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# TEACHERS' CRITICAL INCIDENTS: IMPLICATIONS FOR ADMINISTRATORS

BY

DONNA MAE BOYD 

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Date: September 22, 1989

LOVINGLY DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF MY MOTHER

MURLE MAY SNELL

OCTOBER 19, 1926 TO MAY 17, 1989

## Abstract

Instructional leadership, a concept which has been considered in the literature for most of this century, is an idea which has been difficult to translate into concrete action. Research has generally reported principals' descriptions of their activities; however, little has been written about teachers' views. Through semi-structured interviews this phenomenological study was intended to obtain an understanding of incidents considered critical by teachers and to examine the role, if any, that instructional leaders played at such times.

The ten experienced teachers who participated in this study represented a variety of teaching positions in a suburban school district. Data analysis was ongoing throughout the study where initial interviews were followed by additional meetings for clarification, elaboration, and confirmation of interpretations of comments.

The critical incidents described by the teachers were context specific, but reflected five themes: power or powerlessness, personal needs, affirmation of self, expanding the meaning of teaching, and instructional leadership. The categories identified were: the educational program as a means to an end, a focus on students, staff relationships, autonomy or isolation, and relationship to supervisor. The educational program was used to meet personal and student needs. Generally relationships with students were considered most significant to teachers, and principals were the actors teachers turned to most frequently in critical incidents, particularly if trusting relationships existed. Teachers seemed to feel alone in their teaching experience, but protected their isolation to ensure autonomy.

Professional growth was an ongoing process for the teachers with meanings of teaching developing in different ways. It was a process which occurred over time, expanded and shaped by the nature of experiences. Change was the concept basic to

professional growth and seemed dependent upon the individual perceiving the need for change. Necessary changes had to take place over time and make sense to the individual teacher.

The actions of leaders both impeded and promoted instructional leadership. The importance of everyday acts was a key implication for those in leadership positions.

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My year at the University served to remind me of the importance of taking time for reading, reflecting, debating, and thinking. To those those who provided the stimulation, sincere thanks.

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## Table of Contents

## List of Figures

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

The new School Act which became effective January, 1989, mandated that, "A principal of a school must provide instructional leadership in a school" (1988, p. 14), indicating a trend away from the traditional role of principal as manager toward an emphasis on instructional leadership. Provision of instructional leadership could mean different things since the term has many and ambiguous meanings. Research in this area has generally reported principals' descriptions of their activities. Consequently, there is little information from others describing the instructional leadership actions of principals.

The literature generally supports the notion that principals are significant actors in the instructional leadership role, but credits other actors, in addition to principals, with the fulfillment of this role. However, any instructional leadership initiative, by principals or others, is successful only if it is accepted and acted upon by teachers since they provide the direct link to students. Albrecht (1988) concurs,

> Leadership initiatives must ultimately focus on those at the delivery point--the teachers--as they carry out the work of the organization; that is, interacting with students to help them to learn something of value and how to use it. (p. 29)

For the instructional leadership process to be successful, knowledge of what teachers perceive as useful instructional leadership is essential.

Little has been written about how teachers view instructional leadership. This study is intended to contribute to this knowledge through teacher reports of critical incidents in their schools, classrooms, and in their professional growth. It is hoped that the reports of these incidents will provide insight into the instructional leadership process.

## Statement of the Problem

> More and better "instructional leadership" is invariably the exhortation one hears in calls for reform and in attendant prescriptions for school improvement (Shoemaker & Fraser, 1981; Edmonds, 1982; Sweeney, 1982; Block, 1983). While this is so, the idea of instructional leadership has remained a muddle for much of this century (Strayer & Engelhardt, 1920; Cunningham & Gephart,1973). It is one of those great ideas that convey hope and the possibility of progress, but that actually has provided very little useful guidance. The idea connotes multiple and ambiguous meanings. It is an idea that has the ring of truth to it, yet it confuses and confounds us as we struggle to explain or enact its meaning in concrete action terms. (Greenfield, 1987, p. 57)

The above quotation expresses the problem this study investigated from the perspective of teachers. What concrete actions of principals demonstrated instructional leadership to teachers?

I have not attempted to define instructional leadership for this study. Rather, as I analysed the transcripts, I attempted to identify the actions of administrators which related to instruction. Based on my findings I developed a theme, instructional leadership, as it applies to the situations described by the teachers in this study.

Since instructional leadership is an administrative term, it is not necessarily meaningful to teachers. The concept of instructional leadership was approached in the interviews with teachers through having them describe incidents they viewed as being critical to their professional growth. The impact of these important incidents on professional growth, instruction in classrooms, and learning in schools was explored. Through the discussions, descriptions of concrete actions of instructional leaders emerged.

A few specific questions served as guides to the development of the study and to analysis of the data. These questions were as follows:

1. What were considered to be critical incidents in the world of the teacher?

a. What were seen by teachers as critical incidents in terms of

their professional growth?

b. What kinds of situations were viewed as critical incidents?
c. What circumstances surrounded the situations?
d. Who were the actors in critical incidents?
e. How did teachers feel during critical incidents and did those feelings remain unchanged?

2. What kinds of issues did critical incidents raise about teachers' professional growth?
3. What were the implications for providing instructional leadership to teachers?

## Significance of the Problem

The study has both practical and theoretical significance. Therefore, the results may be of interest to researchers and to educational practitioners.

Norman Boyan states, "The primary short-comings of most of the studies are that they have typically invoked perceptual proxies in lieu of direct observation or even direct reports of administrative behaviors" (1988, p. 83). Consequently, the study may make a contribution to the literature through teacher reports of administrative behavior.

Further, "As of the mid-1980s, the least amount of systematic study has gone into the interaction of personal and situational variables as a source of explanation, the very area that offers most hope for gaining clearer understanding of why administrators do what they do" (Boyan, p. 83,1988). It was hoped that teachers would describe the interaction of personal and situational considerations in descriptions of their critical incidents.

Themes which emerged from the study, as well as descriptions of individual situations, may provide useful insight to those involved in or aspiring toward instructional leadership positions, as well as those involved in training and supervising instructional leaders. Instructional leaders may be better able to provide helpful instructional leadership if they are aware of what instructional leaders have done which has impacted teachers, that is, what was perceived by teachers to be useful assistance.

The knowledge gained about the world of teaching and teachers through this study may be of interest to both researchers and administrative practitioners. With an increased understanding of the teachers' world, attempts by researchers or administrators to impact this world may be approached with greater contextual comprehension.

## Background to the Problem

In the 1987-88 school year a new method of evaluating schools was introduced in the school district where this study was conducted. A profile, based on school effectiveness criteria, was generated for each school. The profile was compiled by a two member team of district administrators. They made monthly visits to schools to interview principals regarding elements of school effectiveness. Students, staff, parents, and administrators had the opportunity to complete annual school climate questionnaires. Achievement results from the Canadian Achievement Test and Provincial Achievement Tests were also compiled. The information gathered through the interviews, the results from the questionnaires, and test results were included in the profiles. Commendations and recommendations were made to each school. The information gathering techniques used by the district administrators were to be expanded and slightly altered annually.

Following the generation of the first school profiles in June of 1988, the district office team observed that most school principals were not instructional leaders. On a continuum of principals as managers to principals as instructional leaders, they suggested that of the 27 principals a few were considered instructional leaders, a few were viewed as strictly managers, and the remainder were at various points in between. The school system's senior administrators are considering what might be done to assist principals in developing skill in instructional leadership since it is considered desirable by the system, as well being a School Act requirement.

It seems unlikely that principals would suggest they are not instructional leaders within their schools. What they perceive that role to include and how they choose to fulfill the role may vary significantly, however. Perceptions of instructional leadership --what it should be and how and by whom it should be provided--may also vary with individual principals.

Regardless of what senior administration or school principals view as "good" instructional leadership, it cannot be effective unless it is useful to teachers. "Leadership initiatives must ultimately focus on those at the delivery point--the teachers--as they carry out the work of the organization; that is, interacting with students to help them learn something of value and how to use it" (Albrecht, 1988, p. 30).

It was the purpose of this study to investigate the perceptions of teachers regarding helpful instructional leadership through reports of critical incidents in their schools, classrooms, and their professional growth. Through these reports, insights into the instructional leadership process from the perspective of the recipients emerged. These may provide direction to school level instructional leaders and system administrators.

## Assumptions

Underlying this study was the assumption that the interviewees had experienced and could identify critical incidents in their professional growth. Further, it was assumed that the information provided by the participants would accurately reflect their feelings, ideas, and opinions about critical incidents in their professional life. A major assumption was that critical incidents of teachers speak to the issue of instructional leadership.

## Delimitations

This study was delimited to the perceptions about critical incidents by teachers in one school system. This allowed for analysis to be made relative to a particular context. It was further delimited to ten participants so a strategy of semi-structured interviews was manageable.

## Limitations

This study was limited by reliance on the participants to remember, reflect, and share their experiences, opinions, feelings, and ideas. The researcher was a part of the world the participants were being requested to share, which may have been a limitation.

## Outline of the Study

Chapter 1 introduces the problem this study investigated. In Chapter 2 the literature about the world of the teacher and instructional leadership is reviewed. Chapter 3 contains the methodology of the study. Analysis of the interview data into categories and the themes which emerged are discussed in Chapter 4. A summary of

the study, reflections, and implications comprise the contents of the concluding chapter, Chapter 5.

## Chapter 2

## Review of Related Literature

From the guiding questions, two potential areas for review become apparent. The first area is the world of the teacher: what is the world of the teacher like and what is the nature of teachers' professional growth? The second topic for review, instructional leadership, is related to a number of other topics each with a large bodies of literature such as change, leadership, supervision, effective schools, decision making and goal setting. Because the literature base which could be included is so broad, this review will focus on a few narrower topics specific to instructional leadership. These will include: meanings given to instructional leadership, by whom instructional leadership may be provided, how it is provided, and the qualities of instructional leaders.

### The World of the Teacher

Teaching seems to be a very personal experience which generally takes place while separated from other adults. Of this isolation Blumberg (1980) notes,

> Despite the creation of "open" schools, team teaching, and so forth, teachers are, by and large, lone operators. They plan their work by themselves and carry out their plans in isolation. Even though they talk with their colleagues about what they do in the classroom, they are alone when they do it, at least as far as other adults are concerned. . . . This way of life has come to be valued. The specific value that is attached to it is called privacy, which may be a pseudonym for "let me make my mistakes by myself." (pp. 207-208)

Little (1987) discusses how the value placed on isolation has led to a way of life that is difficult to alter. Even teachers in support roles are unsure of how to approach their colleagues.

> The precedents of noninterference are powerful, and claims to individual autonomy are closely guarded. Even teachers designated as master teachers, mentors, or advisers are humble about their expertise and uncertain about how to enter into relations that will be both rigorous and respectful. (p. 497)

Sergiovanni (1987) suggests the importance of goals-symbols as a means of influence in schools since direct influence on teachers in classrooms is blunted by teacher autonomy. He states,

> Behind closed classroom doors . . . teachers follow the beat of a different drummer, selecting learning materials, deciding on what and how to teach not in response to objectives, but in response to available materials, their own intuitions and abilities, their perceptions of student needs, time constraints, and other situational characteristics. Tight school structures . . . simply cannot reach into the classrooms and challenge this de facto autonomy of the teacher no matter how detailed such structures might be described. (p. 74)

Lieberman (1988) also refers to the isolation of teaching, but suggests that new organizational forms with appropriate support from the principal and time to collaborate have the potential to change this situation.

> Isolation in the classroom has been the persistent reality for most teachers. The vast majority of schools are organized in this fashion, which makes it difficult for teachers to find time to work with one another and often makes teachers wary of their own colleagues. In an environment where there are only crumbs to share, teachers tend to hide their successes as well as their failures. Each teacher looks out for his or her own welfare. . . .
> Clearly, new organizational forms that enable teachers to work together are a positive development. To establish such organizational forms, however, teachers must be organized, mobilized, led, and nurtured by supportive and concerned principals. . . .
>
> Teachers have little time to read, to talk, to think through tough problems related to their students, to confront colleagues who have differing views on school organization, to resolve their conflicting views. . . .
>
> If teachers can communicate more openly with their colleagues, become more sensitive to schoolwide problems, and have more opportunities to share in the work of the school, the concept of a school community will become a real possibility. (pp. 650-651)

Over the years glimpses of the teacher's world have been gleaned through books written by teachers such as Kohl's *"36 Children"* in the early 1960s which described a white teacher's experiences in a black ghetto school, and Braithwaite's *"Why Shoot the Teacher?"* a humorous and honest account of teaching in a country school during the

depression. A British publication of 1976 by Hannam, Smyth, and Stephenson, *"The First Year of Teaching"* reports beginning teachers' experiences from their point of view. More recently Herndon has published, *"Notes from a Schoolteacher"* (1985), which through a seemingly off-the-cuff style comments from a teacher's perspective on many educational issues of the 1980s.

A major issue, according to Herndon, is the increasing number and frequency of reports on education which recommend particular changes. One report often directly contradicts the next, yet teachers are expected to stop whatever they are doing and implement the most recently recommended changes, even though they may suggest things teachers wouldn't dream of doing. Some of the recurring educational issues discussed by Herndon are: subject emphasis, time on task, discipline, planning, teaching strategies, and excellence. He describes how those who have taught for some time have become aware of the educational issue pendulum which swings back and forth. To combat the increasing velocity of the pendulum teachers have developed a strategy of ignoring the pendulum and making no changes at all. And as was indicated in research on effective schools by Purkey and Smith (1982), without the support and commitment of teachers, change will not take place.

Herndon's observations of how teachers implement change are consistent with the findings of Eaton's (1982) study. Eaton found that teachers willingly added topics to their curricula, but the additions did not mean that they would change what they taught. Teachers weigh changes against their own ideas about what is right for students and implement only those aspects of changes that seem reasonable and manageable.

Sparks (1983) suggests,

> Three criteria influence teachers' decisions regarding implementation of recommended practices. The first, instrumentality, refers to the extent to which a recommendation is stated clearly and specifically. The second criterion is congruence--how well the new practice fits in with the teacher's philosophy of teaching. The third is cost; teachers appear to weigh the effort required against the payoff of the new technique. (p. 70)

Crandall (1983) feels teachers are willing to implement changes, if they are supported. Of this he writes,

> Solid solutions to real classroom problems do exist--solutions that have been developed through both research and practice. Teachers are willing to implement these solutions, but they do need concrete and continuous help from credible people and clear direction from their building and district administrators. (p. 9)

Argyris (1970) found that when teachers became internally committed to a course of action, thus owning it and feeling responsible for it, "the individual has reached the point where he is acting on the choice because it fulfills his own needs and sense of responsibility, as well as those of the system" (p. 20). The literature seems to agree that this kind of commitment is hard to achieve, however.

Critical incidents in a teacher's life from Herndon's perspective seem far removed from what policymakers consider important matters. Herndon's concerns center on individual children and making educational experiences meaningful to them. Although written about different times and places, Kohl and Braithwaite share the same central focus--the children in their classrooms. The same was found to be true for beginning teachers, "As the accounts which follow show, the attention of the teacher in the first year is focussed upon his relationships with children" (Hannam, Smyth, & Stephenson, 1976, p. 59).

The research of Little (1987) is consistent with the sentiments of these teachers. "The teacher-student relationship is both the major *obligation* to which teachers are held and the primary source of *rewards* in teaching" (p. 493, emphasis in the original).

Duke (1986) also identifies the building of meaningful relationships with students as being the critical focus for teachers. Goals, objectives, programs, plans, and other formal aspects of the organizational structure are based on an assumption that life in schools is predictable, but it is not. Pull-out programs, student absences, enrollment changes, assemblies, visitors, teacher absences, testing, troubled students, and field trips contribute to the uncertainty of the school day. The world of the classroom is characterized by interruptions.

Duke describes the life of the teacher as living with contradictions. A love-hate relationship exists with parents, good intentions must be balanced against limited energy, trying to help students exposes teachers to an emotional roller coaster, and teachers try to build relationships with individuals in a crowd situation.

Patricia Dombart (1985), a teacher, expressed her frustrations of living in the teacher's world when she wrote,

> It is not that we are either shiftless or stupid that keeps us silent about visions. It is that we are tired--tired of being powerless pawns in a system that treats us either with indifference or disdain.
>
> Take a look at the working world of the insider. You will find that it is not an atmosphere that nourishes visions. Though we teachers are numerous, we are virtually powerless. We affect none of the key elements of our working lives. For example, we have no control over class size or the length of the school day and class periods. We have almost no input into the form and content of report cards. We do not select our schedules, grade levels, or the buildings in which we teach. Indeed, we do not even control the time within our own classrooms, for we are slaves to the P.A., to notes from the nurse, from guidance, the librarian, the main office. We are often without the essentials, like paper and pencils and desks. . . .
>
> Yet, despite all this, many of us, behind a mask of cynicism, which is the best defence against repeated disappointment, have kept the ideals that lured us into the classroom in the first place. But we have gone underground with them, exposing

> classroom in the first place. But we have gone underground with them, exposing them to only a few close colleagues and, of course, to our closest colleagues--our students--but never to an outsider. (pp. 71-73)

From the literature which describes the world of the teacher from the perspective of teachers, the critical incidents in their lives seem to focus on the classroom and on individual relationships with students in that setting.

Blumberg (1980) describes a cold war that exists between teachers and their supervisors. It is characterized by a lack of trust with each group convinced of the correctness of its position. Herndon (1985) sees administrators and teachers as diametrically opposed groups with collective bargaining acting as the liaison. Duke (1986) feels that teachers and administrators just differ in what they regard as meaningful. Administrators tend to find meaning in collective experiences such as new program implementation or increased test scores: teachers find meaning in individual relationships. Since the literature credits most instructional leadership to school administrators and there appears to be a gap between what is meaningful to teachers and administrators, this study may provide insights into situations where the void between the two groups has been bridged.

## Teachers' Professional Growth

Teachers differ enormously in what they view as useful professional growth experiences. They also differ in the extent to which they use three categories of professional development opportunities: that is, informal opportunities within their working environments, activities initiated in their private lives, and formal professional activities. Teacher use of resources such as principals, colleagues, professional groups, universities, conferences, and workshops vary significantly. Availability of

appropriate materials and time for professional development also impact professional growth.

Within the informal system of professional growth Crandall (1983) observed,

> Teachers are, in a sense, natural emulators. Because of a variety of constraints, including limited time and resources, community expectations, federal regulations, diverse student ability, and large class size, teachers seldom have the opportunity to be innovative in the classical sense of the term. . . .
> Teachers often emulate one another on an informal basis, adapting or adopting the successful practices of peers they judge to be successful and effective. (p. 8)

Joyce and McKibbin (1982) studied the nature of staff development and the professional growth of teachers in California through a long-term inquiry involving the perceptions of thousands of teachers. They conducted about 300 interviews, several hundred group discussions, and distributed 3000 questionnaires. From their investigation they identified categories for describing the professional growth stages of teachers: those who actively use every available aspect of the formal and informal systems available to them, active consumers who are easily involved, and passive consumers and the withdrawns who are very difficult to involve.

To support development of teachers Bird and Little (1986) suggest,

> The most important resource for improvement is time with colleagues: time for teachers to study, analyze, and advance their practices: time for principals, assistant principals, department heads, and teacher leaders to support improvement: time for faculties to examine, debate, and improve their norms of civility, instruction, and improvement. Considerably more time for these activities should be made in the normal school day, either by addition or by the elimination of activities that are less important than systematic improvement of teaching. (p. 504)

Little (1987) reminds readers of the importance of the resources which contribute significantly to teachers working together successfully. She writes,

> The quality and availability of reference texts and other materials, adequate copying equipment, consultants on selected problems, and other forms of material and human support appear to be crucial--but often underestimated--contributors to teachers' ability and willingness to work successfully together. (p. 507)

Teachers vary in their predisposition toward professional growth opportunities and the types of professional development they prefer. The time for collaboration and the availability of resources also vary. This suggests that instructional leaders will require a large repertoire of competencies to meet the needs of individual teachers during critical incidents in their professional lives.

## Meanings of Instructional Leadership

> The mode of leadership receiving extensive attention in much of our current literature is "instructional" leadership. It is a seductive label and, as such, demands a rather vigorous management of meaning. Unless we arrive at some agreement about what we mean by instructional leadership, then we are tacitly inviting anyone in a leadership capacity to assert that instructional leadership is being exercised, regardless of what is being practised. (Waldron, 1988, p. 38)

Because there is no standard definition, practitioners and researchers alike are interpreting the term in individual and unique ways. The resulting difficulties are that practitioners are confused about what should be done to provide instructional leadership and it is very difficult to compare research about the topic since common ground has not been established. With the numerous connotations of this term in the literature it is not surprising that instructional leadership is considered ambiguous and confusing. Hallinger and Murphy summed it up succinctly in a 1985 study by saying that instructional leadership has meant anything and everything.

In describing effective principals, Leithwood and Montgomery credit them with "viewing themselves as instructional leaders whose function is to ensure that students are provided with the best possible programs" (1986, p. 210). Leithwood and

Montgomery supplement this description with other effective schools' goals such as student achievement and happiness. Relationships are task-oriented, rather than human relations, and "the task" is improving the school program.

De Bevoise (1984), like Leithwood and Montgomery, indicates ties between student achievement and instructional leadership when this term is defined as "those actions a principal takes, or delegates to others, to promote growth in student learning" (p. 15). However, "student learning" has connotations beyond the narrower term "achievement."

Greenfield's (1987) definition of instructional leadership is somewhat broader than the previous ones and seems to suggest both a task and human relations orientation. He suggests, "Instructional leadership refers to actions undertaken to develop a productive and satisfying work environment for teachers and desirable learning conditions and outcomes for children" (p. 56). This definition expands beyond the previous ones by inferring the significance of school climate and culture, as well student growth. Blumberg (1980) points out that research

> on group and supervisory behavior have consistently made the point that productive interpersonal or group work is characterized by a balance between the energy devoted to the task itself and that devoted to healthy relationships among the people working on the task. (p. 76)

Sergiovanni (1984) refers to "leadership forces" that "can be thought of as a means available to administrators, supervisors, and teachers to bring about or preserve changes needed to improve schooling" (p. 6). Sergiovanni suggests whom the actors involved in instructional leadership might be and the words "improve schooling" may be interpreted to refer to programs, teaching, achievement, climate, or culture. The specific term instructional leadership is part of the "educational force" in Sergiovanni's five leadership forces (1987, p. 54).

The meanings given to instructional leadership appear to have a central theme of school improvement. The indicators of school improvement appear to vary somewhat which may suggest lack of agreement regarding what constitutes school improvement. If instructional leadership is seen as leading to school improvement, what personal qualities and actual activities are characteristic of instructional leaders who are able to bring about school improvement?

## Activities of Instructional Leaders

"The lack of operational definitions makes it difficult to compare findings across research studies. It leaves an important question unanswered: What should a principal do in order to be an instructional leader?" (Hallinger and Murphy, 1987, p. 181). They further state, "Instructional leadership is seldom defined in concrete terms" (p. 181), but suggest, "Supervision is the job function most commonly associated with the principal's instructional leadership role" (1987, p. 194).

When Deal (1987) discusses strong instructional leaders, their activities are described in this way: "Such principals observe their teachers more regularly. . . . They talk with their teachers more about instruction, are highly supportive of teachers, and are more active in initiating evaluations of the teaching program" (p. 231).

Supervision functions might also include staff meetings, staff development, observation, and consultation (De Bevoise, 1984). Specific to staff development opportunities for instructional leadership, McEvoy (1987) notes six ways that principals in a study appeared to exercise instructional leadership through staff development. They include: informing teachers of professional opportunities, disseminating professional and curriculum materials, focussing staff attention on a specific theme, soliciting teachers' opinions, encouraging experimentation, and

recognizing individual teachers' achievements. McEvoy observed that teachers seemed to appreciate this informal mode of supervision.

The six sets of behaviors Peterson (1987) identifies as composing instructional leadership are behaviors related to supervision of instruction and staff development. They include:

> (a) regularly observing teachers and providing feedback, (b) monitoring student progress by reviewing test results with teachers, (c) working with teachers to build a coordinated instructional program, (d) promoting staff development by securing resources and finding opportunities for growth, (e) communicating to teachers their responsibility for student achievement, and (f) acting as an information node and instructional resource person by regularly discussing matters of instruction with individual teachers at faculty meetings. (p. 143)

Peterson summarizes these behaviors by writing, "In short, instructional leaders engage in behaviors that foster strong programs; possess goals, values, and norms related to improving teaching and learning; and have strong internal motivation" (1987, p. 144).

Many functions of instructional leadership deal with management as well. Examples of management activities that influence instruction are protecting instructional time, controlling class size, and having an effective discipline plan, rules, and procedures (Wilson & Firestone, 1987).

When Rogus (1988) discusses the "oughts" of instructional leadership, he advocates "to formally set aside time to provide direct assistance to supervision and staff development and to lead informally while carrying out day-to-day administrative activities" (p. 17). Fullan (1985) also promotes informal leadership. "Increasing the amount and variety of informal communication and interaction serves as a powerful, information-based system of influence" (p. 410-411).

A number of authors highlight the importance of everyday interactions to instructional leadership. Leithwood (1987) observes that principals primarily engage in solving problems which seem trivial, but move the school in directions valued by the community, the staff, and themselves. De Bevoise's (1984) synthesis of instructional leadership research led to the comment that the principal's essential functions are of a routine nature. Daily cycles of principals helped them assess their schools' working order and the progress being made toward long-term goals.

Peters and Waterman (1982) state,

> An effective leader must be master to two ends of the spectrum: ideas at the highest level of abstraction and actions at the most mundane level of detail. . . . It seems the only way to instill enthusiasm is through scores of daily events, with the value-shaping manager becoming an implementer par excellence. In this role the leader is a bug for detail; and directly instills values through deeds rather than words: no opportunity is too small. So it is at once attention to ideas and attention to detail. (p. 287)

Peters and Waterman's (1982) findings strongly support the critical role of constant interaction:

> After all, who in his right mind would establish Management By Wandering Around as a pillar of philosophy as [Hewlett-Packard] does? It turns out that the informal control through regular, casual communication is actually much tighter than rule by numbers, which can be avoided or evaded. (p. 51)

Fullan (1985) quotes the above passages from Peters and Waterman in his writing of change processes and strategies because he believes "they are describing exactly the more holistic, life-blood, real process of managing improvement that is hidden behind superficial phrases such as 'focus on instructional leadership'" (p. 401).

Although Dwyer (1984) found no single image or single formula for successful instructional leadership, he too noted the day-to-day acts. He found principals engaged in effective, routine acts that required no new programs, innovations, or extensive

changes in their roles. Their success hinged on their capacity to connect the routine activities to their overarching perspectives of the contexts of their schools and their aspirations for their students. They assessed their environments, knew their strengths and limitations, understood the kinds of programs and outcomes they desired for students, and believed in their abilities to influence the parts. All of the principals in his study emphasized the importance of achievement, particularly in language and computational skills. Their other expectations were relative to the student groups with which they worked.

In De Bevoise's *"Synthesis of Research on the Principal as Instructional Leader"* (1984) what is known, not known, and needs to be known about instructional leadership is reviewed. Instructional leadership is viewed by De Bevoise as encompassing such activities as setting schoolwide goals, defining the purpose of schooling, providing the resources needed for learning to occur, supervising and evaluating teachers, coordinating staff development programs, and creating collegial relationships with and among staff. In essence, this adds the concept of vision to the views expressed by others.

It seems instructional leadership has supervision as its base and its connotations are extended from there. The common functions of instructional leadership that De Bevoise (1984) identified from the works of Bossert, Dwyer, and others (1981), Duckworth (1983), and Gersten and Carnine (1981) all include communicating a vision of the school's purposes and standards, monitoring student and teacher performance, recognizing and rewarding good work, and providing effective staff development programs.

It is also apparent from the literature that the work and style of the instructional leader is contingent upon the community in which they work, human and material

resources available, and the beliefs of the principal (Dwyer, 1984; Hallinger & Murphy, 1987). Hoy and Miskel (1987) also highlight the contingency of situation on leadership. About this they state,

> Leadership also implies followers; there can be no leader without followers. However, the concept of leadership remains elusive because it depends not only on the position, behavior, and personal characteristics of the leader but also on the character of the situation. (p. 271)

## Qualities of Instructional Leaders

Research in the leadership field identifies numerous qualities which enhance instructional leadership. These include personal characteristics, skills, strategies, attitudes, and values. The following selections from the literature provide a sample of instructional leadership qualities which have been identified.

Strong interpersonal skills seem to be a necessary attribute for principals according to Porter and Lemon (1988). They feel principals have a unique opportunity to shape schools through their direct involvement in every aspect of the school and through appropriate uses of position and personal power. Porter and Lemon advocate rationality (explaining the reasons for a request) to get teachers to focus on their jobs, ingratiation (making teachers feel good) to help build friendly relations among staff, exchange (reciprocating benefits), and coalitions (gaining the support of a peer or subordinate group). Exchange and coalitions are to form staff groups and gain staff support (1988, p. 30-32). Unlike Leithwood and Montgomery (1986), a human relations orientation, rather than a task orientation, seems to be promoted by these authors.

"The principalship is undergoing a radical transformation, emphasizing behaviors that influence instructional practice and school development. Schooling practices will

become increasingly integrated as they focus on specific goals and working collaboratively" (1986, p. 29) is the conclusion reached by Snyder and Anderson. Their review of research on effective principals indicates that strong instructional leadership is a characteristic found in successful schools. They review an attempt to identify the characteristics of high performing principals by the Florida Council on Educational Management, where 19 competencies were identified and organized into six clusters:

> 1. Purpose and direction: proactive orientation; decisiveness; commitment to mission
> 2. Cognitive skills: interpersonal search; information search; concept formation; conceptual flexibility
> 3. Concensus management: managing interaction; persuasiveness; concern for image; tactical adaptability
> 4. Quality enhancement: achievement motivation; management control; developmental orientation
> 5. Organization: organizational ability; delegation
> 6. Communication: self-presentation; written communication; organizational sensitivity. (1986, p. 18)

Some of the traditional management skills needed by a principal are noted in these competencies, but instructional leadership competencies such as vision, information and knowledge resource, flexibility, and interpersonal skills, including communication, seem dominant characteristics emerging from these studies of high performing principals.

Greenfield (1987) suggests that the character of the principal is key to effective school leadership.

> Blumberg and Greenfield speculate that several personal qualities characterize the principal who would lead a school well:
> * Being highly goal-oriented and having a keen sense of clarity regarding instructional and organizational goals;
> * having a high degree of personal security and a well-developed sense of themselves as persons;

* having a high tolerance for ambiguity and a marked tendency to test the limits of the interpersonal and organizational systems they encounter;
* being inclined to approach problems from a highly analytical perspective and being highly sensitive to the dynamics of power in both the larger systems and their own school;
* being inclined to be proactive rather than reactive--to be in charge of the job and not to let the job be in charge of them;
* having a high need to control a situation and low needs to be controlled by others--they like being in charge of things and initiating action;
* having high needs to express warmth and affection towards others, and to receive it--being inclined toward friendliness and good-natured fellowship; and
* having high needs to include others in projects on problem solving, and moderate-to-high needs to want others to include them. (p. 59)

The key ideas "presumed to characterize those who enact an instructional leadership conception of the principal" (Greenfield, 1987, p. 60) are holding a vision, which acts as a general guide in leading a school, with instruction and classroom performance of teachers as a focus.

From the literature cited here the themes of instructional leadership and school improvement are again apparent. Instructional leaders use their personal qualities to assist them in the evolution of a vision which is communicated to others, motivating them to act to achieve that vision. It will be of interest to my study to see if the incidents teachers view as critical to them are in any way related to the visions of the leaders.

## Who Provides Instructional Leadership?

In most of the literature the principal is credited with being the figure central to the instructional leadership role. A number of other actors are also cited as potentially playing a role.

Ubben and Hughes credit the principal as "the key individual for providing instructional leadership in a school" (1987, p. 17).

When describing images of leadership in effective schools Greenfield centers his discussion of instructional leadership on the principal, but adds, "though it is believed that the elements and conditions to be described are also relevant to instructional leadership by teachers, department heads, and others committed to school effectiveness" (1987, p. 60).

In reviewing effective schools, Purkey and Smith (1982) indicate the potential for leadership by teachers. They suggest,

> Certainly leadership is necessary in fostering change, particularly in the initiating phase. A forceful principal or other administrator would be an advantage, but leadership could also come from a "critical mass" of teachers or a few influential teachers with sufficient energy and vision (Berman & McLaughlin, 1977; California State Department of Education, 1980; Stallings, 1981). At the very least, the school administration must support, however passively, the change process. Active hostility seems likely to prevent leadership from arising from any other groups within the school. (p. 446)

Lieberman (1988) considers the identification of the principal as instructional leader to be "another unexamined assumption" (p. 649). She sees the implications of this assumption to be a contradiction of the knowledge of effective leaders. She states,

> School districts have taken this to mean that the principal *alone* is responsible for curriculum, instruction, and evaluation--and they have relieved teachers from dealing with these problems. But this action contradicts what effective leaders know: the best way to lead is to empower others by finding ways for all members of the community to participate in shaping a school's values, goals, and procedures for attaining those goals. (p. 649, emphasis in the original)

Deal (1987) questions the research base on which the concept of the principal as instructional leader is based. Of this concern he says,

> The chief problem with shifting attention of principals is that no one has really identified what instructional leadership is nor provided solid empirical assurance that if a principal were to do more of it, a school would perform at higher levels. (p. 231)

"We believe that those components of effective leadership, which we label instructional support functions, need not all be carried out by the principal. Realistically, most schools will need more than one person to adequately carry out all of these activities anyway" is the suggestion made by Gersten, Carnine, and Green (1982, p. 49). They go on to suggest roles which could be carried out by supervisors, resource teachers, and curriculum specialists provided that limitations such as time, authority, and training can be overcome.

Wimpelberg (1987) suggests a void in instructional inquiry and development at the school level which he feels calls for a shift to collaboration between central office and schools. "Organizational structure and leadership logically point to a critical role for the intermediate central office administrator, the person who supervises and evaluates the work of schools and school supervisors" (p. 101).

The implication of this literature for my study is to find out from the teachers' perspective who provides useful instructional leadership to them during critical incidents in their lives. I am interested to see the role the principal is perceived to take since Gersten, Carnine, and Green (1982) state, "Research over the last decade has consistently shown that teachers do not perceive principals as instructional leaders, nor do principals usually function as such" (p. 48).

## Summary

In this chapter the literature related to the world of the teacher and instructional leadership was addressed.

Teaching seems to be a personal experience which is experienced while the teacher is separated from other adults. Through the writings of teachers we are able to capture glimpses of that world. The world of teaching seems focussed on the

classroom and building relationships with individual children. Teachers attempt to build relationships with individuals in large group situations and try to make learning meaningful to children in an atmosphere characterized by disruptions, uncertainty, and unpredictability. A major issue for teachers is recommended changes and how to deal with them.

Teachers differ greatly in what they consider useful professional growth opportunities and the extent to which they make use of them. Therefore, leaders require a large repertoire of competencies to meet the needs of individual teachers in their professional lives.

The literature does not agree on the meaning of instructional leadership, the second facet of this review. This has led to unique interpretations of the term which has resulted in ambiguity in meaning and confusion among researchers and practitioners.

Whatever instructional leadership is interpreted to be, it is viewed as leading to school improvement. The activity of supervision seems basic to the concept. Instructional leadership may include: communicating a vision of the school's purposes and standards, monitoring student and teacher performance, recognizing and rewarding good work, and providing effective staff development programs.

Principals are widely considered to be key individuals in instructional leadership with support roles being played by teachers, department heads, and central office staff. Instructional leaders possess personal qualities which assist them in the evolution of vision and communication to others which motivates them to action to achieve that vision.

## Conceptual Framework for the Study

As the review of the literature indicates, teaching for many is still very much a solitary activity and as Joyce and McKibbin (1982) point out, teachers vary greatly in what activities will be considered worthwhile professional development activities. The literature does point out the importance of teacher autonomy in controlling the effects of the actions and wishes of others on the classroom situation and the importance of students in teachers' decisions about classroom changes. Hence, in any situation which may prove critical to teachers' professional growth three factors are in evidence: the situation, the circumstances, and the actors involved (Figure 1).

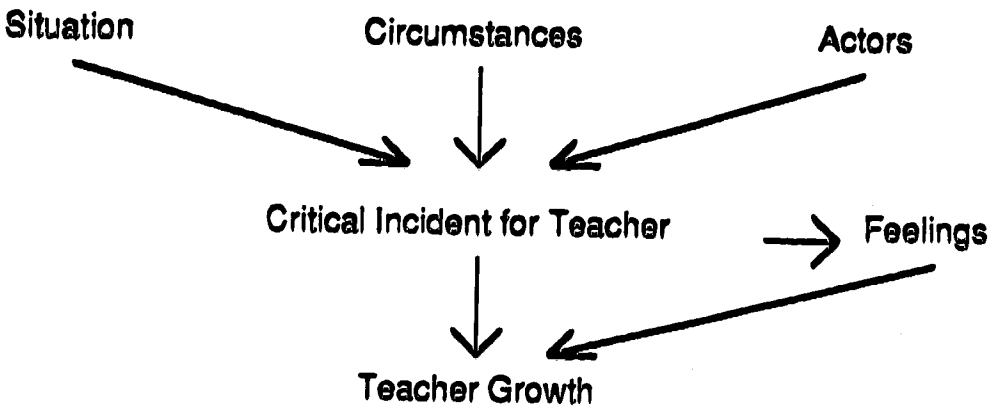


**Figure 1. Conceptual framework of teachers' critical incidents.**

Any situation, the circumstances surrounding it, and the actors involved are filtered through a teacher's own views about each of these factors and the result may be a critical incident for a teacher. The incident itself and the teacher's feelings about it

will result in teacher growth of some kind. Generally, growth implies some kind of change which may be negative or positive.

The occurrence of a critical incident is illustrative of the potential difficulties or benefits associated with administrators attempting to provide leadership, specifically instructional leadership, to teachers (Figure 2).

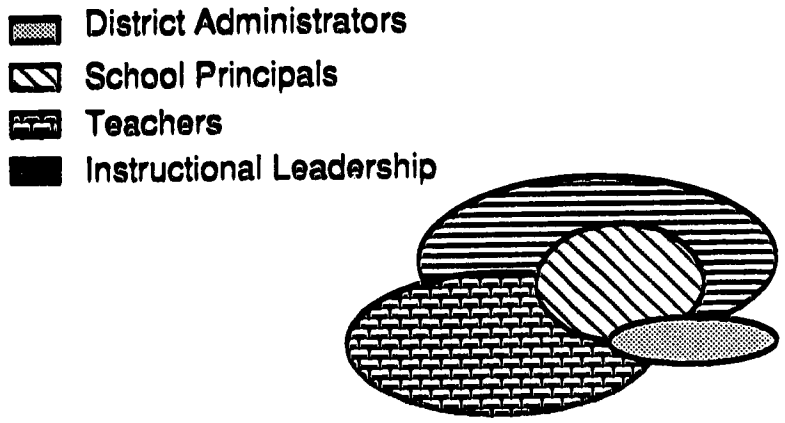


**Figure 2. Conceptual framework of instructional leadership.**

The world of the teacher is centred on the classroom where students are the focus. Situations, circumstances, and relationships cause teachers to reach out of the isolation and autonomy the classroom affords to access resources they view as being helpful to them. These may include professional development opportunities, attending to issues they view as being important, and nurturing relationships they consider meaningful.

Part of the role of administrators is to attempt to impact the world of the teachers through provision of instructional leadership.

District administrators, as agents of school boards, are somewhat involved in providing instructional leadership, although they have many other obligations which take their time and energy away from this area. Central office administrators may bring forward programs, policies, and procedures which serve to define some areas where instructional leadership is required. They may also provide some funding for resources and staff inservicing, and expertise to assist with implementation of something new or changed. Their instructional leadership may attempt to force growth on school level personnel who may not share the vision they are expected to promote

School principals, like district administrators, have many other responsibilities. Principals who view instructional leadership as a part of their role may use this process to promote a vision. And depending on how a vision is developed, they too may be promoting a vision not necessarily shared by teachers.

Teachers are the foundation upon which instructional leadership rests. Without followers there can be no leadership. It may be the teachers themselves who are the instructional leaders. The role of the principal and of district administrators may be to facilitate that leadership.

Teachers must be involved in and believe in the defined vision for student growth to result. The overlapping of the figures in Figure 2 indicates the collaboration that sometimes occurs between these groups.

I believe that instructional leadership remains a largely untapped resource because of the many influences which prevent teachers, principals, and district administrators from utilizing it. Some of these influences are deficiencies in knowledge, skill, energy,

collaboration time, and risk taking, as well as lack of a clear understanding of what instructional leadership is and how it might be provided.

The information from the teachers in this study should help to clarify what influences were present for them in their professional growth experiences, who else was involved, and how the actions of others were interpreted. The specifics of the study to answer these questions are discussed in the following chapter.

# Chapter 3

# Methodology

## Pilot Study

I selected the participants for my pilot study by myself. Both participants were classroom teachers last year, but are not teaching this year. One has moved into a district office position; the other has had a number of teaching contracts during her career, had a temporary contract last year, and chose to substitute teach this year so her schedule would be more flexible.

The initial issue that came up during the pilot interviews was that neither interviewee had any idea of what might be considered a "critical incident." When we discussed what I wished to explore, some synonyms emerged. "Turning point in your career" and "something that happened that had a strong impact on you as a teacher" were suggested phrases.

The pilot participants further suggested that some examples be given of the kinds of incidents which might be considered critical. For example, "It might be a particular student, class, parent, or colleague who had an impact on you; it could be something that occurred in your classroom or school; it could be a course you took or some other professional activity; any incident that you consider significant or critical to your growth as a teacher."

The need to allow the participants an opportunity to reflect on the interview topic prior to the interview was viewed as necessary by the pilot study participants.

The basic purpose of the pilot interviews was to try out the questions in the interview schedule. I found that if I was able to get the participants to tell of a specific experience, the guiding questions were answered with little probing. I actively listened, verbally summarized what I thought I was hearing, asked questions for

clarification, and probed for detail when I felt it was necessary. I also found myself probing when I became "caught up" in their stories and desired more detail about how or why something happened.

In each case I had to ask a specific question of the pilot participants to clarify how they felt at the time of the incident and how they felt now as they reflected back on it. When we discussed this question following the pilot interviews, they expressed that they felt their feelings were reflected through their vocal expression when they talked about the incidents. They felt that questioning about their feelings was rather redundant and displayed a lack of sensitivity on my part. I therefore dropped this as a specific question from my interview schedule unless I was not able to perceive the participants feelings, but I continued to look for expressions of feelings when I analyzed the data.

I did not analyze the pilot interviews in great detail because at the time of the pilot interviews I didn't know how to do that. I listened to the interviews a number of times, checked that through the interviews the questions in my interview schedule were addressed, and decided that I would like some demographic information regarding the participants' years of teaching experience and years teaching in the system where the study was conducted. I wasn't sure I would need this information, but I wondered if the type of incidents considered critical would be reflective of teaching experience. To clarify, would the issues of a teacher with ten years of experience be similar in nature to those identified by a teacher with 20 years of experience? Although I realized that I could not make any conclusions about this question due to the number of participants, these demographic questions became the opening questions of the interview and seemed to relax people, I think because they were non-threatening, information-type questions.

## Selection of Participants

From the school system where I am employed I selected a group of people teaching in a variety of positions. Generalist teachers, subject specialists (both academic and non-academic subject specialists were included), French Immersion, special education, and counselling comprised the group. The men and women selected taught at elementary, junior high, or senior high schools in urban, rural, or schools where the student population was from both urban and rural settings.

I decided to include only teachers with five or more years of experience. With the various experiences that occur over the course of a career, I felt experienced teachers could best determine which ones were critical in nature. The group selected actually had between eight and 22 years of teaching experience. Initially I requested that the critical incident they shared be fairly recent and that only one incident be discussed, but I discovered a preference on the part of the participants to discuss a series of incidents over the course of their careers, so I dropped these stipulations after my second interview.

Each participant was considered a reflective practitioner by reputation. The term "reflective" refers to the dictionary definition, "Given to reflection or thought" (Funk & Wagnalls, 1977, p. 558). And practitioner is, "One who practices an art or profession" (Funk & Wagnalls, 1977, p. 516). I asked teachers and school administrators during informal conversations to identify teachers they felt gave careful consideration to what and how instruction was provided to students. If I knew the person who was suggested, I confirmed or rejected the suggested teacher based on my knowledge of that teacher; if I was unfamiliar or only acquainted with an individual, I did not include them unless they were suggested by at least two people.

From a list of forty possible participants, I selected a group of ten with consideration to the variety of teaching positions, range of levels, and locations of schools I had hoped to include. I was very pleased with the selected participants and with their willingness to be included in my study.

## Research Design

The research methodology used in this study was designed to glean information about teachers' perceptions of critical incidents in their careers which had impacted their professional growth. The design of the study was interpretive in nature. It was a phenomenological study which attempted to reflect what was the reality for each of the participants at a particular time. When I call it a phenomenological study I mean that I tried to "understand a person's behavior in terms of his attitudes, goals, perceptions of the situation in which he finds himself, etc.--in short of the phenomenology of the situation" (Greene, 1973, p. 79). The main method of data collection was through semi-structured interviews which were conducted with ten teachers.

"Meaning is of essential concern to the qualitative approach. Researchers who use this approach are interested in the ways different people make sense out of their lives" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 29). The interviews in this study were an attempt to provide me with a deeper understanding of how ten teachers perceived critical incidents in their careers. Meanings held by the teacher participants were considered most important to this study. Therefore, the research was intended to seek understandings rather than arrive at conclusions and make generalizations about teachers' critical incidents.

Bogdan and Biklen (1982) also state that "by learning the perspectives of the participants, qualitative research illuminates the inner dynamics of situations--dynamics

that are often invisible to the outsider" (p. 30). This is of interest to the "implications for instructional leaders" research question. Although instructional leaders are not necessarily outsiders, they may be unaware of the inner dynamics of any given situation. This study considers the impact of instructional leadership during the critical incidents of the ten teacher participants, thus illustrating how teachers actually viewed instructional leadership initiatives.

## Research Instrument

The basic research questions were derived from the literature on the world of the teacher and instructional leadership, as well as through reflecting on elements of importance in personal critical incidents. My advisor made suggestions based on her experiences with interpretive studies.

A semi-structured interview schedule was planned for the ten interviews, but following the pilot studies I posed a guiding question/introduction which summarized my research questions. I discussed this focus when I initiated participation in the study and again at the beginning of each interview. This was the only structure I imposed on the interviews. This allowed the necessary latitude for the participants to shape the content of the interviews so they would be able to tell their stories without limitations.

My goal in the study was to glean insights into what was of significance to teachers during critical incidents. By structuring the interviews through asking specific questions from my interview schedule I felt I was imposing what I thought "should" be of significance during critical incidents. Removing an imposed structure freed me from feelings that I might slant the information participants provided toward my preconceived notions. This open structure allowed me to learn what the important

questions were, rather than me presuming to know this beforehand. In fact, the participants did comment on the areas I had initially identified in my proposal.

## Data Collection

In January of 1989, permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Superintendent of the school system where the study took place. I received a letter confirming approval for the study; schools were sent letters indicating the Superintendent's permission for me to contact teachers to request their participation.

Initial contact with teachers was made through telephoning potential participants to explain the purpose of the study and request their involvement. Interestingly, unlike the pilot study participants, when I mentioned the term "critical incident" during my first three telephone contacts, I needed to make no remarks of clarification. These individuals thought they knew precisely what I meant and quickly determined an incident they wished to tell me about. However, this was not the case with the following seven participants who required considerable clarification and examples.

A covering letter was drafted to confirm the purpose of the interview, reassure confidentiality, and confirm the meeting place and time. The aspect of confidentiality was again confirmed at the beginning of each interview.

I met with teachers during February of 1989. Interviews took place whenever and wherever was convenient for the participant. Four selected noon hour meetings in their classrooms or an office. I found this impeded the duration of the interviews which lasted 30-45 minutes. One teacher combined a noon hour and preparation period to avail a larger block of time. This interview lasted about an hour and 15 minutes. One interview took place in a classroom after school; another in the teacher's home after school. These interviews lasted about an hour. Two interviews took place in teacher's

homes during the evening and on a non-teaching morning. The interviews lasted about one hour. One forty minute interview took place at the University since we were both taking courses there.

## Credibility of Data

Truth value was promoted through tape recording interviews to ensure that transcripts of interviews were accurate and complete.

Because this was a phenomenological study, I attempted to reflect what was the reality for each of the participants at a particular time. Possible follow-up interviews were discussed following the initial interviews. Follow-up interviews occurred when statements required clarification or elaboration, for confirmation or clarification of interpretations of comments, and for permission for inclusion of any quotations from interviews that I wished to use in the thesis which had the potential of revealing the identity of the originator. Interestingly, follow-up interviews often lasted significantly longer than initial interviews; two were longer than three hours ! In some cases the teachers had thought of additional incidents they wished to share, some had had critical incidents occur since their last interview, and one person felt "cleansed" by the interview process as it was a first time that critical incidents had been shared and hence, more sharing was desired.

One participant, with whom I have frequent contact, allowed me to share preliminary interpretations with him on an ongoing basis. He confirmed and elaborated the interpretations. Further member checks with teachers were made when I had thoroughly analyzed all ten interviews.

I also discussed categories and themes informally with other school system personnel such as teachers who did not participate in the study, school administrators,

and Central Office staff. The purpose was to see if my interpretations were credible based on their experiences. For example, I noticed that the attention of classroom teachers was focussed on the children in their classrooms and the parents of the students. They seemed oblivious to the larger context of the school and school system. Teachers without classroom assignments (pull-out program teachers, specialists, a school counsellor) seemed more aware of school and system goals, policies, and programs, as well as how these could potentially impact them. This preliminary interpretation was consistent with observations made by two district office personnel in recent inservicing of both groups of teachers in the area of human sexuality. The district staff felt the message they were receiving from classroom teachers was, "Leave us alone and let us teach. We aren't counsellors and we don't want to be. We shouldn't have to deal with this stuff." They found non-classroom teachers to be more receptive and to recognize the necessity of learning the skills and programs in light of recent Board decisions. This process of triangulation made it possible to cross-check the data and interpretations.

Non-system individuals with whom I reviewed my interpretations included my educational administration classmates, family members, friends, teachers from other school systems, and two members of my committee. My advisor also reviewed some interview transcripts and shared her interpretations of them with me.

## Data Analysis

Data analysis was ongoing from the time of the initial telephone contacts with the teachers. Data files were compiled which included: journal notations (including global impressions of the interviews), field notes, and interview transcripts. The participants' interview transcripts were colour coded for ease of identification.

Interview data were coded using three methods: coding by research question, coding by critical incident "story," and coding by meanings of individual ideas, phrases, or words.

When I initially coded the transcripts, I did so in relation to the research questions. I went through each transcript and cut out the sections that addressed a particular research question and placed these sections in an envelope. I found that I had to combine the information related to the critical incidents, the situations, and the circumstances as they were so intertwined within the stories that taken out of context, meaning was significantly reduced.

After each interview had been cut up and placed in envelopes, I highlighted important phrases, words, or sentences in the cut-ups and wrote notes containing the key ideas of those segments. In these notes, one interview summary followed the next. These summary notes proved helpful in identifying categories, and later themes.

Complete "stories" of critical incidents were cut out of another set of transcripts and considered holistically. In considering the stories as whole units, I tried to determine why the participants selected a particular incident and the intent or main idea of the story. This process was particularly helpful in uncovering themes.

Finally, another set of transcripts were coded according to the participants' statements without consideration to the research questions. I left the transcripts intact and wrote in the margins. This strategy identified categories and themes which were not necessarily acknowledged through the research questions, but were important to the participant. This coding strategy helped me to identify issues of importance to the participants.

Analysis and synthesis of categories identified through these three coding strategies, as well as rereading transcripts and listening to the interviews numerous

times, led to the emergence of themes which were the essence of the critical incidents shared. Themes stimulated further reflection on and insight into the data being described which assisted me in considering the implications of the study.

## Summary

This chapter reviewed the methodology used to conduct this study, which was designed to identify the perceptions of teachers about critical incidents in their teaching careers.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore the major research questions of the study. Member checks were utilized to ensure the credibility of data interpretation. Data collected from the interviews were the descriptions, opinions, and feelings of teachers about critical incidents in their professional lives. These data were categorized by the stories shared, the research questions of the study, and the ideas expressed by the individuals.

# Chapter 4

## The Findings of the Study

### Category Introduction

While some teachers interviewed discussed a single critical incident, others discussed several, and for some participants one critical incident led to another. The critical incidents were initially sorted into types: crisis, chance, threat to self-esteem, and self-revelation. The crisis incidents were ones over which the teachers felt they had little or no initial control. A school fire, a student with extreme behavior problems, and an unexpected marriage breakdown were examples. The chance situations described were largely unplanned or the impact of them seemed unexpected by the teachers. Examples included such things as unplanned changes in one's personal life, getting into a specialty area by chance, and inservices which profoundly impacted teaching. Having difficulty with discipline, facing unemployment, and having one's professional opinion challenged are illustrations of the type of incidents which threatened the self-esteem of teachers. Self-revelation often emerged from significant incidents. Some examples of such revelation are: realizing a need to feel useful, becoming aware of attachments to students, and having strength to deal with a critical incident come from within.

Repeated readings of the transcripts and listening to tape recordings of the interviews numerous times led beyond the grouping of incidents into types. In discussing critical incidents teachers set contexts and linked a number of actions and actors. Data rich in what excited, saddened, and satisfied teachers were revealed. Categories for analysis of the interview data, therefore, went beyond the situations themselves to aspects of the contexts. The categories were: educational program as a

means to an end, the focus on students, staff relationships, autonomy or isolation, and relationships with supervisors. Discussions of each category follow.

## Educational Program as a Means to an End

Through the subjects teachers chose or were assigned to teach, they were able to address the visions they had for themselves and for their students. The programs were vehicles used to reach desired objectives such as nurturing a love for a particular subject, managing student behavior, being accountable, challenging oneself professionally, and enhancing self-esteem.

In many cases the educational programs were used to help teachers achieve the goals they had set for students. Teachers determined affective and academic goals for the students they taught, and then they structured the learning environment to meet those ends. In discussing these aspects of education, teachers talked about goals for students such as developing a love of learning, personal independence, an ability to use libraries, confidence in reading, and an ability to inquire.

To illustrate this point, one high school teacher's goal was for students to feel good about themselves and to have a good work ethic. He stated it in this way,

> As far as whether they learn the subject I teach, or they learn Math, or they learn English, that's secondary. I think it's how they perceive themselves. It's important that they feel good about themselves and they develop some confidence in themselves and develop some staying power, sticking with something. And, I think, if they can develop the confidence, with the staying power, they'll be able to handle something that comes up later.

Another teacher also felt educational programs should nurture students' self concepts. She felt the educational program should be used to meet this goal through providing opportunities for students to feel successful. She stated, "I don't think any

of the rest of it will come unless the child likes himself." Examples of how program was used to meet this end were expressed in this way,

> No matter how any child can write and no matter how much or how little a child writes, it's terrific for that child. Rather than giving them a picture and saying, "Okay, I want six sentences," give them a picture and say, "Okay, what do you want to say about it?" Every child had a chance to succeed. Things like Math Their Way--every child gets a chance to succeed at their level. I'm always looking for more programs where there are a variety of levels children can work at and be successful.

This concept was echoed by another teacher who, in dealing with a particular student who exhibited a lack of confidence, taught the student through the regular program, but

> worked with him all year on confidence, just his confidence. I told him he could do it, and be patient, and just to stay with it, and work hard. And when final scores came back from the standardized test, he and another student had the highest increases.

Teachers also used educational programs to meet personal needs. For example, a teacher who desired challenges in her work life looked for program opportunities to challenge herself and grow professionally. She told of having been a classroom teacher for three years when a new program was introduced to her school system. Although she had neither training nor experience, she applied for the job because she thought "it would be a great job." She received the position with the understanding that she would take university courses in the area.

Later in her career she desired another role change into a position that was to pilot a unique strategy for delivery of a program. Her comments in this case were, "I'm at the position in my life that I don't have to teach what I don't want to. I was just waiting when they said, 'Would you like this job?' And I took it." She went on to elaborate,

> I was scared stiff--I really was. I had no idea of what to do. But it was just a great challenge. It came at a perfect time in my life. I was having the same problem you have when you've been in a school for a long time. There are teachers you work with constantly because they work with you. And there are some who never ask you anything and you don't ask them anything, because it becomes a fight after a while. You know, there's no use telling a person he needs something when he doesn't need it. He doesn't want it. So how are you going to do it? So you get tired of it and you just sit back and let it go. And I probably wasn't at my best for that last couple years. I was bored. And this just opened up a whole new world. I could probably go back to my previous position now and be much better. I was at an end. I didn't know what to do. I had used up all my ideas. I was taking some University courses which were helping.

A teacher who expressed a need to feel useful found working in Special Education programs fulfilling.

> I've never had any Special Ed. courses or anything, but I think I have a talent working with the slower learners that a lot of other teachers don't, because I'm willing to adapt myself to them and my methods to their ability to learn. Or it may be because I can make them feel that they can achieve. I don't know what it is... And to tell you the truth, I found out it's a lot more rewarding in a lot of ways working with your slower learners than it is with your top matriculation kids. They don't really need you--they don't need you. You know, you're there just as a guide for them, but most of them are bright enough that they catch on with very little effort and these other kids need you more.

The educational program was frequently a point of reference when teachers talked about critical incidents in their teaching careers. In one case the program itself caused, or resulted in, a critical incident. More commonly, however, in describing critical incidents teachers referred to the use of the program as a vehicle to meet a student, class, or personal need.

## Focus on Students

The stories the teachers told during the interviews to a large degree focussed on students. They took on extra duties because of students, their lives were affected by

students, and they had significant relationships with students. At the heart of teaching and what mattered to teachers in their work was students.

**Going the extra mile**. Involvement in additional activities, beyond those assigned to teachers, was a source of critical incidents. In the case of the study participants, they made the decisions to take on these extra tasks; no one asked them to, or implied that they should. Extra efforts were often for the sake of the children because teachers were concerned about their happiness and welfare. Such above and beyond the call of duty efforts resulted in very positive personal and professional growth for the teachers involved. The personal growth was in their own esteem; they felt good about the outcomes of their endeavors, but it also impacted them professionally; what they did or how they behaved in their classrooms.

One teacher expressed the benefits of and difficulties involved in going the extra mile. On one hand it made her job easier, on the other hand it drained her energy.

> I generally enjoy being in the classroom with kids. The marking tends to get me down though and I think that's because I take on so many, many extra activities. Every aspect of what a teacher is supposed to be involved in: in a classroom, extra-curricular activities, ATA, with Department stuff, and then of course there's my own personal and social life. I take kids traveling. I look after grad. . . . The more you do for the kids the more they appreciate you. They know which teachers are putting in extra time. They know and they do care which teachers care about them. So in some ways by taking on some of these responsibilities I think I have made things easier for myself. And that's something a lot of teachers could probably learn from.

Some extra considerations in teachers' work emerged from the environments in which they were working. In such situations the teachers either did something themselves about the concerns they had or learned to live with them. The following story tells about a teacher who took some responsibility for the cleanliness of her students because she could not see an alternative if the matter was to be attended to.

We were in one of the poorer areas. I don't even think all of them had running water or lights. They were really poor. One of my moms, for example, had had nineteen children. And a lot of the families were on welfare. I doubt that they had the energy to be that involved with the school, to be honest with you. Yet they were loving, caring people and did the best they could. The best they could didn't include getting their kids clean all the time. You worked on that with the nurse.

One teacher recalled being new to Canada and being placed in a culturally and racially distinct community. The students were very different from her expectations. They were "children that can't be controlled by just an ordinary teacher." However, everyone was surprised at how this teacher was able to control the class. She felt that because her skin colour and their colouring were almost the same the children respected her and developed rapport with her immediately. Since social activities were not available in this setting, the teacher found recreation in visiting her students in their homes on weekends. In this way she came to know their culture and they became familiar with hers. Through coming to understand the culture the teacher was able to improve her pedagogy to better meet the student's needs. This motivated her to attain credentials in special education.

Another story of the same type of win-win situation was one where a teacher successfully intervened in a situation which could have had long term detrimental consequences for the student, the teacher, and the teacher's family.

The rewarding one in a sense was Gerry Wright. He was in one of the first groups of students in the program I taught. I taught him in grades 11 and 12. He did well, really well. He was quiet, a really nice person. Not quiet to the extent that he wouldn't socialize, but he was quiet. And he graduates and his parents kick him out of the home. "You're finished, you're through grade 12, you're out of the home." They kicked him out of his home. I think it really shocked him.

I asked somebody about him one day, about a year later. I didn't see him around, I'd usually see him around, but I didn't see him at all. I asked one of the students one day, "Where's Gerry?" "The Remand Centre." I said, "What happened?" "Well, his parents charged him for breaking and entering." This was in the winter time. He was getting back into his house to get clothes. His parents

were away and when they got back they charged him. And this just devastated him, you know.

So I went down to the Remand Centre and the look on his face when he came through there--he was hurting bad. He tried to pretend that he wasn't, but it was hurting him really bad.

So a friend of mine's a lawyer, so I got him started with his case. I went to court with the lawyer, and told them I got Gerry a job. I had him lined up for a job, so the judge had that. The judge said, "Do you have a place to live?" And I talked to my wife. It's funny, it was a tough time for my wife and me, but she still opened her house.

And you know there were stories that Gerry had a knife and so forth, so there could have been some danger, but I felt I knew Gerry Wright and I just couldn't believe this was happening and so I said, "Well, that's not true."

He lived with us for about three months. Things went really well at work, then he got a place of his own, he got married. Now he's got a couple of kids, he's got journeyman papers. So those types of things help me on my bad days.

The last two examples point out instances of individuals succeeding in situations where society had failed. They illustrated great risk-taking on the part of the individual. The results in either case could have been negative, but because they were positive they have become one of the significant critical incidents these teachers identified from their careers.

Living the job. Teaching is a career that is lived. The position and the person in that role are one and the same. When teachers leave the school building they retain their teacher persona. Their beliefs, value systems, priorities, mental attitudes, and so on are the same at and away from school.

This concept was illustrated through the story of the teacher who made a former student a part of his family at a time when the young man was in crisis. This teacher deeply cared about individuals and strove to find and nurture their best qualities. He cared about Gerry Wright when he was a student and continued to care about him after he graduated. Even though there were rumors that challenged this teacher's beliefs about Gerry, the teacher remembered the student's positive qualities and retained his

faith in him. Because this teacher cared about his students he gambled on Gerry, and although the stakes were high, in this case everyone won.

Awareness of school from the perspective of a teacher's children influenced one teacher's daily work.

> I look at my own children. Maybe I teach in such a way as I would like to have their teachers teach--in the same kind of sensible way. And I haven't had a lot of experiences with their teachers that lead me to believe that there's that much common sense and sensitivity out there. And I always shake my head. That reinforces me. Maybe two or three times a month you realize, when they tell you their side of the story, that things could be different. They could be approached differently, or could be handled differently. So that keeps your awareness level pretty high. That is true of my teaching pretty well all the time. If it was my children, how would I like them to be talked to or treated?

Another teacher told of being in a crisis at school where she was made to feel unneeded and unwanted by the administrator. She could not leave this feeling of uselessness at school and it profoundly affected her home life. She didn't want her family to know what was happening, but they could "sense a sadness" in her. They wondered if she was tired. She reached such a low ebb that she considered leaving them to be on her own. When she was able to change work situations her self-esteem improved and so did her home life. In her words, "Being appreciated, professionally accepted, then your life becomes better."

In another instance an unhappy student's behavior severely affected a teacher's class, but it also affected the teacher away from school. The teacher perceived the student had problems beneath the surface of the situation and anguished over what she might do to resolve them. "I would go home at night and cry about her. 'What else can I do to help her?' My husband knew this child's whole history too."

The roles played at work reflected teachers' characteristics as individuals. For these teachers, their experiences during teaching were not left at school but affected

their out-of-work lives. Similarly, home circumstances provided reflection on what was happening at school. The values, emotional responses, and actions were the same. Teachers' roles changed, their basic belief systems did not.

**Students' impact on the meaning of teaching.** Teachers are exposed to hundreds, perhaps even thousands, of children over the course of their teaching careers. Sometimes an experience with a student or group of students impacted a teacher so profoundly that it became a critical incident in the teacher's career.

This was certainly the case for the teacher who was new to the country and was placed in a racially and culturally distinct community. The very positive relationships that developed between herself, her students, and their families enabled her to provide them with appropriate learning experiences. This successful experience became a highlight of her career.

An experienced teacher who had remained in the same school for a number of years faced a critical incident when she transferred to a new school where she was not known by reputation. This was her story:

> At my former school, because I had taught their older brothers and older sisters and I had proven myself, I didn't have to prove myself to any of those kids. They knew about me before they came in, most of them. As a teacher I was so confident. Then I changed schools.
>
> All of a sudden here were these kids who treated me like I didn't know how to teach, and I didn't know anything. They had no respect for me, or my knowledge, and what I could do for them.
>
> In fact, the second year I was here, one of the other teachers that had been here for a long time was teaching her first class of a particular subject. I had been teaching the course for ten years at that time. Anyway, what was happening was my students talked to her students and had found out that she had spent three weeks on this section of the program and I had spent a week. "I didn't know what I was doing" and they were coming to me and putting me on the spot, as if I didn't know what I was supposed to do. And I said "Look, I know that there will be one question on your final exam on that or maybe two. Why should I spend three weeks on something that is not going to be stressed?" They didn't trust me.

> One girl went home and complained to her father and he actually phoned me up to tell me how his daughter had spent the whole week-end doing some stuff that I hadn't covered with them. She still got 84 on the exam and there was one question on that particular topic that she spent a whole week-end on.
>
> It took a year and a half, exactly a year and a half, of being on this staff before the kids trusted me. That was three semesters of kids that I went through with this lack of trust. This is my fourth year here now, and I' m getting to the point where I can get away with just about anything with the kids again. Since that year and a half when they were really testing me, they have come to find out that I am caring, and that I can teach, that I'm fair, you know, I've got the right qualities. And they like me. And I know it. And when you know you've got them in the palm of your hand you can do all sorts of things.

Students' lack of trust in this teacher's abilities caused a critical incident. It was the type of crisis that lasted a long time because trust took time to develop and a reputation took even longer.

Another teacher developed a philosophy of priorities in his teaching through critical incidents with individual students over a period of several years. Six of the seven critical incidents he cited were incidents with individual students.

The first was a student who became a model for him in terms of an ideal student and an ideal student/teacher relationship. She was an "A" student, a hard worker, had a nice disposition, and also did three hours of ballet every night. "I didn't think people like that existed. That was probably my first love affair with a student. It would be that scenario. I just admire her so much, to this day." He said of her impact on him, "And she really respected me. I think that really helped me as a teacher."

His second critical relationship with a student was an antagonistic one where a bright student expected what the teacher considered to be "preferential treatment." He would not give her what she wanted and caused him to resolve, "I think I knew from then on I was going to be that way with all of my classes. I would treat all students equally."

The third student was one with

> what I viewed was a lack of confidence. So that's what I worked with him on all year was confidence, just his confidence. I told him he could do it, and to be patient, and just to stay with it, and work hard. And when final scores came back from the standardized test, he had the highest increase. I never said anything to him, or to anybody, but I really felt proud. . . . That was very rewarding for me. You know, concrete evidence that I did help somebody.

From this experience this teacher decided to make student self confidence the central goal in his teaching. He felt that if students had confidence they could achieve almost anything.

Another incident made the teacher accept that there comes a time when the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few. It involved a student who was very abrasive. For example, "He'd never call a teacher by name. He'd make noises--grunt, pig noises, things like that." The student's attitude was poor and the parents were not supportive of the school. This teacher was very patient, but after two and one half years the teacher finally gave up and refused to allow the student back into his class. As a result, the student had to leave school. The teacher felt "like the Rock of Gibraltar had come off my shoulders." He found that the rest of the students were very supportive of his decision. "It made a big difference in the class. And the rest of the year flew by." Since the time of this incident, the student has made contact with the teacher to share his future goals and admitted to growing up a great deal.

This was the same teacher who accepted the delinquent young man into his home confirming his belief that if you seek to find the best in people, you will be rewarded by them trying to live up to your expectations of them.

His final incident involved a student committing suicide. The teacher continues to search for what he might have been able to do, but has reached no concrete solutions. He is now, however, more aware of symptoms to watch for in students. "I watch the kids, really over watch, for any signs, any symptoms like I saw in the student who lost his life. I guess it's good that I'm watching, but I think I'm almost gun shy now."

The stories shared in this section illustrate the profound impact students can have on teachers. Such experiences may alter teachers' behaviors in classrooms, their personal belief and value systems, and the rewards of their careers. Of relationships with students, this quotation from one teacher sums up the essence:

> If you don't have a relationship with children, you may be a strict disciplinarian, you may be an excellent teacher, but I don't think that's very rewarding because the only thing in teaching that I find rewarding is the relationship with the student. And them coming back ten years later and saying, "Do you remember such and such, how is So-and-So, and what's going on?" That's what I find rewarding. If they pass you on the street and say, "You Bitch," or something, then you know that you haven't reached them, or you've reached them maybe in the wrong way, or maybe they're a kid that--I have had a couple of students--who are totally unreachable. You know, you totally cannot get through to them. And the harder you try the worse it is for yourself and for them.

## Staff Relationships

Relationships among colleagues on school staffs took a number of forms. Social relationships seemed common, attempts to work cooperatively and collaboratively existed where there was a desire to establish common ground, and sharing and support seemed to most commonly occur among those with common interests. The nature of staff relationships seemed largely dependent on the nature of the individual and were context specific.

One shared interest which drew teachers together was working at a common grade level or in a common subject area. The sharing included ideas and materials, as well as concerns related to classroom issues, particular students, or personal issues.

A junior high teacher discussed the sharing that occurred within his department, as well as within the grade at which he taught,

> We had a very good department, the teachers all worked very well together. We shared practically everything that we had. If we found something new and interesting we passed it on and talked about how we used it and so on. So it

worked out really well. . . . In fact we had all of our program on computer. We sat down, the two of us at our grade level, we had a couple of days of inservice that we could use to just plan. We put a lot of our stuff on to the computer and we ended up with our objectives, our exams, our notes, our handouts, everything was all computerized.

Concerns regarding particular students or groups of students was another shared interest which drew teachers together. A teacher who had discipline problems with a particular class said, "I would go and talk to other staff members who dealt with this class to see if they were having similar difficulties with this group and it was encouraging to know that they all had."

Where matters for discussion regarded a particular student and confidentiality was a consideration, in schools with large staffs notably, teachers tended to seek out an individual or individuals with whom to share a concern. Common knowledge or concerns seemed to be the basis for selection of participants and informal discussions were generally held away from the staff at large. One teacher said, "If I'm with a teacher and he has a particular student and we're in his office, one might say, 'How's he doing?' and we'll talk about it."

Some teachers did discuss students openly, but not all teachers were comfortable with that. As this teacher pointed out, "When I go in the staff room and hear teachers talking about students, something about that doesn't sit right with me, so I don't talk."

Informal, ongoing support to children through supporting colleagues was discussed by a teacher. She described the kinds of interactions she had with teachers which contributed to continuity in the education of children while recognizing individuality in how teachers preferred to work. She described this informal support in this way,

I've said, "I tried this and it really worked," or, "If you try this, it will just make them more stubborn." And it has to be an ongoing kind of thing. It's not something you can put in a letter. You have no idea how your suggestions would

fit into that classroom. There's got to be a lot of support and a lot of continuity from the previous teacher.

When issues were general in nature the discussions seemed to involve larger numbers or groups of staff members. Regarding a program change, for example, one teacher commented, "We very strongly supported each other. Maybe not one hundred percent, but at least ninety five percent of the whole staff. We tried to relate, communicating among ourselves." The problem in this case was that the communication was effective within the support group, but not with those holding an opposing position. "Communication did not really go two ways. . . so what happened then was it was not really smooth sailing, no matter how we intended to do it."

Collaboration with others helped teachers in dealing with feelings of isolation and provided them with a sense of empowerment.

> To know that there's so much strength, then you know from your own staff even, that you're not alone. If you are to meet a brick wall coming from the top, the Central Office, then you're all by yourself really thinking that what you're doing is right. Forget it, you're hopeless. But with the idea that you have the whole staff together and trying to say, "We're right on this thing." And maybe we can really have our defence right now. And let them know that what they are doing is not really exactly what's supposed to be done to be able to get a better result.
>
> And you know when we come to a big group now, such as an assembly, system wide, some of our teachers are really vocal. It's because they know that they have backing from the staff. And they know that they're not talking all by themselves, there is a group that is going to be supporting them.

The common ground that was established through coordination seemed to improve communication among teachers so they were better able to support and share their feelings with each other.

> Coordination, cooperation, and the atmosphere is different. You're forever really enjoying what's happening. And whatever mistake we are making we laugh at it, because it was not just done by one. We all will accept that it was done by the whole group. And we will say, "Oh well, it was a mistake that we can always

alleviate.". . . We can see anyone who is sour or anyone who's against it--they're not scared to say it. . . .There's no one being repressed at all whatsoever.

Coordination and collaboration were not always easily achieved, as the following example illustrates. A teacher described the frustration of trying to work cooperatively with another teacher when there was interpersonal conflict. Because she was also going through a crisis related to acceptance by students and community at the same time, this interpersonal conflict compounded the dimensions and intensity of the critical incident.

> Within my own department we should work together and in many instances she had actually tried to pull away rather than cooperate. And so it hasn't been the most pleasant of situations to work here. . . .
> Generally I get along with the other teachers and I get along better with her now because I had a blow up, I had it out with her last year just about her attitude. She didn't say anything back but let me spew my venom at her, but I was really annoyed. I think she had it coming. I don't usually do things like that. You know, I try to work away at people. I figure if I'm nice to people and treat them right, that they'll reciprocate. And you wait after a while for them to come around. Most people do, but most people do respond to me. But it wasn't happening. . . . I haven't been very candid about my feelings toward the people in this school. There are certain people who you feel just don't like you, and I'm not used to that. I'm not Miss Popularity, I'm really not, but I am not used to not getting along with people, being congenial with people. You know, to feel that there's some respect and liking because I generally like people and I enjoy being with them. Not only teachers and parents, but I enjoy my students very much.

In times of personal crisis, such as critical incidents in their careers, teachers desired and sought the support of colleagues. A teacher, in a critical incident initiated by parents challenging her evaluation of the progress of their child, said of sharing with a colleague,

> The other teacher of the same grade as me was my confidant. I told her exactly what was happening. She told me not to worry, she had had a situation the same. She told me not to feel bad--that it happened to all teachers.

"Once in a while I'll lean on a colleague who teaches in a similar class. And he will lean on me in return. . . . We work with each other to discuss students a lot," was the comment regarding another teacher's relationship of support with a colleague within her department.

In these situations peer support was sought through relationships with individual colleagues and was positively perceived. However, in a situation where a teacher was new to a school and had to defend her teaching strategies to parents and students, she felt a need for support from the staff as a whole and was disappointed,

> I went through a lot of that and I did not feel most of the staff supported me. There were some individual staff members who were very good to me. They liked me. They were nice to me, they liked me, and they treated me as part of this place.

The concept of support which these teachers described suggested a desire to be listened to, cared about, and accepted by peers.

Social activities, available to all members of school staffs, were commonplace and seemed to enhance morale. Routine joking and teasing, as well as special activities such as hockey drafts, and events such as staff parties contributed to "the comraderie of the staff". "There are some factions of the staff who don't associate with the majority. I guess you get those everywhere."

Although the forms of staff relationships and involvement in them varied with individuals and from staff to staff, they seemed to be a significant component of the teacher's world. And during times of crises teachers often drew on their colleagues for personal or group support.

## Autonomy or Isolation

Teachers verbally expressed a desire for collaboration, yet they generally worked alone. This may not be unusual considering the physical plan of school buildings where the basic physical unit is the individual classroom. Teachers seemed to want to be a part of the larger group or organization, but they also blocked efforts that potentially threatened their isolation. Many teachers had visions of their own which were most easily attained when they were working alone. So, teachers seemed to enjoy the autonomy their isolation allowed them, yet at the same time desired to be members of a group.

Teachers seemed to derive pride from handling classroom management and student behavior problems on their own. "The administration doesn't handle any of my problems now. I handle them all and they never hear from me. And I think from their point of view they appreciate me in that sense." "I didn't want to call the office. I handle my own problems." When I did a checked this concept with other teachers not included in the study I was told that teachers feel they are expected to handle discipline on their own and are given the impression by administrators that if they can't handle it they are failing in their role. One teacher suggested that by having administrators handle discipline, irreparable damage is done to the student-teacher relationship.

A teacher who worked with special needs students inferred that the demands of teaching and the potential power of those she taught motivated her to always be in top form so she would be able to retain control of the classroom environment.

> I've always had those kinds of positions where I've always had to not only be a good teacher and teach to different modes of learning and be their emotional crutch all the time, and had to discipline problems, two or three or four every day, serious ones or mild ones. I never get through a day without one of these things happening, so I'm never allowed to sort of sit back or be easy, or say, "Oh well, maybe next year." I'm always tested, always kept at a peak level.

When a critical situation was specific to the classroom and the only actors were the teacher and students, the teacher seemed to have position power, if the teacher had the self confidence to use it and wasn't intimidated by the students. With this power the teacher was in control and determined the course of the critical incident. Take, for example, the incident where the bright student expected preferential treatment and the teacher refused it. The teacher wanted to be fair to all students by treating them equally. However, by the teacher handling this situation on his own and by neither the teacher nor the child involving her parents or the school administration, the teacher was able to retain control over this situation which he resolved by developing a general rule to govern his teaching. That rule was that all students would be treated the same.

Teachers were very possessive of their classes and the instructional time. When a class was supposed to go with a specialist, the teacher said, "No. She's taking my Math period. You cannot take my class." This specialist was sympathetic to the position of teachers, "Because of the heaviness of the curriculum and because of the many, many interruptions that classes have, they don't want another one."

Despite interruptions, most of a teacher's day was spent alone with students. Therefore, teachers had to be able to acknowledge their own positive experiences as it was unlikely anyone else would be aware of them. Of a student's significant achievement gains a teacher commented, "I never said anything to the student or anybody, but I felt really proud. . . . That was very rewarding for me. You know, concrete evidence that I did help somebody." Another teacher said, "I know people in my position have to pat themselves on the back."

Although teachers were encouraged to plan cooperatively, planning was largely an independent activity. A teacher discussed how Individual Educational Plans for students were expected to be a collaborative effort, but she had found that beyond basic

goal setting, most teachers preferred to plan alone. Another teacher described how her special program was supposed to be "taught through cooperative planning with teachers," but she found that "only some teachers could handle that." So she tried teaching skills in isolation when she initially had contact with teachers. She found this to be a successful strategy because once teachers realized what she was able to do and that she wasn't imposing her program on them, but rather was providing a support to their programs, they became more receptive to cooperative planning. The "cooperative planning" was most successful with teachers who had a vision or goal and asked the specialist to teach particular concepts to assist them in attaining their goal. "The ones that are best are the ones that know what I can do to help them. . .The ones who don't have a goal, really, it doesn't work as well." Hence all have autonomy control.

Scheduling within schools contributed to the isolation of teachers. Except in larger schools, teachers generally had preparation periods alone which eliminated a potential opportunity to work and share with other teachers. A specialist teacher expressed a desire for other teachers to understand the program she taught. She felt observation of her teaching was the most effective way for teachers to glean some understanding, but referred to the scheduling structure which she felt severely hindered this possibility.

For some teachers a challenge to their control or automony provoked a critical incident. In the following incident the teacher took a strong position to make his superiors aware of his feelings regarding a particular issue.

When a teacher was assigned to teach too many students in an inadequate facility, he felt that he had been left to cope alone with a long standing problem. He decided that the issue was important enough for him to submit his resignation.

> I had to teach two sections of this subject. In an area where you should have about 10 students, I had 24 in one group; 22 in another. I went in and handed the principal my resignation. . . . I said, "I can't do it. My other teaching assignment is no problem. I'll teach half time here and half time somewhere else, but this teaching assignment has to go. It's just not a healthy area. It's too small; there's not enough work stations for the students." And I had a couple of meetings with the principal and with a person from the personnel department for the school system. And I think it was something the person from personnel said, and maybe something that should have been said to me a long time ago, one of the cues was, "You've got to get the rag out and do the job." And although they didn't tell me, nobody told me, I think that was a turning point for me in a sense that I had to learn to survive first. You know I tried to do everything just so, and if I wasn't doing everything just perfect, I didn't feel good about it. . . . This subject is an area where every teacher gets stuck there, and I say gets stuck there, cause nobody wants to teach it. Really, I talked to the principal about it, it's something that shouldn't be around. They should change it; they should do away with it. . . . I was explaining to them the problems in the area: so many students, this is something I'm not trained for to start with--I have the basic concept. But if they had come out and said, "Look your first priority is to survive." Which I think they should tell people, I really do--survive--because there's some nuts like me who think everything has to be done just so.

In this situation the teacher put his career on the line to draw attention to poor working conditions. Although neither the program nor the facility improved despite his efforts, the teacher had relieved his feelings of being isolated with the problem. Being a perfectionist working in that setting was very upsetting to this individual, but by his superiors inferring that to do the best he could was all that they expected, he was able to endure the situation.

Some of the isolation of the world of the teacher may have been protected by teachers because it allowed them to have and strive toward personal visions, insulating them to some degree from the school or school system visions. One teacher, in describing how she served her students stated, "With my own point of view, my own expectations, my own philosophy." Regarding school system goals she commented, "And sometimes you tend to say, 'To heck with them.' What we're doing is right and we're really serving all of the children going here. So maybe here are the goals

mandated to us, yes, we'll do it, but we can still put in our own input the way we want it to be. The risk is there; the option is there."

Isolation protected teachers by hiding deviations from expectations. Teachers were limited in their choices about what they taught and for how long by the Alberta Program of Studies, provincial guidelines for scheduling for instruction, as well as school system and individual school expectations. Because teachers had strengths and weaknesses, preferences and dislikes, some deviated from constraints. One teacher said of this issue, "I leave out a lot of things; I pick and choose. Especially in Social Studies because it isn't my cup of tea. It's hard to teach something that you're not really keen on."

In summary, the teachers' world focussed around the students they taught: managing behavior, managing instructional time, and striving to attain personal visions. Because teachers were isolated, they had to provide positive strokes to themselves. Teachers reached out of their insulated world to access resources which enhanced their world. Although there were exceptions, most teachers in the study planned alone, they all carried out their plans independently, and the value of and desire for privacy was very obvious.

## Relationship to Supervisor

The relationship between the supervisor, particularly the principal, and teacher were significant in teachers' descriptions of critical incidents. Modelling, daily activities, feedback, support, and trust of principals appeared to be important components of the teacher/supervisor relationship during critical incidents.

**Modelling.** Leaders served as models to teachers and the model they provided influenced the confidence teachers had in them. "I watch, I keep my ears open, hear what goes on, and I know what they go through--the administration--what they do for the staff here, the number of hours they put in." "In seeing her deal with other situations in the school and having seen her involved in meetings with parents and meetings with students and this sort of thing in various situations, she seemed to be very supportive of her staff and more than willing to provide the kind of assistance that I thought that she could." One teacher commented on the principal being a role model, a mentor, in this way, "He was a very fair person, and he seemed to want everybody to be heard, and I think he could develop trust in people. So I think it more a style of being, as opposed to great words of wisdom or it was a philosophy of life, I suppose, that I gleaned from his actions."

The concept of the principal as teacher and positive role model was discussed by one teacher.

> I had one principal that I felt would never ask me to do anything unless he was prepared to do it, to teach it, himself. And that kind of person I really respected. He just worked so hard that he was a good role model and that really helped. I'd go to him and say, "How would you teach that?" He'd say, "Well, this is a way." I found it really interesting, you know, you go to the one you really think is doing a good job to begin with.
>
> In Junior High it's pretty hard because you know your administration is doing a lot of administering rather than teaching and so you don't see them in that same light. It isn't that I don't think they have the expertise, they just don't have the time. I just wouldn't go, it would be an imposition, they simply don't have time!

Through the behavior of principals in numerous situations role models are presented to teachers. These models serve as an influence to teachers and promote the confidence teachers have in them.

**Daily activities**. It was often short informal interactions with teachers or actions taken by leaders that left lasting impressions on teachers. Usually it was some passing comment or observed behavior that teachers remembered as influencing them. Little things such as putting information about a conference into a teacher's mailbox, soliciting teachers' opinions, encouraging teachers to experiment, and recognizing their achievements were actions remembered as being significant to teachers.

Particularly when teachers were learning something new or were having difficulty setting priorities, they seemed to appreciate direction from their supervisors. For example, when an experienced teacher entered a field that was new to her as well as being a new field to the school system, her supervisor said, "Your spending too much time on that." The teacher described the supervisor as, "not being too helpful," but credited her with "she did tell me what things I should do." A teacher who was a perfectionist said he wished someone would have told him to "just survive first" and was grateful when he was told to "get out the rag and get on with the job."

A liaison role played by some leaders was commented on as being helpful.

> What she does is, she doesn't feel experienced enough to comment on it so she says, "Here's some good things happening. Check with this person because you might be able to learn from this person." Or, "Here's something they tried. Check with them to see if they found it successful." It's truly back and forth. And if she's aware of what somebody is doing, she'll clue somebody else in. And it's truly a chance to share from across the way. Somebody is acting as a go between.

The essence of the everyday acts of principals which were important to teachers seemed well summarized in this teacher's description.

> The principal was *extremely* supportive. A very caring individual, very bright. She cared about her staff and took time to ensure that everything was going okay. She'd do things like--say if I had a meeting--she'd come in and dismiss my class, for example. Or sit down and talk. Or if something happened that was upsetting during the day--because I did have a few children who were quite problematic

> behavior-wise--if they were acting out she'd seem to know that and she'd probably drop by and talk to me. She often admired things we put up too. And things that we put on. We put on a play--the kids did Cinderella. We got a lot of support for that. They wrote their own parts, made their own costumes--they all showed up in their mother's nightgowns. That was funny.

The mere physical presence of someone in a leadership role, particularly the principal, seemed important to teachers. "When I say support, I think that they're there. If there are problems, I can go and talk to them." "They were always there, they were very patient."

**Feedback**. Teachers desired and expected feedback from their supervisors. Those who examined course objectives, checked curriculum, and observed lessons were viewed as leaders showing an interest in what teachers did. One teacher commented, "Because there's feedback, I'll teach anything you want." Another one expressed a desire for more feedback.

> The administrators didn't come into my classroom to see what was happening. They saw the results of it in programs, but they didn't see the step by step approach. I think that generally I got good feedback about things coming from here--from both staff and administration. I got good feedback from it because they saw the end result in a performance. The performance was not necessarily what I was aiming for. It was the teaching of the subject in the classroom. However, that was brought to the forum when you did perform it and so they could see it.
>
> It also depends on the school and the openness of the administration. I can compare two schools in which I've worked. And one was very open, very accepting of all kinds of different techniques and very encouraging. The other one was a little cold. The other administration didn't appear to be that interested in knowing about it or finding out more about it. It tended not to be as accepting of it. I think only because they didn't understand it. They didn't see it, because as I've said, they didn't see the step by step kinds of things that I did in the classroom.

Extreme frustration was expressed about a program not being supported through supervision and feedback. Any feedback or recognition, even negative, seemed more desirable to teachers than no supervision nor evaluation at all. Due to the frustration, a

critical incident resulted for the teacher who made the following statements about a program she was operating.

> Somebody has got to know what we're doing. And nobody knows what we're doing. My supervisor does not know what I'm doing, he's never looked at my list of things that I do; he has never been to one of my classes, he has no idea what curriculum I am following. I'm following my own, but I know what I'm trying to accomplish. . . . Nobody, nobody from the central office has ever been to one of our classes. I had suggested to my supervisor that he, or even a member of the superintendency team, should come. Somebody should be writing this down. Somebody should be seeing that it is being done . . . I don't know if anybody has said, "Is it working?" I don't think the principals know either. I think that's part of the program fault. There's not enough involvement by admin. . . . Nobody knows. And I'm sure I must be doing some good. I know we have to pat ourselves on the back cause there is no way of judging whether we've done anything. But I know there's kids out there who are using what I have taught them. . . . I just don't know how to blow my own horn without stepping on somebody's toes. But I talk to my supervisor and I tell him that, "You've got to know what's going on out there." I think that if my supervisor wants to sit up there and do his thing there should be somebody out there.

In instances when feedback was given by superiors, it was appreciated and seemed to be translated into action terms. "But with this school, because there's feedback, I'll teach anything they want. I'm really learning a lot." Another teacher said, "You can right away spot how these teachers are performing and it's not for themselves, it's for the children they're serving. But of course it reflects that whatever they are doing is being supported by the administrator."

**Support from superiors**. Despite the support teachers got from their own families, students, and colleagues, they desired support from and the approval of their superiors. When teachers in this study faced a potential crisis they readily turned to their superiors, particularly principals, for whatever type of support they required. On the other hand, when a superior indicated a lack of support to a teacher a critical incident was initiated.

One teacher described the transition from elementary to high school teaching. He had only taught for one year when he was asked to make the change. He said of that time,

> I just got my feet wet in elementary. . . . I was sort of looking forward to my next year, but that first year is such a tough year, it's hard. The planning just about killed me. I had enough stuff planned for two years. The administrator laughed when she saw what I was doing and showed me what I should be doing. I was doing much too much. It was the toughest year I ever had in my life until I came up here. Then I had two tough years. . . . Yeah, it's very tough. But when I say support, I think that the administrators are there. If there are problems you can go talk to them, and I think the administration is very professional in the way they handle things here. . . . Support in the sense they were always there, they were very patient, they listen, and let me cry a couple of times--I don't mean cry, I mean complain-- a few times.

This teacher was going through such an extreme critical incident regarding his high school teaching assignment that he almost left teaching. He was a very private person who preferred to work through his problems independently. In this case however, he felt a need to express his frustrations to someone, so he selected his principal. He feels the support he was given affected his decision to remain in teaching.

Another teacher's critical incident also involved a change in teaching assignment. When she considered applying for a change from a generalist to a specialist teaching position, it was the principal with whom she shared this idea. She said of being successful in this request, "It was the principal I went to first and told him I thought it would be a great job and it would be just a fabulous place to work and he must have agreed with me." Although she had no evidence, the teacher assumed it was the principal's support that got her the job. "The principal must have spoken for me. Whether I spoke to the right people, I had just started there in September so I didn't know everybody, so I'm sure it was the principal."

When teachers were unable to obtain support from their supervisors or had to prove themselves to get their supervisor to support them or their program, it seemed very frustrating for them. However, there were very different interpretations of how the support from principals should be demonstrated.

This teacher felt that for the principal to show support for her and her programs the principal should authoritatively direct the actions and behaviors of the other teachers. She seemed to see the schools' activities as being dependent on the priorities or vision of the principal.

> If the principal backs you, you've got it made. But you need a principal directive to say, "Every class must do at least one unit with this specialist." Otherwise you end up with teachers--they do not want you, at all. "Do not interfere. I have my way of teaching. I have my curriculum. And I don't have time for this." . . . If the principal had said, "I want 10 teachers and you must sign up with the specialist." I probably could have planned all those lessons, but nobody ever did that. And so I was at an end. I didn't know what to do. I had used up all my ideas to get them to use my services.

This specialist also expressed frustration about teachers not staying to observe her lessons. When she asked principals to support her by requesting that teachers remain, they obliged. "They have said, 'You must stay.' And teachers bring in books or they bring in a coffee or they mark, but they have to sit there."

Another teacher looked for support from supervisors in quite a different way. She felt that principals should not dictate to the staff, but rather should "come to the grassroots who are the teachers and immediately say, 'Here is something we have to solve." Of this kind of problem solving she said, "That's the kind of thing we really appreciate if we have administrators of that kind. People who really help instead of being told what to do by someone else." She saw this collaborative model of problem solving as being accommodated through teacher involvement in the development of

school goals. "It takes meetings, and meetings, and meetings, but the communication is there from kindergarten through grade six."

When a principal did not support the efforts of a staff member a critical incident resulted. In this case the teachers were expected to adopt a sudden change of approach to their teaching. The teacher who shared this story was made to feel "that I was no good at all. . . . All of a sudden you're not wanted anymore; not needed anymore." This teacher felt that if the change was required, the staff should have been led step by step through the transition. "Make it drip. Let it be absorbed by all these teachers. No matter how strong your philosophy is you have to remember you are working with human beings with their own philosophy too." It took a long time and a change of schools for this teacher to regain her self-esteem following this incident.

Although teachers looked for support from superiors in different ways, consistently support was sought. When support was given teachers seemed to overcome obstacles and grow professionally. In instances when support was lacking or negative, feelings of frustration, confusion, and shattered self-esteem resulted.

**The importance of trust**. Supervisors' trust or its absence was important in the critical incidents described. Where there was trust, teachers turned to the principals for support when critical incidents in their careers occurred.

The following story is of a beginning teacher who experienced difficulty disciplining a clique of junior high age girls. Taking the risk of seeking assistance at this point in his career salvaged his self-confidence which had begun to deteriorate.

> The incident was related to one of the basic problems that I think most first year teachers have and that's discipline and how you control situations within your class. The first year that I taught I was given a grade eight class. I characterize grade eight as the year they leave the human race and in grade nine they come back again. In this particular case it was a situation that developed as a result of

four or five girls who had been in the same class for several years and had developed a very close relationship and so when you discipline one you got the whole rank and file on your case as a result. At that point in time I had experienced other discipline situations which I'd had no trouble with, but I had never experienced this situation where you were disciplining one and you had the whole gang respond.

The group response is the result of the discipline you are carrying out. And I guess the major reaction that often people have when all of a sudden there is support for an opposing position, you first think, "Maybe I've been too harsh, or maybe I haven't judged this situation accurately," and the tendency is to be a little more lenient on the first couple of situations as a result of this kind of reaction. As time went on I started to realize that I was being very much manipulated by the group and at that point in time I wasn't quite sure what was the best method to deal with it.

I felt very comfortable that our principal was very open and very willing to help and to aid rather than to be a critic of your discipline. She would be very helpful in terms of asking her for suggestions of how to handle that particular situation. So I sat down with her and laid out the problems and how would she handle them, what suggestions would she have that I might be able to make use of to deal with this particular issue.

She had made several suggestions and they had worked out very well. The kinds of things she was getting at were: make sure of the situation, make sure it's clear cut, make sure you know where you stand having decided on what action you're going to take, stick with it and don't back down. And if the others complain include them in the discipline but also split the time up so that you don't have the group together so they are individually separated. And by the end of the year I felt very comfortable with that particular situation.

The principal listened to the problem, suggested some concrete actions for the teacher to try, and then followed through with the situation in this way:

After talking with the principal, she had checked around too with other staff members and had found a similar problem. We actually had a meeting to deal with the issue and deal with some of the problems that had resulted from it. That also proved satisfying to know that as a group we were dealing with it as a whole, it gave you support. So what one person did in one class was passed on so we knew what kind of action they had taken in a particular situation. So it was useful. And I wasn't unique, that was an encouragement. I had wondered, "Am I the only one that has trouble with these guys?" But it wasn't the case. It was across the board so even the ones who had been teaching for fifteen years were pulling their hair out.

In another case where a principal and teacher had a trusting relationship, the teacher was going through a critical incident with a student who was an extreme discipline problem. In attempting to resolve the situation with the student, the teacher

questioned the foundations of her entire teaching methodology. The principal supported the teacher, but made her accountable for alternative programs she wanted to try. The teacher described her interaction with the principal in this way:

> I just got tired of using a workbook. For children who are good at workbooks they did really well, for the children who aren't, they didn't progress at all anyway. So I went to the principal and I said, "I don't want to do the workbook." She said, "Fine, what are you going to do instead?" And at that point I'd written my own curriculum and then I heard about Math Their Way through the flyer that came to the school. I approached the principal that I would like to take this course. We talked about math manipulatives and I said I'd go through all the teacher's guides, get all the activities that are manipulative oriented and put them all together. I went through reams and reams of them, wrote them all out and put them in a binder and gave them to her. She looked through them and passed them on to district office staff and the program was approved.

From this initial change in her teaching strategy this teacher went on to explore possibilities for change in other subjects as well. Her philosophy of teaching altered significantly. As she reflected on the change she said, "I worry a lot less about teaching the curriculum now and I worry a lot more about teaching children. I worry less about whether or not they know how to multiply and more about whether they enjoy math."

In another case, having shared a critical incident with his principal a teacher described his feelings toward the principal in this way,

> I guess she just gave you the feeling that if you were having trouble in any particular area she would help you out. . . . It gave you the confidence to know that you weren't particularly being scrutinized or judged or whatever because of the fact that you willingly admitted that you weren't sure how to deal with a particular situation. I thought that was a very positive thing for her to do. I think that as an administrator that's something you have to convey to your staff, cause you don't hear about these kinds of problems. Teachers build up a head of frustration, get kind of bent out of shape, about some of the things that go on. If you don't have the confidence to go to those who are supposed to be there to assist you, you've got a problem.

Principals frequently worked directly with teachers to support what was occurring in their classrooms. One example of such support was described by a teacher as follows,

> She was very supportive. Like we worked out a program where if the student did something really well in class she got to go to the office and show the principal and share it with her. She would come back with positive strokes. We tried hard not to send her to the office for negative behaviors--only for positives.

Teachers expressed that leaders can do much to nurture the relationship between themselves and administration by trusting teachers, showing confidence in them, and encouraging them to take the risk of trying something different. "If you are trusting, or really showing confidence in your teachers, half the battle is won as an administrator." When leaders demonstrated this trust, teachers felt they could take the risks which allowed them to grow and develop.

The positive results of such risk taking became a critical incident in a teacher's career. She was told, "You know, you have a real talent here, you should try this with your students. See if this works with your students." She said, "He gave me a technique he thought might work with students. So I tried it with a student and it was as if a light turned on in this little girl's eyes."

Through being supportive of teachers' attempts, being willing to help, and through being nonjudgmental, principals were able to develop and maintain trusting relationships with teachers. Such relationships made the principal the central figure teachers turned to for support in critical incidents in teachers' careers.

## Themes

### Introduction to the Themes

The themes which emerged from these data were threads which seemed intrinsic to them. They were ideas which were the essence of the interviews. The themes answered my question, "What exactly is it that I think is being said here?"

### Power or Powerlessness

In each critical incident described, a sense of teachers' feelings of power or control over a situation, or feelings of being powerless within a situation were apparent.

Teachers have the power to ultimately control their destinies. It is they who ultimately choose whether to tolerate a situation or remove themselves from it. When the teacher was concerned about the inadequate facilities and overcrowding in the classroom, he submitted his resignation. In a situation where he was powerless to meet his goals, he had to take a stand. After voicing his concerns he decided to retain his position, but he had the power to make that decision. This was also the case for the specialist teacher whose program was cancelled. She was powerless to continue in her position, so she chose not to accept any other position. She retained the power over her destiny in this incident.

A school fire left a teacher feeling powerless, but power came from within and helped her to face and overcome an overwhelming situation.

> All of a sudden, I had nothing. When I started sifting through the ashes in my room I realized that I could teach with nothing. I didn't even need a book. Kids don't like to learn that way. They need their handouts, the overheads, and simulation games, and quizzes, and all that other stuff. But I realized that, you know you give them some desks or some chairs to sit on, and I could teach them. You know, I realized that I had that within me.

Sometimes critical incidents were power struggles. This was the perception of the teacher when the administrator imposed a change in teaching approach on her. The teacher saw four options in this situation: "either I am going to stay put and challenge my administrator, or maybe I'll stay put and work around the students, or leave (change to a different school), or accept whatever is being told to me by the administrator." The teacher decided to prove herself to the students she was serving and to their parents. At the end of the school year she requested a transfer to another school. She said of this situation, "So I think the defeat was not really on my side, but it's a defeat of the administrator in the sense that he or she wasn't able to crush me with the power she wanted to have over me."

In other situations teachers felt a sense of total powerlessness. When a teacher was operating a pilot program without any supervision and yet decisions were being made about the success of the program by her supervisor, school principals, the superintendency team, and the Board of Education, she felt very frustrated. She felt none of them knew anything about the actual program. No one had reviewed her plans, discussed her curriculum with her, observed a lesson, nor attempted to evaluate the program, and yet decisions were being made about its success or failure. She felt she had to work through one of her superiors, but no one requested any input from her. A sense of powerlessness prevailed.

When parents refused to accept a teacher's suggestions regarding a child's progress despite extensive observations, meetings, documentation from specialists, evaluations, and so on, the teacher felt powerless and frustrated. She felt it was her word against the parent's word. The impact of this feeling of powerlessness caused her to resolve that she will be less open and much more politically cautious with parents in the future.

Having tasted powerlessness, a teacher described how she never wanted to be in that position again. This teacher had resigned her teaching position to raise her family. When she was ready to return to her career, jobs were extremely scarce. Being unable to secure a position caused her to question her worth as a teacher. This uncertainty in herself caused her to resolve that if she were rehired she would be "the best." Through upgrading her credentials and being persistent, she was eventually hired to a teaching position where she strives to fulfill this goal.

A teacher who upgraded her credentials in hopes of being promoted felt powerless when no opportunity for promotion presented itself. "I felt like I was being wasted. To this day, I feel I have proven myself over the years that I can teach, that I am good in the classroom. And I know I can do other things but I'm not given the opportunity to."

It seems that the prerogatives of a teacher in a critical incident are context dependent. The feelings that teachers had during such incidents fell along the continuum of feelings of power to powerlessness.

## Personal Needs for Professional Development

Teachers varied in their responses to professional development strategies and opportunities. They learned and grew in different ways and some were more open to growth opportunities than others. One thing that was common to all participants in this study was that their interest in professional development seemed to be based on perceived personal needs.

Additional training through university courses appealed to some teachers. For the teacher who worked with a culturally distinct group successfully for a year, she felt some training in special education would improve her capabilities. As she said to her

school board, "Here I can offer more services to the people I've been teaching without any training whatsoever, but my credentials can really help me out." Following training she reentered this situation with special education training.

When a teacher felt she was getting into a rut she looked to intensive university training in a specific field for three summers to facilitate professional growth. Of her feelings about her teaching prior to retraining she said,

> After you've been teaching a while, or so long, you got into a rut. Or I got into a rut, anyway. And you don't try new things, or see things done a different way, or suggest something different as easily as when you make a big change and then try something.

After each summer course this teacher made some changes to her program. By the end of three years, she had effectively changed her teaching strategies for the delivery of the program.

Practical workshops seemed popular with teachers. They were generally of a fairly short duration--three to five days--and were specific to a particular aspect of a particular program. Math Their Way, process writing programs, and hands-on activities in science education were some of the examples given. Single session workshops seemed appropriate in meeting needs specific to special situations such as the suicide of a student. In this case an inservice on symptoms to watch for in students was a meaningful one for the teacher involved.

Teachers who seemed to thrive on challenges sometimes took new positions without appropriate training or built personal challenges into their positions and then looked for inservice or university courses to meet their requirements. Others looked for opportunities for career changes within the educational system after taking the necessary training to make the transition from classroom teaching into counselling, special education, and administration as examples.

High expectations of teachers and positive role modelling was motivational to some teachers as the following excerpt illustrates:

> I worked with a lady who was, what I consider, one of the world's best teachers. And I think I'm a better teacher because of seeing her try different approaches, different things, that will try to help others understand the concept which she was teaching. She was outstanding because every time she walked in her class she was on with her whole heart.
>
> Just making you understand, in different approaches, in giving you the feeling that YES you can! You can do it. Expecting that you'd give it your best stab and if you took that step and achieved, you took the next one, and the next one, and the next one. And their expectations were so high and you rose to them. As well as being able to watch a master at what they did. So it was a wonderful thing.

Change impacted the professional growth of many teachers. A new program being implemented was stimulating to some teachers. The change of the principal within a school or changing schools initiated professional growth of others. "The reason I lasted as long as I did at that school was because just when I felt I needed a change, we would get a new principal. And getting a new principal is in many ways, like going to a new school," declared one teacher. When she got a transfer to another school she said of that experience,

> The challenge of going to a new facility and working with a new bunch of people puts you--sort of on edge, I guess. It's a challenge, it's stimulating in its own way, but more work. But I think you get a little complacent staying where you are. It gets easy. The kids get to know you, the families get to know you, you don't have to prove yourself in the same way as you do when you go to another school.

Thus, it seemed that for the participants in this study, professional development opportunities were pursued and were most beneficial if they met a perceived need of the individual.

## Affirmation of Self

As teachers moved through their careers, incidents occurred which reaffirmed their sense of themselves. Positive incidents served to affirm the validity of their impressions of themselves and their core philosophies about teaching, as well as serving to nurture teachers to continue to grow professionally and personally. The ways in which self was reaffirmed were: direct compliments, positive comments through a third party, positive self-esteem, the observable impact of activities they had undertaken, and positive accomplishments of their students.

When a teacher worked with students and then the students were able to transfer their learning to a new situation with another teacher, a compliment resulted. "They were able to use resources I didn't even know existed because of what you taught them." This was very encouraging to the teacher because she taught in a fairly nebulous area where direct results were difficult to measure. Another teacher commented on the motivation he and his students derived through written letters of thanks from clients they had served. Compliments in written form served as concrete evidence of a job well done. Positive comments, gifts, cards, and "other teachers saying good things" served as "strokes" to a junior high school teacher who worked with special needs children.

Hearing positive comments that someone made to someone else about them seemed motivational to teachers. A teacher who felt that he had failed when he suspended a student from his class was reinspired when the counsellor told him that this student had said that he was the teacher this student most respected. Another teacher received a job that she found exciting, but a bit overwhelming. "Somebody told us it was personality too. They did not select us by training, but by the kinds of people we were." Knowing that others had faith in her gave her confidence.

How others perceived them impacted self concept strongly. It is like the saying, "I am what I think that you think that I am." This message came through over and over again in the interviews. A teacher's perception that a student whom he thought highly of respected him, gave the teacher confidence "that helped me as a teacher." The impact of the positive opinions of others was succinctly summarized when one teacher said,

> When someone appreciates you, whether it's the kids, the parents, everyone, it's something else and you really work. You feel you are needed, you know.... The idea that you're being accepted, then your life becomes better. Then you aim more. And that's one thing I notice about every teacher that I deal with, once they feel good about themselves, my gosh they're so productive. You can see how strong they really are and when they come to school you can spot how these teachers are really performing.

By observing the impact of their efforts, teachers' sense of self was reaffirmed. "The beaming smile on the beaming faces of these children really are the reward for the teacher who is able to do that." "This package of letters from the grade sixes. That is so priceless." These seemingly minute occurrences in teachers' lives impacted them profoundly. Sometimes the observable impact was something more tangible than a smile like, "The school system won the award that year for all of Canada, so we must have been doing something."

In some instances the reaffirmation of self for teachers came through accomplishments of students such as learning to read, or making achievement gains, or being able to enter an academic stream. Self evaluation through children being able to demonstrate or apply the concepts that had been taught seemed an important form of reaffirmation. As an example, a teacher described self evaluation in her program in this way, "Then all of those steps you've put together, you hope that they can draw on to create a sensible improvisation. And if you've done your job well and they understand

what you're asking for, they can usually use those things that they've done and they can be very successful."

The ways in which self was reaffirmed varied with individuals and circumstances, but consistently impacted the growth of teachers or their motivation to grow.

## Expanding the Meaning of Teaching

Teachers had a desire to know, understand, and develop close ties with their clientele, both individual children, and groups of students, and the communities of which these children were a part. Through this relationship building process critical incidents occurred which impacted teachers in such profound ways that their personal meanings of teaching were changed or expanded. Such incidents seemed to contribute to teachers' philosophies of teaching which were developed and expanded over time. No teacher interviewed had an unchanging meaning of teaching which remained static over the course of a career. Through experiences and critical incidents, the meaning of teaching to the individuals expanded and developed.

One teacher seemed to have no specific philosophy of teaching when he started. His starting point was his personal value and belief system. For this individual critical incidents with individual students over a period of several years developed his philosophy of what it meant to teach. His philosophy was built upon and expanded with each additional critical incident. The kinds of meanings he developed were: developing self confidence and a work ethic in students as a primary goal, striving to treat all students fairly, a willingness to act as a counsellor to students and to watch for symptoms of emotional instability, and the well-being of the many not being sacrificed for the well-being of the few.

Reflecting on a struggle with discipline in his career, a teacher described the process, "I think on the whole that my whole attitude toward discipline changed as time went on. Discipline became a part of the kind of teaching that I did. And I found that the teaching style that I had developed went along with discipline."

One teacher shared a story about the program she taught being eliminated. Despite a very recent and positive provincial evaluation of the program, the school system, when forced to make cutbacks, selected to eliminate this program. This basically meant that the teachers who worked in that field were unemployed. The other teachers in this position were receptive to being redeployed to other fields within their schools, but this teacher felt the program she taught was important and she did not wish to change fields. "I like my job and because I'm at the position in my life that I am, I don't have to teach what I don't want to." This teacher took the risk of not having a job when she wouldn't accept an alternative position. In this instance holding fast to her position worked to her advantage. The school system decided to put a small proportion of the program back into the schools. This person said of that time, "I was just waiting when they said, 'Would you like this job?' And I took it." She said of her present position, "I'm trying to keep the program alive until they put teachers back into it."

One teacher practiced a long time before a meaning of teaching in her subject speciality developed. Her willingness to please, her need to be needed, and her enjoyment of challenges allowed her to be flexible and meet the needs of others. The reflection that came through changes in practice allowed her to look back on previous experiences and determine a vision of what she would like to achieve in her area of expertise.

Everyone interviewed made reference to the impact of past experiences on their present beliefs and practices. As one participant stated, "It's definitely my past

experiences that led me to where I am." In this case some rather harsh critical incidents which injured self-esteem led to this teacher determining that teachers must work together and work around and through the bureaucracy to protect what they believe to be the meaning of teaching.

Each of the teacher participants developed a meaning of teaching in a different way. What was consistent, however, was that developing a meaning of teaching was a process which occurred over time and was expanded and shaped by the nature of experiences.

## Instructional Leadership

As in the examination of teachers' critical incidents, there was a dual emphasis on the teacher's own feelings and experience and on the school context and especially the administrator from whom they sought support. In their discussions, teachers stressed the importance of involvement in decisions which affected the educational program and the students. I have termed this theme instructional leadership because it stresses the process of evolving of a vision through stakeholder groups communicating and articulating in an attempt to attain some desired outcome in student growth. I believe evolution is the best adjective to describe the process because, as one teacher said of collaborative goal setting, "It's an ongoing process so it's not ended. . . . it's going all the time." Through discussions of critical incidents, teachers expressed leadership actions which promoted or impeded this process.

The beginning of the instructional leadership process is generally through consideration of "what is" and "what ought to be." When the teacher working in the racially distinct community was accepted because of her skin colour she suggested, "maybe their own natives can really help them out with their own children too." If this

focus became a goal of the stakeholders in this situation, this could become part of the vision of this school.

The involvement of the stakeholders is critical, as was pointed out by one teacher in discussing an incident which was critical to her, "Sometimes our administrators come to think that a bandwagon philosophy is the best for all teachers. Sometimes maybe they think that's the right way to go, forgetting that the stakeholders are the teachers themselves." The initial step, then, is to develop a vision collaboratively.

Through this collaborative process all stakeholders share the vision which helps avoid situations where some individuals have information which others do not. One teacher described a situation where she was new to a position which was also a new position, "The supervisor often called me down for things that I did. I didn't know things I should be doing; I did things I thought I should be doing, but of course, according to her, I shouldn't be, so I had to change. I mean I learned that way." If the supervisor had been an instructional leader, I don't believe this kind of situation would have developed because the vision of the program would have been shared.

When the vision of a school was not clearly defined nor interpreted into programs and policies, critical incidents developed for teachers which could have been avoided. For example, parents were being used as volunteers in a school without the purposes of the program being clearly articulated. This resulted in a conflict between the home and the school when a teacher had a parent working with her.

> She (a parent) had been coming in about once a week, spending a whole morning in there doing parent volunteer things. The day before our meeting I had her photocopy for me, some preparation of some booklets. So a district office representative at the meeting said, "Have you been volunteering?" Her husband said he didn't consider photocopying for two hours, volunteering for the classroom! He was quite abrupt. So the principal said, "We misunderstood your intentions then," because she (the wife) had written down in a letter that she would love to help out anyway she could. "We misunderstood what you meant by volunteering." And I said, "Now, have you not been in the classroom?" And

she said, "Oh yes, I've done a variety of things." But she probably went home that day and was cheesed that she had been photocopying instead of being right in the classroom. She was in all the time. The trouble is she would just walk right in and sit down, "I'm here," kind of thing and really disrupt our class.

When the vision of a school is shared there are greater opportunities for articulation between programs of the classroom and the school as a whole. An example of such articulation was a school's discipline cycle of which a teacher said, "I talk to the student and I talk to the parents. If that doesn't work, then I will click into the school discipline cycle myself and then the office will take over from there. And then district office staff become involved."

Even when a vision is shared and understood it cannot be assumed to be translated into action and some teachers are more open to change than are others. One teacher's comment about this was, "Most things if they make sense to me--I'm very pragmatic--and if it seems like there's a reason to do it, I'll probably take on anything. I find of course, that experience is a good teacher too." In managing change that a teacher did not agree with she said, "Either I am going to challenge my administrator or I'm going to stay put and do my thing. Or maybe I'll do my own little thing and work around the students." More directly stated, "And sometimes you tend to say, 'To heck with them. What we're doing we think is right and we're really serving all the children going here.' So maybe here are the goals mandated for us, yes we'll do it, but we can still put in our own input the way we want it to be. The risk is there. The option is there. And yet you have a very good sort of a product coming out."

Teachers weighed changes against their own ideas about what was right for students and implemented only those aspects of changes that seemed reasonable and manageable.

The circle of stakeholders involved in determining a school's mission has become wider. Parents and the community in general are becoming more actively involved in

education. In an attempt to include this larger circle in understanding a school's vision a counsellor said, "I did write a blurb for a school newsletter because some people really don't know what counsellors do. I wrote it up from what the handbook for the school system says about counselling. Then I gave it to the principal and she reviewed it."

Teachers discussed how with collaborative models there was a need to develop the confidence of the stakeholders and how change had to take place over time. When one teacher was in a position of having to implement a program into schools, which was part of a school system vision not shared by the schools, she told of how the first year she did model teaching of aspects of the program she could provide. When teachers realized how it could fit into their own programs she worked toward cooperative planning with those she had "won over." She felt she had more success with that approach than she would have had if she had attempted to begin the program with collaborative planning of a program the schools weren't sure they even wanted.

Another teacher told about a sudden change that was imposed by the school administrator,

> They try to make themselves really look good by trying to be really strong in whatever they believe in. Now, most of the time, it's a detrimental situation. You can't really do some kind of testing, there's no litmus testing that can be done whether the teacher will really like and appreciate what you're saying, or will they come and say they'll believe whatever you're saying and will do exactly what you're telling them to do. Many times you come to a point like that and you have to remember that if you try to bring in a change, the change should not be done in such a way that it looks like Niagara Falls coming. And the teachers realize that once there's a change it has to be done in a step by step sort of situation and not a bucket full. Make it drip, let it be absorbed by all these teachers--no matter how strong your philosophy is you have to remember you are working with human beings with their own philosophy too.

In some situations the instructional leadership began at the grassroots level and the role of the principal became one of facilitating the needs of the teachers to assist

them in achieving their vision. At one school the teachers of a particular department wanted to computerize a particular subject area's objectives, student handouts, class activities, and examinations which required considerable adaptation of material. They also wanted to change the teaching of the program to include more hands-on activities for students. The coordinator of the department talked with the principal who "was quite keen to give us some time to work on our scope and sequence. . . . In fact we had an inservice, a couple of days that we could use to just plan." The principal also distributed inservice information to them and funded two teachers from the department to attend a three-day inservice. Of the experience one teacher said,

> We were that excited about that. We had been doing somethings along the same sort of lines already but were looking for some more, something that would challenge us again, give us even broader ideas and perspectives that might be able to help encourage students in class to really get excited about science education. And we found that this really did it.

A teacher described a positive instructional leadership situation where a goal was being imposed on the school which did not fit in with its vision. This teacher suggested,

> If that principal really knows his or her staff and knows the strengths of the staff, she's or he's not going to let it go. What he's or she's going to do is come to the grassroots, who are the teachers, and immediately say, 'Here is something we have to solve', but not just being dictated to. And that's the thing we really appreciate if we have administrators of that kind. People that really help, instead of being told what to do by somebody else.

If determining a vision was a collaborative process, then to overcome problems related to the vision required collaborative problem solving as well.

Such collaborative problem solving was a staff meeting item according to one teacher. Teachers were concerned because learning time in a junior high school was being interrupted by students leaving their classrooms. Teachers on preparation

periods saw that the students were holding rendezvous during these unscheduled breaks. The problem was resolved through the staff deciding to have "stricter control in terms of when they could have a break, what the washroom times were. . . . We were allowed to do pretty much what suited our situation and allowed individual judgement on that."

Teachers seemed particularly to appreciate input into decisions which directly impacted their teaching situations. For example, one teacher working with special needs students was invited to "sit in" the class selection meeting and was able to set up some "ground rules" for the class which put parameters on the makeup of the class by gender and type of special needs. "I really appreciated the little bit of input I had. I was made to feel that I was worthwhile enough to put input into it," she said.

The central role of the principal in instructional leadership was alluded to in a number of incident descriptions. In discussing the feelings about a particular program in schools a teacher said,

> The feeling is different in all schools and it comes from the principal. In most cases, if the principal is pro the program you will find most of the staff pro the program. And it's really funny, you can feel it when you walk in. If the principal doesn't care there's a tendency for the teachers not to care. . . . I think it's the principal who makes the difference--I really do--or a strong somebody in the school, but usually it's the principal. If a teacher is really pro the program they will make sure they teach it to their kids. But in schools where the principal is pro the program, you find that the program is continual.

Another situation where the influence of the principal in instructional leadership was noted related to movement of principals among schools.

> But it's interesting, I think, that a moving around of admin. that's one of the things that happens. If you get an idea, it will move to another school and if the teachers accept it, if it's a good one they'll accept it, and things change in schools.

It was the principal that the teachers in this study looked to and recognized as their supervisors and the key instructional leaders in their schools. Some district office figures were also identified as initiators of instructional leadership. Teachers viewed the principal as the person in a position to protect them from the initiatives of these "outsiders": a gatekeeper role.

The stories of teachers about the critical incidents in their careers did not suggest collaboration between schools and central office, rather they were viewed as adversaries. Here is one story:

> And right now, the critical thing that's happening is the head office, or people that are really leading or watching your teaching, sometimes they are so limited in the ideas they are saying. Every now and then when there are some administrators, or maybe people who are just a little higher than you are, they get to a point where they are now in a position a little higher than just an ordinary classroom teacher. Their views change in comparison to what you've seen them before or when they were just classroom teachers. As soon as they reach a spot or a certain kind of a position higher than classroom teacher, I don't know if it's power or the use of power to be able to do something different, other than what is expected of the teachers. A demand comes out. They don't anymore look at what teachers' needs are. They look toward what goal they have already set for themselves. And when I look at this I seem to say, "Why are they forever using teachers to be able to reach a goal that's for them?" Instead of saying, "The goal is supposed to be for teachers and I should be the person that's going down to be able to express what I would want the teachers to be."... Rather than sipping it from the grassroots up, it's the reverse that I'm seeing.... And the role then of your school administration is to buffer you in a sense and say, "This is the goal of our school, these were accepted by the Central Office and so we can't accept this goal from you that's opposing that."

To summarize, although the term "instructional leadership" was only used by one teacher, it is the process that seemed reflective of critical activities in schools. The ongoing process of instructional leadership is dependent upon stakeholder groups collaborating to attain a vision. This process evolves over time and the stakeholders collaborate to solve related problems. Although teachers, district office personnel, and others were instructional leaders in some instances, the principal appeared to be *"the*

*key individual* for providing instructional leadership in a school" (Ubben & Hughes, 1987, emphasis in the original).

## Summary

The ten teachers interviewed provided rich description of the critical incidents they had encountered in their teaching careers. They described events leading up to critical incidents, the actual situations and circumstances of the incidents, and the effects the incidents had on them professionally and personally.

They expressed the view that the programs they taught were vehicles used to address their personal visions as well as the visions they held for the students they instructed. The self-esteem of students seemed central to their vision for students. Feeling good about themselves, having confidence in themselves, and experiencing success were central goals teachers had for students. Professional challenge and desire for change were needs the educational program met for teachers; personal needs were a desire to feel useful and to be liked.

The relationships which seemed most important to teachers were the relationships they had with children. Sometimes individual students were central figures; sometimes groups of students. The relationships which existed between teachers and their students had a profound impact on teachers both personally and professionally.

In consideration of the happiness and welfare of the children, many of the participants took on responsibilities which extended beyond expectations of their teaching assignments. Some of the activities they engaged in enriched the students' lives at school; others supplemented the shortcomings of society by attempting to address the "whole" needs of children. Teachers felt good about their efforts, and

while draining their energy, assisted in making their work in classrooms more productive.

In describing relationships with colleagues, a number of kinds of relationships were discussed. Social relationships appeared universal to schools and while enjoyed and viewed as enriching the life of teachers, they were not seen as critical. More importantly, teachers related with one another to collaborate, cooperate, share, and support. Teaching at a common grade level, in a common subject area, or teaching the same child or group of children seemed the basis for this type of collegial relationship. Most teachers also had or sought a confidant on staff with whom to share personal and professional issues.

In the world of the teacher a dilemma existed relative to isolation and autonomy, or collaboration. Aspects of the organizational structure such as the physical plant and scheduling encouraged isolation. Although teachers expressed a desire to belong to groups and work collaboratively, they generally chose to work alone. Much of the desire to protect their isolated world came from teachers' needs for privacy and professional autonomy.

In times of critical incidents teachers sought the support of school principals. Conversely, in a situation where principal support was lacking, a critical incident for a teacher resulted. How support from principals was expected to be demonstrated varied among teachers. Some expected principals to be decisive, while others expected principals to be participatory in decision making and problem solving. All of the participants seemed to desire feedback of some sort from the principals of their schools.

The everyday acts of leaders significantly impacted the world of the teacher. It was desired that those in leadership positions be available and be willing to listen,

display trust and confidence in teachers, be positive models, be authoritative enough to make decisions when they needed to be made, and provide feedback to teachers.

Teachers observed their principals in numerous situations. The activites undertaken by principals and the behavior of principals influenced teachers. The impressions left through such observations affected the confidence teachers had in principals.

The participants in this study widely experienced trusting relationships with principals. Through being supportive of teacher's attempts, being willing to help, and through being nonjudgmental, principals were able to develop and maintain trusting relationships with teachers. Such relationships made the principal the central figure teachers turned to for support in critical incidents in their careers.

In the descriptive findings gathered from the interviews with the ten participants, several themes emerged related to the world of the teacher. Within that world the feeling of the teachers in critical incidents suggested a range of impressions from a sense of power to powerlessness. The greatest sense of power was in situations where the teacher held the highest hierarchical position among the stakeholder groups. Even in that position teachers felt threatened and worked diligently to retain control of situations. Teachers felt powerless in situations where they had no input into decisions being made by superiors which directly affected them. Regardless of their view of power in situations, teachers retained control of their personal destinies by choosing to endure the situation or leave.

Teachers varied in the types of professional development they preferred and some were more open to growth opportunities than were others. The participants in this study took advantage of informal opportunities within their working environments (such as challenging positions, new programs, changes in general), and formal

professional activities (such as university courses and practical workshops). The common element of all professional development which the participants saw as being useful was that it was based on perceived personal needs.

Through positive incidents teachers sought to affirm the validity of their impressions of themselves and their core philosophies. Seemingly minute occurrences such as compliments, accomplishments of their students, and smiles of success on children's faces nurtured teachers.

For all of the participants, the meaning of teaching was something which developed and expanded over time. Critical incidents, and experiences generally, developed teachers' present beliefs and practices.

The actions principals took either promoted or impeded the instructional leadership process. Teachers felt that their understanding of and input into the development of clearly defined visions of schools was necessary. They particularly felt they should be involved in decisions and solving problems which directly affected them. Their participation, however, could not be interpreted as acceptance and action. Successful changes had to make sense to the teachers and had to occur over time.

Teachers in this study generally viewed the principals of their schools as the key instructional leaders. Although the principal was not expected to fulfill this role independently, the person in this role was seen as the ringleader. The teacher supported this role if the principal promoted the collective vision of the school stakeholders. Central office personnel were accepted when they acted to support school undertakings. They were viewed as adversaries if they were instigators of their own separate instructional leadership initiatives.

# Chapter 5

## Summary, Reflections, and Implications

### Introduction

This chapter comprises five major sections. The initial section summarizes the purpose of the study and reviews the research methodology. The second section summarizes the major findings of the categories and the themes which emerged from the interview data. Reflections on the literature and personal reflections in light of the research will follow. The chapter will conclude with implications for educational practice and further research.

### Summary

**Purpose of the study**. The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of ten teachers regarding the role of instructional leadership through reports of incidents they considered critical in their careers. Through these reports, insights into the instructional leadership process from the perspectives of the recipients were gleaned.

The reasons for this study are emphasized in the literature, which points out the importance of the principal in the instructional leadership process. Reports from principals were the main information source for the literature; this study examined teachers' perceptions of administrators' actions. My goal in the study was to glean insights into acts of leadership which were of significance to teachers during critical incidents in their careers.

**Research methodology**. The research methodology used in this study was designed to acquire teachers' perceptions of the role of instructional leadership in critical incidents in their teaching careers.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in one suburban school system with ten teachers from elementary, junior high, or senior high schools in urban, rural, or schools where the student population was from both urban and rural settings. This interview strategy allowed the necessary latitude for the participants to shape the content of the interviews so they would be able to tell their stories without limitations. This open structure allowed me to discover what was important to the participants.

Initial interviews took place over a one month period and were tape recorded to ensure that transcripts of interviews were accurate and complete. Follow-up interviews occurred when statements required clarification or elaboration, for confirmation or clarification of interpretations of comments, and for permission for inclusion of any quotations from interviews in the thesis which could have the potential to reveal the identity of the originator.

Data analysis was ongoing from the time of the initial telephone contacts with the teachers. Data files were compiled which included: journal notations, global impressions of the interviews, field notes, and interview transcripts. Interview data were coded using three methods: coding by critical incident "story", coding by research question, and coding by individual ideas, phrases, or words.

Analysis and synthesis of categories identified through these three coding strategies led to the emergence of themes which were more general in nature than were the categories and reflected the essence of the interviews. Themes stimulated further reflection on and insight into the data being described which assisted me in considering the implications of the study.

## Major Findings from the Interview Data

The ten teacher participants provided rich description of some of the incidents in their careers which they perceived as having been critical, the kinds of situations they were, and the circumstances surrounding the incidents. While telling about the critical incidents, teachers described the significant actors in the incidents and indicated their personal feelings and values. A few of the participants told about one or two incidents, most told several stories. One teacher discussed ten incidents which were intertwined in such a way that the teacher described a period of crisis with a four year duration.

Most of the incidents were school related, although a few occurred in teachers' personal lives, but had an influence on their school lives or compounded the impact of some incidents at school. I have intentionally used the term "school" instead of "work" because I cannot recall any of the participants referring to teaching as work.

Through this study of teachers' critical incidents information about the teachers' world was unearthed. Teachers' stories exposed what was of importance to them in their work and personal growth, as well as the significance of those in helping relationships.

**Summary of categories which emerged from the interview data**. The categories of this study focussed on the teacher and on the role of the helper. The central focus of teachers was students. Staff relationships, teachers' isolation or autonomy, and the use of educational programs to meet personal or student needs were other significant topics. Supervisors generally performed a helping role. The help was conveyed through taking advantage of informal daily opportunities to model, provide support and feedback, and develop trusting relationships with teachers. The ability of those in school leadership positions to demonstrate flexibility in style of working with

teachers and to manipulate the school environment to support teachers seemed critical in assisting them at critical times in their teaching careers.

When teachers experienced a critical incident the persons of significance varied from one case to the next. They included: parents of students, colleagues, school counsellors, spouses, district office personnel, mentors, external specialists, community members, students, and principals. In every teacher's interview where a critical incident was described the significant actors included the teacher and a student or group of students, the teacher and principal, or a combination of the three: teacher, student(s), and principal. Generally relationships with students were considered most significant to teachers, and principals were the actors teachers turned to most frequently in critical incidents.

Although the teachers were surrounded by people all day, an underlying sense of feeling alone came through from them. All of the participants in this study were connected to other adults with whom they shared issues of importance to them, but they seemed to feel alone in their teaching experience. This may have been because they largely planned alone, taught alone, and disciplined alone.

While some of the isolation of teachers was tied to organizational structure, teachers seemed to encourage the separateness as well. The teachers had personal visions which were most easily addressed while working independently with children. Because of their need for privacy, teachers protected their isolation. Conversely, when they considered collaborating with others as enriching the teaching experience, teachers did work with others.

A key implication of the study was the importance of the everyday acts engaged in by those in leadership positions. Initially such acts seemed almost too trite to mention, however, it was these acts that seemed to have a powerful impact on teachers. These

were generally short and informal interactions where leaders shared information, sought opinions, encouraged experimentation, and recognized achievements. Also, the physical presence of the leader in the school building was considered important to teachers. Although these same acts may have been carried out by colleagues or others, it seemed important to the teachers in this study that those in leadership positions fulfill these functions.

Everyday interactions with teachers seemed to nurture the development of trusting relationships which appeared critical to successful teacher/leader relationships. When trusting relationships existed, teachers turned to those in leadership positions when critical incidents occurred.

Summarized briefly, in this study it was found that leaders should be available and be willing to listen, display trust and confidence in their staff members, be positive models, be authoritative enough to make decisions when they need to be made, and provide feedback to teachers.

## Summary of themes which emerged from the interview data.

Through the ongoing analysis process, several underlying themes related to the notion of teachers' critical incidents and the role of instructional leadership became apparent.

While critical incidents were occurring, emotional responses on the part of teachers were strong. Because the incidents described were both positive and negative, the feelings of the teachers covered a full range of responses: elation, pride, confidence, hurt, anger, and so on. The feelings generally remained the same as at the time of the initial incident, although time was a healer to those whom had been emotionally battered during a negative critical incident.

Upon reflection of feelings beyond the emotional responses, the sense of teachers' feelings of power or powerlessness while involved in a particular incident were apparent. Feeling one way or the other did not seem to be consistent with individuals, but rather was dictated by the individual circumstances of situations. Despite the feelings relative to power, teachers always retained the power to ultimately control their destinies. That is, they knew could leave teaching, and for some that was a consideration.

Professional growth was an ongoing process for the teachers in this study. The teachers varied in the degree to which they took advantage of professional development opportunities and the types of activities they preferred. While opportunities external to the school such as university courses and workshops appealed to some, others preferred to grow on the job through accepting challenging positions, teaching new programs, or through developing meaningful relationships with students or colleagues. Change was the concept basic to professional growth and the growth seemed dependent upon the individual perceiving the need for change.

Teachers encouraged the autonomy and isolation of classroom teaching in many ways, yet they desired confirmation of their classroom behaviors as well. Teachers looked for confirmation of their teaching through a number of informal channels such as their students' accomplishments, something they had taught their students having an observable impact, and compliments. Reaffirmation of self was an important aspect of teachers' self-evaluation and contributed to self-esteem and motivation to grow professionally.

Each of the teacher participants developed a meaning of teaching in a different way. What was consistent among them, however, was that developing a meaning of

teaching was a process which occurred over time and was expanded and shaped by the nature of experiences.

Through the study, implications for instructional leaders were sought, but most of the implications were appropriate for leaders in general, not only instructional leaders. The actions of leaders did seem to impede or promote the instructional leadership process, however. Involving teachers in the development of a clearly defined school vision seemed important to teachers, particularly when the vision directly affected them. Teachers' knowledge of the vision could not be assumed to mean acceptance or implementation. The changes necessary to achieve a vision had to make sense to the individual teacher and had to take place over time.

## Reflections on the Literature

Consistent with the literature, the focus of the teachers in this study was their relationships with children and making educational experiences meaningful to them. The literature indicated teachers' focussing on relationships with individual children. In this study where teachers discussed critical incidents in their careers, relationships with individuals was the focus for some, while about as many had a more global interest in making learning meaningful for all of the children they taught. Teachers' desires to meet the needs of children individually and collectively extended beyond the confines of specific educational programs. Rather, programs were used as vehicles to address broader goals of education.

As I reflected upon my interactions with the ten teacher participants, it became apparent that the teachers were struggling to make sense out of their environments. Duke (1986) describes the life of the teacher as living with contradictions and many of the incidents described in this study supported this description. In a world of

competing demands and, at times, contradictions, teachers were trying to make the best use of their limited energy and teaching time to most effectively meet the needs of the students they served. Critical incidents usually occurred when teachers were unable to reconcile some demand with their personal value system; or conversely, a positive critical incident resulted from a productive meshing of the teacher's value system and an expectation.

The isolation of classrooms in schools allowed teachers the privacy to make their mistakes alone and the freedom to pursue their own visions without interference. Although there were a few exceptions, the descriptions of their world by the teachers in this study were generally consistent with the following comments from Blumberg (1980):

> The teachers have responsibility for total production within the classroom including planning, operating, and evaluating. Even though specialized roles develop around areas of psychological and subject matter competence, for most purposes, how well one teacher does his/her job is not related directly to how well another teacher does his/her job, even when they are working with the same students. . . . Teachers can do what is expected of them, for the most part, without ever communicating with one another. It seems reasonable to think that this lack of integrativeness of teachers' roles has influenced the development of norms of low collaboration in the school. . . . Because there often is little concern on the part of the teacher with the school as an organization, the idea of devoting energy to improving the organization seem vague and irrelevant. (pp. 242-243).

Although the physical structure of the schools in the district where this study took place largely supported this isolation; school missions did not. Teachers were encouraged to work and plan cooperatively, but teaching and planning were largely independent activities. This was consistent with Blumberg's (1980) finding that teachers are "by and large lone operators. They plan their work by themselves and carry out their plans in isolation" (p. 207). Although most of the teachers attempted to

work in isolation, in follow-up interviews a few teachers suggested that working in isolation wasn't a possible or realistic expectation for teachers to have anymore.

The trusting relationships between supervisors and teachers which were apparent in this study contradicted the literature. Blumberg (1980) described a cold war that existed between teachers and their supervisors that was characterized by a lack of trust with each group convinced of the correctness of its position. Duke's (1986) feeling that teachers and administrators just differed in what they regarded as meaningful seems closer to the findings of this study. As Duke suggested, administrators did seem to find meaning in collective experiences such as new program implementation and teachers did find meaning in individual relationships. However, the administrators in this study showed an interest in and gave attention to those things which were meaningful or critical to teachers. This may have promoted their relationships of trust.

Through daily interactions with teachers, administrators developed trusting relationships with teachers and penetrated the isolation of the classroom to some degree. Little (1987) suggests,

> Lacking the intimacy that confirms trust among family members or long-time friends, team members must rely on other evidence that they intend no harm to one another. They create trust as the consequence, not the precondition, of close interaction by displaying professional reciprocity clearly and concretely in each small exchange (p. 507).

The significance of everyday acts to instructional leadership, a concept well documented in the literature, was apparent in this study. Leithwood (1987) observed that principals primarily engaged in solving problems which seem trivial, but moved the school in directions valued by the community, the staff, and themselves. De Bevoise's (1984) synthesis of instructional leadership research led to comment that the principal's essential functions were of a routine nature. Daily cycles of principals helped them

assess their school's working order and the progress being made toward long-term goals. Dwyer (1984) also noted the day-to-day acts. He found principals engaged in effective, routine acts that required no new programs, innovations, or extensive changes in their roles.

Several of the critical incidents described by the participants in this study were related to teachers' understanding of or feeling for a part of the "bigger picture." The literature refers to this overall plan as vision and suggests that the school principal holds a vision for a school. De Bevoise (1984) identified from the works of Bossert and Dwyer and others, Duckworth, and Gersten and Carnine that they all include communicating a vision of the school's purposes and standards as a common function of instructional leadership.

Like the data in the study suggests, rather than the vision coming from one individual, the principal, as the literature suggests, I see it as being developed collaboratively among stakeholders. Once broad goals are agreed upon, specific objectives can be determined, and then strategies for supporting the vision can be determined with individuals or groups. This is the role I see for the principal as instructional leader: assisting individual teachers or groups of teachers to develop action plans to meet school goals and supervising their progress toward that end.

Since teachers weigh changes against their own ideas about what is right for students and implement only those aspects of changes that seem reasonable and manageable, this seems like a positive tack. Then teachers are moving toward common goals, but moving at individual paces, through modes they are able to manage. By attempting to force everyone to do things the same way at the same pace, thus forcing growth, I think we are likely to find what Eaton (1982) did. That was, teachers

willingly added topics to their curricula, but the additions did not mean they would change what they taught.

Through these means the principal attempts to create meaning for other stakeholders. Braun, J. (1989) suggests that creating meaning is significant because it helps members of the organization to understand their worth. When they have a clear sense of the organization's purpose, its vision, and its overriding goal, they are more likely to identify with it and commit themselves to its success. The result is that they align themselves with the common goals of the organization and strive toward accomplishment of its mission.

Joyce and McKibbin (1982) found that teachers vary in their predisposition toward professional growth opportunities and the types of professional development they prefer. This study confirmed these findings. If the role of principal as instructional leader is to encompass both supervision and staff development as some of the literature suggests (such as Peterson, 1987), then principals require a large repertoire of competencies to meet the needs of individual teachers in their professional lives.

Joyce and McKibbin (1982) identified categories for describing the professional growth stages of teachers: those who actively use every available aspect of the formal and informal systems available to them (referred to as omnivores), active consumers who are easily involved, and passive consumers and the withdrawns who are very difficult to involve. The teachers interviewed in this study appeared to be mainly active consumers of professional development opportunities.

As the literature suggested, teachers took advantage of different types of professional development opportunities. The participants in this study took advantage of informal opportunities within their working environments and formal professional

activities. Mention of the initiation of activities in their private lives to promote their professional growth was minimal.

Through provision of supervision and staff development the principal may be, as credited by Ubben and Hughes, "the key individual for providing instructional leadership in a school" (1987, p. 17). The comments of teachers in this study who discussed this topic supported the literature. Although the literature (Gersten, Carnine, & Green,1982; Greenfield, 1987) suggested that instructional leadership or instructional support functions need not and indeed could not be carried out by the principal alone, the teachers in this study did look to principals for instructional leadership; in many cases it was provided, but when it wasn't a critical incident often ensued.

Wimpelberg suggested a shift to collaboration between central office and schools. "Organizational structure and leadership logically point to a critical role for the intermediate central office administrator, the person who supervises and evaluates the work of schools and school supervisors" (1987, p. 101). Such a relationship might have prevented a few of the critical incidents described by participants. School goals must be compatible with school system goals and through collaboration between school staff and supervisory staff the school's vision must be clarified so supervisors may provide assistance to schools. I think this would be serve both school and system goals better than attempting to impose system goals on to schools. It would also support teachers by providing them with a single, unified vision.

Floden, Porter, Alford, Freeman, Irwin, Schmidt, and Schwille (1988) suggest an instructional leadership role for the school district. "The instructional leader is doing something that leads to a commonality of purpose, which suggests centralized control" (p. 100). "District instructional leadership has three parts: establishing goals, clearly

communicating those goals to teachers, and gaining teacher support for goals" (p. 112).

A shared vision and partnership among teachers, school administrators, and district administrators seems necessary to meet the realities of the complex practice of education and appears to be supported by current educational research literature.

## Personal Reflections

As a principal, these reflections cause me to consider my own practices. Because all school employees are assaulted by competing demands, and too many demands, part of my role is to buffer my staff by limiting the number of activities undertaken. Greenfield discusses this concept as follows,

> Instructional leadership as it is conceived here thus involves the assignment of values to facts and the necessity to select one decision or course of action over another. Decisions and action alternatives often confront the principal with competing standards of goodness--the criterion one uses as the basis for judging that one alternative is to be preferred over others. (1987, p. 61)

Part of this buffering is holding fast to the school's vision of which I do not believe the principal of a school should be the sole originator. The development of a school vision is largely accomplished by the professional staff, but I also feel a responsibility to represent the desires of other stakeholder groups such as students, parents, and district office personnel in their absence. As can be predicted, this introduces those "competing standards of goodness." Therefore, priorities must be set, and the bottom line must be the best interests of the student based on "the assignment of values to facts" by the school staff. These values change as students' needs change and so the vision is ever evolving, always strived for, but never really achieved.

As instructional leader, plans for both group and individual professional development need to be considered in working toward whatever vision is determined. Argyris (1970) found that when teachers became internally committed to a course of action, thus owning it and feeling responsible for it, "the individual has reached the point where he is acting on the choice because it fulfills his own needs and sense of responsibility, as well as those of the system" (p. 20). I think this is what we must strive toward and I believe it can only be accomplished through collaborative goal setting and decision making, and allowing teachers some freedom of choice in how they are able to work most productively toward the vision. Instructional leadership initiatives may started with those who are ready, because I don't find teachers work or grow productively when they don't believe in something.

I do not believe that principals have to provide all of the instructional leadership themselves. I find it most productive to use all three options for assuring that instructional leadership is asserted as were set out by Warren Little and Bird (1987). Principals may: import leadership (district trainers, specialists, consultants); provide leadership directly through leading groups themselves, supervising and evaluating teachers, supplying the necessary human and material resources for an innovation, etc. ; or organize staff to provide leadership to one another (using department heads, peer coaching, teacher-led curricular reform).

Sometimes staff are swayed through observing a process in practice. Positive modelling is important and empowering teachers to provide instructional leadership to one another often has higher payoffs than bringing in outsiders. Most often my role is the routine acts-- encouraging, questioning, suggesting, listening. And as Wilson and Firestone (1987) suggest, management activities that influence instruction must be given consideration (for example, protecting instructional time, scheduling, providing

appropriate facilities, controlling class size, having an effective discipline plan, rules, and procedures).

Much of what I do as a leader, and as an instructional leader, is context specific. Within each unique context choices are made among competing standards of goodness, stakeholder groups with their diverse preferences are involved, and the effort is made to keep the vision for the school foremost in my mind. It's like walking a tightrope--trying to retain balance while moving ahead.

## Implications for Practice and Future Research

Based on the research literature written about the world of the teacher and instructional leadership, and with consideration to the data from this study, certain implications might be considered. The following sections highlight some of the implications for practice as well as for future research in the areas of instructional leadership and teachers in critical incidents.

**Implications for practice**. From the critical incidents which the teachers in this study described, some implications for practicing teachers might be considered. Teachers should be aware that they will likely face some critical incidents in their teaching careers which will cause them to question themselves, their values, their priorities. At such times self-esteem seemed extremely important, since critical incidents were times of vulnerability. When self-esteem was positive, professional growth was enhanced, which in turn gave teachers strength to deal with critical incidents.

Having a confidant with whom to share professional and personal issues was important to most teachers. Even for those who preferred to deal with things alone,

there were times when they needed to share what was happening to them. Significant others, especially colleagues, who were able to empathize with what teachers were experiencing provided very important moral support.

Teachers in critical incidents did not seem able to see all of the options which might have been available to them. Often the confidant was able to help a teacher see other options, as were instructional leaders within the school and at the central office level. When trusting relationships existed between principals and teachers, as principals became aware of a teacher's critical situation they assisted through helping to identify and access appropriate supports. Teachers needed to be aware of the available resources and support personnel available to them within their work environment.

Basically, the considerations for dealing with critical incidents came down to having strong support networks. The most profoundly felt negative critical incidents seemed to occur where teachers turned into themselves, rather than reaching out at critical times.

As instructional leaders, principals must constantly bear in mind that their every act has the potential to influence others. Through their daily acts priorities and values were demonstrated. While dealing with the unpredictability of day-to-day life in schools, principals had to strive to retain sight of their vision, trusting that the tiny steps forward would have the cumulative effect of a giant leap.

Principals in this study were seen as being helpful when they took the time with people to listen, to show an interest. Even when a teacher was facing a critical incident which was out of the control of the school, the principal's mere presence and support were important.

Taking time was a significant factor to the success of instructional leadership initiatives. Time must be spent with individual teachers and groups of teachers to

develop group values and a group vision. Instructional leaders work with individual teachers as well as groups to develop professional improvement plans to enhance the attributes needed to achieve the vision. It must be recognized that the amount of time needed varies with the individual, and so must be flexibly handled.

Further, principals as instructional leaders must empower others, such as staff members and central office staff, to assist the school in working toward the vision held. By the school developing goals which reflect system goals, yet address the particular needs of that school, system supervisors should be able to provide the necessary time, resources, and strategies to assist school personnel. This could also help to alleviate the dissention that existed between some school and central office staff members, since the goals would be complementary, rather than competitive.

Implications for school system practice emerged from this study as well. Because some teachers lacked a support network, school systems might have someone available within the system, but not directly attached to either schools or the central office, to provide objective support to teachers in critical incidents. Secondly, an obvious implication for school system practice is the necessity of determining a congruent base for instructional leadership so those who are supposed to provide it, as well as those evaluating its provision, understand the expectation. Also, if principals are to be instructional leaders they must be given the time to work at this role. This is supported by Rogus' (1988) discussion of the "oughts" of instructional leadership, where he advocates "to formally set aside time to provide direct assistance to supervision and staff development and to lead informally while carrying out day-to-day administrative activities" (p. 17). And finally, school and system goals should be compatible, with school goals being supported by supervisory level central office staff.

**Implications for future research**. I found teachers to be a valuable source of information. Since they represent such a large portion of the educational work force, I feel they should be a major source of information for educational research. Presently in research, teachers have not been given the recognition they deserve.

A number of the critical incidents described by teachers in this study were related to rapid change or change being promoted which was not supported by the teachers. A longitudinal study of a planned change initiative, with various stakeholder groups participating, might provide information about both change and instructional leadership. Since the same incident was seen as critical by some and not others in my study, critical incidents might also be investigated in a change study.

Through the study of teacher's critical incidents this study looked for instructional leadership implications. Additional studies into instructional leadership would be desirable. Repeating this study with a more varied sample such as an entire school staff, instead of only reflective practitioners, might provide further insights. Also, talking to principals, as well as teachers, about how instructional leadership is provided might allow for some interesting comparisons, particularly if teachers and principals discussed the same incidents.

Through teachers describing the educational program they consider themselves to be most effectively teaching or the educational program where they feel their teaching has grown the most, the topic of instructional leadership might be further investigated.

From teacher reports of instructional leadership actions this study attempted to identify how it was being provided to teachers. It might be interesting to have those who provide instructional leadership describe how they feel they provide it, and have those who evaluate school administrators describe their criterion for evaluating the

provision of it. Such a study might help to provide a congruent base for the consideration of the principal as instructional leader in the school.

## Concluding Statement

By examining instructional leadership from the perspective of teachers describing critical incidents, I found it possible to identify the actions of leaders which teachers perceived as being important. This allowed me to compare their descriptions with the literature. Through my discussions with teachers I gleaned a better understanding of the importance of the principal in providing instructional leadership, largely through routine actions. At least as important to teachers was the leader's provision of support, trust, and confidence.

Through the study I came to appreciate the diversity among teachers in how they grow and develop professionally. There was also a great variation in the kinds of situations which became critical incidents for them. The necessity of interpersonal competence and flexibility for those in leadership positions was highlighted. Working with people and attempting to coordinate their activities, meet their individual and group needs, and to keep moving in a desired direction is an extremely complex and difficult task. Simply stated, talk, time, flexibility, and continuous effort is the necessary work for a school leader.

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# Appendix A

## Correspondence

Department of Educational Administration
7-104 Education North
The University of Alberta
T6G 2G5

February 4, 1989.

Dear ,

Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in my thesis research by participating in an interview. When we chatted on the telephone, I mentioned that my area of study is critical incidents in teachers' careers. The interview will focus on an incident or incidents, the circumstances, the individuals involved, and how you felt about the incident then and now. I feel that the perspective provided by you, as an experienced and reflective teacher is unique and critical to this study.

I looking forward to meeting with you on , February , at in .

Please be assured that your interview will be treated with complete confidentiality.

Sincerely yours,

Donna Boyd

53101-Range Road 214
Ardrossan, Alberta
T0B 0E0
July 3, 1989.

Dear

Sincere thanks for the part you played in assisting me with my study "Teachers' Critical Incidents: Implications for Administrators". Your time, interest, and interview contributions were greatly appreciated. A copy of the final document will be available to you through the Learning Resource Services Center.

Sincerely yours,

Donna Boyd

# Appendix B

## Transcript Samples

## Sample #1

R. Some of my critical incidents involve nothing more than self-revelation, knowing myself better, but I'm not going to give you any particular sequence. I was considering this very carefully. I went off to University for a year to do my Masters, and that's where I found out the self-revelations that come into the picture here. I found out how important it is for me to feel useful, to be useful at what I do, and I found out that as a student I wasn't being useful to anyone. And the thing that saved me was that I asked, rather than to teach a class, I asked to be a faculty consultant. And I got as a result, to work with student teachers and I really liked that, and I think that I did a good job working with them as a result of it. But I also ended up getting involved in all sorts of other things like being on the Graduate Students Association as a rep on the floor. And I started printing little newsletters for the floor, and organizing lunches on the floor, I did all sorts of things I think which were making up for all the things I wasn't getting in the classroom. I did miss the students, I didn't miss the work, I missed the students. And I looked so forward to coming out. So I came to a new school when I finished at University. And it was hell, it was just absolute hell. First of all I was teaching mostly grade twelve, the grade tens that I had accepted me because they didn't know me from Adam, they were new in the school too, but the grade twelves had me virtually against the wall. Like who was I and what did I think I knew, and they didn't trust me worth a darn, they didn't know anything about me, so this really put a strain on me. I don't think I did as good a job teaching and I was going through that first year when we had the fire. And normally my feeling for this school at that time were "I couldn't care less" I really had no love for most of the students, I didn't have any love for most of the teaching staff, because I had been brought into this position.

## Sample #1

R. Some of my critical incidents involve nothing more than self-revelation, knowing myself better, but I'm not going to give you any particular sequence. I was considering this very carefully. I went off to University for a year to do my Masters, and that's where I found out the self-revelations that come into the picture here. I found out how important it is for me to feel useful, to be useful at what I do, and I found out that as a student I wasn't being useful to anyone. And the thing that saved me was that I asked, rather than to teach a class, I asked to be a faculty consultant. And I got as a result, to work with student teachers and I really liked that, and I think that I did a good job working with them as a result of it. But I also ended up getting involved in all sorts of other things like being on the Graduate Students Association as a rep on the floor. And I started printing little newsletters for the floor, and organizing lunches on the floor, I did all sorts of things I think which were making up for all the things I wasn't getting in the classroom. I did miss the students, I didn't miss the work, I missed the students. And I looked so forward to coming out. So I came to a new school when I finished at University. And it was hell, it was just absolute hell. First of all I was teaching mostly grade twelve, the grade tens that I had accepted me because they didn't know me from Adam, they were new in the school too, but the grade twelves had me virtually against the wall. Like who was I and what did I think I knew, and they didn't trust me worth a darn, they didn't know anything about me, so this really put a strain on me. I don't think I did as good a job teaching and I was going through that first year when we had the fire. And normally my feeling for this school at that time were "I couldn't care less" I really had no love for most of the students, I didn't have any love for most of the teaching staff, because I had been brought into this position.

## Sample #2

R. One said, "No! She's taking my math period, you cannot take my class." And that is where the problem arises with this job. Because I can only come at a certain time. I make up the schedule by what they told me. "I don't want Tuesday, I don't want Thursday, I have to have Wednesday afternoon or I have to have Monday mornings." I make up my schedule, I send it out, and in this one school, it caught him on his math period. He will not let them go. So that class is not getting any. And some of them won't stay with their classes either. The ones that stay with their classes, you can see a difference. Because that means what I've said, they pick it up and use it during the week. The ones who don't care, who go and have coffee, I think I'm wasting my time.

I. Is there anything you can do about that?

R. I've talked to a couple of principals and they have. When they ask me I never say, "Yes, go for coffee." I say, "It is best if you stay here."

I. So sometimes the teachers do ask you?

R. They do--oh, they do. "Do you need me here?" If it's grade six and at first I often need them. Because I don't know the kids names and they treat me like a sub.

I. So the principals haven't pre-decided whether or not the teachers is to stay or not?

R. In some they have. In some schools and it's different in some--some have said, "You must stay." And they bring in books or they bring in a coffee or they mark, but they have to sit there. Those are not the most helpful ones. And even if the teacher's not saying a word, cause I don't need them for control--last year I did with grade 6--I'm not kidding, some of them were so bad I needed somebody to hold them down, because I didn't know their names. And this year, no problem with them. It could be my own development too. I mean I'm much better at

handling them than I was last year. But the ones who are listening and watching and taking the sheets, the kids see that, they know the teacher's interested, and they work twice as hard. As soon as the teacher is marking over in the corner, there'll be five of them over here talking--"Obviously, this isn't important cause my teacher isn't even listening." Many teachers do not know the things I'm teaching the kids. They've actually come to me and said, "I didn't know those things were available."

I. Tell me, ideally, what would you like the school to do to be ready for you--to get the most out of your service.

R. The service I'm doing right now?

I. Yes, the service you're providing right now to schools. How could a school be best able to make the best use of you?

R. The ones that are best able are the ones that know what I do and can do to help them. And they say to you, "I would like you to do this with them." And they come to me with the idea. Ones who come to me with an idea of what I should teach are the best. And that works the best because there's a need then for the student. If there's no need, if this is just a fly by night class for goofing off, I find less learning than the ones where the teacher has a prescribed idea. I'm going to a school starting now. I was told that I had grades one and six. Half hour sessions with each one. Two ones and then two sixes. The ones, they want me to teach a specific aspect of the program. That's all. That's what I do for 12 weeks. The sixes have said, "We want to do particular studies." So I went to them, and once again, once they tell me they can write it down. I just decide what I think is best then I go back to them. "Okay this is what I think you mean by particular studies." So they said, "Okay, that's what we want." We did the first lesson--it's new to me, I've never done this before--we discussed what the next one would be. So

now that we've done one, we've done a filmstrip, and a writing session, the ultimate was going to be a visit by an specialist in that field and I actually got that all arranged today. That's the best. Kids will get the most out of it because there's two teachers working with them to accomplish that goal. They know the goal. The teachers who don't know a goal, the ones who don't have one, really, it doesn't work as well. It works best if the teacher knows exactly what she wants me to do.

# Appendix C

## Journal Notes

## Journal Notations

## (Sample)

**Global Impression Of Interview**

History: I have never worked with this teacher. We are professional acquaintances. We seem to attend many of the same workshops and have friends in common. She is outgoing and gregarious.

Among her colleagues she is highly regarded. She plans cooperatively with a group of teachers, more often sharing ideas than receiving them (from what I have been told).

The interview took place in the participant's home at her request. She seemed very relaxed. I ran an errand to a neighbors for her and we chatted easily for a several minutes before we got down to the interview.

An ill toddler was a distraction to the participant during the interview, but the teacher seemed to have this story really together and was able to tell it anyway. She said she had told it so many times to so many people that it was easy to recall. She seemed really "injured" by this experience which surprised me, because I deal with cases like this one on a regular basis. I had trouble grasping what was "critical" about it. Basically, the teacher was amazed that parents didn't accept her professional judgment and opinion. After the interview, I asked her why she considered this to be an incident which contributed to her professional growth. She said it made her appraise whether or not she wished to remain a teacher. Because of the support of her supervisors and colleagues, she decided that she did. However, she plans to be less open and trusting in her interactions with parents.

She was pleased by the support given by the principal and C. O. They helped her retain her confidence. I agree with her observation that C. O. is able to be more blunt because he is involved on only a short term basis with the parents.

I felt the principal should have included the teacher from the previous year in the meetings and I was surprised that the counsellor wasn't made to participate to a much greater extent. Interesting observations were that the principal was "so burned out" because she got so involved with such cases and that the counsellor "is basically useless".

**Points of Impact:**

- when the teacher had a problem she went to the principal
- principal seemed apologetic about involvement of C.O. & the extra meeting, but teacher seemed pleased because of whom was involved
- teacher felt very well supported by the system. Didn't expect anymore than she was got.
- husband involved on the home front
-Case was very recent--ended a month ago