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**AND MASTER OF NONE: Teachers' Perceptions
of Teacher Misassignment and the Role of the Generalist
Teacher -- A Case Study**

by



SUSAN MURRAY-BRAYFORD

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH
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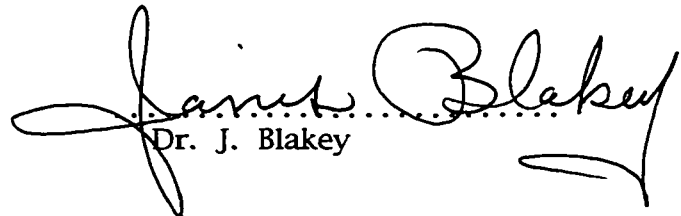
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*In Memory of
Mum and Dad*

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the practice of teacher misassignment from the perspective of the classroom teacher. The placement of teachers in classroom assignments inconsistent with their areas of academic background and/or personal expertise is a commonly used management technique which facilitates the overall operation of the education system. However, little research has focused upon the implications of the practice. What are the perceived ramifications of misassignment for teachers? Do teachers believe their professional performance or the quality of instruction is affected? Does the generalist teacher have a role to play in the specialized environment of the modern secondary school?

This qualitative case study investigated these issues from the teacher's frame of reference. Research was confined to one small secondary school located in rural Alberta. The teaching staff, many of whom had experience with misassignment, were requested to complete a written questionnaire. Specific respondents were then requested to participate in interviews designed to explore the issues more intensely. Of 33 questionnaires distributed, 24 (73%) were completed and returned. Subsequently, 8 subjects were selected to take part in personal interviews.

Research questions focused upon how teachers perceive misassignment affects a teacher's workload, confidence level, self-esteem, feelings of control, and status within the school. In addition, such issues as coping strategies and effects of misassignment upon students were explored.

Study data indicated that many subjects perceived that misassignment does have negative impacts upon a teacher's sense of confidence and control in the classroom and that self-esteem may be negatively influenced. Teachers fear misassignment may lead to loss of credibility and diminished quality of instruction for students. The perception that administrators are unaware of or insensitive to the problems encountered by misassigned teachers was also evident.

The study concludes that while misassignment will presumably continue to be used as a timetabling strategy, administrators should be informed and supportive of the unique challenges confronting misassigned teachers. Educational policy should reflect awareness of these challenges. Teachers should be consulted regarding timetabling decisions which directly impact them. The study further concludes that more extensive research is needed to explore the implications of this practice more fully.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

ORIGINS OF THE STUDY: MY STORY

"Miss Murray, you sure are rusty on these 'IR' verbs!"

"Bien sur, mon ami, tu as raison," I concurred as I attempted to get my mouth around a somewhat tongue-twisting French phonetic configuration. That rather comical observation was offered by a student in my Grade 9 French class a number of years ago. It was, no doubt, a fair commentary on my oral French skills at that time as I, a novice teacher newly graduated with a Bachelor of Education degree majoring in secondary English, struggled to teach a course in third-year French.

Prior to my French teaching debut, it had been at least half a decade since I had seriously looked at a French grammar text and probably longer since I had made even a rudimentary attempt to converse in the language. Paradoxically, teaching French was as much a learning experience for me, the teacher, as it was for my students. No one in that classroom was more aware of my deficiencies as a French teacher than I. Lesson planning required painstaking review of vocabulary, verb conjugations, grammar rules, and phonetics -- intricacies of the French language I had given little thought or attention to since early university days. My lack of oral fluency, confidence, and comfort with the language resulted in lesson presentation which was overly-structured, unspontaneous, and unfulfilling for both myself and, I am sure, my students. Nothing in my pedagogical training as a secondary English teacher had prepared me for the unique demands of the second language classroom.

As a student in the Faculty of Education, I had naively assumed that being a secondary English major indicated that my destiny was to become a high school English teacher. My expectations in this regard were defined and reinforced by the traditional format of teacher training. Upon entering the Faculty of Education, I was required to choose between elementary and secondary teaching. Having selected the secondary route, I was then required

to identify my chosen area of specialty and to prove that I had completed the necessary quota of prerequisite courses relating to this subject area. My methodology courses and practice teaching sessions were specifically geared toward my specialty subject. In essence, I, like all other students in the faculty, was trained to be a subject area specialist.

Our training as teachers merely reflected the compartmentalized structure of the education system for which we were being prepared. Schools are elementary or secondary schools. Within the modern secondary school, staff are segmented into academic departments such as the English department, the mathematics department, the physical education department, and so on. Teachers are therefore trained to function as subject area specialists within these academic cells. The present system exudes a philosophy that teachers at the secondary school level are "experts" in specific content areas and their job is to convey subject area expertise to their students. The prevalence of the "teacher-as-expert" philosophy has led to the demise of an alternate view which depicts the teacher as a facilitator of learning in a more holistic sense. This alternate philosophy extols the value of general teaching skills and global knowledge. It is a philosophy which nurtures the teacher as generalist rather than specialist.

It is not surprising, therefore, that upon graduation from the Education Faculty, I entered the professional world imbued with the perception that I was a specialist in the area of secondary English and that I would ultimately teach exclusively in that domain. Little did I foresee that during my first five years of professional teaching, I would be assigned to teach not only English and language arts, but also remedial mathematics, typing, social studies, reading, guidance, home economics, health, and, of course, French. Why did this happen? I believe it was because I had unwittingly been placed into the category of "generalist" by administrators who exploited my rather diverse academic and professional background to fulfill the year-by-year exigencies of the timetable. In the real world, the neatly segregated model of academic specialization frequently cannot function without the assistance of academic staff who are able to function in a variety of subject areas. Generalist teachers are still necessary to fill holes in the timetable and to keep the system working. The problem is that generalists are attempting to function within a

system which has no place for them, thus their contribution is rarely acknowledged and the peculiar problems and challenges associated with being a generalist in a specialist world are neither recognized nor accommodated. To become the generalist teacher on staff is to fall through an unacknowledged crack in the system, a situation which has profound repercussions for the teacher.

Because secondary teachers have traditionally been trained to be subject area specialists, it follows that those individuals placed in generalist teaching positions at the secondary level will be required to teach some subject areas for which they have not received specific pedagogic training. In my personal experience, teachers refer to this practice as teaching "out-of-area." As I began to research the practice more formally, it took some time before I happened upon the identifying term used most extensively in the research literature. Commentators most frequently refer to the practice as "misassignment" of teachers or "out-of-field" teaching. Throughout this document, these terms are used interchangeably. It is interesting that the terms "out-of-area," "out-of-field," and, "misassignment" all have a somewhat negative connotation, conveying a sense that something about the practice is amiss or out-of-place. This, I believe, is evidence of the prevalence of the "teacher-as-expert" philosophy which underpins the modern education system.

As a consequence of personal experience, I became intimately familiar with the realities of teaching subjects out of one's area of specialty or teacher misassignment. While my out-of-field teaching situation may have been somewhat extreme, it was certainly not unique. Many teachers – especially those in small and rural schools – are called upon to teach curricula which are not closely related to their educational expertise and training. Over time, my own cognizance of how profoundly my professional and personal life as a teacher had been influenced by timetabling assignments inconsistent with my academic background became more pronounced.

Unquestionably, teaching subject areas outside of one's comfort zone of specialization confronts the teacher with specific frustrations, challenges, and rewards. For me, each new subject assignment put my adaptability,

confidence, self-esteem, credibility, and emotions to the test. Are other teachers being placed in similar circumstances, I wondered; and, if so, how are they coping? How closely do my experiences, reactions, attitudes, and feelings reflect those of my colleagues? Since the work-a-day world of teaching affords little time for serious confabulation amongst peers, my questions went both unarticulated and unanswered. Perhaps I was the only member on staff for whom this was a concern and my apprehensions were symptomatic of some inherent failing within me. Yet the discernible intensification in staff anxiety levels evident as each year's academic timetable neared finalization, indicated to me that this was not the case. Teaching assignment, particularly assignment to teach in unfamiliar subject areas, was a genuine concern for most members of the faculty.

From personal experience I am convinced that teachers' anxieties about out-of-field teaching assignments are understandable. Teaching any new course, even in a thoroughly familiar subject area, requires a great deal of non-classroom time. Unit plans, lesson plans, activities, quizzes, tests, and evaluation schemes must be prepared. This preparation becomes more problematic and time-consuming when the teacher is not acquainted with the curriculum and not well-versed in the field of study. Finding suitable instructional materials may be difficult and teachers may find themselves dependent upon the generosity of other staff members more experienced with and knowledgeable in those subject areas. These problems are compounded and workloads become even more onerous when teachers are required to teach concurrently in several out-of-field areas.

Adding to the burden of preparation and the stress of presentation is the realization that administrative evaluators are interested in present performance. The academic background and experience of the teacher under evaluation may not be taken into account. Misassigned teachers, wrestling to cope in non-specialty areas, are expected to perform expertly in those areas. They will be compared in the eyes of students, parents, and administrators to the specialists on staff who teach exclusively in their areas of specialization. Loss of professional credibility is a persistent threat to the out-of-field teacher.

The teacher cast willingly or unwillingly in the role of staff generalist is constantly called upon to be flexible and adaptable. Reflecting upon my career, I can envisage a varied sequence of classroom vignettes which illustrates this point. Several years ago, I taught a large group of rough and tumble non-academic high school English students who prided themselves on never having read a book in their lives. Before the end of the semester, I saw this same group visibly moved while reading about the experiences of a young cancer patient in Hunter in the Dark. I recall attempting to demonstrate the technicalities of baking a giant chocolate chip cookie before a rowdy group of Grade 7 students, without the 'luxury' of kitchen facilities. (The home economics lab was double-booked that semester.) I recall tactfully persuading a small group of 'modified' Grade 9 Guidance students who had selected a stringent academic agenda of courses for Grade 10 to redirect their aspirations to more appropriate, and attainable, goals. I recall reluctantly instructing a high school typing class despite the fact I had never set foot in a typing class in my life. I recall discussing the intricacies of human sexuality with a class of Grade 8's who expressed their appreciation by producing indelicate sound effects during class. I recall playing the part of an unconscious accident victim requiring resuscitation from a Red Cross volunteer in the course of a Reading 10 unit on first aid. And, I recall rooming-in with a delightful Quebequois family during one of my many efforts to improve my oral French fluency for the benefit of my students. The role of generalist can be exhilarating, unpredictable, challenging, diverse, and at times, extremely frustrating, exhausting, and demoralizing.

While there is an undeniable level of self-satisfaction achieved by successfully teaching courses outside of one's area of specialty, I have found that this sense of accomplishment also comes with a price. The satisfaction is frequently that of having survived rather than having excelled at an assignment. For me, teaching out-of-field content material led, at times, to feelings of vulnerability and lack of self-assurance in the classroom. No one, even a teacher, can be good at everything; yet, teachers placed in the generalist role may feel that they are expected to be just that. The teacher whose assignment is 'spread all over the map' is constantly striving to simply keep abreast of day-to-day demands -- never mind the improvements and polish attained by those fortunate enough to be given a 'niche' within the

system. As generalists are frequently moved annually from course assignment to course assignment, depending upon the vagaries of that year's timetable, they may feel that the situation is indeed 'no-win'. Repeatedly placed at the starting gate each September and unable to build upon individual strengths and to improve previous work, generalists may come to sense that they must always struggle just to survive, knowing that they can not achieve the competency, self-confidence, and prestige afforded the specialists on staff.

Part of the generalists' problem is practical -- it is hard to teach unfamiliar material; but, part of the problem is social and psychological. For example, it is difficult for generalist teachers to define a specific identity for themselves within the secondary school's bureaucratic and departmental framework. Teaching outside of their individual areas of training and frequently within several curricular domains, generalists on staff may be confused about which departmental horse they should hitch to their wagon. Which department meeting should they attend? From which departmental budget should they requisition supplies? After other staff have been neatly categorized and placed for parent-teacher interviews, where does the generalist fit in? There is, of course, little doubt the generalist will be persistently overlooked and forgotten when administrators select department heads and subject coordinators. After all, unlike subject specialists who are teaching consistently within one subject area, generalists lack obvious subject area affiliation. Their role within the school is amorphous and indistinct and will, in all probability, change with next year's timetable.

Inability to establish a strong profile and identity within the internal structure of the school obfuscates the significance of generalist teachers; as a result, they may feel that they have become invisible, voiceless and undervalued entities within the school. They accrue less recognition and less status than subject specialists who are acknowledged for high-profile activities such as teaching departmental examination courses and functioning as department heads. The generalists' initial flexibility, adaptability, and perhaps more global experiential and educational background -- attributes which in all likelihood led to designation to the generalist role -- may instead have become handicaps forestalling career advancement. Specialist 'niches' become closed, filled by individuals with narrower interests and abilities;

individuals who are then able to hone talents in their areas of expertise, excelling in ways that generalists cannot. The school is merely one constituent institution in a society which tends to celebrate the achievement of the 'expert' while affording much less attention to the practitioner whose skills may be broader in scope but less clearly defined.

Out-of-field teaching may be fraught with difficulties and frustrations, but it can also offer challenges and rewards. Being required to teach unfamiliar subject content from time to time places the teacher once again in the position of learner and may infuse the teacher with greater empathy for students. In my experience, I found that teaching from a less assured stance helped me to step out of the 'master' role in the classroom. As a fellow-learner with my students, I could assume a more comfortable role as facilitator in the learning process. There are those who argue that this is a more appropriate model for the teacher than that of teacher-as-expert.

I personally discovered that my most effective coping strategy in all cases was honesty. I tried always to inform students when I was teaching in unfamiliar territory and was willing to admit when I could not answer a question with confidence. In my opinion, students are, for the most part, extremely receptive to this approach and it diminishes significantly the teacher's feelings of stress and vulnerability. This is, I would argue, an acceptable situation when it occurs on an occasional basis. However, when a teacher is consistently placed in this context, it is inevitable that the teacher's credibility will be called into question by students, parents, administrators, and, unfortunately in many cases, the teacher himself or herself. As a generalist, I always felt I had to apologize for not being a specialist because the prevailing attitude maintained that this is what a "good" teacher ought to be.

Misassignment can provide an element of intellectual stimulation leading to new avenues of interest and discovery. In my case, the requirement to teach French and my own nagging sense of inadequacy in that assignment, motivated me to undertake serious upgrading in the field -- upgrading which included both university study and a period of cultural and linguistic immersion. I doubt I would ever have aspired to undertake those challenges if I had been more comfortable in my assigned teaching role. Teaching

assignments inconsistent with my specific pedagogical training have taken my career on a completely new and unexpected tack, one which has opened new opportunities. It is also not inconsequential, I would suggest, that these changes also resulted in a shift in my own teaching role. I am now more consistently identified as a subject area specialist than as a generalist. I would again caution that such advantages gained in the course of out-of-field assignment are positive only when limited. Constant upgrading is exhausting and demanding. In my experience, I felt that the present system dictates that the generalist must aspire to an unrealistic expectation of being a master of all fields, emulating the specialist rather than developing the unique strengths of a true generalist.

My own teaching history is a somewhat extreme example of out-of-field assignment. In five years of teaching, I was assigned to teach over twenty different courses, many of them in subject areas totally unrelated to my field of training or background. A number of my colleagues were also required to teach at least some out-of-field courses. At the same time, a significant proportion of staff was not required to teach in out-of-field assignments. These individuals tended to be thought of as true specialists, teaching consistently within their designated specialty areas. The subject specialist/out-of-field distinction on staff was the direct outcome of administrative decision-making. In my situation, I felt I had virtually no input into or control over timetabling decisions which determined the direction of my career. To what extent my colleagues believed they shared in this process, I did not know.

I have outlined above some of my personal experiences and my perceptions and interpretations of those experiences. I was, however, uncertain about the degree to which other teachers in similar circumstances might relate to my story. What commonalities in experience and perception might exist amongst teachers who have been required to instruct out-of-field? I wanted to know what are the personal and professional implications of misassignment for teachers. Does teaching in one's specialty area really make a difference? Does the system really have an inherent bias against misassigned teachers? This study had its genesis in my own story; it evolved from my perception of the realities of teaching out-of-field. The study was devised and designed with the

intention of assessing the validity of that perception by aligning my story with the stories of colleagues in similar and, at times, contrasting situations. My purpose was to alleviate my perplexity while allowing the voice of teachers to be articulated and heard. From the outset of the study, it was my firm conviction that I, along with my professional peers, had things of importance to express; things which might have significant implications for teachers, students and administrators.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Teaching is a profession which places demands not only upon the intellectual but also the affective facets of its practitioners. Both within and outside of the classroom, the expectations of the profession put more than the teacher's knowledge to the test. On a daily basis, teachers confront situations and take part in interactions which try their confidence, self-esteem, self-control, as well as their status and credibility as professionals. In my personal experience as a teacher, I discovered that a crucial factor impacting me on each of these planes was that of teaching assignment or, more specifically, misassignment. The fact that I was consistently assigned to teach subject areas outside of my areas of training had repercussions on every aspect of my professional experience. It was possible, however, that these were nothing more than my unique views and interpretations, products of my singular personality quirks and experiences. On the other hand, if the realities of misassignment as I experienced them were shared by others in the profession, then, I believed, they warranted consideration.

The purpose of this study was to provide a format in which teachers would be allowed to share and articulate their experiences and feelings relating to the implications of timetabling decisions and teaching assignment. Central to the study was the question: What are the personal and professional implications for teachers of being placed in teaching assignments inconsistent with their defined areas of expertise and training? The study was not designed to be a quantitative assessment of the issue of misassignment, but rather an investigation into teachers' perceptions of how inconsistent assignment affects them in their day-to-day lives.

Research reveals that out-of-field assignment is an inscrutable reality for many teachers, yet no one has specifically addressed the issue from the teacher's perspective. This study was intended to allow teachers to give utterance to their perceptions and experiences, redressing the prevailing assumption that misassignment is an acceptable administrative strategy without consequence for teachers or students. Officially, misassignment has been viewed as a nonissue and, perhaps, teachers' silence has been misconstrued as concurrence. This study purposed to end that silence. It was anticipated that the insights provided by this study could be of benefit not only to teachers, but to administrators and students as well.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Within the context of a relatively small rural secondary school, a significant proportion of teachers is required to instruct in areas other than those in which they have specific training. Other teachers are assigned to teach consistently within their subject speciality areas. The purpose of this study was to investigate, from the teachers' frame of reference, the perceived consequences experienced by teachers when they are assigned to teach in out-of-field subject areas. Responses from both teachers experienced with misassignment and those considered to be subject area specialists were considered in the study.

The research was guided by the following questions:

1. As a teacher, do you perceive of yourself as a generalist or subject area specialist?
2. In what ways do you believe teaching subjects outside of your specialty area(s) has affected (could affect) your workload?
3. In what ways do you believe that teaching outside of your area of specialization has affected (could affect) your confidence, self-esteem, feelings of control and/or status within the school?
4. In what ways do you believe teaching subject outside of your area of specialization has affected (could affect) your students?
5. What strategies have you used (could you use) to assist you in teaching curricula inconsistent with your training and expertise?

RESEARCH DESIGN

In order to achieve the stated objectives of the study, it was necessary to select a methodology which would enable teachers to express themselves freely within a context which was both flexible and nonthreatening. Because the purpose of the study was to facilitate an open discussion of the issues, it was important that the approach not be overly structured or intimidating to respondents. To achieve these objectives, I decided to employ a qualitative case study which would afford an in-depth investigation of a limited number of subjects. In order to keep the scope of the study within manageable bounds, the case study was restricted to one small rural secondary school with a teaching staff of approximately 35 and a student population of about 600.

Initial data collection was accomplished by means of a questionnaire which was distributed to all members of the teaching staff in the school. In designing the questionnaire, I had a fairly clear idea of the type of data I wished to collect primarily because of my own extensive experience in out-of-field teaching. A pilot questionnaire was tested using several collegial volunteers who also assisted in editing and refining the questions to be included in the final instrument. Once the final questionnaire was completed, it was distributed to potential subjects. Instructions allowed respondents to complete the questionnaire in full, in part, or to abstain from the study. A covering letter explaining the purpose of the study and ethical criteria governing the process was distributed with the questionnaire as was a blank envelope in which the completed questionnaire could be placed before return. This was to assure anonymity and confidentiality for subjects.

The second major step in the data collection process was a series of personal interviews which were conducted as a follow-up to the questionnaire. The interviews were specifically guided by the respondent's earlier questionnaire responses; however, the data acquired was much greater in detail and broader in scope. Interviews took place in a one-on-one setting, assuring confidentiality for interviewees. Only those subjects who had previously indicated on the questionnaire their willingness to be interviewed were approached to become interview subjects. The structure of the actual interview was quite informal and tended to take the form of a dialogue between peers. As a consequence of my own background, I became an active

participant in the discourse on many occasions and found this discourse was quite effective in helping to direct the discussion in directions most appropriate to fulfill the study objectives.

Analysis of collected data took place on two levels. The first of these was an analysis of data relating to the five main research questions. A separate file was created for each question. Applicable data was then rewritten or transcribed onto separate cards and placed in the appropriate file. From this initial classification process, I was able to complete a global analysis of the data. The second level of data analysis was more reflective in nature. After considerable review and cogitation, I identified the major themes which emerged from the data. Data was once again copied or transcribed onto cards and filed according to thematic categories. It was then necessary to synthesize the data thematically, an exercise requiring subjective reevaluation and interpretation, culminating in a new, more holistic understanding of the data collected during the research process.

As pointed out previously, the origins of this study were rooted in my personal experiences with teaching out-of-field. Not unexpectedly, therefore, I came to the study with some clearly formulated preconceptions about what I might discover. Substantively, there were very few surprises. I was astounded, however, by the intensity with which subjects frequently expressed themselves. I became very aware that the issue of misassignment is anything but a nonissue for teachers. In fact, the factor which impressed me most during the data collection process was just how important an issue this really is for teachers and how profoundly they believe both they and their students are affected by the practice.

ASSUMPTIONS

In conducting this study, I was made cognizant of the following assumptions:

1. Teachers will respond honestly to questionnaires and inquiries.
2. Teachers will be able to relate their experiences, opinions and perceptions to a researcher.
3. Misassignment has discernible impacts upon teachers' perceptions of their professional life.

4. Teachers' perceptions regarding their roles, responsibilities, status and level of control over their professional lives may effect their professional performance and job satisfaction.

LIMITATIONS

The study was confined to one small rural secondary school which may or may not be representative of a larger population. Written data was collected from all willing respondents by means of questionnaire; interviews were limited in number to eight. Not all willing respondents were invited to participate in an interview, thus the researcher's selection of interviewees somewhat limited the amount of available data which was accrued. The study was limited to addressing the teacher's perspective on the issue of misassignment. Neither students nor administrators *per se* were active participants in the study.

DELIMITATIONS

Data was collected only from individuals who were willing to take part in the study. There is no way of determining what data might have been collected from potential subjects who chose not to respond to the questionnaire or take part in an interview. The opinions expressed by subjects in the study school may or may not reflect those of teachers in other settings. Extrapolation of study results to other settings could not be substantiated without further research. Because the researcher is herself a professional teacher with considerable experience in out-of-field teaching, the interpretation of data may have been influenced in some way. A researcher presenting a different professional background may have approached the study in a different manner or may have interpreted data from an alternate perspective.

DEFINITION OF TERMINOLOGY

Misassignment: placing a teacher in a teaching assignment which is inconsistent with that teacher's academic training or background.

Out-of-Field/Out-of-Area: a subject area which is inconsistent with a teacher's academic training and background.

Subject Area Specialist: a teacher who is consistently assigned solely to subject areas for which he or she has academic training or background.

Generalist: a teacher who is assigned to teach a diversity of subject areas, one or more of which are inconsistent with his or her academic training or background.

Timetable: the master schedule of all teaching assignments within a school for one semester or one academic year.

Teaching Assignment: the specific instructional course load assigned to a teacher for one semester or one academic year.

Academic Courses: courses which usually lead to an advanced high school diploma and which are necessary for university entrance.

30-Level Courses: courses at the grade 12 or graduate level which are evaluated, in part, by completion of provincial departmental examinations.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Prior to commencement of the study, the purpose of the research and the nature of participant involvement was discussed with the school's administration. The administration was welcomed to put forward any concerns they might have as the research progressed. They were also invited to peruse drafts of the document in progress, however no editorial privileges of any kind were extended to the administration. The administration did not request to review working drafts, but did request a copy of the final document for placement in the school's professional library.

Teacher participants were fully informed that involvement in the study was voluntary and could be terminated at any time during completion of the project. Subjects were assured that neither the school nor any individual participant would be identified in the working drafts or the final document. To achieve anonymity for subjects, I explained to potential subjects that comments and conclusions would be generalized, verbatim responses which might prove embarrassing to a subject would be paraphrased, and all specifics which might render a subject identifiable from the text would be deleted.

Participants were free to scrutinize, clarify, and/or rephrase any written or verbal responses they may have given during the data collection process. Prior to all interviews, subjects were informed that the conversation would be taped. Verbal consent for recording was obtained from each interviewee. All written and interview data were treated as totally confidential. No one, other than myself, had access to the data at any time.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The placement of teachers into teaching assignments inconsistent with their post secondary education and/or areas of personal expertise is a very common practice in secondary schools in the province of Alberta. In smaller secondary schools, such as those located in rural areas, the practice is even more prevalent. This situation is necessitated by the provincial mandate that all secondary schools offer a complex array of curricula within the constraints of increasingly limited resources. In Alberta, the trend has been toward a proliferation and fragmentation of required subject offerings without a concomitant increase in government funding to sustain these new programs. Thus, smaller schools are forced to stretch existing resources -- and staff -- to fill the need.

Teachers in particular are asked to bear the brunt of ever-increasing demands for performance and productivity in an environment of diminishing resources and heightened expectations. It can be argued that teachers are the most crucial cog in the bureaucratic machinery of education. They alone have day-to-day interaction with students. What teachers experience, how they react, how they feel, and how they cope are important questions not only for teachers, but also for the many students whose lives are directly impacted by teachers. If the main concern of the education system is the welfare of students, we must also be concerned about the welfare of the teachers who play such an influential role in the lives of those students.

This study was intended to investigate the issue of teacher misassignment from the perspective of the classroom teacher. If indeed the practice is as widespread as the research which I have reviewed indicates, it is important that educators understand the implications its use holds for teachers. We can no longer assume that there is no correlation between placing teachers in

assignments for which they are trained and other variables in the system such as teacher satisfaction, productivity, and the success of students. Misassignment is a fact of life in the education system, yet we have not seriously looked at the practice from the point of view of teachers. This study attempts to redress that omission by providing insight into teachers' perceptions regarding the repercussions of out-of-field assignment. The study should be of special interest to stakeholders in small and rural school jurisdictions throughout the province of Alberta.

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

Chapter One provides an introduction to the study specifically delineating how my personal history as a teacher and experience with out-of-field teaching motivated the case study. This chapter outlines the purpose and significance of the study, the methodology employed, as well as the ethical considerations which guided the research process. Other elements affecting the study such as limitations, delimitations, and assumptions are also briefly discussed. A succinct list of terminology, including definitions, is also included.

Chapter Two is composed of a review of available literature dealing with the issue of teacher misassignment. The review traces concerns regarding the practice back as far as the early 1960's and follows those concerns into the late 1980's. Included in the chapter is a discussion of how the literature depicts possible impacts of misassignment upon students and the teaching profession. Also broached are such topics as the industrial paradigm of education in the modern secondary school and the debate about whether the role of educational administration should be that of business management or academic leadership.

A detailed description of the research design and procedures employed during completion of the study are found in Chapter Three. Such variables as choosing an appropriate setting, selecting participants, designing an effective research instrument, and conducting personal interviews are discussed. Processes and approaches used to analyze research data are described as are ethical guidelines which were followed during the research process.

Chapter Four begins a very thorough analysis of the data collected. This initial analysis entails a global view of the data, presented from a topical perspective. The analysis is systematized according to the major research questions underpinning the study. In accordance with my original objective of allowing teachers to articulate their experiences and opinions, a good deal of verbatim data is included in this initial analysis.

Chapter Five continues the analysis of data; however, the approach in this chapter is much different from that in Chapter Four. Various recurrent themes emerging from the data are identified. The following discussion then synthesizes the data according to a thematic schema. Personal interpretation plays a significant role in this chapter as does verbatim data acquired from study participants.

Chapter Six concludes the study document. In this chapter I present my personal reflections on the study and on the process of research. Recommendations based upon study findings are presented as are suggestions for further research which could evolve from this study.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

INTRODUCTION

In undertaking the study, I was motivated by a desire to explore teachers' perceptions and experiences relating to out-of-field teaching assignment. I assumed that the prevalence of the practice would assure that a substantial body of literature and research documentation would be readily available to facilitate my research. This was not the case. In reality, I discovered a notable paucity of relevant literature. I was surprised by the fact that, while my personal research revealed considerable concern on the part of teachers regarding the frequency and significant repercussions of teacher misassignment, there appeared to be little actual research or documented discussion exploring the issue. It was also noted that the largest body of extant literature was from the United States, although some documents of British and Canadian origin were also reviewed.

The preponderance of available literature reviewed for purposes of this study attempts to ascertain that misassignment of teachers is a widespread practice, the existence of which remains largely unacknowledged by the educational establishment. Much of the literature reflects a belief that requesting teachers to teach in subject areas for which they are pedagogically unprepared is an undesirable practice which is detrimental to students, teachers, the teaching profession, and the educational system as a whole. However, few data are offered to substantiate these conclusions, indicating that little research has been conducted in the area.

The lack of research data confirming these suppositions is perhaps explained by a prevailing assumption, evident in much of the literature, that misassignment of teachers is a somewhat covert practice, facilitating bureaucratic expediency at the expense of academic interests. Often, the accuracy of relevant statistics is obscured by the absence of clearly defined parameters by which to assess the true extent of the practice. In one instance, out-of-field teaching assignment is referred to as "education's dirty little

secret" (Hechinger, 1985). The connotation of such a description could, in itself, explain much about the dearth of available research data. It is quite possible that misassignment of teachers has been viewed as a politically inexpedient topic to broach.

It follows that research into the implications of out-of-field teaching assignment for students, teachers, and other stakeholders in the educational system is minimal. These issues tend to be referred to in only a cursory and peripheral manner in the literature. This is, of course, to be expected. If educators are reluctant to admit a particular situation exists within the education system, it is unlikely they will concern themselves with assessing the consequences of that situation. Educational authorities are under public and political pressure to present a positive public image of the education system. The fact that teachers are routinely placed in assignments for which they are untrained and perhaps unqualified may not enhance the public's estimation of the education system, thus it goes unreported and unrecognized. The system's reticence to concede that teacher misassignment is prevalent may be a prime example of what Watts (1986) has called "the policy of nondisclosure." In short, this policy maintains that: "we educators [can] best secure that all important public support for the schools by presenting only positive and happy information. Stated more bluntly, we must never report negative or critical information, since such news would only discourage and dissipate [public] support" (p. 723).

There are those, such as Gregory and Smith (1987), who refute the prevailing notion of "teacher-as-expert" upon which much criticism of teacher misassignment is based. These authors look at the often maligned role of the generalist teacher and discuss the rich attributes the generalist can bring to the educational experience of students. In doing so, Gregory and Smith call for a return to smaller, more community-oriented schools, countering the present mind-set that large "industrial model" schools are superior. The defence of the generalist teacher outlined by Gregory and Smith is discussed in this chapter.

Also addressed succinctly in the chapter is the issue of how administrative style and decision-making approaches affect teachers' day-to-day lives. The

topics of administrative attitude and rapport with staff were significant concerns raised by subjects involved in my data collection.

In this chapter, I will summarize literature which deals with issues relating to out-of-field teaching assignment. There is very little in this review of literature that relates directly to the topic of this study, since the teacher's perceptions and perspectives are rarely taken into account in these documents. Nevertheless, the literature does provide an informative background to the study while establishing the fact that there is much more research which can be undertaken in this area.

EARLY AWARENESS OF OUT-OF-FIELD TEACHING ASSIGNMENT

Background

Undeniably, the practice of assigning teachers to out-of-field content areas is nothing new. It has been with us since the days of the one-room school house when the lone teacher was responsible for instruction of all subject areas and all grade levels. In many cases, the teacher had only a modicum of normal school preparation before undertaking his or her eclectic duties.

However, times have changed. The educational paradigm has become infinitely more complex and less homogeneous in nature. Concomitantly, the teacher's role has become more and more compartmentalized into specialist slots. For example, a teacher is an elementary or a secondary teacher specialist. At the secondary level in particular, the role is further fractionalized into specific subject area specializations. A typical secondary school faculty consists of English teachers, mathematics teachers, biology, chemistry and physics teachers, physical education teachers, and so on. In this milieu, the teacher is identified by his or her departmental affiliation. Furthermore, the teacher's post-secondary training mandates classification according to subject area groupings. Education students aspiring to teach at the secondary level typically specialize in one or two specific content areas. In some jurisdictions, the teacher is certified to teach only in specific subject areas.

This is the traditional "ideal;" specialized teachers instructing in their specific areas of training, preparing students to function in a specialists' world. However, reality is and always has been quite different. Requirements of the real school may render it impossible for administrators to neatly slot all staff members into their preferred areas of instruction. Many teachers find themselves assigned to teach in subject areas for which they are untrained and/or unqualified: "even at the most senior levels it is normal for teachers to teach several quite disparate subjects" (Lockhart, 1991). Traditionally, this has been viewed as an administrative necessity and privilege. The question which then emerges is whether or not the misassignment of teachers is a practice which is acceptable, justifiable and professionally ethical.

The 1960's and 1970's

In the early 1960's, Conant (1963) questioned the acceptability of loopholes in the teacher certification system in the United States which basically allow administrators the freedom to assign classroom teachers to instruct in subject areas with few, if any, restrictions. For instance, he noted that despite certification regulations for teachers in New York state, it was still possible within any school in that state: "to have all the courses in a particular subject taught by persons untrained in that subject" (p. 52). Conant considered the misassignment of teachers to be an objectionable evasion of the intent of certification. In his view, policies which allow the practice of out-of-field teaching assignment to continue do not "serve the purposes of those concerned with quality teaching" (p. 54). He further recommended that this "misuse of teachers" be eradicated by legislation:

The state education authorities should give top priority to the development of regulations insuring that a teacher will be assigned only to those teaching duties for which he is specifically prepared, and should enforce these regulations rigorously. (p. 67)

In the fall of 1963, the National Commission on Teacher Education and Professional Standards (NCTEPS) appointed a Special Committee on the Assignment of Teachers. The Committee surveyed a large sample of U.S. educators, publishing its findings in a 1965 report. In this report, educators concurred that "misassignment of teachers" was prevalent in the United States citing it as a major factor "limiting the quality of education" (NCTEPS, 1965).

The Special Committee recommended that "proper" teacher assignment be enhanced by "the development of and adherence to sound personnel policies and procedures" (Rousseau, 1970, p.10). It suggested that teachers and administrators be more cognizant of their responsibilities in relation to the assignment process and that these groups take a more active role in convincing "all concerned of the damaging effects of misassignment" (p.10). In completing its report, the NCTEPS formulated the following rather comprehensive definition of "proper assignment" and "misassignment":

A proper assignment is one in which the teacher's education in subject-matter and methodology, his experience, and his physical and psychological condition are appropriate for maximum effectiveness in his teaching situation. Misassignment constitutes any violation of the conditions of proper assignment.
(Rousseau, 1970, p. 10)

The survey concluded that of the types of misassignment reported:

subject matter competence appropriate to the grade level and/or subject taught accounted for fifty-nine percent of the cases, and teaching methods appropriate to the grade level and/or subject taught accounted for an additional twenty-five percent of the cases. These two types of misassignment accounted for a total of eighty-four percent of all the types. (Rousseau, 1970, p.11)

The report further indicated that while misassignment of teachers takes place in every type of geographical and educational setting (Ford & Allen, 1966), it does occur more frequently in rural schools than in urban schools. This is caused by rural districts' attempts to offer too broad educational programs while lacking funds and resources to provide qualified staff for all subject offerings. As a result, "a person prepared to teach social studies may find himself teaching not only social studies but also subjects about which he knows very little" (Ford & Allen, 1966, p. 41). Interestingly, the report also pointed out that the subjects most frequently taught by unqualified teachers are the core subjects such as mathematics, sciences, English, and social studies (Davies, 1966). A similar finding was made by Trauttmansdorff (1968) in regard to the British educational system.

Religious instruction apart, mathematics and English stand out as the subjects which are most widely taught in secondary schools by teachers who have not themselves studied them as a main subject either in degree courses or at teacher training colleges. (p.1085)

In the mid-1960's, Scamman and Manatt (1967) investigated the efficiency of teaching assignments in Iowa secondary schools. Their results supported several findings of the NCTEPS study. They concluded that efficiency of assignment increased as the size of the school district increased. "Assignment practices of smaller schools resulted in less efficient use of the preparation of teachers" (p.471). They also found that academic subjects tended to be taught by less qualified teachers than were specialized subjects such as music, home economics, and agriculture.

Scamman and Manatt (1967) articulate an assumption which is common in much of the literature dealing with misassignment of teachers; that is, when teachers are misassigned, the quality of instruction is adversely affected. They state, for example: "It would appear likely that smaller schools were not providing the type and quality of instruction found in larger schools" (p.471). A similar assumption is offered by Ford and Allen (1966): "the misassignment of teachers limits the quality of American education and adversely affects the lives of thousands of teachers and countless numbers of children" (p.42). It is typical of the literature that an assumption is made regarding the negative impacts of teacher misassignment. It is consistently seen as a problem which must be fixed, a weakness within the system which erodes the quality of teaching students receive.

While the assumption is made that out-of-field teaching assignment does impact negatively upon both teachers and students, there is little hard data provided to substantiate these assumptions. Rousseau (1970), in his study of teacher misassignment in Alberta, cites the results of several studies discussed by Ackerman (1954) which tend to support this thesis. Amongst those studies which suggest a positive relationship between teacher qualification and pupil performance in class are studies by Betts (Ackerman, 1954) and Roskler (Ackerman, 1954). On the other hand, a study by Davis indicated a negative relationship between these two variables (Ackerman, 1954). Davis's results did not include highly technical subjects such as chemistry. Rousseau offers an interesting hypothesis to explain Davis's unexpected finding:

A possible reason for the unexpected finding of superior performance by students of less qualified teachers is that the teacher who does not

have specialized training in the subject he teaches is learning as well as teaching. The similarity between his position and that of his pupils may engender a greater understanding of the difficulties involved in the assimilation of the material. On the other hand, the specialist may have set goals which are beyond the capacities of his pupils and may have thus succeeded in hindering their progress. (Rousseau, 1970, p.14)

I would suggest that Rousseau's interpretation of Davis's work could also be seen as a critique of the prevailing teacher-as-expert stance which forms the basis for much criticism of teacher misassignment. The perceived empathy which evolves between non-specialist teacher and student is a strong argument in favour of the generalist teacher.

Rousseau (1970) also states that his research indicates that teacher preference for a subject area is positively related to student achievement. Consequently, he suggests that teacher preference as well as preparation be taken into account when teaching assignments are determined. Rousseau bases this recommendation on the work of Lindstedt of the University of Alberta. Lindstedt (1960) measured the impact teacher qualification had upon student achievement in grade nine mathematics. Lindstedt concluded:

there was no significance between the number of mathematics courses taken in university and the level of achievement of the students. However, there was a significant relationship between teachers who gave mathematics as their preference and the achievement of the pupils. (p.83)

Freehill (1963) concluded that the quality of teaching is influenced by teacher attitude and teacher attitudes are, in part, determined by correct assignment (Fasano, 1971). Fasano cites McPherran's (1965) discussion regarding the relationship between teacher assignment and morale in which he states that "personnel perform most effectively and efficiently when their assignments fully utilize their personal assets and aid in fulfilling their aspirations and goals" (p.18). It is not surprising, therefore, that teacher preference as well as preparation seems to play an important role in teaching success. It would follow logically that misassignment, by placing the teacher in a situation in which personal assets are under-utilized and fulfillment of personal aspirations and goals is frustrated, could indeed have a detrimental impact upon the quality of instruction.

Getzels and Guba (Neagley & Evans, 1970) would explain the negative effect of misassignment upon teaching quality as a conflict between two classes of phenomena which exist within the social system: the nomothetic (comprised of roles and expectations that satisfy the goals of the institution) and the idiographic (comprised of the personalities and need-dispositions of the individual) (Neagley & Evans, 1970). They hypothesize that, when the individual's need-dispositions and personality are in conflict with the role expectation of the institution, "quality performance will not result" (Neagley & Evans, 1970, p. 32; cited by Fasano, 1971, p. 9). This theoretical construct would parallel the situation of the teacher placed in an out-of-field teaching assignment due to the overriding needs of the administration. Fasano (1971) cites further the assertion of Neagley and Evans that "...teachers can hardly be expected to do their best under these circumstances" (p. 10).

It is, perhaps, not coincidental that the early interest in misassignment of teachers evident in the literature of the 1960's and 1970's emerged concurrently with increasing levels of teacher qualification and emphasis upon professionalization of the teaching profession (Fasano, 1971). Fasano notes that based upon the conclusions of Robinson (1967), Byrne (1968), and Clarke (1968): "the marked improvement in qualifications of Alberta teachers could be taken as evidence of growing teacher professionalism" (Fasano, 1971, p.14). He states further that while increased qualifications denote increased professionalism, they are also indicative of increased specialization. Clarke (1968) went so far as to see higher levels of teacher preparation, professionalism, and specialization as heralding the end of the generalist teacher. "The omniscient, flexible, fit any slot teacher is a vanishing breed" (Clarke, 1968, p. 13). The National Education Association stated that misassignment, by nullifying teachers' improving qualifications and specialization, is a primary factor undermining the professional status of the teaching profession.

Our most earnest claims to professional status are undermined if anyone can be assigned to teach almost anything; if a history major who has six credits in chemistry can become a chemistry teacher overnight, or if a high school physical education teacher can take over a second grade classroom without any preparation in the teaching of reading....Our claims to professional status are undermined if we cannot offer the public reasonable guarantees

that their children's teachers are qualified for their assignments.
(NCTEPS, 1965, p.6)

Davies (1966) strongly reiterates this point of view:

Misassignment of personnel short changes the teaching profession, the public, and the children in the schools. Something should be done about the problem and done quickly. Our most earnest claims to professional status are undermined if anyone can be assigned to teach almost anything and if expediency, scheduling complexities, convenience, and seniority come before competence and quality.
(p. 12)

MISASSIGNMENT OF TEACHERS IN THE 1980'S AND 1990'S: HAVE THINGS REALLY CHANGED?

Education's "Dirty Little Secret"

The early literature addressing the issue of teacher misassignment condemns the practice as one which is destructive to quality education, to both student and teacher welfare, and to teachers' aspirations of attaining a higher professional status. There is, however, a sense of optimism apparent in much of the early literature. Despite the alleged evils of misassignment, there is a sense that disclosure of its existence should lead to a concerted effort by legislators, educational administrators, and teachers to eliminate or limit the assignment of teachers to subject areas and teaching levels for which they are unqualified (Davies, 1966). For example, the influential NCTEPS (1965) report offered suggestions for improving assignment policies and practices. The report included a "Model of Optimum Placement and Assignment Policy and Practice" as well as a comprehensive checklist of "Standards of Good Practice in Teacher Placement and Assignment" (Davies, 1966).

During the halcyon years of the 1960's, education was in a period of prosperity, growth, and experimentation. It seemed probable that with "a concerted, cooperative, thoughtful attack on the problem (i.e. misassignment of teachers) by all those who are concerned" (Davies, 1966), a solution could be found. However, the 1980's witnessed the emergence of a more conservative political atmosphere and an intensification of economic recession. These external influences manifested themselves in the introversion and rigidification of the education system. The period of apparent unlimited

growth and optimism of the 1960's quickly faded in the political and economic realities of the succeeding decades. It is not surprising, therefore, that in reviewing the literature of the 1980's and 1990's it becomes evident the 'problem' of misassignment appears to be as prevalent and serious as ever.

In the mid-1980's, a seminal and far-reaching survey conducted by Robinson (1985a) in the United States under the auspices of the American Federation of Teachers and the Council for Basic Education (a private association of parents, educators, and other citizens) once again focused attention on the issue. Robinson's final report, entitled: "Making Do in the Classroom: A Report on the Misassignment of Teachers," summarized results of a telephone survey of certification and accreditation officials in state education agencies in each of the 50 states. The survey was conducted between December 1984 and February 1985. The objective of the survey was to outline the parameters within which teacher misassignment can occur and the extent of teacher misassignment in the United States.

Robinson concludes that "Assignment of certified teachers to grade levels or subjects for which they are not certified is a well-established management technique in American schools; and, as far as anyone can tell, it happens often" (Robinson, 1985b, p.18). Robinson discovered that all states require school jurisdictions to report teacher assignments to state officials early in the school year. This theoretically allows teacher assignments to be verified at the state level in relation to teacher training and background. However, she also discovered that there are "almost no states in which this actually happens" (Robinson, 1985b, p. 20).

Robinson found that, while many states do have regulations on the books to prevent misassignment of teachers or to penalize schools which engage in the practice illegally, statistics are fuzzy due to liberal state policies and inability and/or reluctance to effectively monitor school district practices. In some states (eg. Arizona, Alaska, Hawaii, New Hampshire, Nebraska, and Utah) misassignment is legal. In states where it is illegal, authorities usually do not check teacher assignments against certification records. Ironically, although three-quarters of the states do have an explicit policy acknowledging that placing teachers in out-of-field assignments is pedagogically unsound, few

states have a reliable means of measuring the occurrence of the practice within their own jurisdictions. "Most states simply do not know how much out-of-field teaching goes on" (Robinson, 1985a, p.6). On average, on-site investigation of teacher assignment occurs about once every five years. Penalties are minimal. In most cases, schools with misassigned teachers receive a lower accreditation rating if assignments are not adjusted within one year.

Even when misassignments are noted and schools are required to correct them, penalties for noncompliance remain weak; in many states a school may continue in violation if it is "willing to take the demerits" on its accreditation. Many officials claim that state aid will be withheld where teachers are misassigned, but at the same time most admit that this has never happened. (p.6)

Only in the state of Rhode Island are assignments checked immediately and schools notified of apparent misassignments. School districts may be required to return state funds used for purposes of misassigned teachers' salaries until the misassignment is corrected (ERIC Digest 14, 1986).

Robinson (1985b) describes that, in general, state officials were defensive and some appeared resentful or offended when questioned about the lack of enforcement of regulations controlling out-of-field teaching assignments. Their responses were frequently "ambiguous." For example, some states insisted that they were certain that misassignment did not occur while admitting that no monitoring policy was in force. The scenario which took place in the state of North Carolina over a three-year period is not atypical of that witnessed in other states. The sequence of events there was described by a researcher as follows:

- (1) Outright denial of the existence of the problem;
- (2) Development by the Centre of a data base showing the problem;
- (3) Denial of the problem by ignoring the documentation;
- (4) Publication of the data by the state's news media, on a district-by-district basis;
- (5) Admission of the problem;
- (6) Action to address the problem in a minimal way, by watering down certification standards

Eventually, after considerable press attention and after the researchers presented their findings to the state board, North Carolina took some steps to remedy the problem. (p.21)

The actual extent of the situation in the United States is unmeasurable due to sloppy policy enforcement and record keeping. However, it was estimated by Albert Shankar, President of the American Federation of Teachers, that in 1985, 200,000 teachers in the United States were instructing in subject areas for which they were unprepared (Hechinger, 1985). Shanker admitted that statistics were unreliable due to the reluctance of school boards to "let the facts get out" and to the ease with which regulations may be circumvented.

Robinson's findings substantiate Shanker's statements:

in a large number of states, what looks like out-of-field assignment, feels like out-of-field assignment, and has the predictable consequences of out-of-field assignment for both the unfortunate students and the unhappy teacher, is legally not misassignment at all.

The biggest problem is that, in most cases, out-of-field assignment doesn't have to be reported to anyone. Thus, it does not even become a matter of record, and the states can correctly claim ignorance of the extent to which local school districts are using the out-of-field option extended to them. (Robinson, 1985b, p.20)

Shanker refers to misassignment of teachers as "education's dirty little secret," the dirtiest aspect of which is that in most jurisdictions it is totally legal. It is, he states, a "cynical practice" which allows states to implement "elaborate licensing and certification requirements to assure instructional competence, including in subject matter," while routinely empowering local school administrators "to bypass these requirements" (Robinson, 1985a, p.3). He notes that, despite a wave of education reform evident since the early 1960's when Conant first addressed the issue of misassignment, the issue has continued to go "unnoticed and unremarked...as if there were no logical or ethical connection between demanding that teachers meet high standards and assigning them to teach the subjects for which they have been academically prepared" (Robinson, 1985a, p.3).

Subjects Most Frequently Misassigned

Studies conducted as early as the 1960's revealed that the most common areas of teacher misassignment were the core areas of language arts, social studies, mathematics, and sciences (Davies, 1966; Trauttmansdorff, 1968; Scamman & Manatt, 1967). Recent studies verify that the school's curriculum core is still the area of most frequent misassignment (Rumberger, 1985; Robinson, 1985a;

Bobbitt & McMillen 1990; Souviney, 1985). It would appear that administrators are reluctant to misassign teachers to specialty areas such as art, music, vocational education, and home economics because, critics state, it is difficult to maintain an appearance of quality in areas requiring observable skills. Gehrke and Sheffield (Robinson, 1985a) explain it this way:

The skills to utilize the special materials of art and music can't be picked up the day before class begins. Not only would the teacher's lack of competence be obvious to students and their parents, but there would be risk of error, waste, and accident, making the problem one not only of pedagogy but also of economics and safety.

The principal, then, must look to the core academic courses, where the absence of expertise is less visible to outsiders. A good textbook and supplementary materials can sometimes mask a teacher's inadequacy, if the teacher is a fast reader and can stay the proverbial "one page ahead" of the students and somehow muddle through the year. (p.36)

In the instance of misassignment *among* core curriculum areas, Gehrke and Sheffield (Robinson, 1985a) state the problem is more puzzling. In the absence of other explanations, they attribute this practice to "anti-intellectual bias," which they define as "the assumption...that the core content areas [can] be taught by almost anyone" (p.36).

Within the Canadian context, statistics reveal that as recently as 1991, in Canadian schools, subject specialization is still more prevalent in peripheral subjects than in academic core subjects.

Oddly enough, specialization appears to be less well defined at the academic core than at the periphery. Library, vocational, home economics, physical education, art, and life-skill teachers are more likely to teach exclusively or predominantly within the area of their own specialized training than are literature, history, geography, and language teachers. Even science and mathematics teachers are often expected to teach subjects well removed from their own specialty in order to balance timetables. (Lockhart, 1991, p. 58)

Why Does Misassignment Occur?

It was noted in the discussion of early research into the issue of teacher misassignment outlined previously in this chapter that the incidence of teacher misassignment at that time was most frequent in small rural schools.

These schools simply lacked sufficient funds and qualified personnel to sustain a complete array of course offerings without assigning out-of-field instructors in some classrooms (Ford & Allen, 1966). However, small schools were not the only ones resorting to placing teachers in unfamiliar subject areas; the practice was also prevalent in large urban schools. The scenario today is not drastically different. Robinson notes that the internal variables which lead to teacher misassignment are still most acute in small rural schools. "These schools wish to offer a broad curriculum, yet they face the natural limitations of a small staff. To offer certain courses those limitations must be stretched or ignored altogether" (Robinson, 1985a, p.7). Large schools also engage in the practice, not only in areas where teacher shortages are evident but also in areas such as English and humanities where there is no shortage of qualified teachers.

While misassignment is a frequent response to teachers shortages, other circumstances may also precipitate its occurrence. Other explanations for its use include "overload," a situation in which there are too many sections of a specific course for one teacher, yet not sufficient sections to justify employment of a second, and "underload" which occurs when a specialist teacher does not have a full course load. Another cause, mentioned above, is the desire of school jurisdictions to offer an overly broad range of courses (ERIC Digest 14, 1986). In difficult financial times or in periods of shrinking enrollments, staff layoffs or reductions-in-force may create distortions in the timetable and precipitate misassignment. This is so because such staffing decisions are most frequently based upon seniority rather than the requirements of the timetable (Hechinger, 1985). Undoubtedly, these situations are frequently used by administrators as rationale and justification for out-of-field placement of teachers.

The fact that misassignment is used as an acceptable technique of personnel management in schools says a great deal about the perceived status and function of teachers within the education system as well as the priorities of those who control the system. Shanker calls misassignment of teachers "a betrayal of the meaning of education" (Hechinger, 1985).

The message it sends is that bureaucratic convenience takes precedence over academic standards, that the school's custodial role is more

important than its intellectual mission. (p.C8)

Robinson maintains that the respectability of misassignment tells us something about how we see teachers.

Underlying these circumstances lies a pernicious notion on the part of educators and much of the general public as well: that teachers are mere "facilitators" of learning; that they are secondary conduits of information already contained in textbooks. Once people have been trained as teachers "in general," this prejudice supposes, they have the ability to teach any subject at all. (Robinson, 1985a, p.7)

It is, perhaps, the acceptance of this premise -- the idea that a good teacher can teach anything -- which has allowed the practice of misassignment to become an administrative prerogative and an integral part of the educational bureaucracy. From an administrative perspective, out-of-field placement facilitates the operation of the institution as a whole, and it is this global perspective which concerns education administrators. The repercussions of the practice on other less influential stakeholders in the system such as teachers, students, and parents have rarely been investigated or considered.

Out-of-field assignment of teachers is accepted as a respectable administrative technique by school supervisors and generally acquiesced in by teachers. Few parents know it is happening, and for students it just is one more inscrutable feature of school life. Its contribution is that it oils the machinery of education, making it possible for schools to offer courses, cover classrooms, meet emergencies, and support activities that they would otherwise not be able to manage. (Robinson, 1985a, p.7)

The Question of Public Disclosure

Several authors imply that administrators fear they will lose public support if they "go public" with problems which occur within the school, thus they invoke what Watts (1986) calls "the doctrine of nondisclosure" (p.723). Watts states that there is an assumption on the part of educators that public support is best sustained by exclusively presenting a positive and happy profile of the school. Negative reports of internal problems might only dissipate public support. "We educators are just not supposed to air our little secrets" (Watts, 1986,p. 723). This may, in part, explain why misassignment has come to be identified as a dirty little secret. Watts believes that a more open disclosure of the problem would in no way diminish public support for the school system.

Do educators really expect to be criticized for stating that, in their professional opinion and under the current circumstances, they are not able to find a qualified teacher for every classroom in the district? (Watts, 1986, p.724)

Masland and Williams (1983) concur with this call for a more open discussion of management within the education system.

A school's plan for handling [staffing problems] should be made public. Information about problems that educators confront needs to be part of an expanded effort to communicate more effectively with the public, and ultimately to garner support from the public rather than criticism that is based on ignorance. (p. 8)

Masland and Williams (1983) further assert that when educators choose to ignore problems of credibility they succeed only in magnifying public antagonism. Ignoring the presence of misassigned teachers will not prevent the public from assessing what is actually taking place in the classroom:

Out-of-field teaching perpetuates contradictions that ought to be addressed immediately within the teaching profession before a confused and angry public independently figures out what is happening. (p. 7)

They see misassignment as a practice which weakens credibility both inside and outside of the teaching profession.

Misassignment and the Professionalization of Teachers

Central to the debate relating to misassignment of teachers is the question of how the professionalization of teachers is compromised when administrators exercise their prerogative to place teachers in out-of-field assignments. It was pointed out previously in this chapter that early commentators were concerned that the practice undermined teachers efforts to upgrade their professional status (NCTEPS, 1965; Davies, 1966). Recent commentary has changed little; misassignment is still viewed as a practice which subverts all other efforts to upgrade teacher education and certification (Robinson, 1985b). Watts (1986) goes so far as to identify misassignment as part of "the current trend toward 'dumbing down' the teaching profession" (p.723).

Roth (1986) states that "a profession is only as strong as its practitioners are competent" (p.725). He criticises the traditional policy of lowering standards in order to place a "warm body" in every classroom. While the practice of teacher

misassignment is viewed as an administrative necessity, "nothing to become upset about," by some, Roth believes that misassignment is a major policy issue -- one which affects the integrity of the teaching profession as a whole. Roth's assertion that misassignment is a practice which downgrades the competency and, concomitantly, the professionalism of teachers is echoed by others. Robinson (1985b) questions how teachers can ever achieve true professional status while out-of-field assignment is still practiced. She states:

In practice, the distinguishing features of a profession are that its practitioners have special training and have been warranted by responsible authorities to use that training in performing a service. It is hard to think of anything that could do more harm to that definition than out-of-field assignment. (p.23)

Spillane (1986) observes that "under current conditions, elementary and secondary-school teaching cannot be considered a profession" (p.1). He maintains that a profession must have a unique and specific knowledge base although he does not believe that "a foundation of esoteric knowledge exists for pedagogy as it does for...law and medicine" (p.1). He states that professionalism for teachers can be enhanced by concentrating their training upon specific academic content areas which are to be taught, not upon general "education" courses. Woolford (1982) documented a similar assertion in his work for the North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research: "a person cannot be a good teacher without first knowing the subject areas" (cited in Hawk, Coble & Swanson, 1985, p.13).

Robinson (1985a) also attacks the "pernicious notion" that teachers are nothing more than "facilitators of learning" who merely convey information contained in textbooks. There is a "prejudice" evident in this point of view which purports that "once people have been trained as teachers 'in general', they have the ability to teach any subject at all" (p.7). She counters this prejudice as follows:

The simple fact is, of course, that the most worthwhile teaching beyond rudimentary facts and mechanical skills requires a broad perspective and a critically engaged brand of thinking.... Teachers learning from a textbook even while instructing from it are trapped within the borders of the page. Teachers cannot be expected to fulfill their tasks simply by staying a chapter or two ahead of their students, nor can their students be expected to learn. (pp.7, 8)

Masland and Williams (1983) use analogy to point out how misassignment diminishes the teaching profession in the eyes of the public: "To understand how an informed public view out-of-field teaching, ask if you would willingly be the passenger in a 747 jet that was being piloted by someone whose only license was for flying Piper Cubs. If the plane crashed, would the pilot be blamed?; the airline that hired the pilot to fly jets be blamed?; or the public be held responsible for their ignorance about the difference in training required to do the job right?" (p. 7). Masland and Williams also question the stringent content area specialization required by faculties of education and certification boards when school administrators are at liberty to disregard the profession's interest in specialized training for its practitioners. "Lingering problems of quality instruction will be caused by efforts to bypass what educators have already assessed to be worthwhile and necessary components of a teacher's preparation for a specific teaching field" (p.8).

Much of the debate relating to teacher misassignment is founded in diverse interpretations of what the practice of teaching truly entails. For example, critics might justifiably challenge Masland and Williams (1983) on two levels. First of all, they over-dramatize the consequences of teacher misassignment by comparing the teacher's role in the classroom to that of an airline pilot. Teachers are not confronted by life-and-death decisions on a routine basis; therefore, the analogy is an exaggeration and inappropriate. The second criticism relates to Masland's and William's reduction of teaching to little more than the employment of proper skills and techniques in order to achieve factual presentation of subject content. It can be argued that teaching is a much more complex process than the prevailing teacher-as-expert school of thought indicates. Mastery of subject content is one element of successful teaching; many other unquantifiable components are necessary to complete the mix. These critics have a more global view of the teacher's function in the classroom. They would not denigrate the title "facilitator of learning" as a "pernicious notion", but rather espouse the concept as the essence of effective teaching.

IMPLICATIONS OF MISASSIGNMENT FOR TEACHERS

A "Victimless" Crime?

The available literature is almost unanimous in appraising misassignment as a negative phenomenon within the education system. Actual investigation into the true consequences out-of-field assignment holds for individual teachers is almost non-existent. Nevertheless, the literature reviewed does reveal a presumption that misassignment is intrinsically detrimental for teachers. Ironically, the literature also implies that the "powers that be" do not estimate that impacts of out-of-field assignment upon teachers are consequential. Robinson (1985b) summarizes this anomaly as follows:

After the children...the people most disserved by out-of-field assignment are teachers. Given this fact, it is puzzling that no poll of teacher opinion ever asks, " Are you teaching what you are prepared and qualified to teach? Are you teaching the subject that you devoted yourself to mastering, the subject that you know and love?" To be doing so would seem to be the most important "condition" of work." (p. 23)

Shanker (cited in Robinson, 1985a, p.3) points out the logical and ethical inconsistencies in expecting teachers to meet high standards of performance and productivity while disregarding the necessity of placing them in classroom assignments for which they are academically qualified.

Several authors (Rose, 1987, Robinson, 1985a) refer to teachers as "victims" of a system which places administrative expediency ahead of academic rationality. The cost of this expediency for teachers is simply not considered. Perhaps it is because the impacts of misassignment for teachers have never been clearly articulated or documented that they are not esteemed to be a significant factor in administrative decision-making. The distribution of power within the educational bureaucracy is such that while teachers may, in theory, refuse out-of-field assignment, they do so to their own peril.

Expediently filling gaps in a timetable may be a preoccupation of administrators, but it is one which often leaves many teachers dismally mismatched with courses they are then expected to teach. And teachers are often surprisingly unaware that they may refuse an assignment for which they are not qualified. There may be consequences to such a refusal, such as the possibility of being excess

to a school, but the fact remains that one can [refuse and assignment].
(Rose, 1987, p.16)

In reality, teachers are not empowered by the system to intervene in the decision-making process in a manner which might serve the best interests of their students or themselves. Influence is top-down. Any input from the bottom-up is accepted at the discretion of the administration. In this sense, teachers may feel that administrators are free to manipulate them as they see fit. Rose (1987) describes how many teachers approach the annual return to school with an "attendant trepidation" in respect to the year's teaching assignment. She notes that teachers, especially those in smaller schools, are frequently asked to cope with "bizarre" subject combinations which may "defy all belief and reason." Sadly, she continues,

these weird and wonderful combinations, rather than indicating particular abilities in creative programming, can probably be traced more often to a desire to fill the spaces in the timetable grid as quickly and efficiently as possible, with little or no thought given to the background, interests, or talents of those destined to fulfill these assignments. (p.14)

A Question of Confidence

It appears that many pundits, lacking concrete data on the topic, have used more subjective approaches in order to assess the implications of out-of-field assignment for teachers. Masland and Williams (1983) surmise that misassignment undermines teachers' confidence in their professional training which may well contribute to dissatisfaction on the job. If administrators indiscriminantly place qualified teachers in situations for which they are unqualified, those teachers lose a sense of control. Concomitantly, they may experience a pronounced diminution of self-confidence, self-esteem, and status. Michael Apple (1990) states: "There is no better formula for alienation and burnout than loss of control of one's labor" (p. 233). The suppositions of these authors are consistent with the results of my own research in which teachers repeatedly describe experiencing a lack of confidence, a decreased sense of control, and increased levels of stress and dissatisfaction with the job when required to teach out-of-field.

Teachers also fear that, when they are confronted with the difficulties inherent in teaching out-of-field, they will personally lose credibility as a

result of deficiencies which may become apparent in their classroom performance. As the Council for Basic Education states, "inadequacy on the part of such a teacher is probably ascribed to personal shortcomings or poor professional preparation; only the students may know that the teacher is improvising with unfamiliar material" (Council for Basic Education, 1986). In most instances, when administrators place teachers in unfamiliar assignments, they do not alter expectations. Not surprisingly, teachers are concerned that their professionalism will be compromised by bureaucratic inequities which are beyond their control. This is a fear I heard voiced frequently in the course of my own research.

In 1987, a survey of 250 non-specialist physics teachers was conducted in the United Kingdom (Millar, 1988). The intent of the survey was to ascertain anticipated and actual problems encountered by these teachers while teaching beyond their areas of specialization. Of all the literature I reviewed, this study is perhaps the most closely related to my own research. Particularly of interest were the anecdotal comments offered by these teachers in respect to their classroom experiences. Many clearly reflected comments and feelings I encountered during my own data collection. In particular, these teachers described a lack of confidence and increased difficulties in fulfilling classroom responsibilities as a result of their self-admitted lack of background knowledge in the content area to be taught. Some expressed a belief that their lack of knowledge was unfair to their students. I also heard this from teachers. Millar sums up his observations that teachers desire to be familiar and comfortable with their subject area as follows:

These matters -- of background familiarity with a subject, of having a fund of stories and anecdotes, of confidence in one's depth and breadth of knowledge, of the ability to recognise which pupils' questions and difficulties are genuinely difficult ... are the products of extensive experience, rather than short-course provision. Yet they appear to be close to the nub of teachers' own perceptions of where their expertise falls short. (p.46)

Hacker and Rowe (1985) conducted detailed classroom observations of science teachers. They concluded that the distinction between specialist and non-specialist teachers may be more evident in teaching style and approach than in conceptual understanding. They observed that there were

substantial changes in teaching and learning processes when the topics studied were outside the teacher's specialist discipline area... informational approaches were twice as likely to be encountered when the teacher was teaching outside his discipline area and this increase was at the expense of more effective problem-solving and enquiry approaches. (p. 173)

These conclusions parallel very closely comments I received in which out-of-field teachers discussed the necessity of greater structure and control when teaching non-specialty areas. Several subjects in my study discussed how they were able to do an "adequate" job of covering the content of non-specialty courses, but felt the students lost out because they lacked the richness of knowledge which comes from immersing oneself in a subject one truly loves. From this ilk of data, it is not difficult to hypothesize that, for the most part, teachers are more content and believe they are better teachers when assigned to their specialty areas.

IMPLICATIONS OF MISASSIGNMENT FOR STUDENTS

The Student as "Victim"

Just as the literature reviewed is consistent in castigating misassignment of teachers as detrimental to teachers, it also condemns the practice as one which is damaging to students. Typical of the criticism is that of Robinson (1985b) who states, "Out-of-field assignment is not a victimless crime. Its victims are students" (p.23). Robinson makes the assumption that students taught in sections of some subjects by non-specialists will receive instruction inferior to that received by students in sections taught by specialists. In a similar vein, Hechinger (1985) iterates fears that out-of-field assignment will have a cumulative effect upon some students' progress.

The problems caused by the misassignment of teachers is greater than the statistics suggest. The damage done by one unqualified teacher is multiplied by the number of children who are hurt by it day after day all year long. The void this leaves in a pupil's understanding of a key subject is often difficult to fill later on. There is no assurance that a child may not be exposed to a succession of teachers who do not know their subjects. (The New York Times, October 8, 1985, p.C8)

Despite the severity of such criticism, my research revealed a minimum of research data to justify such claims. Hawk, Coble, and Swanson (1985) report

results of their study which indicate that in-field certified mathematics teachers know more mathematics and use more effective teaching practices than do their out-of-field colleagues. At the same time, these researchers conclude that the students of in-field mathematics teachers achieve at a higher level than do students taught by non-specialists. This study was, however, a pilot study and the authors do point out the necessity of further research in mathematics and other subject areas to substantiate or counter these initial findings. Few other commentators offer descriptive data to prove that misassigned teachers are, in fact, a detriment to student progress. Most do, however, accept this assumption. This area appears to be one in which much further research is needed.

IN DEFENCE OF THE GENERALIST TEACHER

The Modern School - An Industrial Paradigm?

Gregory and Smith (1987) critique the modern secondary school which they claim is patterned after the industrial model of the 1920's. In emulating this model, these authors claim, educators have come to "idolize giantism," viewing the large school as inherently superior and desirable. The primary, sometimes the sole, goal of the large industrial-model school is the transmission of content. Its social infrastructure requires rigid control. To create workable size units within the large school and to reduce isolation and anomie amongst the faculty, strong, clearly defined academic departments have been instituted. As a result of this departmentalization of academic interests, the role of the specialist has become paramount. "Specialization and confining one's involvement with students within a set of well-defined boundaries are implicit in the arrangement" (Gregory & Smith, 1987, p. 67). This is the paradigm extolled by theorists such as Conant (1963).

Gregory and Smith (1987) criticize this model because it negates the school's sense of community. They believe smaller schools provide a less formal, more supportive environment for both teachers and students. In this milieu, education becomes a more holistic experience. It is in this ambience that the generalist teacher can excel. Unfortunately, the strengths of the small school have been lost due to the predominance of the industrial model. "Schools arrange themselves in a pecking order; small high schools have sought to

emulate large high schools" (p.61). Thus small schools have either consolidated or sought to imitate the organization and curriculum of large schools. Academic compartmentalization has been implemented even when numbers can not sustain a specialized staff. For teachers, specialization has come to be equated with professionalism. The specialist has become ascendant; the generalist has lost identity and status.

Strengths of the Generalist Teacher

Gregory and Smith (1987) concede that in the small school paradigm, specialists will be few and many teachers will be required to teach in areas in which their expertise may be quite thin. However, they suggest that having teachers instruct across subject boundaries adds something of value to the educational process. It demonstrates to students an admiration for knowledge and learning *per se* and opens the door for truly innovative curriculum development. Having stepped out of the role of "teacher-as-expert," these teachers can model a true joy of learning, a willingness to take risks, and an admission of ignorance when necessary. In describing the successful generalist teacher, Gregory and Smith state,

Teachers who succeed, even excel, under these informal conditions often share two traits. They enjoy diversity and are truly generalists, who value the commonalities across disciplines rather than emphasize the differences between them. And they have largely abandoned the teaching model most linked with expert teachers, the lecture.
(p.68)

In talking to teachers placed in the role of generalist, I found that much of what Gregory and Smith (1987) conjecture rings true. The generalist may be a truly exemplary teacher, yet because the present educational paradigm is designed to accommodate only the specialist, the generalist teacher loses status, influence, and identity. The strengths of the generalist are not appreciated or acknowledged. The large school mentality has no defined niche for the generalist, despite the fact that the generalist is required to make the school function efficiently. In this context, the generalist is an essential non-entity. It takes a strong, confident individual to accept and to flourish in this role with its lack of external recognition.

THE ROLE OF THE ADMINISTRATION: MANAGEMENT OR LEADERSHIP?

In talking to teachers about their perceptions of timetabling procedures and the role of the administration in regard to determining teaching assignment, one point became very evident: teachers want to be included in decision-making processes which affect them. Commentators such as Raelin (1987) substantiate this observation. The teachers whom I interviewed felt that closed or secretive decision-making by the administration augmented teacher stress and generated a negative "vibes" between teachers and the administration. Most felt that an authoritarian approach by administrators was deleterious to teacher morale and classroom performance. Calabrese (1987) concurs, stating that "teacher stress is elevated when teachers are not incorporated into the school's decision-making process" (p.68). Glasman and Heck (1987) note that administrators are frequently hesitant to allow others to provide input in teacher assignment decisions, fearing this may erode their own authority and discretionary powers. "It is somewhat surprising to note principals' perceptions of the lack of room for bargaining with teachers over class/grade assignments" (Glasman and Heck, 1987, p.3).

Critics of the authoritarian approach to school administration, based upon the industrial management model discussed above, see it as being counterproductive to the overall interests of the school. In exacerbating teacher stress, it can have "a devastating effect on classroom instruction" (Calabrese, 1987, p.66). Negative classroom behaviour by teachers is conveyed to parents via the students and results in creating "a negative community attitude toward the school" (Calabrese, 1987, p.66). Spillane (1986) suggests that the role of the principal be redefined away from the 'management model' and toward the 'principal-teacher' model. He notes that *A Nation at Risk* calls for a return to instructional leadership as opposed to management for educational administrators -- a transition which present school organization does not foster.

The way schools are organized does not encourage administrators to make the quality of instruction their first priority. The message should be: 'the effectiveness of the instructional program comes first.' Your [i.e. the principal's] relationship with teachers and your understanding and coordination of the instructional program must be your highest priority because it is...your students' highest priority. (Spillane, 1986, p.4)

A call for more open, two-way communication within the school is suggested as a method of reducing teacher stress and improving the quality of education by allowing teachers to take part in the decision-making processes of the school (Brandt, 1988; Calabrese, 1987; Raelin, 1989; Spillane, 1986; Tewel, 1990). These commentators are addressing an issue which was of utmost concern to the subjects in my study, many of whom felt that they had no input into timetabling decisions which profoundly affected their professional lives.

A second concern relating to the role of administration was raised during my data collection. That is, teachers are disturbed by the belief that many decisions relating to teaching assignment are based upon little more than administrative hunches and perceptions of teachers' abilities. Glasman and Heck (1987) state that research tends to substantiate teachers' concerns. They found that a large proportion of principals admit that they use "intuitive feelings" and subjective judgment as a major data source in making timetabling decisions. "Principals also report that when they make teacher assignment decisions they rely on hunches which they develop as well as on data which they collect systematically" (p.3). Medley and Coker (1987) question the validity of using hunches and intuition in making such important administrative decisions. Disturbingly, they report research indicates that principals' judgments regarding teacher effectiveness are frequently erroneous.

Nearly all decisions about teachers' roles stem from judgments of their effectiveness – judgments usually made by principals. ...The validity of principal's judgments of the effectiveness of teachers they supervise is generally taken for granted. However, the small number of studies of the validity of principals' judgments (or ratings based on them) that have been reported in the literature have yielded consistently negative findings. Each such study has concluded that there is no appreciable agreement between principals' judgments of teachers' effectiveness and the amount students learn. (Medley & Coker, 1987, p.38)

These findings are particularly disturbing for teachers who believe that administrators have formulated inaccurate assessments of their performance. This is certainly an area which requires further investigation for the benefit of all stakeholders in the educational system.

SUMMARY

In completing this review of literature, I was able to retrieve very little research documentation related specifically to teachers' perceptions and feelings in relation to out-of-field teaching assignment. In fact, the impact of the practice upon teachers is rarely commented upon. Consequently, I conclude that, to this point in time, scant attention has been focused upon this aspect of the misassignment issue. Nevertheless, I was able to ascertain from the literature which I did peruse that misassignment of teachers has been a concern to certain factions within the educational community for a considerable period of time. For the most part, commentary on out-of-field teaching assignment assesses it to be a very negative phenomenon -- detrimental to students and teachers alike.

Other voices counter this stance by calling into question the predominant philosophy which extols the "teacher-as-expert" whose sole role is as a conduit and purveyor of discretely categorized subject content. These critics query the accepted superiority of the large industrial-model school, an educational paradigm which they claim has been imposed upon large and small schools alike. They call for a reevaluation of the small school model and a return to more community-oriented approach to schooling. Within this context, the teacher plays a multifaceted role and the subject area specialist is almost non-existent. These commentators believe the generalist teacher has unique strengths which are overlooked and undervalued in the modern academically compartmentalized secondary school.

A final issue touched upon in the literature review is that of administrative decision-making style. While this may not appear to be directly related to the central theme of the study, it was raised frequently by subjects during my data collection. This is perhaps not surprising if one considers the obvious fact that teaching assignment originates within the administration. If teaching assignment is a major influence in teachers' perceptions of their professional role as well as their degree of satisfaction with that role, surely the ways in which assignment decisions are made is of crucial importance to teachers.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND PROCEDURES

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of teachers assigned to teach in subject areas outside of their fields of expertise and experience. In particular, the study was intended to investigate teacher misassignment from the perspective of the teacher. How do teachers feel about being assigned to subject areas for which they are not trained? Do they believe misassignment has an impact on their classroom performance? What perceptions do teachers hold regarding the implications of misassignment upon professional status, self-confidence, self-esteem, and job satisfaction? Do teachers sense that students are affected in any way when teachers are placed in out-of-field assignments?

From my own experience in teaching out-of-field, I had formed conjectures relating to these issues. How closely these reflected the perceptions of others in like circumstances I did not know. This study was essentially motivated by my desire to assess the validity of my personal perceptions by touching and sharing the reality of my peers.

Despite the multiplicity of social interactions encountered by teachers in the course of their daily responsibilities, teachers are incongruously members of a peculiarly isolating profession. The nature of the job is such that little time for confabulation with peers is available – teachers have little time to compare notes or to engage in reality checks with associates. As Harris (1992) has noted, once the doors are closed, we are quite uninformed and unaware of the activities and dynamics of someone else's classroom. As a result, individual teachers may come to feel that their experiences and perceptions are unique, their problems the consequence of idiosyncratic frailty, and that colleagues confronted by similar challenges are coping just fine. We hesitate to let others glimpse beneath the veneer of external appearances, fearing that disclosure may expose our vulnerability and be interpreted as weakness or incompetence.

In undertaking the study, I intended to penetrate the veil of isolation, affording teachers the opportunity to recount singular experiences and perceptions. In sharing personal recollections and personal interpretations, I hoped subjects could provide valuable insight and fresh perspective on a somewhat inscrutable practice which has been largely unacknowledged and uncomprehended. The objective was to provide a forum within which subjects could define the teacher's subjective reality, actively contributing to a discussion which, to this point in time, has characterized the teacher's role as one of passivity and voicelessness.

To accomplish the objectives of the study, I decided to conduct a qualitative case study encompassing the academic staff of one small rural secondary school -- one in which out-of-field assignment is a common timetabling practice. By limiting the scope of the study to this context, I endeavoured to confine the research within identifiable boundaries and to keep the undertaking at a manageable scale. Collected data would consist of anecdotes, observations, opinions, and perceptions elicited from teachers, especially those with experience in out-of-field teaching. In choosing a methodology and research instruments, it was crucial to select those which would encourage spontaneity and flexibility on the part of the participants. Strategies were to be straightforward, open, and non-threatening. Questionnaires and formal and informal interviews were employed as research techniques in the data collection process.

RESEARCH CONTEXT

Setting of the Study

The study was conducted in a relatively small public junior/senior secondary school located in a small municipality (population about 700) in Alberta. The school accommodates an average enrollment of 600 students per annum. Approximately half of the students are in the junior high grades (grades 7 to 9) while the remaining students compose the senior high population (grades 10 to 12). A small number of students live in the municipality itself with the larger proportion being transported to the school from outlying rural areas.

The academic staff consists of 36 teachers. About a half dozen of these are in half-time positions while the remainder teach on a full-time basis. The majority of teachers instruct at both the junior and senior high level. In addition, the school has one full-time administrator and two half-time administrators each of whom is responsible for a half-time teaching assignment. I have been teaching in this school for the past decade.

The Participants

All members of the academic faculty were viewed as potential subjects with the exception of the principal who fills a full-time administrative position. It was considered a reasonable criterion that all participants be presently active in classroom teaching. Participation in the study was completely voluntary. Some individuals chose to participate in a portion of the study by completing a written questionnaire while declining to take part further by participating in a personal interview. The option of participating solely in the interview was also offered to the staff, but no one chose to do so.

Initially, a written questionnaire consisting of both closed and open-ended questions was distributed to each member of the teaching staff. Closed questions were designed to obtain demographic and background data relating to the informant. Open-ended questions focused more directly upon the informant's experiences, opinions, values, and feelings. Respondents were free to answer the questionnaire in full or to choose only those questions which they felt were relevant to them. Respondents were asked to specify whether or not they would be willing to explore the issues raised by the questionnaire in greater depth by taking part in personal interviews with the researcher. Only in this instance were respondents requested to identify themselves by name; otherwise, they could remain anonymous. It should be noted, however, that in a school of this size demographic and background data were sufficient to render the respondent identifiable to me in all cases. Anonymity at this stage of the process, particularly in light of my established familiarity with staff members, could not be guaranteed. Respondents were aware of this fact.

In reality, candidates offered to become subjects by completing and submitting the questionnaire; those preferring to refrain simply did not respond.

Individuals willing to become more intricately involved in the study volunteered to be questioned more intensely by taking part in an interview. I decided not to include all willing respondents in the interview process as it was evident that completing an excessive number of interviews and analyzing the resulting data would be overly time-consuming and unwieldy. Thus I used the data provided in the questionnaire to select those respondents whom I determined to have background most appropriate to the needs of the study. For example, it was necessary to interview subjects with broad experience in out-of-field teaching. At the same time, I determined that the input of subject area specialists would provide a useful comparison, so several of these individuals were chosen. In this way, the pool of interviewees was reduced to a reasonable yet representative sample.

In total, 33 questionnaires were distributed to staff members in late January, 1993. Several members of staff did not receive questionnaires due to staffing changes which occurred at that time. Twenty-four questionnaires were completed and returned to me, resulting in a positive response rate of approximately 73%. Of the 24 subjects responding in writing, 70% or 17 individuals expressed a willingness to participate further by engaging in a personal interview. Several of those indicating a preference not to participate in an interview stated that this was because they believed they would have little further to offer beyond the data volunteered in the questionnaire. From this group of 17, I selected 8 subjects whom I subsequently interviewed in May and June, 1993. Categorizing these interview subjects according to my own criteria, I would categorize 5 of these teachers as "generalists" and 3 as "subject area specialists." It is interesting to note, however, that few subjects viewed themselves as generalists, even when their teaching assignment was quite diverse. Of the 33 initial respondents, 31 identified themselves as specialists while 2 placed themselves in the generalist category.

The response rate in this study was quite positive. I credit this largely to an assumption that many teachers contributed because they see teaching assignment and the practice of misassignment as issues which affect them profoundly at a personal level. During informal conversations preceding the more formal data collection process, teachers expressed strong interest and concern relating to the prevalence of out-of-field assignment as a

professional fact of life. It became very apparent that timetabling was a major variable influencing teachers' perceptions regarding workload, self-confidence, self-esteem, status within the school, and overall job satisfaction.

It is also probable that my long-standing acquaintance with many of the respondents influenced their decision to participate. Several were close friends, while all were professional colleagues. I would maintain that this was a factor in the positive response rate. Furthermore, I would surmise that the response rate indicates that a rapport and bond of trust between subjects and researcher had been established prior to commencement of data collection. I believe these factors facilitated the research process throughout the course of the study.

PROCEDURES

Getting Started

The incipient step in the research process was determining a suitable location in which to conduct the study. Having selected the school described above, it was then necessary to approach the chief administrator to request approval for the study. In seeking approval to conduct research within the school, I described the objectives and rationale for the study as well as giving the administrator a succinct description of the procedures I would be following in collecting data. While the administration had no editorial control over the content of the research document, I did permit administrative access to drafts of the document as it progressed. Administrators were also free to address any concerns they might have regarding research procedures. In reality, the administration did not request to see drafts of the document nor did they approach me at any time regarding concerns relating to the study.

Designing a Questionnaire

I decided to employ a questionnaire [see Appendix C] as my initial data collection instrument. In designing the questionnaire, I was concerned that the instrument be effective in eliciting the desired information yet be sufficiently straightforward and brief to encourage completion. I realized that an overly lengthy or complex instrument might deter subjects from responding. I developed a rudimentary questionnaire which I tested on

several willing colleagues who, in turn, offered their advice and suggestions for improvements. With this input, I refined the questionnaire to a four-page document consisting of 14 questions. The length of the instrument was influenced by my desire to retain a clean, uncluttered appearance with sufficient space provided to accommodate open responses where required. This choice was a result of my own frustration with survey documents which provide inadequate space for requested information.

A significant proportion of questions included in the instrument were intended to elicit biographical and demographic data. For example, respondents were asked about their years of teaching experience, present teaching assignment, past and/or present experience in teaching out-of-field. In addition, they were asked to describe specific coping mechanisms or strategies they may have implemented when teaching out-of-field. Respondents were also asked to identify themselves as subject area specialists or generalists and to rationalize why they placed themselves within one category or another.

The open-ended questions included in the questionnaire requested respondents to discuss such issues as how they believe teaching out-of-field may have affected their workload, confidence, self-esteem, feelings of control, and status within the school. In addition, respondents were asked to specify ways in which misassignment may have impacted their students. Because these questions were intended to involve the domains of opinion, value, and affect, they were designed to be very open; respondents were given the liberty to respond in any manner and in as much detail as they desired. In fact, some subjects chose to provide quite complex responses, some used only point form and key terms. Despite variations in the style or complexity of responses, I found that consistency and trends in the data were readily detectable.

Administration of Questionnaires

The questionnaire was distributed to all members of the teaching staff in late January, 1993. Each questionnaire was placed in a large envelope along with a covering letter (Appendix B) describing research objectives, procedures involved, and ethical criteria to be adhered to in completion of the study. Also enclosed in the package was a blank envelope in which completed

questionnaires were to be placed before return. The purpose of this was to assure that no one other than myself would have access to information contained on the questionnaires. It also protected the identity of respondents. A sealed package was placed in each teacher's mailbox located in the staff work room. I requested that completed questionnaires be returned, sealed in the blank envelope provided, to a specific box also found in the staff work room. Completed questionnaires were collected several times daily.

After a period of several weeks, I distributed a follow-up letter (Appendix D) to all staff members indicating that I would like remaining interested parties to submit questionnaires to me by a specific date. This letter was merely a reminder to those who may have procrastinated in returning their questionnaires that I was still in the process of collecting data. It also gave me a date at which I could "cut off" this stage of research. At no time did I approach any individual on a face-to-face basis to request participation or completion of the questionnaire, as I felt this would put the individual in an uncomfortable situation -- one which might compromise the ethics of my research procedures. Several individuals who happened to encounter me in the hallway or in the office made promises of submitting their questionnaires but never did so. To me, this seemed to verify what I have said above about people's discomfort when placed in direct social contact. I believe the non-personal nature of having responses distributed in and returned to a designated place rather than a person gave potential subjects a greater sense of comfort with the process, whether they chose to participate or not.

Analyzing Questionnaire Data

When I had determined that all the questionnaires had been returned, I began the process of scrutinizing the responses received. First, I read through all of the questionnaires to determine if sufficient data were available to continue with the research project. It was fairly apparent by early February that there was more than sufficient interest and data to continue with the study.

The next step was to survey each questionnaire to determine which respondents were willing to continue further by participating in an interview. Because a large number were willing to do so, I then had to determine which individuals would be most appropriate as interview subjects.

Several respondents had a great deal of background in out-of-field teaching. These subjects tended to have quite strong opinions on the topic and were ideal interview subjects. Five of these were selected to be interviewed at a later date.

To provide some balance to the data, I wished to get an alternative perspective. To achieve this, I selected several interview subjects who had limited experience in teaching outside of their specialty areas. I felt that subject area specialists, having alternate background experience, could offer a contrasting frame of reference. Three subject area specialists were selected as interview subjects.

Further analysis of the data required that information relating to specific themes be aggregated. To do this, I created separate files for data relating to each of the major opinion/value/feeling questions. All responses relating to each question were copied and placed in the appropriate file. For example, all opinions regarding the impact of misassignment upon workload were placed in one file. Biographical and demographic questions were then used to derive background statistics and to create a profile of the subject sample. How many respondents were beginning teachers? How many had more than five years experience? How many had more than twenty years experience? How many considered themselves to be subject area specialists? How many saw themselves as generalists? What percentage of respondents have been misassigned during the past five years?

Data obtained from the questionnaires provided the underpinnings and framework of the study. The overall pattern and direction of research data were now emerging. However, it was interactive discourse with teachers in the interview process which enhanced the richness and vibrancy of the data. Initial analysis could then be fleshed out as teachers offered their personal stories and perceptions. The implications, repercussions, and reality of teacher assignment and misassignment came to life in the lived experiences of teachers.

Preparing for the Interviews

As pointed out above, finding willing and suitable candidates for the interview portion of the study was not difficult. Subjects had previously expressed their willingness to be interviewed as a response to the questionnaire. It was then left to my personal judgment to determine which respondents might become the best subjects for a more in-depth exploration of the issues. Data provided in response to the written questionnaire made these decisions relatively simple. I merely had to select individuals with appropriate teaching experience in out-of-field teaching and/or as subject area specialists. Because many respondents had expressed a willingness to participate further in the study, there was an ample supply of available interviewees.

Once I had determined the individuals I felt would best meet the needs of the study, I approached those subjects to reconfirm, in person, their desire to participate. Because several months had elapsed since the questionnaires had been completed, it was essential to assure that these teachers had not changed their minds about being interviewed. It was also necessary to arrange suitable times and venues for the interviews. I felt it was very important that the interviews take place in a relaxed, unhurried ambience; thus, all interviews were conducted outside of class time. Most were conducted after school hours while others took place during teachers' preparation time, during semester break, or at other times when no classes were scheduled. I also believed that confidentiality was of utmost consideration and that interviews must be conducted in locations which assured privacy. The majority of interviews were conducted in otherwise empty classrooms, but several took place in diverse locations such as private homes. I did not want interviewees to be concerned that their comments might be overheard by other staff members or administrators. In fact, I attempted to arrange interviews so that other staff members would not be aware that the interviews were taking place. It was hoped that this would maintain the anonymity of interview subjects.

The purpose of the interviews was to explore the issues raised by the questionnaire in much greater depth, allowing respondents to expound upon comments they had made in writing and to tell their stories more fully. From the data obtained in the interviews, I hoped to gain a greater awareness and

understanding of subjects' perceptions and to define the consistencies and trends expressed by teachers.

In order to prepare myself for each interview, I reviewed the subject's questionnaire responses in great detail. As I read through the questionnaire, I would jot down ideas, questions, and reactions elicited by the subject's comments. These informal jottings were to be used as cues to assist me during the interview, ensuring that the conversation would be as comprehensive and efficient as possible. I did not want to overlook or forget important lines of inquiry during the interview process. I was confident this preparation would help keep the dialogue on track and prevent deviations from the main themes of the study. In most cases, I simply wrote my notes on the margin of the questionnaire document. Each subject's questionnaire was perused in this interactive manner several times prior to the actual interview. I attempted to familiarize myself with the interviewee's frame of reference and to immerse myself in his or her mind-set so that I could conduct the interview knowledgeably and empathetically.

Initially, I had planned to jot down notes as the interviews progressed. However, in reality, I found this was impossible. The conversations tended to flow so quickly and naturally, that stopping to write comments was disruptive and counterproductive. In the end, I relied entirely upon the taped record of the interview for feedback. Thus I found that all I really needed to have in hand during the interview was the subject's questionnaire which, of course, contained my preparatory notes.

Logistically, preparation was quite simple. I had to be certain that I set up the interview site effectively, placing the tape recorder in such a way that it would not be overly conspicuous or distracting while ensuring that the conversation would be picked up accurately. The tape recorder was checked several times preceding the interview to assure that it was not malfunctioning in some way. Extra tapes were always kept on hand in case the interview ran longer than expected or some other technical problem arose. I attempted to arrange the furniture in such a way that the atmosphere was relaxed and informal. I hoped to place the interviewee at ease by keeping physical barriers to a minimum and retaining a sense of equal status between

interviewer and interviewee. I did not want the subject to feel that he or she was "on trial" in some way -- this was to be experienced as a dialogue between peers.

I tried to set up the interview scene prior to the subject's arrival in order to minimize distractions and an aura of unpreparedness or disorder which might prevail if the subject had to wait during this process. I wanted the subject to know that I felt his or her participation, and hence personal time, was important to me. In this way, a good rapport could be established from the outset, improving the chances of a successful interview.

The Interview Format

The foundation of each interview was to be the written questionnaire. In each case, I used written responses as a guide to determine which issues were of significance to a particular subject and what concerns might be explored in greater depth. Prior to each interview, I reviewed each questionnaire several times, reflecting upon the responses and interacting with them on a personal level, noting my thoughts on the margin of the document. Before each interview was undertaken, I had a mental construct of possible directions the dialogue might follow, yet overall the structure of the interview was to be relatively informal and the dynamics of the interchange quite flexible.

The Interview Process

Before the first interview commenced, I was quite anxious and somewhat nervous that the subject might be hesitant to share her experiences openly. There was a concern the interviews might be stilted, not enough data would be elicited, or that the process would fail to produce the desired results. However, my fears were quite unfounded. In all cases, the subjects were extremely forthright and candid in recounting their experiences and disclosing their personal perceptions, opinions, and feelings. In fact, I was surprised at the openness displayed by the subjects while sensing that these individuals enjoyed sharing their thoughts with me. I found my role was primarily that of motivator and empathetic listener. Because of my own background and familiarity with out-of-field teaching, at times I became a participant in the

conversation, sharing anecdotes or observations with interviewees and asking them to reflect and comment upon my perceptions. Were their experiences and reactions to them similar or substantially different from my own?

The interviews tended to be relaxed and informal exchanges between peers. I found I had only to direct the conversation toward a particular issue and the respondent would, in most cases, spontaneously offer a wealth of data. I did not encounter any interview subject who presented a closed attitude; in no instance did I feel compelled to draw information from a reticent subject. At times, responses merely paraphrased and reconfirmed what had been proffered in writing. However, more typically, the interview format facilitated a more intense and intimate exploration of the issues. As the interviews progressed, I ceased feeling anxious and began to enjoy the entire process.

I am convinced that the fact all subjects were colleagues – individuals with whom I had established professional and, in some cases, social relationships – was an important catalyst in the interview process. The building of trust, confidence, and rapport between myself and the interviewees had, in reality, taken place over an extended period of shared experience and acquaintance. It was not necessary to institute these important bonds as an aspect of the study *per se*; they were established before the study commenced. I believe this also explains the intimate and candid nature of much the data.

Analyzing Interview Data

Stage One - A Topical Analysis:

The analysis of the interview data was a more time-consuming process than was the analysis of questionnaire data. Since each interview was 45 minutes to a full hour in duration, it took considerable time just to listen to the interview tapes. As the first step in the analysis, I listened to each tape in full. In this way I could construct a global view of what was actually said in the interviews. After listening to the tapes several times, I could identify trends and consistencies in the data.

It was essential to determine a means of categorizing the interview data in order to make sense of it. I determined that it would be most logical and consistent to organize the interview data according to the five central research questions contained in the written questionnaire. These questions had, of course, also formed the basis of each interview. Because the questionnaire data had previously been categorized in a similar way, this made it much easier to mesh the written and oral data when formal analyses of data were undertaken. The questions used to classify interview data were as follows:

1. As a teacher, do you perceive of yourself as a generalist or a subject area specialist? Why?
2. In what ways do you believe teaching subjects outside of your specialty area(s) had affected (could affect) your workload?
3. In what ways do you believe teaching subjects outside of your specialty area(s) has affected (could affect) your confidence, self-esteem, feelings of control and/or status within the school?
4. In what ways do you believe teaching subjects outside of your area of specialization has affected (could affect) your students?
5. What strategies have you used (could you use) to assist you in teaching curricula inconsistent with your training and expertise?

Having selected these questions as foci for an initial topical analysis of both the written and oral data collected, I once again listened to the tapes. This time I transcribed verbatim only those specific comments and data which applied to the five topics. Transcribed data were copied onto cards and placed in five separate files -- one for each topic. This was very intense, time-consuming work, but it was less onerous than transcribing the entire text of each tape. This procedure also forced me to listen actively to the voice of the participants, to hear the essence of what had actually been said, rather than reducing their words to lifeless script on a page. I found that listening to the tapes brought the narrative quality of teachers' recollections alive. Each time I audited the tapes, I found the spoken word recreated the ambiance and dynamics of the initial dialogue. In this way, I hoped I could complete my analysis in response to participants' stories as they were uttered. Had I responded to a written transcript, I believe much of the tone and vitality of the interview data would have been lost.

Since written responses from the questionnaires had previously been copied and classified according to the same topics, I was then able to synthesize data obtained from the questionnaires with data obtained during the interviews. When this task was complete, I was able to draft Chapter Four, "The Global View". In this chapter, I present an initial topical analysis of the research data, presenting an overview of how subjects responded to the five major research questions which directed the study.

Stage Two - A Thematic Analysis:

The next step in the data analysis was to complete a much more abstract, thematic interpretation of the data. As I was now more fully cognizant of and familiar with the content of each questionnaire and interview tape, I was able to identify specific themes which emerged from the research data. This was a much more subjective exercise than was the preceding topical analysis. In the first instance, I was able to use the research questions as a framework. In this portion of the analysis, I was required to synthesize abstruse ideas, searching for commonalities and apparent trends. After considerable contemplation and reflection, I identified the following thematic nuclei around which I could structure and develop this portion of the analysis:

Theme 1 - The Dilemma of the Generalist: Never Quite As Good

Theme 2 - Evaluation: The Paper Game

Theme 3 - The Administration: Behind Closed Doors

Theme 4 - The Students: Why Are We Here Anyway?

Theme 5 - The Secret Rewards of the Generalist

Here, condensed to a minimum of words, were the central concerns reiterated by teachers, the trends consistently evident throughout the data. The themes express the essence of what I felt my colleagues were saying, thinking, and feeling. In order to mould, develop, and verify the thematic analysis, it was once again necessary to review the questionnaires and to listen to the tapes, transcribing verbatim responses which could be thematically classified. Again I preferred to actively listen and respond to the actual discourse, rather than work from a written transcript. I felt I could keep in closer touch with

the oral data using this approach and that the thematic analysis would more truly reflect teachers' perceptions and feelings.

Five files were created -- one for each theme -- and appropriate data were filed in each. Using these files, I was then able to draft Chapter Five, "Themes Emerging From the Data." This portion of the data analysis was much more complex to write and was, by its nature, more profoundly influenced by personal interpretation than was the topical analysis presented in the preceding chapter.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Certainly there are very specific ethical considerations to be addressed when a researcher is asking individuals to voluntarily share personal information which might prove embarrassing or result in negative consequences should confidentiality be breached. It is the responsibility of the researcher to confront these issues before initiating research procedures. In the case of this study, the following ethical guidelines were followed.

Prior to beginning the study, the school administration and all potential subjects were informed as to the purpose of the study and the nature of their involvement. Each individual concerned was informed, in writing, that participation in the study was voluntary -- potential subjects were free to take part or to refrain from taking part as they wished. To protect confidentiality and impartiality, questionnaires and follow-up materials were distributed to all staff members. No one was specifically excluded from the study or individually encouraged to participate.

During the data collection process, steps were taken to assure the confidentiality of questionnaire responses as identical blank envelopes were distributed for return of all completed questionnaires. During the interview segments of data collection, all interviewees were made aware that their responses were being recorded and that they were free to withhold consent if they wished. Each subject was notified before recording took place that the tape would be accessible to me alone; no one else would listen to the tapes at any time. Subjects could, however, request to hear to their own responses. I

informed each interviewee that I would personally destroy the recorded data after the research project was completed. In addition, interviews were scheduled and arranged in a manner to protect the privacy of the subject at all times.

Subjects were made aware that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time, in which case all data submitted by an individual would be excluded from the study and destroyed. Participants were at liberty to review, validate, and ask for changes to submitted data should they be uncomfortable with initial responses. Specific comments could be rephrased or withdrawn at the request of the subject. Furthermore, I outlined my intentions to camouflage the identity of respondents. This could be done by paraphrasing explicit data or deleting identifying information such as references revealing particular respondents' teaching areas. Assurance was given that neither the school nor individual participants would be identified in the text of the final document.

VALIDITY

Of course, when doing research, one is always concerned about the validity of the results. As with all genres of research, qualitative research depends upon the honesty of subjects and the integrity of the researcher. One must assume that the data offered by respondents are accurate and complete and that subjects are not simply telling the researcher what he or she wants to hear. Similarly, it is important that the researcher not skew the results by distorting data analysis in accordance with his or her peculiar biases.

Within the context of this study, I believe the fact that I myself am a teacher who has had considerable experience in out-of-field teaching has helped me to establish an empathetic rapport with subjects. This reality assisted me in identifying and directing the inquiry into areas which are of importance to teachers. Furthermore, because all subjects were colleagues with whom I had existing professional and/or social relationships, the establishment of commitment and trust between interviewer and participant was facilitated. In the end, I feel my own background facilitated the education of a considerable body of relevant data. At the same time, I had to be very frank about my familiarity with the subjects and my experience in out-of-field teaching as these factors could have been misconstrued had I claimed to be a totally

detached observer. From the outset, it was noted that the entire study was motivated by my professional history. While I strived to be objective throughout, it was very difficult for me to evaluate the extent to which my analysis may have been coloured by my distinct frame of reference. The best way to deal with these concern, I believe, was to identify them openly as variables which may have influenced the study in some ways.

RELIABILITY

To assess the reliability of the study results would necessitate further research. For instance, it is possible another researcher would collect, classify, and interpret the data differently. There is also the question of how representative this school is of a larger population. Each research setting must have unique characteristics and idiosyncracies which, no doubt, affect the individuals who operate within that context. An identical study conducted in a separate school might result in varied data and different outcomes. This again would require further study. I also do not know how closely the experiences and perceptions expressed by those who volunteered to take part in the study reflect the experiences and perceptions of those choosing not to take part. One must be careful not to extrapolate conclusions beyond the boundaries sustainable by existing data. I do maintain, however, that the consistency and intensity of the data collected for this study does indicate that further research into the implications of timetabling policy and out-of-field assignment for teachers is warranted.

CHAPTER FOUR

TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INCONSISTENT TEACHING ASSIGNMENT:

PART I - THE GLOBAL VIEW

INTRODUCTION

The objective of this study was to determine, by engaging in discourse with teachers, exactly how teachers feel about teaching in subject areas which are inconsistent with their own areas of training and expertise. The intent was to allow teachers to give utterance to their own experiences and to describe the personal and professional consequences of such experiences as teachers perceive them. The study itself was rooted in my own years of experience teaching a diverse array of subject areas. As a result, I did not enter into the study with a totally objective research perspective. In many aspects, the basic theme of the study was merely an expansion of my own story as a teacher. Thus, before research began, I had formulated personal perceptions relating to my own experiences and, no doubt, preconceptions about what other teachers might say in relation to their experiences. In what ways and to what extent the voices of other teachers would reaffirm or contractict my perceptions and expectations, I was unsure.

In the initial stages of data collection, as the questionnaires began to be completed and returned, and as an awareness of the study became general knowledge amongst the school's faculty, it became apparent by means of written responses and informal discussions with staff members that this topic was seen to be of importance to the teachers. The allotment of teaching assignments within the school was clearly seen by teachers to be a major factor influencing teachers' levels of satisfaction. Teachers were obviously concerned about teaching assignments which took them out of their specialty areas. Their concerns in this area included perceived impacts upon workload, effectiveness and control in the classroom, self-assurance, status within the school, the attitudes of administrators and evaluators, confidence levels of students and parents and, above all, the possible consequences for students.

As the data collection continued and became more intense, interviews provided a much more detailed, intimate, and in-depth view of how teachers believed they had been affected on both personal and professional planes by teaching assignments. In total, eight teachers were interviewed. Five of these teachers were individuals who had definite experience in teaching courses in areas outside of what they identified to be their areas of specialization. For purposes of this study, these teachers were referred to as generalists. The other three interview subjects were individuals who had taught almost exclusively within their areas of training. All three were presently teaching 30-level academic courses. These teachers were referred to as subject area specialists. All interview subjects were very open and willing to express their feelings. In some cases, they shared incidents from their teaching experience which proved to be very personal and, at times, painful.

At all points during the process of data collection, I was encouraged that many teachers on staff preferred to share their experiences with me. To some extent, this choice to share may have been the result of my having been well-acquainted with the staff members. However, I also detected that, because this was an issue close to their hearts, they wanted to talk to someone about it. In particular, the generalists, and those who had had some experience in teaching outside of their areas, recounted their stories openly. In many cases, these individuals described difficulties and inequities in the situation of which they felt administrators and evaluators should be cognizant.

In this chapter and the chapter which follows, I present perceptions and experiences recounted by those teachers taking part in the study as well as my personal interpretation of the data that was collected. In Chapter Four, I give a broad overview of how teachers responded to the major research questions addressed in the study. This global discussion is then followed, in Chapter Five, by a more detailed analysis of the data. In the latter chapter, I offer my interpretations of the data and discuss the thematic trends which emerged from the teachers' responses.

THE GLOBAL VIEW

Question 1 - As a teacher, do you perceive of yourself as a generalist or a subject area specialist?

It was of interest to me that while well over half (58%) of the respondents had had experience in teaching subject areas outside of their areas training during the five years preceding the study, a very small number of respondents viewed themselves as generalists. In fact, only two respondents (8%) clearly identified themselves as generalists, while one respondent saw herself as being a generalist in practice and a subject area specialist in training. Some of these teachers had taught in as many as five areas outside of their areas of training during that time. One teacher who identified herself as a generalist explained that her response was a reflection of what she had been assigned to teach; she personally considered herself a subject area specialist as well.

In reality, virtually all of the teachers considered themselves to be subject area specialists. Even those who had taught in many different areas saw themselves as specialists who had been required to teach outside of their areas of specialty. Teachers' perceptions in this regard were very close to what I had anticipated before I undertook the study. In years when I taught no courses within my area of training, I still thought of myself as a specialist in that area; however, those completing the timetable may have had a different perception altogether. At no point in my teaching career would I have identified myself as a generalist, although others may have viewed me as such as a result of my diverse timetable. No respondent involved in the study indicated that he or she had ever requested to teach in an unfamiliar subject area. In all cases, inconsistent teaching assignments were seen to be something imposed upon the teacher by those completing the timetable.

Perhaps one explanation for teachers' reticence to identify themselves as generalists is the departmentalized infrastructure of the secondary school system. The foundational schema of the secondary school is composed of discrete subject area groupings. The typical high school has an English department, a science department, a mathematics department, and so on. To

have a real presence within the corresponding social schema, teachers must be seen to have some affiliation with a specific department. To lose this affiliation is to lose one's personal identity within the system, to become less visible. Furthermore, it could be argued, one loses status as well.

Question 2 - In what ways do you believe teaching subjects outside of your specialty area(s) has affected (could affect) your workload?

From personal experience, I know that teaching in subject areas outside of one's area of specialty involves an increased workload. What surprised me in the responses which I received from other teachers was the vehemence of their reactions. With only one exception, all teachers involved in the study -- whether they had experience in the situation or not -- felt that workload is or would be augmented when a teacher is assigned to teach out-of-area. Those with actual experience were most fervid. Various respondents surmised that their workload was increased by anywhere from 30% to 100% when out-of-area subjects were placed on their timetable. Respondents identified preparation for classes as the most time-consuming element in their out-of-area teaching assignments. However, preparation of quizzes and exams as well as development of new evaluation schemes also consumed a significant proportion of the teachers' time. A common descriptor was that workload "increased dramatically" as a consequence of out-of-area teaching assignments. One teacher stated that during one such assignment, her workload increased "almost to the breaking point."

Concomitant to concerns about onerous augmentation of workload, teachers repeatedly expressed anxiety about perceived increases in stress experienced when teaching courses out of their areas of specialization. Many respondents stated that they felt much more stressed when teaching such subject areas. Undoubtedly related to teachers' anxieties about stress levels was the concern that teachers are less confident when teaching in unfamiliar areas. A number of respondents commented about their lack of security, their sense of vulnerability and the fear that they would lose credibility with students, parents and administration as a result.

During the interview process, there emerged a very obvious consensus amongst respondents that administrative evaluators in particular must be aware of the heavier workload and other unique problems borne by teachers placed in teaching assignments inconsistent with their training. No respondent with recent experience in this situation felt that evaluators took this into consideration in any way. There was a very fervent assertion by those questioned that evaluators must make allowances for the realities of teacher misassignment and must verify their awareness in written evaluations. Teachers felt that to do less was to make the evaluation unjust and invalid. A representative comment was that while the generalist teacher might be working harder than the specialist on staff as a result of teaching unfamiliar content matter, there was little chance that they would receive an evaluation that reflected their increased workload. There was some resentment that the system at present is biased against the generalist teacher or the teacher placed in a teaching assignment inconsistent with his or her background.

Question 3 - In what ways do you believe teaching subjects outside of your specialty area(s) has affected (could affect) your confidence, self-esteem, feelings of control and/or status within the school?

Teachers taking part in the study had mixed reactions as to the effect teaching outside of their areas of speciality has had or might have upon their feelings of confidence, self-esteem, sense of control and/or status within the school. Some teachers expressed very positive feelings about having proven their ability to cope with and to teach unfamiliar material successfully. For example, one teacher described experiencing a boost in confidence at having "taken on the unknown" and having surprised herself at how well she did it. Similar responses indicated that some teachers see the situation as a challenge, a chance to enhance their self-esteem and confidence by proving to themselves and others that they are versatile and capable. One respondent stated that he enjoyed the variety in course content while another specialist teacher stated that if she taught the same course too many times, she became bored with the material, felt stale, and feared she might lose effectiveness in the classroom.

This respondent suggested that all teachers, especially those who are identified as subject area specialists, be assigned out-of-area courses from time to time just to keep their teaching and learning skills acute.

Some respondents believed that teaching in new subject areas did not significantly affect their status within the school. One teacher suggested that generalist teachers might well be perceived by others as being versatile and well-rounded. However, he conceded that if the teacher in question appeared to be incompetent in the assignment, that teacher would rapidly lose prestige within the school. It is perhaps significant that this respondent has not taught outside of his specialty area for many years.

In spite of possible positive spin-offs acquired by teaching outside of one's area of specialty, study respondents offered predominantly negative responses to the question. Many teachers described feelings of discomfort, worry, apprehension, and self-doubt incurred while teaching unfamiliar subjects. Typical responses included: "I was always second guessing myself. Was that the right way to explain it?", "students sense when a teacher is unsure of the material," "I felt that the students, parents and staff questioned my credibility," "students came to think that I knew as little in my speciality area."

Many teachers felt that their self-esteem was diminished as a result of inconsistent timetabling assignments. No doubt, the correlation between reduced levels of confidence and diminished self-esteem is predictable. It was evident from teachers' responses that in many cases, although they felt they had been placed in undesirable circumstances involuntarily, they still tended to place blame upon themselves when things did not go as well as they would like. In extreme cases, the teacher was profoundly affected by the situation. Several teachers described how, when teaching out-of-field, they had lost sleep, experienced nightmares, wept, and felt emotionally drained. Several stated that they would consider quitting their jobs rather than accept a similar teaching assignment in future. One teacher described her feelings as a result of incidents which occurred while she was teaching in an unfamiliar subject area: "I felt almost worthless."

Some respondents believed that inconsistent assignment should not influence teachers' status within the school. Nevertheless, the data indicated that those teachers who had the most experience in the situation believed that their status was affected. Overall, there was a trend evident in the data suggesting that an assignment outside of one's area of specialty, or a shift in direction away from a specialist position toward a generalist position, is perceived to be a demotion or diminution in status within the school. Comments received from teachers taking part in the study led to this observation.

Barb: Becoming a generalist, I feel my status has declined.

Ann: As a generalist, I feel I'm not important enough or knowledgeable enough to teach some high school academic courses; or maybe not good enough as a teacher.

Gil: As far as status is concerned, I think if you are teaching a variety of subjects, out of your area, you appear to be a 'jack of all trades, master of none', and you also begin to question your 'direction' in subject areas. For example, you would have to discuss your plans with subject liaisons in say three different areas, and you spread yourself and your talents too thin, hence, your status is lowered.

Cal: It has not affected my confidence or self-esteem; however, it gives me the feeling that the administration has down-graded my specialty area.

In regard to "control," teachers discussed the issue on two separate levels. One aspect of control considered was that of the teachers' control of their professional lives. For the most part, teachers felt that they had very little control over timetabling decisions which affected them. Timetabling in the school was seen to be a very centralized, top-down, almost dogmatic process. No one, including the subject liaison teachers who took part, felt that he or she had any significant input into the timetabling process. In fact, teachers described how the timetable is viewed as a guarded secret until finalized by the administration. They illustrated this point by describing how the timetable is kept under lock and key until final teaching assignments are distributed to staff. The notable exceptions to this are subject area specialists who teach the highest level academic courses. These individuals are very confident that they will be retained in their present assignments with very little change. These teachers do, however, feel pressured to produce classes with good results on the provincial departmental examinations. A comment which was repeated in several cases was, "you're only as good as your last exam results."

The second interpretation of 'control' involved classroom control or discipline. It is interesting that many teachers saw teacher confidence and classroom control to be interrelated. Some respondents felt that classroom discipline is not and should not be influenced by what the teacher is teaching. However, many of those who have actually taught out-of-field courses, as well as those who hypothesized what it might be like to do so, indicated that classroom control becomes a greater problem when the teacher lacks confidence in what he or she is doing. Several subject area specialists associated their ability to control students with their familiarity and comfort in their subject areas.

Erin: I am confident and relaxed in my classroom and have very few problems because I know my area so well.

Fran: I have been lucky lately in that I have been able to teach in my subject area. As a result, I do feel more in control of my classroom and tend not to have the discipline problems that may be associated with lack of confidence.

Jill: [When teaching in your area of specialization, you are more in control] because of your self-esteem. As soon as kids feel that you're not confident, then they'll lose all confidence...not just in the teacher's ability to teach the material, it's in the classroom itself.

Similarly, a subject who has had wide experience teaching both within and outside of her subject area stated:

Ann: Confidence and feelings of control are always decreased when teaching a new subject.

Dialogues with teachers revealed that in many cases they sensed that their lack of confidence, increased workload, and heightened levels of stress caused them to feel they needed to exert more control than normal over their students. There was perceived anxiety about students losing confidence in the teacher. Teachers feared that, once their credibility was undermined in the eyes of the students, their ability to control the students would likewise be diminished. On the other hand, if they had mastery of the subject matter they were teaching, respondents felt this assurance allowed them to be more comfortable with students and more in control.

Question 4 - In what ways do you believe teaching subjects outside of your area of specialization has affected (could affect) your students?

The majority of teachers taking part in the study exhibited a high level of sensitivity regarding the perceived impacts their strengths and weaknesses as teachers had upon their students. Some saw this question as the most important aspect of the research inasmuch as our *raison d'être* as teachers is to "be there" for our students. In conducting my research, I detected an awareness of the part of teachers that this is the crux of the issue of inconsistent teaching assignment; this is essentially why the issue is of importance to teachers. In some cases, the awareness was explicitly expressed; in other cases, it was implicit in the comments of teachers. Nevertheless, I discerned a common supposition held by teachers taking part in the study. I would specify this supposition as follows: teachers were concerned about the negative impacts teacher misassignment has upon them because they perceive that these negative impacts are transferred, in many ways, to the students they are teaching. Respondents were also concerned about the professional and personal impacts the practice has upon teachers; however, these concerns appeared to be secondary to concerns about how students would be affected.

Some respondents clearly stated that students "did not get good instruction" from them while they were teaching outside of their areas of expertise. This belief was most often explained as a consequence of the teacher feeling "lost" regarding the content matter or teaching procedures required for the course. As one respondent simply said, "I could not do a good job." While many teachers did not go to this extreme, they did feel that students were negatively impacted because they as teachers lacked the necessary knowledge to give the students everything they needed. Typical of responses in this vein were:

Barb: I felt I let my students down in the more advanced concepts.

Rick: slower students might benefit because I may go slower and allow them to keep up. Brighter students may suffer slightly since I won't always be able to answer their more complicated questions if it goes beyond my realm of understanding.

Most teachers, however, felt that even while teaching subjects out of their areas of specialty they were able to do a "competent" job. They believed they

covered the essentials of the curriculum adequately and, because they did, students were not adversely affected. The concern teachers expressed was that merely covering the curriculum was not good enough for their students. They were compelled by the conviction that students are entitled to the best instruction possible, instruction that will motivate them, imbue them with an enthusiasm for a subject area, and, perhaps, impel them to pursue an area of study in the future. Teachers worried that, when teaching outside of their own areas, they simply could not offer to their students the unquantifiable extra dimension the students deserved.

Greg: I do not believe the students were adversely affected. I believe I did a competent job in presenting the subject material. The one area that may have been lacking was motivation. It is difficult to be motivational and exciting as a teacher in a subject area you are not passionate about. (There are probably enough boring teachers around without adding to that problem.)

Ted: I don't believe I have sufficient knowledge to display "enthusiasm" about [the subject area]. Much of a student's motivation comes from a teacher's excitement about the subject area she is teaching.

Fran: If a teacher enjoys what [he or she is] doing that is passed on to the students inadvertently and is very motivating. If a teacher is enthused so too will the students. I think it is difficult for a teacher to be enthused and happy when teaching a course out of his/her subject area.

Tim: I had a feeling that the students would have enjoyed the subject more with a more knowledgeable teacher.

I detected a feeling held by teachers that their affiliation with a subject area is more than a means of establishing identity within the bureaucracy or achieving some level of status within the system. Most teachers seemed to exude a genuine enthusiasm or love for their chosen subject areas.

Jill: Of course there is a detrimental effect on students when they have a teacher teaching out of his area. Anyone can pick up a textbook and teach it [the subject content]. But because you don't have a love for the subject, the students are cheated. I have an outside interest in my subject area; I subscribe to magazines in that area. I'm updated in it so the kids benefit from my love of the subject. Then, my kids are enthusiastic too. I always tell my kids that this and that are happening in [the subject area]. I couldn't offer that to kids in another subject area because I don't like it as much. I think that's what you lose when you don't have specialty teachers.

I sensed that many teachers wanted the opportunity to share their enthusiasm with their students. I was left with a perceptible impression that those teachers who were required to teach out-of-field perceived that, in many dimensions, both they and their students had been cheated.

Erin: I guess some people have to teach certain things. We're not all teaching for the pleasure of it -- it would be nice if we were. I just don't like teaching that stuff [subjects outside of specialty] and it must be awful to always feel that way; to know every day 'I have to teach science and I'm a social teacher'. I guess you get used to it over the years. But I know the longer I teach [a subject out of my area], the more I dislike it. The longer I teach [my specialty area] the better I like it, the better I get at it. I really think its compatibility with your interests.

When the teacher cannot do his or her best, the students do not receive the best and this seems to take away much of the innate satisfaction of teaching for many individuals.

Question 5 - What strategies have you used (could you use) to assist you in teaching curricula inconsistent with your training and expertise?

Teachers are quite inventive when it comes to devising tactics to help them succeed in the classroom. In particular, those teachers who have been assigned to teach in unfamiliar subject areas find it necessary to develop strategies to cope with the difficulties of their situation. There was some evidence in the data indicating that there are teachers who will deliberately not do a good job in an unfamiliar assignment, specifically because they believe they will then not be required to teach such an assignment in the future. Nonetheless, it became obvious to me from my research that the vast majority of teachers are determined to do the best job they can, in spite of circumstances which might be less than ideal. When presented with the challenge of teaching a course outside of their area of specialization, the data revealed that most teachers understood that this would increase their workload substantially, yet they accepted heavier demands upon their time and resources in a professional manner. Teachers did not want their students to be at a disadvantage because of their own perceived weaknesses in a subject area.

In relating their coping strategies, the almost universal response was summed up in two succinct responses found on the questionnaires. The first of these was, "I work harder." The second was, "SURVIVE!" A number of respondents discussed the necessity of doing a great deal more preparation for these classes, stating that: "you must learn before you teach," or "you spend lots of extra time researching curricula, including taking classes." Others described putting in "maximum time and effort" to prepare for courses in unfamiliar subject areas while one respondent replied that in these situations she felt it incumbent upon her to "plan ahead to be extra prepared." Several subjects alluded to their more onerous reading requirements owing to the need to familiarize themselves with a subject before presenting it in the classroom. One respondent expounded upon his personal strategy by explaining that he tackled new material "one chunk at a time so I do not get overwhelmed."

Respondents expressed a virtually unanimous consensus that teaching one or more subjects outside of one's area of speciality entails greater imposition upon teacher time extrinsic to time actually spent in the classroom. It would follow logically that most strategies adopted by teachers in this situation are devised to minimize the amount of time spent in preparation for classroom performance. This assumption was verified by the data collected.

Other than simply working harder, the strategy most utilized by respondents was to access colleagues believed to be more experienced and well-versed in the unfamiliar subject area. Many teachers described the assistance they had received from other staff members, particularly subject area specialists or other generalists who had taught a specific course in the past. One teacher described how she had coped in a wide variety of subject area assignments by "developing a network of friends and associates who will help with the subject matter." It was apparent that, in many instances, colleagues on staff were very willing to assist a teacher struggling with an unfamiliar assignment.

There was a significant proportion of respondents who felt, however, that colleagues on staff were not willing to assist them; these teachers described situations in which the specialists on staff were extremely closed to requests for assistance. One respondent related an account of how she had found herself teaching in a very demanding yet unfamiliar subject area assignment.

When questioned about the assistance she received from the subject liaison teacher in this area, she recounted:

Jan: I was given the curriculum guide; everything else such as binders and answer keys were locked away.

This teacher, like several other respondents, disclosed that she had to seek help outside of the school as a consequence of the reluctance of colleagues to share their expertise and materials.

Teachers questioned were very much aware that any sharing of materials by peers was strictly voluntary. There was no apparent mandate for specialists on staff, even those acting in the role of subject liaison, to assist teachers assigned to new teaching areas. This lack of supervised help is perhaps understandable when one realizes that, if each teacher must plan independently for his or her course assignment, accumulated materials such as lesson plans, unit plans, quizzes, tests, evaluation schemes, day-to-day classroom activities, and so on represent many hours of work by the individual teacher. Many teachers question why they should be expected to simply "hand over" their materials to someone newly assigned to teach in an area.

In some cases, the willingness or hesitancy of one teacher to share materials with another teacher was clearly determined by the unique consociation of personalities involved. In many cases, however, these elements were obviously influenced by the level of experience and respect accrued by the requestor. Teachers were much less inclined to assist or to share materials with those viewed to be "new" teachers; that is, those who had recently entered the profession. There is an apparent prerequisite that new teachers must earn the respect of their peers before such assistance is freely given. One respondent who had recently undertaken some courses outside of her area of specialization explained it this way:

Barb: Other teachers have been very generous with their course files and materials. Those are lifesavers.

I find that as long as you're a respected member of staff, staff are willing to give you stuff and to help you. I know that this year, for instance, there have been a couple of people who are less experienced and haven't been around very long and people don't

know them very well and I know that people haven't wanted to help them. I feel bad for those people.

With me, they [i.e. colleagues] know I've done all of that [work] all those years with other courses, so people...have just come up to me and asked me, "Would you like this, or can you use this?"

Individual respondents suggested other coping strategies for teachers placed in assignments inconsistent with their training and expertise. Several teachers mentioned using the university curriculum department to access appropriate materials. Similarly, one teacher mentioned that she has made use of curricular materials produced by the Alberta Correspondence School. There was a tendency for these teachers to rely more heavily upon the use of audio-visual materials, perhaps to compensate for their perceived deficiencies in respect to content matter. Transference was another particularly useful tactic employed by teachers coping with new subject matter. One teacher provided a rather concise definition of the strategy as: "carrying material and knowledge over from my area of expertise."

In conclusion, one respondent submitted that much of the undue workload and stress imposed upon teachers thrust into unfamiliar subject territory could be alleviated by a more cooperative and open approach to course planning overall. The proposed approach, if more widely enacted, might reduce feelings of isolation and stress experienced by teachers struggling to survive in foreign waters. This, of course, is open to debate; nevertheless, this respondent's comments do provide food for thought:

Greg: As a subject area liaison I have done a lot to develop a program which is compatible with teachers in my area who are out of their own area. Common exams, common evaluation procedures, total use of my lesson and unit plans. Course outlines and meetings to give advice to all take the stress and worry out for rookie teachers in [the subject area]. Too many young teachers come out and establish their curriculum and materials and then horde these. They figure if they did this much work to develop good materials and lessons, they are not going to just give it away. If there was more cooperative planning and sharing of materials among all teachers in a subject area, the stress on teachers in a new area would be much reduced. The subject would be presented in a much better manner and the students would be the beneficiaries.

Overall, I found that there was a great deal of consonance in participants' responses to the major research questions addressed in the study. This

consonance could indicate that the perceptions of the teachers taking part in the study are representative of teachers' perceptions on a broader scale, or it could simply indicate some consensus amongst the small sample of teachers involved in the case study. It is quite possible that the teachers who chose not to respond to the questionnaire or to engage in the interview process might hold very different perceptions about the implications of teaching in areas inconsistent with training and expertise. Perhaps only teachers who felt personally affected by the situation responded. It is possible that my acquaintance with some of the respondents may have influenced their decision to take part in the study. There are many points open to conjecture. This case study is rudimentary and quite limited in scope; it would be premature to extrapolate any far-reaching conclusions from the data. Nevertheless, the consistency of responses and the predominant trends which can be inferred from that consistency does suggest that there is fertile ground for further research.

In the Chapter Five, I will identify consistent themes which emerged from my analysis and interpretation of the data. During the course of this study, I listened to what teachers had to say about their own experiences and personal perceptions relating to those experiences. My task here is to accurately recount the voices of those teachers and to search for possible meanings within their utterances.

CHAPTER FIVE

TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INCONSISTENT TEACHING ASSIGNMENT:

PART II - THEMES EMERGING FROM THE DATA

INTRODUCTION

In the introduction to this study, I recounted some of my personal experiences in teaching subjects outside of my area of specialty, as well as my affective responses to those experiences. In fact, the underlying purpose of my study was to talk to other teachers in order to see if my reactions were idiosyncratic or if they were more generic in nature. In other words, did other teachers feel the same way I did when placed in similar circumstances or were my feelings merely a repercussion of my peculiar personality and temperament. Perhaps I was hypersensitive to the realities of my chosen profession; perhaps I was overreacting. Year after year, as I was placed in the role of generalist on staff as a consequence of timetabling decisions, I began to feel that I was in a situation in which I would always be expected to work harder than some of my colleagues who were deemed to be specialists. Yet, although I was always working to develop new course materials, new resources, new examinations, I sensed that my allotted position as "generalist" also indicated, whether to peers, to administrators, or to myself, that I was not quite as good as those who were allowed to teach consistently in their areas of specialty. Why were some staff members thought of as specialists while others were cast in the role of generalist? I knew it was not related to academic background since my academic record was equal to that of any other member of the staff. Nevertheless, the cycle of new course after new course repeated itself. The implications for me personally and professionally were profound. I wanted to know if my feelings were shared by my peers.

Certainly my experiences as a generalist were not totally negative. The demands of the role were heavy – my workload seemed to always be equal to that of the neophytes on staff. It was challenging as I was often working in as many as four or five different subject areas per semester. And, in its own way, the role was rewarding. After all, how many other members of staff could effectively cope with all these subject areas, I wondered? Surely I had proven

that I could survive in just about any teaching assignment. My self-esteem was somewhat bolstered by the realization that my talents must have been considered to be multifaceted, otherwise the administration would surely not ask me to teach such disparate subject areas. However, in spite of these positives, my perception was that, as a generalist, I was not seen to be an 'important' member of staff continued to grow. I began to see that, after a period of time, working as a generalist was seen by administrators to be an indication not of multifaceted abilities, but of mediocrity. The longer I continued in the role of generalist, the more I sensed that the administration judged me on my past assignments rather than my qualifications. This perception was verified when I was told by an administrator that I was not "academic" enough to teach an academic high school course. I remain convinced that the administrator was unaware of the fact that I held separate university degrees in two specialty areas, qualifications equal to those of any specialist teaching on the staff at that time. Nor do I believe that, at that point in time, that fact would have been considered relevant. It became apparent to me that I was being judged according to what I had been assigned to teach in the past, not on what I was actually qualified to teach. My career aspirations appeared to be a casualty of a system in which perceptions often overtake reality.

I do not believe that administrators or other players within the educational system deliberately down-grade the generalist or see the generalist as an 'inferior' teacher. It is simply that the generalist falls through the cracks of the system. As mentioned earlier, the foundational schema of the secondary school is composed of discrete subject area groupings. To retain visibility and a voice within the corresponding social schema, the individual must be seen to have a clearly-defined affiliation with a specific grouping or department. To lose this affiliation is to lose one's identity, recognition, and status within the system. In short, the system is designed to accommodate specialists; it has no place for the generalist. Thus, the external rewards accrued by those who succeed within the system, whether it be designation as subject liaison or department head or instructor in a high profile course such as a departmental exam course, go to those who have achieved an identity within the system (i.e. the specialist). The rewards accorded to the generalist are more internal in nature. Their sense of satisfaction must come from within themselves because

the external recognition is not there. It is not a coincidence, I believe, that those study respondents who were most clearly identifiable as generalists were also those who had undertaken self-esteem enhancing activities external to the school such as postgraduate university degrees and teacher exchange programs. It seems that generalists are always working and striving to survive within a system which simply does not recognize their contributions. This, in essence, is the dilemma of the generalist teacher.

As I reflected upon my personal experiences and perceptions and compared them to those offered by my colleagues as this study was in progress, I realized that much of what the participants expressed reaffirmed my own observations and interpretations. I was comforted to know that I was not alone in my feelings; others had been there and were willing to share their stories with me. At the same time, many individuals who had not been in the situation of teaching outside of their areas of expertise also came forward to share their opinions and feelings. As I perused the data and contemplated the stories related to me by teachers, I detected certain themes emerging, themes which gave meaning and structure to what had been said. The themes defined here are, of course, the product of my personal analysis and interpretation. They are in no way intended to be closed or dogmatic; it is hoped that this is where the dialogue will begin, not where it will end.

Theme 1 -The Dilemma of the Generalist: Never Quite As Good

In talking to teachers who have had experience teaching courses outside of their areas of expertise and training, a constant sentiment was reiterated. These teachers were frustrated because they discerned that, although their teaching assignment required a heavier workload, they could neither be nor appear to be as competent and effective in the classroom as could a subject area specialist. Over and over teachers told of experiences in which they lost self-confidence as a consequence of inconsistent teaching assignment. Teachers simply did not feel as self-assured when they were teaching in an unfamiliar subject area.

Fran: I never knew if I was teaching them the right thing. I was following curriculum, but I didn't know the difference between a participle and whatever. I lacked

knowledge. I tried not to let that show [to the students], but I'm sure they knew ...they felt it.

Various respondents described their experiences as being "demoralizing," "confidence draining," "emotionally draining," "stressful," "exhausting," and "disastrous." Several talked about being "scared," "uneasy," or "dreading" the days they would have to teach an out of area course. One colourful description compared the situation to that of "going to teach in China without knowing one word of Chinese." Another respondent described that, while completing a particularly harrowing out-of-field teaching assignment, she had been "very upset" and felt "almost worthless." Her experience led her to question herself as a teacher and the memories of it remained with her years later:

Jan: Up until that time, I felt that I was a good teacher, that I was doing good things for students and was contributing something. [During this teaching assignment] I felt completely undermined, like someone had taken the feet out from under me.

Every night I would go home and do lesson plans [for the unfamiliar course] until all hours. Then, the next day there would be a knock on the door and I'd find [I hadn't done some small detail correctly]. It didn't matter what I had done, it wasn't right.

To tell you the truth, I've blocked most of it out. I have never thought of it since I got out of the situation, I've just turned it off and tried never to think of it again, it was that horrendous of a situation....I'd never go back [to that situation], I wouldn't care what they paid me.

Another teacher recounted her experience in teaching a course which was quite removed from her area of specialization. She felt that, although she worked very hard to cover the material on the curriculum adequately, certain students used her lack of background in the area as an excuse for their own poor results in the course. She described how she felt she had been "attacked" by both the students and the parents. During this time, the respondent described that she was drained to the limits of her emotions. "I couldn't have worked any harder, done more, or been more prepared. It's very demoralizing to work so hard and to still be looked down upon." This teacher also stated that she would be very hesitant to accept an out of area teaching position again. In fact, she had subsequently been offered, and refused, a similar teaching assignment for this reason.

The generalist is caught in a no-win situation. Work harder; get less. If you don't do a good job, you're out. If you do do a good job, you'll get to do it all over again next year. One veteran generalist on staff explained it this way:

Ann: I feel that I have to work harder to prove that I am capable of handling those [out of specialty area] courses, but the harder I work, the more new classes I get. I find it demoralizing. At the beginning, I thought, "If I teach some of these lousy classes, I will get a reward; I'll get a better timetable," but it never seemed to work out that way. I'd always have new courses.

A central concern for all teachers in relation to unfamiliar teaching assignments is the fear that their admitted lack of confidence and vulnerability in a new subject area will be ascertained by students and conveyed to parents. There was an assumption on the part of respondents that a lack of confidence on the teacher's part quickly leads to a loss of confidence by students. Teachers fear that their credibility will be questioned by students, parents, peers, and administrators. Most teachers, when working outside of their areas of specialization, feel that they do work much harder to compensate for their limitations in content area and knowledge of procedures. Nevertheless, there is a real apprehension expressed by teachers that no matter how intensely they prepare when presenting unfamiliar subject matter, it may not be good enough. They may be risking their professional reputations.

Ann: I'm worried all the time that these kids are going to go home and say, "We're not learning right; we're not being taught right," or somebody's going to come in and say, "You're doing this wrong or that wrong." I just don't feel confident.

Erin: It's that insecurity and I think kids know and I think the respect level goes down. I'm sure it does because kids...want you to know your stuff. The parents expect it.

Jill: The kids go home and the parents basically believe what the kids say. And then you're apologizing for not knowing the area. You're trying to explain, "Well, they gave me this area -- I'm learning." Maybe in two or or three years you would have it down. I mean, we're all capable of learning, but what about that year or so? Your reputation could be destroyed.

Closely related to teachers' misgivings about losing confidence and credibility in the classroom is the underlying anxiety that this could result in greater difficulties in keeping students under control. For the most part, respondents

felt that respect for the teacher is closely related to a teacher's ability to maintain discipline. Since most teachers expressed a reduced sense of confidence when teaching subjects outside of their areas of specialization, they felt that they had, or feared that they would have, more difficulty with discipline when teaching in these situations.

Jill: Confidence is part of discipline. If you are confident in the material, I feel that you have better discipline.

Erin: That's another area [i.e. discipline]. If you know your subject area, you can always distract kids. You know, something starts happening and you can say, "You know what? You want me to tell you something?" If you're out of your area, you don't have all those little things.

Fran: I have been lucky lately in that I have been able to teach in my subject area. As a result, I do feel more in control of my classroom and tend not to have the discipline problems that may be associated with lack of confidence.

Ann: I didn't like it [i.e. teaching a class out of specialty area]. I had a big class and I ranted and raved at them every day and that's not my usual kind of teaching. I did that because I didn't feel comfortable and I thought, "I have to keep these kids in more control than I generally do." I didn't feel comfortable.

Ideally, the role of generalist offers variety, challenge, mental stimulation, and an opportunity to continue learning in many different areas. However, because the educational system does not recognize the uniqueness of what the generalist is doing, teachers placed in this role often find that the reality is much different. They are competing with specialists in the minds of the students, parents, peers, administrators, and themselves. Thus, the reality of being misassigned is often that one's self-confidence, credibility, and professional reputation are at risk. All this while spending more hours in preparation for classroom duties. It does not surprise me that teachers taking part in the study were not thrilled at the prospect of having out-of-area courses placed on their teaching timetables and that virtually none regarded himself or herself to be a generalist by choice.

Teachers who had little or no experience teaching out of their specialty areas expressed quite adamantly that it was not something they would choose to do. A number of subject area specialists made comments such as, "I'm lucky. I teach only in my own area." The converse of this statement is, of course, that

generalists, those teaching out of their own areas of specialization, are "unlucky." While most participants in the study could see some positive aspects to teaching an out-of-field course, no one expressed a desire to do so on a volunteer basis. Responses from subject area specialists often reinforce the attitude that their generalist counterparts are in some way less fortunate or in a less desirable situation.

Fran: I would probably be very upset [i.e. if asked to teach an unfamiliar subject area]. Just to give you an example, a few years ago, I had taught out of my area and then the following year I was able to get back into my area. The year after, it was another case where I could have taught out of my area and I told the administrator at that time I would quit before I taught that course again.

Jill: We went to university and got into areas because we were interested in them, we could succeed in them and feel good about it. I mean everyone could do it [i.e. teach a subject outside of area of specialty], but I might need a lot of help and I'd be up all hours of the night cramming and banging my head when I couldn't understand it. Of course, I could do it, but why would I see that as desirable?

One subject area specialist was asked how she might feel if she were to return to school in September to find an out-of-area course had been added to her timetable. Her response was:

Erin: I would take it as an insult from where I am now to be given [an unfamiliar course]. I would *know* what it meant. I would take it as, "You haven't been doing your job so you're being demoted."

The same respondent related the following experience:

Erin: In fact, I've had nightmares about having to teach computers -- I've actually cried in my sleep because my teaching assignment said "Computer Science 9." I thought, "I can't do this." It was just like a pink slip. "They're trying to get rid of me!"

Most respondents articulated that they believed generalists and specialists on staff were treated equally, that generalists contributed equally to the success of students, and that they should be "proud" of what they do. One subject area specialist surmised that generalists are, in fact, doing a different job from that of the specialist. "It's a much harder job; much more difficult." No doubt, there is an explicit, conscious assertion that teachers who are misassigned are of equal value within the system. However, I would maintain that the connotation of what was said tells a very different story. Words such as "unlucky," "demoted," "It was just like a pink slip" convey to me an underlying attitude

that the generalist teacher is indeed seen to be in an unfortunate, if not inferior, position within the system. Here again, generalist teachers are in a perplexing situation. No one ever says that the generalist is not quite as good as the specialist; but, on a subliminal level, the attitude is there.

In marked contrast to the experiences of teachers in out-of-area teaching assignments, the subject areas specialists taking part in the study displayed a noticeably higher level of satisfaction with their teaching assignments. These respondents explained that, because they were working in subject areas which they enjoyed and with which they were completely well-versed, they were much more relaxed and confident in the classroom. Overall, these individuals appeared to be much less stressful than were their out-of-area colleagues; they tended to feel that they were fortunate to be working in fields for which they had a true love. Typical of comments received from these teachers was:

Erin: I think you're always lucky when you get to do what you're trained to do. If you've specialized in an area you obviously like that area or you have aptitudes and interests in that area. I feel lucky because my knowledge of what I'm interested in has increased. I feel very lucky to be able to teach what I enjoy and what I would be doing anyway.

One respondent who teaches in a particularly high-profile program area compared the success of the program during the current year, in which he is teaching strictly within his specialty area, to previous years in which he was required to teach at least one or two courses outside of his area of specialty. He observed that, while he was busier than ever within his own area, the program itself had flourished during the present year. He attributed this to the fact that he currently can concentrate fully on his own area, whereas in past years he had to spend a disproportionate amount of time preparing for courses which were clearly outside of his range of training and interest. In fact, he estimated that his preparation time was increased by 65% with the addition of these courses. This was all time which had to be taken from his main area of concentration. He explained, "Time is the most crucial element; the more you take away, the more difficult the job becomes." Just the addition of one out-of-area course "makes the difference between me feeling really good about my year or not."

This teacher outlined his thoughts about why the academic and extra-curricular programs in which he is involved have improved so substantially during the present school year:

Hal: I actually have time now if students come in wanting extra help. I actually feel that I have time to give to them, whereas before, I felt I was just keeping abreast of what I was doing from day to day so I didn't have a lot of time to put into it.

In my area I find that it may be a drop in the bucket to teach one kid something about one small element...or whatever, but later on that's going to come back ...and you'll see that's helping the whole thing, so I try to work on each of those little tiny aspects; whereas if I was just to brush them off because I didn't have enough time, then all of a sudden it starts to eat away and you have a hole there, just because you're spread too thin.

This respondent summarized his opinion about the issue of out-of-area teaching assignment as follows:

Hal: I have major concerns in this area. As a specialist in a rather "special" area, it is an very legitimate concern with me. I feel this year (largely as a result of my teaching solely in my areas of specialization), as compared with the last [few] years, I'm actually doing the best job I feel I'm capable of with regards to my teaching assignment.

This subject area specialist verified what other specialists taking part in the study told me. They perceive that, because they are working in their area of specialization, they are more satisfied and capable of doing a better overall job. It's not that subject area specialists are not required to work hard; in most cases they work very hard. I believe it's because they see their efforts as being more focused, coherent, and appreciated. Specialists are able to improve, refine, and perfect their work. The efforts of the generalist, on the other hand, are often widely dispersed, transient, and little-noticed. These are simply not returns which tend to create a high level of self-confidence, prestige, or satisfaction on the part of the teacher.

Erin: I see more happiness among people who are free to do what the do (i.e. specialists). A change in my subject area would change my whole attitude toward my job. With being in your area, you get to perfect what you do. If you don't quite get it right the first time, you know there's another year to get it right. I know there's a next year. You're looking ahead, not thinking, "Okay, what am I teaching next year?"

[As a generalist] you burn-out. You feel like you're not growing personally. You're always a novice. You can't be a mentor to anyone because you're always a novice yourself.

Another subject area specialist assessed the disadvantages faced by teachers who are frequently moved from area to area as follows:

Jill: First of all, you're not going to feel content as a teacher, that you've done your best. You would develop an attitude: "Why burn myself out year after year? I can teach, I'll survive." So every year would be a survival year where you'd just do the best you could do without doing hours of work a night. Every time you teach something over, it becomes a little better -- then, of course, if you have an interest in it it helps. But to always be given new -- like a lot of new courses -- I would not be a good teacher. I think I *am* a good teacher, but I don't think kids would see me as such a good teacher if I was teaching new courses year in and year out. I would just be tired and dissatisfied with myself as a teacher.

The sentiments expressed by these subject area specialists were substantiated by a generalist respondent who had great experience teaching in a variety of subject areas:

Ann: It's a "you're the victim of your own success" kind of thing. I think that's been done and I think it shows because there have been people who have been moved to other areas, have not done well in those areas and so they don't teach them again. So if you are moved to this area and that area and whatever, and you do well, then okay, you can handle it.

In a sense it's a backhanded compliment or vote of confidence by the administration, but I don't often think of that. You know, I'm told, "We've given you [a new subject area] because you can handle it," but at the time I feel miserable because I'm thinking, "How can I handle this? How can I keep up the standards when I don't know what's going on?" I guess I always did okay, but I didn't feel good about it ever.

It's like being a first year teacher over and over and over again and you can't keep up that intensity very long. I've paid my dues [as a new teacher], but I can't keep paying my dues over and over. You realize, "I can't keep working with that intensity," so you stop doing it. You decide, "I'm only going to do what's necessary, I'm only going to do what I can." You have to do that to survive. And then maybe your teaching suffers or the kids suffer.

The study also addressed the issue of how teachers believed their status within the school was influenced by teaching assignment. There was an interesting range of responses in the data relating to this issue. Here again, on the surface, there was some agreement that both subject area specialists and generalists should have equal degrees of status within the school's social

structure. Some respondents who had limited experience in teaching subjects outside of their areas of specialization did not feel that their status had been unduly affected by the situation or that the impact had been "minimal." A response offered by a number of respondents indicated that while teachers may have felt somewhat negative about the experience at the time, after they had successfully taught a course outside of their area of training, they felt a boost in self-esteem if not in status within the school. One respondent felt that the situation could be interpreted in a positive way in that it might make the teacher appear more flexible:

Greg: Your status within the school would not be greatly influenced. You may be perceived of as versatile and well-rounded. However, if you were totally out your element and appeared incompetent in your subject area, then your status as a teacher would quickly drop amongst students and staff.

Many of these respondents, however, are teachers who appear to be subject area specialists for whom teaching a course or two outside of their areas of specialization would appear to have been an aberration from their typical teaching assignments. Teachers whose timetables had taken them out of their areas of speciality in a more frequent and intense pattern were somewhat less positive in their responses. Responses from these individuals indicated that they did perceive a perceptible reduction in status on the part of teachers who were categorized as generalists. Comments reflecting these perceptions included:

Ann: As a generalist, I feel that I am not important enough or maybe knowledgeable enough to teach some high school academic courses; or maybe not good enough as a teacher. There is a certain prestige in the school for high school academic courses, which I rarely have an opportunity to teach.

I felt like I was the low person on the totem pole. It was like "We'll do everyone else's timetable, then we'll slot you in."

Barb: Becoming a generalist, I feel my status has declined. [When I was a specialist], I had a very definite niche within the school... I had an office; people always knew where to find me and I was very visible, very high-profile. Now, I don't really have an identifiable niche anymore. You know, like when they have the phone list at the beginning of the year which says what subjects you teach and you've got three subjects beside your name. Or, when [the principal] introduces you at the assembly at the beginning of the year and says this teacher is going to be teaching this, that, and that. The kids and the staff don't think of you in the same way anymore.

You'll look at certain people and you'll know that they *are* the Social department, or the English department, or the art teacher, or the home economics teacher. I very definitely feel that there are solid groups of people that are in those departments and then there are the other people who fill in the gaps.

For example, we [generalists] are not called to meetings. We have subject meetings and the generalist has to choose which one to go to. You don't even feel like you're part of the department. I've got one [subject] course so they [the department] had a meeting at the beginning of the year and as an afterthought they called me down to it. That's fine, but it's just the way you kind of fall through the cracks.

One respondent, who had many years of teaching experience in a specialty area, reacted to an out-of-area course assignment recently assigned to him in the following way:

Cal: It has not affected my confidence or self-esteem, however it gives me a feeling that the administration has down-graded my specialty area.

Subject area specialists taking part in the study were hesitant to explicitly say that they may, in fact, accrue more status for their specialist role. This hesitancy could have been modesty on their part. During interviews, it became more apparent that, in reality, they did concede their special status.

Jill: In this school, there are the core teachers, the ones teaching all English, all social studies and all biology for example. It starts with who is teaching the 30-level courses; these courses are identified as the core in each area. If you look at the area in which the 30-level teachers are teaching, we're all specialists, really limited specialists. Because what we do is more public, we might get more status. We're kind of the showcase of the school; our marks are published in the paper. We're so into evaluation, maybe we do get more recognition.

Erin: I really do believe you get promoted. Teaching in your own area is a promotion. It's one of the only kinds of promotion we get. Maybe it's not necessary for us to be so concerned with status; but, I was thinking, when you have it [i.e. status], you don't notice. It's like being blinded, take it away, and you're devastated. When you *don't* have it, you're always aware of it.,

It's not that anyone is really treated better. I think everyone's treated professionally. But it's like a vote of confidence when you're allowed to do what you want to do and it's not withdrawn from you. In some people's case, they're not allowed to do what they excel at because it doesn't fit the timetable. I guess that's an insult.

If you know you're valued, you can be enthusiastic and you feel even better

about what you do. It builds upon itself. I guess administrators have to know that if they want a happy staff and a good school.

I would suggest that this respondent has pegged the essence of the status issue. Specialists tend to be less aware of the issue simply because they do receive recognition and a certain level of prestige for what they do. As implied here, perhaps when one has status, the issue of status does not seem to be a significant concern. However, for generalists, those who may feel a palpable lack of status and recognition for what they do, the issue is more problematic.

Theme 2 - Evaluation: The Paper Game

In the course of data collection for the study, I found that the issue of teacher evaluation aroused the most vehement and consistent responses of any issue addressed by the study. There was a great deal of uniformity in teachers' opinions regarding the system by which teachers are evaluated in the school, particularly in regard to teachers being evaluated in subject areas outside of their areas of training and expertise. Teachers taking part in the study were extremely concerned that evaluators did not take into consideration in any way teachers' qualifications and suitability for subject areas assigned to them. Only one respondent indicated that an evaluator had taken this into account during an evaluation, and this, it was noted, occurred during a prior superintendency. All other teachers interviewed or questioned stated without exception that, when they were evaluated by representatives of the school administration or the superintendent of schools, the fact that they were teaching in a new and/or unfamiliar subject area was ignored by the evaluator. All teachers questioned, whether they had had experience teaching outside of their areas of training and expertise or had taught consistently within their specialty area, agreed that this situation was unfair and in many cases rendered evaluations invalid.

Once again, it was apparent to me that the system has a built-in bias against generalist teachers and teachers who are required to teach outside of their areas of training. It is only logical that a teacher struggling to cope with unfamiliar subject content or a variety of new course assignments will experience a myriad of difficulties with which the specialist on staff will

simply not have to cope. The fact is apparent to everyone. Nevertheless, the evaluation system imposes a rigid and inflexible code of criteria upon all teachers, regardless of their teaching situation.

In my dialogues with teachers, I discovered that this situation has exacerbated an existing sense of cynicism about the evaluation system used in the school. I detected an underlying sense that the evaluation system is viewed as a game which teachers must play; but, it is a game in which they place very little real credence. In the case of some generalist teachers I spoke to, it was the greatest point of irritation and resentment cited. What really disturbed these teachers most of all was the realization that, despite the reality of their teaching situation, what was said about them on paper would endure forever and that this evaluation system is what they, as teachers, would be judged by in future. The frustration is that the evaluation system is not geared to reflect the strengths of the generalist teacher on any level. It simply does not provide an honest reflection of the generalist teachers' capabilities.

Respondents described their feelings as follows:

Ann: Now that's the thing that always bothered me. The administrators could see that I was doing okay with these different courses, but then an outside evaluator would come in and evaluate me and this would be my third or fourth new course that year. I wouldn't get as good an evaluation as somebody down the hall who did half the work that I did and never taught outside of their area. That's what I really feel bad about...the evaluations. I can cope with the rest.

The evaluations are what have made me feel the worst over the years...that I'm totally incapable. There's no flexibility, no allowances.

Barb: That's one area that I do feel is unfair and other teachers feel the same way. In the past, I have had very high evaluations teaching [my specialty area], and then the superintendent came in and evaluated me teaching [an out of area course] and, of course, my evaluation dropped. And I said, "well, someone looking at my file and not noticing the change of subject is just going to see that my levels have dropped." And I really felt that that was ...unfair. Especially since they like to see some continuity and they like to see you improving. If you suddenly drop they don't seem to put two and two together and realize that you're now teaching a bit of a mish-mash and you're not in your area anymore or that you don't have a background in that area.

Jan: Let's face it, if you know you're being evaluated, you do a different kind of lesson than you normally would because that's not what the superintendents want. They want a bunch of bull so you put on a bunch of bull...you put on a lesson for them and that's what they see.

Hal: There should be some consideration for teachers teaching subjects outside of their areas...at least a statement on the evaluation for their file. When I was evaluated teaching a course outside of my area, no consideration was taken...

Jill: [Teachers outside of their areas] are without a doubt being placed at a disadvantage in judgment from the parents, the students, and probably the administration. How can they give a good evaluation? How can they compare going into the one room where the teacher is teaching in his area and the teacher is so enthusiastic and the kids can ask him anything and he knows it with a teacher who may have had equal experience teaching, but who doesn't know the material and who has been put in that position by no fault of his own?

As these representative comments indicate, there was a general consensus by all teachers interviewed that the present evaluation format does not make allowances for teacher differences. In particular, it does not allow for the distinction between teachers teaching within their specialty areas and those teaching in unfamiliar areas. All felt that this was unfair to teachers placed in teaching assignments which might be inconsistent with their academic background. In my view, the evaluation scheme merely reflects the subliminal bias against the generalist or non-specialist teacher which permeates the system as a whole. These teachers do not fit into the dominant scheme of things; and, the evaluation system simply bears this out.

Theme 3 - The Administration: Behind Closed Doors

The scope of the study did not include the experiences and perceptions of administrators; therefore, administrators *per se* were not included in the data collection process. Several staff members who acted as part-time administrators were included inasmuch as these individuals were also part of the teaching staff of the school. There was no attempt to address the issues discussed in the study from an administrative perspective. This attempt could be the focus of a further study. Nevertheless, as I reviewed and reflected upon the data collected from teachers, there emerged several consistent trends evident in respondents' comments regarding the role of the administration and its perceived impacts upon teachers. In identifying and analyzing these trends, it is not the intent to criticize administrators. No doubt, they have their own stories to tell. However, since recurrent themes relating to the role of the administration did arise from the data collected, it was obvious that these issues

were of importance to teachers; therefore, I felt that it imperative to include them in the study.

Teachers taking part in the study frequently provided data which indicated that they had a sense that the administration is quite isolated from the reality of teachers as it is lived out from day-to-day in the classroom. I noted an implicit observation on the part of many respondents that the administration is, in fact, following a very different agenda from that of classroom teachers, an agenda comprised of priorities which are often disparate from the priorities of teachers.

I could characterize this apparent dichotomy as follows: administrators are concerned with issues on the "macro" level; their mandate is to make the school run as efficiently as possible. Teachers, on the other hand, deal with issues on the "micro" level; they are involved with the intricacies of interaction at the classroom level. It is not surprising that the interests of these two groups within the system do not always mesh. As one teacher observed: "Administrators are so busy that they don't have a lot of time to do reality checks. They see [things] more holistically: will the school run?"

Nevertheless, participants were frequently troubled by the apparent aloofness of the administrators and their possible lack of awareness about what really goes on in the school. For example, one respondent explained: "To me, that would be a really important thing, if they [administrators] would just drop in. They would have to drop in often enough to understand [what I'm really doing]. If I could make just one change, that's what it would be...that people drop in more often." A second respondent offered a similar commentary: "It's hard to know what's going on in another person's classroom unless you walk in. But, the administrators *should* walk in and administrator's *should* ask people who know. As subject liaison, all someone has to do is ask me [who's the best person to teach a course in my area]. But, they don't check with me."

Several respondents expressed concerns that administrators were more worried about appearances than with substance; things must look good on paper regardless of the situation teachers might be coping with in reality. Some teachers stated they felt that administrators were either unaware of or

unsympathetic towards their difficulties, especially as these difficulties related to inconsistent timetabling assignments. They feared their problems appeared inconsequential when compared to more important administrative problems.

Hal: Administrators were not aware of my problems [in teaching outside of my area], or they would rather not think about them. This is the way it goes: it has to look good on paper, but you guys [teachers] fend for yourselves.

Jan: The administrative response [to my problems with an out of area class] was: "Be sure it's all documented." Does that help you control a class? Not a smidgen. They don't know what to do, they don't have any idea. All they tell you is to be sure it's all documented. You may go off the wall, you might jump out the window, but at least you will have it documented.

Fran: I don't know if they [administrators] are aware or not [i.e. of difficulties experienced by out of area teachers]. Not many teachers will go to the administrator and say, "I can't handle this!" and cry on their shoulders, because that shows a sign of weakness and as teachers we don't like to show that. If they do know, they're sure not doing anything about it. In a sense, they're the one's who created the problem so the blame leads back to them.

There is a further perception articulated by several respondents that, as a consequence of their isolation from the mundane operations of the school, administrators are not fully cognizant of the real abilities and strengths of the teaching staff. As a result, timetabling decisions in particular are made based upon supposition and hearsay rather than an accurate understanding of teachers' strengths and weaknesses. This frustration with the timetable was a real problem for individuals who felt that administrative perceptions about them were inaccurate. How can one counteract something as elusive as a perception?

Ann: I don't think the administration knows what goes on out there in the classrooms. They're isolated and I think they rely on what other people are saying, what the kids are saying, what the parents are saying. That's what they rely on for what they think is happening out there.

Erin: In this school, a perception is formed within the first few months of your being here and that perception is really hard to do anything about.

Jan: Teachers are not considered in any way shape or form. We are a commodity -- much like a roll of paper. *Any* roll of paper will do, we'll just write on it. I don't think we are used to our best advantage because we aren't even considered as a person.

Fran: To a certain degree, I think that administrators *do* forget what they've done. They make up the timetable and think, "Oh yeah, they've accepted teaching that." Then they forget that there are teachers out there who are

teaching Phys Ed 10, Home Ec 9, Science 7, and all sorts of things because they don't hear about it.

At the same time, the data revealed a presumption held by many respondents that timetabling decisions divulge an informal social hierarchy underpinning the bureaucratic structure of the school. Many felt that subject area specialists, especially those teaching at the 30-level, were unlikely to be allotted unfamiliar subject area courses; these individuals were seen to be the "elite" of the teaching staff. Other teachers, particularly those classified as generalists by the administrators, were likely to be given the "leftovers" or those courses which simply didn't fit into the specialists' timetables. Certain teachers were considered to be the "catch-alls" who would be given any variety of subject area offerings. In opposition to the elite staff members, these people were seen as the least important or influential teachers on staff.

Jim: I do feel that teachers can be taken advantage of if they are not considered a specialized teacher and these teachers will get the "leftovers".

Fran: I know I wouldn't want to be teaching out of my area, yet it's not fair that one person is always cast as "catch-all". The person that's going to be doing four or five courses. That's not fair either.

Ann: I felt like I was the low person on the totem pole. "We'll do everyone else's timetable, then we'll slot you in."

Jill: At the 30-level here they try to match the best teacher for the course. But at the lower levels, I assume it's often filling in holes.

Barb: There is a general perception that there is a hierarchical structure and that some staff have more influence than other staff members. Definitely.

When I was teaching [my specialty area], I was asked if I wanted to teach the 30-level course. All my courses were in my specialty area. I was given a choice, I could pick and choose. I'm sure that happens all the time now -- the key people in the English department, for instance, will take their pick of what they want to teach. As a generalist, however, you're available as a useful commodity to fill in the gaps. In a sense, it's more useful than having another English teacher or social studies teacher.

From the data collected, I would assess that one the most distressing aspects of the administration's isolation from staff is the timetabling process itself. Respondents in the study consistently reported that they felt they had either very minimal or nil input into the timetabling process. This lack of input appeared to be disturbing to teachers because timetabling assignments are so crucial to teachers' overall satisfaction with their jobs. As outlined earlier in

the study, teachers feel their confidence, credibility, self-esteem, and status are all profoundly influenced by teaching assignment. Unquestionably, teachers see timetabling as a very high priority within the school. One teacher succinctly stated, "I think the timetable is the essence of a good school. If you have a good timetable, people are happy." Another respondent indicated that timetabling is essential to maximum performance by teachers. "Looking at it from the administrative point, I would think that the happier you can keep your teachers, the better they're going to perform for you." I would conjecture that timetabling is one issue which holds a different priority for teachers and administrators. Teachers are concerned with their individual assignments and the possible personal implications of such. Administrators look at the timetable as a whole and are basically interested in the question: "Does it work?"

Respondents were particularly perplexed by the secrecy of timetabling procedures employed in the school. As it was described to me, the timetable is completed by administrators alone and all information is kept under lock and key until the final timetable is presented to the staff as a *fait accompli*. While the administration does distribute a form requesting teachers on staff to inform them of their teaching preferences for the upcoming year, many respondents felt that this input was not taken into serious consideration during the formulation of the timetable. The only respondents who demonstrated a significant degree of confidence in relation to the stability of their timetabling assignments were those teaching the academic 30-level courses. These teachers stated that they felt quite assured that their timetables would change minimally as long as they received good results from students on the most recent diploma exams.

Erin: People are promoted or demoted depending upon how they do at that top level. Rightly or wrongly, people are judged on their diploma exam marks. If you produce results there, you're okay. I *know* in this school they're used to judge teachers. One set of bad diploma exam marks and right away some judgments are made about a teacher's abilities. People are rewarded with courses.

Of course, the reality for the majority of teachers on staff is that they do not teach courses at this level. There was a great deal of dialogue concerning the establishment of a "niche" on staff, and that it is up to the teacher to find his or her niche.

Fran: I remember one particular administrator who told me, "You haven't created your niche yet." And I said, "I want to create my niche." He said, "That may be difficult because other people have their niche."

Jill: Once you get into the 30-level or the high school level, you begin to develop a niche. But maybe if you never get there, if you never get the chance at a 30-level course or a high-profile course, you're not seen. That's the key, to get a 30-level course or high school course and start to develop it.

Erin: I guess it takes all kinds to fill a timetable, but it seems unfair that sometimes people get slotted and they don't get a chance to rise and fall because of the system.

Although 30-level teachers believe they have more stability in their teaching assignments, they feel that they, like all other teachers on staff, are shut-out when it comes to the dynamics of timetabling. For example, all subject liaison teachers questioned said categorically that they were not consulted regarding selection of appropriate teachers for courses within their areas. Teachers assigned to 30-level courses did indicate that they had been asked if they would like to teach those specific courses; but, for the most part, teachers replied that they were rarely consulted about timetabling decisions which affected them. This included the assignment of courses which might take teachers outside of their areas of specialty. Respondents proposed that they would feel more content with their timetabling assignments if they were assured that they would be consulted and allowed to voice their opinions regarding decisions which impacted them. Several agreed that a more open timetabling process might lead to a better result in the long run.

Erin: I think the timetable is the essence of a good school. If you have a good timetable people are happy. I don't see why it has to be so secretive. Teachers can come up with really creative ideas in the timetable like switching classes. Get some feedback from the teachers -- maybe they can help with the timetable. But that doesn't happen -- it's a secret.

Ann: Everybody's left out [of the timetabling process]. Somebody just makes the decision and that's the way it's going to be and if you don't like it, you should seek employment elsewhere.

Hal: I don't know if they [administrators] have the luxury of saying, "Gee, this isn't going to be good for the students or the teacher." But, on the other hand, sometimes it contradicts the whole premise of what's best for the student is number one priority of the school. That is not necessarily the case. [Administrators think] "We have to make the logistics work." The student may get the short end of the stick, but that may be what they feel is uncontrollable.

Some teachers felt that the exclusive control exerted by the administration over the timetabling process was an instrument which exemplifies the control and authority which administrators hold over teachers. Administrators are hesitant to relinquish that control because it might diminish their authority in the eyes of teachers. In considering such responses from teachers, I could see the connection between this perception and comments which were offered suggesting that teachers are rewarded with course assignments or that teachers are often seen to be promoted or demoted as a corollary of their teaching assignments.

Ann: I see that the administrator -- whoever does the timetable -- has a tremendous amount of power and I think that that is a consideration when doing the timetable: "I have the power to do this and that is what I'm going to do."

John: If someone has that amount of power, there should be some awareness of the impacts of his or her decisions. You can give some people the opportunity to excel and do extremely well or you can destroy someone by the kinds of decisions you make in the timetable.

Erin: People are rewarded with courses.

One respondent stated that the situation is analogous to placing the administrator in the role of teacher while the teachers are relegated to the role of students:

Fran: As a result, we have lost some professionalism as teachers because of it. We're not treated as professionals like we really do know what we want or what we can do. It's like we're the classroom and he [the administrator] is the teacher and controlling.

Another respondent suggested that the present system depersonalizes the individual teacher:

Jan: We are a commodity, much like a roll of paper, *any* paper will do, we'll just write on it. We aren't even considered as a person.

Some participants equate the exclusivity of the timetabling process with a desire to retain control and authority. One participant felt that administrators are preoccupied with their own agendas.

Ann: They [administrators] are looking globally; they're concerned about power; they're concerned with their own problems.

In assessing the data relating to the role of the administration and its impact upon teachers, I was surprised by the degree to which many respondents felt the administration was secluded from what was really happening in the school. I would surmise that administrators are, to a large degree, unaware of these feelings held by teachers simply because teachers expressed hesitancy to voice such concerns to administrators. This reluctance is exacerbated by a sense that administrators are closed off and too busy to provide support for teachers. Teachers fear administrators will trivialize their difficulties. Furthermore, teachers do not want to appear weak or incapable, yet they would invite greater interaction with and affirmation from the administration. Respondents indicated that they would like to have some control over their own situations within the school and would like decisions to be based upon substance rather than hearsay and perception. It would appear that respondents feel that a heavy-handed or authoritarian approach to school administration is counterproductive and erodes their professionalism as teachers.

Theme 4 - The Students: Why Are We Here Anyway?

The preponderance of data collected as the study was conducted dealt with teachers; teachers' experiences, teachers' feelings, teachers' perceptions, teachers' observations, and so on. This focus was only to be expected since the purpose of the study was to allow teachers to express themselves regarding these components of their professional lives. The study was very much intended to articulate the teacher's voice and reflect the teacher's perspective. Indeed, while it does appear that teachers are often preoccupied with those forces and influences which impact their day-to-day lives in the classroom, it is also evident that teachers are primarily concerned with the welfare of their students. As I collected and reviewed the data, I was impressed by the frequency with which teachers related their sensitivity to the assumption that factors which influence them also affect their students. In fact, the main issue reiterated by teachers throughout the course of the study was the question: "How will this affect the students?"

In discussing the issue of misassignment of teachers, the direction of dialogue consistently led to concerns about the impacts such teaching assignments hold for students. This is not to say that teachers did not place significant emphasis upon implications timetabling assignment held for themselves. Yet, overall, teachers were able to cope or survive (if not thrive) in uncomfortable and unfamiliar teaching circumstances. Despite personal levels of discomfort and unhappiness, I did not meet one respondent who actually "threw in the towel" and gave up on a difficult teaching assignment. All respondents experienced in this situation managed to muddle their way through with varying levels of satisfaction and success. There was, nevertheless, a consistent underlying uneasiness that, while the teacher survived, the students suffered some level of disadvantage as a result.

Most respondents who had experience teaching out-of-field did believe that they were able to provide a basic and adequate level of instruction. This was not the point. What bothered teachers most was that their their own lack of knowledge, reduced self-assurance, and personal discomfort in the situation was transferred to the students in the form of a less than optimal learning experience. Common sentiments were: "I think the kids would have enjoyed the course more with a more knowledgeable teacher," "...they cannot get the best possible education because I am unfamiliar with the area," "...it has been somewhat unfortunate for them [the students]...because I know that the depth of knowledge in any area is critical the teaching success," "I felt I let my students down," "they did not get very good instruction in some areas...I felt lost," "I wasn't as competent as the area specialist and therefore couldn't immediately respond to questions...but I always researched and found out," "I didn't have sufficient knowledge, so I didn't cover the material as well as I would have liked," "It is difficult to be motivational and exciting as a teacher in a subject area you are not passionate about," "sometimes I feel I can help them only so much, a limited amount."

I detected a clear conviction on the part of respondents that students deserve the best we have to offer, not just an adequate learning situation. Most felt that teachers instructing in areas outside of their areas of specialty were simply unable to offer this to students because they lacked both knowledge and love for the subject they were assigned to teach.

Jill: You know who benefits or loses? It's the kids. If you're happy as a teacher, your class is happy...You don't have as many discipline problems. Everyone's happy. Everyone's getting the benefit of a good, happy teacher. On the other hand, you have someone outside of their area and they're scared of the material and swamped -- the kids aren't going to be happy.

Why are we here -- we're here for kids. So if you want to benefit students, and that's what the whole thing is supposed to be about, then why not try to match people who are capable of doing what they're trying to do for those kids?

Erin: I believe that people sell their subject. There are kids who are really interested in subjects and a teacher that is trained in that area can build upon those enthusiasms, whereas if you're not [trained] sometimes the kids are passing you. That can be good sometimes, but students should have people who can feed them as far as they can go. But if you haven't mastered the subject yourself and you're assigned to teach it, that can be pretty intimidating. You can only fake it so much.

Fran: I think it was the kids who lost out. They didn't get a love for the subject that a specialist could have given them. There was no spark. It's easy to walk into a classroom and say, "Turn to page five, read pages five to ten and do the questions -- we'll discuss them later". That's easy. But, it's not easy to get them to *enjoy*. And that's what I think they lost out on because I didn't enjoy it. That's going to rub off.

Hal: Sure, anyone can teach any one particular course. They'd have to do a heck of a pile of homework on it...but I think any teacher could survive in any course. But, who's going to get the worst end of it is the students, for sure, and probably the teacher in the other areas [he or she] is teaching.

Theme 5 - The Secret Rewards of the Generalist

There is no question that responses from participants in the study revealed that these teachers, by an overwhelming margin, preferred to be categorized and assigned as subject area specialists. No respondent viewed himself or herself to be a generalist by choice. Those few who did place themselves in that category later explained that this was a consequence of the role which they believed had been imposed upon them by timetabling decisions. Intrinsically, these individuals continued to perceive of themselves as subject area specialists who were required to work outside of their areas of specialty. As the data presented to this point have indicated, respondents saw a paucity of positive spin-offs for themselves as a result of being placed in the generalist category. That is not to say, however, that teachers who had

experience teaching outside of their areas of specialization did not see any positives in the situation.

In discussing the benefits of out-of-area teaching with respondents, I perceived that the rewards of teaching outside of your area are not clearly obvious. I discerned that the types of rewards generalist teachers experience are very personal, they come from within the teacher. These positions simply do not afford the teacher recognition, prestige, or a high profile within the school; these more external rewards remain the domain of the specialist. I would say that most of the benefits accrued by the generalist are self-generated and probably apparent only to the individual. Thus, people who are able to attain a high level of satisfaction from the role of generalist are individuals who appear to have a strong sense of identity and self-worth. They take pride in their contributions even when those contributions do not receive recognition or plaudits from colleagues or superiors. They do not wait to be allotted a niche within the system; they carve out their own niche which meets their own needs. I found that those who were able to thrive in the role of generalist tended to be independent in character; types who, although placed on the periphery of the social schema, tended to enjoy the uniqueness of their role. It was also apparent that these individuals were likely to become involved in activities external to the school which might bolster their self-esteem and sense of accomplishment. As one experienced generalist on staff explained: "I lost motivation school-wise, but I turned to other activities outside of the school to affirm my self-esteem."

The most frequent positive response put forward by those who had at least a minimum of experience teaching in unfamiliar subject areas dealt with the boost in self-esteem teachers experience when they are able to tackle the unknown and do it successfully. As one respondent explained, "It's hell on earth while you're having to do it, but when it's done, then you feel great. That's another subject I can teach." Many teachers considered an out-of-area subject assignment to be a challenge which could be invigorating and stimulating. "When it has occurred, it has been gratifying in revitalizing teaching strategies, but [I was] uncomfortable in course knowledge." Many teachers described their experiences of being quite unhappy in the assignment at the time they were teaching it, but having experienced a sense

of accomplishment after the fact. "My confidence was boosted when I completed the assignment, but at the time my self-esteem was quite low."

Other teachers commented on the variety which the position offered them: "At first I was apprehensive and worried a lot, but I also considered it a challenge. I enjoy the variety of assignments, but only because I have had help from other teachers." Another teacher stated: "I like one new course so I have to do some work, something new to keep my mind going. I think if I was like some people who have been specialists for years -- who've done nothing but teach the same courses -- I'd hate that." Additional positive aspects of generalist teaching suggested by respondents included such things as: "it's never boring," "you're constantly learning new things," "after several years, you gain the confidence that you can teach anything," "it has caused me to explore numerous other teaching styles," "you develop skills and strategies that can also work in your areas of expertise," "I gave me a chance to meet different kinds of students who still come and visit me from time to time," and "it looks good on a resume and is good when interviewing for another position."

An interesting commentary on the possibility that teachers can become "too specialized" was outlined by one respondent. This respondent was a subject area specialist and subject liaison teacher.

Erin: I think that generalists should be proud of themselves...that they can do so many things and do it so well that the kids don't know. The kids judge you somewhat on what you know, but also for what you are. Your discipline, your manner. If you're too much of a specialist, the kids can't understand you. The kids "turn off" because they say: "All he's interested in is chemistry or physics or whatever." You can become too narrow. You can be so wound up in your subject area that you're not even a human being anymore. The enthusiasm is there but it's at a level that's unreachable. Sometimes I think these guys should have to teach grade 2 or something to realize that we're teachers here and whatever we have to do to get the content across, we'll do.

A respondent who had moved from the role of specialist to generalist within the last few years gave a very concise and lucid explanation of why she has enjoyed her new role. Her comments reveal much about the character of those individuals who seem to flourish in the role of generalist:

Barb: I'm quite happy to let go of that specialist feeling. I know I'm kind of 'jack of

all trades and master of none' these days and what was a pleasant surprise is that I really enjoy the variety of the curriculum. There are some positives in it.

[I was told], "Try to make this a positive thing for yourself," and he [the administrator] was quite right. I'm loving it. I really like it. At this point, I wouldn't want to go back to teaching all [one area]. I find it boring.

In a way, I feel kind of unique in the school. I have very good self-esteem these days because I know I'm fairly unique in what I do teach and the niche that I fill in the school.

This generalist has attained a high level of satisfaction in the role as a consequence of a high level of self-confidence and a well-defined sense of identity. This teacher had earlier admitted that, as a result of changing from a specialist to generalist position, she sensed a loss of status and identity within the school. She also recounted that this transition resulted in her receiving a less positive administrative evaluation. Yet she was willing to make those trade-offs in order to teach in areas which were presently more attractive and interesting to her.

I believe this individual exemplifies the persona of the successful generalist. These are teachers who are willing to exchange the more visible rewards of the subject area specialist in return for a sense of contentment and achievement derived from a role which adheres more closely to their personal idiosyncracies and interests. Not everyone is cut out for the role of generalist. The role of generalist is, in itself, specialized within the social schema of the secondary school. I believe it is a role which allows the preponderance of the system to function efficiently and smoothly. The irony of the generalists' position is that the workload and difficulty required by the position is incongruous with the lack of recognition and esteem it derives from the system as a whole. Thus, while the generalist is often fulfilling a difficult and necessary role, it is one which is in many ways invisible and underappreciated. The generalist must be willing to accept that reality if he or she is to succeed and be satisfied in the position.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON THE DATA

In identifying the themes which emerged from the data collected, the objective was to give both meaning and structure to the voices of teachers as they recounted the narratives of their experiences in the classroom. I hope that the themes sketched out above have achieved both these goals to some degree and that I have done justice to the teachers who so willingly shared their stories with me. I would also hope that the dialogue will continue, particularly with the inclusion of other voices, such as those of administrators and students, voices which must be taken into account before these narratives can do any more than simply tell a story.

If I derived one overriding perception from everything which teachers had to say to me during the course of the study, it is perhaps that, in many ways, we teachers are not terribly different than students. We are taught to encourage students, to value each student as an individual, and to make each student feel that he or she is important. We endeavour to enhance the self-esteem and confidence of our students by allowing them to succeed to the best of their ability. We want to be open and supportive of our students in their strengths and weaknesses. We may not always succeed in all these points, but we do try. As I reviewed the data collected from teachers during the course of this study, I was struck by the similarity of what teachers desired to obtain from the system in which they work. We all want to feel important, valued, self-confident, and free to do our best with the support of those to whom we are accountable. When we do not receive these positive reinforcements from the system in which we operate -- whether student or teacher -- we cannot do and be our best. That is a shame, because when that happens to one individual within the system, everyone loses something.

CHAPTER SIX

FINAL COMMENTS AND RECOMMENATIONS

Personal Reflections on The Study

Completion of this study afforded to me the privilege of sharing the personal stories of a number of my professional peers. During the research process, I was able to enter into a discourse with other teachers exploring their experiences with and perceptions of the practice of teacher misassignment. As a professional with extensive background in out-of-area teaching, I was personally able to engage in discussions and participate as an empathetic listener as I collected data relating to the consequences of misassignment in the lived experience of teachers.

Prior to undertaking the study, I had become aware of my own feelings of frustration and demoralization at repetitive teaching assignments which assigned me to instruct in a wide variety of out-of-field courses. In time, it became apparent to me that the challenge of teaching out-of-area, when overdone, soon turned to a sense of exhaustion and discouragement. My success as a teacher was undermined by decisions which were beyond my control or comprehension. I realized that the issue of misassignment was crucial to my professional advancement and longevity. However, I was not conscious of the degree to which my experiences and feelings might approximate those of other misassigned teachers. This study was undertaken as a means of coming to a better understanding of that quandary.

As I began data collection procedures, I was aware that other teachers might not share my concerns, in which case I would deem the issue of misassignment unworthy of further investigation. On the other hand, if colleagues did share my feelings in kind or intensity, I surmized that the issue of misassignment is important -- an issue which warrants a great deal more attention than it has garnered in the past. It appeared that the study was breaking new ground, as I was unable to uncover similar studies in the available literature. My background research indicated that no one, to this point in time, has undertaken a systematic exploration of the impact misassignment has upon

teachers. As a consequence of this omission, I believe, teachers dealing with the problems inherent in out-of-field teaching have been fighting a presumption that ignorance implies nonexistence. Educators may simply be unaware of the negative repercussions misassignment has for teachers; and, teachers confronted with the negative aspects of out-of-field teaching may be afraid to voice their concerns lest their comments be misconstrued as "griping" or "whining". This situation certainly benefits no one.

If this study has accomplished nothing else, I do hope it provides evidence indicating that misassignment is not an innocuous practice; its use as a management technique has probable and significant effects upon teachers and students. If the practice is as widespread as the literature indicates, and if the repercussions are as profound as my research implies, we can no longer indiscriminantly misassign teachers for bureaucratic convenience while claiming to be acting in the interests of our students. If nothing else, we owe it to both teachers and students to investigate this issue in greater depth to ascertain more clearly what effects this commonly used practice invokes within the education system. It is unlikely that teacher misassignment will be eradicated, especially given the financial constraints under which today's schools are operated. However, if we are to continue implementing misassignment as an administrative strategy, we must do so from a position of knowledge and understanding. Educators must acknowledge the difficulties faced by teachers in out-of-area assignments while providing correspondent accommodation for those difficulties in administrative policy. To continue to ignore the realities of teacher misassignment is to condone an injustice against teachers and students alike.

Final Thoughts On The Research

The purpose of this study was to explore the practice of teacher misassignment and the ramifications it holds for teachers on both the personal and the professional plane. In particular, the study was designed to assess how teachers feel about the practice of misassignment; how do they experience teaching in areas which are unfamiliar to them? What are their subjective responses to out-of-field teaching assignment? The study was not intended to be an objective external investigation of the issue, but rather an intrinsic

exploration of the perceived reality of the misassigned teacher. In this sense, the study was not trying to measure and assess the quantifiable consequences of misassignment. Instead, the intent was to identify these consequences as they were perceived and interpreted by the individuals most directly affected -- teachers.

In designing a research project which could fulfill the objectives of the study, it was necessary to devise an approach which would allow teachers to disclose perceptions, describe feelings, and recount stories. The desired data would be rich, detailed, and personal -- very much qualitative as opposed to quantitative. To gather this genre of data, I felt it would be requisite not only to acquire information from teachers in a formal written format, but also to engage teachers in interactive discourse. The depth and quality of data would be greatly enhanced, I was convinced, if the approach was personal and one-on-one. Consequently, I decided to conduct a qualitative case study of one relatively small secondary school. In this way, the scale of the study could be kept within manageable boundaries while assuring that the components essential for success of the study would be sufficient.

Because the study was the first to use this particular perspective to investigate the practice of teacher misassignment, there was considerable flexibility in research design. No one, according to my own research at least, had undertaken an in-depth look at the implications of out-of-field assignment for teachers. It was not possible, therefore, to build upon or to fine-tune prior research. At the same time, the novelty of the approach meant that many questions would remain unanswered at the end of the study. New avenues of inquiry were opened in the course of the research, but not all could be fully pursued. It was essential that the activities of the study be contained within their predetermined bounds; other questions could be the substance of further research.

In the end, the methodology chosen for the study was quite straightforward -- written questionnaires followed-up by a series of personal interviews. I found these instruments were, nevertheless, capable of eliciting a wealth of pertinent and, at times, quite intimate data. As the study proceeded, I found this

approach allowed me to view intrinsically the day-to-day world of teachers, subjectively sharing in their experiences.

One could surmise that the success of any research undertaking depends upon asking the right questions. Drawing upon my own background, I believe I was able to determine issues which teachers would consider to be substantive. The formulation of pertinent questions was a critical factor in the success of data collection for the study.

A second factor influencing the quality of data collected was my pre-established links with the subjects. Participants were also my colleagues, many of whom I had worked with for a number of years. I believe that those who chose to participate in this study were demonstrating their assurance of trust in me as a colleague and a researcher. This, in turn, allowed subjects to disclose their experiences and feelings more profoundly and intimately than would have been likely had the researcher been a "stranger" or an "outsider." Some critics might be concerned that my familiarity with the subjects would in some way colour the data. I maintain, however, that the opposite is true. I am confident that this rapport and level of trust put subjects at ease, allowing them to be honest and forthright. As a result, the collected data displayed greater vibrancy and richness.

It became evident to me as my research progressed that the study was delving into an area of sensitivity for many participants. Misassignment is a fact of life for many teachers; a frequently used administrative strategy which rarely takes into account the impact its use has upon practitioners. My research supports the assumption that educational administrators have persistently failed to entertain the possibility that the practice has negative implications for teachers. Teachers, perhaps due to their traditional subordinate rank in the bureaucratic hierarchy, have not been consulted on the issue. Thus, the topic of misassignment and its concomitant consequences have been officially ignored or flippantly relegated to the category of staff room "griping", not something to be taken seriously. As I explored these variables with teachers, I sensed they were relieved that thoughtful consideration was at last being focused on the practice of misassignment. I believe this is a major reason so many were willing to confer with me about their personal experiences in this

regard. The qualitative case study format afforded me the opportunity to accomplish a profound exploration of the issue within a limited subject sample.

Reflections on the Process

I entered into this study with considerable anxiety. I was completing research within the context of a school setting and amongst a population made up of my professional peers. I was somewhat concerned that other teachers might view my research as an inconvenience or, worse yet, as irrelevant. Since the study evolved from my own professional history, there was a danger that my research was merely "grinding a personal ax." To what extent other teachers shared my concerns about the issue of misassignment, I did not know. However, I soon discovered that my fears were quite unfounded. The response rate was very favorable as was the level of interest expressed by many respondents.

I detected that many teachers were willing to share their stories because it was the first time the problems associated with out-of-field teaching had been addressed in any "official" way. In one sense, the study sanctioned an airing of concerns relating to the practice of misassignment. Up to this point, some respondents stated, they had kept their comments and feelings to themselves or had confided only in trusted associates. It was as if the difficulties encountered by misassigned teachers are in some way invalid because the practice itself negates the neatly compartmentalized ideal upon which modern schools are patterned. The misassigned teacher is a necessity, yet one which is something of an embarrassment to our specialist mentalities. Perhaps this is why many participants described feelings of isolation when placed in out-of-field assignments. When the issue was broached via the study, affected teachers were very willing and relieved to share their stories.

I was surprised by the openness and intimacy which teachers brought to the study. Some participants recounted experiences which were quite emotional and, in some cases, painful. I would conjecture that my background and resultant empathy with these individuals facilitated their comfort in disclosing personal information. During the interviews, in particular, I was able to partake in a sharing of experiences. I perceived that this was the first

occasion on which anyone had formally acknowledged that the problems associated with out-of-field teaching are real. I could relate closely with the feelings of respondents because I too had encountered an official attitude of denial relating to the unique problems associated with misassignment. I also had been made to feel that any difficulties I might encounter while teaching out-of-field were due to inherent weaknesses within me as a professional. As a consequence, I, like others who told me of similar experiences, had learned to internalize these difficulties and to cope on my own. I repetitively heard how administrators failed to place credence in the plight of the misassigned teacher.

As I listened other teachers recount their stories, I realized that alienation is a sentiment frequently shared by misassigned teachers. I would surmise that administrators often turn a blind eye to the difficulties associated with misassignment because the practice is viewed as an aberration within the system. This could explain why the interviews were characterized by such openness. Interviewees and I were exchanging private yet mutual stories that others did not want to acknowledge or to hear. For me, this gave greater resonance to Shankar's reference to misassignment as: "education's dirty little secret" (Hechinger, 1985).

In the end, the processes of research and data analysis provided reassurance to me as a professional. I had entered into this project with considerable uncertainty about the relevance of the research topic and the significance of any conclusions I might reach. I was not far into the collection of data before my anxieties about the viability of teacher misassignment as research topic were alleviated. Teachers were very interested and concerned about this issue and their willingness to participate in the study proved this to me. The conclusions I could draw from data accrued were also reassuring to me as an individual. I no longer feared that my experiences and perceptions about the realities of teacher misassignment were uniquely my own. Other teachers had been there. They reinforced my personal interpretations by proffering their own stories. I no longer felt that the alienation, frustration, and other challenges I encountered while teaching out-of-field were the consequences of my personal idiosyncracies. I determined that I, along with other misassigned teachers, had been let down by a system which deliberately places its

practioners in circumstances it neither acknowledges nor understands. It is my hope that the results of this study will help to redress this situation by providing greater enlightenment and sensitivity regarding the impact this practice has upon those entrusted with the education of children.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Assessment of the data collected for purposes of this study indicate that the following recommendations should be considered:

1. Educators should acknowledge that the practice of misassignment does confront the teacher with unique problems and challenges not encountered by teachers assigned to teach in areas in which they are trained. Educators should seek to inform themselves fully about the repercussions of teacher misassignment. School policy should reflect awareness and support of the role played by out-of-field or generalist teachers on staff. For example, administrators should assure that such teachers are not excluded from departmental meetings or overlooked when in-school promotions are considered.
2. Administrators should seek to minimize the practice of misassignment whenever possible, always ensuring that the best fit is made between teacher preferences and teaching assignments. As professionals, teachers should always be informed regarding timetabling decisions which affect them. In particular, out-of-field assignments -- when necessary -- should only be made in consultation with teachers affected. My research indicates that teachers are more willing to accept out-of-area assignments when they are included in the decision-making process.
3. Administrators should seek to equalize out-of-field assignments amongst staff in order to prevent disproportionate stress upon specific individuals. For instance, out-of-field assignments could be rotated amongst staff each year so that all staff members are required to teach out-of-area for some portion of their time. Relegating certain individuals to the "catch-all" position is destructive to morale and does not enhance optimum use of the strengths of the faculty as a whole. In the same vein, creating a dichotomy

between subject area specialists and misassigned or generalist teachers stratifies staff and results in competitiveness and resentment amongst staff members. A sense of cooperation and equity amongst teachers should be encouraged.

4. Misassigned teachers should be evaluated according to criteria which take into account the unique problems and challenges presented by out-of-field teaching assignment. Teachers in my study were extremely resentful of a teacher evaluation system which is designed to accommodate the strengths of the subject area specialist. Misassigned and generalist teachers felt that the evaluation system was clearly biased against them. Until this perception is rectified, many teachers will continue to view evaluation as invalid and meaningless. If school jurisdictions continue to provide substantial funding for teacher evaluation, this weakness within the system must be addressed.

5. A more open and cooperative approach to scheduling could improve rapport between teachers and administrators while providing innovative solutions to timetabling difficulties. A top-down, closed approach to decision-making within a school blocks communication between teachers and administrators. While administrators must have the authority to make final decisions, teachers should feel that their ideas and feelings are of importance to the administration. Results of my research indicate that teachers who perceive of themselves as being valued within the system are clearly more satisfied and, possibly, more productive. Administrative approaches which emphasize bureaucratic control stultify creativity and contentment on the part of teachers, a situation which may have negative consequences in the classroom. The school should exude an aura of community in which all members -- whether students or teachers -- have value.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The purpose of this study was to investigate teachers' perceptions regarding the implications of teacher misassignment. It addressed such variables as the perceived impacts of misassignment upon teachers' self-esteem, self-confidence, feelings of control, status within the school, and coping strategies. Teachers were also asked about perceived effects misassignment has for students. The collected data were able to provide some insight into the issues

outlined here, however many questions remained unanswered or in need of further research. In reviewing the study, I would make the following suggestions for further research into the practice of teacher misassignment:

1. Much more extensive research has to be completed to verify or contradict the findings made in this study regarding the implications of teacher misassignment from the teacher's perspective. Similar studies could be conducted in various research settings and with a broader subject pool.
2. The issue of misassignment should be investigated from the perspective of other stakeholders in the education system such as administrators and students.
3. Much more research needs to be done related to the repercussions teacher misassignment has upon students. This is the most crucial variable associated with the practice of out-of-field teaching.
4. Practical strategies should be tested which could assist teachers required to teach out-of-field courses, alleviating many of the negative repercussions now described by misassigned teachers.
5. More research could be directed toward the effects of strict departmentalization within secondary schools. The strengths of the generalist teacher and benefits of more holistic instruction could be investigated in greater depth.

FINAL COMMENTS

I do believe that this study has succeeded in its objective of documenting teachers' perceptions of the reality of teaching in the out-of-area classroom. I also believe it has pointed out a very real reluctance on the part of educational administrators to acknowledge and to verify these perceptions. It is possible that many of the negative consequences of misassignment could be alleviated by more open communication between teachers and administrators, as it would appear that the present situation is of little benefit to teachers, administrators, or students. If we continue to ignore teachers' voices, it is the students who ultimately bear the consequences of our passivity. To pretend that the practice

of misassignment does not exist or to discount the ramifications of the practice within the education system is dishonest. The practice of teacher misassignment must be addressed in a forthright manner in a search for solutions which will help both teachers and administrators to serve the best interests of students.

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APPENDIX A

January 19, 1993

Dear Sir:

As a final requirement for completion of an M.Ed degree at the University of Alberta, I am conducting a research study intended to investigate the experience of teachers who find themselves assigned to teach subject areas which may be inconsistent with their personal areas of training and expertise. The project is being supervised by Dr. Jim Parsons, Professor of Secondary Education, University of Alberta. In accordance with our conversation of last spring, I would like to conduct research at [your] High School which will be instrumental in the completion of my thesis.

For many teachers, especially those who are teaching in smaller school jurisdictions, teaching assignment outside of their areas of specialty or preference is a professional fact of life. The proposed study will be a qualitative case study designed to explore how teachers respond to and cope with the realities of teaching in this situation. The final document will attempt to present a description of the teacher's experience -- focusing upon such questions as: how does timetabling affect the teacher's perception of his/her own degree of self-confidence in the classroom; how are the teacher's feelings of control, self-esteem, and status within the school affected by teaching assignment; in what ways and to what degree do teachers believe that non-specialty teaching assignments impact their students; what coping strategies have teachers developed to help them succeed in these scenarios?

The goal of this research project is to provide greater insight into how timetabling decisions affect the teacher's personal and professional experience within the educational context. Inasmuch as the teacher is the individual within this context who has the most direct and intensive interaction with students, it is not unreasonable to hypothesize that students may be profoundly influenced by the teacher's perception of his/her role within the system and subjective interpretation of what takes place in the classroom as well as in the school as a whole. If the well-being of the student is the ultimate objective of the educational system, it is hoped that a study such as this will be of value to all stakeholders in that system.

Pending your approval, my research activities will commence in January, 1993 and will continue during the winter semester. The methodology employed in collection of data will be quite straightforward. An initial questionnaire will be distributed to all members of the teaching staff. Results obtained from this questionnaire will then allow me to select individuals who have expressed a willingness and desire to submit to more detailed interviews. The duration and frequency of interviews with the subjects will be directed by the research itself. It is anticipated that accumulation of subject data will be completed by June, 1993. It is my expectation that the final document will be drafted early in 1994.

Subject participation in the study is, of course, voluntary and any participant is at liberty to withdraw from the study at any time. In accordance with University ethical standards, neither the school itself nor individual respondents will be identifiable in the text of the final document. It will not be necessary to involve students in the research process; subjects will be limited to members of the teaching staff. All data will be kept confidential.

Please feel free to discuss progress of the research at any time. You are invited to review the drafts as they are completed. I thank you for allowing me to conduct research in [your] High School and for your personal support of this undertaking.

Yours truly,

Susan Murray-Brayford

APPENDIX B

January 25, 1993

Dear Colleague:

As a final requirement for completion of an M.Ed degree at the University of Alberta, I am conducting a research study intended to investigate the experience of teachers who find themselves assigned to teach subject areas which may be inconsistent with their personal areas of training and expertise. For many of us, especially those who are teaching in smaller school jurisdictions, this situation is a professional fact of life. This study will attempt to explore how teachers respond to and cope with the realities of teaching outside their individual boundaries of specialization.

Essential to the study is the input of individual teachers who are willing to share their personal experiences and reflections. Your thoughtful and honest completion of the attached questionnaire would be much appreciated. I will also be requesting certain individuals to participate in a personal interview to explore their comments and responses in greater depth.

Please be assured that all responses will be strictly confidential and that University ethical standards require that no individual respondent be identifiable from the text of the final document. Participation in the study is, of course, completely voluntary. Any participant is at liberty to withdraw from the study at any time.

I hope you are willing to assist me in this endeavour. Thank you in advance for your cooperation and time.

Sincerely,

Susan Murray-Brayford

12. a) Given a choice, would you prefer to teach classes at the junior high school level or the senior high school level? Please circle one response below:

JUNIOR HIGH

SENIOR HIGH

NO PREFERENCE

- b) If you indicated a preference in 12. a), please outline briefly the reasons for your preference below:

13. Are you interested and/or willing to explore these issues further by participating in a personal interview of approximately one half hour duration at some time during the next few weeks? YES NO

If YES, please write your name: _____

14. If you have any further concerns or comments relating to this questionnaire or to the overall study, please include them below.

PLEASE FEEL FREE TO COMPLETE WHATEVER SECTIONS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE YOU CHOOSE.

PLACE COMPLETED QUESTIONNAIRE IN THE ENVELOPE PROVIDED AND PLACE IT IN MY MAILBOX IN THE STAFF WORK ROOM. ALL RESPONSES ARE, OF COURSE, CONFIDENTIAL.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND ASSISTANCE.

APPENDIX D

March 9, 1993

Dear Colleague:

I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank all those individuals who took time to respond to the letter and questionnaire which I distributed to staff members on January 25. The response has been very positive and all input will be very valuable in the completion of my research project. Your support has been very encouraging and most appreciated.

If any staff member would still like to submit a completed questionnaire – or would prefer to simply be interviewed – I would be pleased to receive any additional input. I would request that responses be returned to me by March 19, 1993.

Please note that you need not be teaching outside of your area to respond. The attitudes and opinions of specialists teaching within their areas of specialization are also of value. The questionnaire is designed to be a guideline for responses only; please feel free to structure your responses in accordance with your own situation and/or experiences.

Once again, I would like to thank everyone who has assisted me in this endeavour.

Sincerely,

Susan Murray-Brayford