity to rid the profession of "people like you who should never have gone into teaching in the first place!" He took to listening in on my classes over the intercom, frequently belittled and lectured me in front of staff and students and in general treated me the same as a student whom he wished to keep in line. What saved me was my own obstinance and the intuition that I could become a "good" teacher if I could survive these crises.

### ***Lack of teacher advocacy in resolution of difficulty***

There were aspects of ... (teaching) ... that I found distasteful. They had to do, largely, with the administration ... the problem of priorities by which decisions are made.

...(he) did little other than the "have-to's" administrivia. There were definitely feelings of internal hostility and resentment towards the administration, as well as some other inter-staff personal conflicts

## **The meta-theme of relationship and separation**

The overall meta-theme we identified, within which all themes and subthemes resided, as noted in teachers' life stories, was *relationship* versus *separation* between administrators and teachers. In everyday worklife, this is experienced as *collegiality* versus *professional isolation*.

There is a positive picture of relationship and collegiality. The creation of relationships and collegiality require educational leaders to provide ample opportunity for positive interactions between administrators and teachers. A key factor in these interactions is the administrator's attitude towards power. In positive

collegial relations, the administrator's sense of power is authoritative, rather than authoritarian, based on the expertise of that administrator. This is paralleled, however, by the respect of the administrator for the teacher's expertise, and the principal's mission of enabling teachers to acquire more expertise. The power relations are horizontal rather than vertical.

Clearly, the themes identified from this data in relation to contextual, process and substantive events are not mutually exclusive; they are cyclically related and mutually impact upon each other in potentially positive (and negative) synergistic ways. The administrator - through encouragement and support; through demonstrating trust and respect and recognising a teacher's autonomy, abilities and expertise; and in being a role model for caring - creates the context of a positive organisational climate. This context opens the door for reciprocation and opportunities for increased positive interactions. The administrator uses effective collegial communication as a core process within the organisation, characterised by approachability, good interpersonal skills, non-judgmental acceptance, intuitive intervention, mediation and conflict resolution. In turn, positive intercollegial communication enhances the organisational climate and, in a synergistic way, sets a fertile ground for professional learning initiatives.

Within the context of positive climate and the generic process of intercollegial communication, the prime substantive focus of the administrator is to lead and initiate the workplace learning and career development of both individuals and the whole school staff. She/he provides focused *challenges* - problems for individuals and groups to solve - while providing the *support* of a safe environment within which to be creative and take risks. Further, workplace learning is facilitated and supported by the administrator acting as a role model, mentor or coach in respect to a specific individual's professional learning needs - through action rather than only through words.

Administrators who are positively regarded attend to a specific teacher's work aspirations and professional talents through enabling career developments and changes in recognition of that teacher's individual expertise. Most importantly, at moments of serious doubt, critical incidents or career crises, the administrator is there as a teacher advocate, coach and supporter, and prioritises to put the teacher first. These sorts of attitudes, values, behaviours, actions, interactions and processes, when seen together, characterise the administrator as initiating leadership through actions focused on teacher wellbeing and learning.

On the other side of the ledger, in some cases there is a negative picture. In a worst case scenario, this picture reflects separation, fragmentation and isolation or a lack of relationship between administrators and teachers. Administrators who cannot prioritise time to interact with teachers or provide support for teachers' individual and group projects; who don't work alongside teachers; who display distrust of teachers' motives, and a lack of respect and recognition of their expertise; and whose actions and priorities indicate a lack of caring for teachers - are likely to create a negative climate for teaching and learning. This can be made worse by little, poor, one-way or authoritarian communication.

In contrast to the positive scenario, administrator-teacher relations perceived as negative by teachers are also characterised by a lack of administrator facilitation of workplace learning. The reasons for this range from an absence of action, to initiatives which are seen to stifle development through: being unsupportive of teachers; making negative judgmental statements and career threats; not supporting teachers in difficult situations; and putting teachers last amongst stakeholders in their decision making.

The power in this negative scenario is not distributed or shared; it is centralised in the administrative office. Relationships, if they exist, are hierarchical or authoritarian. Administrator values, behaviours, attitudes and actions, in this scenario, tend to be the opposite of the positive situation. The organisational structures and processes are negative in a cyclic and synergistic sense, and will continue to reinforce separation of teachers from administrators. The result is fragmentation and balkanisation of the school staff that seriously impacts upon professional health and wellbeing and professional learning.

## **Conclusion**

In this article we have sought to foreground teachers' voices through autobiographical analysis of workplace relationships involving administrators and teachers. If there is a concluding message for administrators, it is in terms of a generic style that might be characterised as 'leading collegiality'. Most importantly, leading collegiality on teachers, individually and collectively, appears to result in reciprocity with the administrator, peers and students, which in turn accentuates initiatives the administrator does take. Collegiality encourages positive interactions, atmosphere and rapport.

This finding has been confirmed in recent leadership studies (eg Day et al 2000; Retallick & Fink, in press), which increasingly show the importance of personal relationships in leadership efficacy. A positive sense of professional health and wellbeing, therefore, appears to be related to feelings of trust, respect, autonomy and efficacy as a teacher. This sets the stage for a willingness to be committed, be creative and take risks in order to continue to grow professionally, through solving problems and engaging with the challenges of teacher and pupil learning. Feeling successful gives a teacher the confidence to take new roles, career changes and challenges in professional development. Teachers in difficulty feel that they matter and are helped through tough times. Administrator-teacher relationships in schools are clearly fundamental to the professional wellbeing and continued workplace learning of teachers.

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