

**THE NATURE OF STRESS AMONGST
URBAN SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS**

BY

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The Nature of Stress Amongst Urban School Administrators

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Abstract

This study examines the working conditions of ten urban school administrators in one school division in Manitoba in order to examine the nature of their job-related stress. Hiebert and Basserman's (1986) definition of stress is utilized, that stress is the result when the demands of a given situation exceed an individual's coping skills. Are administrators experiencing stress? If so, what is the nature of this stress, and how are administrators coping with the demands placed upon them? What are the supports/sources of direction utilized by administrators, and what are the more stressful times of the school year?

This study used both logbooks and interview technique to compile data. The method employed by Lam and Cormier (1998) was replicated here. Administrators recorded calls/contacts they initiated with the school division office, in a logbook format over a three month period. These calls/contacts were categorized under an eight cell typology developed by Lam (1988). In this study, administrators were also interviewed in order to obtain their perceptions regarding job-related stress.

Administrators reported a low amount of stress. They appear to be coping with the demands placed upon them. Study participants described a number of supports/sources of direction they utilize. Stressful times of the year, as reported by the administrators include April, May and September. Urban administrators called/contacted their division office for similar reasons to those found in Lam and Cormier's (1998) study of rural administrators. This study did not find a relationship between the number of calls/contacts made and the amount of stress reported by the administrators.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Just at this moment somehow or other, they began to run . . . the Queen kept crying 'Faster!' but Alice felt she could not go faster, though she had no breath to say so. . . . The most curious part of the thing was, that the trees and the other things round them never changed places at all; however fast they went, they never seemed to pass anything . . . they went so fast that at last they seemed to skim through the air, hardly touching the ground with their feet, till suddenly . . . they stopped.

Alice looked round her in great surprise. 'Why, I do believe we've been under this tree all the time! Everything's just as it was!'

'Of course it is', said the Queen . . . 'here, you see, it takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run twice as fast as that.'

(Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*, pp. 194–196).

Background Information

The public school system is under increased pressure for a variety of reasons. Those who work in Manitoba face numerous challenges and the job of administrator offers many. For instance parent groups, pressures for increased accountability, and competition for students as a result of the Schools of Choice initiative, have all impacted on those who administer the public schools. One of the more common challenges facing administrators in this decade is "stress". Stress, both positive and negative, is an ever present component of an administrator's life, and dealing with it and at the same time executing one's

responsibilities effectively and efficiently is of concern.

No one seems immune from this powerful force. Stress affects many people with increasing frequency, spanning a variety of ages. It has been recognized for quite some time (Greenberg, 1986) that all jobs produce stress and all work engaged in, requires stress (p. ix). Those who work in the education field are not immune. This essential ingredient in our lives is both a positive and a negative factor in all that we do.

How do we know if our lives are too full of stress? Often our bodies react in a particular way when we are unable to cope with the stressors in our lives. We become ill. Books have been written about how to deal with stress but frequently these solutions only deal with ways of coping with stress. Unless one examines the reasons and causes for the stress in one's life, one will continue in a pattern of stressful living, often with inadequate coping mechanisms. It is necessary to understand both the nature and causes of stress in one's life in an effort to address these issues before any permanent reduction in stress level can occur.

Much has been written concerning stress in the lives of teachers, but less work has been carried out pertaining to administrators and stress. Some studies exist, but the majority of the literature is based on opinions, and little research of an empirical nature has been carried out (MacPherson, 1985, p.1). Much of the work describing administrator stress tends to be of a self-reported type. Self-administered questionnaires often fail to be objective. Less subjective attempts to describe stress amongst administrators do exist and will be the focus in this study.

Are administrators overwhelmed by work-related stress in their jobs? Despite media reports to the contrary, a growing body of literature supports the

assertion that administrators are coping well in their positions, and are functioning with a high degree of enjoyment and experiencing job satisfaction (Hanson, 1991, Kmetz & Willower (1982), Martin & Willower (1981), Milstein & Farkas (1988), Farkas (1983), and others).

The Problem

This work is undertaken in an effort to discover what events, if any, in the job of an administrator are stressful. What does the stress look like and how are administrators coping? What are the sources of direction and supports used by administrators? Perhaps some predictions can be made as to what the future will hold for administrators. The researcher will endeavour to document any concrete resources for administrators in need that are discovered through this work. Practical solutions to assist administrators in successful stress management techniques are a worthwhile goal from this endeavour. It is hoped that information obtained from this study will supplement the existing knowledge base concerning administrators' stress.

Definition of Stress

One of the difficulties in studying stress, is determining what stress is. Many definitions of stress exist, but a consistent definition is difficult to find. A detailed discussion of various definitions for stress can be found in the next section. For the purposes of this study, Hiebert and Basserman's (1986) definition will be employed. They refer to stress as the result when the demands of a given situation exceed an individual's coping skills (p.1).

Demands are considered to be situations requiring the attention of the individual. These situations may be of two types. Pressures are the first type of

demands and are perceived by individuals to be within their own ability to cope. The second type of demands are stressors which are seen to exceed individuals' coping ability. An event is perceived as more stressful when individuals believe their ability to cope is inadequate. Coping behaviours are the attempts by an individual to deal with demands. Stress is the end result when individuals perceive their own lack of resources for coping with the demands in their lives. According to Hiebert and Basserman (1986), "The key factor in determining the extent to which a person experiences stress in any given situation is the individual's evaluation of his or her ability to handle a demand satisfactorily" (p.1). Thus what is stressful for one person, may not be stress producing for someone else. Perception is an important ingredient in an individual's response to demands placed upon him.

Lack of Information Regarding Administrator Stress

Lam and Cormier (1998) report a distinct lack of information concerning the nature of principals' job-related stress (p.53). The many definitions that exist for stress make it difficult to study this concept using a consistent framework. There are as many ways to study stress as there are definitions for stress. The majority of the work on stress uses a questionnaire format with individuals scoring themselves on various items depending upon how stressful they perceive various events to be. Such self-reporting tends to be subjective, and also does not account for the other non-work stressors in an individual's life (Lam & Cormier, pp. 53-54).

Lam and Cormier (1998) refer to shortcomings in the methodology of stress studies, and comment on the validity of some of the reported findings. They caution about "the futility of depending on questionable subjective

measures and dubious data to arrive at far-reaching conclusions in discussing principals' job-related stress (pp. 54–55). One must take care in generalizing findings from research of this nature, and keep in mind the many factors that might cause an individual to not accurately report their own stress. Cooper, Sieverding and Muth, (1988), comment on the problems with this type of assessment of stress:

Self-reports are usually suspect because people are often unable or unwilling to record information that is sensitive, embarrassing, or job-threatening. Further, such self-reporting techniques often fail to detect important aspects of stress itself, since people are generally poor self-analysts (p. 198).

The difficulty in comparing various studies without an adequate framework is mentioned, as Lam and Cormier (1998) offer the lack of a “unified conceptual framework within which an integration of findings can be studied” (p.251).

Lam and Cormier (1998) mention the changes that are taking place in the nature of the administrator's world of work. The external environment has become more complex and turbulent. Changes in the external environment have created more disruptive forces, as power structures shift. The availability of resources have lessened and the external demands or expectations of the administrator's job have been increased (Lam & Cormier, 1998, pp.54–55).

In short, the lack of information concerning principals' stress arises in four possible explanations. Variation in the definitions of stress, the many ways of examining and reporting stress, the change in the nature of administrators' work, and the shortcomings in the methodology used for examining stress all contribute to the lack of knowledge about what makes it stressful to administer in the school setting.

Conceptual Framework

Why study stress in the educational setting? Is there anything that can be done to avoid stress amongst administrators in their workplace, and is this a necessary endeavour to undertake? Bailey (1983) stresses the infectious effects of stress, or burnout amongst individuals working in a school. He comments on the ease with which others follow suit when several individuals are suffering from the extremes of stress. An entire organization could cease to function effectively. Bailey (1983) terms this phenomenon "cop out" (p.16). Precautions to follow for reducing organizational stress for educational administrators are stressed, with the goal of helping to ensure high productivity.

Lam has examined stress in the lives of administrators in several studies. His 1998 work looked at the types and sources of stress experienced by administrators in a rural setting to determine if there is a cycle of job-related stress corresponding to the various times of the school year (Lam & Cormier, 1998, p. 55). He used a conceptual framework adapted from Gmelch and Swent (1982) to examine administrator stress. Lam and Cormier offer a tool for measuring stress which is a relatively new way of doing so. Their conceptual framework will be employed in this study.

Stressful events were captured in a non-subjective way by monitoring administrators' telephone calls to their school division office. The theory behind this is that individuals possess different levels of tolerance when it comes to stress, and what is stressful for one individual will not necessarily be viewed as stressful by another person. Lam and Cormier feel that what is perceived as stressful is a direct result of the different degrees of tolerance. Once an administrator had exhausted all of his or her resources and was still unsure of how to cope with a situation, then the school division office would be the place

he or she would turn for help. Lam and Cormier believe this to be a more reliable indicator of stress rather than self-proclaimed confessions of stress by administrators (Lam, personal interview, June 16, 1998).

Lam and Cormier's (1998) findings indicate there were highly significant differences in the sources and types of stress amongst the principals in the study. They noted the following trends:

1. There has been a steady transformation in the roles and responsibilities of the administrator in both their internal and external roles.
2. The management of the external environment has become equally, if not more, demanding than the internal environment of the school. This represents a change for the traditionally inside focused principals (p. 60).

With respect to the more stressful times of the year for the principals, Lam and Cormier (1998) note that incidents of stress tended to peak in the month of June. Stressful incidents declined from January onwards to a low point in April and then began to climb again during May and to June (pp. 61–62).

Lam (1988) notes three approaches to examine tension experienced by school principals. Firstly, he mentions the approach of examining the nature of stress, and cites Gmelch and Selye who adopted this methodology. The second approach, and the most common one, according to Lam involves searching for the sources of stress among school administrators. The third approach compares and ranks stressors indicated by school administrators. He comments on the lack of a conceptual framework and proposes one adapted from the work of Gmelch and McGrath. Lam proposes four types of stressors: role-based, task-based, boundary-spanning and conflict-mediating for categorizing stress (Lam, 1988, p. 251).

Together with these four types of stress, he suggests three sources from

which stressors arise. Firstly, stress arises from administrators' interaction with their organizational external environment and is termed extra-organizationally induced. Secondly, stress arises from sources on the job and is referred to as intra- organizationally induced. Lastly, stress from intrapersonal sources is also mentioned (Lam, 1988, p.250-251). For the purposes of this study, intrapersonal sources will not be examined in keeping with Lam & Cormier's (1998) methodology, and due to the difficulty in obtaining and quantifying this information.

Development of the Measuring Instrument – the Eight Cell Typology

The origins of the framework for categorizing stressors in this study has its origins in the work of Gmelch, Heibert, and Lam. Lam developed a framework for examining stress amongst administrators as early as 1984, drawing on the work of several other researchers. Lam (1984) created his framework for studying stress in order to combine an understanding of school administrators' stressors with theories of organization presently in existence (p.51). A second purpose for developing this framework to analyze administrators' stressors was to provide some organization to the many different approaches to the study of job stress. Lam (1984) refers to the need for some type of conceptual synthesis for sorting out the numerous studies dealing with fragmented pieces of information (p. 51).

Lam's original work with this framework dealt with a twelve cell typology, based on four types of stress, and three sources for stress. The combination of these types and sources led to the twelve different cells. The four types of stress include role-based, task-based, boundary-spanning and conflict-mediating. They are associated with three sources of stress: extra-organizational,

intra-organizational and intra-personal. Firstly, extra-organizational stress refers to stressors having their origin in administrators' interaction with their organizational external environment. Secondly, intra-organizational stress is meant to stand for stress that arises on the job, that is job-related stress originating in more traditional internal management. Thirdly, intrapersonal sources would include personal characteristics and conditions that either dilute or intensify the effects of the stressors.

Lam chose to only consider the first two sources of stress for his study with rural administrators, omitting the intra-personal stress and using an eight cell typology. His rationale for doing this lies in the fact that intra-personal sources of principals' stress were not readily available for his study (Lam, 1998, p.8). In a similar fashion, for this study, the researcher chooses to follow this same eight cell typology which will be outlined as follows.

Starting with the extra-organizational source, role-based stress refers to pressure on the job as a result of changing power redistribution. In short, it can also be referred to as decentralization, or the stress resulting from more responsibility being given by the school division office without any corresponding increase in authority. This has also been referred to by Cedoline as "control over one's destiny" (Lam, 1988, p.252).

The second type of stress, task-based, arises from the day-to-day administrative tasks and a lack of resources. In this case, resources are seen to be supplies, personnel or time, that is, anything that interferes with the smooth running of the administrators' responsibilities. In other words, this stress is associated with executive problems as a result of a shortfall of funds (Lam, 1988, p. 252).

A third type, boundary-spanning stress refers to pressures from dealing

with different external stake holders (Lam, 1998 , p.9). An administrator's activities in the area of school–community relationships are found in this category, and according to Lam, are the result of frequent (and sometimes unpleasant) interaction with other people in order to carry out the functions associated with the job of administrator (Lam, 1988, p.252). This area involves dealing with parents and the community in an effort to resolve complex student problems, and may involve interaction with health and social agencies, or law enforcement groups.

The last type of stress, as outlined in Lam's typology is conflict–mediating stress. It arises from the pressure of harmonising the often incompatible social values of the students and their families with those of the school. This stress arises from the effort of resolving conflicts. Conflicts are often found in the school setting and may be a test of managerial skills and coping ability, according to Lam (Lam, 1988, p.252).

With respect to the intra–organizational source of stress, role–based stress here refers to the pressures of balancing bureaucratic and professional authority. This has been termed a “dual authority structure” by Hanson (Lam, 199 p.9). Task based stress arises from principals' attempts to cope with the various organizational needs and at the same time maintain effective operation of the school. Routine functions such as supervising instruction, identifying program needs, implementing curriculum, and evaluating staff, not to mention the processing of paperwork to ensure adequate information flow would fall into this category (Lam, 1984, p.49).

Boundary–spanning stress involves the day to day communication functions with staff, students, parent councils and other groups within the school to ensure the best possible communication networks. This type of stress is

based on the quality and quantity of intrapersonal contacts and communication with the aforementioned groups and is a large component of the school climate and the motivation of the staff (Lam, 1984, pp. 49–50).

The last type of stress, conflict–mediating, is based on the often unpleasant task of handling conflict between individuals or among groups within the school setting. Lam states how internal conflict mediation is a constant job stressor of the school administrator, and improper management can often lead to crisis situations (Lam, 1984, p.50). With this type of stress, often there is no other recourse, other than to seek assistance from the Division office.

Research Questions

A number of research questions have been identified as requiring further study. The following questions will form the basis for the inquiry in this study:

1. What is the nature of the stress experienced amongst urban administrators?
2. How does the nature of the stress experienced by the urban administrators differ from that of the rural administrators as found in Lam's work?
3. What are some of the supports/sources of direction for the administrators?
4. What are the more stressful times of the year for administrators?

These questions have their origin in Lam & Cormier's work, and the natural progression that comes from reading their study of rural administrators. Reviewing the literature in the area of stress is another source for these research questions as they arise through careful reading. Another reason for delving into the area of urban administrators' stress is the increased number of administrators securing medical leaves of absence from their positions and the desire to know why this is so, and what can be done to prevent it. Another more personal reason for inquiry in this area is to learn more about prevention and coping strategies to deal with stress in the educational setting. In order to better manage stress, administrators would benefit from shared resources with their colleagues.

Organization of the Thesis

The next section of this research paper, Chapter Two is a review of the relevant literature of the subject of stress. Ways of conceptualising stress, definition of terms, sources of stress, and methodology of stress studies are examined. In addition, the concept of administrator stress, stress management, cycles of stress in the school year, and future trends in this area are presented.

Chapter Three describes the methodology employed in this study. This chapter includes a description of the sample, methods of data collection and data analysis, issues of reliability and validity, as well as some limitations of the study.

Chapter Four reports the data analysis and includes both results from the analyses of the administrators' logbooks, and the responses to the interview questions. A summary of the results can be found in this section.

Finally, Chapter Five presents a summary of the study, and its significant findings, a discussion of the results, as well as some suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of the Literature

**Antibiotics can't touch it. The microscope can't even spot it.
It's rapidly spreading, and almost everybody's feeling the effect
(Pritchett & Pound,1998, p.i).**

Introduction

The subject of this leading quotation is stress. Stress has become a catch-all descriptor for a variety of situations. Gmelch (1988) referred to the numerous materials, produced annually, with stress as their subject matter. He mentioned 100,000 books and articles, 1,000 research projects and 6,000 additional publications catalogued every year (p.222). According to Pritchett & Pound (1998), stress and tension create numerous problems today, but what is of more concern is to consider how stress will make its impact on individuals in the future (p.i).

Like many other groups of professionals in today's world of work, educational administrators are experiencing stress. This fact has been documented in the literature (Cooper, Sieverding & Muth, 1988, Hanson, 1991, Lam & Cormier, 1998) and others. At some time all administrators will experience situations of conflict and the resultant stress (Hanson, 1991, p.291). Just how much stress are administrators experiencing, and this stress

widespread? Statements in the media indicate the prevalence of stress amongst teachers and administrators both. However, a growing body of literature proposes these reports to be exaggerated (Hanson, 1991). The examination of this complex and multi-faceted term starts with a look at the various meanings of the term stress.

Ways of Conceptualising Stress

One of the difficulties in dealing with the topic of stress, is determining what stress is. Many definitions of stress exist, but a consistent definition is difficult to find. Hiebert (1985) remarks on the confusion that exists, as different authors use the same term to mean different phenomena.

This problem is enhanced as most people hold a personal and subjective definition for stress. The definition selected influences the conclusions an individual makes regarding how people become stressed and the way stress should be controlled (p. 11). As well, a clear conceptualisation of the particular definition for stress employed in a study will aid with understanding the study's methodology and the interpretation of its findings (Travers & Cooper, 1996, p. 12).

A discussion of the numerous ways of defining stress is undertaken using Hiebert's (1985) three models. He employs environmental, response, and interactional models to describe the various aspects of looking at stress (p.12).

The Environmental Model

The first way of viewing stress, according to Hiebert (1985) is an environmental model. This model consists of identifying stress-producing situations, or conditions, and then altering the situations or conditions to make

them less stressful. The major problem with this type of model is that it does not allow for any individual coping strategies, as individual ways of reacting in similar situations are not included.

Of Hiebert's three models of stress, the environmental model is the one least represented in the literature. Only two definitions of stress matching the environmental model were found. Kyriacou (1989) proposes a definition of stress that utilizes "the experiences . . . of unpleasant emotions such as anger, tension, frustration, anxiety, depression and nervousness, resulting from aspects of their work" (p.27). He also defines stress as an unpleasant emotional state (p.27).

Rahim (1996) also utilizes an environmental model in his work with stress. He defines job stress as work characteristics which pose a threat to employees. Threats occur where there is a poor fit between a person and his or her environment (p.3).

This environmental model of stress sees situations as stress producing. Making changes to the situations is the way to reduce stress. There is no allowance made for individual attempts to cope with the stressors.

The Response Model

A second way of examining stress, according to Hiebert (1985) is the response model. It deals with stress on an individual basis. Treating stress involves teaching individuals to react to demanding situations in a way that is appropriate for them, and that will lower the level of stress. Problems with this model are twofold. It tends to equate stress with arousal, and does not account for the fact that other situations might produce a high arousal state that is not stressful. Secondly, this model does not account for possible reasons as to why

some situations are experienced as stressful, and others are not.

Many of the studies, and much of the work done utilize the response model. A number of definitions, and ways of conceptualising stress present here are of the environmental type. Selye's early work with stress is of this type.

Selye adapted the term "stress" from physics in 1936 and since then, stress has come to mean a variety of things (Kendall & Hunt, 1982, p.15). Selye (1974) described the body's response to any demand, as nonspecific. He referred to this as psycho-physiological reactivity, or the body's rate of wear and tear (Everly & Sobelman, 1987, p.7). Selye's notion of stress as a reaction has endured, and forms the basis for much of the conceptualisation of stress today.

Selye (1980) emphasizes that stress should not be assumed to be something negative, as it is also regarded as a stimulant and is a feature of living. Selye identified four different types of stressors an individual can experience: hyperstress, or overstress; hypostress, or understress; distress, or bad stress; and eustress, or good stress (Travers & Cooper, 1996, p.16)

In a similar way to Selye's studies, Ratsoy's (1986) work with stress also describes a physiological response to stress. Ratsoy defines stress as "the body's physical, mental, and chemical reactions to circumstances that that frighten, excite, confuse, endanger or irritate the individual" (1986, p.5). He stresses the importance of distinguishing between the negative effects of "over-burdening stress, and the desirable necessary stress which contributes to the efficient and effective functioning of individuals and of the schools and systems within which they work – Hans Selye's terms, eustress as contrasted with distress" (p.7).

Ratsoy also utilizes a number of terms he equates with stress. Such

labels as anxiety, frustration, hassles, conflict, pressure, tension, shell-shock, battle fatigue and dissatisfaction are employed in his work (p.5).

Kendall and Hunt (1982) mention the physiological, psychological and social manifestations of stress, and the importance of dealing with all three areas. Over time stress leads to individual wear and tear. Such symptoms as poor work performance, ill-health, disease, and even death may result according to Kendall and Hunt (1982, p.15).

Another definition that can be categorized under the Hiebert's environmental model is Kyriacou's work. Kyriacou (1989) describes stress as "the body's natural emotional and physiological reaction to the perception of danger in one's environment" (p.28). Kyriacou (1989) is quick to mention that although the body is prepared for 'fight' or 'flight' the perception of danger is not limited to a physical sense. Threat to one's self-esteem and mental well-being is also a trigger of this emotional state (p.28).

Another study that is environmental in nature is the work done by Cooper, Sieverding and Muth (1988). They state how stress is the result of the complex interaction between the environment, one's personality and the body. Demands on the nervous system are influenced by an individual's personality, that is, a combination of the desires, drives, preferences, background and upbringing. Complex biochemical reactions are the result of these interactions (Cooper, Sieverding, & Muth, 1988, p.198).

Hanson (1989) defines stress as the adaptation of our bodies and minds to change. He comments on how stress has been blamed for costing the North American economy approximately two hundred billion dollars per year, and cites stress as being linked to eighty percent of all illnesses. At the same time as stress is being implicated in millions of deaths around the world each day,

Hanson labels stress as the key to excellence (p.17). He sees the many forms and intensities of stress, ranging from chronic to acute as being surmountable obstacles on the way to an individual's success (p.19).

Another view encompassed in the environmental model is Giammatteo and Giammatteo's (1980) work with stress. They see stress created when several groups with different ideals are unable to negotiate a new norm. Stress is the result when adaptation is required or when a more out of the ordinary response is needed (Giammatteo & Giammatteo, 1980, p.vii). Likewise these two authors refer to stress as something that "makes some individuals tick" while it causes other individuals to "stop ticking" (Giammatteo & Giammatteo, 1980, p.2). They mention two sources for stress as being the environment and personal process. Their solution to managing stress is for the individual to manage himself or herself (p.57).

The last researcher whose work falls under the response model is Wieck. Wieck (1970) mentions two components of stress, stimulus intensity and duration. He advocates using stimulus intensity and duration as a means to compare stress reactions in various systems. Wieck cautions about the tendency to oversimplify the treatment of stimulus intensity by assuming that stimuli are "very intense" in all cases (p.293). The idea that stress is a process that increases and decreases is also put forward (p.295). Building on this idea, Wieck (1970) poses the question of how to know when the stress situation is over and the stress response is no longer required. He also mentions how failures to cope with stress may come about because the person either stopped the coping efforts prematurely, or maintained the efforts to cope too long, and therefore created new stress (p. 298).

Hiebert's (1985) response model describes many of the views of stress,

and much of the work done in this area. The response model conceptualises stress as an individual perception. It can be lowered through an individual's reaction, to the particular stressor, in a way that is appropriate for him or her. The response model does not account for why some situations are perceived as stressful, and others are not. Nor does the model account for states of high arousal that are not stressful.

The Interactional Model

The third model, presented by Hiebert (1985), is the interactional model. Stress is viewed as an individual's psychological and physiological response that involves his or her perceived ability of coping. Stressors are the name given to situations where stress is experienced. Coping behaviours are what individuals call upon in order to ease various stressful situations. Homeostasis is the preferred state with this model. Controlling stress involves a combination of altering environmental demands (stressor management strategies) and altering personal reactions (stress management strategies) (pp. 12–14).

The majority of the literature reviewed employs the interactional model of stress. Various definitions and ways of conceptualising stress under this model will be examined in this section, starting with a look at Hiebert's definition.

Hiebert (1985) poses a definition of stress, in keeping with the interactional model. He defines stress as “a complex psychological and physiological reaction to a situation that approaches or exceeds a person's self-perceived ability to cope with that situation” (p.14). He mentions three types of reactions people experience when confronted with stress: physiological, cognitive, and behavioural.

Likewise, Monat and Lazarus (1977) refer to stress in terms of the

interactional model. Stress is used generally to describe what occurs when external or internal demands exceed an individual's adaptive resources. The physiological, psychological and social components of this definition of stress are emphasized as well (Monat & Lazarus, 1977, pp. 1-8 in Feitler & Tokar, 1981, p.1).

Kahn (1970) advocates viewing stress from the dual perspective of individuals and organizations, and states the need to include both of these as responding to stress, and as the objects of stress (McGrath, 1970, p. 97). Kahn echoes the stress definition of others, as he refers to stress as a demand of some sort that the environment is placing upon some system (either an individual or an organization) (p.98). The demand is followed by some sort of recognition, a response by the individual, and finally a consequence results (McGrath, pp. 98–99).

This way of viewing stress stated by Kahn, perceives stress as change, "implying a previous state of equilibrium" (McGrath, p. 101). The individual's response to the change is also an important facet of this model. What performance repertoire does the individual possess, and how appropriate is the choice of response made by the individual? (McGrath, p.100). Kahn (1970) perceives both overload and underload, that is too much and too little demand, to be the same sort of stresses damaging to the system (McGrath, p. 102).

Gmelch (1984) utilizes Khan's model to view stress (p.193). In a later study, Gmelch (1988) elaborates on where the stress occurs in this process:

Whether a particular demand produces stress depends on stage two – the individual's *perception* of the demand. If the individual does not have the physical and/or mental resources to meet the demand he or she perceives that demand as a stressor. The stress created by this discrepancy between demand and personal resources results in a stress or *coping response* (stage three) taking the form of psychological, physiological, or behavioural reactions. The fourth and final stage, termed *consequences*, pertains to the intensity and long-range effects of stress (Thorsen, C. & Englestone, J., 1983, in Gmelch, 1988, pp 225–226).

Keavney and Sinclair's (1978) work also falls under the interactional model. They refer to stress as teacher anxiety (Feitler & Tokar, 1981, p. 2).

Other studies also included in this model have used conflict, frustration, or threat to mean stress (Feitler & Tokar, 1981, pp. 2 & 4). Psychology would see stress resulting when one of the lower needs of Maslow's hierarchy goes unfulfilled. Burnout is another term that is often used to describe the end result of too much or too prolonged stress (Feitler and Tokar, 1981, p.3). Psychological terms are the basis for McGrath's (1976) work with stress, while Eddington (1984) reminds of the need for some type of stress in our lives (Ratsoy, 1986, p. 5).

Stress is referred to as "excessive distress" by Friesen and Williams (1985). Their work examines organizational stress in an educational setting, and falls under Hiebert's interactional model (p.13).

Kelly, (1997) likens stress to a reaction, arising from our response to various events, but not from the events themselves. He states how it is an individual's choice of whether they will react in a stressful way to a certain event. One person may see a difficult project as an exciting challenge while another may view the same project as an impossible event (Kelly, 1997, p.3).

This attitude toward stress can be seen as one of enabling individuals to take control of their environment and thereby control the stress in their lives.

Sells' (1970) definition of stress is interactional in nature, and contains two elements. The first is the lack of an adequate response by an individual when faced with a situation. The second element is that the consequence of failing to respond, for that individual, must be important to him or her (p. 138). Sells (1970) advocates this model as it provides a general concept of stress, it allows for an unrestricted range of coping measures, and that it requires no special concepts of stress behaviour (pp. 138–139).

Capel (1989) describes stress as a process that involves the awareness of a substantial imbalance between an individual's response capability and the environmental demand. Failure to meet the demand is seen to be having important consequences for the individual (p. 37).

Sarros and Friesen (1987) utilize a definition close to the one used in this study, "stress is viewed as a distressful response to a demanding situation that is perceived as exceeding the person's resources and capabilities for meeting the demand" (p.165). According to the creators of this definition, it extends beyond Selye's physiological interpretation of stress, and "includes the fundamental, everyday, interactive relationships among individuals, organizations, and environments as leading to stress" (p.165).

The stress definition used in this study is one that is interactional in nature. Hiebert & Basserman (1986) refer to stress as the result when the demands of a given situation exceed an individual's coping skills (p.1). This definition was selected for this research paper as it encompasses two important elements. Demands, and coping skills are both notions critical to this work. Administrator demands, and the way in which the administrators were able to

cope with these stressors forms the basis for this research paper.

Hiebert's third model for studying stress, the interactional model, is widely utilized in the literature. This model includes an individual's perceived ability of coping. Stress is seen to be controlled through a combination of stressor management strategies, and stress management strategies.

Thus Hiebert (1985) offers three models for studying stress, environmental, response and interactional. These models provide an excellent way of categorizing the material presented, and aid in the understanding of the concept of stress.

Definition of Related Terms

An better understanding of the concept of stress can be achieved, if some related terms were looked at. Other terms are often used interchangeably with the word stress, without understanding exactly what is meant. Several important and related descriptors will be examined.

Burnout has been defined in many ways, but a widely-used definition is provided by Sarros and Friesen (1987). They define burnout as "psychological, physiological, and behavioural responses to chronic work stress experienced by helping service professionals" (p.164). Sarros and Friesen (1987) state the assumption in their work, that burnout is a negative feeling experienced by the respondent (p.167). Kyriacou (1989) refers to burnout as "a state of mental, emotional and attitudinal exhaustion . . . which results from a prolonged experience of stress." Individuals are still able to function, but have lost their enthusiasm and commitment to their work, as evident by aspects of job performance (p.27).

Burnout is also described as a chronic response, that comes about as a

result of being exposed to cumulative long-term stress. The time factor is important here, as Capel (1989) comments that it is professionals who are subject to "continued stress and strain due to unrelenting work demands" as being particularly susceptible to burnout (p. 36).

Travers and Cooper (1996) define **role ambiguity** as a situation where an employee either does not have enough information to be able to carry out a task, or he or she does not fully understand the requirements (p. 46). Situations that might lead to role ambiguity are also mentioned, and include job relocation, changes in the method of working, new organizational structure, and changes in the actual requirements of the job (p. 46). A closely related term is **role conflict** which is described by Travers and Cooper (1996) as a situation that exists when an individual is torn between conflicting demands placed upon them by others in the organization. In this case stress may result from the inability to meet these various expectations or demands (p. 47).

Vetter (1976) uses **role pressure** to describe the situation where an individual takes on the roles that accompany the office. Expectations from others are that he will "behave and perform in a manner that befits the role(s)" (Vetter, 1976, p.12). If the individual experiences difficulty with these various responsibilities, **role overload** may result. This condition occurs when an individual "lacks the time and energy to do all that is expected of him" (Vetter, 1976, p.12).

Sources of Stress

A number of sources of stress have been identified in the literature, and will be briefly dealt with here. Regardless of the extent to which administrators are purported to be experiencing stress, it is important to look at the factors that

are causing this stress.

All complex organizations, educational systems included, create situations that can cause the development of conflict and stress (Hanson, 1991, p.272). The educational setting can be a pressure-packed environment. Hanson (1991) describes the long hours of an administrator, approximately 53 hours per week for secondary principals, and 50 hours for elementary principals. These times are characterized by a fast pace with lots of variety, brevity and a great deal of "task fragmentation." He describes the range in work experience from one of "traumatic adrenaline rushes to mindless rituals and syncopated drudgery" (p.272). Problems with stress are found both during the slow times and those that are fast-paced.

Cedoline uses the term "paper mountaineering" to describe filling out a tremendous number of forms and reports. Cedoline refers to dealing with vast quantities of paperwork as an "encumbering" task (Hanson, 1991, p.273).

Hanson (1991) reviewed stress studies (Cedoline, 1982, Gmelch, 1982, and Gordon, 1982) and reported the top ten stressors found in these works. A lack of sufficient resources was reported as the most stressful challenge facing administrators. This included such things as supplies, fiscal aid, assistance with evaluation, personnel, and inservice funding. The second most stressful item reported in these studies was a lack of support from superiors and the public, followed by work overload, involving both the quantity of work, and paperwork. Next came collective bargaining, followed by a lack of a clear direction from school boards and superintendents. Federal and state laws were listed as a source of stress, followed by a lack of control of students, teachers and schools. Responsibility for children's total needs and taking on many new roles, including that of the parental role were also stated. Lastly, pressures from

parent and community relationships were mentioned (p. 279). Hanson (1991) sums up sources of stress:

The conditions creating a stressful environment are present in most school systems, certainly some more than others. The long hours, overcrowded space, upset parents, limited resources, potential for physical violence, and so forth go with the job for most educators. The tragedy is that like most formal organizations, educational systems typically ignore the impact that stress has on administrators and teachers (p. 281).

Sparks and Hammond (1981) propose that no one in the field of education can completely avoid the effects of stress. They mention the two most stressful things for teachers as managing disruptive children and poor quality relationships (p. 9). Perhaps administrators are also subjected to stress from these two stressors as well.

Lam (1996) cites dilemmas faced by school administrators, in executing their responsibilities. These dilemmas are created as administrators face more complex and wide ranging responsibilities with decreased resources, and higher public expectations of what the school should be. Striving for academic excellence is in conflict with the practice of mainstreaming and the philosophy of educational equality for all. These concerns are all stress producing according to Lam (p. 127).

Another source of stress for administrators is the decentralization that has not led to "decisional autonomy" on the part of the administrator (Lam, 1996, p.129). Feeling powerless is common for administrators as they shoulder more responsibility, yet face more legal and professional constraints handed down to them by their superintendents (p. 129). In a similar manner, principals, in being given more authority through a school-based management model, are forced to relinquish some of this authority, as decision-making within the school takes on

more of a consultative approach (p. 131)

Lam (1996) mentions the increased role the school takes on of nurturing and educating the young, with a decreased involvement, and influence of such institutions as church and family. Lam mentions the incompatible roles of counselling and disciplining students, faced by the school (p. 130).

The experience of stress is a very personal phenomenon (Travers & Cooper, 1996, p. 61). What is stressful for one person may not necessarily be stressful for someone else. Under particular levels of pressure, and in certain environments, some individuals survive the strain, while others do not. Some individuals are more susceptible to stress than others, and more research is needed into this area to determine why this is so. Likewise, features of the environment and such personal characteristics, that lead to reduced resistance and increased vulnerability by certain individuals, as age, experience, life events, life stages and ability, personality, behavioural disposition, attitudes, values and needs are contributing factors to the perception of stress (Travers & Cooper, 1996, p.61).

Menzies (1996) documents the effects of school-based management (SBM) on administrators as 29 studies were reviewed with a mixture of findings. With SBM, principals took on additional roles of a managerial nature. From a positive standpoint, administrators were relaying information and utilizing increased flexibility and discretion with SBM. In terms of negative items, principals were faced with increased workloads, a greater need for accountability for performance. Some loss of power was indicated (p. 2).

Woods (1989) comments on the nature of the institution and how it can be a stress producing force:

Such is the character of 'the greedy institution'. It eats you up, always wants more, is never satisfied, the more it consumes the more it needs. One does not have the personal resources for this. Nor are the traditional compensations of bureaucracy in great abundance – the acquisition of status, monetary rewards, career advancement (p. 91).

This quote sums up the ever demanding role of the administrator and the perceived lack of compensations for administrators.

Sources of stress are many for administrators. Whether an event or a situation will be perceived as stressful is a personal response. It is important to look at where stress originates in order to obtain a better understanding of this complex phenomenon. The look at stress in the literature continues with a review of some methodologies for studying stress.

Methodology of Stress Studies

Kyriacou (1989) mentions the difficulty in estimating the extent of stress due to the lack of a widely accepted, objective measure of stress. Various methods have been used to measure stress, and each has its own limitations and shortcomings (p.29).The variety of methodologies utilized in studying the phenomenon of stress will be looked at in this section.

Questionnaires, inventories, and interviews are the most frequently employed methods in stress studies. A less common methodology utilizes physiological measures, such as heart rate, absenteeism, and ill–health to examine this concept. Some studies utilize both questionnaire and physiological methods to collect data. Another way posed by Lam utilizes a typology to categorize stressful incidents. Stressful incidents in Lam and Cormier's (1998) work were equated with phone calls/contacts initiated by

administrators to their school division office.

Questionnaire/Inventory/Interview Method

A frequent method of studying stress utilizes a questionnaire or inventory format. An individual's response to various items is sought with this method. Rahim (1996) employed an inventory called the Occupational Stress Inventory developed by Osipow and Spokane in 1983. It contains 54 items with a five point scale, and has been widely used in the field of psychology (Rahim, 1996, p. 7).

Another study employed a 147 item questionnaire. Friesen and Williams pilot-tested this questionnaire in a small study with twelve principals prior to its use with a larger sample. The instrument contained items for individuals to rank, according to how stressful they found these activities to be (Friesen & Williams, 1985, p.16).

Gmelch (1984) utilized a fifteen item questionnaire to measure stress. This device referred to as an index of Job-Related Strain was modified from its rather generic format to one more specific to administrators (Gmelch, 1984, p.195). This Administrative Stress Index was again used in Gmelch's work in 1988 with continued success (Gmelch, 1988, p.226). Gmelch continues by stating how most studies investigate the sources of stress and do not deal with how educators' cope with job-related stress (Gmelch, 1988, p.222).

Lam (1988) studied 256 principals from Manitoba to look at the impact of external environmental constraints on types and sources of job-related stress. A three part questionnaire was utilized in this study to look at the relationship between stressors, contextual and background factors, as well as the types and sources of stress experienced by the administrators.

Findings from this survey technique indicate that significant relationships existed among the types and sources of stress. Results are indicative that stress on one aspect of the administrators' jobs increased stress on other areas of their jobs. Older school administrators experienced more difficulty adjusting to changing roles, according to Lam. Older and more experienced administrators also adapted less easily to changes in power distribution. Divorced and widowed school administrators were more likely to experience stress associated with the functions or roles of their job, and were less content with their jobs (p. 255). Administrators working in larger schools reported higher levels of stress from monitoring student behaviour. Urban administrators were more likely to experience higher levels of conflict due to the supervision of their staff. Levels of stressors from extra-organizational and intra-organizational sources of stress were the same in this study (p. 257). Complying with the Department of Education policies was another source of stress for administrators (p. 261). Lam felt that complying with educational policy led to feelings that the administrators' perceived authority was being undermined (p. 262). Lam (1988) concluded from this study that administrator stress is a complex subject that needs a consistent system for examination (p.263).

Everly and Sobelman (1987) caution the use of stressor scales in research as they state that these scales measure stressors and not stress. They state how implications about stress can only be inferred from such stressor scales (p. 84). Likewise, stress assessments from self-reports represent only an indirect assessment of the stress response. This method does not account for individual perception of the desirability of a certain life event (pp. 117-118).

Martin (1995) utilized interviews in her study of female educational administrators. Interviews are employed in this research paper as part of the

source of data.

Physiological Method

A number of studies have utilized physiological methods of measuring stress. Physiological measures are easily affected by other factors that might reflect stress in different ways. One study, Sutcliffe and Whitfield (1976), utilized heart rates to monitor stress. They reported the difficulty that their data often reflected the subjects' physical movement around the room, and did not only measure stress.

Other studies have employed other factors, such as behavioural measures, including absenteeism, ill-health, or leaving the profession. These behavioural indicators are subject to many other factors and are difficult to attribute solely to stress (Kyriacou, 1989, p. 29).

Combination of Methods

Other studies have used a combination of methods to study stress. One such study by Cooper, Sieverding and Muth (1988) utilized both a questionnaire format (Jenkins Activity Survey Form) and a series of physiological parameters to measure stress. Heart rates were recorded using a portable ECG (electrocardiogram). Subjects' heart rates were monitored for a period of 24 hours. In addition, participants kept a diary, and were interviewed as well (Cooper, Sieverding & Muth, 1988, p.204).

This study employs a combination of methods. Interviews and recorded data from logbooks form the basis for inquiry in this research paper.

Lam's Typology

Lam's typology originates from his work in 1988 utilizing a questionnaire format. The typology evolved and was utilized in 1998 by Lam and Cormier. The eight cell typology was used to categorize types of stress. Phone calls/contacts initiated by school administrators were termed stressful incidents in this study. The stressful incidents formed the basis for studying stress.

Lam and Cormier (1998) examined the working conditions of principals in a rural Saskatchewan school division. They reported school principals facing added responsibilities at a time when both external, and internal environments were undergoing change. These leaders are struggling to fulfil both their traditional and emerging responsibilities, brought about by change. Site-based management is affecting the way administrators execute their responsibilities. Increased work responsibilities are having to be faced without a corresponding increase in power. Community support is important, but comes at the cost of the administrator having to take on increased boundary-spanning activities. An increased reliance on the school division office for support and guidance indicates the principals' helplessness and anxiety. Lastly, Lam reports the administrators' stress to be higher now than it was ten years ago (p. 64).

A variety of methodologies exist for studying stress, including questionnaire, inventory and interview collection, physiological measures and Lam's typology of stressors. These methodologies have their shortcomings.

Difficulties in studying stress abound. Feitler and Tokar (1981) report the lack of consistency among methods, sampling techniques and results when examining stress. Another problem lies with the nature of the majority of the work done in this area. According to Hiebert and Farber (1984), over 70 % of the articles on stress they reviewed were based on opinion of the author. Only

27 % of the works looked at contained an empirical data base (MacPherson, 1985, p.1). There seems to be a lack of strong research in this area and those involved in the education field would benefit from further work in the area of stress.

Administrator Stress: Reality or Myth

Recent literature suggests that administrators are coping quite well in their jobs, and are not all subject to major levels of stress as frequently reported. Hanson (1991) reports the administrator role to be "robust, challenging, meaningful and action packed" (p.289). He further states how much of the negative anecdotal literature originated from dissatisfied educators attempting to generalise their own bad experiences. Hanson (1991) states, "The image of frustration, anxiety, and burnout is derived from the folklore of anecdotal literature and wire service stories that spread around the country through an efficient communication system" (p. 289).

Kmetz and Willower (1982) studied five elementary school administrators while Martin & Willower (1981) looked at a group of five high school administrators, in an effort to determine how administrators perceive their job. Both studies report that administrators appear enthusiastic about their jobs, rather than being burned out. The results from both studies are summarized as follows:

At both levels, it was concluded that although the principalship was fast paced and complex, involved periodic crises and conflicts, and featured long hours, those holding the job could not be considered beleaguered. They typically enjoyed their work, were able to cope with the turbulence, and took obvious pride in their schools (Hanson, 1991, p.289).

In a similar fashion, Farkas (1983) reports the 302 secondary and

elementary principals in his study, to demonstrate low levels of stress. This group possessed sufficient decision-making authority to be able to carry out the functions of their jobs. They also experienced a "high locus of control and were fundamentally in control of future events" (Hanson, 1991, p. 289). Milstein and Farkas (1988) summed up the role of administrator as being a low level occupational stress group (Hanson, 1991, p.290).

Sarros and Friesen (1987) looked at 128 administrators in a large western Canadian school district. The sample consisted of 62 assistant principals, and 66 principals. Sixty-two percent of the respondents described themselves as being very satisfied to extremely satisfied with their work. One quarter of the participants referred to their work as "considerably stressful", 8 % used the term "very stressful," while 2 % chose "extremely stressful." Other study results led the researchers to conclude that "school-based administrators tended to experience less burnout compared with other groups of helping service professionals" (such as social workers, counsellors, teachers and police officers) (Sarros & Friesen, 1987, p.169). Thus Sarros and Friesen (1987) report the administrators in their study to be coping very adequately with the rigour of their jobs, with moderate to low levels of Emotional Exhaustion and Depersonalisation burnout in the majority of cases. Higher levels of Personal Accomplishment burnout were evident. This latter type of burnout is associated with a lack of positive feedback provided from the job, or a failure to adequately supply status, recognition, and satisfying interpersonal relationships (Sarros & Friesen, 1987, p.176).

Results from a study involving 272 principals and assistant principals as well as 2,478 other educational district based administrators, and supervisory personnel indicate that the principals and vice-principals are faced with having

to deal with inadequate physical resources. These researchers also report the claim by others "that principals are experiencing burnout in 'record numbers' seems too strong" (Ratsoy, Sarros & Aidoo–Taylor, 1986, p. 275). Ratsoy, Sarros and Aidoo–Taylor (1986) support the finding of Gorton (1982) that "most high school principals are coping rather well with the difficulties of their job and are not experiencing a high level of stress" (p.199 in Ratsoy, Sarros & Aidoo–Taylor, 1986, p.276).

Hanson (1991) offers the newly developing school of thought, that the role of the administrator is strong, the occupants are keeping up with the work, and are enjoying the work they do and the benefits that come with it. This area is deserving of further study to support these ideas, according to Hanson. (p.291).

Hiebert (1985) reviewed several studies regarding administrator stress with some interesting findings as well. McMurray (1984) surveyed elementary school principals in five provinces with more than half of the respondents reporting too many meetings, and a lack of sufficient time for planning as the top two stressors. Other stressors reported by the principals in this study included paperwork, students with special needs, staff conflicts, lack of administrative support and unmotivated students (p.29).

Hiebert (1985) also reported on the relationship between leadership style and stress as investigated by Yackel (1984). This study involved 122 Saskatchewan rural school principals. He reported leadership style to not affect either the levels of the principals' stress, or the types of stressors indicated. Various coping procedures utilized by the administrators were not related to specific stressful situations, but were targeted at stress in general (Hiebert, 1985, p.29). The last study reported by Hiebert (1985) was Syrotuik and

D'Arcy's 1983 study with 122 school administrators from Saskatoon and the surrounding area. This study indicates the most common source of stress was role conflict, due to setting high expectations and accepting too many responsibilities, while the second most frequent source of stress was staff evaluations. Stressful situations were reported as not interfering with the principals' family lives. This study also reported that administrators experienced less stress than their classroom colleagues (pp. 29–30).

Hiebert (1985) cautions about interpreting these reported results as all of the studies utilized self-report questionnaires as their source of data. As Hiebert states, "the questionnaires contained primarily negative items and few attempts were made to tap sources of satisfaction or procedures for coping" (p. 30). He further comments on the types of questions asked, different ways of reporting results, and the different questionnaires used in the studies as being important to note (p. 30).

A variety of studies have been looked at in this section, none of which reports any significant stress amongst the groups of administrators studied. It would seem that administrators are coping well with, and in the majority of cases, enjoying the challenges and demands of their particular employment. Heibert (1985) summarizes the stress response and an individual's ability to cope with these demands:

As long as individuals perceive themselves to be dealing satisfactorily with the demands of their jobs, little stress will be experienced. If the demands of a job increase, or if a person's abilities to meet those demands diminish, then the person will experience stress. The intensity of the stressful experience will be related to the imbalance between the demands and the individual's abilities to deal with the demands satisfactorily (p. 51).

In order to gain a more complete understanding of the topic of stress, it is

important to look at the various aspects of this concept including the techniques individuals use to cope with the demands placed upon them. The examination of the literature will continue with a look at some reported stress management techniques.

Stress Management

Sparks and Hammond (1981) state that one individual's positive stress, or eustress may be another person's distress, and that physical factors, learned responses and conditioning determine the perception of life's events (p.11). Likewise, at a certain point in an individual's life, they may perceive an event to be stressful, that they would not at another time. Controlling stress, on an individual basis, through a variety of methods is advocated, in order to prevent, or retard serious illnesses. Such factors as diet, sleep, exercise and relaxation need to be looked at only after a certain degree of self-understanding has taken place. Self acceptance is required, as well as an appreciation of people's unique styles and the way in which individuals interact with their environment, producing stress in order to better manage stress (Sparks & Hammond, 1981, pp.11-12).

Ratsoy, Sarros and Aidoo-Taylor (1986) report collegial support, assistance from members of the immediate family, and recreational activities as ways of managing stress reported by administrators in their work (p.281).

Kyriacou (1989) report stress to be dependent on the skills and strategies possessed by the individual and the degree of control they have in dealing with their particular circumstances. The control people feel they have over the frequency and nature of the demands placed upon them is a critical factor in the ability to deal with the demands, and experience stress, according to Kyriacou

(1989, p.28).

For Hanson (1991), there is sadness in the way individuals who are experiencing stress are treated by the “system.” He comments on the way dysfunctional stress is considered to be a personal problem. Those who are experiencing distress must find their own solution as few provisions are offered for assistance. An allotment of sick days might be taken, transfers made, or discussions with untrained colleagues or supervisors take place, but often there are few options for the educator experiencing stress (p. 281).

Hanson (1991) refers to an optimum stimulation zone. He likens this state to an optimally tuned violin string to produce the best music. Stress is necessary in a sufficient amount to clear the senses, heighten awareness, focus the mind and make the adrenalin flow. Work is seen to be a challenging and satisfying endeavour as problems are viewed as obstacles that can be overcome while at the same time, strengthening or improving the educational system. Hanson (1991) advocates a self-awareness of optimal stress to maintain peak functioning (p.282). The first step in achieving a personal level of stress lies in diagnosing the situation. Understanding the conditions generating the stress is essential as well as making required adjustments to plans and organizing in order to take a proactive approach to stress (p. 287).

Hiebert (1985) comments on the suitability of the interactional model perspective when dealing with stress control. One area of concern would focus on the environmental demands, that is attempting to reduce the pressure in the situation. Another way would concentrate on an individual's coping skills (p. 13). As an individual's repertoire of coping skills becomes more extensive, it is less likely he will perceive a given situation as stressful (p.18).

Cycles of Stress in the School Year:

The times of the year that are more stress producing for administrators is an area that has not experienced a great deal of study. Two studies are reported in this section with similar findings.

With respect to cycles of stress in the school year, Hembling and Gilliland (1981) report administrators as having three peaks in stress during the school year, with September, December, and June as being the more stress producing times (pp 327–328). A recommendation from the authors of this study would be for elective or special events to be time tabled to low points in the cycle of stress in the school year in an effort to reduce stress overload (Hembling & Gilliland, 1981, p.330).

Lam & Cormier (1998) found similar results to that of the previous study. They offer the stress levels of administrators in January as sliding until reaching a low point in April. From here, stressful events climbed during May to reach a peak in June (p.61). These fluctuations in reported incidents of stress are expected with the usual cycles of report preparation, dealing with parents, and end of year activities.

Further work in this area is definitely warranted to supplement this small but revealing body of work. The look at stress continues with a look to future trends.

Future Trends

Like anything else, the object of optimal performance is achieving a balance in life, between too much stress leading to organizational turbulence, personal anxieties, and dysfunctional coping mechanisms, on one hand and too little stress with its associated boredom, apathy and dissatisfaction, on the

other (Hanson, 1991, p. 291). As Hanson states, "The right amount of conflict and stress can be the seeds of innovation, creativity, improved interpersonal relations, and higher levels of productivity" (p. 291).

Sarros and Friesen (1987) look to future research to provide a look at "the extent to which the motivational needs of administrators are critical determinants of burnout and concentrate less on the impact of job-specific factors as contributing to administrator burnout" (p.176). For these researchers, motivational needs of administrators play a larger role in administrator burnout than job-specific factors. They would also like to see more work done in the area of positive feedback and training in human relations skills as lessening the amount of burnout experienced by administrators (p.177).

Ratsoy, Sarros and Aidoo-Taylor (1986) believe administrators are not suffering unduly from work stress when compared with members of certain high stress occupations. They state that "any form of distress in education is a matter of concern" (p.282). These three advocate further examination of the time at which coping strategies are most effective, whether they are undertaken prior to the immediate stress response, or as intervening variables after the immediate effects (p. 282).

Hiebert (1985) looks to further areas of inquiry for providing solutions to issues such as the way individuals cope with the demands of their job, what sort of stress management skills people are receptive to learning, what stressor management strategies are teachers, administrators, and school boards willing to adopt, and what effect does using coping skills have on individual's stress, and work performance (p.52).

Lam (1996b) mentions some conventional approaches to dealing with some of the dilemmas faced by administrators. Training school administrators in

time management would allow for streamlined schedules, a better strategy for coping with multiple demands, and minimising the downtime on routine tasks, in order that a more efficient operation will result. Principals need to prioritise the tasks they have to complete (p.132). Lam (1996b) states his belief that these approaches are simply dealing with symptoms and not the underlying causes of administrative problems. In order to adequately deal with administrator dilemmas, it is necessary to tackle the deep-rooted problems themselves (p. 133). Many principals experience stress on the job as a result of having to find ways to deal with crises and find fresh solutions when problems arise. Lam believes that routinization of the process of problem-solving would aid in decreasing time spent on dealing with the same problems, and “assist principals in reducing the stress of dealing with dilemmas (p. 135).

In a later work, Lam and Cormier (1998) advocate intervention strategies to reduce leadership stress. School divisions need to revisit their decentralization policies and procedures to ensure that administrators are empowered to be able to carry out all the functions of their role. When principals are confronted with new and unfamiliar external demands, support from school divisions and the faculties of education could be offered. Universities need to offer “meaningful managerial and political skills” to prepare administrators to be able to interact with their environment (p. 64).

Esteve (1989) poses at least three reasons for looking at burnout among educators. Firstly, the need to assist with feelings of bewilderment and isolation is stated in order to provide support for those who are experiencing stress. Secondly, Esteve advocates calling society's attention to this problem. Parents, the media, local and national education authorities can be made aware of the new problem's facing those in the field of education. Lastly, action is needed in

terms of training, in-services, resources and a re-thinking of the relationship between responsibility, salary, and working hours. The problems of education require societal solutions (p. 5).

McGrath (1970) comments on the need to be systematic when approaching the problem of stress. Also, studies with multiple stress conditions and multiple measures of stress effects would allow for a better understanding of the complexities of coping responses (pp. 348–349). McGrath (1970) advocates stress research that is externally valid, and that encompasses longer time periods of a person's life (p.349).

There is a great deal of potential in terms of topics to examine in future studies regarding stress. The study of stress is one that would benefit from more work in particular areas in order to better understand this concept.

Summary

There are many ways of defining and studying stress. Hiebert's (1985) work provides three models of stress. Environmental, response and interactional models assist with conceptualising stress. Little work has been done in the environmental area, but there are many studies that fall under both the response and interactional models. Related terms to stress, and sources of stress were also looked at. Methodologies of stress studies take on several forms. Questionnaire, inventory, and interview techniques as well as physiological measures and Lam's typology are all important to look at in order to better understand the concept of stress.

Administrator stress is documented in the literature but a more recent trend is emerging. This trend in the literature reports administrators to be coping well in their roles, and not suffering from extreme effects from stress. Stress

management, cycles of stress in the school year and future trends to examine were also looked at in this section.

The study of stress is a complex process, involving an extensive range of contributing factors. A very brief overview of the topic of stress has been undertaken here to provide the reader with some background to this study. It is by no means complete. The reader is directed to the many current resources concerning stress.

On the basis of this Review of the Literature, I selected Lam's methodology to replicate as I wanted to determine its value; to see if it was an authentic measure of stress. The concept of being able to monitor stress based on such signals as initiating contact with the school division office interested me. Lam's instrument for measuring stress was preferred over questionnaire and other methods for the study of stress as I felt that it offered the best yield of information about the nature of stress amongst administrators. Interview technique was chosen to compliment the instrument of choice and in order to expand the parameters of the study (Lam, 1998, personal interview). A different way of capturing the level of administrator stress has been undertaken in this study. Chapter Three looks at the methodology for this research paper.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Because the community these days is very demanding of education. You know, its not just the schooling piece. The hockey team becomes an important issue for hockey parents, this other . . . the musical becomes an important issue for the music parents. And all those issues are quite important.

(Ed, Administrator, on the demands on the school).

Introduction

This study examined the nature of stress amongst a group of administrators in Manitoba. School principals working in an urban setting were chosen for this study, in an effort to replicate Lam's work with rural school administrators in Saskatchewan. Administrator stress was the focus of this qualitative and quantitative study. Job-related stress is a key factor in the lives of administrators. It is necessary to examine its nature and make up in order to control and limit its effects.

This work examined logbooks and used an interview method in order obtain information about the topic. Logbooks were employed to replicate Lam's work. Replication of another researcher's work allows for unique observations, according to Kirby & McKenna (1989). The process of replication allows the researcher to follow the maps created by the previous researcher, "you would take maps already created by some other researcher and travel the same

routes making your own observations" (p.43). Following Lam's maps, was the method of the quantitative portion of this study.

It was felt that additional valuable information could be ascertained by interviewing the participants. It was necessary to speak directly with each administrator, rather than utilize a questionnaire format, so that individual perceptions could be included. Care was taken in reporting administrator responses to questions during the interview so that no data would be excluded. The interviewer did not want to make value judgments about the worth of the comments, and therefore bias the results by omitting comments she felt did not belong.

The ten administrators in the study kept a phone call/contact log of contacts they initiated with their school division office. It is Lam's belief that a better understanding of the job-related stress an administrator is experiencing could be obtained by examining incidents where the administrators contacted their school division office. In this study, some administrators were frequent callers while others seldom made any contact with their school division office. The phone call logs were kept by the administrators for the months of January through March. At the end of March, the logbooks were returned for coding, and classifying of the administrator initiated contact with the school division office. Calls/contacts were classified into one of the eight cells of Lam's typology of sources and types of stress. Findings from this data analysis can be found in Chapter Four.

Following the three month data collection period, the administrators were asked a series of follow up questions to obtain their feelings regarding such things as stress, the supports in their job, their relationships with the individuals at the school division office, and their preparation for taking on the role of

administrator. Their responses were grouped by theme and are also found in Chapter Four.

Sample

Permission was obtained from the University of Manitoba Ethics Review Committee and the particular school division, prior to any research being initiated. Once approval had been obtained from both areas, a number of administrators from the school division were approached. Participation in the study was sought from administrators who the researcher felt would be willing to participate in the study. Representatives were sought from both genders, with different amounts of experience as administrators, from different types of schools. Potential administrators were sent letters explaining the study, and asking for their participation.

Ten administrators working in an urban school division in Manitoba were selected for the study. All of the administrators that were asked to participate in the study did choose to become involved. They are not a true random sample as willingness to participate in the study was a factor considered. The administrators were informed upon agreeing to participate in the study that their schools and identities would remain confidential. Pseudonyms were chosen for each administrator and school populations were indicated by categories, as opposed to exact population figures in an effort to keep the administrators and schools involved confidential. In a similar fashion, years of experience indicated in Table 3.1 were a combination of time spent both as a vice-principal and a principal. A summary of the information about each administrator, including the number of teaching and administration years, as well as the school population is found in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1**Descriptives for Administrators in the Study**

Administrator	School Population	Years of Experience	
		Teaching	Administration
Ann	less than 300	8	6
Barb	more than 650	14	16
Cathy	300–650	25	3
Don	less than 300	11	5
Ed	more than 650	12	15
Faye	less than 300	13	6
Gail	300–650	10	12
Hank	300–650	10	22
Ian	more than 650	28	12
John	less than 300	18	7

Of these school administrators, five were female and five were male. Although all ten administrators were employed by the same school division, they reported to different individuals, as they were within different areas of the school division. The administrators in the study represented three of the four separate areas in this particular school division. The three districts are each administered by an area superintendent. Three different area superintendents are responsible for all the schools in the study.

The administrators' schools were situated in a variety of locations, including some in areas with families of low socioeconomic status and others in

areas with families of higher socioeconomic status. Three of the administrators in the study worked at elementary schools, while three worked in schools that were middle years. Four administrators worked in senior high settings.

Participants ranged in experience from several administrators at the beginning stages of their careers to those in the middle of their careers, to others who were towards the end of their careers. All of the administrators had taught prior to entering administration. The average number of years taught by the administrators, prior to entering the administrative stream was 14.9 years. The range in number of years taught was a low of 8 years to a high of 28 years. (Mode = 10 years, Median = 12.5 years).

The administrators in the study were a diverse group with lots of teaching experience and other management experience, prior to becoming administrators. The study participants had all spent some time as vice-principals before being appointed as principals. The average length of time as a vice-principal was 4.7 years. The administrators in the study ranged in their vice-principal experience from one half of a year to 12 years. (Mode = 3 years, Median = 3.8 years). In terms of their experience as principals, study participants ranged from 1 to 10 years in the role of principal. The average number of years spent as a principal was 6.3 years. (Mode = 9 years, Median = 6.5 years).

Administrators worked in schools that ranged in size from less than 200 students to in excess of 1000 students. The average school population in the administrators' work settings was 560 students. (Mode = 300 students, Median = 476 students).

The main reasons for an administrator being included in the study were a willingness to participate, and motivation to cooperate by completing the tasks

asked of them. Selection of this diverse group involved contacting potential participants from a list of all the administrators in the school division until all the categories were filled. All ten of the administrators chose to become involved in the study after they were approached. I tried to select individuals who would find participating in the study to not be a great burden. Equal representation was sought by type of school, gender, and level of experience.

It was the hope that some of the administrators in the study would be generally interested in the research questions, and would anticipate any findings or recommendations that might be of benefit to them in their own management of stress.

Methods of Data Collection

The principals in the study were given a logbook to record their phone calls to the Division office administration (i.e., the area superintendent, the secretary–treasurer, and program consultants, etc.). Principals kept track of these calls for a period of three months, beginning in January and ending in March. Relevant details of the contacts were noted, including the date, time, individual called, and the nature of the call.

A code was utilized to place each of the contacts/calls into one of the eight source–type of administrative stresses as described by Lam and Cormier (1998), and outlined in Chapter Two. Calls were recorded in chronological order in each of the principals' notebooks for ease in organizing later on. Principals were encouraged to record their calls/contacts in their logs at the time of the contact or when practical, immediately following the call/contact. The difficulty in remembering what had taken place at the end of the day was

mentioned in the initial discussion with each administrator. All of the administrators preferred to keep track of their calls themselves. No one chose to have the calls recorded by office staff. All of the calls/contacts recorded by the administrators were able to be classified into one of the eight categories. No calls were excluded from the data.

Data collected in this manner was in keeping with the definition of stress utilized in this study, that an individual is unable to cope with the demands of a given situation. Calls/contacts were made by the administrators, presumably because the "situational demands could so outweigh individual resources that seeking assistance and guidance from central office became a logical response to cope with otherwise 'insurmountable' challenges" (Lam & Cormier, 1998, p.57).

Upon completion of the three month record keeping period, principals were interviewed by the researcher. An interview technique was chosen so as to obtain a different perspective from that provided by the quantitative data. Interviews allowed the participants to tell what was important and meaningful to them. It allowed emotions to be expressed, as some of the administrators were very passionate as they described some aspects of their job, and their concern for students in their care.

Kirby & McKenna (1989) define interviews as "a special form of interaction between people, the purpose of which is to elicit information by asking questions" (p.66). They state that the basis of all interviews is the question. Kirby and McKenna (1989) also mention the sources of interview questions as from personal reflections, interactions with other people, and from readings while researching (p. 66). Woods (1986) states that interviews are often the only way of finding out people's perspectives, "but it is also a means of

'making things happen' and stimulating the flow of data" (p. 62).

Interviews were conducted with each of the ten administrators in the study at a time and location convenient to them. All of them chose to be interviewed at their workplace. The advantage of interviewing participants on their own territory is emphasized by Hammersly & Atkinson (1993), "It allows them to relax much more than they would in less familiar surroundings" (p.150).

The interviews took place at a variety of times throughout the day. Interview lengths varied from twenty minutes to just over an hour. Administrators were given copies of the interview questions prior to the interview. Some chose to make notes prior to our meeting, and referred to them throughout the interview. Some of the administrators preferred to speak without any notes. Prior to the interview starting, participants were reminded that they were free to decline to answer any or all of the interview questions. One administrator declined to answer one question.

Input was sought, from the administrators, concerning their perspective of stress in their workplace. Interviews were taped and later transcribed with all identifying characteristics removed. The tapes will be destroyed following the approval of this thesis. Administrators were informed that their telephone logs, interview tapes and transcripts of their responses would be kept in the strictest confidence. It was made clear to the participants in this study that they had the right to withdraw at any time, from the study should they so choose. A summary of the thesis will be provided to the individual participants upon completion of the report.

It is the intent that this interview, in addition to providing information for the researcher, might prove useful for the administrators themselves in terms of an overall look at the stressful events and timing in the school year.

Methods of Data Analysis

Data analysis took on several forms. The initial set of data analyses examined the nature and the sources of job-related stress experienced by administrators in the study. A Chi-square analysis was performed on the number of calls/contacts reported by the administrators throughout the three months of the study to determine if there were any significant differences in the distribution of the type of stressful incidents observed, from that which was expected.

A second set of analyses looked at the time of year, and cycle of school events to determine if certain times of the year were more stressful than others. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to detect if there was any statistically significant difference in the numbers of stressful incidents recorded from month to month.

Thirdly, the qualitative data from the interviews with each of the administrators were examined for common themes. Lastly the data were examined to determine if there was any difference between the results obtained in this study with the urban administrators, and those results obtained by Lam and Cormier in their work with rural administrators.

These data analyses were helpful in answering the research questions and in learning more about the nature of stress amongst urban school administrators.

Reliability

This study utilized logbooks over a three month span during the school year. Data were collected by the administrators as they recorded their own

calls/contacts with their school division office. Administrators recorded calls/contacts over the same time period throughout the study. Interviews were conducted with the participants as well. Both forms of data were analyzed for this research paper. Another researcher examining this data should obtain the same results. Should another study be carried out with a similar group of administrators, similar results should be obtained.

Kirby and McKenna (1989) refer to reliability as “the trust or confidence we have when speaking about the description and analysis of our data. Does the description truly represent what we found?” (p. 35). In this research paper, administrator recorded data represents what was taking place in his or her school during the three months of the study. Some calls/contacts were not recorded in the administrator logbooks. At least two administrators admitted that they “forgot” to include a few calls, particularly at the beginning of the study. It is likely that these unrecorded calls are few in number and would not represent a significant difference in the results.

Validity

This study examined the nature of stress by looking at the events taking place within individual schools that warrant phone calls or contacts with the school division office. Lam has equated calls/contacts with stressful events taking place within the school setting. One administrator stated during the interview, that she did not feel any stress when she contacted her school division office, while another administrator mentioned how relieved he felt when dealing with a difficult situation and getting to speak with his superintendent. Are all of the administrators contacting their division office when they experience stress? Perhaps other coping techniques and support networks

were utilized by the administrators in the study.

Woods (1986) comments on the possible influences affecting the results obtained:

In addition, the researcher will be alerted to possible influences operating on informants – ulterior motives, the desire to please, situational factors like a recent traumatic incident (for example, a disruptive incident), values, etc. – all of which may colour their judgments... (p.83).

Additional areas of concern will be dealt with in the Limitations of the Study section.

Limitations of the Study

This study represented a look at the issue of stress from the point of view of ten individuals in one particular school division during a three month period of time. The results are really a snapshot of the administrators' perceptions regarding job-related stress, and are not necessarily representative of the whole school year. Had the study occurred at a different point in the school year, perhaps the administrators would have been dealing with different issues in their schools and may have experienced different frequencies of calls/contacts with their school division office.

Sample selection is another factor to consider when looking at potential limitations to the study. Administrators were selected by approaching potential participants to seek their participation until ten were found. They are not a random sample of the administrators in the school division. Bias might have played a role in their selection.

Logbooks were used to collect data, and participants may not have recorded all calls/contacts for a variety of reasons. The pace at which things

were happening in the school often precluded recording the call or contact at the time it was made. Later in the day, or several days later, details were often not accurately recalled according to one administrator.

This study only dealt with administrator initiated calls/contacts. One administrator informed me that he felt it caused him more concern when his school division called him, as he knew that meant he would have some task to perform, or some piece of work that would need to be generated as a result. By not including these calls in the study, perhaps some stressful incidents were not being included. Likewise, it was pointed out that calls to parents were not included in the data collection, and often she found these to be the worst sorts of calls to make, and actually found them to be quite stressful.

Potential limitations to the study include the snapshot, three month time span of the study, sample selection, logbook format and the fact that only administrator-initiated calls were included in the data collection.

Summary

This qualitative and quantitative study examined the nature of stress amongst a group of urban administrators in Manitoba. A replication of Lam's work was undertaken as well as interviews with each of the participants in the study. Both methods of data collection and analyses yield important results that contribute to a better understanding of this issue. There are limitations to the study that have been looked at. The next section will continue the examination of the data collected as the results are presented.

CHAPTER FOUR

Data Analysis

You're kind of in the middle . . . you're kind of in the center. So the kids, the problems with the kids come at you, problems with teachers come at you, problems with parents come at you. They come down on you from the administration, and the government, and you're just in the middle.

(Cathy, Administrator).

Section A: Logbook Analysis

Administrators' logbooks were examined following the three month data collection period. Calls/contacts with the school division office were categorized into the eight cells of Lam's typology. Each call/contact was assigned one category. Calls/contacts with a multi-purpose, as identified by the administrators, were allocated by the first, or primary purpose indicated. The total number of calls/contacts initiated by the ten administrators over the 3 month time span was 364. Some administrators contacted the division office on a frequent basis while others experienced long periods of time between calls/contacts. See Table 4.1 and Figure 4.1 for a breakdown of the calls/contacts by month, for each administrator in the study.

Table 4.1**Administrators' Calls/Contacts by Month**

Administrator	Month			Total	Monthly Average
	January	February	March		
Ann	6	8	5	19	6.3
Barb	29	8	15	52	17.3
Cathy	8	3	11	22	7.3
Don	8	4	6	18	6
Ed	5	8	0	13	4.3
Faye	9	12	5	26	8.7
Gail	25	18	13	56	18.7
Hank	28	24	31	83	27.7
Ian	5	7	16	28	9.3
John	14	21	12	47	15.7
Monthly Totals	137	113	114	$\bar{X} = 36.4$	$\bar{X} = 12.13$

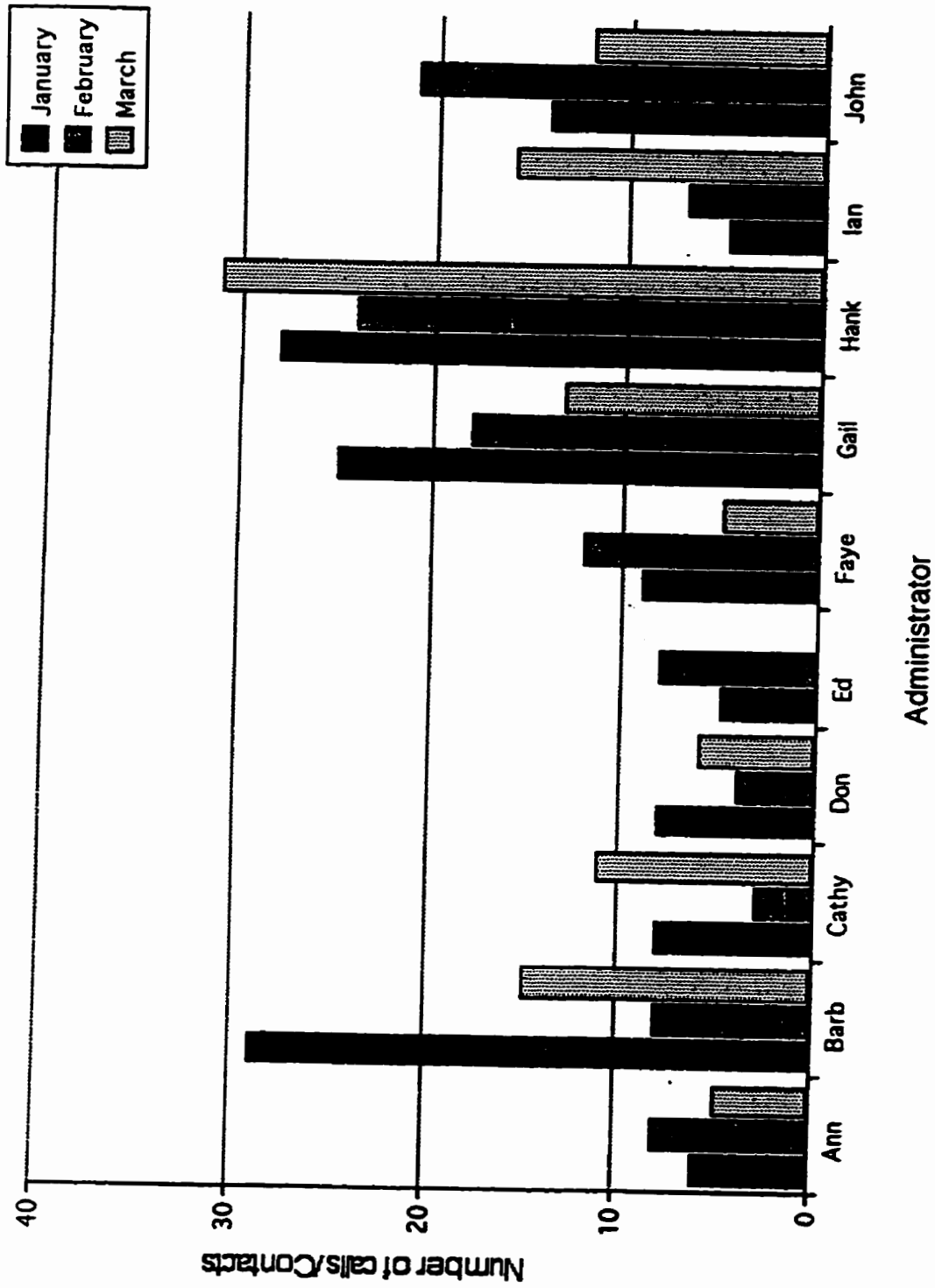


Figure 4.1 Administrators' Calls/Contacts with the School Division Office For January, February & March

Quantitative analysis of the data collected from the ten administrators over the three months of the study took two forms. Firstly, the data were examined as to the different sources and types of "stress" as postulated by Lam (Lam, 1984, p.48). Secondly, the data were analyzed for the variation in the number of calls/contacts on a month to month basis.

Each of these analyses will be dealt with separately. The examination of the data will begin with a look at the sources and types of the reported incidents of stress.

Analysis of Sources and Types of Reported Incidents

The data were analyzed to determine if there were any significant difference in the sources and types of the reported calls/contacts the administrators initiated with their school division office. A Chi-square test was chosen for this analysis. Such a non parametric test of significance was selected, as the data were in the form of frequencies, in more than two mutually exclusive categories (Gay, p.483). This test was also selected in order to replicate Lam and Cormier's analysis of their data (Lam & Cormier, 1998, p. 57). The Chi-square test compares the actual proportions obtained in the various categories with the proportions one would have expected for each category. The assumption is made that given a normal distribution, the proportions in each of the eight categories, or sources and types of stress should be equal.

The results indicate that there was a significant difference between the numbers of reported contacts/calls by the administrators, in the eight cells, than that expected due to chance alone. ($\chi^2 = 496.44$, $df = 3$, $p = .0001$) The null hypothesis would be rejected. There was a significant difference between observed and expected proportions amongst the sources and types of stress in

Lam's eight cell typology. In addition to examining the statistical significance of these results, it is important to look at the meaningfulness of these results. Findings from this analysis of the sources and types of the reported incidents are summarized in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2

Sources and Types of Administrator Calls/Contacts

Type of Stress	Sources of Stress				Total	%
	Extra-organizational No.	Extra-organizational %	Intra-organizational No.	Intra-organizational %		
Role-based	3	0.82	4	1.10	7	1.9
Task-based	45	12.36	172	47.25	217	59.6
Boundary-Spanning	79	21.70	25	6.87	104	28.6
Conflict Mediating	17	4.67	19	5.22	36	9.9
Totals	144	39.55	220	60.44	364	100

$\chi^2 = 496.44$ $df = 3$ significant at .0001 level

From Table 4.2, it is evident that the incidents from the intra-organizational source (220) were more numerous than those from the extra-organizational source (144). The percentages of the total calls/contacts

were 60.44 % and 39.55 % respectively. This differs from Lam and Cormier's work as they found the number of incidents to be equally represented between the extra-organizational and intra-organizational sources (Lam & Cormier, 1998, p. 58). These two sources, extra-organizational and intra-organizational will be examined in greater detail to provide information about the distribution of reported incidents of stress by the ten administrators in the study.

Extra-organizational Sources

Extra-organizational sources of reported incidents are those that arise from the administrators' interaction with their organizational external environment (Lam, 1988, p. 251). The extra-organizational sources accounted for 39.55 % of the total calls/contacts reported by the administrators in the study, and are 144 in number. The four types of stress will be looked at first starting with the most numerous one, the boundary-spanning category.

As with Lam and Cormier's study, the boundary-spanning category contained the most number of calls/contacts in the extra-organizational source. This study found 79 incidents in this category, representing nearly 22 % of all reported incidents, and over half of those in the extra-organizational category. This compares with Lam and Cormier's study where they reported 17 incidents for 19 % of the total calls and 39 % of the extra-organizational source (Lam & Cormier, 1998, p. 58). It should be noted at this time, that like Lam and Cormier's work, this category represented the second largest overall, second only to the intra-organizational task-based category.

Boundary-spanning activities include the pressures of dealing with external stake holders, and external agencies. Such groups as law enforcement, health and social agencies would fall under this category, as

would liaison with interest groups. This category also contains stressors resulting from the pressures of maintaining harmony amongst the various ethnic groups in the community. The responsibility for heritage programs and/or secondary language programs also falls in the boundary-spanning type (Lam, 1984, pp. 48-9).

The second most frequent type of the extra-organizational source was task-based, with 45 call/contacts for just over 12 % of the total incidents, and 31 % of the extra-organizational category. This type represents financial matters and concerns, and resource adequacy. Lam (1984) summarized the relationship of the economic conditions to this type of stressor:

From the school's economic environment, the amount of financial support and resources available to the school operation will determine the degree of fiscal difficulties and the adequacy of technical, curriculum and personnel resources that are at the disposal of the school principals. Conceivably, understanding of the perceived economic conditions governs the degree of externally induced task-based stress to which school administrators are subject (p.48).

Lam and Cormier (1998) reported the number of calls/contacts in this category as being third in frequency, with twenty percent of the total incidents, or 10 % of the total reported incidents of stress (p. 58).

Next in importance in terms of frequency with just over 4 % of the total contacts/calls (17 in total) was the conflict-mediating type. This category representing 12 % of the extra-organizational source summarizes value compatibility and looks at the compatibility of school and student social values. Or, to state this another way, the compatibility of school and student subculture values (Lam, 1984, p. 49). Lam and Cormier reported this category to be his least frequent under the extra-organizational source, with 16 % of the extra-organizational, or 8 % of the total incidents (Lam & Cormier, 1998, p. 58).

The category with the least number of incidents reported was the role-based, with only 3 incidents for just less than one percent of the total calls/contacts, or 2 % of the incidents in the extra-organizational category. It is interesting to note that Lam and Cormier's study reported this to be the second highest category under the extra-organizational source. They reported one quarter of the extra-organizational incidents and 12 % of the total reported incidents in the study to be in the role-based type of stress (Lam, 1998, p.58). This category includes the implementation of site-based management, and deals with pressure resulting from a change in the power distribution. It really examines control and direction, particularly with the clarity of direction from above and the degree of local autonomy (Lam, 1984, p.48).

The small representation of reported incidents in the role-based category in this study, as compared to Lam and Cormier's work, might be due to a variety of reasons. The school division studied in this work might provide clear direction from above, allowing administrators to function well, and more independently in this system. Perhaps this urban school division utilized in this study is farther along in their adjustment process with site-based management. Perhaps this school division has managed to move beyond any earlier difficulties they may have encountered previously. Yet another possible explanation for the few scores in this category could lie with the school division office having given more power to the administrators in this particular division than the administrators received in Lam and Cormier's study.

Intra-organizational Sources

The intra-organizational source represented 60.44 % of the total calls/contacts reported in the study. This is a larger amount of reported incidents

than that found for the extra-organizational category, by over half as much.

The largest number of reported contacts/calls falls under the intra-organizational, task-based category, representing 47 % of the 364 reported calls/contacts in the study, and 78 % of the incidents in the intra-organizational source type. It was a surprise that this single category contained so many calls/contacts, and was so much higher than the other categories. The task-based type deals with such functions as human resources, personnel, staffing, supervision of instruction, identification of program needs and logistics of implementing special needs and curricula (Lam, 1984, p.49). In short, this category deals with an administrator's attempt to maintain effective school operation while coping with various organizational needs and demands. Lam (1984), reported this category as having a maintenance function, and keeping up with the various routine demands on the job (Lam, 1984, p. 49).

Lam and Cormier (1998) also reported this category as being the one with the highest number of incidents at one quarter of the total incidents, or one half of those in the intra-organizational source (Lam & Cormier, 1998, p.58). They stated how this maintenance function category could easily be subdivided into two separate entities. The first, Lam and Cormier commented on as being "the logistical problems of mainstreaming special needs children while support staff (ie., teaching assistants, resource teachers and resource personnel from the school division) were being reduced" (Lam & Cormier, 1998, p.59). The second heading under which Lam and Cormier subdivided this Intra-organizational task-based category was that of not affecting the existing programs, while coping with the pressures of taking on new curricula (Lam & Cormier, 1998, p.59). They commented on the concern over this latter task. "Serious doubts were raised concerning the schools' ability to fulfil new

instructional goals while the human, technical and curriculum resources were not available to teachers" (Lam & Cormier, 1998, p.59). Truly this seems to be an onerous task to accomplish without the necessary supports in place.

The second most numerous category under the Intra-organizational source was the boundary-spanning function with 25 incidents reported, or 6.87 % of the total calls/contacts, and 11 % of the incidents in the intra-organizational source. This category dealt with supervision, both of staff and teachers in matters of instruction and learning (Lam & Cormier, 1998, p. 60). It also contained items pertaining to communication and intrapersonal contacts within the school. Communication between Parent Advisory Councils, staff, or students would be found in this category (Lam, 1984, pp. 49-50). Lam and Cormier reported this category to be less numerous, with only three incidents. They stated that a few less experienced administrators searching for more effective ways of assisting a few unmotivated staff and also some at-risk students were causes in this category (Lam & Cormier, 1998, p. 60).

Next in frequency in the intra-organizational source, was the conflict-mediating type. This category represented 5.22 % of the total reported calls/contacts with a raw score of 19 incidents. This was indicative of nearly 9 % of the calls/contacts in the intra-organizational source. One would expect that dealing with conflict between staff members, or between students is a large component of an administrator's job, and it was surprising to see this category ranked third most numerous of the four, under the intra-organizational source. Lam and Cormier's work found this to be the second most prolific category with over 12 % of the contacts/calls for the intra-organizational source, and 12.5 % of the total incidents in the study (Lam & Cormier, 1998, p.58). They further sub-divided this type into two sub types of conflict. Firstly, they mentioned the

inter-personal conflict among school staff. The second type indicated, and described as the more serious of the two, was the staff inter-group conflict. This latter type is "often as an outcome of the competition for limited resources or situations of jurisdictional ambiguity," according to Lam and Cormier (p. 59).

The category with the lowest frequency in the intra-organizational source was the role-based type. Lam and Cormier (1998) report this category to be more numerous with 18 % of the incidents of the intra-organizational type, or 9 % of the total incidents (p. 58). This study indicates only 4 incidents, or just over 1 % of the total number of reported calls/contacts and nearly 2 % of those in the intra-organizational source. The role-based type deals with the pressure of reconciling authority from two areas. The authority from bureaucratic or formal sources, is in competition with professional authority. This category also deals with decision-making dilemmas, that is, group decision-making versus principal initiated decisions (Lam & Cormier, 1998, p.60). Lam also described the principal's "formal authority in structuring, managing and giving direction to a complex mix of human and material resources" conflicting with "staff's need for greater autonomy in the process of professionalization" (Lam, 1984, p.49).

The low number of reported incidents in this category, as reported in this study, might result from a variety of reasons. Perhaps the authority structure is more clear in schools in certain divisions, or maybe a balance has been struck in this area, and there is not as much pressure to reconcile bureaucratic and professional authority.

Analysis on a Month by Month Basis

The month with the greatest number of reported calls/contacts was January, with 137 incidents (see Table 4.1 and Figure 4.1). February and March

each saw an similar number of phone calls/contacts made by the administrators of 113 and 114 respectively. The February and March totals show a decrease from that reported in January. (See Figure 4.2) It should be noted that one administrator did not report any calls for March, and this may have affected the results to some degree.

To examine the difference in means between the three months, a one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was chosen. This test is appropriate as it looks at “the amount of variability (the differences) between the means of the groups, compared with the amount of variability among the individual scores within each group” (Kranzler & Moursund, 1995, p. 89). A One-way ANOVA was performed to see if there were any differences between the three months. The difference between the means of the three months was found to be not statistically significant $F(7, 356) = 1.22, p = .29$ (see Table 4.3). Follow up analysis was unnecessary with this non significant finding.

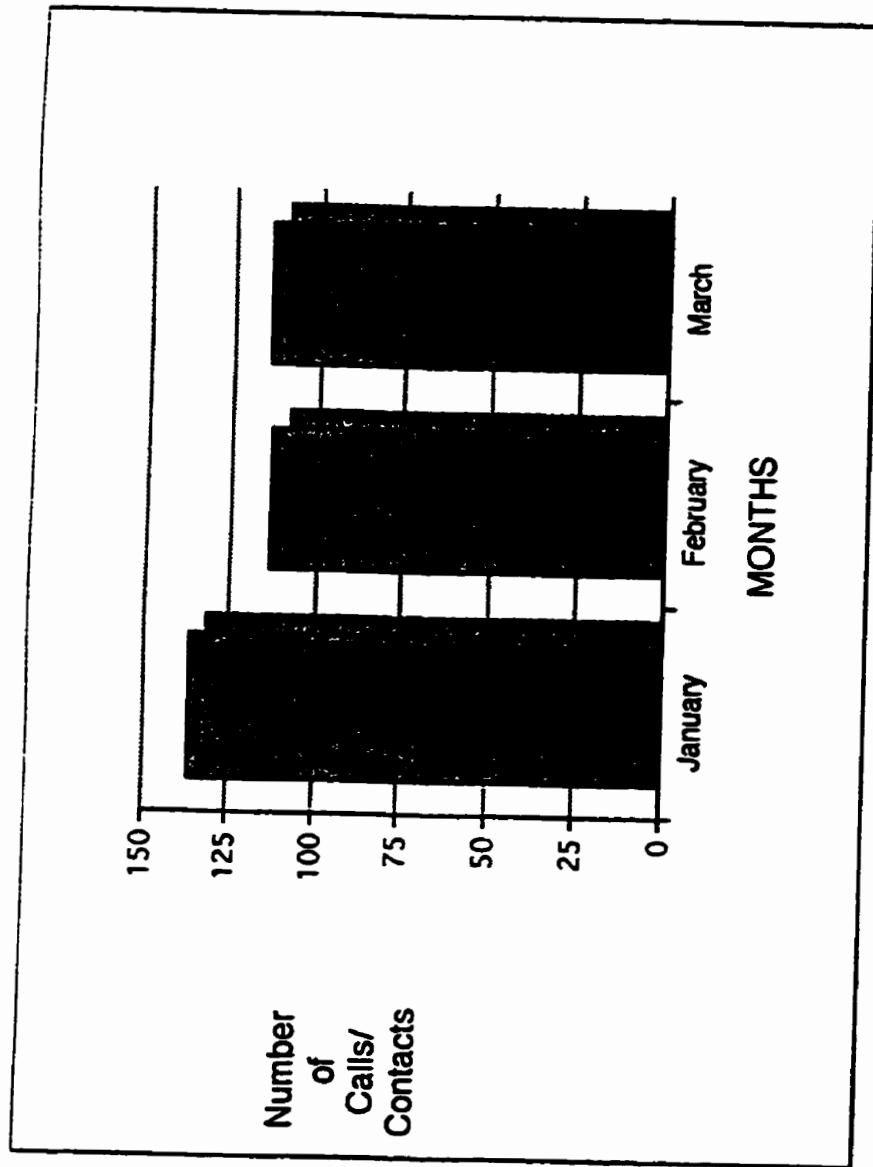


Figure 4.2

Total Administrator Calls/Contacts for January, February, & March

Table 4.3

Analysis of Variance for Administrators' Reported Calls/Contacts by Month

<u>Source</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>SS</u>	<u>MS</u>	<u>F</u>
Between group	7	5.86	0.84	1.22 *
Within group	356	243.68	0.69	
Total	363	249.54		

* Not significant

Lam and Cormier (1998) indicate a significant difference between the months in their study, with June showing significantly more stressful incidents than any of the other months (January to June) (Lam & Cormier, 1998, p.61). In addition, stressful incidents in February were found to be significantly more frequent in number than those in March (Lam & Cormier, 1998, p.61).

Further examination of the relationship between the different months is warranted.

Section B: Interview Analysis

Careful examination of the transcripts of the interviews with the administrators yielded a number of themes. For the most part, this section is organized by question, with one theme emerging from each of the questions. Some of the administrator responses have been interspersed where they fit best.

Stress is a part of life and how we choose to deal with stress is the key.
(John, Administrator).

Themes in the Data: Participants' Definitions of Stress

The first interview question dealt with the meaning of stress. The definition of stress has been dealt with in an earlier section of this work. (see Chapter 2) Hiebert & Basserman (1986) refer to stress as the result when the demands of a given situation exceed an individual's coping skills (p.1). A time factor could be present in this particular definition. Perhaps an individual is unable to cope as he does not have enough time to seek out resources, or is unable to find the time to take care of all the demands placed upon him.

When asked what stress meant to each of them, the administrators included time, or items relating to time, emotional or physical factors, or control. Some administrators cited more than one item in their personal definition of stress. The most frequently stated terms in the participants' definitions of stress were items that involved time.

The majority of the administrators mentioned time, or items related to time management as personal stressors. Participants used such expressions as "fitting everything in", "time limits", "time management", and "deadlines" in their

definitions. Ed summed up his feelings on stress, as he stated “ I think the stress for me comes more when you can't get to things that you know you need to deal with as soon as you can but there are just not enough hours in the day.” Ed continued with his thoughts on stress as being time dependent and the resultant loss of control this sense of incompleteness brings:

I think that the only time I think that I feel a sense of stress, is over things when you just can't fit them in time wise. It's more of a time management kind of stress.. Where you're hit with so many of things all at once, that you can't get to them as soon as you want to get to them. And that creates a stress, because you can't complete things. So you're doing a partial job, sometimes of going through that piece.

Barb echoed Ed's comments with respect to time, as she gave her opinion regarding stress, “You get a feeling that its coming from all directions and a high frequency of requests, decisions, challenges all at once.” Ian again used the issue of time, as he mentioned deadlines, and lots of things to do as being stressful for him. He also stated that stress is different for everyone.

John referred to emotional or physical factors causing some kind of body response as his definition of stress. Anything that makes him react, he views as a stressor. Ann also commented on the emotional and physical component, stating, “I feel stress... when I'm emotionally, physically, and mentally drained.” Ann went on to clarify her response by adding, “And its when I'm feeling like that and everybody else has needs that they are more needier than I am, and so my needs get shelved.” Her answer indicates a feeling of a loss of control. This theme is evident in the responses of other administrators as well. Cathy also referred to emotional factors in her description of what stress means to her. “And, sometimes my emotions are close to the surface, so I feel like getting angry or I feel like getting upset much faster than I normally do. And I have a desire to go and do something physical.” Cathy stated her belief that when she

is stressed, she is unable to shift gears as quickly as she would like. If there is a crisis and something else happens that demands her attention, she feels that she is not able to transfer her thoughts and energy to the new situation fast enough. Several of the administrators qualified their definition of stress with a description of how stress affected them. For example one individual stated how she tended to eat when she felt stressed.

Gail stated she is aware of her own high stress level, if she is waking up at night and thinking about work, or if she is losing sleep over a work issue. Gail postulated that her procrastination might be a contributing factor to her stress at times. She mentioned that she could probably complete tasks as soon as she received them, but that she liked to think about things and mull them over for awhile first.

Several of the administrators in the study stated that stress to them meant more than one thing. At least one administrator mentioned the factor of time as well as other items. One of the common elements cited by several administrators throughout the interviews was the issue of staffing. They found having to make staff cuts to be a very stressful time.

In summary, the administrators cited time, emotional and physical factors, a loss of control and multiple factors in their personal definitions of the meaning of stress. This initial interview question served to open the conversation and put the participants at ease as we spoke about their personal definition of stress. A natural progression from this theme of personal stress definition was to move to the administrators' personal perceptions of their own stress levels.

I think a lot of people in our position anyway, in terms of administration, have to be really good at dealing with stress. Otherwise it'll eat you up. It'll eat you health wise, emotionally, physically and the whole bit.

(Ann, Administrator, in response to stress).

Themes in the Data: Personal Perception of Current Stress Level

Participants in the study were asked to rate their current stress level at the time of the interview. The responses to this question ranged from low, okay, average and moderate. None of the participants described their stress level as high or extreme. As the interviews took place at various times throughout the day, and on different days, answers to this question become very much personal ratings. Comparison of stress levels between administrators would have to take into account what was happening in each school at the time of the interview. Also, the various personal situations of each administrator would need to be considered. As this study is not examining personal factors, work environment will be looked at.

Administrator self-reported stress level here may have been linked to the time of day the interview took place. For instance, interviews first thing in the day, or during the morning would likely see an administrator rate their stress level as low, if no stress producing situations had occurred yet. Had the interviews with these administrators occurred later in the day, perhaps their answers to this question would have been different.

The majority of the administrators (six) rated their current stress level as "low". Of these six, four of the interviews took place in the morning, prior to 9:30 a.m. The six administrators who chose a low rating for their stress level, in most

cases, qualified that ranking with an adjective. Some of the phrases they used include, "fairly low", "probably low", "very low", and "excellent – low".

Hank rated his current stress level as "okay". His interview took place mid-morning on a Monday and the phone rang several times in the first few minutes of the interview. Hank spoke to one of his secretaries and asked her to hold his phone calls. For the rest of the interview, the calls were transferred to voice mail. By the conclusion of the interview, Hank had several messages to check. Hank qualified his initial description of his present stress level to "pretty good." He then went on to elaborate that for him, Monday meant "fall out from weekend stuff." He explained how he had been very physically active at his home on the weekend working on projects. Hank commented on his physical fatigue, and how that was good to do, "It takes away, it adds another level of stress but its good physical stress." In stressing his body physically, Hank is better able to deal with other forms of stress.

The interview with Faye took place after school, around 4:00 p.m. Faye referred to her stress level as average, but commented on how the day before had been fairly stressful. She went on to describe a situation that had caused her stress and how she handled it. Perhaps she was still experiencing lingering effects from the hectic events of the previous day. Faye mentioned her use of "high drama in appropriate places" when dealing with certain students, in order to get her point across. It may appear that she is stressed, as her voice is raised above its normal level. Faye stated how she is just playing a role, and how effective it can be. Faye continued her response by indicating her stress level "would have been higher yesterday than it is today." She was quick to state that although she experiences stress in her role as an administrator, she does not attribute it to interacting with her superintendent, "But I have to tell you that there

is little that is ever related to dealing with my superintendent.”

Although reporting her stress level as low at the time of the interview, Barb also described an occasion recently where her stress level had been higher. She was trying to meet a deadline, and given very little time frame to work with. The deadline was met, with time to spare, due to the cooperation of several individuals. Barb gave no indication she was experiencing any lingering stress as a result.

Two individuals, Cathy and Ann reported “moderate” stress levels. Cathy’s interview took place at the end of a rather busy school day. She referred to her own stress level, “I guess today’s moderate. Today is interesting. We’ve had a lot of action today.” Ann also rated her present stress level as moderate, “Its neither high nor low. So its pretty moderate. Pretty normal.” Here Ann’s rating of moderate as being normal might indicate her usual state. To different people relative terms like low, moderate and high may mean different things.

Other administrators also elaborated on their answers. John commented on his low stress level, and clarified that by stating that he didn’t often drink beverages containing caffeine. He describes coffee and its effects, “I don’t drink coffee. Once in a while. Not often. That’s a stressor. It increases your heart rate artificially. Anything that does that artificially, I don’t think it can be that good for you.” John prefers to select decaffeinated coffee. Don stated how he finds himself to be more “tired” than stressed at the end of the day. One would expect the hectic times to be more stress producing than the quiet times. The reverse seems to be true in Don’s case. He mentioned how he finds the quiet days to be as fatigue producing, as the really busy, hectic days:

Its kind of funny, days that you have too little to do, I'm just as tired as days when I have too much to do. I'd much rather be doing too much. . . . The more I have to do that keeps me busy during the day, I kind of enjoy those days. I feel productive, useful, time goes very fast. That's less stressful for me.

Gail also elaborated on her response. Although reporting a low stress level as she does not have many deadlines in the near future, Gail is looking ahead to a more stressful time approaching:

Staffing's coming up so I know that's stressful. It's been in the back of my mind for about two weeks now. . . . So you know its going to be some changes for some people, that's always stressful. You anticipate that you're going to have staff in your office angry, or tearful or whatever. Because I tend to be a bit emotional, I know that I'll be in tears just as much as the teachers will be.

The issue of staffing is of concern for many administrators in the study.

In short, the ten administrators reported that they were generally not very stressed at the time of the interview. Several administrators mentioned times when they did feel stressed. The issue of what each of the administrators finds stressful for them will be dealt with next.

That stresses me out. Just the effort of staying cool stresses me out more than anything.

(Cathy, Administrator, on dealing with a staff member.)

Themes in the Data: Stressful Events in a Day of an Administrator

When asked to name the more stressful events they face in a day, the administrators came up with stressors such as students, staff and parents. As

well, the study participants had a number of other concerns including relationships, perceptions, problem solving, meeting deadlines, dealing with misrepresentation by the media, creating agendas, and coping with the rapid pace of a multitude of events.

Seven of the administrators cited students, and issues around students as being some of the more stressful events in their day. Ann mentioned dealing with “students in crisis” as one of the more stressful things she encounters. She commented on her “frustrations with the social system and not being able to meet their needs” as also being a source of stress for her. Hank echoed Ann’s comments when he referred to “students who are really out of control, where we’re just not able to make the proper connections we want to make. . . . And they not only hurt themselves, but they take other kids with them, and they cause that level of chaos.” He went on to mention how it was stressful to be dealing with this, and being “the bottom line”, coupled with all of the other responsibilities he faces.

Ian identified a stressor for him as being a situation “when something bad happens for a kid”, like an incident at home where Child and Family Services is involved. He went on to state how he did not know whether he would call such an event stressful. Rather, he described an emotional stress and a life stress, as different stresses:

One is like the emotional one. When something like that happens . . . to me it is not a work stress. That’s a life stress . . . I get more emotional in my heart and in my feelings when those happen than I do over deadlines, and paperwork and that kind of nonsense. But it still causes stress, or you react, chemically or whatever.

Ed too mentioned situations where students are in danger, as being stressful for him. Faye also commented on her feelings of helplessness at being unable to

help students who are in trouble. She referred to students who are emotionally ill. Although all the available resources have been accessed for that child, it is going to take a long time for the child to show any improvement. For Faye, this is the most stressful thing, dealing with the students who are emotionally ill.

Gail spoke about her concern over interacting with certain types of students, and the resultant stress:

Dealing with angry kids, or noncompliant, or defiant kids is always stressful too because its exasperating. And in some cases it doesn't matter what you say to them, they're so resistant that you can't get through to them. And when you can't reason with kids, they effectively shut you down. They control what you do.

In addition to dealing with certain situations with students, the administrators mentioned interactions with staff, second most frequently, when asked to relate stressful events in their day. Faye commented on her frustration when she has to deal with people "who don't want to do their job, hate their job, or bully other people." She also remarked on situations where "teachers do impossible things", that is when they make decisions based on "anything but common sense." The result in such a situation is intervention by the administrator, according to Faye.

Barb also stated how dealing with staff members in various situations would be stress producing. She said that it was easier to deal with students as expectations were usually pretty clear. The difference in dealing with staff who are colleagues is mentioned by Barb, as she comments on what she finds challenging in her day, "Its colleague to colleague situations, unprofessional conduct, those kind of things. Inappropriate comments, morale kind of issues. . . . Those would be the ones that are more challenging, dealing with peers." It is interesting to note Barb's language in that she chooses to say "more

challenging” as opposed to stressful to describe these interactions.

Another administrator who mentioned dealing with staff is Cathy. She stated her frustration in trying to stay calm while dealing with unreasonable staff members, “that stresses me out. Just the effort of staying cool stresses me out more than anything.” Don mentioned dealing with staff members who are negative as being a stressor for him. He commented on the staff member who works very hard at being negative and endeavouring to have others on staff see their way. Don shared a particular incident of dealing with a staff member who was quite negative. After spending time with him, and dealing with his issues, the staff member has changed his attitude somewhat for the better. The result has been that this issue has gone away, and with it, the stress it caused.

In addition to students, and staff, some of the administrators mentioned dealing with parents as being a stressful event in their day. Gail commented on “hostile parents” while Don brought up “unreasonable parents and kids” who create stress. He described a situation of dealing with an unreasonable parent who went out of his way to make an administrator’s life miserable:

I think perhaps the most stressful times are when you’re trying to deal with parents and kids who you know they need to take a certain perspective, but they are very unreasonable. They are protecting their children. They are enabling their children to behave in this negative way. And not only are they not seeing your perspective, they are willing to make your life even more miserable. They are beginning to phone superintendents, they are beginning to phone politicians. They actually come to into the school in a violent manner, confrontational, and they are unable to see what their child, or what they have contributed to the situation. I think those are my most stressful situations.

Ed mentioned issues around relationships as the most stressful things to deal with. The many interactions between staff, students, and other workers in the building was stated. Ed commented on personal issues, as well as health

and family issues affecting the interaction:

You have a myriad of relationships and personal issues outside, and health issues and family issues. And so you're dealing with a myriad of personal situations and relationships. You're blending work and health and all those kinds of things. So some of those can be kind of stressful when you're aware of staff being under stress and trying to cope, and then their relationships with other people, and the impact of all those things.

Ian remarked on another issue that causes him stress. He referred to "ugly personal things" as a stressor. Ian was quick to point out that he did not mean problems with staff, but the unexpected things that come up and just how awful they can be. He stated how in dealing with these incidents, it is part of his job, and it is managing people:

And in this business, you get the worst things you could imagine. And then at that point it becomes part of your job. It is just a job in the managing people. It has nothing to do with . . . what we consider, or a lot of people would consider stress. Work. Job. Principal. That kind of thing. That's human management. Totally unexpected. That's the worst one I think.

Ian was referring to the difficulty of having to inform a staff member of some terrible news. He then went on to describe another situation where a student at the school became ill, and how that impacted on him and the rest of the staff and students in the school.

John felt that problem solving was the most stressful aspect of his job. It might be straightening out conflicts between staff members, students, or staff and students, or even the school board dealing with an issue. To John, his job is problem solving, but that too takes its toll:

You've got to make it flow. You've got to make something work. That's a neat thing, and its useful and I think that's what my job is. But if, when you do it all day long every day, that's a stress. Like who's solving my problems for me. And those kinds of things.

John continued describing his stressors by mentioning another stressor, that is dealing with perceptions. In every situation each of the participants perceive the events differently. He used the example of a child who goes home and tells his parent a version of what went on at school. John stated the need to make the parent understand the other side to his child's story and the role John would play in helping the parent to understand.

In addition to the stressors previously mentioned, the administrators mentioned a number of other things that also cause them stress. Meeting deadlines, dealing with misrepresentation by the media, getting agendas ready for meetings, health of people, and coping with the number of things happening simultaneously at a rapid pace.

Thus the administrators expressed agreement concerning what events they find stressful. The majority of them mentioned events surrounding students as the most frequent cause of stress. This is not unexpected as administrators deal with students on a frequent basis. Students are the clients in their world of education. It is interesting to note that staff should be reported as the next most frequent stressor. The administrators mentioned parents and a variety of other stressors. Of the list of stressors generated by the administrators, the majority are things an administrator has little or no control over. Getting agendas ready, and perhaps to some extent, meeting deadlines and coping with the rapid pace of multiple events are the only items an administrator would have much influence over.

My relationship with my superintendent is really good. I have a difficulty, and I think a lot of administrators do, and you know, that we get really impatient with bureaucracy. We've been, over the years . . . allowed to believe that we have some control over with our staff, and our parents about where the school should go, but there's limits to that. And so I have the odd testy moment with my superintendent and the secretary–treasurer, but I would say that 99 % of the time, it's really positive.

(Hank, Administrator, on relationships).

Themes in the Data: Relationships with Individuals at the School Division Office

This question examined the nature of relationships between the administrators in the study and certain individuals at the school division office. Relationships with superintendents, the secretary–treasurer, and program consultants were looked at. As well, the different ways the administrators reported they interacted with the school division office were examined. The discussion will begin with a look at administrator reported relationships with superintendents.

Relationships with Superintendents

The school division under study consists of different areas, each with a separate area administrator. Three of the areas in this school division are represented by administrators in this study. Consequently, three separate area superintendents and one Chief Superintendent make up the administrative structure referred to in this work. It is mainly to the individual area superintendents that the administrators are directing their comments.

The fact that the administrators readily talked about their relationship with their area superintendent is indicative of the working rapport they share. I was

anticipating that some of the study participants might be hesitant to speak about how they interact with their superiors. The positive comments directed to the area superintendents and the descriptions the administrators provided concerning the extensive responsibilities the area superintendents are charged with, was quite extraordinary. One administrator declined to answer this particular question. I did not question him further in this regard, nor did I endeavour to speculate about the reason why he chose to pass, on this question.

The administrators in the study, for the most part, described their relationship with their area superintendent in positive terms. Some common terms used to describe this relationship included “really good”, “very positive”, “great”, “excellent”, “superior”, “really decent” and “an excellent rapport and trust level”. Other qualities appreciated in a superintendent were brought out by the administrators. Gail’s comment is indicative of the positive feelings expressed by the other administrators too, as she describes her relationship with her area superintendent, “I think pretty good. I feel that I can talk to my superintendent and share concerns. When I have made a request, she’s really reasonable.”

Ann shared the sentiments expressed by Gail, “With my superintendent, I have, I think, an excellent rapport, and a trust level and a confidentiality, like a good feeling that what I say to her will remain in confidence.” Don, too, expressed his appreciation for the relationship he shares with his area superintendent and commented on the way he interacts with her:

I have maintained fairly good contact with her over the phone, meeting, keeping her informed, checking her perspective, seeking her advice in different situations, running through scenarios with her. She has come to trust my judgment, I believe, and what I’m doing and lets me know that.

Don welcomes this positive feedback from his superintendent. Together they

have developed an excellent working relationship that Don is thankful for.

Barb appreciates the way her area superintendent returns phone calls, and how she is able to be reached on very short notice:

She always responds to requests. If you put a phone call in, and say its not . . . just a regular call about general questions, she'll always return it. It might be at 4:30 or 5:00 that day, or first thing the next day. So given her schedule, the fact that she returns calls is a bonus, in a prompt manner.

Barb commented on her interaction with her area superintendent. Barb is aware of the tremendous workload these individuals are faced with every day, "I try not to pester her knowing that she's got a big workload. And I jot down questions that come up of a general nature that are non-emergency. So when I do speak to her, I just fire them off." Barb endeavours to make best use of her superior's time when she does get hold of her, rather than bothering her with several items of a non-emergency nature on numerous occasions throughout the day.

Some of the administrators recognize the need for give and take in this relationship. Ed is aware of and respectful of the deadlines placed upon him by his area superintendent's office. At the same time, he expects them to respond to his requests when the situation warrants it. He comments on his relationship with the individuals in his area superintendent's office:

I've always felt they're very approachable and I mean there's things that are demanded, certain time lines. I have the same scenario, a parent calls me with a really severe need for information. I put pressure on people to provide that information, get it to me quickly, and the same thing happens to me. Its all part of the job. Relationships are very positive.

Ian too is not hesitant to request things from the school division office when he needs to. His self-described "direct" style is part of his good relationship with the individuals in his area superintendent's office:

I have a really decent relationship. . . . I'm kind of blunt. I'm direct. I say what I think. . . . I don't mean that in a negative way. But they know I will give them an honest answer and that I'll be honest with them. So I mean they can't do any more than that.

Ian also clarified his "really good relationship with everybody over there" by adding the phrase, "to this point in time." I did not ask him to expand further on his statement.

Hank chose to speak for some of his colleagues when he stated his feelings regarding school division bureaucracy. Hank feels that it impacts on his relationship with his superintendent. Hank's comments speak about a lack of control felt by some administrators at times:

I have a difficulty, and I think a lot of administrators do, and you know, that we get really impatient with bureaucracy. We've been, over the years, we've been allowed to believe that we have some control with our staff, and our parents about where the school should go, but there's limits to that. And so I . . . have the odd testy moment with my superintendent, and the secretary-treasurer, but I would say 99 % of the time its really positive.

Hank's statement indicates a positive healthy relationship where trust and respect allow for necessary questioning and seeking answers on the part of the administrators. Requesting clarification is usually based on a desire to access resources in order to be able to do more for students. Hank also mentions the issue of control.

Cathy had little to say regarding her relationship with her area superintendent. She described it as "fine" and went on to describe her area superintendent's style as "distant." Cathy did not have anything negative to say about her relationship with her area superintendent.

Top praise came from Faye who described her interaction with her area superintendent as being positive. These feelings are shared by other

administrators in this area according to Faye, "I have a great relationship with her. I would tell you that most people really appreciate working for her. . . . I particularly like [name of superintendent] because she's a straight shooter." Faye appreciates her area superintendent's ability to speak the truth, and her directness. She again described their working relationship:

She is . . . first of all you enjoy working with her, but most of all if there's something that's unpleasant that's going to happen, she tells you straight to your face. I've had her tell me what to do and I know that that's the way things are, because she's got the bigger picture than I have.

In addition to a positive working environment with her area superintendent, Faye remarked on the assistance she has received from all of the superintendents' staff. Faye described the response she's received from the staff at her school division office, when faced with an urgent situation:

I don't mind going and asking her for advice, or for questions, I always get an answer. And that's true actually of all of the superintendents. I have called when she has been involved with something else, and to me it has been really important, so I've asked her secretary and, or somebody in that area and I've had [name of Chief Superintendent] call me back. I will tell you as a principal, that's the kind of support you get from the superintendents. You may not always be in agreement with style, or always in agreement with what you get, but you will get answers.

This administrator's experience with her supervisor has been positive and tells a story of trust, and support. To some extent, it can be seen as a somewhat ideal one. Perhaps the other administrators have not experienced the same level of support, or perhaps they have just not articulated it in such favourable terms, as Faye has done.

Two of the administrators chose to describe an area superintendent's workload and just how numerous their responsibilities are. Both Barb and Hank shed some light on the tremendous workload faced by the superintendents in this particular school division. Barb outlined her procedure for saving up

questions or a non-urgent nature and then asking them all at once when she does catch up with her area superintendent. Often times, according to Barb, her queries take the form of personnel issues, or clarification of procedures. She described her area superintendent's reaction to her list of questions to be asked, "So when I do speak to her, I just fire them off. She says I'm ready, sit down, let er rip." Barb also comments on the workload faced by her area superintendent, in addition to responsibility for approximately twenty individual schools:

Its unbelievable. In addition to that, [responsibility for twenty schools], she has other responsibilities for all of the [name of subject area] and [name of subject area] teachers and all of the ordering for that. Mini council, advisory council with the parents, and deal with the extreme cases of personnel in terms of disciplinary kinds of issues. And the trustees. In addition to all of the other responsibilities, staffing and everything else.

Hank also referred to the large workload of the superintendents, the amount of pressure they receive from every angle, and the lack of support available to them:

The superintendent's department have very little support. They work much harder than they should have to work, given that they're dealing with crap coming from every angle, parents, teachers, principals, school board, and they don't have a lot of back up support. They don't have a lot of clerical support. They don't have a lot of research support. . . . I think I get more service than I deserve from my superintendent. She bends over backwards to help me in this school.

When one looks at the number of contacts and phone calls made to the area superintendents by the ten administrators during the three months of this study alone, it is little wonder that they are overloaded. Such a large number of contacts and phone calls seems overwhelming when an equal amount from the other schools, also in their charge, is considered.

Relationships with the Secretary–Treasurer

In this particular school division, the structure is such that interaction with the secretary–treasurer would take place on an as needed basis. The likely hierarchy would be for requests for funding to pass through the Chief Superintendent and the school board before going to the secretary–treasurer. Area superintendents would be the link to the secretary–treasurer. Another way of accessing this department, or information relating to financial items, would be through the district business administrators. Consequently it is to be expected that there would be infrequent communication between the secretary–treasurer and the individual school administrators.

Most of the administrators stated that they do not have much contact with the secretary–treasurer. One administrator stated that she did not know the secretary–treasurer at all while several others commented on their lack of contact. Don was quick to point out that what contact he has had with this department has been to his satisfaction.

Gail mentioned that the only time she would deal with the secretary–treasurer is if she had a question about procedure, or budget. She stated that she does know him and feels comfortable with him. If something has happened and she doesn't know why, Gail said that she would call the secretary–treasurer to seek information.

As well, Barb would call the secretary–treasurer as required, although rarely. She describes when this would occur, "There may be an item with regard to some purchase, or procedure that we have or have not followed, occasionally, but very rarely. That usually would be through the superintendent... would be the lines of communication, generally."

Faye also commented on the channels of communication being

responsible for her lack of contact with the secretary–treasurer:

I have very little to do with the secretary–treasurer. Its one of those once removed. . . . My relationship to that is that he works with the board and with the Chief Superintendent. We only get the directives, and we follow those directives, because that's the way its set up. So, its not a relationship with individual schools. My relationship with finance is either through my superintendent, or through the district business administrator.

Faye did not comment on any contact either positive or negative with the secretary–treasurer.

One administrator mentioned a negative experience with this department. Ann referred to an experience with some special funding and a lack of communication. Due to some procedure not being passed along to her, her school was almost denied some funding. She feels that better communication with this department would be invaluable in aiding administrators with their job. Ann also referred to enrolment adjustments and the resulting reduced funding that could be better passed along to the administrators. Ann commented on this communication, “so in terms of that area, the whole budget area, I think there could be a better dialogue. Some sort of a system. I don't know what, but some sort of . . . whether its e–mail or anything. Some kind of documentation.” Her experiences with the secretary–treasurer's department have influenced her thinking along these lines. Ann believes that increased communication with this department could only benefit administrators.

Another administrator who is thankful of the support of the secretary–treasurer's department is Hank. He comments on his relationship with them, “Secretary–treasurer same thing [very helpful]. I think my relationship there is a pretty good one. They know what I'm trying to do, and if I get out of line, and spend . . . call them too many times, they tell me.” Hank seems to be

aware of his budgetary limitations but at the same time tries to access the maximum resources for the students in his school.

In summary, the majority of the administrators have little interaction with the secretary–treasurer. Those that do report positive things and appreciate the support they receive, whether it be a clarification of a procedural or a budget item. The suggestion was made by one administrator for a method to improve communication with this department. In this way, administrators would be informed in a more timely manner of any changes to their budget allocation, or any other items that would be important for them to be aware of.

Relationships with the Program Consultants

Relationships with the program consultants in this particular school division, were described by the administrators as positive. Ian described his as a really decent relationship, while Ed referred to his relationship as positive. Cathy cited a good relationship with program consultants as well, although she clarified her answer by stating that she doesn't deal with them very much.

Don described his relationship with the individuals who are program consultants as generally positive. He is pleased with his interactions to date, "Generally positive, if I ask them to come in and do things. If I ask them for advice, perspectives, then I usually get it. They are busy people."

Likewise Gail interacts well with program consultants but comments on her limited interaction with them, "I'm comfortable with them, all of them. But, I think that they're probably more critical to teachers. They certainly are very obliging, all of them, when you need assistance." Ann echoes Gail's comments in that she has experienced positive dealings with the program consultants from both her own school division and those from the Department of Education. She

describes her relationship with them as “pretty open” and “nice”. Ann remarks on how often she deals with them, “They’re more of an ‘on call.’ They’re not in our buildings on a regular basis. But they’ve been here when we’ve called.”

Faye too reports a problem free relationship with program consultants, “I don’t have a problem. I’ve worked with [name of program consultant] for a number of years, so program issues are not, or curriculum issues are not a problem for me. If I have difficulties or questions, I simply phone and ask.” Faye continued her description with her thoughts on the special education issues and the changes to the procedures to be employed. She used the term “stressful” to describe this issue.

In general, relationships with program consultants and the administrators in the study tend to be fairly positive. Several administrators reported limited interaction with the program consultants.

Ways of Interacting with the School Division Office

Through discussions with the ten administrators, it became evident that there are a number of different ways of interacting with the individuals at the school division office. Whether it be the area superintendents, the secretary–treasurer, or the program consultants, the administrators often have a system for getting in touch with individuals, and seeking out information as required.

For the most part, the administrators seem to be very mindful of time and time constraints faced by the area superintendents. Administrators in the study were respectful of their supervisors and some had even developed ways of trying to save time for the area superintendents. For instance, Barb shared how she saves up calls of a non–emergency nature and makes one call, covering

several items at one time, in order to not "bother" her area superintendent with minor queries. Barb also mentioned that for emergency situations, the procedure would be quite different for getting in touch with her area superintendent:

And, if there's an emergency situation, I go through her secretary and get the word to her, and she'll call, you know between meetings. Or if its just a one liner that I need a yes/no to, the secretary will catch her as she flies by. So we've got that relationship, and as I mentioned to you before, I try not to pester her knowing that she's got a big workload.

Other administrators mentioned using the fax and the e-mail in order to interact with their area superintendents as well as other individuals at the school division office. Faye described how she often phones her area superintendent's secretary first as a initial contact, informing her that she will be sending a fax. The fax might be dealt with by the area superintendent, and then the secretary would fax back a reply to Faye. Another scenario sees the superintendent herself calling Faye with the information. A third option would see the secretary get in touch with the needed information. Faye commented on her relationship with her area superintendent's secretary:

You don't just simply call up your superintendent, you actually talk most of the time to the superintendent's secretary. And when I first started, as a vice-principal, you don't do that you see, because you go to the principal first. And so, what you don't know is that you need to pass everything through the secretary, and that you learn to do that in the most succinct way possible. And you either give details in writing and fax it over, or you tell her very quickly what it is, and she is exceptional at sorting out what should be coming back to you immediately, and she always gets back to you, or somebody gets back to you.

Faye, like the majority of her colleagues had to learn this way of interacting with her area superintendent and the superintendent's secretary when she became a principal. It is interesting as well that Faye stated she would never call either of these two individuals on the day before, or the day after a school board

meeting. She reported that she was aware of the extra pressures they were both under on these days and tried to avoid wherever possible having to contact them at this very busy time.

My partner. I rely big time on my vice–principal partners. I always have.
(Ian, Administrator, on sources of support).

Themes in the Data: Supports/Sources of Direction for Administrators

This question looked at each administrator's existing support network. It was a question that generated some fairly lengthy responses from some of the participants in the study. Some seem quite comfortable with the support network they have developed, while others still seem to be searching. The majority of the administrators in the study seemed content discussing who it is that gives them direction and support. No one declined to answer this question. Names of individuals were seldom mentioned. They were referred to as "former principals and colleagues" by most of the administrators. A couple of the administrators had good suggestions of ways to support administrators, and at least one administrator felt that there are not a great many supports for administrators.

When asked to speak about their supports and sources of direction in their job, the administrators responded in similar ways. Superintendents, colleagues, staff, family, department heads, and friends were some of the sources mentioned by more than one administrator in the study. Other supports suggested were policy manuals and documents, Senior High Principal's Council, Child Guidance Clinic staff, guidance counsellors, the Manitoba Teachers Society and [name of school division teachers' association], exercise,

custodians, students, and the teacher in charge. These various sources will be dealt with in this section.

The two most frequently cited supports/sources of direction, each mentioned by seven of the administrators, were other colleagues, the superintendents. The category of superintendent here includes the superintendent's secretary while other colleagues includes both vice-principal and principal co-workers not in the same school. Each of these two sources will be looked at in more detail beginning with the category of other colleagues.

Other Colleagues

In terms of other colleagues, seven of the administrators reported receiving support from other administrators. This seems to be a very logical and appropriate place to seek assistance, from ones' peer group. It is only natural to ask for clarification, or exchange ideas from people who are in the same situation and are facing similar decisions, challenges and responsibilities on a day to day basis.

John mentioned other colleagues as his first source of direction in his position. He also stated that it depended at times on the situation as to where he would look for assistance. Gail too, reported calling administrator colleagues to ask their opinions about particular situations. Cathy uses colleagues, three administrators in particular that she would talk to regularly. She describes the support she receives from them, and when she would be in touch:

I have . . . three principals . . . that I talk to regularly. Two that I've worked with in the past, and one that I've formed a link with, since I became an administrator. All of whom are very supportive. So I have phoned them, just for sympathy, or for affirmation that I'm not doing something really stupid.

Hank too counts on support from principals and vice-principals at other schools, "I really need to be able to check things out with other people as to what's going on in their school. How are they dealing with issues, how are they dealing with problems." Ian mentioned a couple of principals who are his friends, that he's met over time. If he is curious about something or if they've done something he's particularly interested in what they have done, he'd call them. He appreciates the exchange of ideas and being able to ask what they think about this, or that. Ian referred to them as his "network of people" that he has known over time. When he calls them, he always gets a good answer, a straight answer, or an honest answer on something.

Faye remarked on how she uses her "speed dial" on her telephone to get in touch with a couple of principal colleagues. Prior to taking on the job of principal, Faye had been vice-principal in a high school. She stated how she thought she would be in contact with her former principal, to ask questions and seek advice. Faye found she did not call him for assistance. Faye commented on the differences between the problems faced by early years and senior years principals. She reported the two principalships to be really separate jobs, and found that the things she needed assistance with were not things that a senior years administrator was familiar with.

Barb mentioned other colleagues too, as sources of direction in her job. She stated how the Senior High Principals' Council was a good place to share ideas. She described the support from her colleagues at these meetings:

We like to hear ourselves complain. But we have tried to have a focus to the meeting, in terms of having . . . Lately we've been having some of the consultants in to talk about where are we with curriculum. What is expected, what do you see with the Pan Canada curriculum, textbooks, those kind of focusses. But then we have just general complaints. We often don't come up with a whole lot of solutions but its nice to know that . . . I feel the same way, or whatever.

Superintendents

The other support, or source of direction referred to by seven of the administrators was their superintendent. Area superintendents are a logical resource for the individual administrators to make use of in that these individuals are the next step up in the hierarchy, and likely best able to provide assistance. The administrators' calls made to the superintendents is expressed as a percentage of their total calls in Table 4.4. Of the 364 calls made to the school division office, 157 were made to either the area superintendents, or their secretaries. This is an average of 43 % of their calls made to the superintendents. The ten administrators in the study ranged from a low of 23 % to a high of 86 % of calls to their superiors. See Table 4.4.

Table 4.4**Number of Calls/Contacts to Superintendents**

Administrator	Total Calls	Calls to Superintendent	Percentage of Calls to Superintendent
Ann	19	6	32 %
Barb	52	12	23 %
Cathy	22	18	82 %
Don	18	8	44 %
Ed	13	6	46 %
Faye	26	18	69 %
Gail	56	23	41 %
Hank	83	27	33 %
Ian	28	24	86 %
John	47	15	32 %
Totals:	157	364	Average Percent = 43 %

Both Ed and Hank mentioned the superintendent's department first when asked the question about their supports. Ed referred to the support he receives from the superintendent's department when he needs external input on certain issues. He stated the advantage of this support originating from outside the school, "They're much better coming from the division than from the school, and that takes the pressure off the school community in a sense." Hank described

his area superintendent as his biggest support. He also referred to the other individuals at the [name of school division] office as supportive. Ian too, mentioned talking a lot with his superintendent, "We discuss different things and different options. Because a lot of things she's dealt with before. You go to somebody that has had that kind of support." Roughly half of Hank's calls were to his superintendent at 46 %, while Ed called this department of the school division for 33 % of his calls.

Ian stated that he talks a lot with his superintendent. This is substantiated by the fact that 86 % of Ian's 28 calls during the three month period were to his superintendent or her secretary. Another administrator with a high percentage of calls to her superintendent's department was Cathy. Cathy made 18 of 22, or 82 % of her calls to her area superintendent. Cathy did not mention her superintendent as a source of direction for her.

Don named his superintendent as one of his sources of direction. Don made 44 % of his total calls to his superintendent or her secretary. He referred to the superintendents in tandem with documents from the Department as providing support and direction for him. Don's belief is that much of what an administrator does is already determined. Curriculum, policy and procedures are set. It is up to the administrator to make decisions and judgments as he sees fit. Don comments on the guidelines set out for administrators and how he feels about carrying out his job:

Most of your direction of a principal comes from your superintendents, and documents coming from the department. Much as it sounds funny, a lot of what you do is already dictated. There is a curriculum set. Its how its delivered. Most of your reaction to situations are set in policies. You make judgments based on these policies. A lot of it is set in some way. Its how judicious and wise you deliver the policy. How much discretion you use in making decisions. It makes you feel good about yourself. You know you're working within the parameter.

The common theme of a lack of control is evident in Don's response. He views the decision making process as a positive thing for him.

Faye contacts her superintendent, or the superintendent's secretary in a variety of situations, making up 76 % of all the calls she made to the school division office during the three month period. She commented on how they are her main support. In Faye's words, "Ultimately, I always use [name of superintendent] and [name of superintendent's secretary]." Faye stated how she has learned to be more succinct and how to state her query in a short time period. She is aware of the large workload for the individuals in her superintendent's office, and she tries to be as concise as possible in order to best make use of their time. Faye described how she plans out how to contact the superintendent's department:

So I've learned to be fairly succinct, and to think ahead of time before I call. I have to think what is the exact problem, what background do they . . . do these people have to have to get the information and what's my real question here. And I spend a little bit of time thinking before I make those calls. And I make a fair number of them, usually information calls.

Both Gail and John stated how they would call their superintendent if the situation was appropriate to do so. Gail commented on her somewhat hesitant admission that she would call her superintendent, "I guess if I need help, I feel comfortable enough that I could call my superintendent." Gail contacted her superintendent for 41 % of her total calls. John too stated that he would check with the superintendents in various situations and at different times in order to "ask for their wisdom." John's contacts with his superintendent made up 32 % of all his calls during the study. He went on to describe his support network and likened it to a web. John's closer supports would be the sources he would approach first for assistance:

I think those would be the first sources, the closest part of the network. If it were a spider web, and I was in the middle, the people immediately surrounding me would be my closest contacts and resources. The superintendent would probably be farther out. Someone I might have to go to at times.

Ann made 32 % of her total calls/contacts with the school division office to her superintendent's department. This was the second lowest percentage of calls to this office by an administrator. The administrator with the lowest percentage of total calls to her superintendent was Barb at 23 %. This may have something to do with Barb's policy of saving up calls of a non-emergency nature and then calling with multiple items at one time.

Some of the administrators might have a better developed support network than others, and may choose to contact their area superintendent less frequently than other administrators who have few resources beside their immediate supervisor. It should be mentioned that administrators likely have different comfort levels when it comes to calling their superintendents. This might be a result of the particular superintendents they deal with, the relationship they share, or a whole range of other personal factors. An interesting comparison would be to look at the relationships each administrator has with his individual area superintendent. A shortage of time and a lack of available and willing administrators precluded that for this study.

Vice-Principals/Administrative Team

The third most frequent source of direction mentioned by the administrators is the vice-principal, or the rest of the administrative team. Five of the administrators in the study named this support for their work. It is interesting to note that the principals in smaller schools, with no vice-principal, report that

they miss being part of a team.

Ian, Barb and Faye all named the vice-principal first as being a support. Ed also mentioned vice-principals as being a support for him but it was mentioned second after superintendent. Ian and Barb both are in situations where they work with vice-principals, while Faye does not have a vice-principal in her school. Faye described the administrative team at her previous school, "One of the best things when you're in administration is to be part of a team, to be part of a principal, and vice-principal team. That really works awfully well." Faye commented on her desire to be part of a team again.

Like Faye, Ian enjoys being part of a team. He really values his vice-principal partner. Ian named his source of direction, in response to the question, "My partner. I rely big time on my vice-principal partner. Always have. I think its . . . we talk a lot about different things. What do we do about this. What do we do about that." This opportunity to bounce ideas off each other is also highly valued by Barb. She comments on her supports, "I would say in a school this size, the team. The other two administrators that I'm working with. Because we'll often run ideas by each other. We talk about what approach we're going to take, either with an individual, or with a situation."

Ed cites the rest of his administrative team, as a source of direction for him, "My vice-principals of course, because they take away tons of responsibility and support a lot of direction. And then, also provide the consultative approach for looking towards future directions." Ed too recognizes the value of being part of a team and appreciates sharing the load with his vice-principals.

Barb commented on her earlier days of working in a school with only one administrator:

Its most noticeable when you're not in a team situation, and when you're in a school by yourself. Its quite different. The secretary, and your guidance counsellor, and your head custodian are your support team. It varies. And it can be an isolating experience or you don't feel comfortable.

She goes on to remark on how there are administrative teams in some of the schools that do not function as a team. Barb stated that she and her vice-principals try to keep in touch throughout the school day, and go out for coffee one morning a week before school, "just as a way to get away from things, or just to talk to each other, because sometimes we don't see each other during the day." Establishing and maintaining good connections among the members of her administrative team is important to Barb.

Staff members

Five administrators mentioned their staff as being a source of direction and support to them in their positions. Don, Ed, Hank, John and Faye all commented on the support they receive from the staff at their schools.

Don had mentioned the two sources of direction for him as being his staff and his area superintendent. It is interesting that he should name his staff first, before any other sources. In that Don is relatively new to his school, he commented on how his interaction with his staff has changed somewhat over the past year. For the first part of the year, at this school, Don listened to everyone and employed somewhat of a hands off approach, allowing his staff to continue with the good work they had been doing. As time passed, Don found himself more involved, giving more feedback, and directing events at the school to a greater extent. He is pleased with his transition to the new school:

I'm getting lots of direction from my staff. So its important that I filter, and put everything in perspective. The first five, six months, I listened an awful lot to people. Do what you want. Yes, sounds good. And I didn't take too much initiative, as much as trying to make people happy. The last few months, I've been filtering a little bit and putting things in perspective and all of a sudden, more of it is my direction. Its my vision, based on the feedback I've gotten from the staff.

Don relied on his staff a great deal, as he eased into his new position. This relationship changed as he settled into the new school. Administrator and staff are becoming accustomed to working together.

Ed referred to his staff as a source of support as well, as they take on "countless responsibilities outside the school day." Ed summarized his thoughts on supports from the people around him, as he stated his style of shared decision-making:

I think there's lots of people around to share the load and to take on some responsibility. I think that you get a far better structure of shared decision making anyway. Where I like to give people responsibility to make decisions, and then check with me as we go along so we're on the same page.

Hank too stated that he receives support from his staff members, "I get lots of support from my staff, amazing, amazing loyalty and support and they just . . . are always building me up, so I always feel good about myself when I come in the door of this building." The support Hank receives is indicative of the relationship he shares with members of his staff. It speaks of encouragement, a partnership and an incredible level of trust. One could make the assumption here that although Hank comments on the terrific support he receives from his staff, that he likely encourages and sustains his staff in a similar manner.

John counts on support from his staff, and he frequently bounces ideas off of staff members, whether its one on one, or in a small group setting. John said that it depended upon the situation, who would be involved in the

discussion, and what form it would take. He gave an example of the shared decision-making process he utilizes within his school:

If we're talking about some staffing issues for next year, and its a program that I'm looking to establish, what do you think if we did that. Then I might include a couple or three people. And there's other bigger staff decisions. . . . What do you think? Can you live with that staff? Or have you got a better alternative?

John mentioned that if he needed to check out something to be done for the staff, then he would run the idea by a colleague, that is somebody in another building. He would not involve his own staff in decision making under certain situations.

Faye, as well, commented on her reliance on her staff for support. Her arrival and initial adjustment period were eased by the individuals on staff. "When I came here on my own, my supports and resources were some of the people in this school. You have people who already know the culture. . . . I just needed to use the knowledge of other people." Some of the individuals Faye has relied on over the years include resource teachers, guidance counsellors, custodians, as well as various people outside of the school community. Faye has developed a wide range of supports and sources of direction in her network.

Other Supports/Sources of Direction

A number of other supports/sources of direction were identified by the administrators as being important to them. Some of these included department heads, friends, family, policy documents, exercise, students, Manitoba Teachers' Society and the division teachers association, as well as the Child Guidance Clinic.

Barb and Ed both mentioned department heads as sources of support for them. In that they both work in a high school setting, it is not surprising to see them include this group of staff members. Barb and Ed are two of the three high school administrators in the study. Friends were mentioned by Ian and Cathy as being sources of direction. For John, Hank and Faye, family members offered similar support for them. Hank stated that it is his partner at home that keeps him focussed and balanced. Faye's husband was also in the education field, but worked in another school division. She commented on how he had been a great source of direction in her first year as an administrator:

And then a lot of my chief source, of my first year was to talk to my husband, and even though he would not presume to give me advice . . . he would often tell me . . . what would happen in his situation. . . . Then I could take . . . I already had the knowledge of my division, and then I could look at it and did it make sense, or did it not?

Cathy stated two unique supports for her, not mentioned by any of the other administrators. She uses exercise as a support for her and for lowering her stress level. As well, she also spends time with students when she is experiencing frustration in "dealing with adults." Cathy stated, "If I'm frustrated with adults, I go into a classroom, or I do something with kids. And it always makes me feel good. They make me laugh. And it just makes you feel better. That's the background so that should help." For Cathy, returning to a classroom full of students is a source of comfort.

Barb also mentioned supports that other administrators in the study did not refer to at all. She commented on working in a support group setting with members from Child Guidance Clinic in different situations. She also mentioned how working with guidance counsellors in other settings acted as a source of direction for her at times. Barb summed her feelings on her support network, as

she referred to policies, procedures, protocols, and individuals as offering assistance:

So I think there are sufficient policies, and procedures, and protocols available, and then its your colleagues, and staff and as a last resort call [name of superintendent], or other people in the division. So, having networks with the clerical contact, the human resources department, they're excellent at responding as well.

Like Barb, Don utilized documents as one of his supports. Documents coming from the department were mentioned by Don, although he did not elaborate on which documents were more helpful than others.

Gail remarked how she relies on the [name of teachers' association] and the Manitoba Teachers' Society (MTS) for support. When it concerns teachers, she is comfortable calling them "to make sure that I'm doing the right thing." Gail continued to say that she does not feel that there are a lot of supports for administrators. She mentioned that existing supports, tend not to be utilized by administrators very much:

For administrators, there are not a lot of supports. You know when there are really traumatic events that happen in the school, or something like that, or if the press in on your case, or if you have parents that are against an administrator, making life difficult for him or her, other than the superintendent, and the division, there isn't a lot. The division takes a certain approach. The [name of teachers' association] and MTS can be supportive of administrators, but administrators tend not to seek out that support as much.

Gail continued by stating that she did not know why administrators tended to not seek out support as much as they could. She attributed this to a difference in perspective in terms of seeking support from different sources. Gail described the differences between advice from the superintendent and the school division versus that an administrator might receive from the MTS, or the [name of school division teachers' association]:

Sometimes the advice that a principal gets from the superintendent and the division is not necessarily the same as they would get from the [name of teachers' association] or the Society. Mainly because [they] are looking out for the best interest of that individual. Whereas the division has all the political things to worry about, the community and politics. So sometimes the advice is not the same.

Following her previous comments, I asked Gail why administrators were hesitant in seeking assistance from outside groups, or organizations. In response to my query, Gail stated how she was unsure if "hesitant" was a good word to describe administrators' attitudes to seeking assistance from sources external to their schools. For example, such a source as the Manitoba Teachers' Society was mentioned by Gail. She felt that perhaps the administrators were simply not accustomed to doing that. Gail also posed that some administrators might be unaware of what is available to them. She felt that the situation was improving, as people are trying to increase communication between the various groups. Making administrators more aware of their rights and what the benefits are of dealing with these groups is a goal. Gail described the situation as slow going." This area of seeking advice and support would be a good one for further examination. Likewise, administrator perceptions around asking for assistance would be interesting to examine.

Ann too feels that being a single administrator in the building is tough and that there need to be more ways of providing support for each other:

We need as administrators, it doesn't come from the division, we need to as administrators to put mechanisms in place where we can support one another, especially those who are in single administrator schools. Because there are only certain things you can tell staff members and things that you certainly can't tell them. . . . There are definitely issues around support that I think as administrators that we could work particularly to help one another.

Only Ann suggested a proactive way of dealing with issues, and supporting one

another is this endeavour. Ann followed up on this concept in her response to another question as she offered the idea of helping other administrators out when they experienced a death within the school community, a weapons offence, or another difficult situation. Ann stated her concern that administrators do not talk about their weaknesses, nor do they examine issues and look for solutions. She offered her concern:

I've noticed in this job rarely do administrators talk about their weaknesses. It's almost like this infallible person in front of you who can take all, listen to all, and be all to everyone, and that's not the case. We do this to ourselves because I think we need to step up and say stop. Let's look at our issues, what's wrong with looking at our issues? We're human, we have needs.

Ann reports an honest and objective look at the expectations placed on the role of administrator and believes that administrators need to be more honest about examining their jobs and the workload involved.

In contrast to Gail's and Ann's remarks, Faye commented on the number of supports that are available to administrators to use within this particular school division:

I mean there's an enormous number of supports out there. . . . This division has everything in place for you. I'm not saying its perfect, because you can still have battles over things, and you can still get frustrated. . . . And I'm not naive and I'm not starry-eyed. I just know . . . use what you've got. Its there. Its designed for you to use.

Faye makes good use of the supports available in her school division, and encourages her colleagues to do the same.

I learned that I call the school division office a lot more than I thought I did. I didn't realize I spoke to them that often.

(John, Administrator).

Themes in the Data: Contacting the School Division Office

During the three month data collection period, the ten administrators contacted their school division office a total of 364 times. This is an average of 36 calls, or contacts per administrator, or roughly 12 calls for every administrator for each of the three months. It is not surprising that there were some administrators who were well above this average, and others who were very much below the average number of contacts. Contact with the division office could take many forms. Phone calls, faxes, e-mails, and personal visits were all included in the administrators' logbooks.

The administrators can be divided into three groups. Firstly, those administrators who contact their division office on a frequent basis, that is a total of over 50 times in the three month period. Three administrators fall into this category. Hank reported the most contacts with his division office, at 83 during the data collection period. Gail indicated the next largest number of contacts at 56. The last administrator in this group with 52 contacts in the three months was Barb.

The second group consists of administrators who made between 25 and 50 calls or contacts during this time. This group is made up of three administrators. John, Ian, and Faye made 47, 28 and 26 calls respectively.

Thirdly, the final group of more infrequent callers to the division office is comprised of the last four administrators. Cathy contacted her division office 22 times, while Ann recorded 19 contacts. Next came 18 contacts for Don, and

finally, Ed had 13 contacts. It should be noted that Ed did not record any calls/contacts for the month of March, for a variety of reasons, to be discussed later. Had he continued his trend from the previous two months, he likely would have reported a total closer to 20.

The administrators reported a variety of reasons for contacting their school division office. The reasons will be examined in this section for each of the three groups of administrators. For the purpose of this section, the administrators have been grouped according to the criteria above. Those with more than 50 calls, or an average of more than 17 calls per month. Secondly, administrators contacting the division office between 25 and 50 times during the data collection period, or monthly averages between 8 and 17 contacts. Thirdly, those administrators making less than 25 contacts in total, or less than 8 calls per month on average.

Group One Administrators: Greater than 50 total Calls/Contacts

Hank reported the most number of contacts with his school division office, (82), and the highest average of contacts per month at 27.7. When does this administrator contact his division office? According to Hank, whether or not he calls the division office depends upon the situation he is dealing with. If he is having to make some personal decisions, he would likely talk to his partner at home first, and then to a "couple of key people on staff". These staff members are people that he knows well, possibly his vice-principal. He might speak with some colleagues he knows and has come to trust over the years. They are individuals he has spent a lot of time working with.

If Hank were to contact his area superintendent, it would likely concern

issues around programming, interacting with parents, or staffing. Hank stated that he would likely "go and get some advice first on how to tackle it", if he knew that he was experiencing difficulty. According to Hank, he calls his division office over bigger issues. He felt he receives support from various sources. Hank made a comment regarding support for administrators as he stated, "I don't think one person should ever feel that they have nobody they can turn to." Hank has demonstrated that he is not reserved about contacting his division office, and he mentioned the individuals he speaks with when necessary regarding decisions he must make.

Another administrator who communicated more frequently with her school division office is Gail. She contacted her division office 56 times during the data collection period for an average of 18.7 contacts per month. Like Hank, Gail stated that it depends on the situation as to whether or not she would contact her school division office. For situations involving parents, or the media, Gail said that she would contact her superintendent first. She also contacts her superintendent "sometimes to ask what I should do, sometimes just to let her know what I've done already, so she's not surprised." Gail would likely contact a colleague first if it was to do with something related to having to write a note, or speak with a staff member, just to get his or her perspective on how something would be received. When asked how she feels, when she contacts her division office, Gail responded that it is no problem for her as people are really helpful. She believes that individuals at the school division office are quicker to respond to an administrator's request than to one from a teacher. Gail comments on the comparison between the two situations, a teacher and an administrator calling, "I have had occasion as a teacher to call, a department, or payroll, or something, at board office. You don't get the same response, which is

unfortunate. It should be the same." Gail concluded by saying that this was just her perception.

When asked to describe occasions where she contacts her school division office, Barb replied that she never hesitates before calling. Barb made 52 calls throughout the study months, giving her a monthly average of 17.2 contacts with her division office per month. Barb commented how earlier in her career, she would call other colleagues, to seek out the information she required. She no longer does this. Now there are policy books, which is a help, according to Barb. She mentioned that she often deals with her area superintendent's secretary, and how knowledgeable, and helpful this individual is. Often, Barb will be told that the secretary will get back to her right away with the clarification she has requested. Even if the area superintendent's secretary is unsure what specific things the superintendent wants, but she will find out and return the call.

More specifically, Barb contacts her school division office if she is facing a situation that has been a problem, or when a student has been suspended. Often she will call just to alert the individuals at the superintendent's department on a potential situation with a parent. Barb will get in touch with the secretary, and say:

We've just had a situation. The parent is threatening to go to the Sun or the Press. I mean we haven't had that for ages. That kind of thing. Or we anticipate that there is going to be more. So just sort of run it by her and say that if she gets a call from this parent, here's more information. And [name of superintendent] would never call a parent without checking with the school first to see what the nature of the situation was.

Barb believes that it is just common courtesy, on her part as an administrator, to contact her area superintendent when she feels that something might go further and end up on the superintendent's desk. In this way, Barb feels that her

superintendent can better prepare for certain situations by receiving early advance notice from an administrator.

Group Two Administrators: Between 25 and 50 total Calls/Contacts

The second group of administrators are three in number, John, Ian and Faye. They each contacted their school division office more than 25 but less than 50 times over the three month period of the study. Their average calls/contacts per month were between 8 and 16.

John made 47 calls to his division office over the course of the study, an average of 15.7 contacts every month. He stated that he calls for specific situations. John believes in preparing his superintendent in advance so that she will be aware of what she may have to deal with. He described his contact with the division office as "If there's something going on in the community then the superintendent wants to know when its going to hit the newspapers. . . . So I call when necessary." If John is going to make changes that may affect the way the school is viewed in the community, and "there may be a backlash" then he will contact the superintendent. John feels that contacting the school division office is part of his job. He described it as "no big deal... its's just part of the job."

Ian contacted his school division office an average of 9.3 times per month during the study, for a total of 28 calls in the three month period. Ian is not hesitant about calling and in his words, "I call whoever I think can give me the best answer, or the best suggestion." He commented how he phones people he doesn't know, and the individual he chooses to call depends on what he is looking for. Ian, who knows a number of people at the school division office will call someone he knows to find out who he should speak with concerning a

specific issue. Ian related the story of struggling with an issue in his school, and asking for the name of the expert in this area. When he found out the name of the individual who has much experience in this area, he called her up for the information he required. Ian's philosophy could be summed up by saying "who do you know who can help us?" If he does not know somebody, he will ask someone else until he finds someone who can assist him with whatever problem he is trying to solve. Ian mentioned that he would phone his superintendent and ask her who he should call for assistance. As well, he might contact her secretary, when he is looking for advice on something. In this manner, Ian says that he does not have to bother his superintendent, as the secretary often "steers" him in the right direction.

Faye initiated contact with her school division office a total of 26 times during the study, for an average of 8.7 contacts per month. This ranks sixth in terms of frequency amongst the administrators. When asked to indicate when she calls her division office, Faye responded that she calls to "give them information." For example, on the day of Faye's interview, she remarked that she was planning to call her superintendent the following day. There were several reasons why Faye needed to be in touch. Firstly, she needed to inform her superintendent of an issue with an outside resource. Secondly, Faye had a concern about a security issue with a student. Thirdly, she had a staffing query that needed to be addressed by the superintendent. Finally, she needed to pass along an agenda for an upcoming meeting.

Faye spoke about the procedure for getting in touch with her superintendent and commented on how all of these questions would go through the superintendent's secretary. The superintendent responds accordingly and then either the secretary contacts Faye with the information she needs, or the

superintendent herself might make the call to Faye. Sometimes Faye needs to speak to her superintendent, or needs to see her in person. She described the procedure for requesting some time to meet with the superintendent in person, or on the phone:

But if I really need to talk to [name of superintendent], that's what I ask for, and I will call and ask for time. Sometimes I'll say, 'I need an hour of your time.' I'll come with a list of stuff, if you want. I'll fax it in to you earlier. I need your support because I need to wind these things up.

Some of the other things Faye will call her division office over include personnel issues, and according to Faye, "points of ignorance, things I really don't know and I have to find out." Faye described calling her division office in panic, when she was a vice-principal. The various occasions ranged from parental complaints to inappropriate actions by teachers. Faye also commented on having to call the school division office when there was "something really seriously wrong with the building", and she needed to call and see if she could evacuate the school.

Faye remarked on some of her colleagues who call the school division office on a daily basis. She speculated as to why this was so, "I don't know whether they feel its sort of keeping in contact. . . . It seemed to be an important part of their lives that that contact was there." Faye stated how she assumed her superintendent's secretary likely did not want to hear from her unless Faye really needed to be in touch for a specific reason.

Group Three Administrators: Less than 25 total Calls/Contacts

The last group of four administrators is composed of those who call the school division office on a less frequent basis than the other administrators in

the study. Cathy, Ann, Don and Ed all contacted their division office less than 25 times during the three month period of the study, an average of less than eight times per month. These administrators' reasons for calling the division will be examined in this section.

Cathy contacted her division office on average, 7.3 times per month, for a total of 22 calls during the study. She described how she contacts the office, on an infrequent basis, "usually only over things that are either really serious, or something that is very unusual." Cathy cited a couple of examples of when she might initiate contact with her school division office. For instance, she would call over a suspension, or an incident requiring police involvement. Cathy would contact the human resources department over something she "does not know", and is unable to find information on. In Cathy's own words, "I don't phone very often." This comment of Cathy's is supported by the data which confirm her infrequent calling. Cathy's numbers are well below the group average of 36 total calls, or an average of 12 calls per month. Cathy stated that she feels fine when she has to call her division office. This indicates her lack of concern over contacting her division office and how she views this task as part of her job.

Ann contacted her school division office a total of 19 times throughout the three month data collection period for an average of 6.3 calls per month. Ann stated that she calls the division office when she thinks "there's a potential for there to be a problem that would move beyond the school level." This idea is very much in keeping with several other of the administrators who have previously stated this same idea. Ann also contacts the office when she has exhausted her "repertoire" of strategies. Or to put it another way, when the potential exists "for stuff to go back to the superintendent, its best to notify them first." Ann thinks that she should inform the superintendent right away so that

she will have the information first hand. In this way, her superintendent is not surprised by phone calls. Ann summarizes her way of contacting the superintendent in a proactive fashion:

When I think its got potential to move outside of the school walls, or outside the community, then I certainly would phone. And a lot of the stuff that I do, if its to do with any community organizations, or whatever the issues might be, I always document it, and then call to say something is coming. And then I send it fax confidential.

Ann mentioned other occasions when she would call her superintendent. Incidents involving outside organizations, or interaction with potential funding sources would both rate a phone call to her superintendent. Ann does not initiate contact with her superintendent unless she absolutely has to. Ann described her own policy with calling as a “no news, good news policy,” meaning that if Ann has no specific reason to be in touch with her superintendent, then she will not call.

Don's average number of calls per month was 6 making a total of 18 calls during the three months of the study. His self-described pattern is calling the division office “as a last resort, in terms of not knowing what to do.” Don stated how he would usually consult with a colleague first, in terms of a situation that looks a little different. He might phone his superintendent and run a particular situation by her, that is tell her what he is thinking. Don mentioned that he hasn't done this very often, that most of his calls are to keep his superintendent informed. Don's calls to his superintendent tend to be proactive in nature.

Don gave a specific example of when he would call. He outlined a situation where there has been a fight and two students have been suspended as a result. One parent believes that Don is picking on his child. Don would contact the superintendent and inform her that she might get a phone call from

this parent. Another situation where Don would contact his superintendent is if something was happening in his community that he felt she should be aware of. These events might impact on “how we do business in the building.” Something of this nature would affect the climate of the school, Don feels. The majority of his contacts with the school division office have been this way, Don states. He commented on what would often happen when he contacts his superintendent, “If all my resources, in terms of dealing with a situation are exhausted, I find that my superintendent will either tell me or ask me what is the best thing [to do].”

When asked how he feels when he has to contact his school division office, Don replied that for him, most of the time, it is a matter of informing or consulting and that’s all there is to it. He implied that this was not a problem. Don did mention other sorts of calls where difficult parents, or “parents that are working overtime to enable their child” are involved. He commented on how he was unsure of how his call would be received by the superintendent, “you’re never sure what sort of reception you’ll get on the other end with your superintendent.” He went on to describe anxious feelings prior to making this particular type of phone call and stated that he would feel stressed. Don remarked on how much better he feels when he gets to actually speak to his superintendent when he is in the middle of a difficult situation. He attributed this calming effect to speaking with his superintendent and the working relationship they share:

And so while you’re thinking of making that call, and you’re making that call, you feel really stressed. However the superintendent, and this is why I say its a positive and strong relationship, usually what I’ve done has been affirmed, and I feel good, and so that drops the stress level. It must be a part of her job that says I need to listen to my administrator. I need to affirm. I need to provide them with support. And once it is done, you feel less stressed about that situation.

Don is grateful for the ability of his supervisor to put him at ease when he is dealing with a difficult situation. In Don's words, he is paying his superintendent a compliment on her ability to read the situation and support an administrator when they need to be listened to.

Ed made the fewest number of calls throughout the study, contacting the school division office 13 times over the three month period. This is an average of only 4.3 calls per month. Ed did not make any calls in the month of March. He stated he tries to do most of his problem solving and consulting within the school. He would call the division office when he needs something. Ed mentioned how he would "update the superintendent on issues that may go to a division level." Serious situations in the school, perhaps a personnel issue, an issue with a student, or maybe an issue that the community is concerned with would result in Ed contacting his superintendent. He might need to seek clarification of board policy. Ed stated how most of the time an administrator can refer to the policy manual, but other situations often require a quick affirmation from the superintendent. Ed also mentioned the speed of requests at times, that sometimes a building request might be required quickly. He described the contact he has with his superintendent and his goal of keeping his superintendent up to date, as Ed says, "so that we're on the same page."

A mentoring project. More experienced administrators could mentor a less experienced administrator."

(Gail, Administrator, on a potential resource for administrators).

Themes In the Data: Other Resources for Problem Solving

By the nature of their jobs, administrators need to be able to draw on

various resources in order to carry out all of the functions of their jobs in the schools. In that the school system has been subject to dwindling resources in the last several years, administrators have had to become even more resourceful at finding different ways to obtain resources, and to problem solve. The administrators in the study were asked what other resources would be useful to them, in their problem solving. The responses took on many forms. Some of the administrators chose to speak about the resources they currently use, while others took the opportunity to dream a little and present a partial wish list. Some of the suggestions made by the administrators included a vice-principal, time, support, and the opportunity to mentor. These resources will be examined here.

Three of the respondents indicated they would like to have a vice-principal, or be part of an administrative team in their school. Don, Faye, and John all valued being part of a team. Don emphasized the benefits of being able to discuss issues with another administrator, "If I miss anything in this building it is being a solitary administrator. . . . You'd like to just use someone as a sounding board, or reflection, to talk, to discuss." Don has developed his own resources within his school and will talk to a number of different staff members when he needs their input. He stated how he feels very fortunate to have such a good group of staff who are professional, energetic, and have a vision. Don mentioned that he might discuss issues with staff members, but refrains from talking about personnel or staff issues with anyone. Don stated that being able to talk with someone about certain situations is a resource that he misses.

John too expressed his desire to have "a school team" or a "second administrator partner" in his work. He stated schools with a population of one hundred or more students needs to have an administrative team. He

commented on how that second person should not be the Special Education Resource teacher, or the Physical Education Department Head, or the Counsellor, as that puts these individuals in a difficult situation. If one of them is “the ear of the administrator, then staff start looking at them differently,” according to John. He mentioned that it would be helpful if there was enough money and sufficient resources to be able to have a vice–principal in every school.

Don’s and John’s comments were echoed by Faye regarding vice–principals. She mentioned how, although she wished to be part of a team, that it would not be a financially practical decision, given the size of her school. Faye enjoys working as a team, and would like to have someone she could genuinely talk to about problem solving, about managing some of the evaluation and dealing with certain issues. Like Don, Faye is aware of the limitation of using staff members as vice–principals. She would not discuss personnel issues with a staff member, nor would she seek another staff member’s opinion at an inappropriate time. Faye stated that in some controversial situations where she would like to have the extra support, she is not able to do so, by the nature of the issue being dealt with.

Faye mentioned that she could not think of any other resources she would like to have. Had I asked her the same question when she was in her first year as a principal, she would have had a lengthy list, according to Faye. She commented on how very many resources there are for administrators to use, “If you had asked me these questions in my first year, I would have thought of forty other things. What you learn in your first year is how many resources you really have.”

Ed reported time as a valuable resource. He would like to have more

time for a variety of reasons. He commented on the passage of this precious commodity, and how time for reflecting would be valuable:

The day to day workings are just a blur at times . . . Everybody's problem is the important problem to resolve. So consequently, you're trying to meet all those and deal with all of those issues, so consequently you end up in a situation where you need more time to reflect. More time to meet with people, to discuss direction, to look at the philosophy behind decisions, instruction.

Ed stated how he was unsure how he could manufacture more time into his day. He referred to the existence at present of some time in his day for doing just this, but said that only careful budgeting of time creates this. For Ed, the issue of time is accompanied by corresponding issues of developing school culture and ensuring consistency is applied. Ed favours an environment where the school climate fosters development of appropriate attitudes amongst the school population. Coupled with this development of school climate is Ed's belief that problem solving should take the form of preventing issues from surfacing. This proactive, rather than reactive style, advocated by Ed involves "programming appropriately for preventing things from happening." Ed also sees problem solving as a joint shared experience involving everyone in the school community. Students, teachers, parents, and superintendents would all be involved in a problem solving piece. He gave the example of two students who are in conflict and subsequently sent home. After their four day suspension, they return to school with their parents. The issue between them has not been resolved satisfactorily by the suspension. The students need to be involved in the problem solving process, according to Ed. Although this is a time consuming way of resolving difficulties, the benefits are numerous.

Gail posed a mentoring program to benefit new administrators. Her idea would see more experienced, or senior administrators mentor a less

experienced colleague in another school. Gail stated her belief that “it kind of goes onto age.” More senior administrators could offer their experience and role modelling to their more junior counterparts. Gail is thankful for the chance to have been a vice–principal in more than one school. She worked with principals “who took their mentoring role seriously.” She stated how she really benefited from that. Gail thought that the school division’s training program for new administrators is not the same as actual on the job experience. She commented on the value of sitting in on real situations:

But its not the same on a day to day basis where you can just run to the next office and say what do you think about this, or sit in on a meeting with a parent and a child that the other administrator is conducting. Or sit in with just the administrator and a student who has had difficulties and watch them work with the kid. That really was helpful for me.

Gail expressed her concern over the number of retirements in her school division, and the fact that less experienced administrators are being moved up to fill the new principalships at various schools. She commented on how these newer administrators would likely answer this question in a different manner than she did.

At least one school division in this province operates an Administrator–Mentoring program where potential administrators are paired up with different administrators in a job shadowing program. Over the course of a year, participants would spend approximately one week in total with administrators observing what a typical day in the life of an administrator entails. One of the participants in this program with whom I spoke, found this to be an extremely useful and practical experience.

More than one of the administrators mentioned that they would like to have more support, whether in the form of resources, superintendent time, or

support for personnel issues. Cathy mentioned her wish for “more resources for the kids.” She stated how she would prefer to have more allotted Child Guidance Clinic support, and better links with Child and Family Services. In addition, Cathy would like to see funds available for more flexibility in programming. She gave a specific example of how beneficial it would be to establish an interim program for students that would allow for transition between two of the present programs in her school.

Ann commented on her belief that the whole notion of administrator welfare needs to be revisited. She advocates having the school division work more closely with the middle management. Ann gave the example of dealing with a personnel issue, and being “caught between a rock and a hard place.” She described the difficulty of being represented by her teachers’ association group and at the same time, having the teachers represented by that same group. She felt that she could use support for dealing with personnel issues that are tenuous. The time involved in dealing with such issues was mentioned by Ann. The difficulty in dealing with such an issue in a small school, and trying not to have the issue turn into an awkward situation was also posed. Ann stated how it would be beneficial to have someone come in and assist her with some of the paperwork, “If I had somebody come in and help me with the documentation, and help me do that kind of thing, and work in partnership with me, or collaboration with me on a TIP, [Teacher Improvement Plan], or whatever, or an EIP [Educator Improvement Plan] for non-teaching staff, that would help.”

Hank mentioned that a course in organization might be a helpful resource for him to make use of. He also mentioned the value of more online support for administrators, “so that you wouldn’t have to always call somebody.”

Referring to something online would give an administrator needed answers, and would eliminate the necessity of establishing telephone contact, according to Hank.

In addition to thinking about support for himself as an administrator, Hank also mentioned how he would like to have more support available for his superintendent. This in turn would free up some of his superintendent's busy schedule, and allow her to be more easily reached by administrators. Hank commented on the elimination of the assistant superintendent position in his school division and the impact on administrators. He stated how his need to speak with his superintendent, prior to making some crucial decisions, really slows down the process at times:

Right now, if I need to talk to my superintendent, basically I have to talk to my superintendent. There's nobody else. She has control of twenty-two schools and I can't make decisions without talking to her first. And that can really delay things a long time. It can slow up what you're trying to do.

The administrators in the study came up with several resources that would be useful to them when they are problem solving. The most common request was for a vice-principal, or to be part of a team in their job. Other resources wished for by the administrators included more available time, support and resources, in addition to a mentoring program.

When I first thought about administration, I thought ninety percent of it is organizational, but ninety percent of it is conflict resolution, regardless of whether its a staffing decision, a money decision, an ordering decision, a time tabling decision, staffing . . . dealing with angry kids, angry parents . . . and I wouldn't have thought that originally.

(Barb, an Administrator).

Themes in the Data: Preparation for the Role of Administrator

Each administrator was asked to speak about his, or her preparation for the role of administrator. Did each administrator feel that they were adequately prepared to cope with the stresses of the job when he started the career? What had been his background in coping with the day to day stressors of the job? Firstly, the issue of adequate preparation, and training for administrators will be addressed.

Five of the administrators felt they were not adequately prepared to deal with the events of their new career when they first started out. The comments ranged from "not trained enough" to "absolutely not" to "nothing can prepare you," when asked about their preparedness for the role of administrator. Another administrator indicated that if it was not for her counselling background she would have to say that she would not have been prepared either.

Ann stated how she didn't know "what could really prepare you for going into administration." She commented on the transition from teacher to administrator:

All of a sudden, one day you're a teacher, the next you're an administrator, its like people look at you different[ly], they treat you differently. You know, you have to be much more careful about what you say, how you say things, how you conduct our self, you know, to everyone . . . the crisis and the protocol.

John did not feel adequately prepared for the role of administrator either.

He commented on his belief that “it would be unrealistic to expect to be prepared fully without being in it, because some of the things that you have to deal with you have to experience.” John felt that a lot of the situations dealt with in the Professional Development Program, and in the New Administrators’ Group were theoretical in nature. Now he has been in the job for several years, John sees this theory put into practice. He stated how after dealing with many different situations, he has gathered his own strategies about how he problem solves. Sharing experiences with colleagues allows for an exchange of ideas and suggestions that add on to each administrator’s repertoire of skills, according to John.

Faye believed that “maybe” she was prepared for her role as an administrator. She felt she was prepared for her role as a vice-principal. As a newly appointed vice-principal, Faye described her experience with her new administrator colleagues, and the importance of having common sense:

But, they were very good, they were most worried how I would make decisions, and how I would be involved with the kids, so they gently guided me. Where I needed to be, they gave me sensible advice. They told me what to do when I needed to be told, but for some strange reason, I have been blessed with a lot of common sense, and that above all you need. If you’re missing that, you can really foul things up for yourself and for the school.

In terms of taking over as principal, Faye said that she was a nervous wreck at first. Due to a combination of holidays, a compassionate leave, and a maternity leave there was no support system in place when she arrived at the school. She stated how she found her way and “muddled through.”

Cathy, too, did not feel prepared for taking on her new role. She commented on how “the school division gives it a fair shot” in terms of the interview process and the two years of sessions for new administrators. Cathy

felt that teachers who have taught for awhile before becoming administrators tend to be fairly experienced in school division procedure, and sometimes understand more than some of the less experienced new administrators.

Another administrator who commented on the training she received as a vice-principal was Gail. She believed her various principals divided up the responsibilities so that she was able to cope. She also found it useful that her principals provided lots of support for her. Gail commented on this "on the job" form of training, "If you want to call that training, it was training. I don't think its planned to be training." She felt prepared for becoming a principal because of her vice-principal experience, and the situations she had been involved in. She did not attribute this to the workshop training sessions. Gail stated her feelings regarding formal training offered by the school division:

That [workshop training] might tell you a little bit about the paperwork, and the policies and processes of the division, what they expect in terms of evaluation. When it comes to the actual leadership stuff, and the people skills, I don't think that their training program really offers any of that.

Gail commented on the irrelevance of courses offered at the university, "the university courses definitely don't offer anything. If you take Educational Administration and Foundation courses . . . they are really irrelevant."

Ann too felt that the training sessions from the school division were inadequate, "Our training, or our information sessions that we received from the division, they don't . . . put you in those real life situations." Ann advocated a mentoring program, or job-shadowing where individuals who are in a pool of potential administrators, would have some time away from their teaching positions for a couple of days to spend time with an administrator in a school. She described what would take place with such a program:

Spend a couple of days with administrators in schools, and . . . run with them, run when we do whatever we do, so that they get a good handle in terms of the kinds of questions, the kinds of issues that are being faced either on a daily basis or those ones that pop up and end up taking big, large chunks of your time.

Ann went on to describe how useful it would be to watch someone go through the time tabling process for a school, or to sit through a session dealing with a weapons offence. She described how this first hand experience would be invaluable for potential administrators. Ann advocated action based types of training in school settings to assist in the preparation of administrators.

Ian wondered what adequate training really meant. He commented on how he never received any formal training in dealing with stress. He believed that "coping with stress and dealing with this kind of thing is more your personality than anything else." Ian mentioned volunteer experiences, coaching, being active on committees and involved with community as being important training activities. He believed that dealing with people, that is organising and running things where you are dealing with lots of people is important because the job of administrator involves dealing with people to such a large extent. Ian also commented on an individual's own personality as being important in terms of how one handles things.

Hank felt unprepared as well for the role of administrator. In terms of training, he mentioned that there has always been some kind of ongoing training for new administrators in his school division, but when he was starting out, the training likely consisted of a weekend in Fargo or Grand Forks. He stated how there was not a great deal of support at that time. Hank postulated that the follow up for new administrators now is much more positive and more focussed than when he was starting out.

Don felt he was more than adequately prepared for most of his roles as an administrator. Principals at schools where he had been a vice-principal had allowed him to assume responsibility for most of the tasks he would have to face when he became a principal. During his time as a vice-principal, Don "took on more roles that would simulate taking over the school." Don went on to elaborate what being prepared for the role of administrator meant to him, "Well I think prepared administratively is having skills to do certain things. When I look at administration, you need some required skills. Right off the top, without talking about leadership or anything like that." The necessary skills Don is talking about include the ability to deal with stress, people skills, a strong sense of curriculum, communication skills, and decision making skills.

Don mentioned that stress can have an impact unless one takes care of himself.

In terms of background in coping with the day to day stressors of the role of administrator, the participants in the study often mentioned previous areas of expertise. Physical Education, counselling, working in the area of resource, and classroom teaching were all mentioned by the administrators as important preparation for their role as an administrator.

Ian remarked that his background in coping with stressors was all his years of working with people in a variety of capacities. John's background in dealing with stressors was in having an outlet for his stress. His experience came from the area of physical training, and being able to take the focus away from the stress, or the problems of the job while physically training. After the physical activity is over, an individual can look back and things seem to be better, as the job stressors seem to be more manageable. John found this to be a way of stepping aside from a problem, and putting things into perspective. He commented on diet and exercise as being very important in handling stress.

Cathy, too, recommended exercise for herself as a way of coping with stressors.

Hank believed that every administrator brings different things to the job, but there are certain things that must be learned. Some of these skills that need to be developed include dealing with the public and parents, as well as planning. Hank stated his opinion:

I think probably we all come into the job with something different, whether our background was Physical Education, or Guidance, or English teacher, or Shops teacher. You develop teaching skills, and that gives you a start, cause you learn how to pace yourself in the classroom, you learn how to deal with the public, parents, and you learn how to plan . . . and you obviously cared enough to work hard or else you wouldn't get there.

Hank too cited his previous training in the areas of counselling and in coaching as serving him well. Hank believed that similar philosophies are employed in both coaching and management. Such skills as team building, understanding weaknesses and strengths, and understanding when to put on pressure, and when to give support are common to both these areas, according to Hank. Hank was quick to praise colleagues in his school division for their leadership skills, and for influencing him in a positive way, "there's a real good leadership group in the [name of school division] and some unbelievably talented people, you know, teachers and administrators. You really just have to kind of spend time with them and it rubs off."

Barb commented on administrators' backgrounds and why she believes Physical Education is such a good preparation for going into administration:

I think that in the past, many people have gone into administration from Physical Education, because you look at what you're organizing, whether its a tournament, kids . . . You're used to, I guess, in your head, separating all the different decisions you have to make. . . . You're able to switch from one topic to the other very quickly. . . . You generally I think, are able to handle emergency situations in a sort of a logical way. . . . I think all of those things lead up to it.

Barb summed up what she believes are some of the essential skills of being an administrator. She also mentioned the value of a counselling background in terms of application of conflict resolution skills. Decisions concerning staffing, finances, time tabling, or ordering are all made easier by conflict resolution skills, according to Barb. She spoke about having to deal with angry students, or angry parents, and the value of being able to resolve conflicts. To her, "that was the most valuable resource I could have brought to the job."

Probably the spring in some ways is the most stressful, in a way because you're at the stage of running the current year, and finishing off and dealing with a lot of issues, plus you're planning for next year.

(Ed, Administrator, on a stressful time of the year).

Themes in the Data: Stressful Times of the Year

The administrators were asked to identify times of the year they found more stressful. Their responses are contained in Table 4.5. For example, Barb chose September, April, May and June as the most stressful months for her, while Ann selected November, February, and March.

Table 4.5

Administrator Reported Stressful Times of the Year

Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan
Ed Hank Don Barb Gail	Don	Ann	John	
Feb	March	April	May	June
Ann	Ann John	Ed Ian Hank Barb Faye	Ian Hank Don Barb Cathy Gail	Ian John Barb

It is interesting to note, that with the exception of January, all the months of the school year were named. When the results of the numbers of calls/contacts per month were examined, in conjunction with the administrator responses to this question, some trends were noted. Two of the administrators reported their highest number of calls/contacts with their school division office in the month of January. Barb reported 29 contacts for January, twice as many as her next biggest month, while Gail reported 25 for the same month. Neither Barb, nor Gail reported January to be a stressful time of the year.

Administrator reported stressful months tended to cluster around certain times of the year. Two main clusters are indicated with the most of the administrators citing April and May as their more stressful times of the year. Two

of the administrators referred to this time as "spring." Two also stated that "now" at the time of the interview was the most stressful time for them. These administrators' interviews took place mid to late April. All of the interviews occurred between April 15 and May 6. The second most frequently named time was September, or the start of the school year.

In addition to the beginning of the year, and the April/May cluster, other stressful times were reported by administrators as well. These will be examined in more detail later in this section. First, the two major times cited, Spring, and the beginning of the school year will be examined.

When the months of April, May and June are combined in one grouping, nine of the ten participants in the study found this to be a stressful time. Ian, Hank Don, Barb, Cathy and Gail reported May as being a stressful time for them. Ian Hank, John and Barb also mentioned the month of April, while Ian, John and Barb included June. Faye and Ed cited spring as being the more stressful time for them. Several of the administrators qualified their selection by stating that this time of the year coincided with decisions centring around staffing for next year. In total, seven of the administrators mentioned staffing as being something occurring at this time of year that they either find stressful, or challenging. Some of the administrators remarked on the added stress at this time of the year and gave possible reasons for feeling this way.

Barb mentioned the end of the year, starting towards the end of April as being stressful because, "that centres around staffing." She commented on the relief felt when numbers of students were stable, and she did not have to declare any staff member surplus, "so that's one less stress . . . a major stress." Barb is aware of how losing staff members through a decline in enrolment can impact on a staff, "When we have to declare surplus, its devastating for the staff,

morale, and probably the most difficult thing I have to do in the job." Other administrators in the study shared Barb's concern regarding staffing.

Faye too finds this time of year and the concern over staffing to be the most stressful for her. She commented on the importance of the task of preparing the staffing estimate, "Everything that is going to happen in the next year rides on doing that correctly, and . . . I've probably just not had enough years experience to make it a normal part of my life." Faye also mentioned the stress involved over knowing that there are staff members that will not move, and should not move." Other causes of stress at this time of year for Faye include student behaviour which she reported as being worse in the months of April and May, evaluations that are coming due, budget concerns, impending changes for next year, and dealing with stressed out teachers. According to Faye, "So its the spring that's very, very tense. This is the most difficult time."

Ed remarked on the spring as being the most stressful, "because you're at the stage of running the current year, and finishing off and dealing with a lot of issues, plus you're planning for next year." He referred to this time as "heavy paced". Ed commented on the issue of staffing and how staff cuts impact on people's lives:

That's always a tough one. You're dealing with surplus staff. Because the reality is that even though no one's losing a job, you're impacting on their life. They may have been in that school for a long time, their life exists around there, their friends are there. Their day to day operations are there. And now you're saying to them, we don't have enough space. We have to move somebody on at this point, just because of programming needs. And that's a stressful scenario, dealing with those issues with people that are very, very personal.

Hank too mentioned the staffing issue, and how those decisions are really hard for him to make.

Cathy concurred with several other administrators in that she stated May

to be the most stressful time for her. She said that in addition to the "usual stuff", planning for June and for next year is also a priority. Staff members might be transferring, and an administrator might be interviewing staff for available positions. Gail too, mentioned staffing as being a stressful time. In conjunction with this, she also commented on the time tabling process that follows shortly after staffing for the upcoming year has been yet.

Don remarked on the stresses in May, and how he has to try and meet the needs of different people. Don believed that he is the right person to make the decisions regarding staffing in his building, as he has more of a global picture of what is happening and where the school is going. This vision is due to his consultation with staff, superintendents, parents, and the community. He commented on that responsibility and how he does not treat it lightly, "So I'm the one that's best to make the decision, about who goes and who stays, what the changing assignments are. So I feel that I'm in a privileged situation. One that I have to handle very responsibly." Knowing that he is charged with this responsibility does not take away from its associated stress.

For John, things get busy when he starts preparing for next year. This is usually from the middle of April onwards. This is in keeping with the other times of the year that he finds stressful, that is the "closings", before Christmas, before spring break, before the end of school in June. He commented on how the longer the break, the longer before that things start to get more complicated. According to John, the more responsibility one holds in school, the more stress:

So the bigger the break, the longer before, and that's a natural occurrence in a school cycle I think. It happens in all schools. There's always . . . and it doesn't differ much from a teaching assistant to a principal, just with the added responsibility, comes the added stress.

John stated at the end of the school year, how everyone wants something the

administrator. Parents want to know what is happening, superintendents want to know what is being done, and teachers want to know what is happening in the future. There is also a need for "having closure to what has just occurred," for the members of the school community.

Ian found the time from mid-April through to June not to be stressful, but just busier and more hectic because there is more taking place. He stated how there are a pile of activities going on, and lots of "organizational things". Time tabling, field trips, exams, reports and summaries, evaluations, and other items with a year end target combine to add to the fast pace of this time according to Ian. He commented on why this is stressful for some of his staff, and challenging for him:

So anytime you do a lot of things that are out of the ordinary your staff finds it stressful. Not everybody has the same reaction to change. That is what makes this time of year the most active. I don't know that I'd call it stressful. I find it challenging.

Barb also mentioned the end of the year as a stressful time with exams occurring later in June, this year. Trying to get everything tidied up as well as completing marks, awards and all the last minute things that happen at this time of the year adds to the fast pace during the month of June.

The beginning of the school year was cited by several administrators as being a stressful time. Ed, Hank, Don, Barb, and Gail found the start up of the year to have its challenges, and stress. Other administrators in the study chose to state why the beginning of the year was not stressful for them. Barb mentioned the start of the year as being one of her more stressful times. Trying to get all the new students in, registered and settled, reviewing rules and regulations with staff and students, and changing from a summer holiday routine to one of work were all mentioned by Barb as being part of this stressful

time.

Don too mentioned the months of September and October as being stressful for him. He commented on potential surprises, that is, not getting the number of students anticipated, and having to make changes to staffing, or timetables, the discipline issues that surface with the students vying for status, and interpersonal difficulties. Like Barb, he commented on going from holiday mode to work mode for the adults. For the students, he posed their transition to as Don termed, "excitement mode" at being back at school. Don referred to the excitement and apprehension he as an administrator feels at the beginning of each new school year.

Hank mentioned the stress September brings as schools struggle to make sure they have as many students as they predicted back in the spring. The ramifications of not reaching a projected enrolment, and the corresponding pressure from the school division were mentioned by Hank too. Hank commented on the situation where a school had the correct number of students they had predicted, but still experienced many other challenges. At this time of the year, programs are set up and the yearly plan starts to take shape. Trying to meet the needs of the student population without becoming burned out, or running the staff into the ground were also posed by Hank as being factors to consider at this time of the year.

Ann expressed her concern over this potentially stressful time, at the start of the school year, revolving around numbers of students. She postulated that a better picture of a school's enrolment could be obtained in a different way, rather than relying on one day attendance figures on which to base the entire year's funding. Ann suggested taking the average of the school's attendance on several different days as a more accurate assessment of where the school is at

in terms of population. Ed referred to the attendance reporting in September and the tight time line it creates, when faced with multiple other tasks at this time. Educating new students in the building about the structures in the school is one such task that must be completed at the start of the year according to Ed. Gail too mentioned the fall as stressful in conjunction with reporting numbers of students.

Ian stated how the beginning of the year is not a bad time for him at all, as he is coming off a “good mind set” from being on holiday. He finds it exciting to get going again at the start of a school year. Likewise, John reported “openings” to be simple for him, “because you come in early, you’re prepared, you’re ready for the onslaught of new registrations, and children coming back excited.” Both Ian and John commented on why this time of the year is not that stressful for them.

Ann reported slightly different times of the year, from most of her colleagues, that are stressful for her. She mentioned the time before Christmas break, February, and March. Ann commented on the fact that the novelty of attending school has worn off for some students by that time. Reality starts to set in with students, regarding their credits, as they come to realize they will not pass some of their courses. Ann talked about these crucial times for the students of whether they are going to make it, or give up and go into crisis, as often occurring prior to a holiday. John also commented on the pre-holiday stress he feels.

And I think as an administrator, you're a little bit more lonely. . . . I'm admired, respected, and accepted as a colleague, but the nature of the relationship . . . has changed.

(Don, Administrator)

Themes In the Data: Changes in Personal Character/Lifestyle After Taking on the Role of Administrator

This question was suggested by one of the administrators in the study at the time of his interview. It was in response to the question of was there anything else I should have asked the administrators that would illuminate the issues being examined in the study. This question was added on to the previously prepared questions as I felt that it was a worthwhile and interesting chance for participants to reflect and comment on their personal growth. The administrators' responses to this question varied. It was difficult to discern any common elements or themes. In order to best present the responses, answers from each administrator will be summarized separately. The look at changes in personal character and/or lifestyle, after becoming an administrator will begin with Hank.

Hank

Hank was not sure if he had changed as a result of being an administrator. He stated that he must have changed as "you can't have life experiences just go on in a benign way, they have to affect us." Hank commented that he thought administration had changed him in that he had learned a lot more skills in dealing with people effectively. He stated that likely, someone who has known him for his whole career with the school division would need to be consulted for his or her opinion on this question. Hank felt that

an individual's strength of character, and how effective he becomes has a great deal to do with the continually challenging himself with new experiences. Hank likened new experiences to moving to a new school, and the resulting effect on how an individual sees himself. Also, the way other people see that person and his effectiveness.

Faye

When asked to reflect on whether her personal character or lifestyle had seen a change since she became an administrator, Faye responded that she now had more confidence. Faye mentioned one way her life has become different is that she had to purchase a new wardrobe, and lots of comfortable shoes. As well, Faye stated how she really missed the classroom, and now as an administrator, she did not mind assisting with covering classes for teachers, as it gave her a chance to teach and she loves to teach. Time, and issues around time are different for Faye now that she is an administrator. After school, and evening meetings necessitate later suppers and changes in routines at home for both Faye and her spouse. One interesting point raised by Faye was in conjunction with her feelings of confidence, now in the way in which she meets people. She commented on how she meets new people in a different way, now that she is an administrator. Faye posed how, much to her surprise, that people, not involved in education, treat her differently, when they learn she is an administrator. Her interactions in social settings are often in a new way:

People treat you . . . they listen to you a little more, and I thought that's kind of ridiculous. I knew the same amount when I was a teacher, not about the same things. But, I thought I was worth listening to then, the truth of the matter is that I may be not worth listening to now.

John

Like Faye, John stated how his interaction with people is somewhat

different, now he is an administrator. Friends often treat him differently. He gave the example of spending time with a new acquaintance, while playing a game of squash, and that person finding out his occupation. The individual launched into a story of a problem encountered with his child at school. John stated that his opinion was sought as to what he would do. He said that in such a case, his word "carries a little more weight all of a sudden." John commented on the manner in which his friends treat him now that he is an administrator, rather than a teacher:

Now all of a sudden, last night my opinion was just, well I'm just one of you. I'm a salesman, you're a teacher, okay, that's great. That's a nice opinion. Now that you're an administrator, vice principal, or principal, hmm, boy, then you must have a little bit more knowledge because you're in a position of authority. So your friends treat you a little differently, you often get the last word in discussions, and it becomes ego tied to a degree. How come I'm this important all of a sudden? If I wasn't this important, [before], and I'm not any different [now].

John spoke about some very personal issues to him. He mentioned the way in which becoming an administrator has changed his relationship with his family. Prior to becoming an administrator, he would mark tests and assignments at home in the evenings. Now what John takes home are issues he has dealt with throughout the day. John described how he had to unload all of this baggage somewhere, and consequently used to find himself taking it out on his family. He commented on the tremendous personal sacrifices involved in embarking on this career, and how there was no way around it. John gave examples of not being able to drop his own children off at school, in the morning, or having to be at school until 6 pm and then having to make a meeting at 7 pm.

John has spent some time reflecting on his career as an administrator and examining his career choice. He mentioned how the first couple of years,

he was really shaking his head and asking himself if this was what he wanted to do. Like Faye, John too, commented on how he loves teaching, but does he want to be a "problem solver" all day? Sometimes he is uncertain. John stated one reason for continuing with a job he very much enjoys, "I'm seeing a lot more scope that, well, you're affecting a lot more children, more kids by doing it this way. . . . All of the kids in this school are my responsibility." John also stated the amount of the job that has to be private, that cannot be shared with a spouse, or other family members. He reechoed his earlier comment of the great personal cost involved in the job of principal. In summary, at the end of his interview, John stated that "stress is a part of life, and how we choose to deal with stress is the key." This philosophy of choosing how a person deals with their own stress is an important concept mentioned by John. It indicates he is aware of positive ways of dealing with stress.

John felt that it was crucial to educate the public concerning the role of the principal. He stated, "We've got to get society somehow to accept that, like we have to support professionals and their understanding of what they do for stress." John continued as he described his wish for society's acceptance of a more flexible approach to work hours for administrators. John would like to leave work at 3 pm one day, go and do some form of exercise in order to reduce his stress level. He feels this would be particularly warranted especially if he did not have a lunch hour that day, nor if he has had any coffee breaks all week. John believes that his leaving work early should be seen by the public as acceptable behaviour. According to John, "that's going to make him better for the community that night, when he goes back to the meeting." John stated the need to do a better job, as professionals, indicating that being an administrator is a full time, 24 hour a day job. It is a career, and his hours should be

somewhat flexible when required.

Ann

Like John, Ann spoke about things that matter a great deal to her. She talked of the way she is as a person, and her innermost feelings as she responded to this question. She indicated that she has always been a very private person, and now she is an administrator, she has become very private. Her personal life is not up for public display. Ann stated that she is an administrator first, and her job is what her job description from the school division says she should do. If she chooses to share with staff members, about her personal life, and she often does, then she must be careful of the potential for gossip. Ann is very careful with whom she talks to about work issues and is always cautious about confidentiality. In terms of routines, Ann is aware of when and where she goes to shop, in order to avoid people passing judgment of her on a day she feels like going out in more relaxed attire.

Ann has also learned to leave the big issues at work, although she stated that it took her awhile to be able to do so. She is aware of when a situation has gone beyond her control and when she is unable to influence it for the better.

Ann comments on this lack of control:

I can't influence this situation for the better. All I can do is be a provider of information, and pray, or hope that the child or the teacher, or parent, or whomever will take advice and know that they can come in and continue to dialogue or whatever it might be. Its knowing that you tried everything and being okay with that, you know. And leave your job and go home.

Barb

Barb stated, with the exception of the disciplinary focus with kids and with teachers, that she did not feel that she has changed all that much since becoming an administrator. She stated that she was still generally optimistic

about things, as she was, when she was teaching. Barb described herself as generally pretty logical, and able to handle emergencies very well. She has always “put in the time needed” no matter what position she has held in the school. Barb was also aware that she needs a break at certain times throughout the year. She will not spend her whole summer in the school, and when it is holiday time she holidays. Barb was aware of participating in physical activity and various hobbies in her spare time. Barb reported her personality and character to be very similar now she is an administrator than when she was a teacher.

Cathy

Like Barb, Cathy reported few changes to her lifestyle or personal character since becoming an administrator. She stated that she works longer hours and that her hours are less flexible now than when she was teaching. Cathy also mentioned her awareness that she has to be more careful of what she says. She described the situation where an administrator walks into the staff room at her school and the conversation ceases. Cathy commented on how this would likely not happen, or would seldom happen, when you were a teacher. She stated that sometimes an administrator needed to follow up on a scenario like this, and sometimes it was best to leave it alone. Cathy summed up her feelings on this by saying that such an occurrence was part of the job.

Don

Don believed that “most of my life is still the same. Most of who I am is still the same.” One part that has changed for Don, since becoming an administrator is the dynamics of collegiality. He stated how he was much more accepted as a teacher, whether it was pulling pranks and jokes with his colleagues, or just interacting with staff members. Don experienced a different level of interaction

with his colleagues, and even though he was still comfortable in his role as an administrator, when he interacted with staff, the relationship has changed. Don summarized his feelings as he commented on this relationship with staff members, "And I think as an administrator, you're a little bit more lonely. . . . I'm admired, respected, and accepted as a colleague, but the nature of the relationship, the nature of the relationship of collegiality has changed." Don remarked on how he felt that his relationship with colleagues would remain altered from what he experienced when he was a teacher. He commented on his ability to establish connections with staff members, and yet still be aware of how he viewed as the administrator by his colleagues at the school.

Gail

When asked whether becoming an administrator had altered her personality or her lifestyle Gail expressed her hope that it had not. She went on to state that she felt some of her administrator colleagues would likely be unaware that it might have affected them. Gail continued the discussion by describing the interruptions that occur throughout the day. She felt that some people might experience frustration if they were the type of person who made a list of things to be done during the day, and then were unable to get through all of them. Flexibility is required in the job, as is an ability to switch from one task to another.

In terms of taking work home, Gail mentioned that she assumed teachers were spending a couple of hours of their time in the evenings preparing and marking. If she needed to write a year end report at home, or if she was reading some material the superintendent has passed along to her, "It is no different than what I would have been doing as a teacher. So the time element is the same." Gail also commented on how her day has changed in some positive

ways. She has more freedom in planning her day around various tasks that need to be completed. She gave the example of having a report to write, and deciding to leave it for the afternoon, or even leaving it to do at home. This contrasted with her role as a teacher, where, in the classroom, there were things that had to be done right away, because of the 25 students in front of her, as opposed to her role as an administrator, where she sometimes has flexibility.

Gail said that a de-stressor for her has been a decreased emphasis on the clock. As a teacher, she was more governed by time. She also mentioned the freedom to use the washroom when she needed to, or to go and get a cup of coffee when she wanted rather than having to wait for a designated break time. The job of administrator required a certain personality type according to Gail. She was not referring to learning styles, but rather to interacting with people through meetings as she commented, "If you don't like meetings then you can't do this job, because that's all it is. You know, if its not meetings with kids, or with parents, its with your superintendent, or its with your teachers."

Gail also felt that she had less control of her environment, in terms of deciding what happens when. She stated that as a teacher she knew what she was going to do each day in her classes, and if a lesson plan did not get completed one day, then the next day it would be finished. For a teacher, when the day is done, for the most part, they have completed what they wanted to do. She described teaching as "being creative and being flexible and doing what your kids need you to do." Gail is at the "beck and call of anyone who appears" at her doorway at any time throughout the day. She also must respond to anyone that chooses to call her. She commented that the increased flexibility comes at a price, that is, the loss of control. Gail mentioned that for some people, the loss of control might be an issue.

Ed

Ed commented that the stress levels are increasing in the role of administrator. He stated that the school is seen as a much broader scope than it used to be. Rather than having academic focus and program focus, there is now an increasing demand to deal with social issues. Programs that exist outside of the curriculum, as well as a long list of co-curricular activities have become important for a school to provide. Ed also commented on the increased parenting responsibilities for kids being asked of the school community. The stress comes from these increased demands, according to Ed. Likewise, the administrator must adapt to the new challenges of being pulled in many different directions. Ed commented on one thing he really likes about his job:

But you know that its an exciting job. . . . but one of he things that indeed that some people may see as a stressor actually, is that when you come to work every day, you have no idea what's going to happen. You have no idea of what's going to go on. So you're never bored . . . you know its not a routine thing . . . its very much a people job.

The demands of the role of administrator are changing according to Ed, and this forces an administrator to adapt along with these increased responsibilities. For Ed, the job is an ever changing one and the variety is one thing he enjoys.

Ian

Ian's extensive background as a volunteer in a variety of areas not only prepared him for the role of administrator, but allows him to adapt and change as the nature of his job changes. He tended to view potentially stressful events as challenges to be met with his vast assortment of skills and talents. Ian stated the importance of personality in his job, and his is one that is well suited to his job. His attitude of breaking down onerous tasks into easily approachable tasks has seen him through a great many challenging situations. Ian described how

this is not the case with some of his colleagues, "in terms of how you handle things. How you see things. . . . Some take things and they make them gigantic. I see them, and I start thinking about well, how can we deal with them as opposed to Oh my God, this is horrendous. A lot of it is your personality." Over the course of Ian's career, he has continually adapted and changed to meet the demands of his job.

Summary of Data Analyses

From the quantitative and qualitative data analyses it is evident that some things about the administrators are very similar, such as who they turn to for support, and the perception of the current stress level by each administrator. Other things were reported to be very different, such as how the administrators have changed since taking on the role of administrator. A brief summary of the data analyses will be made in this section.

Significant differences were found between the different sources and types of stress as reported by the administrators over the three month period. In the extra-organizational category, the boundary spanning activities were the most numerous, while the task-based type proved to be reported most frequently under the intra-organizational source. No significant difference was found between the different months of the study in terms of the frequency of the administrators' calls/contacts with their school division office.

The administrators used a variety of terms to define stress, but for the most part, their definitions included the concept of time. Other themes in their descriptions included emotional or physical factors, and control. The administrators also rated their current stress level in a similar fashion. The common term used here was "low" as the response to the query concerning

their current stress level.

With respect to what causes them stress, the administrators mentioned students first, followed by staff, and then parents, as their top three stressors. Other stressors commented on included relationships, perceptions, problem solving, meeting deadlines, dealing with misrepresentation by the media, creating agendas, and coping with the rapid pace of the multitude of events occurring simultaneously. A common theme amongst the stressors as stated by the administrators included that of having no influence, or control over many of these items.

The administrators in the study, for the most part, reported positive relationships with their individual area superintendents. The secretary–treasurer is a person that the administrators would only deal with occasionally. What contact there has been with this person was reported to be positive. In terms of dealing with program consultants in the school division, again reports by the administrators tended to be of good relationships where there had been interaction. A number of ways were reported by the administrators of interacting with their school division office, including phone calls, fax, and e–mail.

A variety of supports, or sources of direction were reported by the administrators, including superintendents, colleagues, staff, family, department heads, and friends. Colleagues and superintendents were two supports cited most frequently by the administrators in the study. Some of the study participants have well developed support networks, while others do not have extensive systems of support and direction in their work.

The administrators could be divided into three distinct groups in terms of the frequency with which they contacted their school division office. Hank, Gail,

and Barb each contacted their division office greater than 50 times over the three month period. The middle group consisted of Ian, Faye and John who called between 25 and 50 times. The less frequent callers comprised the last group of administrators, those with less than 25 total contacts. Cathy, Ann, Don, and Ed were all members of this group. The most common reasons for contacting the division office included updating the superintendent, seeking information, or clarification, or requesting specific items.

In terms of other useful resources for the administrators when they are problem solving, the consensus was to be part of an administrative team. This was expressed particularly by administrators in single administrator schools. Other desired resources mentioned by the participants in the study included time, support, and the opportunity to mentor.

The preparation for the role of administrator, experienced by the participants in the study took on many forms, depending upon when the individual had taken on the role of administrator. Half of the administrators reported that they had been unprepared for their new role. Some stated that other experiences in their lives had prepared them for this job, and that they wished their training had been more worthwhile. Some administrators reported having received no training. Suggestions were made as to possible ways to improve training for administrators. Mentoring programs, job-shadowing and action based types of training were all mentioned by administrators as being valuable ways to prepare for the role of administrator.

With respect to stressful times of the year, the administrators in the study mentioned all the months of the school year, with the exception of January as being stressful. Common times of the year reported to be stressful included spring (April and May), and the start of the school year (September). Spring was

reported to be stressful by several administrators due to the staffing requirements for the upcoming year, that needed to be finalised at this time.

When asked how becoming an administrator had altered their personal character, or lifestyle, the administrators' responses varied. Some positive comments were made in response to this question and some negative changes were noted. Perceptions by other people were noted by more than one of the administrators.

In summary, the ten administrators in the study reported thoughtful and meaningful responses to the questions asked of them at the time of their interview. A summary of these findings, including conclusions and some future trends will be looked at in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER FIVE

Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

I can always equate being an administrator to the guy that was juggling the plates [on the Ed Sullivan Show]. He'd start, on a pole with one plate. He'd get it going really nicely, [and then move on to the next plate]. By the time he got to the eighth plate, if he didn't pay attention, the first one would fall and break. That's an excellent analogy for being an administrator. You have to keep the superintendents' department informed and happy of what you're doing, and the staff, and the kids, and the community and parents.

(John, Administrator).

This Chapter includes a summary of the study, and the findings obtained. An discussion of these findings, as well as some suggestions for future research in this area are also included in this section. The summary begins with an overview of the study in general.

Summary

This Study in Review

This study examined the job-related stress of ten administrators in one urban school division in Manitoba. It represents a snapshot in the lives of the participants, arising from an examination of their logbooks, and listening to their

thoughts and feelings regarding the issue of stress during the three month time period in which the study took place. This study was undertaken partly to replicate Lam and Cormier's (1998) work with rural administrators in Saskatchewan. This study was also chosen to find out more about the participants' perceptions of stress, the work-related demands placed upon them, the supports they make use of, and the degree to which these administrators are coping with job-related stress.

Data collection for this work took on two forms. First, administrators were given a logbook in which they kept track of the phone calls/contacts they initiated with their school division office for the months of January, February and March. Relevant details of the contacts were noted, including the date, time individual called, and the nature of the call. Calls/contacts were classified by the researcher according to Lam's eight cell typology. This method was in keeping with Lam and Cormier's (1998) work and allowed for comparison with the results from their study. Statistical analysis was carried out on the numbers of calls/contacts in the typology in a similar manner to that of Lam and Cormier (1998). Calls/contacts were also examined by month to determine if there were any differences from month to month.

Second, data was also collected through interviews with each of the ten administrators in the study. Interviews took place following the three month logbook record keeping period. Interview questions were submitted to the administrators in advance of their respective interviews. Participants were instructed that they were free to decline to answer any or all of the interview questions. Interviews ranged in length from twenty minutes to just over one hour. Interviews were taped, and later transcribed. Input was sought from the administrators concerning their perceptions of stress in their workplace, their

ability to cope with the demands placed upon them, and their feelings regarding their support networks, and their preparation prior to becoming administrators.

Administrators were informed that their logbooks, interview tapes, and transcripts would be kept in the strictest confidence. The participants in the study were informed that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time. A summary of this research paper will be provided to the study participants upon approval of this thesis.

The Problem

This study examines the area of stress and administrators in the educational setting. Are administrators experiencing stress? If so, what is the nature of this stress, and how are administrators coping with job-related stress? A group of ten administrators working in an urban setting in Manitoba are the subjects of this study, in an effort to learn more about job-related stress. How are these individuals coping with the demands of their jobs? The sources of direction and supports used by the administrators is of interest, as well as their more stressful times of the year. In short, this study examines the demands placed on the administrators and how they are coping with this job-related stress.

Research Questions

Four research questions formed the basis of the inquiry in this work. The research questions guiding the focus of this study were as follows:

1. What is the nature of the stress experienced amongst urban administrators?

2. How does the nature of the stress experienced by the urban administrators differ from that of the rural administrators as found in Lam's work?
3. What are some of the supports/sources of direction for the administrators?
4. What are the more stressful times of the year for administrators?

Background to this Study – A Look at Lam's Work

Lam developed a framework for examining stress fifteen years ago as he built on the work initiated by Gmelch and Hiebert (Lam, 1984). Lam's framework combined existing theories of organization with an understanding of administrator stressors in order to provide a better organization for the many different ways of examining job-related stress (Lam, 1984). The result of Lam's work was an eight cell typology used to study stress experienced by rural administrators in Saskatchewan (Lam and Cormier, 1998).

In this study, Lam and Cormier (1998) utilized administrator initiated calls/contacts to the school division administrative office to represent stressful incidents. Lam and Cormier's approach to this particular study fits in with Hiebert's (1988) definition of stress where situational demands outweigh an individual's ability to cope. Seeking assistance and guidance from the central office is a logical way to cope with these challenges according to Lam and Cormier (1998). They feel that tabulating calls/contacts may represent a conservative way of monitoring stress signals. Lam and Cormier (1998) stated

how principals are often reluctant to involve central administration as these requests for assistance may be incorrectly perceived as a negative reflection on their ability to cope (p.57).

Lam and Cormier (1998) found that administrators contacted their respective school division offices in order to cope with the demands of their external environments more than the researchers predicted. Lam and Cormier also reported school leadership to be entering a difficult transitional period, with administrators having to cope with added responsibilities in both their internal and external environments. Lastly, their study stated the level of principals' stress to be higher now than it was ten years ago (Lam & Cormier, 1998, p.64).

Lam and Cormier (1998) make the assumption that calls/contacts are indicators of job-related stress in the administrators in their study. These researchers also believe that administrators who are experiencing stress will contact their school division office for assistance with the situations they are unable to handle.

Findings from the Study

Calls/contacts initiated by the administrators to their school division office concerning maintenance items arising within the school, were the most frequent type noted. Items arising outside of the school were more frequently those dealing with external agencies. The administrators have extensive, well developed support networks that appear to be providing sources of direction and assisting them in coping with the demands placed upon them.

Administrators participating in this study reported their own job-related stress levels to be low. More stressful times of the year as reported by the administrators were April, May and September. This study demonstrated that

ten administrators in one urban school division in Manitoba are not suffering greatly from the effects of stress and appear to be coping effectively with the demands and challenges of their roles as administrators. This study also shows that there does not seem to be a relationship between the number of calls/contacts made by an administrator and his or her level of stress. Administrators displaying frequent rates of contacting their division office did not indicate higher levels of stress than those who made contact less often.

The research questions are utilized in this section to assist in a summary of the findings. A look at the findings begins with the first research question.

Nature of the Stress Experienced Amongst the Administrators

A summary of the findings from this study will begin with a look at the nature of stress experienced by the administrators in the study. Information obtained from the logbooks as well as from interviews with the administrators serve as the source for these findings.

Administrator logbooks indicated a great difference amongst the participants in their frequency of contacting the individuals at their school division office. Some administrators contacted their division office on a near daily basis while others seldom made contact with the administrative office. This difference in the frequency of contact with the school division office is likely due to a variety of factors, including the activity in the school, the type of school, the personality and style of the administrator as well as the relationship between each administrator and the individuals at the school division office. In terms of frequency of contact with the school division office, more than one administrator mentioned their own extensive support network where they would go for assistance initially, rather than contacting individuals at the school division

office.

During the three months of the study, administrators contacted their division office for a variety of reasons. Classification of administrator calls/contacts according to Lam's eight cell typology revealed that the majority of the administrators' calls tended to be intra-organizational in source. That is, items dealing with issues arising within the school. Of the intra-organizational source, the most common type of call by far, was the task-based kind. Task-based calls/contacts dealt with organizational needs in order to maintain the school's effective functioning. Human resource matters, personnel, staffing, implementing new curricula, and dealing with logistical matters of a variety of origins are the types of issues found in this category. In short, items of a maintenance function comprised this most frequent type of contact with the school division office.

A minority of administrator calls/contacts fell under the extra-organizational source. Within the extra-organizational source, boundary-spanning tasks were most frequently noted. These tasks included such activities as dealing with external agencies including law enforcement, health and social agencies, the media, searching for alternative resources for existing programs, as well as outreach activities.

Interviews with the ten administrators yielded a fairly consistent definition for stress. The administrators in the study perceived stress as centring around issues of time, or items related to time management, and a lack of control over events, or outcomes, as well as reference to emotional or physical factors. Empowerment is an issue for administrators in their role, as Lam (1988) remarked on the erosion of administrators' perceived authority (p. 262).

In terms of the administrators' personal perception of their current stress

levels, study participants all reported experiencing low to moderate levels of stress at the time of their interviews. Such terms as “low”, “average”, “okay”, or “moderate” were used to describe the administrators' stress. No one reported high levels of stress. When asked to name the more stressful events they face in a day, the administrators reported their top stressors as expected; students, staff, and parents. This is not surprising when one considers these three groups make up the majority of interactions an administrator would experience during a typical school day.

In summary, for administrators in this study, the most common reason to contact the school division office under the intra-organizational source was to deal with maintenance items, including personnel issues, and items of a routine function. Boundary-spanning activities, such as dealing with outside agencies was the most frequent cause of contacting the school division office on the extra-organizational source. Study participants defined stress as centring around issues of time, a lack of control, or emotional and physical factors. This sample of administrators reported low levels of stress. No relationship was found between the frequency of contacting the school division office and the level of stress reported.

A Comparison of Rural and Urban Administrators

When the findings from this study were compared with those from Lam and Cormier (1998) some similarities are noted. Rural administrators in Lam and Cormier's study, and urban administrators from this study both reported calls/contacts most frequently of the task-based type in the intra-organizational source. Lam and Cormier reported total incidents of an extra-organizational source to be the same in number as those from the intra-organizational source.

For urban administrators in this study, the intra-organizational contacts outnumbered those from extra-organizational sources by more than two and one half times their number. Lam and Cormier (1998) also reported the boundary-spanning type to be most numerous amongst the extra-organizational sources. In this regard urban and rural administrators demonstrated similarities in the types of calls/contacts they made with their respective school division offices. The tasks carried out by rural and urban administrators are nearly the same, as their jobs are very similar in nature. Urban administrators were faced with more calls/contacts of the task-based type than their rural counterparts.

With respect to stressful times of the year, urban and rural administrators reported similar patterns. For the urban group, of the months January, February and March, January was the one with the most calls/contacts, while February and March were similar and lower in number. The rural administrators reported a decrease in calls/contacts from January to February, followed by an increase to March.

During the interviews, urban administrators reported April, May and September to be stressful times of the year. None of the administrators reported January to be a stressful month for them, yet this month saw the most number of phone calls/contacts made to the school division office. This supports this study's assertion that there does not seem to be a relationship between the level of stress and the number of calls/contacts made by an administrator. Urban administrators reported stressful times of the year to coincide with staffing, preparing for the next year while still executing the present year, and also the stress associated with the start of the school year.

Supports/Sources of Direction for Administrators

In terms of supports and sources of direction, administrators in the study mentioned superintendents, colleagues, vice—principals, staff, family and department heads as offering support and guidance. The administrators indicated many other resources they would like to have to help them carry out their jobs. The most common wish expressed by the administrators in single administrator schools was their desire to be part of an administrative team. The benefits of being able to work with a vice—principal were stated.

The administrators reported a variety of reasons for contacting their school division office, the most common being to provide information to the superintendent. The majority of the participants in the study advocated keeping their superintendents up to date, so that there would be no surprises. Positive, and supportive relationships were described by the administrators with their area superintendents.

Preparation for the role of administrator was something most of the administrators felt they would have benefited from, as half of the respondents felt they were not prepared for taking on the role of principal. Since becoming principals, some of the respondents felt their personal character and lifestyle had changed while others felt they had not experienced much change in this regard.

Stressful Times of the Year

When the frequency of calls/contacts are examined on a month by month basis, no significant differences were found between the months in this study. The three months of the study each indicated a similar frequency of contact on the part of the administrators. This compares with Lam and Cormier (1998) who

found June to be the most stressful month. Hempling and Gilliland (1981) reported similar findings to that of Lam and Cormier, with a more stressful time indicated at the end of the school year.

In this study, administrators perceived stressful times in the school year to be the spring (April and May) and the start of the school year (September). Stress associated with the spring tended to center around staffing issues, and planning for the next year while at the same time still carrying on with the current school year. School start up, and all of the activities, and organizational functions associated with the initiation of new students to the school was reported as stressful as well.

Interview Findings

This work did not find the administrators to contact their division office when they were experiencing stress. Administrators in this study demonstrated their well developed support networks. They frequently contacted other colleagues, friends and family members with queries before contacting their division office. Likewise, participants in this study reported feeling comfortable when they had to contact their division office and did not find this to be a stressful experience. Administrators also reported they frequently contacted their division office to provide information for their superintendents, that is to keep them informed, or to confirm some minor query. Results of such contacts were seldom stress-producing, according to the participants in this study, merely the way the individuals in the school division operated, and a necessary part of doing business.

Discussion of the Findings

When I first began the work for this study, I believed stress amongst educational administrators to be widespread in this province. The number of administrators on medical leaves of absence appeared to be numerous, when one listened to media reports. Educational administrators in Manitoba seemed unable to cope with the demands of their jobs.

Examining the literature and working with the ten administrators in this study have altered my viewpoint concerning stress amongst educational administrators. The ten administrators in the study did not appear to be experiencing a great deal of stress, nor were they bothered by, or unable to cope with, the challenges of their job. On the occasions I met with the participants throughout the duration of the study, I found them to be effective administrators who functioned well in their capacities as principals.

On one occasion, an administrator appeared to be particularly “rushed” when we began his interview. The phone rang several times at the start of our time together, and his unease was evident. Once he began answering questions, and as the interview progressed, he became calmer and visibly relaxed while speaking about his job. I believe this is an example of the fast pace at which many administrators operate, and is not indicative of a significant degree of stress.

I was surprised to learn the significant amount of time administrators spend in calling/contacting their school division office, especially in getting in contact with the individual area superintendents. The most common reasons for calling/contacting the school division office included fulfilling maintenance functions, and concerning dealing with external agencies. Many of these calls were to provide information for the individuals at the school division office, and

for the superintendents.

Why did some of the administrators contact their school division office on such a frequent basis? A true answer to this question will likely not be found but one can speculate as to reasons for frequency of contact between the school division and the administrators in the study.

Perhaps the superintendents favour the type of relationship where the administrators are encouraged to keep in touch, and provide frequent updates. A few of the administrators mentioned their concern over keeping their superintendents informed of any events or situations that have the potential to develop into something more serious. This frequent contact might be part of a micro-management philosophy amongst the policy makers in this school division.

Consequences for not keeping the superintendents informed of potential media reports, or involvement with parents and the community would likely be far reaching. Negative public perception of a school within its own community is not an easy situation to deal with, especially with the increased competition for students brought about by the Schools of Choice Initiative.

Are the administrators worried about the consequences of not keeping superintendents informed, or is this simply a realistic way to do business today, where legal repercussions of wrong doing are high? It is likely that administrators are mindful of the ever increasing litigious trend of our society, and truly desire to carry out the functions of their jobs in an appropriate manner.

The superintendents too are mindful of the need to be kept informed of situations within the schools they are responsible for, so as to be better prepared for calls from parents and the media. Those in positions of authority need to be kept aware of potential troublesome situations. Likewise,

superintendents are likely eager to keep the stress levels of their administrators low, and would likely be aware of the need to strengthen the coping mechanisms of these individuals under their supervision.

Administrators in Lam and Cormier's (1998) study tended to call/contact their school division office for similar reasons as the administrators in this study. There is a difference in the calling frequency of urban and rural administrators. Participants in this urban study reported an average calling frequency of twelve calls/contacts per month while those in Lam and Cormier's (1998) study in rural Saskatchewan called/contacted the school division office approximately three times per month. Administrators in this study initiated contact with their school division office on a more frequent basis than those in Lam and Cormier's (1998) study.

The administrators reported low levels of stress at the time of their interviews. There might be a hesitancy on the part of the participants in the study to admit they are experiencing stress, and that they are not able to cope effectively in their positions. There is a reluctance in admitting weakness and the administrators are likely not an exception to this. The desire to be seen as competent at what one does is a powerful motivating factor as well. Admitting to experiencing stress on the part of an administrator might be an admission that he or she is unable to deal with the demands of the job. Factors such as the time of day the interview took place, and what events were going on in the school at that time may have influenced administrator's responses to interview questions as well.

This study does not support Lam's assertion that calls/contacts to the school division office are stressful incidents nor that calling the school division office is an indicator of stress. No relationship between the number of

calls/contacts made and an administrator's level of stress was noted. Given the nature of the calls/contacts observed in this study, many appeared to be merely an exchange of information. Perhaps calling/contacting the school division office in this manner is an indication of the procedure in this particular school division. Administrators pass along information to their area superintendents and also seek information on a very regular basis.

One issue that emerged during the interviews was the desire of principals in single administrator schools to be part of an administrative team. There is a strong sense of a loss of collegiality on the part of administrators who are on their own. It is likely that a lack of available resources would result in maintaining this situation for administrators in this particular school division. Perhaps other ways of making connections for principals in single administrator schools could be explored. In a similar manner, participants in this study also mentioned the benefits of a multi-day administrator-mentoring or job-shadowing program during the school year. This program would benefit new administrators, or those who aspire to be administrators.

The administrators in this study are very experienced, with many years in both teaching and administrative positions. They have been able to achieve the positions they hold at present by doing what is expected of them. Consequently, the system in place in this school division in Manitoba is one that appears to function reasonably efficiently. It is likely that the same procedures for administrators in terms of contacting their school division office will continue to be employed.

Administrators in the study demonstrated well developed support networks. Some of the administrators' sources of direction included superintendents and individuals at the school division office, while others

tended to use colleagues, staff members and family as their primary supports. These findings are what is expected from a group of ten individuals with differing personalities and levels of experience. One recurring comment from the administrators was their appreciation for their area superintendents and the assistance they received from them.

In terms of stressful times of the year, it is understandable that peaks would occur at certain times during the school year. The start up of the school year, as well as the months of April and May, where planning for the next year coincides with the winding down of the present school year, are both expected to be stressful times of the year for school administrators. Lam and Cormier's (1998) work dealt with the January through June time period, and therefore did not mention the start of the school year in September to be stressful. Likewise their study reported June as the most stressful time of the year, as compared to this study which finds the stressful end of the year to occur a little earlier, during the months of April and May.

In summary, findings from this study shed light on the issue of the nature of stress experienced by a group of urban administrators in Manitoba. This group of administrators is fairly representative of principals in this school division. It was not possible to speak with administrators who are presently on leave from their positions. In this study, logbooks of calls/contacts initiated by the administrators did not yield a great deal of information about the nature of stress amongst administrators but provided a good record of when, how and why these administrators initiated contact with individuals at their school division office. The interviews provided information about what these administrators find stressful, their support networks, the relationships they hold with individuals at their school division office, and the more stressful times of the

year for administrators. Administrators in this study appear to be coping well with the current stress levels they are experiencing. Should stress levels amongst administrators increase, then more supports for administrators may be required in order to allow these educational administrators to continue to function well within this school division.

Suggestions for Future Research

A number of areas of interest for future research emerged during the development of this research paper. Current research is needed in the area of stress and administrators as much of the work in this area is nearly ten years old. Some of these topics for further inquiry are presented in this section.

An area for further research would be to look at how the Schools of Choice Initiative impacts on the role of administrator. Levin (1995) has done some work in this area and reports the results of choice of schools will likely be complex but less far-reaching, or damaging than first proposed (p. 6). As this is an emerging and new area of inquiry, further work on the impact of the Schools of Choice Initiative is very much warranted.

A second area for further inquiry concerns support networks for administrators, particularly for new administrators, and those who do not have extensive support networks of their own. Isolation of administrators in single administrator schools is a concern that was mentioned in this work. More supports for administrators are called for, as well as better links with provincial associations and educators' groups in order to better enable administrators to connect with peers in similar positions. A needs assessment of what administrators would find beneficial to them in this area of support networks, or mentoring, would be a valuable starting point for further work in this area.

What is the situation in other school divisions in this province, and in the rest of the country regarding stress and administrators? Looking at the job-related stress of administrators in other school divisions would add to this body of knowledge regarding stress in the educational setting. It would be of interest to examine the organization of the school division offices in other school divisions to compare the amount of contact between administrators and their superintendents.

The benefit of including stress management training for administrators needs to be looked at. Training in techniques of stress management could be included in the university setting for future administrators in training, and by school divisions, for individuals who have been identified as administrator candidates. This would assist in developing effective coping mechanisms, and would especially benefit individuals without a well developed network of support.

Stressful times of the year for administrators need to be looked at in more depth. Identifying the more difficult times of the school year could lead to strategies being put in place to help administrators cope more effectively with the demands placed upon them during these hectic times. In such a manner, the effectiveness of administrators could be maintained throughout the school year.

This research paper has led to further areas for examination beyond this work. The role of the superintendent needs to be examined in more detail, both in this school division and other school divisions. Likewise work should be undertaken in the area of further supports for administrators in single administrator schools, and the inclusion of a possible mentoring program for both administrator candidates and new administrators. Links with other

organizations, groups and departments that could offer support, and act as a resource for administrators needs to be examined. Administrator perceptions concerning the effectiveness of the administrator training program in the school division in the study could also be looked at. Finally, this study advocates providing more support for the superintendents' office in order that they can continue to provide support administrators.

A Final Comment

A growing body of research indicates administrators are coping with their jobs and are enjoying the work they do (Hanson, 1991, and Sarros & Friesen, 1987). With increasing demands placed on administrators through parent councils and the competition for students and available resources, this might change in the future. Administrators must possess an effective support network and good coping skills to be able to exist in their jobs. Should the demands placed on them come to exceed their repertoire of coping mechanisms, then stress will result. It will continue to be important to monitor stress levels to ensure administrators are able to function efficiently in their roles.

The ten administrators in this study are busy individuals who offer a wide range of programs and initiatives in their schools. They represent a snapshot of a group of principals over a three month period of time in one urban school division in Manitoba. They are coping with the demands of their jobs. It would appear that the methods they have in place in terms of their supports, sources of direction and repertoire of coping skills are working. These administrators represent a very talented and innovative group who are representative of their other colleagues throughout the province. I wish them continued success in their endeavours.

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APPENDIX ONE

Letter to Participants

December 9, 1998

Dear Educational Administrator,

I am a student in the Department of Educational Administration, Foundations and Psychology, in the Faculty of Education, University of Manitoba, conducting research for my M. Ed. thesis under the supervision of Dr. Edward Hickcox. You are being asked to voluntarily participate in a study examining the nature of stress amongst urban administrators. You have been selected for this study after having expressed your interest in the topic, and willingness to participate, during informal conversations with me during the last several months. A representative sample of administrators from the division is being approached, in order that results will be generalized back to the whole population of administrators within the school division.

There are many definitions of stress and a variety of ways of measuring stress reported in the literature. There is much documentation that administrators experience stress, yet the nature of this stress has not received much attention. This study will examine the type of stress experienced by administrators in their day to day work, and will look at what are the more stressful times of the school year. Findings from this study will be compared to those from a similar study involving rural administrators. By examining the nature of stress, and when it occurs, perhaps resources can be developed to assist with these stressful events in the life of an administrator.

You are one of a group of administrators selected to participate in this study, that will run from December of 1998 through to April of 1999. You will be asked to keep a phone call log of the phone calls/contacts initiated by you to the school division office over this time. Calls/contacts will be grouped under a variety of categories. The phone call log books will be given to you prior to the start of the study. Keeping track of the daily phone calls initiated by you to the division office should take a matter of seconds per call, as you will only be required to place a date and a mark in the appropriate column for each call. A sample logbook page is attached to this letter.

Following collection of the data, you will be asked to participate in a

follow up interview at a time and location convenient to you. Interview questions will be designed to address issues relating to stress. A list of these questions will be supplied to you prior to your interview. It is estimated that this follow up interview will be approximately one half hour in length. The interview will be taped and later transcribed with all identifying characteristics removed. The tapes will then be destroyed. You have the right to decline answering any or all of the interview questions.

Your telephone logs and your responses to the questions will be kept in the strictest confidence. At no point within the thesis will your name or any information which could be used to identify you, or your school, be reported. You have the right to withdraw at any time should you desire. Upon completion of the study, a summary of the thesis findings will be provided for you.

Should you require additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me by telephone at (204) 896-5401, or e-mail at <hwatters@minet.gov.mb.ca>, or write to me at 54 Ascot Bay, Winnipeg, Mb., R3R 0X4. Your cooperation and assistance in this study are greatly appreciated. Thank you for your time and your support.

Sincerely,


Jan Watters

I hereby give my consent to participate in this research project. I will be contacted to arrange an initial meeting within one week after receipt of this signed consent.

(Signature of Participant)

(Date)

APPENDIX TWO

Logbook Page

APPENDIX THREE

Eight Cell Typology

Typology of Sources of School Administrators' Stress

Sources of Stress		
Types of Stress	Extra-Organizationally Induced	Intra-Organizationally Induced
Role-Based	Control and Direction	Authority Structure
Task-Based	Resource Adequacy	Maintenance Function
Boundary-Spanning	Program Demands	Supervision
Conflict Mediating	Value Compatibility	Staff

Adapted from

Lam, Y.L. (1988). External Environmental Constraints and Job-Related Stress on School Administrators. The Journal of Educational Administration. 26 (2), p. 252.

APPENDIX FOUR

Interview Questions

Interview Questions for Urban Administrators

1. Briefly describe what stress means for you?
2. How would you rate your current stress level today; low, moderate, high?
3. What would you say are the more stressful events in your day?
4. How would you describe your relationship with your director, secretary–treasurer and program consultant?
5. Who, or what are some of your supports, or sources of direction in your position?
6. When do you call your division office—eg. when your other resources have been exhausted, etc. How do you feel when you must call/contact your division office?
7. What other resources would be useful for you when you are problem solving?
8. What has been your background in coping with the day to day stressors of your job? Do you feel you were adequately prepared to cope with the stresses of your day to day events when you started this career?
9. In your opinion, what are the more stressful times of the year for you in this job?
10. Are there any other questions that I should have asked you that would have shed some light on the issues I am exploring – stress and administrators?
11. Do you have any comments or questions that you would like to make regarding this study?
12. How has being an administrator altered, or changed your personal character or lifestyle?

Note: Prior to the interview, I will remind each of the participants that they are free to decline to answer any or all of the interview questions.