

Proactive Strategies for Preventing Resource Teacher Burnout

by

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### ABSTRACT

Resource teachers in Manitoba are responsible for supporting diverse groups of students, while working alongside educational assistants, teachers, administrators, clinicians, consultants, and parents/caregivers. Their duties include managing a caseload of students requiring student-specific plans, supporting the coordination of clinical services to those students, facilitating learning goals based on assessments, aligning teaching strategies with resources, and a range of other duties as assigned. While resource teachers play a crucial role in supporting appropriate educational programming in schools, they can experience stress and burnout due to the demands of their job. Implementing proactive strategies can help alleviate symptoms of burnout experienced by resource teachers.

To better understand the challenges and strategies used by resource teachers to prevent burnout, a research study was conducted with six resource teachers from different school settings in Manitoba. The participants engaged in two focus group interviews through Zoom videoconferencing. Grounded theory methodology was employed to identify four emergent themes: (a) the need for school leaders to have a clear and shared vision of student support services, (b) the importance of a safe and caring school culture, (c) the value of resource teachers' awareness of mental health and well-being practices, and (d) the need for continuous professional development in inclusion and student services.

The study revealed that resource teachers face unique challenges and utilize a variety of coping strategies to prevent burnout. The data collected through the focus groups can offer valuable guidance for school divisions, school leaders, universities, and other educators in supporting best practices for inclusion that strengthen student outcomes and foster a fulfilling school culture for school communities.

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## **Chapter 1:**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Like many other professions, newly graduated teachers often aspire to roles beyond the classroom. Some may hope to become school leaders, teach a preferred subject or course, such as physical education or health education, or work as a school guidance counselor or resource teacher. As a resource teacher myself, I have been drawn to student services due to my interest in supporting inclusive and equitable educational programming for all students. During my first year as a full-time resource teacher in a metro Winnipeg school, I was fortunate to meet a colleague who had been working as a resource teacher in the same school division for most of her career. This colleague, whom I will refer to as Mabel, was truly inspiring and played a pivotal role in leading me towards the topic of my research.

Mabel was known for ‘running the ship,’ meaning she influenced decisions the administration made about the school and programming because she knew her stuff and was effective. Coincidentally, as I was joining the team, she was preparing the team for her pending retirement. This played to my advantage because our administrator tasked us with transitioning her caseload to me, which I leveraged as an opportunity to learn as much possible about the role. After all, she was a seasoned vet – she knew the nuances of the school and the role intimately. My colleague spent her final weeks preparing me to ‘take the torch’ (an inside joke – Mabel always kept a prop cigarette on her desk and when moments were tricky, she would take a fake drag of the prop cigarette like a scene from an old timey film; this always seemed to offer her a moment of clarity and a solution). Through shadowing and listening to her endless advice, I found myself reflecting on how she had managed to balance it all for as long as she did.

Mabel survived and thrived for 30 years as a teacher, many of those years in the role of resource teacher. She shared how there had been a lot of transition in student services and that

this metro Winnipeg school was a challenging school to work at. I observed the school's cultural landscape as rich with diversity. This school community, like most in Manitoba, has its own way of being, with many successes and challenges. However, the school had also experienced a few unique challenges due to an increase in the size and diversity of the school's population, along with managing the idiosyncrasies of the school's open concept design.

I learned the school's community had experienced waves of demographic change characterized by broadening diversity and new family dynamics. This included an increase in students who were visible minorities, First Nations and Métis, and newcomers. Additionally, there was an increase in subsidized and lower-income housing complexes within the school's catchment area. It appeared that as the population changed, so did the needs of the students. For example, as non-English speaking student enrollment increased, the school redirected resource teachers to respond by increasing the capacity of resource teachers to facilitate English as an Additional Language support and additional literacy interventions in the classroom. Reflecting on how my colleague managed to cope with the evolving needs of the school led to curiosity about the mechanisms and strategies that allowed Mabel to cope and adjust over the years.

It seemed to me that what my colleague had managed to do, working as a resource teacher for nearly 30 years, was nothing short of incredible. I learned there was value in the conversations I was having with her during this transitional time. I collected little gems of advice that went far beyond the specifics of the responsibilities of the resource teacher; she shared the evolution of the school's service delivery model and what she thought would make for good next steps. Understanding what helped Mabel be successful mattered to me: I wanted to envision myself and other resource teachers as able to talk about a fruitful career that made an impact and was supportive of students and staff. This prompted the idea that if I was able to gain knowledge

and inspiration from a deep dialogue with one resource teacher, what might be learned from a group of experienced resource teachers willing to share their experiences and what they needed to be effective?

Leading up to Mabel's retirement, she shared stories that reflected her love for the job and more importantly her love for the kids. We discussed the social, intellectual, and personal rewards of doing this important work. We discussed how the resource teacher's roles and responsibilities are different from other roles on the school's team – resource teachers are generally expected to guide classroom teachers and school administration in enriching the school's inclusive and equitable philosophy and practice. This includes helping principals to identify areas within the school's development plan and service delivery model that would benefit from redevelopment or clarity. Katz and Lamoureux (2018) note that resource teachers often support designing inclusive programming and embedding inclusive practices in the school culture, at large, and in the work of individual classroom teachers. I believe that resource teachers experience a special relationship with their teaching profession, working with students and consulting with school leadership. This belief prompted my curiosity about what resource teachers need from their administrators to feel effective and as though they are making an impact, while participating in continual learning themselves.

Despite the many professional development opportunities that focus on strengthening inclusive practices for all learners, classroom teachers benefit from expanding their capacity to support inclusion, starting with developing a shared understanding of a common language and beliefs about learning and inclusion (Mitchell, 2014). Aligning teachers' understanding of inclusion and inclusive programming with Manitoba's philosophy is work that is continually being developed and supported at school, divisional, and provincial levels. To guide this work,

Manitoba has redeveloped its *Standards for Inclusive Educational Programming* (Manitoba Government, 2022) to clarify roles and responsibilities and reaffirm that inclusion is for all students. This is important because the definition and treatment of inclusion have evolved (discussed in the literature review to follow). It is the view of Moore (2016) that “the reason *inclusion* as a term has been contaminated is that it is used synonymously with the word *integration*” (p. 12). Moore (2016) further explained that classroom teachers need to view inclusion as more than people “sharing a physical space” (p. 18). Resource teachers are tasked with helping classroom teachers with planning and implementing programming, which often includes pseudo teacher training to expand upon their colleagues’ understanding of differentiation and assessment from inclusive education for students with special learning needs to a consideration all students, along with training on reporting requirements (Katz, 2013). A part of resource teachers’ work is to model inclusive teaching practices through co-teaching and to help the classroom teacher develop rich and meaningful learning experiences. To provide adequate co-teaching support, resource teachers require a service delivery model that is aligned with safe and caring school policies and procedures to provide appropriate inclusive educational experiences to students.

In my colleague’s stories, Mabel identified a need for having more professional development opportunities for classroom and resource teachers alike; classroom teachers reported to student services and administration the feeling of being inadequate, underprepared, and undertrained in supporting inclusive educational programming for all students in the classroom. Frequently, teachers resorted to requesting more time with an educational assistant, believing this to be the remedy for providing accommodations for special learning needs and classroom management (Andrews & Lupart, 2015). Increasing additional adult support, such as

adding more education assistant time or reducing the number of pupils is often not a sustainable solution to commonly experienced problems (Mitchell, 2014). The need to help teachers realize their potential and expand their capacity highlights the leadership role that resource teachers play in supporting classroom teachers in developing their practice. This leadership can lead to potential stress, requiring coping strategies.

Mabel explained she found it difficult to get teachers to think differently about their teaching pedagogy and practice and to understand why change is needed to advance education for every student. Through her stories, she shared how it was challenging to encourage classroom teachers to dedicate more time to their professional learning journey towards effective, inclusive teaching practices that genuinely made teaching and learning fun, like implementing land-based learning, inquiry-based learning, or project-based learning. Simply put, there are too many curricular areas for classroom teachers to master and only so much time. When teachers share about their skills and confidence in addressing special learning needs, they can feel vulnerable. This vulnerability requires trust to be built and maintained between classroom and resource teachers. Katz and Lamoureux (2018) agree that “we cannot ask teachers to move from the isolation of their classrooms to publicly sharing their practice without ensuring they will be met with support and nonjudgement” (p. 61). Understanding that a part of resource teachers’ responsibilities is to support teachers’ programming led to curiosity about how resource teachers might cope with the stress that comes from these interactions with their colleagues.

Understandably, not all resource teachers feel as comfortable and competent as Mabel expressed about herself in her role as a school leader in student services. The reality is that many resource teachers report feeling stretched in their role and will often describe themselves as operating within survival mode. Carrington and McIntosh (2021) suggest resource teachers feel

this way because we often have the most vulnerable children being supported by teachers who are overworked and overwhelmed, “trying to help them navigate during the most difficult experiences of their lives” (p. 91). Because of the potential to feel overworked and overwhelmed, school divisions need to proactively take care of their teaching staffs’ well-being, and teachers also need to take care of themselves (Carrington & McIntosh, 2021). Thus, I wondered how resource teachers, like Mabel, managed multiple complex tasks, such as spending significant portions of their days (a) supporting the most vulnerable children in their communities, (b) helping teachers struggling to develop their professional capacities to meet increasingly diverse needs, and (c) communicating with and supporting the myriad additional individuals identified in each child’s circle of support (see Figure 1).

Another factor that affects resource teachers is the number of people resource teachers interact and coordinate with. The Circles of Support model (Figure 1) illustrates the many people who may be involved in a student’s support team, including the core team, in-school team, divisional supports, outside agents, and other stakeholders. Coordinating services for a caseload with extensive lists of people from a student’s circle of support led to curiosity about how this coordination might contribute to stress and how resource teachers cope with such stress.

My new position at Mabel’s school led me to be curious if resource teachers cope with all the stress from the profession by changing their position, which could mean transferring to a different school or a new role within the school team. I was curious about what happens if a resource teacher experiences so much stress that they burn out. Should a resource teacher burn out, what does that look like? I wondered if resource teachers avoid burning out of their position in invisible ways – not by leaving the profession but by moving to another support student services position, returning to the classroom, or taking on other roles within the educational

system. Understanding how teachers experience burnout is important if we want to have resource teachers feel capable and stay engaged in their profession.

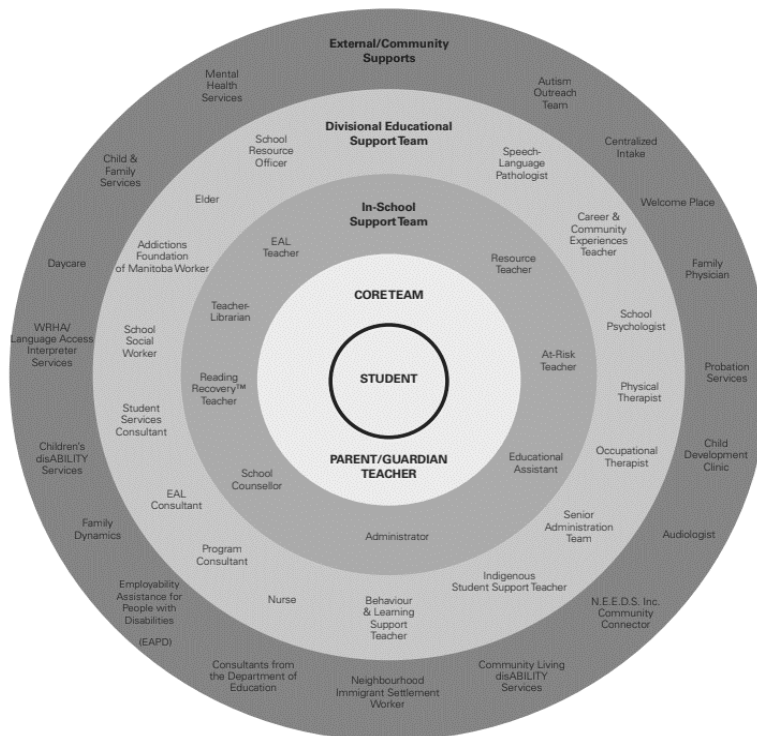
Katz and Lamoureux (2018) used the Canadian Teachers' Federation report to demonstrate that a significant number of teachers (47%) quit teaching before retirement age, citing stress and lack of support as their reasons. Many factors affect the perception that the demands on teachers are too great and that school leaders, including government, school division/district personnel, and principals, do not provide teachers with the support they need. For instance, as self-regulation and co-regulation skills become mainstream in education, reforming perspectives on student behaviour becomes an important factor affecting all the players in students' circles of support (Carrington & McIntosh, 2021). This, of course, includes resource teachers who often act as case managers for students and who are charged with supporting classroom teachers among other responsibilities throughout the school. Teachers often report having a lack of resources, including staffing and teaching materials, along with a seemingly endless list of programs they are asked to implement above and beyond the curriculum. This perceived inability to meet pressing needs may be leading to increased burnout and stressing the organizational structures of the public education system. As Katz & Lamoureux (2018) point out, "school leaders, resource teachers, and consultants are critical facilitators, supporting teachers, who in turn, support those students who are otherwise marginalized or excluded" (p. 57).

Mabel imparted many gems of advice and insight about the evolution of her role in the school, the philosophy of inclusion practiced within the school, and the general ins and outs of the job; but she also talked about the strategies she used to achieve personal and professional balance. She talked about how she preserved her passion for teaching and advocating for

inclusive education. In these discussions, I thought exploring the collective experiences of resource teachers might help me gain a deeper understanding of their professional growth, how

Figure 1

### Child-centred Teams: Circles of Support



Child-centred Teams: Circles of Support, Pembina Trails School Division (2021). Adapted from,

Manitoba Education (2012). *Student-Specific Planning: A Handbook for Developing and Implementing Individual Education Plans (IEPs)*. Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Education.

Available online at <[www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/specedu/iep/](http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/specedu/iep/)>

to build resource teachers' capacities, and how to help resource teachers make sure their needs are being taken care of (Carrington & McIntosh, 2021). Overall, this feeds into how to keep knowledgeable and dedicated resource teachers in their roles for greater periods.

This research study is timely and relevant to my daily work in inclusion support in public education in Manitoba but also because I served as president of the Manitoba Association of Resource Teachers. As president, I participated in many conversations that focus on appropriate and inclusive education with equitable access to resources, such as clinicians and professional development. In my role as president, I had seen competent resource teachers share a need for resources that support students' wellbeing and resilience. Being a part of discussions with school leaders also demonstrated that principals are working towards strengthening and clarifying their school's service delivery models. The underlying message I received was that, like students, teachers also struggle with feeling balanced in terms of their health and well-being. Ultimately, I have seen several resource teachers leave the role by returning to the classroom part-time or full-time or by transitioning to a new leadership or support role that focuses on consultation at the district, divisional, or provincial level. I believe resource teachers care about those they support and generally have a meaningful reason behind why they chose this profession (Andrews & Lupart, 2015). However, despite their love for the students and their work, they continue to feel that their job can be "soul-sucking" and doubt their ability to do their job well, resulting in competent resource teachers leaving the roles or profession before the age of retirement (Katz & Lamoureux, 2018). However, with intentional and continual support from school leadership and education stakeholders, issues that contribute to burnout can be proactively addressed to alleviate burnout.

In summary, to gain insight into the proactive strategies that resource teachers use to cope with stressors connected to the roles and responsibilities of their profession, I conducted a research study that investigated: 1) resource teachers' perceptions of challenges they face in their roles and responsibilities and 2) the strategies resource teachers proactively use to cope and prevent burnout. In Chapter 2, I will paint the professional landscape of resource teachers in Manitoba by discussing the literature related to the history of inclusion in Manitoba, the roles and responsibilities of resource teachers, and the service delivery models described by the provincial government. In addition, I will discuss resource teacher burnout, strategies that support resource teachers, and the concept of demoralization (as the superseding step that follows burnout). In Chapter 3, I will discuss the design for my research study, and I will present and discuss the findings in Chapter 4 and 5. Recommendations are presented in Chapter 6 to address structural changes at provincial, school division, and local school levels.

## Chapter 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In this chapter, I will review the Manitoba government's interpretation of inclusion, the roles of resource teachers, resource teacher burnout, strategies commonly linked to supporting resource teachers, and demoralization. I recognize that the research on resource teacher burnout is thin. I also encountered challenges finding information that targeted burnout in the Canadian school context, and newer research regarding burnout focuses on the COVID-19 pandemic. I believe these challenges support the value of my research study as it will add to the volume of research on this topic and provide a deeper look into an area that may need greater scrutiny as needs in our schools evolve and grow.

#### Manitoba's Interpretation of Inclusion

Like other Canadian jurisdictions, Manitoba has built its understanding of inclusion gradually over time and in conjunction with the outcomes from the Salamanca conference. In 1994, Canada, along with 91 other nations and 25 international organizations, assembled in Salamanca, Spain as part of the United Nations' strategy to address special (inclusive) educational needs. The conference resulted in the adoption of the *Salamanca Statement on Principals, Policy and Practice in Special Needs Education* and a *Framework for Action* (UNESCO, 1994). The *Salamanca Statement* (UNESCO, 1994) highlights the need to reform education internationally, as challenges regarding the support for students with special (or additional) needs were not occurring in isolation. The conference and newly adopted document acknowledged former efforts in promoting special and inclusive education for *all* learners (UNESCO, 1994), which originated with the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* in 1948, following the World Conference on Education for All in 1990, and the *United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities* in 1993. The *Salamanca*

*Statement* (UNESCO, 1994) provided guidelines for action at various levels, such as recommendations concerning the school-student-parent partnership and the provision and distribution of resources. The essence of this document (and others noted above) was that it gave rights to people with special learning needs, valuing each journey as an individual experience, and triggered a change in, and discussion of, social perspectives. For far too long, the problems of people with special learning and regulation needs had been compounded by a disabling societal perspective that labelled those who did not fit the norm as having deficits and impairments (to be fixed as a medical model would engage) rather than focusing on their potential to grow along their own self-determined, autonomous journey (Andrews & Lupart, 2015; Katz & Lamoureux, 2018; UNESCO, 1994).

In *Introduction to Inclusive Education*, Jordan (2007) noted that “in Canada, the belief that every student has the right to an education that fulfills his or her potential to grow is central to the federal Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the human rights legislation in each province and territory” (p. 7). This belief shapes the common understanding among educators across Canada that every student has the right to belong in their community school with their peer group and be provided with rich learning and assessment opportunities.

Specifically, within the Manitoban context, inclusive educational programming emerged in the mid-1960s (Britton, 2006). By September 1989, Manitoba developed an action plan to provide teacher training and educational services to students with special needs as outlined in *Special Education in Manitoba: Policy and Procedural Guidelines for Education of Students with Special Needs in the Public School System* (Britton, 2006).

Over a decade later, and stemming from the *Special Education Review* in 1998, Manitoba’s Bill 13 and supporting regulations were proclaimed as *The Public Schools*

*Amendment Act (Appropriate Educational Programming)* in October 2005. This placed the obligation on the province's school divisions to ensure that all students have equitable and appropriate educational programming in place for all enrolled students. This act outlines the expectation of the principal to ensure that appropriate educational programming is available in a regular classroom for all students, special needs are reasonably accommodated, and other methods of differentiated instruction and adaptations are used to assist students to meet expected learning outcomes.

Inclusion in Manitoba is viewed by governing bodies and educators alike as a philosophy of inclusive educational practices that supports the diversity of *all* learners, providing *all* with appropriate educational opportunities. The provincial ministry and Department of Education for Manitoba's Public Schools Amendment Act defines inclusion in the *Standards for Student Services* support document. It reads:

Inclusion is a way of thinking and acting that allows every individual to feel accepted, valued and safe. An inclusive community consciously evolves to meet the changing needs of its members. Through recognition and support, an inclusive community provides meaningful involvement and equal access to the benefits of citizenship. In Manitoba, we embrace inclusion as a means of enhancing the well-being of every member of the community. By working together, we strengthen our capacity to provide the foundation for a richer future for all of us. (Government of Manitoba, 2006, p. 1)

Although the provincial governing body is responsible for providing a working definition of inclusion, it is easy to see that the philosophy or definition of inclusion has been interpreted differently over time. Canadian education researchers (and those viewed as leaders in the world of inclusive education) like Shelley Moore and Jennifer Katz discuss how the definition of

inclusion has been contaminated by different interpretations over time (Katz, 2012; Moore, 2016). So, to create clarity for how I interpret inclusion and for the intention of this research study, the definition of inclusive education that will be used in this Thesis is as follows: reasonable, practical, and appropriate educational programming that a school board must provide, wherein students with special learning needs are accommodated to support full participation in appropriate classes and learning experiences with their peer group (Mitchell, 2014).

To further explain how inclusion is defined and honoured in today's schools, inclusive pedagogy and practices go beyond supporting students with diagnosed cognitive or behavioural conditions; it is holistic and acknowledges the diversity of students' stories. I adopted this from education leaders who advocated for inclusion to encompass more than students with special needs. That inclusion must include other considerations that impact a student and their home life, such as poverty, family dynamics, crime, general health and well-being, culture and language, gender, and sexual identity, among other factors not listed here (Andrews & Lupart, 2015; Katz & Lamoureux, 2018; Moore, 2016). Looking at inclusion through this lens means that we are teaching diversity and not special-education initiatives (Moore, 2016, p. 5; Katz, 2012; Katz & Lamoureux, 2018). Moore (2016) argues that inclusion is about all students and needs to go beyond simply integrating all students into one shared space. Moore noted that "before we can even begin to align philosophy with practice and shift our deficit-based education paradigm to a strength-based model, we need to understand this essential condition" (p. 23).

As Moore (2016) advocates, "inclusive education is about providing opportunities with supports for all students to have access to, and contribute to, an education rich in context and experience with their peers. Period" (p. 17). The definition of inclusion that this study uses must

inherently have flexibility as it is not intended to hold one shape – especially if we believe in approaching each learner as an individual with strengths, challenges, interests, and their own unique identity. Inclusion that acknowledges a broader scope of diversity in order to truly respect the diversity of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples and enhance classroom learning experiences with Indigenous ways of knowing, doing, and being (Katz and Lamoureux, 2018).

### **Manitoba’s Interpretation of the Roles of Resource Teachers**

In the Manitoba educational context, four service delivery models align with Manitoba’s philosophy of inclusive education. These models include the consultative-collaborative model, the co-teaching model, the response to intervention (RTI) model, and the universal design for learning (UDL) model (Government of Manitoba, 2014). School boards and their respective school administrative teams are responsible for determining the service delivery model or combination of models that will be implemented by the resource teachers (or resource teams) within individual schools and often across divisions or districts (*Supporting Inclusive Schools*, 2014). In this section, I will describe each model to illustrate the organization of resource services provided by and coordinated through the resource teacher roles.

Before discussing the various service delivery models, it is important to acknowledge that roles that are common to all resource teachers, regardless of their school, will be referred to as universal roles. These universal roles include providing service and support to classroom teachers and students and promoting success for all students in inclusive learning environments (*Supporting Inclusive Schools: Handbook for Resource Teachers in Manitoba Schools*, 2014). The roles and responsibilities of a resource teacher are defined by the scope of activities within their school, which may include management, leadership, and other duties that are shaped by the service delivery model(s) being implemented.

The first model supported in the Manitoba Support Document, the consultative-collaborative model, is designed to enable the resource teacher, in concert with the recommendations of clinicians, to advise the classroom teacher on how to support students with additional needs in the classroom (Katz, 2012). The goal is to provide learning within typical learning spaces, avoid pull-out programming, and push services into the respective classrooms. The various forms of this model are outlined in Appendix F.

In all the variations of the collaborative-consultative model, it is assumed that many resource teachers to classroom teacher conversations tend to focus on students who are placed on caseloads or have diagnoses. These conversations often include preparing and writing student-specific plans, collecting and distributing adapted materials, preparing and modelling lesson plans, and other strategies that are useful for the classroom. It is common practice that the resource teacher does not typically work directly with the students who need intervention or additional adult support. As Mitchell (2014) notes, “to make this consultation model work, the [resource] teacher must be thoroughly familiar with the curriculum being followed in the classroom and the classroom teacher must assume chief responsibility for educating all learners in [their] classroom” (p. 72).

A second service delivery model implemented in Manitoba is the co-teaching model. It is illustrated in Appendix G. Co-teaching embodies collaboration and constant dialogue and planning to meet all the diverse needs within the classroom (Katz, 2012). In this model, it is common for the resource teacher to schedule times throughout the week in specific classrooms, entering teaching partnerships with classroom teachers. The goal is to support all the learners in each classroom. To make the co-teaching model work, the classroom teacher and resource teacher must be willing to recognize each other’s strengths and challenges. They must be able to

dance with each other, letting each other take the lead at different times. Sharing the workload, having clear communications, and having fun with the experience are also important to co-teaching success. In *Purposeful Co-Teaching* (Conderman et al., 2009), the authors explained that co-teaching is a rewarding experience when:

...both partners experience a high comfort level, humour, communication, and acceptance. Students, parents, and classroom visitors often are unable to distinguish the [resource] teacher from the [classroom] teacher. Both teachers are fluid, move around the classroom occupy all spaces, and interact with *all* students. (p. 10)

In addition to the resource teacher's role in supporting learning within the classroom, co-teaching is also seen as an opportunity to build the capacity of classroom teachers. Co-teaching can be linked to greater professional development goals, in the pursuit of developing the principles of universal design for learning (Katz, 2012).

Despite the potential for supporting learning and building teacher capacity, Michell (2014) has analyzed the empirical evidence that supports co-teaching and identified common issues experienced in the co-teaching service delivery model. A common complaint was a lack of planning time. More importantly, the resource teacher was often observed playing a subordinate, rather than an equal, role. Mitchell (2014) concluded that co-teaching is a moderately successful model. From my own experience, I can identify that one of the main issues I have experienced with the co-teaching model is that there are often too many classroom teachers who require support. To do co-teaching well, you must limit the number of collaborations at one time, but sometimes, you simply cannot wait to support a struggling learner, especially when that learner is the classroom teacher.

The third model approved for implementation in Manitoba is the Response to Intervention model (RTI). This model has three tiers which act as a continuum of increasingly intense interventions (Government of Manitoba, 2014). Tier one is universal planning, wherein core academic and regulation instruction and assessment are differentiated in the classroom. Tier two is targeted group interventions, with differentiated, small-group instruction and more frequent assessment. The final tier three involves intensive individual interventions, with individualized instruction. Each student is placed into one of the three tiers, and as students meet their goals or respond positively to interventions, they can move up or down tiers.

Katz (2012) noted that this model assumes that universal design is being practiced within the classroom and that most needs can be addressed with standard programming and strategies. In Katz' (2012) view, the roles of the resource teacher in the RTI model are typically to collaborate with the classroom teacher in selecting the programming that will be implemented in the classroom, facilitate assessments, and develop student-specific plans. Overall, the RTI model is useful in planning interventions and supports for various needs with fluidity. It helps organize and evaluate ongoing progress. This model is further illustrated in Appendix H, in the Response to Intervention (RTI) in Manitoba's support documents.

The fourth and final model that is approved for implementation in Manitoba is universal design, also known as universal design for learning (UDL). In Manitoba, the model for UDL that is most often referenced is the Three-Block Model for universal design, developed by Jennifer Katz (2012). The Manitoba provincial documents describe the Three-Block Model of UDL as an "an effective approach to classroom management, planning, instruction, and assessment that creates a compassionate learning community" (Government of Manitoba, 2014, p. 62). The three blocks address: a) systems and structures, b) inclusive instructional practices, and c) social and

emotional learning to develop compassionate learning communities (Katz, 2012). In this model resource teachers serve in various roles throughout the school, from supporting the classroom teacher in planning access points for all learners, to co-teaching and developing student-specific plans. A provincial support document noted:

...in education, universally designed schools, classrooms, curricula, and materials provide all students with access to the resources they require, regardless of their diverse learning needs. Universal design encompasses the following seven principles: equitable use, flexibility in use, simple and intuitive use, perceptible information, tolerance for error, low physical effort, and size and space for approach and use. (Government of Manitoba, 2014, p. 6)

This model is further illustrated in Appendix I: Universal Design Principles and Appendix J: Three-Block Model.

In my own experience, this model is highly effective because it scaffolds support for the academic and regulation needs of all learners (Katz, 2012). Students often develop a greater understanding of their learning strengths through multiple intelligence activities and when they participate in goal setting. However, facilitating UDL in the classroom requires classroom teacher knowledge and openness to pedagogy that underpins universal design values (Katz, 2012).

These four service delivery models, consultative-collaborative, co-teaching, response to intervention (RTI), and universal design for learning (UDL), often exist in tandem (Government of Manitoba, 2014). However, as mentioned previously, it is the principal's responsibility to decide on the model or combination of models that will be used. It is important to note that the roles and responsibilities of the resource teacher tend to overlap between the models, too.

Overall, regardless of which service delivery model is being implemented, the school administration and support services team need to understand the model, communicate it clearly to classroom teachers, and use evidence-based data to guide instructional practices. In this study, I hope to discover how resource teachers see their school's support service delivery plan concerning proactive strategies to prevent resource teacher burnout.

### **Burnout in Inclusive Education**

In the 1970s, researchers conducted studies that followed participants through their careers in human service professions. These studies introduced a new multidimensional construct: burnout (Hutlell et al., 2013; Van Droogenbroeck et al., 2021). Generally, most associate burnout with a psychological state (Hutlell et al., 2013; Maslach & Leiter, 1997) that gradually develops after extensive and prolonged work-related stress (Soini et al., 2019). Burnout is predominantly described by three traits: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of personal accomplishment (Brunsting et al., 2014; Maslach et al., 1996; Soini et al., 2019). Emotional exhaustion is characterized by a depletion of emotional energy and feeling strained or fatigued at work (Brunsting et al., 2014; Hultell et al., 2013; Maslach et al., 1996; Soini et al., 2019). Depersonalization is characterized by “indifferent, impersonal, and dehumanized attitudes toward other people, usually [students and colleagues]” (Van Droogenbroeck et al., 2021, p. 291). Lastly, a lack of personal accomplishment is characterized by reduced feelings of adequacy and efficacy (Brunsting et al., 2014; Hultell et al., 2013; Soini et al., 2019).

Teaching is often described by educators as a highly rewarding profession (Mitchell, 2014; Moore, 2016). However, teaching is also reported as one of the most stressful professions (Saloviita & Pakarinen, 2021). Mulyani et al. (2021) suggest that burnout is a global concern in public education. Studies on teacher burnout are emerging in countries such as the United

Kingdom, the Netherlands, Greece, Turkey, Iran, and the United States (Brunsting, et al., 2014; Mulyani et al., 2021).

Since 1987, the United States has conducted an annual survey of educators: *The National Teacher and Principal Survey* (previously called the schools and staffing survey from 1987-2012) (Santoro, 2017). This survey revealed that 55% of teachers who left the profession left due to dissatisfaction; however, the source of the dissatisfaction was not gathered (Santoro, 2018). Diving deeper into the concept of dissatisfaction, Santoro (2018) noted that other studies have reported that teacher dissatisfaction is likely due to challenges regarding equitable access to quality resources and being able to teach the way they believe to be right.

Additionally, in a study conducted in 2005 in the United Kingdom, teaching surfaced as one of the most stressful professions when compared to 26 other professions (Saloviita & Pakarinen, 2021). In a study in 2010, teachers in Finland reported experiencing burnout at a higher rate than other professions, with a 4% annual increase (Saloviita & Pakarinen, 2021). Teacher burnout is a global phenomenon (Mulyani et al., 2021; Soini et al., 2019). The better we understand burnout and discover the positive proactive strategies for coping with perceived teaching-related stressors, the more successful schools and their administrative teams will be in alleviating teacher burnout within their schools (Saloviita & Pakarinen, 2021). Understanding teacher burnout in educational contexts holds value because it may help to solve problems regarding teacher attrition. More importantly, it may help us promote teacher well-being and student achievement outcomes (Brunsting et al., 2014).

What is evident is that most studies that have focused on the concept of burnout have been applied to the population of general classroom teachers (Hultell et al., 2013). Frequently, these studies compared general teachers to special education teachers, who facilitate

programming in a resource room (Brunsting et al., 2014). Brunsting et al. (2014) compiled research studies on burnout regarding special education teachers. Their results included 23 studies. Their findings suggest that the greatest impacts on reducing burnout involve special education teachers being aware of self-care and practicing stress management and emotional control strategies (Brunsting et al., 2014; Mulyani et al., 2020). Brunsting et al. (2014) also suggest that remediation of burnout requires administrators to prioritize alleviating burnout and researchers and funding agencies to investigate positive, proactive interventions for burnout.

Studies regarding burnout also revealed that the big-picture question should not be about how to recruit new, good teachers. Rather, we should focus on how teachers can best be supported in developing their capacity for inclusive education to alleviate the potential of burnout (Brunsting et al., 2014). This support is crucial for developing a strong school team that is resilient and able to address the varying challenges encountered throughout the school year. There is value in understanding the effects of burnout on resource teachers, as prior studies have indicated that resource teachers are at a higher risk for experiencing burnout and leaving the profession (Brunsting et al., 2014). Brunsting et al. (2014) argued that losing a teacher is not as important as teacher well-being and student outcomes.

Interestingly, data on burnout among special education teachers also demonstrated that when the teacher is struggling with the effects of burnout, students struggle socially and emotionally, are more disruptive, and have lower rates of goal attainment, especially when they have an individualized education plan (Brunsting et al., 2014). Factors that were identified as contributing to burnout included lack of perceived support from administration, lack of access to planning time, lack of resources, lack of perceived support from students' parents, the high number of students with additional needs within classrooms, and higher numbers of adults in

classroom spaces (Brunsting et al., 2014). While it might seem reasonable to assume that more adult support in a classroom would alleviate burnout, studies suggest it also presents a unique stress, which has also been identified as a challenge to the co-teaching model (Conderman, 2008). As previously mentioned in Chapter 1, a resource teacher who is feeling balanced well-being will be better equipped to serve others (Schutz & Zembylas, 2009).

### **Demoralization**

In Doris Santoro's (2018) exploration of teachers' encounters with demoralization, a term referring to a sense of disillusionment and ethical conflict, she sheds light on its overlap with burnout. Both conditions manifest through symptoms such as “exhaustion, disappointment, and frustration” (p. 54). Her research investigates how demoralization stands as a significant factor prompting educators with five or more years of experience to exit the teaching domain. Within this context, Santoro (2018) acknowledges burnout as a pressing concern necessitating attention. The repercussions of teacher demoralization and burnout encompass diminished educator well-being, heightened absenteeism, and attrition (p. 161). Santoro (2018) emphasizes that while burnout addresses certain issues, it falls short in addressing the moral predicaments experienced by American teachers and their subsequent impact on attrition rates. To distinguish between demoralization and burnout, Santoro (2018) delves into their causative factors and symptomatic expressions. Her approach involves dialogues with teachers, who share narratives spotlighting how they perceive and navigate moral quandaries. These narratives are categorized into two primary groups: those that have potential to harm students or degrade the profession. Instances where teachers' moral compass is compromised, such as being compelled to teach curricula with perceived negative societal effects or lacking support in determining curriculum delivery, can precipitate or contribute to demoralization.

Santoro (2018) underscores that her book's principal objective is to facilitate effective problem-solving for educators. This mission demands a clearer recognition of demoralization, often conflated with burnout, as a distinct phenomenon. As mentioned, Santoro (2018) defined burnout as different from demoralization. She explained that moral concerns in teaching need to be understood as a matter of professional ethics rather than personal dilemmas. She shared her belief that school leaders can alleviate these issues and that re-moralization can happen, too, and that "it entails cultivating an authentic professional community" (p. 14). In the examples of the teachers' narratives she collected in her research, she summarized burnout with the traditional definition with the awareness that this implied that the teacher experiences burnout as a result of not taking care of themselves and/or losing sight of success. Santoro acknowledged that burnout may be an effect of unresolved demoralization, and in some cases, focusing on developing resilience is unlikely to help. Building teacher resilience is a useful and proactive strategy for alleviating burnout but, ultimately, increased resilience is not sufficient for addressing issues related to demoralization (Santoro, 2018).

Santoro (2018) elaborates on how critical it is to ensure that contracted rights and responsibilities align with current practices. She expresses concern when dissatisfaction is based on the concept of burnout, stating:

Burnout rests on the assumption that something is wrong with the individual teacher that prevents him or her from succeeding in the job. In demoralization, experienced educators understand that they are facing a conflict between their vision of good work and their teaching context. (p. 180)

In the interviews, teachers revealed that the problems they experienced could not be resolved by “individual remedies such as therapy, mindfulness or resilience in the form of the ability to handle adversity” (Santoro, 2018, p. 48). For example, demoralization was described by teachers when they experienced a misalignment between school practices and union rules. Other examples included the stress of asking a student to leave the classroom when there is a lack of alternative programming and support for such students and their attendance alone is already an achievement. These dilemmas require a form of strategic action to remedy the situation and return the teacher to the feeling of doing good work. Overall, demoralization is a problem with the context of teaching, not the psychological well-being of the teacher.

Santoro (2018) summarized the strategic actions to re-moralize a circumstance into five broad and often overlapping categories: student-centered action, teacher leadership, activism, voice, and professional community. The strategies she noted included improving inclusive and equitable teaching practices, developing specific initiatives driven by data and based on research, and participating in leadership opportunities with colleagues to support professional repertoire and provide meaningful feedback. Other strategies focused on developing an outlet for professional networking and sharing voices through blogs or other platforms. She listed examples of how a teacher can align strategies with their concerns, contexts, and dispositions. For example, she suggested engaging in professional learning, forging partnerships with local higher education faculties, developing a code of conduct with colleagues, and/or changing grades or subjects. As you can see these strategies are suggested with the intent to lead to action. She also made recommendations for school leaders for improving teacher satisfaction and retention, such as developing mentorship opportunities, facilitating discussions about what good teaching looks like, and recognizing and responding to teachers’ moral concerns. These strategies are

suggested to transform and interrupt the conditions that contribute to demoralization experienced in the education profession (Santoro, 2018).

### **Strategies for Preventing Burnout**

In *What Really Works in Special and Inclusive Education*, Mitchell (2014) discussed a combination of twenty-seven evidence-based strategies that have been analyzed in a significant number of research articles and demonstrated to be effective across many different disciplines. In his book, he aims to improve teaching effectiveness by providing educators with strategies that can scaffold learning and improve student outcomes (Mitchell, 2014). I assumed that when resource teachers and classroom teachers experience self-efficacy and fidelity in their practice, their autonomy and coping skills increase along with their ability to cope with symptoms that can lead to burnout.

I recognize that resource teachers inherently work as part of a team. They are constantly working with groups of people from the students' circles of supports (see Figure 1), engaging in co-planning and co-teaching with others and interacting with students' families and other supports outside the school. Mitchell (2014) discussed a set of mechanisms that are useful for supporting wraparound interventions that are also applicable to team collaboration in general. For example, he highlighted the value of establishing team-based goals which aim to develop problem solving, coping skills, and self-efficacy in their practice and further team autonomy. It is understood that resource teachers benefit when the team they belong to has a shared vision (Mitchell, 2014).

Mitchell (2014) also highlighted an important aspect: emerging evidence indicates a connection between the working conditions of teachers, their level of professional contentment, and student achievement in high-needs schools. He noted that when teachers are satisfied with

their school's culture, administrative leadership, and collegial relationships, they plan to stay longer, which contributes to improved student achievement. Overall, he concluded that "teaching conditions matter a great deal to resource teachers" (p. 269) and when they perceive a positive work context, student achievement is increased (Mitchell, 2014).

Similarly, as discussed in Katz and Lamoureux's (2018) *Ensouling Our Schools*, when resource teachers perceive their workplace as a safe and trusting environment, which is supportive and nonjudgmental, they are better able to manage stressors. Katz and Lamoureux (2018) expand on this idea throughout their book by addressing effective leadership and administrative support. They believed that leaders can develop a safe and caring environment by implementing similar structures to what teachers do in their classrooms and focusing on developing the team. They discussed the importance of leaders sharing their vision and expectations and "gradually releasing responsibility to a more distributed form of leadership that empowers [resource] teachers to assume leadership roles" (p. 56). They suggested that leaders who focus on building capacity by discussing the team's strengths, setting goals, and moving towards collegial/collaborative decision-making and distributed leadership responsibilities reduce resource teachers' stressors, alleviating burnout (Katz & Lamoureux, 2018).

As discussed, one of the strategies that benefit resource teachers is the implementation of school-based mental health programming (Katz & Lamoureux, 2018). When resource teachers integrated "cognitive-behavioural strategies such as problem solving, building social support and social skills, developing assertiveness and reduced cognitive restructuring strategies to promote positive self-perception" into their teaching practice, it reduced [resource] teacher stress and improve job satisfaction (Katz & Lamoureux, 2018, p. 37). Overall, Katz and Lamoureux (2018) suggested that engaging in wellness and mental health programming can be a proactive, cost-

effective strategy that school leaders can use that has a positive influence on both resource teachers and students.

Comparably, there is a large body of research that was reviewed for a study by Sun et al. (2019), that suggested there is value in providing mindfulness programs to teachers because mindfulness is associated with lowering the risk of burnout. Mindfulness is a practice that originally had roots in Buddhism (Kinsella et al., 2020). It is also worth noting that modern-day mindfulness curricula often focus on teaching habits that support having an awareness of and attending to the present moment in the mind, body, and surrounding environment. This understanding of mindfulness is intended to have an attitude of nonjudgmental curiosity and kindness towards self and others (Kinsella et al., 2020). Flook et al. (2013) discussed how there is a range of mindfulness programs designed for students with a wide range of benefits for teachers, too. The benefits of incorporating teaching with mindfulness programs noted a reduction in anxiety, stress, and depression – all of which are stressors that are frequently associated with resource teacher burnout.

To further demonstrate this perspective, Flook et al. (2013) demonstrated that pre-service teachers who engaged in courses with mindfulness interventions for at least eight weeks experienced a negative correlation with burnout. However, after the intervention (learning with mindfulness programming) concluded, most participants were observed experiencing regression. This suggested that there is still work to be done in designing programming that focuses on creating a lasting impression and bank of strategies for pre-service teachers, as part of their professional development.

### **Conclusion**

In the Manitoba educational context, inclusion is interpreted as a way of thinking and acting that supports all students. Principals direct resource teachers' work in their school. Typically, the roles and responsibilities of the resource teachers are to apply universal strategies to support the classroom teacher by providing strategies, resources, and materials to develop appropriate programming for all learners. With a collaborative team approach, resource teachers may be directed to provide co-teaching or use another model or combination to support classrooms. In addition, resource teachers frequently act in leadership roles, managing and coordinating services or programming for students on their caseload (which can include a multitude of clinicians or other stakeholders), along with other assigned duties. Understanding the Manitoba educational context is important because this may differ from other jurisdictions and Manitoba is experiencing growth in demand, changing the experience resource teachers have over a period of time and the potential stressors that come along with this demand.

As resource teachers work towards modelling and planning universal supports in the classroom, it requires commitment from the school division to provide an opportunity for professional development to strengthen skills and to keep current with effective practices. When teachers are not able to teach in the way they believe to be right, the risk of burnout or demoralization increases among teachers. Burnout is understood as emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of personal accomplishment. In one study, the majority of teachers who left the profession left due to dissatisfaction (Van Droogenbroeck, et al., 2021). Despite teaching being reported as a highly rewarding profession, the dissatisfaction was likely due to teachers not getting access to the resources to support them in teaching the way they believed to be right. The perceived lack of support from administrative teams, lack of support from parents

and other members of a student's circle of support, and an unbalanced/extensive caseload contribute to stressors that cause burnout. Thus, school divisions would benefit from purposeful and intentional planning to support resource teachers in developing their capacity to alleviate the potential of burnout.

The research by Santoro (2018) demonstrated that in addition to burnout, teachers also reported feeling demoralization. She explained that demoralization and burnout manifest and present similarly, with the difference being insufficient consideration of teachers' moral, ethical, and personal concerns in the case of demoralization. Proactive strategies that can be concluded from Santoro's research are to ensure school and school division practices are aligned with the teacher union rules and regulations. In her research, she provided a framework for re-moralizing that focused on student-centred action, teacher leadership, activism, voice, and professional community. Lastly, her research recommended facilitating mentorship opportunities and leveraging professional learning networks to recognize and respond to teachers' concerns.

Being able to identify the risks and impacts of burnout and demoralization on resource teachers, and ultimately student outcomes, gives reason for school divisions to invest in understanding the proactive strategies that can be put in place as scaffolds for supporting staff. The research showed that establishing team-based goals is beneficial in creating a long-lasting shared vision and supporting resource teachers in working collaboratively as a team. Another strategy that is often referenced is developing a school culture with a safe, caring environment where teachers can share challenges without judgment and ask for help. The mechanisms to achieve this would differ per school, as it would require an individual response to the current climate of the school. Finally, the last strategy discussed was using health education programming to address mental health and well-being topics. In addition to supporting students'

learning, a byproduct of facilitating these programs is that teachers experience a lasting impression from the lessons, too. Thus, an extension of having teachers facilitate well-being programming for students is to engage teachers in these lessons through their professional development, which can be extended to pre-service teacher training as well.

## **Chapter 3**

### **METHODS**

#### **Research Study Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to seek out resource teachers in Manitoba and have them participate in a series of two focus group interviews through the videoconferencing app, Zoom, and engage them in a conversation with each other that would lead to a deeper understanding of common challenges they experience in their role and the strategies used for coping. The conversation was guided by questions prompted by the researcher. The questions were designed to collect perspectives about the stressors they perceive regarding their roles and responsibilities as resource teachers in Manitoba. By capturing their voices, the common strategies shared in their dialogue were used to identify emergent themes, which were then analyzed and compared to the literature mentioned in Chapter 2. These themes help to explain answers to the two key qualitative research questions:

1. What are resource teachers' perceptions of the challenges they face in their work roles and responsibilities?
2. How do resource teachers explain the strategies they use to cope with the demands and pressures of their jobs, to prevent burnout?

#### **The Stance of the Researcher**

As a researcher, I want to outline my position and experiences to avoid potential conflicts of interest. I have worked as a teacher in both rural and urban elementary and middle schools, holding various roles, such as general classroom teacher, guidance counselor, and resource teacher. I have noticed that smaller schools often experience the same number of demands, like putting together a winter concert, providing excellent programming, and enhancing a range of

school goals; however, they have smaller teams based on student population to support daily tasks. Alternatively, larger schools have more students who generally need student-specific plans and case management, and so the workload is still full, but in different ways. I do not hold that one way is better than the other but recognize that appropriate programming is crucial in all communities.

To ensure a diverse range of perspectives from within the Manitoba context, I recruited participants through the Manitoba Association of Resource Teachers (MART). MART is a special area group of educators that operates under the umbrella of the Manitoba Teachers' Society, the provincial teachers' union. The association has approximately 250 active members, largely resource teachers, located throughout the province. Members typically take interest in professional development and various learning and advocacy opportunities that often directly connect to supporting diverse learning needs in schools.

As a member of the executive member committee, I had access to their large pool of professionals across the province, which I strategically selected to recruit through the association. This included members from public school divisions, funded independent schools, and First Nations schools. By gathering input from a diverse membership, I believed that I would be able to capture a wide range of experiences and perspectives that would be valuable for my research.

As an executive member of MART for the past seven years, I have had the opportunity to engage in conversations with many resource teachers at conferences and in personal conversations. From these interactions, I have come to believe that the work of resource teachers is becoming increasingly difficult, resulting in many leaving their roles. Although resource teachers are typically strong and capable leaders, they face unique challenges that may cause

burnout. Therefore, I aimed to explore the perceptions of resource teachers regarding the challenges they face and the factors that contribute to their success. By gaining insight into their experiences, school divisions, school leaders, and universities can proactively support resource teachers' professional and well-being needs, ultimately leading to positive impacts on student achievement and the education system.

## **Procedures**

### **Research Design**

In this qualitative study, grounded theory methodology was used to explore the challenges faced by resource teachers in Manitoba and the strategies they use to prevent burnout. This was particularly useful in exploring the complex social phenomena and understanding the experiences and perspectives of resource teachers. During the study, participants engaged in two focus group interviews where the researcher simultaneously collected and analyzed the data. This allowed for a dynamic and interactive process where the researcher could clarify their understanding from what participants were sharing, ask for verification from others, and shift the direction of the conversation if needed. The main goal of the study was to generate enough dialogue during the focus group videoconferences that interviews could be broken down into smaller units of meaning and categorized into themes and concepts. Using grounded theory methodology, the data collected from the focus group discussions was analyzed using a systematic and rigorous coding process, which identified patterns and themes that emerged from the data. Overall, the use of grounded theory methodology allowed for a deep and nuanced exploration of the challenges faced by resource teachers in Manitoba and the strategies they use to prevent burnout.

## **Recruitment**

A comprehensive description of the steps taken during recruiting is crucial to understanding the context of the researcher's connection to the group. In this subsection, I will explain the procedures applied in recruiting participants.

After receiving approval from the necessary authorities – my faculty advisor, Master of Education thesis examining committee, and the Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba Fort Garry campus – MART was contacted for support and assistance in recruitment. This process included a formal letter to the MART's vice president requesting permission to contact their members with recruitment information (see Appendices A and B). The letter requested the vice president to present my request to the executive committee without my presence – ensuring a fair vote of support by the executive members. In addition to the letter, the recruitment information was also included and shared at the table.

After the executive committee approved my research and agreed to support it by sharing materials and information to assist in the recruiting process, the vice president emailed MART members, sharing the recruitment poster (see Appendix C). The poster included detailed information about the study, the criteria for selecting participants, the method for data collection via videoconferencing, including the technology requirements for the participants, and the dates and times for attending the focus groups. The first five to eight resource teachers who responded and met the eligibility criteria were accepted as participants.

Additionally, the sampling technique used in this study was purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique commonly used in qualitative research. The purpose of this technique was to recruit participants who met specific criteria that would provide rich and varied perspectives related to the research questions with the Manitoba lens. The criteria for selecting

participants were that they were resource teachers in Manitoba with at least five years of experience in the role and that they were willing to participate in two focus group interviews through videoconference on Zoom.

The sampling frame for this study was resource teachers in Manitoba who were members of MART. This sampling frame was chosen because it allowed for a targeted approach to recruitment, ensuring that participants had the necessary experience and qualifications related to the research questions. By selecting participants from this sampling frame, the researcher was able to collect data from a group of individuals who shared similar experiences, while also allowing for variations in perspectives and insights.

Ultimately, the sample size of this study was five participants, which is a typical sample size for qualitative research studies using a focus group design. While the sample size may seem small, it is important to note that qualitative research is not focused on statistical generalization but rather on in-depth exploration of a phenomenon. By selecting a small sample size, the researcher was able to focus on each participant's experiences and perspectives in detail, which provided rich and detailed data. However, it is important to note that the sample size was limited by the availability of eligible participants who were willing to participate in the study.

### **Participants**

The participants of this study are central to the research process, as they provide the primary source of information necessary to answer the research questions and inform the study's findings. Therefore, providing a comprehensive description of the participants is essential to understanding the context of the data collected and its relevance to the research topic.

In this subsection, I will present a detailed overview of the participants involved in this study, including their work-related factors. In particular, I will examine factors that may have

impacted each participant's work, such years of experience, the type of school (rural or urban) they work in, the size of their caseload, and any other relevant factors that may have shaped their perspective on the research questions. Through this detailed analysis of the participants, we can better appreciate the diversity of experiences among resource teachers in Manitoba and gain a more nuanced understanding of the issues they face. By exploring each participant's unique perspective, we can gain a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities that resource teachers face in Manitoba's educational system. This information is also critical in helping readers contextualize the data collected and interpret the findings in a meaningful way.

As explained in the previous subsection, a total of five participants successfully met the eligibility criteria and were selected to participate in the study. The first participant is referenced as BB. She has over five years of experience as a resource teacher. BB is a resource teacher in a rural high school with less than 200 students in the Parkland/Westman region. She is a part of a team of resource teachers and manages a caseload. In addition to being a resource teacher, she also has courses she teaches in the subject area of English. She indicated that a challenge she experiences that impacts her work is the lack of relationships and trust between parents and school staff.

The second participant is referenced as SQ. SQ is in her sixth year as a resource teacher at a rural high school with a student population of under 200 in the Parkland/Westman region. She reported being the only resource teacher at that school with 30-40 cases to manage. In addition to her role as resource teacher, she also teaches courses in the subject area of English. She indicated that challenges she experiences that impact her work include being redeployed to classrooms as a substitute, lack of time to collaborate, and the need for more adult support in the classrooms.

The third participant is referenced as KI. KI is in her twelfth year of resource at a rural, middle school with a student population of under 500 in the Southeast/Interlake region. She is a part of a team of resource teachers that manages a caseload. She shared that a challenge she feels impacts her work is the provincial block-funding model and the school division's ability to use the funding to provide adequate support in the classroom for students with special needs who would benefit from more adult support in the classroom.

The fourth participant is referenced as NE. NE has more than five years of experience working at a Winnipeg elementary school. The school has less than 100 students. She is the sole resource teacher and manages a caseload for all students with student-specific plans. She shared that a challenge she experiences is the feeling of wearing many hats and filling in wherever is needed, at a cost of feeling ineffective.

The fifth and final participant is referenced as TS. TS has 20 years of experience as a resource teacher in a Winnipeg high school with a student population of over 400. She is a part of a resource team and manages a caseload. She shared that a challenge she experiences that impacts her work is being used as a substitute teacher.

### **Videoconferenced Focus Group Interviews**

This research study utilized videoconferencing as a medium for conducting focus groups, which provided an opportunity to reach participants who may have been typically inaccessible due to barriers such as location or time constraints. Additionally, videoconferencing supported social distancing, which was a necessary precaution during the COVID-19 pandemic. The focus groups consisted of five participants, excluding myself as the principal researcher, and were scheduled to meet twice, one week apart, for up to two hours each time. The Zoom videoconferencing app, licensed through the University of Manitoba, was used for the focus

groups. Both sessions were recorded by the host (myself) using the recording feature available on Zoom.

During the focus group interviews, I began by reviewing the participants' rights, the interview protocols, such as raising a virtual hand for turn-taking, and my role as a moderator. Participants were given the option to use an alias and to turn their camera off if they preferred. They were also asked to share about themselves, their roles, and their schools, with no pseudonyms used during the interview portion of the sessions. However, to protect the participants' identities, transcripts used initials and redacted identifying information.

A semi-structured focus group interview model was used, with open-ended probing questions designed to elicit responses and guide a robust discussion. Participants were encouraged to share their ideas and perspectives based on their direct experiences, with an unstructured discussion following each question. This model fostered diversity in knowledge and ideas while maintaining autonomy and creating a friendly competition of ideas.

The use of videoconferencing allowed for the scheduling of two focus group interviews, with the second session taking place a week after the first. This approach allowed participants time to reflect on the initial session and identify preliminary themes or topics of interest. The second session was used to follow up on emerging themes, allowing for a more in-depth discussion and exploration of ideas.

In summary, the use of videoconferencing allowed for the inclusion of participants who may have been inaccessible otherwise and provided a safe and effective means of conducting focus groups during the COVID-19 pandemic. The semi-structured focus group interview model facilitated robust discussions, and the use of two sessions allowed for a more comprehensive exploration of ideas and themes.

## Data Collection

The data collection process for this study involved conducting two semi-structured focus group interviews with five participants using videoconferencing through Zoom as the medium. The purpose of the focus group interviews was to generate a discussion about the factors that resource teachers perceive as challenges in their work and the strategies they use to cope and avoid burnout. The focus group interviews were guided by a set of probing, open-ended questions designed to elicit responses that would provide insight into the participants' experiences and perspectives. The questions covered a range of topics related to the participants' roles and responsibilities as a resource teacher. I wanted to learn about the factors that support them in doing their valuable work. The talking points used to guide the discussion were as follows:

1. Can you describe your school and your roles and responsibilities as the resource teacher?
2. Can you describe the service model the school uses? What are its strengths and challenges?
3. How does your school have a shared understanding of inclusion?
4. What do you find most rewarding about your work as a resource teacher?
5. Can you describe some of the challenges you experience in your work?
6. Can you think of any factors that contribute to burnout in your role as a resource teacher?
7. What makes you feel supported, and is there anything you wish your school or colleagues did to support you better?
8. Do you have any recommendations or advice for others, including new teachers, resource teachers, and school leaders?

Since the medium for the focus group interviews was videoconferencing through Zoom, the video and audio were recorded with the transcription feature enabled, which produced a transcript of the interviews. The transcripts were checked for accuracy with the participants through a member-checking protocol. This involved sending the transcripts to the participants within ten days to provide a response. The participants understood that if no response was received, it would be assumed that the transcript was accurate. As mentioned, the transcripts used initials to indicate the speakers and any identifying information, such as names of schools or people's names, was redacted or replaced with a synonym in the transcript. This process of member-checking also provided an opportunity for participants to see their words in writing, which can be a cathartic experience for the participants.

Prior to the second focus group interview, I sent an email to the participants sharing the preliminary themes identified and potential questions I would be using to guide the discussion and clarify or dig deeper into the participants' perspectives. I anticipated participants would have reflected on the first focus group interview and would have more to share regarding the questions previously posed.

Once the member-checking process was completed, I compared the data to identify emerging themes and subthemes. The themes were coded and organized electronically with assigned tracking colors to highlight themes identified and outlier data sources. All data collected, including transcripts (done by myself with the aid of the transcription feature within the Zoom app), recordings, and anonymized/coded documents were kept strictly confidential. All data was stored virtually in the cloud, approved, and licensed by the University of Manitoba.

## **Data Analysis**

In this subsection, the results of the analysis conducted on the data collected through two focus group interviews with five participants using videoconferencing through Zoom as the medium are discussed. The purpose of this analysis was to apply grounded theory to identify the challenges that resource teachers perceive in their roles and responsibilities, as well as the strategies they use to cope and avoid burnout. The analysis involved identifying emerging themes and subthemes from the data and organizing them into categories to gain insights into the participants' experiences and perspectives.

After transcribing and member-checking the focus group interviews, an inductive approach was used to code the data. Words, phrases, and sentences that related to the research questions were identified and marked with corresponding codes. These codes were grouped together to form emerging themes, which were reviewed and refined to ensure accuracy. Subthemes were identified within each emerging theme to further categorize and organize the data. They were also reviewed and refined. Finally, the themes and subthemes were organized into a coherent structure to form the findings of the study.

The data analysis revealed four key themes and several subthemes that emerged from the focus group interviews. One prominent theme was the importance of school leaders supporting the roles and responsibilities of resource teachers by establishing a clear and shared vision about the school's service delivery model and appropriate programming expectations. Several participants emphasized the need for a team approach for addressing the needs of students, and one noted the value of having a shared understanding of inclusion and a commitment to equity in the school community. Another theme that emerged is the importance of developing a safe and caring school culture. For example, participants shared the value of collaboration, celebrating

successes as a team, being open about challenges and/or next steps required to support students on caseloads, and having a solution-oriented approach with any challenges that are shared. Being open about growth and celebrating successes without judgement enhance a shared understanding among colleagues and school leadership in supporting the work of resource teachers.

The challenges that resource teachers face in their work included factors such as lack of support from colleagues and school leadership, high workload, and limited resources. For example, participants expressed frustration with the lack of time allotted for planning and preparation. Another theme that emerged was the strategies used by resource teachers to cope with these challenges and avoid burnout. Participants discussed strategies such as prioritizing self-care, setting boundaries, and seeking support from outside resources. The final theme that emerged was the importance of continual professional development for all educators, targeting a deeper understanding of topics that seem to be currently missing from new teachers' repertoires and extending this learning to experienced educators at all levels of public education.

Overall, the analysis offers valuable insights into the experiences and perspectives of resource teachers, highlighting ways in which schools and colleagues can provide better support for their crucial work. The study highlights the importance of improving support structures for resource teachers, ensuring adequate resources are available, and fostering collaboration and shared understanding among colleagues. These efforts can help to mitigate the challenges that resource teachers face and promote their overall well-being. The study's findings have practical implications for the field of education, emphasizing the need for teachers to be trained and equipped with the necessary skills and resources to effectively meet the diverse needs of their students while understanding their role within the school, be it classroom teacher or otherwise. This could lead to the development of more effective teacher training programs, improved

curricula, and better resourcing for schools to support their teachers in meeting the needs of all students.

## **Chapter 4**

### **FINDINGS**

This chapter presents the findings of this qualitative study, which aimed to investigate the challenges and strategies used to prevent burnout among resource teachers in Manitoba schools. Two focus group interviews provided a platform for participants to share their experiences and perspectives. This chapter will delve into the four key themes and subthemes that emerged from the analysis of the focus group interview transcripts. The chapter will be supported by direct quotes and examples from the participants, as well as connections to the literature discussed in Chapter 2. The four themes that emerged from the analysis are: a) clear and shared vision of inclusion and student support services, b) a safe and caring school culture, c) practices that support mental health and well-being, and d) continuous professional development. Each of these themes will be thoroughly discussed with examples of challenges and strategies identified by the resource teachers. It is important to consider these themes when aiming to support the work of resource teachers and prevent burnout.

#### **Common Understanding of Inclusion and Student Services Delivery Model**

After analyzing the transcripts of the focus group interviews, it became evident that a clear and shared vision of inclusion and student support services was a crucial factor in supporting resource teachers and can be shaped as a proactive strategy for preventing burnout. The participants highlighted the importance of establishing a common understanding of inclusion, supported by an effective service delivery model with articulated roles and responsibilities. Through the remarks of the participants, a comprehensive and well-defined service delivery model should include supportive factors such as autonomy and joint decision-making, collaboration, and balanced caseloads and schedules. To shed light on each factor's

significance, I will present examples from the focus group interviews and relevant literature discussed in Chapter 2.

### **Common Terminology: Understanding of Inclusion**

A shared understanding of inclusion is critical for resource teachers to effectively support all students and prevent burnout. This means that both resource teachers and the broader school community must have a common understanding of the principles of inclusion, the benefits of inclusive education, and the strategies that can be employed to create an inclusive learning environment. By promoting this shared understanding, resource teachers can collaborate more effectively with other teachers, parents, and students to ensure that all students have access to the resources and supports they need to succeed in school.

During the focus group interviews, one participant emphasized the importance of establishing a shared understanding of inclusion within the school community, stating, “I think as a school, we need to talk about what inclusion is and what it means to [educators] and what it means to everybody. You can’t necessarily go beyond that until you’ve gotten to that base understanding” (BB, Focus Group Interview, May 10, 2022). The participant’s perspective was supported by Shelley Moore’s book, *One without the Other* (2016), which was referenced in Chapter 2. This sentiment was repeated by another participant who shared:

I was thinking, as a school, we need to talk about what inclusion is, what does inclusion mean to you. I think until you have an idea of what that means to everybody, you can’t necessarily go beyond that, until you’ve got that base understanding, and we have yet to do it because the last two years have been insane (due to the COVID-19 pandemic). But it is something that I still think about, I’d like to understand, like, I know what I think, but

what do you think at as individual teachers and then they from there, you can come to a shared understanding. (KI, Focus Group Interview, May 10, 2023)

This emphasizes the importance of teachers having time to work together as a school team to dive into inclusive principles and practices based on a common understanding and goals.

However, another participant noted that while teachers may understand the principles of inclusion, in practice, they may not always apply them consistently, especially when it comes to students who are more behaviorally challenging. The participant explained:

You know, one of the most powerful things is actually doing the role and taking on student services, because I just find you know where some [teachers] will advocate [for students], but you know when I listen to people going on, you know, like ‘can you just take them out,’ or that they’re making too much noise like it hurts my heart. And I just think, and I do get it, I mean you don’t want to be teaching in a in a room that’s just super super loud, I mean I get that but I mean if we’re talking about a little fidget or maybe a little video they’re watching quietly in the corner, you know, I don’t know I just I sometimes think you know, students [need to be] part of a school community. And when we were talking about some of those [more behaviourally challenging students] you get to know what’s everybody’s belief is about inclusion. You know I think it sometimes depends on the student, you know *that* student that I carry a walkie-talkie for. You know people just kind of stand back and are like, oh look, they’re having trouble [instead of supporting the situation]. [They] could offer some help or [they] could see if they need you to get someone...And I sometimes think that having that perspective of working in resource, where we are advocating, we get to see a different perspective. We get to know the family so well that you want to make sure their child is part of the school community.

[The student] may not be in a[classroom full time], but they are part of the school, kids are greeting them in the hallways, they are joining some of the different things that they're interested in. So, I mean it's not possible for everyone to get that, but I think that perspective and being on the other side of things sometimes can be helpful. (NE, Focus Group Interview, May 10, 2022)

This participant emphasizes the importance of seeing students as part of the school community, regardless of their behavior or abilities, and promoting inclusion through joint decision-making, collaboration, and flexible assignments. As resource teachers, they have a unique perspective and the opportunity to advocate for students and their families and to ensure that students are fully integrated into the school community. Another participant shared her experience with inclusion in practice”

When you've seen those things work and you know it can happen, then I find myself really advocating because I'm like, no, this student can have a better school experience! I've seen it, it can happen [where classroom teachers question inclusive programming] because they're like, why on earth would you even think about that (as in plan for inclusion). In a previous school I taught in, it was a large school, we had a student coming into kindergarten with [a disability] who was nonverbal and the kindergarten teachers decided to teach all the kindergarteners basic sign language. And the EAs, to this day in that school, still use the sign language in the lunchroom...that made him seem so welcome. And he did a demonstration at a big school assembly, one day, and really puffed up his chest. And I had another little guy in grade one who had an oxygen tank. When he went to Phys. Ed. we picked up the oxygen tank and ran around after him so that he could be just a student. I'm finding I'm pushing a lot of those boundaries for the

non-L.A. and Math areas, like no, they're cognitively disabled everywhere. (TN, Focus Group Interview, May 10, 2022)

This demonstrates the power of inclusion.

Furthermore, the participants shared that they recognized that inclusion goes beyond addressing special learning needs, extending to a variety of factors that impact student presence and engagement at school. One participant shared:

I heard [colleagues] talking about being an advocate for the children. I think, absolutely we [as resource teachers] are. We meet [students'] needs, and I think that includes like all needs of the children, you know you've got mental health and physiological. You know there's a lot of times when [students] need to have their basic needs met before [teachers] can even touch the curriculum. And that's where I think some of our teachers struggle. I think most [teachers believe] in inclusion, like they're doing their best, they have their stresses of meeting curriculum and getting through curriculum. While trying to meet the students' needs, there's a lot of pressure on our teachers and I think one of the hardest things for a teacher to accept is that sometimes curriculum for some of these children, you know you're kind of your highest needs sort of ones, that they need to meet their needs first in order for them to even learn the curriculum. There's no point in trying to stuff curriculum down their throats or anything like that. Until [the students] basic needs are met, like maybe they're hungry, maybe they're tired, maybe it's a mental health thing, like we've had situations where you know it's low attenders and things like that we had you know students that were just happy to get them in the building that was kind of your first step. And now you know, we need to get them to stay awake and class all class like that those are our baby steps that we need to take and that's hard for teachers, and I mean,

it's hard for me when I'm in a classroom that I'm trying to get through some curriculum as well, but if I have a student that is going through something, mental health crisis or trauma in the home or something, they're not going to be able to learn. Their brain isn't ready to learn, right. We kind of know that but it's hard to think for some teachers to kind of understand that it's okay, like if [the student] needs to go out of the room for a little bit because they are going through something emotionally, then that's what they need to do in order to [eventually] learn. If they were to stay in that classroom through that moment, they're not going to learn anything anyways, so that's kind of been a tough one to kind of help teachers along with, to understand and things like that. (BB, Focus Group Interview, May 10, 2022)

This comment highlights the importance in building the understanding of inclusion to include a range of issues that present barriers for students in accessing learning, such as engaging with learning and self-monitoring or co-regulating their emotions. This is consistent with present-day research in inclusive and equitable teaching, such as Jennifer Katz and Kevin Lamoureux (2018) who express the importance in supporting the child as a whole, as discussed in Chapter 2. The sum of the participants' comments demonstrates that by promoting a common understanding of inclusion and incorporating it into a well-defined service delivery model, challenges experienced by the school team not carrying out their roles and responsibilities effectively may be mitigated. This may, in turn, help to reduce resource teachers' stress and prevent burnout.

### **Common Understanding of the Service Delivery Model**

The participants' comments shared in the first subsection demonstrates the importance of a common understanding of inclusion, which extends to supporting inclusion through an established service delivery model with articulated roles and responsibilities. Participants

discussed how a common understanding of the school's service delivery model requires school leaders to have a robust understanding of an appropriate education and the recommended frameworks for supporting an inclusive service delivery model. In practice, the service delivery model itself is hinged on all the adult players in students' circles of support knowing and effectively implementing their roles and responsibilities.

A participant shared that her school's delivery model was unclear, possibly because it needs to adapt to meet the school's current needs. The participant explains that their role is unpredictable and challenging due to the high-needs student they are supporting this school year. She explains how her responsibilities range from unplanned and planned substitute teaching, acting as a consultant or co-teacher with classroom teachers and flexing her day to accommodate co-regulating with students as issues arise. The participant shared:

I would say our model in the school has kind of an ebb and flow over the years and it depends on the needs in the building. This year, in particular, we have a really high-needs student and we have walkie-talkies in case that someone needs to call me right away. Those kinds of situations do make it tricky because you feel unreliable when you do plan to be in a room and so a few years ago, probably a fair number of years ago now, we did have a really high-needs student in the school, and I would often have time scheduled into classrooms to go and co teach and I'd hear him in the hallways and it would be I'm really sorry, I have to go. So I think, in a perfect world, I think, ideally, our building, we would like to do more of the co-teaching and I agree with what everyone was saying about you know, there needs to be time for that co-planning in order for good co-teaching and good co-assessment. Unfortunately, I find in the resource role that there are just so many other things happen, and the role is unpredictable that it doesn't always lend itself

nicely to that, so I would say that we do more of the consultative because I have lots of different hats this year. I do spend two hours of my day doing level of literacy intervention group, so I mean that takes a chunk out of my day in my library capacity when that's able to happen, I can do some. I guess co-teaching but it's more of I've planned it and then the teachers kind of jump in and we do go back and forth, but there isn't any cool planning time. We're just there together supporting the students and just working around the room, like classroom teachers. So in that way it's nice, but I think because of the small school and having so many hats to wear, I think we all know what we'd all ideally like for it (the service delivery model) to look like, it just doesn't always work out, so that's kind of how our building looks. (SQ, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2023)

Considering the participant's remarks, the importance of co-teaching and co-planning, which are standard practices in education, are emphasized. However, the participant's experience indicated that the unpredictability of the needs of the school means that she is only able to engage in consultative work and occasional co-teaching when they have planned it ahead of time and no interruptions occur. Additionally, the participant acknowledges that the ideal service delivery model is challenging to achieve in their small school with limited resources. As researcher, I was curious if the principal had experience in student services and was aware of the impact this has on resource teachers. Could it be possible that without a formal plan in place and constant changes to support the school, the service delivery model led by the school's principals, and subsequently resource teachers, has the potential to causes stress that contributes to burnout? Another participant shared that she was engaged in supporting teachers in restructuring because the school's needs changed:

Mine is quite similar I did do co-teaching. I had a teacher that I worked with in a Grade 7 and 8. It was a few years ago and we were co-teaching, but the amount of time that you have to put into that in the planning, the execution, and the assessment is a lot. The principal finally came in, and we had to get a divorce. So, [co-teaching] ended about Christmas time. It was too much time away from other duties as assigned. But yeah, I do a lot of consulting. I do a lot of planning. I do have some teachers that COVID has affected greatly... We often base our new students going into classes, based on numbers. So, I wanted one of the teachers in Grade Five that had the lowest numbers because a couple of students had moved away [receive a student]. We had a [newly registered] student come from Winnipeg with high needs, and so he was going into her class. And she, she just, she, she broke down and cried. And I said no, no we'll do this together. And together has looked very similar to me. I planned his programming and [gave] it to the EA, and they executed it. She just doesn't have the capacity anymore. And she's got another student in [the classroom] also with higher needs, more an individualized student who has been modified student. You know, I've got a six-week block of electricity unit and I've got these students, these two students, that are on modified programming. What am I going to do for them? (KI, Focus Group Interview, May 10, 2022)

This comment demonstrates that the resource teacher identifies that the school engages in co-teaching as part of the service delivery model. However, it also shows the challenge of being able to support the co-teaching process with efficacy, as the participant shared she had to stop due to the significant time commitment involved.

Shifting the priority of work daily creates challenges for resource teachers to schedule themselves and offer classrooms and students dependable support. One participant continued the

conversation about service delivery models by explaining how it feels when a principal who understood student services is leading the school:

I'm really lucky in my role that my administrator was a previous resource teacher so she has a lot of understanding about what goes on in the role of student services. I think, just in general, whether it is in building admin or senior admin or department, just having that connection back to what it means to be a classroom teacher [makes a difference]. And what it means to be working in a classroom with so many various needs. You know it sounds really easy on paper to do all *this stuff* but it's really hard. (SQ, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2022)

In this quote, the participant is expressing her gratitude for having an administrator who was previously a resource teacher and therefore had a good understanding of the challenges and responsibilities involved in student services. This is important because it helps to acknowledge that working with students with special learning needs is not an easy task and requires a lot of effort and understanding. In general, the participant emphasized the connection to the classroom, coupled with experience in student services, is valuable for anyone in an administrative position. In contrast, another participant shared their perspective of having a newer principal without experience:

Most of the vice principals that [the school division] is putting [into the position], or existing vice principals, and I have heard [this] from a few other resources teachers that I talked to on semi-regular basis, that it's just these folks are [too] new. They have never been in the position before, but now all of a sudden, they're the boss. And, you know, while at the same time recognizing that we have way more experience than they do, but still, [they decide] this is what you're going to do, and that's the end...they meet

they make the decisions, they let me know what's going on, [however] they don't care.

That's my opinion, it just seems that they're not interested. (KI, Focus Group Interview, May 10, 2022)

The participant expressed their opinion on the hiring and promotion decisions made by the school division for vice principals. The participant felt that most of the vice principals who have been appointed are new to the position and often lack experience in student services, a critical component of providing appropriate education for all. She also mentions that she has heard similar opinions from other resource teachers – believing that these new vice principals are making decisions without considering the experience and expertise of the teachers. She expresses the feeling that the new vice principals she is working with seem to be disinterested in gathering resource teachers' opinions and input. She expressed frustration and a sense of being undervalued in her role as a teacher.

A consistent and thoughtful service delivery model with clear and predictable roles and responsibilities supports collaboration within school teams and enhances students' learning experiences. When there are too many responsibilities pulling at a resource teacher, there is potential for resource teachers to feel too stretched and ineffective. This was observed in this participant's remarks:

In a small school, where we only have perhaps two student services [teachers], we have so many hats that you feel like you do nothing well. So, like you said you know we all have our own sort of niche and expertise, but [we are pulled] in all sorts of different directions. It's nice having the people there, but you know, I think, in my opinion, resource takes precedent. You know when a child is in crisis, when a child is struggling, when a child needs some co-regulation, when you know the children's needs, or when

you know coverage or classes are not filled, I feel like those always are going to trump illiteracy group and some of the other things that are maybe not as important in that moment; and yet they still are important, but I feel like we just become a catch all for those things, and by taking on all those roles, in my mind it kind of lends itself to feeling overwhelmed. Because you feel like you're just not doing anything well. (NE, Focus Group Interview, May 10, 2022)

Later in the focus group, this participant expanded on these remarks expressing her experience with her responsibilities in supporting the school, particularly concerning filling in as substitute teachers”

I feel like unfortunately it falls on the people that are still in the building and I think that's part of the burnout piece. Because one of the other things I even put on my list [to discuss] was about teacher in charge, which honestly has never interested me but for all of my eight years, I believe. I've had to do it, and the reason is they don't want to pull or pay a classroom teacher to do it. [The principals] want someone who has the ability to do that job but I'm not getting any extra support for it. It's now just one more thing on my plate...like somebody has to pick up those pieces and it's just unfortunate because it falls to the people in the building and they're already stretched they're already doing lots of work. Actually, even as I was thinking about this [interview], I mean being in a small school, I'm very close with my [principals] and I feel like we are a team, and we tackle lots of things together...a lot has been put on student services and the team to pick up all of those extra pieces. (NE, Focus Group Interview, May 10, 2022)

By understanding how resource teachers allocate their time to support the school and how they can effectively respond to emerging needs, it becomes evident that a collaborative team approach

between classroom and resource teachers is necessary to support learning for all students. An example of this was shared by a participant:

For me I've done a lot of work to build that inclusive idea... When I was a classroom teacher before in the same school, before I became a resource teacher, and it was very much a very different model. It was very much the resource teacher who created the IEPs, wrote them, and gave them to us (the teachers), and we were expected to implement them. But yet teachers had zero input in [developing learning goals]. Then, when I took over as resource teacher, that was one thing I kind of wanted to change about that. I said, I want these plans to be the students and the teachers' plans like I'm there as a consultant, sort of, I kind of chair the IEP meetings and things like that, but I really wanted teachers and EAs, and students, take ownership of those [IEPs] because they were going to be the ones using them. I think that that really that really helped a lot. Now, they are taking ownership over that and so now it is a lot more of a collaborative type of experience. (BB, Focus Group Interview, May 10, 2022).

This participant is demonstrating her vision for a service delivery model with responsibilities for resource and classroom teachers, such as the resource teacher chairing meetings and coordinating services, while the teacher plans and delivers lessons that support individual learning goals.

When school teams work together to create a shared vision for how inclusion should look, feel, and sound in their school community, it can become the foundation for understanding the processes involved in an effective service delivery model, hinged upon these collaborative efforts. Regardless of the service delivery model itself, and whichever factors it entails, resource teachers along with their colleagues, and ultimately students, benefit from well-developed plans with clear roles and responsibilities.

During the focus group interviews, participants consistently emphasized the importance of a collaborative approach in any service delivery model. This was especially true for co-teaching and the consultative model, where clear communication is essential for effective teamwork. One participant shared an example of how reverting back to an outdated approach of gathering resources and depending on an educational assistant to facilitate learning activities can undermine the effectiveness of co-teaching. It was suggested that resource teachers can have a greater impact by helping teachers develop their capacity to coordinate materials for their lessons with scaffolds for all students to access the curriculum being taught. However, this approach presents a challenge for resource teachers, and there is a concern that relying solely on gathering materials may not lead to school improvement. Another participant shared her experience in supporting teachers by helping them prepare materials, which was a significant part of her role as a resource teacher. She emphasized the importance of striking a balance between collecting materials for teachers and modeling and supporting teacher independence to increase their capacity to contribute to learning for all students in their classroom. She shared:

For us, I'd say we're more the consultative, little bit collaborative model, as far as my role goes I don't do a lot of co-teaching because the high school content areas are pretty specific to the teachers. When I have done [co-teaching] in different places in different roles, it often becomes kind of a secondary, you know glorified EA, with the teacher in the classroom. If you don't have the time to put into doing it properly, no one seems to feel like that is the best use of anyone's time. So I have started doing a lot more in the last couple of years, really working with the teachers' planning materials for students, especially if they are receiving modified programming. So having [teachers] go through [the curriculum] and select their [learning] outcome goals for the student and then I will go

spend the time going through and finding materials at that students' instructional level. I know even in my own classroom that's really time consuming to try and differentiate a hundred different ways, not to mention, you know Grade 11 history for our students with a great wide reading level. So that's I think probably what my biggest role is trying to build that resource bank right now. And so far, the staff that I've collaborated with have been pretty receptive to that, they're finding that the most helpful piece is knowing that you know if [the teachers] come to me with their goals and their ideas, I will try and find some stuff for them. [The teachers] feel like that's been a big piece off their plate. (SQ, Focus Group Interview, May 10, 2022)

These remarks show that one way resource teachers collaborate with classroom teachers is by building a resource bank to help classroom teachers with differentiation. It seems like resource and classroom teachers are receptive to this approach in general.

### **Scheduling and Caseload Management**

Within the service delivery model, resource teachers often manage a caseload. Managing a caseload can be challenging when a resource teacher feels like there are too many student needs for one person to manage. One participant discussed how their caseload often changes, sharing, "being in a small school, my caseload often fluctuates even throughout the year, and year-to-year it doesn't seem to matter" (BB, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2022). She continues to express how she manages, saying, "my caseload creates more work like paperwork or connecting with support workers for families, and things like that." She explains that she might have several students on a caseload and, despite the challenges, finds a way to manage the demands. However, she explains that the challenge is not the number of students on the caseload, but the supports required to address the needs of the students. She shares:

Sometimes what I find [challenging] is one [student with] extremely high needs, whether it's the family [support] or the student. That takes up more time than having you know, twenty kids on your caseload. Sometimes I think it really depends on what levels of supports [the students] require...sometimes one [student] can make the difference...I know some bigger schools, that they basically split up their caseload basically based on that, based on the need, but I take it on all regardless of how many we have. (BB, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2022)

The participant stated that managing a caseload creates additional work, such as paperwork and coordinating services and meetings. Despite these challenges, resource teachers find ways to manage the demands of their caseload, a caseload that often includes several students with special learning needs. However, the resource teachers shared that the biggest challenge is not the number of students on the caseload but rather the support required to address each student's special learning needs. Another participant emphasized the importance of having the necessary resources to provide adequate support for each student and their family:

We have we actually divide our caseload by grade, but I very much agree with what we've talked about so far in that sometimes there are students, and even though it's only one student, much like I said, [the student who I support by carrying] the walkie-talkie, it's a more intensive. And, it kind of ebbs and flows. You know, there are days that you know [the one student] takes up seventy-five percent of your day and there are other days, where it takes up five percent of your day. But, I do find in a small school, even if there aren't students on my caseload necessarily, it does feel like everybody's on our caseload. Just in the nature of the building, but I do find that it depends on who's on the

caseload, and it depends on the family, and how much support they require. Yeah, so I think all of those things are a factor. (NE, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2022)

This suggests that there could be value in achieving a balance in caseloads based on the overall support needed to deliver an appropriate educational experience for students with special learning needs, who require direct and continuous assistance. Another participant continued the conversation by sharing her experience with students on her caseload who have significant learning needs and the consequential impacts on her professional performance, sharing:

I have quite a few higher needs students. So, if it's not one or the other that's taking up the bulk of the day. There is just no time. We used to have a very deliberate time during the cycle, where the Grade Five teachers [have] a prep on the same period. The Grade Sixes, Grade Sevens, and Grade Eights, and so on, we would all get together and we would meet. You know guidance counselors, myself, the teachers, and we would have that at that time to do it and we just don't have that time anymore. I'm not sure that it's going to get any better, because our division is, I don't know what other divisions are doing, but we are I think, most of our schools are losing at least one teacher. (KI, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2022)

To help resource teachers overcome the obstacles they face in managing their caseloads and supporting students' learning needs, it is important to identify the factors that create these challenges. During a focus group interview, a participant discussed the challenge of limited time for collaboration due to their workload and the number of schools they cover. Another participant shared:

I agree with the no time. There is not enough time to collaborate with anyone really. For me, because in our system, there are two and a quarter teachers for resource, and we have

17 sites that we bounced between. And the [divisional] office is an 18th site. So for me, I have eight schools I go to. The other resource teacher has eight schools she goes to, and then, the quarter time is attached to our vice principal. So, for us to even be in the same building is a miracle... We each have our eight schools. But, our heavy duty kids we talked about so that if something happens one of us can jump in if the other one's away or really needs help that we're all aware of what's going on in all of our schools. So the collaboration piece is so important. (SM, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2022)

Despite this, they make an effort to stay informed about each other's caseloads and collaboratively support students who have significant needs. However, finding time to meet and collaborate is still a challenge. This highlights the importance of finding ways to facilitate collaboration and communication among resource teachers to better support their students.

Lastly, another participant's remarks reflect the limited opportunities for collaboration between the classroom teachers and the student services team, especially in regard to professional development. The participant elaborates on the challenges of balancing administrative duties with their roles as resource teachers. The participant shares:

Often, if we do have a chance to get together, it really is just about talking about students and maybe doing some programming decisions and things like that...that whole idea of actually doing group, like team PD or something along those lines actually hasn't happened in a really long time either...it is tricky because often...they like to have resource teachers take on that teacher in charge so it's really difficult to have the admin and your resource team out when they are also your teacher in charge people as well...I would love to get back to some of that actually doing PD because that's supposed to be our role. Where are one of our rules of getting all this PD that we can actually use to

support classroom teachers and students and things like that. So it doesn't happen, but it would be nice to go back to something like that. (NE, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2023)

In summary, in this subsection the participants' comments all had a common underlying theme: the importance of collaboration in supporting a shared vision and common understanding of inclusion, the school's service delivery model, and managing caseloads and schedules. The participants shared their experiences of receiving this support and the challenges they faced. By identifying the challenges and exploring solutions and mechanisms to value, viable options were identified.

### **Safe and Caring School Culture**

As classroom diversity expands, resource teachers are facing growing demands in their roles and responsibilities. To address these challenges, resource teachers have shared their perspectives on the impact of relationship, particularly with their principals, along with the importance of collaboration with colleagues to enhance their effectiveness. In this subsection, I will share the comments of resource teachers, highlighting the significance of a safe and caring school culture and the variables that contribute to its development. When the participants were prompted to discuss how school leaders support their work, the participants shared examples that indicate resource teachers value teamwork and support from colleagues, including their principal. Strong communication also surfaced as participants expressed appreciation for the sense of camaraderie and teamwork in the school, noting it as beneficial for their mental health and their ability to do their job well.

### **Collaborative-Team Approach**

In the remarks shared by the participants, there was a shared feeling amongst the resource teachers of appreciating a supportive relationship with their principal. One participant shared that she felt lucky to have a principal who was a former resource teacher:

I'm really lucky in my role that my administrator was a previous resource teacher. So, she has a lot of understanding about what goes on in the role of student services. I think, just in general, whether it is in building admin or senior admin or department, just having that connection back to what it means to be a classroom teacher [makes a difference].

(SQ, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2022)

Next, another participant shared, “we wear like eight hats...some of the more important things that I have found that have helped me and my mental health, and sort of helped me survive...[is having a] team that it's very collaborative” (NE, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2022). The participant continued, “our principal is so in tune with the different things going on, you never feel like you're carrying a heavy load. Like when you have those times when a kid is in crisis, and you know, we're not quite sure what the right steps are.” These remarks demonstrate the shared value of having a supportive relationship with their principal. The same participant expanded on their perspective about how valuable team collaboration is as a support:

We're trying different things, [the principal] is in there with us, like she is very much a part of that team. I appreciate that, because in a small school, you can feel very alone, and you can feel like you're carrying it all by yourself. Even little things, like we do have a student, where we have to carry a walkie-talkie, and you know it's physically heavy and it's mentally heavy. If people can understand that [we can work together], [then] when I do my literacy groups, my [principal] actually takes the walkie-talkie so that she will be

the person that's called. I just really value that sense of teamwork, that we are all there to support each other. And the other thing I value, too, is that [my principal is] there you know. She is not someone who is out of the building all the time and you know, I know we all get sick and things like that, and you know we've talked about absenteeism...but we have all shown up for each other, because it's important to support each other in that way. And if we aren't there, then the other two people [on the team] are there so like there's just that real sense of teamwork and camaraderie and how we can all work together to support the students and the teachers and our community. Our staff, to me, has been the best thing for my mental health and trying and doing the best job I can. (NE, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2022)

The sentiment of teamwork continues in the next participant's comments:

Similar to what everybody else has said, it is just having somebody. Like I always had a good relationship with my [principal], but I noticed with some others, like you said, just being there and being willing to take that on you know, sometimes when either one the resource teachers or the classroom teacher themselves, when they're the ones that always have to be the ones kind of dealing with those situations. (BB, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2022)

What the participant is trying to convey is the appreciation she has for the principal because they directly support the resource teacher by being a team player in co-regulating with students. She continues to explain:

Resource teachers appreciate when principals are kind of willing to get their hands a little dirty to and be there for that...just for them to understanding that role, and like you know

just hearing small comments to let [me] know that [the principals] appreciate the role and they value [my work]. (BB, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2022)

She explains how she understands that principals are tasked with making difficult decisions, especially when it comes to providing classroom coverage. She shares how she appreciates when the workload to provide coverage is shared between the team, making resource teachers a ‘last resort’ to pull from their programs. She explains, “I don’t mind going in and helping out when it’s needed, but if I’m constantly that go-to, if [principals] constantly [pulled] me out, and I was always the first one they go to, that would get pretty frustrating” (BB, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2022).

Another participant shared her recent experience with principals and how they offer support through a collaborative-team effort. She expressed that she appreciated the principal adjusting her workload by sharing some of her administrative duties: “she’s working on trying to get up to speed on everything...and taking some of that admin stuff off my plate, which is great” (KI, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2022). She continues to share how she feels supported by her principal:

We do have the student we carry walkie-talkies [for] all the time, so I get what you’re saying [about the challenges] physically and mentally...we are dealing with behaviors and all kinds of things...[the principal] always has her walkie-talkie on, and she always responds...she’s there and that’s really appreciated...It’s the first time that I’ve worked, that I’ve been at the school, where we’ve had that level of involvement from [principals] before. They are you know, they’re great. They would ask opinions and I was part of the team. (KI, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2022)

## Communication

Closely aligned with a collaborative-team approach, communication emerged as a subtheme. The participants emphasized it supports a shared vision and supporting the daily operations of the school team. Therefore, strong communication within the school team is an explicit, proactive strategy in preventing resource teacher burnout. Strong and consistent communication within the school team fosters a safe and caring culture, benefiting students and staff.

During the focus group interviews, participants were asked to think about factors that contributed to their resiliency and mindfulness and how it supported them. A participant expressed the value she placed in feeling part of a greater team, especially when teams have the ability to have open dialogue about challenges they are faced with, saying:

To know that you can count on each other to kind of [take over] on those tough days. I think that helps with resilience. I do think having those open conversations and being able to be honest, and even if it's just to say, I don't know, I'm at a loss, and coming to your team, I think that builds a sense of resilience...like being mindful of their time. You know, being as supportive as possible, and you know tagging out sometimes we've done that in ways. As well, I think there really is a lot of commonalities between all of that, but I actually have found it easier to have more of those open, honest conversations with maybe a student services team than as a whole staff. I think there are definitely those conversations that happen between some of the staff, but I don't know that as a bigger staff that that we've had some of those...those are kind of some of the things that I think helped make a team resilient. (KI, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2022)

Next, a participant elaborated on how her communication style supports staff who consult with her instead of the principal, at times. She shared, “I have people not really sure if they can go to [the principal] about things, so they often will come to me first because [I’m] nonjudgmental, I’m willing to take the tough questions and take it at face value, and so on” (BB, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2022). Similarly, another participant shared:

I thought I kind of echoed everybody else. In terms of resource and student services, the resiliency part comes when you have those connections with other people. If you have a problem, you know you have somebody else you can turn to talk to, to ask for advice, what’s your opinion on this, and they’re open to that opinion...like I don’t know the answer but I’m still willing to come and ask you, rather than fail miserably because I didn’t think you would...I thought you would think badly of me if I came to you, not knowing what to do. Because I have had situations like that, where you go to someone and they’re like well, you should know what to do. Well I am telling you I don’t, or this is what I think I should do, is this the right choice, or do you have another way I could do this. Where you can work collaboratively like that with both student services at the divisional level and with the other resource teachers at the school level. So, [I] have that connection piece with everybody at the school level, and when you were talking about [sharing] a strong vision, so everybody has kind of the same vision, you’re willing to talk about ideas, to maybe tweak your vision, a little bit here and there. Just having those conversations and like I said, having time is so valuable for student services and for [principals] that if somebody can take ten to fifteen minutes to talk to you about something, it does mean something. Rather than just, I don’t have time to talk to you. I had a situation where I was at the end of my rope one day and I reached out to people on

it took them a week to get back to me. Like I needed help six days ago, not today! Sorry, the situation is done now. I fought my way through it and I had no help. So in addition to the resiliency, [I value] knowing there's someone to support [me], when you really need it and just kind of help you along the way... Where I find [my] resiliency the most is just being able to collaborate in an open and honest way without fear of any kind of repercussion. (TN, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2022)

Lastly, another participant emphasized the value in being included in critical conversations that impact or support the work of the resource teacher, saying, "I would say communication. Having [principals] include you in some conversations that go on, that are needed to be happening, whether it might be with a support person or whatever if they keep you up to date, it means that they value your opinion as well as your involvement in in some of these tasks that need to be done" (BB, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2022).

### **Collaborating with Clinicians**

During the focus group interviews, as the conversation deepened about the value of teamwork, opportunity to gather and discuss challenges, and explore alternative teaching strategies, a subtheme emerged in regard to support offered by clinicians. Participants expressed how they viewed consulting and collaborating with clinicians as beneficial professional development because of their aid in planning programming, learning about materials and resources and, simply put, their social support. When asked to elaborate on helpful professional develop opportunities, one participant shared:

I think probably the biggest support in my success has been that level of teamwork...my clinicians have taught me so much about their own specialties and things that they do and ways that we can support students. Probably without clinicians, I wouldn't have probably

stayed as long as I have as resource. Yeah so that whole collaboration, the support of our clinicians is helpful to me. (NE, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2022)

The value in using clinicians as a form of professional learning and support was echoed in another participant's comments:

I agree with everyone else in terms of like the clinicians being invaluable and with sharing their knowledge and being willing to share and help and give suggestions. But the one thing that I did before I was putting the resource role was, I was lucky enough that the division I was in had a resource internship program. So, when I was still a classroom teacher, I got three release days in a year to go attend divisional resource teacher meetings to meet with the resource teachers to learn about how to write well. That was write funding apps back then. And how to learn all the little things that pop up here and there, within the day, so it made the transition from the classroom to resource much more smooth because I'd had that [training] and I had those connections at division office. I had the connection with the clinicians. I had connections with the other resource teachers, so that was a huge help. (TN, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2022)

In addition to emphasizing the value of learning from clinicians, this commentary is also referencing a subtheme regarding mentorship opportunities to newer resource teachers, or all teachers, as a form of professional development. The importance of clinical support was also noted in another participant's comments, who shared:

I agree with everybody that to me clinicians have been the most amazing thing ever. I shared last week that when I was in Ontario, it was like maybe once a month we'd see a clinician, or once a year. I just I tell everybody just how blessed we are to have the amount of clinician involvement that we do and I couldn't do this job without them and

their input and their programming suggestions are everything. It just puts everything onto a different level and I'm eternally grateful for them. (KI, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2022)

Overall, the insights shared by participants highlight the critical role of collaboration with clinicians in supporting resource teachers' professional development and success. Clinicians can offer valuable support in planning programming, sharing specialized knowledge, and providing social support to resource teachers. The importance of mentorship opportunities, such as internships and connections with other resource teachers, was also emphasized. These findings suggest that resource teachers may benefit from continued opportunities to collaborate with clinicians and other professionals to enhance their skills and expertise in supporting students with diverse needs.

### **Conclusion**

Tying together the collaborative-team approach with positive communication, including nonjudgmental dialogue that is solution-oriented, even when possible approaches are still being explored is needed to develop a safe and caring school culture. By embracing these ways of being and doing, resource teachers can build strong bonds with their colleagues and move forward together as a team. This is important because educators are always striving to improve their practice and help their students and themselves reach their full potential.

### **Practices that Support Well-being**

Another theme that emerged during the focus group interviews was in regard to what has helped them or what they have done to help others during moments that can be strenuous and affect their ability to cope. The participants share perceived challenges in balancing work responsibilities with personal lives because there are always planning and reporting needs.

However, the participants shared their thinking about setting boundaries as an important proactive strategy that helps resource teachers cope with perceived stressors. During the focus group interviews, the participants shared perspectives about setting boundaries with work-related tasks, such as emails and planning, and learning to say no when necessary. The participants also emphasized the need to find ways to decompress outside of work as essential to maintaining mental health and overall well-being. They agreed that finding hobbies or activities outside of work that bring joy and fulfillment was important, whether it be reading, exercise, or something else entirely. By prioritizing self-care and setting boundaries, resource teachers can better manage their workload and maintain a healthy work-life balance.

### **Supporting and Coming Together**

Throughout the focus group interviews, participants talked about how they appreciate coming together with their colleagues and offering support to each other as part of a proactive strategy to keep the lines of communication open and offer small gestures that have a big impact in collegial bonding and show collegial comradery. Participants discussed what they do to encourage teachers to come see them and connect about their day. Participant shared examples of how they offer support to their colleagues through simple gestures or displays of gratitude and appreciation, which can be helpful in bringing staff together. For example, one participant shared that she lures teaching staff into her office to talk about students or their day in a safe space by providing treats like candy and doughnuts. She shared:

The school that I started [working] resource in, was school I taught in. The resource teacher had a jar of jelly beans in the middle of her meeting table. So, whenever you went for a meeting, everybody was always stealing a jelly bean. The jelly beans were just always there. And then, when I took over, I went in, and then I added my favorite

[candy]...and then it's like oh it's report card time, the teachers are cranky, let's throw a little chocolate in the cupboard. And then it started encouraging the teachers to come see me because some of them would just blip-in and be like I've had a day. It's been enough...and they'd open the cupboard grab chocolate and be gone. But then other ones would come in and be like 'oh, my goodness!' And they'd eat their chocolate and kind of have five minutes of venting and just kind of letting that off...I'll still stop at Tim Hortons...and I'll grab a box of small box of tidbits or get everybody a tea, depending on what they like, and just show up, and they're like, this is exactly what I needed today! I just needed something. (TN, Focus Group Interview, May 10, 2022)

The small gestures demonstrate how resource teachers and other educators come together, to lean on and decompress with each other in a nonjudgmental and supportive way. The underlying message is being able to talk about issues openly and honestly is valued. Another participant added to the idea of creating a safe space for open conversation with her colleagues, sharing:

I brought [a teacher] into my office and I'm like, 'okay there's no consequences to this, I just want you to tell me how you feel. I just want you to be able to get it out, because I know it's really bothering you I know you're not settled. I know this is festering in there and we talked about quite a few different things.' And she said, don't tell [the principals] about [my issues(s)], and I'm like, 'no, that was the deal, I'm not taking this anywhere else.' She said, 'I just need to get it out'...I find that sometimes just having that time with each one [of the teachers] just kind of smooth things along a little bit too and builds that connection, so that when something does come up, they feel like they can talk to you before it gets really big and really out of hand. (TN, Focus Group Interview, May 10, 2022)

Having these confidential conversations where colleagues can air their concerns without consequences helps teachers express their worries and ask for help. It demonstrates that it's okay to not be perfect and that as a team we are working together to support the classrooms and student body. The participant believes that having these one-to-one conversations, where teachers can vent, helps to proactively build connections with colleagues and prevent small issues from becoming bigger problems.

The notion of having staff come together organically to have open dialogue was emphasized in another participant's comments; however this participant points out her perspective that these conversations do not tend to happen with a larger school group of teachers, inferring this is work for school leaders to work on – coming together for open and productive conversation. However, the participant mirrored this sentiment of valuing open and honest dialogue with colleagues, as she explains:

I think [we] are somewhat similar, you know some of the things people have talked about such as the whole idea of not having a duty...I feel like that whole idea of giving people time back to collaborate, to know that you can count on each other, to kind of take off on those tough days. I think that helps with resilience. I do think having those open conversations and being able to be honest and even if it's just to say, like, 'I don't know [the answer to a problem],' 'I'm at a loss and coming to your team [for help],' I think that builds a sense of resilience. I think it can also be tied to classroom teachers as well, like being mindful of their time. You know, being as supportive as possible, and you know tagging out sometimes we've done that in [different] ways as well. I think there really is a lot of commonalities between all of that, but I actually have found it easier to have more of those open, honest conversations with maybe a student services team than as a whole

staff. I think there are definitely those conversations that happen between some of the staff. But I don't know that as a bigger staff that we've had some of those, but yeah, those are kind of some of the things that I think helped make a team resilient. (NE, Focus Group Interview, May 10, 2022)

This comment also demonstrates the importance of having consultative-like discussions with classroom teachers and to approach questions about students' learning as a team, reducing the perceived expectation that resource teachers are expected to know all the answers.

Within this subtheme of bringing teachers together through gratitude, participants noted how resource teachers could work together in supporting the school team, by recognizing each other's efforts and showing gratitude to their colleagues, as a way of bonding teams together.

One participant shared:

Having that time to connect and giving [teachers] someone that can listen to them, but even doing things such as making sure that you know, maybe, I leave a little, thank you, on their table so that the next morning, they come in, if they've you know if they had to cover [a class], or ... it was a rough day or just that acknowledgement that they are doing important work and they are important to the school...if someone volunteered to take on someone else's duty, because they weren't there, you know I appreciate those things, because otherwise it does fall on other [teachers]. So, I think expressing that gratitude for helping out, and you know going through things, and still showing up the next day. (NE, Focus Group Interview, May 10, 2022)

The participant is expressing that she believes it is important to connect with colleagues and show gratitude for their hard work. She suggests leaving little notes to acknowledge when someone takes on extra duties. The nuance that is noted in this comment, as mentioned in other

participants' commentary throughout the focus group interviews, is the shortage of support when there are teachers or educational assistants absent from class (which can be due to a wide variety of reasons). This participant is discussing having gratitude for their colleague who took additional supervision because it prevented it from falling to resource teachers who are often perceived as inherently having more flexibility in their scheduling and availability due to not being a classroom teacher. The same participant explained that she also uses her discretion to create opportunities for educational assistants to have some respite during their day by allowing them to remain with their assigned classrooms instead of being reassigned a different student to provide one-to-one support. She explains:

Then, another thing that I find can be helpful in building the relationship with the [educational assistants]...is when you can [give educational assistants] time. Like I mentioned before, EAs are away a lot...I'm assuming it's probably the same for most people's [schools]...you know it's hard to get [substitute educational assistants], but we don't have a lot of EAs in our school, and honestly, some days we barely able to cover the kids that are really high needs. We don't have any EAs doing reading groups, we have EAs doing general support...when you can and a student who is maybe coming in late because they had an appointment, I don't reassign the EA to work with another high-needs student...maybe they'll get to go and work in a classroom and just do a small group of something. Or you know what, maybe they could have recess with everybody else, as opposed to on their actual designated break. So, I think sometimes having that flexibility, and acknowledging and giving them breaks when we can is important for them. As well, it's hard to do and it this year has been well the last few years have been harder. Because we have less people and we're not getting people into cover so that it

does mean that we're stretching the people in our own building, but I think when we can it's important to give them that little bit of breathing room. (NE, Focus Group Interview, May 10, 2022)

Overall, the participant acknowledges that finding coverage can be difficult but believes it's important to give everyone a little breathing room when possible. This demonstrates ways of bringing staff together to express care and gratitude for each other as a school team.

### **Setting Boundaries for Work-Home Balance**

Another common practice that emerged as a strategy for supporting resource teacher well-being was boundary setting, particularly with respect to how to engage with work after hours, typically from home. Participants expressed the importance of setting boundaries and finding a balance between work and personal life. The participants discuss how they prefer to keep their work at school and during their office hours. They also emphasize the importance of being able to say no to requests that may disrupt their personal time. For example, in this participant's comments, she explains how she views engaging with email correspondence after hours from home, saying:

Setting some sort of boundary with what you are okay with would be probably most important. You know, for me, I don't mind if I check emails because I have [the email application] on my phone. I don't mind checking emails and if I really feel like it, I will respond to it, if it's a quick reply, but never would I ever apologize for not responding at night. If somebody needed something immediately, my office hours [is when I am available]...if it's something that is going to kind of occupy my evening, I will leave it to the next day, but at least I know it's there. You know it depends, some people will put their phone away, I know, like our principal, for example, says, do not contact me after

eight o'clock at night, whatever it is, I will have my phone off, and it will turn on until seven o'clock [in the morning]...so don't even bother because I'm not going to see it. So, setting those boundaries so that you don't end up taking on more [work]. And being able to say no as well. Definitely divisions like when [staff] work on their own time and expect things to get done regardless of whether you've been pulled into a classroom that day... But also, you know, being okay with not following that all the time and saying no, whether it's a parent [requesting] a call late at night, saying [to the parent], you know we can discuss this tomorrow during this my office [hours]... being able to say no is helpful in setting those boundaries. (BB, Focus Group Interview, May 10, 2022)

This participant agrees that setting boundaries is important but admits to feeling guilty sometimes when saying no. She explains how she prioritizes her time at home so that she has time to decompress and be with her family:

I agree about [setting] boundaries. I don't feel like I'm always good at setting them because I think we all feel guilty, or I feel guilty sometimes, when I have to say no, but I'm getting better at it. And I also find because of our days, I will try and not take work home with me because I often get there early in the morning and I often stay there late...I left today at 5:30. And I feel like that's enough of my time, and so, if something didn't get done, unless it's absolutely urgent, it's going to wait for me for the next day, and I have to just be okay with that because I have already given enough time there and I need to be able to come home and decompress myself, and also be there for my family as well. So I think that the boundary piece is important. (NE, Focus Group Interview, May 10, 2022)

Overall, this participant is clearly expressing her belief that setting boundaries is crucial for maintaining a healthy work-life balance. Similarly, the next participant's comments highlight setting boundaries, too. She agrees with the other speakers that setting boundaries is important and she explains how she has learned to separate work and home life. She explains that, typically, she does not work in the evenings unless it's been an extremely stressful day. She emphasizes that she finds it helpful to keep home and work separate unless there is something stressful happening and she needs to lean on her spouse for support. She says:

I have found over the years, I agree with [another participant]...the weekends are a different story because there's planning to do for some students that I plan for, but I'm [at school] generally earlier than most, and later than most, and so I don't often work in the evenings. I have learned to kind of separate, and I don't know if it's if it's age or what it is, but you know, home is home and work is work. Unless it's been an extremely stressful day and I need to vent to my husband, I don't...it's not part of my thought very much in the evening. The same at school, my home does stays out of out of school unless there's something stressful happening. I found that that has been very, very helpful...This is the first school that I've been in where I've experienced that nobody reads for pleasure, they read for professional needs, and I think it's important too. If you're a reader, to read for pleasure, but I think it's important that you find something that you're passionate about, so some people work out like crazy and I read. And I think that's it's important to find what it is [you enjoy]. It has helped me a lot. (KI, Focus Group Interview, May 10, 2022)

Lastly, this participant emphasizes the importance of finding something that you are passionate about and making time to enjoy it.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, the participants' comments demonstrate an emerging theme of taking care of their own well-being as well as proactively supporting each other as resource teachers to prevent burnout. During the focus group interviews, resource teachers discussed several strategies for supporting their well-being, such as finding time to support each other with small gestures that bring the team together, allowing time and space for confidential conversations without judgement, prioritizing self-care, and setting boundaries between work and personal life. The participants emphasized the importance of taking breaks, engaging in activities that they enjoy outside of work, and being able to say no to requests that may interfere with their personal time. They also discussed how they have learned to separate work and home life and how they find it helpful to keep home and work separate unless there are extenuating circumstances. Additionally, the participants highlighted the importance of finding something they are passionate about and pursuing it, whether it be reading or working out. Overall, these strategies can help resource teachers maintain a healthy work-life balance and improve their overall well-being, thus reducing stressors that lead to burnout.

## **Continuous Professional Development**

Another proactive strategy to prevent resource teacher burnout that emerged from focus group interviews is continuous professional development in inclusion and student services. This strategy aims to promote deeper understanding of inclusion through collaboration and mentorship among teachers. The participants emphasized that this training should begin during pre-service teacher education and continue throughout teachers' careers. Regular and comprehensive professional development opportunities throughout the year are critical in establishing an inclusive foundation for teacher learning and supporting resource teachers and

school leaders as their shared understanding and capacity grow. Ultimately, this approach enables teachers and resource teachers to become more aware of their roles and responsibilities in supporting learning and to be responsive to the various types of diversity present in every classroom situation.

### **Pre-service Teacher Training**

Based on the focus group interviews, participants emphasized the need to support resource teachers by offering effective training in inclusion and student services, which can equip them with the necessary skills to establish a culturally welcoming and inclusive classroom environment, address the diverse needs of their students, and promote academic achievement and well-being for all. This training needs to be offered to all teachers, starting with pre-service training at the university or college level. By providing pre-service teachers with comprehensive training in these areas, resource teachers can help to improve the overall quality of education and create more equitable opportunities for all students.

To achieve effective pre-service training, a participant shared her perspective on utilizing mentorship as a practical strategy that promotes inclusion, effective collaboration in planning and, providing appropriate learning opportunities for all students. The participant emphasized the importance of providing pre-service teachers with mentorship opportunities, where they can receive guidance and support from experienced teachers who have demonstrated success in creating inclusive and supportive classroom environments. The participant shared her idea for strengthening the practicum portion of teacher training, which could, in turn, be viewed as a proactive strategy for supporting resource teachers. The participant said:

I've often thought when we've had student teachers in the building that it would be really good for them to spend, you know, a few days in the learning support area. So that [they

are] getting the hands-on experience with students [with special learning needs]. With talking to [resource teachers], there should be an expectation that these students are in those lesson plans that they are implementing in classrooms, that there is evidence of what and how [they are] adapting [lessons]. If you have a student that has higher needs, how are you going to include them? What activities are they going to do? Because I know that I have a student that is 90 to 95 percent of the time in the classroom and I never saw the student teacher, when he was teaching, have anything to do, you know, anything planned for [the student], and I thought that that was a shame. And maybe a bit of a sin. (KI, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2022)

Creating opportunities for pre-service teachers and newer teachers to spend time with resource teachers for mentorship was emphasized by another participant who said, “I love the idea actually, of having student teachers sort of spend some time with someone in student services to get that perspective” (NE, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2022). This commentary emphasizes that there is an opportunity to build an effective and well-functioning school team, through building capacity of the teachers before and during the entry stage of their teaching career. Working alongside experienced educators who act as mentors, pre-service teachers can gain valuable insights into effective teaching practices, strategies for promoting inclusion, and techniques for supporting students’ diverse needs. This mentorship can ultimately help pre-service teachers become more confident and competent educators capable of creating classrooms where every student feels valued and supported.

The participants also shared ideas for improving the pre-service training through university or college courses. As one participant said:

One thing that I've always thought that the university could help us with, is how to differentiate learning for their classroom because I'm finding that a lot of our newer teachers that come in are taught how to teach to the average student, they don't know how to adapt little bits here and there to make [learning] accessible to other students...Just putting those little things into [students'] programming. (TN, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2023)

The participants were nodding their heads in agreement with this sentiment of having resource teachers act as mentors.

The conversation shifted to discussing how university courses can also support developing teacher understanding about inclusion. Another participant shared her ideas for strengthening pre-service teacher training:

I also love the other idea about making sure that that whole idea of inclusive programming is embedded in all of the courses, because I often find and I think of even my own coursework that I took, you know before I took my [post bachelorette diploma in education]. But it really was like how do you reach struggling readers you know. Which is all good information as well, or you know some of those pieces, but [pre-service training] don't ever really get into what about some students with significant needs what can that look like. And then the other thing I thought about, and it kind of comes from my own coursework that I took, is making sure that the people who are doing these courses actually have the background to share some of that information and their experience because one of the courses I was most looking forward to was how to develop a resource program. I was like, oh my gosh this is perfect, like this is totally meant for resource teachers, but it was taught by a counselor who never worked in a school. She was only

doing private stuff and I thought she's bringing no school experience. She couldn't speak to what this looks like in a school context. She very much just had to rely on us in the class to do it and I just think we need the people that are doing the work to teach those pieces and what it actually looks like. So in my mind, that was a real disservice to us taking the class. (NE, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2022)

Similar thoughts were shared by another participant in regards to embedding inclusive planning expectations into coursework, saying, "like when you take a social studies course, [teaching to diversity] should be included. It should be integrated into every course that [pre-service teachers] take, they should be planning with that in mind, and not just as a side piece onto their lesson plan" (BB, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2022).

Another participant shared other ideas that they believe would strengthen pre-service teachers' experience in university or college:

When I took my very first post bach course, I took it just because it was the only one that was available. It was Transitioning to Adulthood, and the professor was very well versed in transitioning. She ran the program for [university students with] special needs, Campus Life. She was very knowledgeable and she brought in other people on a regular basis. I would say, like 85 to 90 percent of the time people in the community, former students that had gone through the program, all kinds of [guests] that were so invaluable and they were not professors, they were not accredited, but they were you know if you could do it like that, where you're bringing experts into as a guest speaker. (KI, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2022)

This comment demonstrates that learning from people with lived experiences is helpful in supporting teachers in understanding factors that affect their work from the lens of a former student with special learning needs. Another participant who shared affirmed this idea:

I think that would be fabulous...what was said before about like having lots of different people come in, because I think, in our field everybody has a different perspective and a different strength. And I think just hearing those different voices and being able to ask [questions], almost like networking. I mean we've talked about how important it is for us and we do this job on a daily basis, so that whole idea of having a network of people that you can have come in, I think, would be so invaluable. So, I would 100% support that.

(NE, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2022)

This demonstrates the value held by experienced resource teachers on the topic of providing exposure to lived experiences of people with special learning needs and to help shift perspectives on why we do this work and how we can approach it with a student-centered focus.

Lastly, a participant also shared a comment that is worth noting: it's important for new teachers to learn strategies for supporting Indigenous students by integrating culturally appropriate activities into lessons and how to generally integrate Indigenous practices (ways of knowing, being, and doing) into the classroom as regular programming (BB, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2022).

Overall, these comments emphasize the perspective that through mentoring pre-service teachers during their practicum experience and enhancing university or college courses, pre-service teachers can gain valuable insights into effective teaching practices for equity and inclusion and techniques for supporting students' special learning needs. This can empower them to engage skillfully with the school's service delivery model and be successful in their careers,

ensuring that all students receive the education they need to reach their full potential. This also serves as a proactive strategy reducing potential unnecessary stress that can contribute to resource teacher burnout.

### **Resource Teacher Professional Development**

During the focus group interviews, the participants also discussed supporting teachers' professional development throughout their careers, especially around transitioning to the resource teacher role. One participant started the conversation by expressing her frustration with the lack of professional development that specifically targets appropriate inclusive education, saying, "there is this whole idea that we get a lot of PD on how to do this [work]. I don't quite understand why" (BB, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2022). Another resource teacher added, "I would love to get back to some of that actually, doing [professional development] because that's supposed to be our roles" (NE, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2022). When asked to further explain what it means to get back to doing professional development, the participants all similarly expressed how they have observed professional development become more difficult to access in light of a few factors, such as release time due to lack of substitutes or other responsibilities.

One way that professional development is accessed is through routine meetings for resource teachers. One participant shared:

We have our resource team meetings usually twice a year with the K to 12 resource teachers. And then a couple every year with just our high school resource teachers.

There's [less than 5] high schools in my school division and we're all relatively small schools, so that's really helpful to gain information from other resource teachers that are in a similar position and role...Admin, guidance, resource, and clinicians would meet and

talk about policy and do some PD together...and just trying to brainstorm some ways that are outside the box, I think it's probably the most valuable thing I took away. (SQ, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2022)

Viewing and valuing resource teachers gathering for meetings as a way of professional development and sharing information was further discussed:

For us there is kind of a difference between our resource group with the division and our PLC (professional learning community). So, just to kind of differentiate, basically are our division kind of mandated divisional resource teachers meetings to look very different. It's not really all that helpful to be honest. We get some information and they tell us a lot, but then there's no time to actually learn really anything. They give us some deadlines and they tell us when we have to do things by and things like that. However, we did have like prior to COVID, we had a PLC that usually involved, not all but most, research. That helps more. So, that helps us to kind of build those connections across our division, because like I said last time, all our schools in our division [have] one resource teacher. There's none sometimes. Like what one of our bigger schools, sometimes they have a resource support person but they're really just running some literacy programs or something like that. They're not the main like case manager for that school. So, yeah, that time allows us to build those connections. With these connections we can share stories and offer support. Whether that be like how to help manage a certain situation, we collaborate some ideas to help out that that resource teacher. Or just even to be able to kind of like help our mental wellness as well. Just to kind of share our stories and kind of say kind what gives you that idea, and that okay, I'm not alone in this kind of struggle. So

that's kind of where our PLC is and how they help. (BB, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2022)

The challenges with getting together with other resource teachers continued with another participant sharing their experience:

We're similar to AA in that we have divisional resource teachers' meetings. They have been quite spotty in the last two to three years. When we were all [teaching remotely] in 2020 and onward, we actually had a few [meetings]. Where we got some learning around some of the new initiatives coming out from the province. And then last I mean for me, I have missed two [meetings] in the last couple of years, and I feel like last year there were only two in total and I missed the first one. I can tell you what we did talk about in the last one. Then this year we've only had two. And I had to miss last the last one because we just have a student that when he amps up, it's either myself or the vice principal who is halftime resource [wo responds]. And he was having a day, and so it was like one of us needs to stay, so I stayed. So I'm missing a lot of it, but I do agree with BB that it's a lot of top down stuff [at the meetings]. Here's what you have to be doing, here's the deadlines, here's you know, this is what you need to know that's new. I think the last one they talked about the new [Supporting Inclusion: Modification and Individualized Programming in Manitoba Schools] document and what that is going to look like...As for PLC, there is no such thing. (KI, Focus Group Interview, May17, 2022)

Another participant added:

In the beginning when I started resource, we used to actually have times to get together with resource teachers and it often was a lot of that dissemination of information, but there were some time to do some collaborative thinking in groups, and I really miss that. I

don't know why it's kind of fallen to the wayside, I know this year, you know subs have been an issue and things like that, but I don't even think I've been to a resource teachers' meeting this year. So I miss that part of networking and I find that what I have ended up doing finding people that are doing the same job as me, whether it's in my building. And I have a partner, we do lots of talking and connecting. Then it's also me on my own maybe meeting up for coffee with somebody that you know that I'm friends with that is a teacher. But it's really been left in my hands to make that happen. And we all know how things get it gets crazy and you never end up doing it, but I really look forward to having that back again because I think it was important and it was good to get out of the building and do something purposeful but helpful. (NE, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2022)

The theme of resource teachers accessing time to gather with other resource teachers as a form of support and professional development continued with another participant sharing:

Often, if we do have a chance to get together, it really is just about talking about students and maybe doing some programming decisions and things like that. One thing that I think I'm trying to think about is how much [resource teacher meetings] we actually ever used to do. That whole idea of actually doing group-like team PD, or something along those lines, actually hasn't happened in a really long time either. But what a great opportunity to be able to go and do something as a student services team or those things. But it is tricky because often, and I don't know if this is the same potentially everywhere, but they like to have resource teachers take on that [acting principal], so it's really difficult to have the admin and your resource team out of the building when they are also your [acting principal] people as well. So, I think there's some logistics that way, but I would love to

get back to some of that, actually doing PD, because that's supposed to be our role. (NE, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2022)

The acknowledgement that meeting with other resource teachers as a helpful strategy was noted by a participant who shared:

I think again kind of coming back to that teamwork type of situation would be probably [resource teachers'] greatest factor for success...I think that what has helped me be successful is [meeting with resource teachers]. I know there's lots of different other ideas, and I think just having those connections and teamwork and continuing to make those connections, not necessarily in your team, but like with support people, and kind of learning what your area has to offer for supports...But yeah definitely teamwork, connections, learning what supports are out there for your families, so that if they do need something you kind of have that at your disposal to offer for them. (BB, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2023)

This participant is emphasizing the importance of collegial connections that are forged when resource teachers are able to meet with other resource teachers whose work is similar to the work that they are engaged in.

Additionally, leveraging resource teacher to resource teacher meetings is a proactive way to set up informal professional development opportunities for teachers who are transitioning to the role. One participant shared her experience:

I think I'm going to kind of circle back to the newer resource teachers, and you know it's not necessarily newer [resource teachers], but I think that that the division's student services really need to be aware of people that are stepping into this role and supporting them...making sure that they know what resources are available to them. Like my first

year [as resource teacher], there was somebody that would come to our school because I was new and I had no idea really what she was because it was something I'd never heard before and it took me almost until the end of the year to realize what her role was. Which was too bad because it would have been a much easier year had I had I understood it. And I just think that that we need to maybe have a mentorship program. Maybe something to help newer resource teachers. And then ongoing check-ins with people that are new, like what are challenges that are new to you this year, what is something that you haven't done before, and how can we help? (KI, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2023)

This idea of providing a structured support for resource teachers who are new(er) to the role was also noted by another participant who shared:

I was going to say the same type of thing. Like you know what they offer for new teachers. They often will have kind of like, a not a co-teacher, but a teacher mentor. Mentor programs for our new resource teachers would significantly help. I know we have had a new resource teacher in our division...somebody needed to support them from the division and check-in with them...or assign somebody to do that, an allow time for it as well. But he was phoning me. I didn't know him whatsoever, but we sat in a meeting together one time and kind of had a connection...he started phoning me throughout the year for support. How do I do this he [asked], I have to do these resource reports, like I have to make that like start from scratch? ...But unfortunately, probably due to [the resource] teacher's load and being also put as the only resource teacher for one of our smaller schools, he now wants to leave. And I said right away, I bet you he was overworked. It was ridiculous to ask him, he was doing like a kind of a special area type

of course, like just a regular teacher course in addition to resource. I said well right away, I said, I know what it is, that you should never have put those two responsibilities on one person, that's ridiculous. And then, I know another teacher in our division that kind of went back to the classroom because she was just be know...you factor of the resource was just too much in her position, wasn't valued, and so I would say that was probably the reasoning for her kind of sort of burnout in the resource teacher role. (BB, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2023)

This participant emphasizes the importance of offering collaborative support as a form of professional development and how these opportunities of mentorship can be a proactive strategy in preventing resource teacher burnout.

Overall, the professional development of teachers, particularly when transitioning to the role of a resource teacher, was discussed in focus group interviews. Participants expressed frustration with the limited professional development opportunities available to them. They noted that it has become increasingly difficult due to various factors such as a lack of substitutes. Routine meetings for resource teachers were emphasized as support that was valued by the participants. The participants discussed the benefits of building connections and collaborating with other resource teachers, which acts as a proactive strategy for preventing resource teacher burnout.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, continuous professional development is a proactive strategy that can be utilized to prevent resource teacher burnout and promote inclusion and student services. The strategy should begin with pre-service teacher training and continue throughout teachers' careers. Regular and comprehensive professional development opportunities are critical in establishing an

inclusive foundation for teacher learning and supporting resource teachers and school leaders as their shared understandings and capacities grow. The use of mentorship is a practical strategy that can promote effective collaboration in planning and providing appropriate learning opportunities for all students. By providing pre-service teachers with comprehensive training in inclusion and student services, resource teachers can help to improve the overall quality of education and create more equitable opportunities for all students. Through this approach, classroom teachers and resource teachers can become more aware of their roles and responsibilities in supporting learning and responsive to the various types of diversity present in every classroom situation.

Supporting teachers' professional development is essential for their career development, especially when transitioning to the resource teacher role. However, the participants in the focus group interviews expressed their frustration with the lack of professional development that targets appropriate inclusive education. They noted that access to professional development has become more difficult due to factors such as release time due to lack of substitutes or other responsibilities. Routine meetings for resource teachers are one way to access professional development and share information. While the participants viewed and valued resource teachers gathering for meetings as a way of professional development and sharing information, they also discussed the challenges of getting together with other resource teachers. They suggested that these meetings should allow for more collaborative thinking in groups, disseminating information, building connections, and offering support. Therefore, it is important to provide more opportunities for resource teachers to engage in professional development, especially through meaningful interactions with colleagues, to support their ongoing learning and development as educators.

### **Conclusion**

The findings in this chapter provides insights into the perceived challenges and the strategies used by resource teachers to prevent burnout. The participants shared examples that directly and indirectly impact their ability to work effectively in their role, with their responsibilities. The participants' commentary emphasizes the importance of school leaders developing a strong vision of the school's student services delivery model based on a shared understanding of what inclusion can look, feel, and sound like in practice. The participants also emphasized some challenges in supporting colleagues in enhancing their capacity to provide appropriate programming for all students. Additionally, throughout their stories, they shared how ensuring that all school staff members share a common understanding of inclusion, its importance, and their individual responsibilities in collaborating effectively to facilitate learning for students while promoting professional development through a collaborative-team approach is essential.

The participants in this study discussed various strategies to address the challenges faced by resource teachers. Strong leadership, clear and consistent communication, school-wide collaboration, and opportunities for professional development were identified as crucial components in reducing work-related stress and promoting a positive work environment. Furthermore, the participants recommended investing in new teachers' understanding of inclusion and skill sets right from the beginning of their teacher training. By including various components related to supporting students with special learning needs in pre-service teacher training, it would deepen their knowledge about and how to support various special learning needs. This would, in turn, strengthen the school's team, as teachers would have a better

understanding of how to plan for and deliver appropriate educational programming and be an active participant in the service delivery model, improving the effectiveness of the team.

In summary, this chapter highlights the importance of addressing the challenges faced by resource teachers, which can lead to burnout. The strategies discussed by the participants, including strong leadership, clear communication, collaboration, and professional development opportunities, can help to reduce this stress and promote a positive work environment. Moreover, investing in pre-service teacher training can deepen teachers' understanding of inclusion and their ability to support students with special learning needs, leading to improved outcomes for students and a stronger school team overall.

## Chapter 5

### DISCUSSION

#### **Common Understanding of Inclusion and the Student Services Delivery Model**

The first emerging theme that surfaced in the focus group interviews on reducing challenges faced by resource teachers that contribute to burnout pertains to the school leadership's role in creating a common understanding of inclusion and the student services delivery model – the framework for how resource teachers organize their work and collaborators within a larger school team. In addition to a common understanding of inclusion and the service delivery model, a third subtheme emerged as caseload management and scheduling of resource teachers.

A common understanding of inclusion leads into the development of a framework for an inclusive and equitable service delivery model. During the focus group interviews, a resource teacher made a connection to Shelley Moore's book, *One without the Other* (2016), which is referenced as part of the literature review in Chapter 2. She started by recalling the ideas shared by Moore and then explained her own perspective: "I think as a school, we need to talk about what inclusion is and what does it mean to [educators] and what it means to everybody. You can't necessarily go beyond that until you've gotten to that base understanding" (BB, Focus Group Interview, May 10, 2022). Furthermore, Mitchell (2014) explained that to bring about an inclusive culture in a school, the leadership must "provide and sell a vision: this involves defining the philosophy and goals of inclusion and promulgating them wherever possible" (pp. 266-267). School leaders must provide and sell a vision that defines the philosophy and goals of inclusion and gradually release responsibility to a more distributed form of leadership that empowers teachers to assume leadership roles (Katz & Lamoureux, 2018, p. 56). Empowering

teachers to assume leadership roles is foundational to increasing teacher capacity and leveraging skill sets to service students.

The importance of school leaders having clarity in regard to the service delivery model and student services is suggested in *Ensouling Our Schools*, by Katz and Lamoureux (2018), as they explained, “the roles of the educational leader becomes paramount in steering schools toward a shared vision” (p. 56). They continue to note that “leaders who are successful in moving their schools toward a more inclusive model do so by sharing a vision, taking a strong leadership position on what is expected, and then gradually releasing responsibility to a more distributed form of leadership that empowers teachers to assume leadership roles” (Katz & Lamoureux, 2018, p. 56). Empowering teachers to assume leadership roles will be discussed later, as it is foundational to increasing teacher capacity and leveraging skill sets to service students. Thus, strong leadership with a shared vision is essential for building inclusive schools and reducing resource teacher stress and burnout (Katz & Lamoureux, 2018).

As discussed in the literature review, Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning has developed policy directives for school divisions to use as guides in developing their policies. Within the *Standards for Appropriate Education*, the recommended frameworks for service delivery models are the response to intervention model, universal design principles, co-teaching models, and collaborative models (further explained in the Appendix F-J) (Government of Manitoba, 2022). To some degree, these models are often combined, so that no one model is used in isolation because none of them can fully address and support the various dynamics that support inclusive education in classrooms and schools on their own. However, these models do support putting the student at the centre of planning and programming. Nonetheless, a shared

vision and understanding of the student services delivery model by educators, administration, and parent(s)/caregiver(s) is essential to enhance student achievement and success.

Regardless of the service delivery model itself, and whichever elements it entails, resource teachers and other educators benefit from well-developed plans with clear roles and responsibilities. This may also be extended to include resources and strategies accessible to educators. During the focus group interviews, several resource teachers reported that administrators need to have an excellent understanding of resource teachers' roles and responsibilities and effective classroom practices that support students with additional learning needs. One participant noted, "I'm really lucky in my roles [as a resource teacher], that my administrator was a previous resource teacher, so she has a lot of understanding about what goes on in the roles of student services." The same participant elaborated:

In general, whether it's [school administration], or senior admin, or departmental, just having that connection back to what it means to be a classroom teacher and what it means to be working in a room with so many needs...it sounds really easy on paper to do all *this* stuff but it's really hard. (SQ, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2022)

This illustrates that when administrators have lived experiences in the resource teacher roles, they are more likely to hold a robust understanding of what inclusion can look, sound, and feel like in their school and the roles and responsibilities tasked to resource teachers.

Understanding how resource teachers spend their time supporting the various situations that arise throughout the day, week, or year is essential in creating a school plan with equitable expectations of leadership, resources, and other valuable supports, such as scheduling additional tasks, like recess or lunch supervision or acting principal/teacher in charge. During the focus group interviews, many participants noted that when resource teachers are expected to fill in for

the gaps in supports, it feels like “we have so many hats, that you feel like you do nothing well” (NE, Focus Group Interview, May 10, 2022). The resource teachers expressed their appreciation for their administration when they were not assigned additional duties, such as filling in as a substitute teacher, recess supervision, or supporting school events like winter/Christmas concerts and community feasts. The resource teachers shared that they are consistently forgoing non-contact time and other scheduled services to support students on their caseload when required. They further explained that resource teachers can’t say to students, ‘don’t have a meltdown right now because it’s my non-contact time’ or ‘I’m busy supporting another part of the school.’ The resource teachers continued to express the feeling that ‘somebody has to pick up the pieces’ and that it is typically expected that it should be the resource teacher. One resource teacher observed, “this isn’t realized by other staff in the school,” noting that it is especially concerning in larger schools (NE, Focus Group Interview, May 10, 2022). Further to that point, she shared her perspective that there is an imbalance of additional duties and explained that this imbalance is “unfortunate because it falls to the people in the building that are already stretched,” alluding to how easy it is to burn out from balancing literacy groups and other regular duties they facilitate throughout the day (NE, Focus Group Interview, May 10, 2022). When resource teachers’ schedules and time are respected and considered when assigning additional tasks, it positively impacts how resource teachers feel about their value (as in they are not disposable members of the team). Having flexibility to attend to their regular duties and “support students when in crisis gives [me] the feeling that my job matters” (TN, Focus Group Interview, May 10, 2022). I interpreted these comments to mean that when resource teachers and administrators discuss what works best for the additional duties, there is an improved sense of a shared vision as a team. As one resource teacher explained:

I'm close to my admin and I feel like we are a team, and we tackle lots of things together. I feel like they fit into this boat too, like how much has been put on [resource teachers and administrators] for these teams and trying to pick up all those extra pieces. (NE, Focus Group Interview, May 10, 2022)

This notion brings us back to the main point of having a shared vision, supported by clear communication. Thus, administrators must have a robust understanding of what inclusion can look, sound, and feel like in their school and the roles and responsibilities tasked to resource teachers.

The resource teachers shared their perspectives around protecting time for collaborative conversations and planning with classroom teachers and clinicians. One participant shared her perspective and cautioned about being engaged in authentic collaboration, so that “resource teachers are not viewed as a glorified educational assistant in the classroom” (SQ, Focus Group Interview, May 10, 2022). During the focus group interviews, the resource teachers discussed how the consultative and collaborative model requires a lot of planning and assessment. One resource teacher said that the administrator of the school asked her to stop co-teaching because it was taking too much time out of her schedule (KI, Focus Group Interview, May 10, 2022). Another resource teacher shared that she would intend to support co-teaching, but when a student was struggling with challenging behaviours, she would have to step out of the classroom to support the student or team with co-regulating (NE, Focus Group Interview, May 10, 2022). Followed by another participant who shared that she contributes to co-teaching by locating sets of materials for classroom teachers to support students' learning goals and outcome expectations (BB, Focus Group Interview, May 10, 2022). The overall view that was established during the discussion was that “in a perfect world...[resource teachers] would have time for co-

teaching...there needs to be time for that co-planning in order for good co-teaching to take place” (NE, Focus Group Interview, May 10, 2022). The intent for co-teaching is largely to support the classroom teacher in building their capacity and develop skill sets that support them in meeting the diverse learning needs. As discussed in Mitchell’s (2014) *What Really Works in Special and Inclusive Education*, the underlying idea is that co-teaching benefits students and teachers, “where ‘the whole is greater than the sum of the parts,’” and that co-teaching has the potential to create learning opportunities while “reducing the professional isolation that can occur during teaching” (p. 70). Mitchell (2014) affirms that although resource teachers can provide instructional strategies, materials/resources, and demonstrate teaching techniques, the classroom teacher carries chief responsibility for the learning that takes place for all students in their classroom. Just having another teacher in the classroom is not co-teaching; it is not quite as good as it could be without a process. Co-teaching cannot be last minute add-on; rather, it needs to be built into the school’s service delivery model, which in turn is being implemented by, and reflected in, the school plan.

The participating resource teachers agreed that a shared vision and school plan must be an equitable design supported by all school staff and must acknowledge diverse learning needs. It seems valuable for all staff to understand the service delivery model and the roles and responsibilities of the members and to support the understanding of what makes the model equitable, while supporting connectedness and collaboration. All student services delivery models implemented should inherently support collaboration with students, parent(s)/caregiver(s), and educators. Perspectives shared by the participants on decision-making, team mindset, collaboration, clear roles and responsibilities, flexible timetables, and flexible support based on different levels of intervention are embedded within the shared vision,

all of which can be leveraged as proactive strategies to prevent resource teacher burnout. Katz and Lamoureux' (2018) message in *Ensouling Our Schools* summarizes this first theme perfectly: administrators and their teams benefit from sharing their vision and expectations for the school plan and developing teacher capacity, so that they can work closer towards empowering leadership roles and therefore evidence-based best practices. Thus, school leaders must create a school plan with equitable expectations of leadership, resources, and other valuable supports, such as scheduling additional tasks, like recess or lunch supervision or acting principal/teacher in charge, to reduce resource teacher stress.

### **Collaborative School Culture**

The second theme that emerged as a way to address perceived challenges experienced by the resource teachers and as a proactive strategy to prevent resource teacher burnout is collaborative school culture shared by the school team. By adopting collaborative and communicative practices, the culture of the school promotes dialogue between resource teachers, administration, clinicians, and the rest of the members of a students' circles of support (see Figure 1). The initial subtheme that arose is fostering a collaborative-team approach to assist resource teachers in proactively preventing burnout. According to the participants, they felt supported by positive relationships with principals and other staff, when administrators have a grasp of student support services and standards for appropriate educational programming, having principals actively engage with students, and sharing the responsibility of covering supervision gaps in the event of staff absenteeism. The second subtheme that arose as a proactive strategy in preventing resource teacher burnout is communication. The participants shared that they routinely engage in consultative conversations with classroom teachers and clinicians. According to the participants, they felt supported when they are not expected to be subject experts in all

things regarding special learning needs. They also discussed the characteristics of good communication as nonjudgmental, trusting, honest, and vulnerable and noted that they appreciated when they were a part of decision-making processes and when they opportunities to share their perspectives and opinions.

Through a collaborative-team approach with clear communication, Mitchell (2014) suggests school leaders can use conversations with staff to build an inclusive culture. He says, leadership must “provide encouragement and recognition: this can be formal and informal, public or private, but it has the common feature of recognizing those who are promoting inclusion” (p. 267). Not only did these comments highlight the relationships between resource teachers and school administration, but they also linked the ideas poised in the first theme. That is, when administrators understand the roles of the resource teacher, they might have more insight into how and when to offer support with compassion, engage in collaboration, and celebrate successes.

Through the focus group interviews, I noticed that the conversation did not go into discussing specific mechanisms that resource teachers would perceive as a direct tool for communicating the value of inclusion and how it will be supported through staffs’ roles and responsibilities in connection to the service delivery model. However, the literature did discuss the value in principals using school plans to support inclusive practice and by extension resource teachers. I conclude that schools and school divisions could leverage school (improvement) plans as a tool to communicate school goals for improving learning and building staff capacity. School improvement plans often include elements that reflect teacher collaboration, which is helpful in maintaining a clear vision about the service delivery model and supporting a safe and caring school culture – benefiting staff and students. Through supporting a collaborative-team approach

with open communication, students and staff schools can create a safe and caring space.

Research conducted by the department of Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning indicated that schools should “create a sense of belonging and community that helps students develop and maintain their social, emotional, and psychological well-being” (*Safe and Caring Schools: whole-school approach to planning for safety and belonging*, 2017, p. 24). The province indicated in this policy directive that:

Across the social-ecological systems (student, family, classroom, school, community, and society), opportunities are created for children and youth to experience connection and build a foundation of caring that will support the problem solving process when issues are identified or incidents occur. Feeling connected and part of the school community strengthens a sense of belonging, develops positive relationships, and communicates support in resolving issues. In planning for school safety, a social-ecological systems perspective recognizes the connection and influence between students and the multiple systems around them, including parents/family, peers, classroom, school, community, and societal dynamics. From this perspective, planning for safety and response addresses these interrelationships, with a focus on identifying contributing risk and protective factors. (*Safe and Caring Schools*, 2017, p. 24)

To support the high level of interrelationships that occur for each student who is on a resource teacher’s caseload (see Circles of Support, Figure 1) a collaborative school culture for staff is important. Especially with the growing demands being placed upon resource teachers, as classroom diversity expands.

The participants described a collaborative school culture with characteristics such as supportive and positive relationships with principals and other staff, collaboration within the

school team, celebration of successes, and acknowledgement of challenges. These characteristics have the potential to bond the school team together, working towards moving forward together. This is important because educators are constantly looking for ways to improve their practice, in the spirit of helping students and themselves reach their potential.

A collaborative school culture does not just happen. It requires intentional focus by the administration and the staff. Mitchell (2014) articulated that school culture is the “characteristic of the school as an organization and not of individuals, although all members of the school community contribute to forming its culture” (p. 266). He affirmed that a collaborative school culture requires the intentional exercise of administrative leadership and that its benefits contribute to developing its culture. He suggests that “schools in which teachers perceive a positive climate, with a high degree of affiliation among teachers, an atmosphere of innovation, high involvement of teachers in the decision-making process, [and] cooperative...had better student achievement” (Mitchell, 2014, p. 269). To further demonstrate this point, Mitchell (2014) highlighted in his research:

A US study reported a positive relationship between teacher’s perceptions of ‘school climate’ and student achievement in fifty-nine elementary schools. The influence of school climate was stronger in high socio-economic status communities (SES) than in lower SES communities. Overall, the authors concluded that schools in which teacher perceived a positive climate, with a high degree of affiliation among teachers, an atmosphere of innovation, high involvement of teachers in the decision-making process, cooperative, friendly students and adequate resources and facilities, had better student achievement. (p. 269)

The overarching idea that resonated throughout the discussion in the focus group interviews is that resource teachers perceive positive and supportive relationships to be key in building a safe and caring school culture.

A collaborative school culture proactively supports resource teachers and holds implications for student success. Participating resource teachers took turns sharing about the positive relationships and the perceived impact they have in helping them cope with various situations. One participant shared:

I know for myself that I probably wouldn't have made it through my years if I didn't have such a strong relationship with either my partner in student services...my admin was so supportive, and we're all going through the same thing...knowing that you're not alone, that everyone is kind of in it together. (NE, Focus Group Interview, May 10, 2022)

This impact was very important because the same resource teacher mentioned earlier that she was the closest to burnout this year than ever before. The underlying idea is that resource teachers benefit when they can express themselves openly with their administration and feel like they belong to a team.

With the foundation of supportive relationships, the participating resource teachers also described collaboration as a component of an effective student support team. Being a member of a collaborative school culture engages resource teachers in student support teams that strive for consensus throughout the student-specific planning process. The ability to collaborate ensures that each team member has a voice and sees themselves as a respected participant. During one of the focus group interviews, a resource teacher shared, "It's helpful to feel like [you] have somebody in your corner" (BB, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2022). She explained:

Just having somebody [you have] a good relationship with [like with my administrator]... just being there and being willing to take on [anything with me] helps...teachers appreciate when principals are kind of willing to get their hands a little dirty too. (BB, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2022)

Another resource teacher commented, “Just being able to collaborate in an open and honest way without fear of any kind of repercussion is supportive” (TN, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2022). To drive this point home, another shared, “I have a vice principal and a guidance counselor that I can talk to about the [students] on my caseload. We are sounding boards for each other and our clinicians, too” (KI, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2022). Collaboration and striving to reach consensus are key in developing the sense of belonging to a team.

Another critical relationship mentioned frequently is between teachers and clinicians. Clinicians is the general term used to describe speech and language pathologists, occupational therapists, reading clinicians, school psychologists, social workers, and physiotherapists. Mitchell (2014) suggested “planning and delivering instruction requires the active collaboration of a range of professionals and parents, with clear delineated responsibilities” (p. 327). This concept is directly linked to the purpose for the student’s circle of support model. One resource teacher shared her personal perspective that “[clinicians] are probably the most supportive...they are quick to pump your tires” (KI, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2022). Collaboration with clinicians is important because it is not reasonable or sustainable to expect resource teachers to have all the solutions for addressing needs for the growing diversity that teachers are supporting throughout the day at school. One resource teacher shared that, at times, she felt like there was an impression, held by principals or classroom teachers (or both), that resource teachers hold all the answers and are always able to support the school’s growing diverse needs.

In response to the growing diversity of students' strengths and challenges, as well as diversity of staff capacity, a resource teacher shared how she values developing her resilience in handling situations and acknowledged that collaboration is key. She said:

Resiliency comes when you have those connections with other people, and if you have a problem you know you have somebody else you can turn to, to talk to and ask for advice what's their opinion, and they are open to you being that able to show that you may not have all the answers. (TN, Focus Group Interview, May 2022)

Collaborative relationships, such as the ones described in the participating resource teachers' comments, demonstrate the value in having timely and consistent access to clinicians and allotting the necessary time needed to carry out collaborative meetings. Another resource teacher shared:

The biggest support in my success has been [a high] level of teamwork. Clinicians have taught me so much about their own specialties, and things that they do, and ways that we can support students, and I probably, without clinicians, wouldn't have stayed so long as I have in resource. (NE, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2022)

This suggested that whole-team collaboration is important in supporting resource teachers' roles and responsibilities. Ultimately, it may even feel personal and anchored to their *why* for doing their work.

Protecting collaboration time is a strategy that was referenced by several participants and in the research referenced above. The participants shared how often they have opportunities to collaborate with divisional clinicians. Their answers varied from daily to monthly. Teachers in rural school settings reported not having routine access to clinicians, which negatively impacted

their ability to fully support students on their caseload and their respective teachers. One resource teacher shared:

I agree with everybody that to me clinicians have been the most amazing thing ever. I shared last week that when I was in [another province], it was like maybe once a month we'd see a clinician or once a year. I just tell everybody just how blessed we are to have the amount of clinical involvement that we do, and I couldn't do this job without them and their input. Their programming, suggestions, everything, it just [takes] everything to a different level [of planning and support]. I'm eternally grateful for them. (KI, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2022)

The emotion in these statements highlighted the urgency for school divisions to grow the number of clinical supports resource teachers can use to support the schools' caseloads. This suggested that having consistent, timely access to clinicians is a tremendous asset. Furthermore, clinician collaboration should be viewed by school leaders and school boards as an investment in enhancing student achievement and success while doubling as a proactive strategy for alleviating the pressures that could result in burnout.

Additionally, supporting teachers as they transition into resource teacher roles was also identified in the focus group interviews. The participants noted that mentorship is another proactive strategy that should be built into the school's service delivery model and school plan (a plan that outlines the school's priorities). In the *Safe and Caring Schools* document, the department recommends that schools employ the three-tiered model (primary, secondary, and tertiary) to offer school teams a frame to identify evidence of what strengths, needs, and priorities are present (Government of Manitoba, 2017). This model is intended to help schools identify needs by delineating responsibilities. When newer resource teachers are partnered up

with intentional mentorship, we are providing opportunities for staff to feel visible, appreciated, and cared for (Katz and Lamoureux, 2018). Katz and Lamoureux (2018) identified the importance for staff to be supported to prevent isolation, underappreciation, and a lack of friendships with colleagues. They indicated:

Professional learning communities require effort to truly be inclusive and support a positive school culture...when close to half our teachers leave the profession, something is wrong. Teachers are human beings, with partners and families, hearts and souls. It's not okay to make them sacrificial lambs...we must change the ways in which we work together and support each other. (Katz & Lamoureux, 2018, pp. 202-203)

One resource teacher shared her experience watching a newer resource teacher transition into the roles: "We had a new resource teacher in our division, somebody needed to support them from the division and check in with them or assign somebody to do that, but allow time for it as well" (BB, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2022). The resource teacher elaborated that the newer resource teacher would frequently call her throughout the year for support with reports, decision-making, and for connection. The resource teacher ended her story by explaining that the newer resource teacher left the role at the end of his first year, likely due to being overworked with a high number of student files on his caseload, feeling undervalued, and needing a stronger support system to navigate challenging situations. Despite her efforts to offer support when she could, she recommends a mentorship program exist to support newer resource teachers, as mentioned earlier in this theme.

Resource teachers agreed that taking time to celebrate success and openly acknowledge challenges with a solution-orientation is helpful in coping with various stressors connected to supporting student programming and planning. A resource teacher shared, "what we do [as

resource teachers] is hard...it's a lot of work" (SQ, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2022). She continues to express appreciation when their school team acknowledges the challenges of the resource roles and responsibilities and feels supported when they are met with compassion, explaining the value in colleagues saying, "you're not going to get it right every day, but we'll just keep trying and we're here to help you keep trying" (SQ, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2022).

Although having compassion for colleagues during difficult and vulnerable conversations is vital in supporting communication, it seems that school leaders also need to create a space for reflection to fully identify and work towards addressing professional goals. Giangreco and Broer (2003) from the University of Vermont created a tool (a workbook) that is meant to be used for gathering data and assessing next steps in ensuring schools are not becoming over-reliant on educational assistants in supporting students with additional learning needs; and should that be identified, to assess their situation and then develop, implement, and evaluate alternate plans. Within this workbook, Giangreco and Broer (2003), stated:

In order for your screening and self-assessment to be reflective and honest, teams need to be able to be self-critical without the fear that the information they record for their planning purposes (and ultimately for school improvement) might inappropriately be used against them. Our experience with other schools suggested that often it is the healthiest and most advanced schools that are the most self-critical. Avoid the temptation of comparing the self-ratings of one school to another; such comparisons are of little value and potentially harmful. (Giangreco & Broer, 2003, p. 1)

This suggested that constructive conversations help tease out the priorities that can be made actionable in planning to support student-specific plans and to build an inclusive culture.

In conclusion, a collaborative school culture is a key factor in promoting the well-being of resource teachers, students, and staff. This can be achieved through open communication, positive relationships, and intentional exercise of administrative leadership. By fostering a sense of belonging to a team and providing support, resource teachers are better equipped to handle challenges, which ultimately leads to better student achievement and well-being. It is also important for school leaders to create a space for reflection to address professional goals, assess the reliance on educational assistants, and build an inclusive culture. Overall, promoting collaboration and support among all stakeholders in a school community can lead to a more positive and effective learning environment for everyone.

### **Practices that Support Well-being**

The third theme identified as a proactive strategy to prevent resource teacher burnout is developing a culture within the school's staff that supports well-being. Practices that foster well-being for students and staff build a healthy and positive school culture, with healthy teachers (Katz & Lamoureux, 2018). Well-being is fostered through healthy social and emotional interactions in a collegial space.

However, these practices are not specific to supporting just resource teachers but rather the whole school team. During the focus group interviews, the participating resource teachers provided their perspectives on how they experience aspects of their roles and responsibilities have potential to be positively impacted by being resilient; however when they discussed what helps to build up their resilience, the participants shared that receiving and giving little moments of gratitude bonds staff and leads to an opportunity to lean on each other when needed. The participants also discussed how their resilience is supported by having boundaries and healthy approaches to managing work, along with finding time to fuel oneself through personal

enjoyment, personal interests, and celebrating successes as a team – all of which can be viewed as proactive strategies for preventing burnout.

Andrew and Lupart (2015) summarize the understanding of resilience as the feeling we are “doing well in life in spite of adversity” (p. 134). As mentioned, resource teachers support a variety of needs within the school, many of which have the potential to be challenging. As discussed in the introduction, the role of resource teachers frequently include multiple interactions with a large team of players throughout their day to support their caseloads, school goals, teams of educational assistants, and classroom teachers (Katz & Lamoureux, 2018). During the focus group interviews, a resource teacher expressed her thoughts about being resilient:

I think that for to be in this position, you are already a resilient person, because you are working alone so much, and you are making a lot of decisions that in a split second. You have to be resilient, and you have to be confident with the decisions you’re making. (KI, Focus Group Interview, May 10, 2022)

This suggests that the resource position is generally attractive to teachers who have, typically, already developed resiliency, which also implies that school divisions would benefit from leveraging opportunities for resource teachers to maintain their sense of resilience and build upon relationships with the larger school team. As discussed in other themes, collaboration is essential, and it would appear to be helpful in supporting resilience because having time to interact with fellow resource teachers, clinicians, and administrators may lead to empowering resource teachers to trust their professional judgements in handling sensitive situations.

Figure 2

Framework for Well-being

<b>Intrapersonal</b>	<b>Interpersonal</b>	<b>Spiritual/Existential</b>
<p><b>Intellectual</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Critical thinking/problem-solving</li> <li>• Perseverance</li> <li>• Develop interests/talents</li> <li>• Metacognition</li> <li>• Positive Self-talk</li> <li>• Brain/biochemical awareness</li> </ul> <p><b>Physical</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Body image</li> <li>• Nutrition/exercise</li> <li>• Mastery/self-regulation/independence</li> <li>• Sensory awareness</li> </ul> <p><b>Emotional &amp; Psychological</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Joy, happiness</li> <li>• Self-worth</li> <li>• Personal growth</li> </ul>	<p><b>Intellectual</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage in social issues/problem-solving</li> </ul> <p><b>Physical</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Touch</li> <li>• Participation/engagement</li> <li>• Sensual/sexual</li> </ul> <p><b>Emotional &amp; Psychological</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Belonging</li> <li>• Cultural connection</li> <li>• Positive relationships</li> <li>• Social coherence (find your social circle- shared values and interests)</li> <li>• Altruism/ service/ social contribution</li> </ul>	<p><b>Finding Meaning &amp; Purpose</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who am I?</li> <li>• Why am I here?</li> <li>• What is my gift?</li> <li>• Where does my joy lie?</li> </ul> <p><b>Recognizing</b></p> <p><b>Interconnectedness</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where do I belong?</li> <li>• How does my existence impact others?</li> <li>• How does my existence impact the planet?</li> <li>• How does my existence impact history?</li> <li>• How do I fit in the web of life?</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Environmental mastery</li> <li>• Autonomy</li> <li>• Sense of purpose</li> <li>• Set and meet goals</li> <li>• Resilience/distress tolerance</li> </ul>		
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(Katz and Lamoureux, 2018, p. 108)

In addition to developing a sense of resilience, the resource teachers talked about having gratitude. I understand gratitude as appreciation for kindness or other elements. I believe that gratitude is both given and received and deeply connected to happiness. Resource teachers shared examples of gratitude in the form of actions that influenced their feelings of autonomy and a sense of purpose. Examples of gratitude were leaving thank you notes on peoples’ desks, keeping a stash of chocolates for special moments of comfort, getting coffee for a colleague, or an “acknowledgement that [staff] are doing important work and they’re important to the school” (NE, Focus Group Interview, May 10, 2022). The examples are all simple actions, but the key message here is for school leaders to consider how they might leverage reflections and actions of gratitude as a proactive strategy in supporting well-being and preventing resource teacher burnout.

Firstly, to establish a context for fostering healthy social and emotional skills for resource teachers, I will use the *Framework for Well-being* as outlined in Figure 2 below (Katz & Lamoureux, 2018). Although this framework is designed for consideration in planning for students’ needs, it is easily applicable to teachers, too. I will draw parallels between examples provided in the focus group interviews and aspects of “intrapersonal well-being, interpersonal

well-being, and spiritual or existential well-being” (Katz & Lamoureux, 2018, p. 108). The aspects focused on by the resource teachers were resiliency and gratitude.

Secondly, resource teachers shared that they believe establishing workload-related expectations, boundaries, and prioritizing work-life balance are important in managing their workload. Being able to manage a diverse workload is important in coping with perceived stressors as they arise and can contribute to preventing the feeling of burnout. During the focus group interviews, the resource teachers shared about the perceived pressure to meet various deadlines and not fall behind in managing the various aspects of their roles and responsibilities. Being mindful of how much work one will engage in outside of regular office hours is one aspect for consideration. One resource teacher shared:

I will try and not take work home with me because I often get there early in the morning and often stay there [late]...If something didn't get done, unless it's absolutely urgent, it's going to wait for me for the next day. I have to just be okay with that because I already given enough time there and I need to be able to come home and decompress myself and also be there for my family as well. (NE, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2022)

This was followed by another resource teacher sharing their experience, saying, “setting some sort of boundary with what you are okay with [doing after hours]...I don't mind I can check emails I have it on my phone, I don't mind checking emails and if I really feel like it I will respond to it if it's a quick reply, but never would I apologize for not responding at night” (BB, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2022). She continued to share that she generally could tell if a concern (for example, an email from a parent) is an immediate concern or if it would “take up an evening” if she were to attend to it. She then continued to express how her school leaders are modeling balancing home and work life. She explained, “our principal, for example, says, do not

contact me after eight o'clock at night. Whatever it is, I will have my phone off, and it will turn on at seven o'clock [in the morning]."

The participants as a group shared their experience of having a phone/email turned off or unmonitored after hours. This was important because at times there are expectations to be accessible to staff. For example, one participant discussed the expectation to have her cell phone turned on early in the morning, as early as six o'clock, to accept sick calls, which is significantly beyond the expectation for other staff in the school. She felt this was an expectation because of her responsibilities in finding a substitute educational assistant for staff absenteeism.

A range of other examples followed. One resource teacher shared that although it is common practice for teachers to make phone calls to parents in the evening, they felt that there should be a balance in having these key discussions during regular office hours as well. Another example is not consistently bringing physical work home with her, like reports. She shared, "I have learned to be kind and separate [home and work]" (KI, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2022). She acknowledges that there needs to be room in life for both personal endeavors and work-related responsibilities.

Another perceived situation worth mentioning that could carry an impact over time is protecting non-contact time for resource teachers. Resource teachers shared that their roles and responsibilities often include filling in gaps and taking on a variety of tasks to support the school. Based on the comments of the resource teachers, many were not able to have a routine lunch break or preparation time because their skills are in constant need. A common experience shared by the resource teachers was the need to co-regulate with a student when they are in crisis, often during unstructured or differently supervised times of the day, like lunchtime. A resource teacher commented that you can't put a student's emotional needs on hold. This clearly adds to the

complex nature of resource teachers' roles in the school and emphasizes why relationships are so valuable.

Thirdly, in addition to social and emotional well-being and workload management skills, simply investing in celebrations and happiness should be viewed as a proactive strategy to preventing burnout. To establish a context for celebrations and happiness for resource teachers, I will again use the *Framework for Well-being* as outlined in Figure 2 (Katz & Lamoureux, 2018, p. 108). In the interpersonal well-being category, aspects such as belonging, positive relationships, and finding your social circle are listed as considerations for supporting well-being and are connected to the purpose for celebrating moments throughout the school day with students and colleagues, small and big. A resource teacher shared how students affect her perception:

I feel like it's the kids that keep bringing us back and make us feel like we need to be there. We need to keep doing the work that we're doing because someone has to advocate for them, and someone has to celebrate those success and somebody has to support the teachers in being able to be a part of those celebrations and successes. So that is what is important to me and why I keep going. (SQ, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2022)

The motivator for her continuation, the feeling to 'keep going' is also posited by Andrews and Lupart (2015) who said, "research has demonstrated that, for teachers, a feeling of engagement in what they do and a belief that it has meaning and importance are the most important and lasting forms of well-being (p. 144). Similar to student strategies, interacting with colleagues (peers) and students in extracurricular and social activities within the school is a proactive strategy to foster a sense of belonging or autonomy.

Lastly, the mention of happiness gets its own moment of recognition as a strategy in preventing burnout. Happiness from who and how you spend your time and invest your energy matters. For example, a resource teacher shared:

If you're a reader, read for pleasure. I think it's important that you find something that you're passionate about. So, some people work out like crazy, and I read. I think that it's important to find what it is that is yours, and I think that has helped me greatly. (KI, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2022)

Essentially the message here is find what makes you happy and find time to invest in it as a proactive strategy.

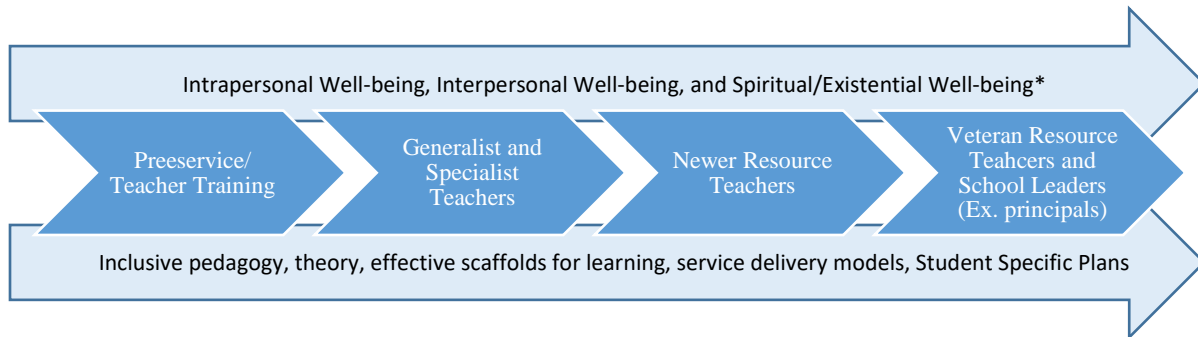
As researcher, it is important to note that I am not suggesting that the issue of burnout lies within resource teachers. I am suggesting, along with other researchers, that similar to how we plan for students' well-being, there are benefits to the schools, as organizations, if they build a healthy school culture that prioritizes learning opportunities for students and staff that tackle topics connected to mental health and well-being (Katz & Lamoureux, 2018; Mitchell, 2014; Santoro, 2017). Based on what the resource teachers shared, schools would benefit from including healthy social and emotional skills, occupational skills, and simply honouring opportunities for celebrations, personal joys, and activities. Focusing on mental health and well-being is about the relationship we have with ourselves, others, and other aspects of our individual lives that give our lives meaning and purpose, allowing for "interconnections within ourselves, with others, and with the planet" (Katz & Lamoureux, 2018, p. 108).

### **Continuous Professional Development**

The fourth and final theme that emerged from the focus group interviews as a proactive strategy to prevent resource teacher burnout was continuous professional development in

Figure 3

Framework for Continuous Professional Development: In supporting inclusion and diversity



\*As presented within an inclusive framework as presented in Figure 3, Framework for Well-being by Katz & Lamoureux, 2018, p. 108.

inclusion and student services from the pre-service level and beyond. The underlying idea here is that teachers should expect to participate in professional development that fosters deeper understandings of inclusion and well-being through collaboration and mentorship at the pre-service teacher level at colleges and universities, during teachers' careers in the classroom, and during teachers' careers as resource teachers and/or school leaders. Using continuous, rich professional development opportunities throughout the year as the vehicle to build an inclusive foundation in teacher learning will be critical in supporting classroom teachers, resource teachers, and school leaders. Ultimately, this aids classroom and resource teachers in becoming aware of their roles and responsibilities in supporting learning and to "be aware of and responsive to many sorts of diversities that are present in every classroom situation" (Andrews & Lupart, 2015, pp. 418-419). To help illustrate what I gathered from the resource teachers, I have added Figure 3, Continuous Profession Development Model for All.

In Figure 3, continuous professional development is illustrated with learning beginning at the pre-service level. In addition to explicit learning about teacher well-being, the resource teachers in this study and other researchers suggested that there is a need for a greater focus on the introduction of inclusive pedagogy and theory at the pre-service level. To that end, effective scaffolds for learning through multiple means, both as a separate curriculum and integrated into all other courses and in-field (practicum) experiences (Andrews & Lupart, 2015) are required. The effects of the model can be as positive for both educator and students; when teachers know more, they can do more, affecting student achievement along the way.

As researcher, I heard resource teachers share their perspective that well-designed pre-service teacher training at colleges and universities facilitates the development of positive and proactive strategies for managing the pressures of the teaching profession and learning about effective and inclusive teaching pedagogy and practices. During the focus group interviews, the resource teachers shared their thinking about how future resource teachers might be supported in the long run if particular fundamentals were included right from the beginning of the pre-service teacher training experience, in coursework and in the practicum. They expanded on their ideas for strengthening the current pre-service teacher training with intentional models of collaboration and mentorship right from the onset. Ideas shared included a long list of aspects, such as exchange agreements between school divisions and universities for master teachers, job shadowing various roles in the school like resource teachers, reviewing and practice writing student-specific plans, including adults with lived experiences in courses, and expectations that lesson plans and assignments will demonstrate an awareness of teaching diverse classrooms.

Andrews and Lupart (2015) discuss how pre-service and in-service teachers alike benefit from adopting the attitude that they are not experts in inclusion and teaching to diversity upon

graduation; rather, “they should have a solid understanding of the fundamentals of working in diverse environments from which they can build their knowledge as they practice” (p. 194). In chapter 6 of *Teacher Education, Professional Development, and Student Diversity*, Andrews & Lupart (2015) acknowledge there is great diversity in teacher training programming across the country and provide a summary of what pre-service teachers should master by graduation:

- understanding of inclusion and respect for diversity,
- collaborating with stakeholders,
- fostering a positive social climate,
- instructing in ways conducive to inclusive education,
- engaging in inclusive instructional planning,
- engaging to meaningful assessment,
- engaging in life-long learning (p. 193)

It is reasonable to assume that robust pre-service teacher training programming that includes suggestions from resource teachers and research would be anchored in professional development opportunities focused on collaboration and mentorship.

Once newly graduated teachers enter their classrooms, it is expected they will continue to engage in continuous professional development opportunities to support them in developing their practice. I agree with the perspective from the research that teachers should adopt a positive attitude towards their own learning and “realize their skill set is never complete or necessarily optimal, meaning that these teachers are aware of the need to engage in career-long learning” (Andrews & Lupart, 2015, p. 200). A resource teacher shared her perspective that “there’s this whole idea that we get a lot of PD on how to do this [work]. I don’t quite understand why I think some [teachers], like our new teachers, are good with accepting that situation! ... They don’t have

the tools to be able to [plan inclusively] and that's hard. But if they had a little bit more experience with [inclusion] because we are now taught to plan with all students in mind" (BB, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2022). Her perspective was that newer teachers seem underprepared for the realities of diverse classrooms.

The resource teachers commented that subject-specific courses might need revision to strengthen pre-service teachers in learning how to create opportunities for every student to acquire subject-specific knowledge and demonstrate learning outcomes. It is important for teachers to be knowledgeable in creating access points to learning in the lessons they prepare (Andrew & Lupart, 2015). A resource teacher emphasized, "like when you take a social studies course, [teaching to diversity] should be included. It should be integrated into every course that [pre-service teachers] take, they should be planning with that in mind, and not just as a side piece onto their lesson plan" (BB, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2022). This perspective was mirrored in another comment: "there should be an expectation of that they are including those [student's learning needs] into their lesson plans that they are implementing in the classroom, that there is evidence of what [they] are doing to adapt [or accommodate] students [with] higher needs, how they are going to include them and what activities are they going to do" (KI, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2022). These comments highlight the concern for how much exposure pre-service teachers have to inclusive practices and how it looks in practice, in real time, in the classroom.

Having authentic experiences during the practicum period of teacher training is another consideration for strengthening training. Another perspective on pre-service teacher training is to include job shadowing or mentorship with resource teachers during their practicum experiences. A resource teacher explained, "I've often thought when we've had [pre-service teachers] in the

building [for their practicum experience], that it would be really good for them to spend, you know a few days in the learning support area...so that [they] get hands on experience with students, with talking to the [resource] teacher or [classroom] teachers” (KI, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2022). The overall idea here is for pre-service teachers to have an opportunity to deepen their understanding in how to engage in supporting the service delivery model and all students in their classroom.

Another suggestion that came forward from resource teachers during the focus group interview is to continue to strengthen Indigenous education into pre-service teacher training. One resource teacher shared her perspective that it’s important for new teachers to learn strategies for supporting Indigenous students by integrating culturally appropriate activities into lessons as regular programming and how to generally integrate Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing into the classroom (BB, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2022). Naturally, this suggestion can be extended to educators across the province as this is a priority in learning for many Manitoban teachers.

An additional idea came forward about learning from people who have lived experiences with disabilities or special learning needs. One resource teacher shared a wondering around if students enrolled in postsecondary programming for students with special learning needs have joined in pre-service teacher training to share their perspectives (KI, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2022). I have included this wondering because I recall my own experience in connecting with students from Campus Life at University of Manitoba. I also felt that experience taught me to learn from lived experiences in the educational system. This can also be applied to Indigenous educational experiences, too.

Lastly, while specifically addressing pre-service teacher training, it is important to consider how programming can be designed to explicitly include lessons on well-being. When teachers are trained in understanding well-being and can lead social and emotional programming in the classroom, such as mindfulness programming designed for students, they, too, will feel the benefits when teaching mindfulness techniques (Flook et al., 2013). Beginning holistic learning at the pre-service teacher level would be expected to continue as a priority to school divisions in their professional development planning. As suggested in Chapter 2, mindfulness practices are associated with lowering the risk of burnout, influence student performance positively, and increase teacher capacity to develop healthy coping habits. This all results in a healthy and positive school culture.

Ongoing professional learning must be prioritized by both school leaders and senior administration (Andrews & Lupart, 2015). This is particularly important when it comes to prioritizing release time so that resource teachers can meet with other resource teachers at divisional meetings, supporting internal collaboration, consultation, and general problem solving. Additionally, having time to learn from various subject experts from the field may lead to meaningful learning opportunities, wherein resource teacher capacity is increased, and may offer an overall sense of professional satisfaction and general support.

To explain further the points made about the need to prioritize routine meetings for resource teachers, one resource teacher shared her experience, saying, “we have our resource team meetings, usually throughout the year with all the K-12 teachers” (SQ, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2022). She continued, “[these meetings are] really helpful to gain information from other resource teachers that are in a similar position and role.” She then provided a clear example of how she benefits from these discussions by explaining that these

meetings are beneficial because they get opportunities to discuss policy and learn how other jurisdictions handle things in different programs and through networking. At these meetings she was able to brainstorm ways to problem solve issues that impact learning for individuals or groups of students at her school (RP, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2022). Another resource teacher shared that she participated in a divisional professional learning network that usually involved research and opportunities to build connections, share stories and offer support, and examples of what collaboration looks, feels, and sounds like at their school. Additionally, it gave time and space to discuss projects and the programming they engaged in. In addition to these topics, she suggested that these meetings also allowed opportunities to be with likeminded people “just to be able to kind of help our mental wellness as well just to kind of share our stories...that you’re not alone in this kind of struggle. So that’s [how] our PLC [helps]” (BB, Focus Group Interview, May 17, 2022). Overall, this places value on the importance for professional development to include collaboration and mentorship.

### **Limitations**

My research study has several limitations that need to be addressed. One primary limitation is the absence of prior research on burnout among resource teachers. Typically, existing studies concentrate on burnout within the broader teacher population, with the narrowest dataset pertaining to burnout in education affecting teachers in general. In addition to the lack of prior studies, it is important to position this research study as spanning over a period of time that overlapped with the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the pandemic, teachers experienced several pivots in service delivery and roles and responsibilities as the roles and responsibilities of resource teachers and other available educators were stretched, challenged, and transformed during the 2019-2020, 2020-2021, and 2021-2022 school years. Educators at all levels

experienced a shift in how teaching looks, feels, and sounds. Since my research had begun prior to the pandemic, I decided to omit data that was entering the field within the pandemic response or endemic lens. What I assumed is that the pandemic placed strains on all facets of education systems. These strains may have resulted in resource teachers experiencing increases in stressors or demands at an increased level during the time of the focus group interviews.

Furthermore, another limitation to my research is the number of participants was small with a total of six resource teachers. To capture a more robust sample of resource teachers' experiences and perceptions of burnout, a larger sample size would be needed. This could be extended to include a national sample to compare universal experiences that support a healthy school culture and school division.

For future research, I recommend that more research is conducted to examine the incidence of burnout within the teaching profession, specifically within student services, and the proactive strategies that have the greatest impact on reducing burnout, such as the strategies discussed within the themes that emerged in this study. Lastly, I also recommend research that provides a scan of effective strategies for supporting pre-service teaching in graduating with a baseline of knowledge and skills that support participating in planning, delivery, assessment, and reporting for every student, with diversity in mind.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the purpose of my research study was to better understand resource teachers' perceptions of the challenges they face in their roles and responsibilities and the strategies they use to cope. It was my intention to understand how resource teachers use these strategies to reduce potential burnout and allow them to not only engage in their work, but flourish. The rationale for why this matters is that there is a cost to school divisions when their

resource teachers are not able to be effective at their work, as well as costs to student engagement and achievement.

My research study included five resource teachers with varied years of experience from across the province of Manitoba. Through Zoom, the participants gathered for two focus group interviews about the perceived demands and pressures they experience in their work roles and responsibilities and their perceptions about what they do to cope. Through the stories shared by the resource teachers, I used grounded theory as part of my methodology to shape four emergent themes. The emergent themes identified are: a) school leaders having a clear and shared vision of student support services, b) developing a safe and caring school culture, c) school-wide and individual practices that support mental health and well-being, and d) continuous professional development in inclusion and student services (and well-being) that starts at the pre-service teacher training level. Each theme was broken down to demonstrate the interconnectedness between school leadership, the structures in place to support service delivery models, and the mechanisms used by resource teachers that can be leveraged as a proactive strategy.

To help build the context for what Manitoban resource teachers experience, in my literature review I relied on the department of Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning's documents to describe Manitoba's interpretation of inclusion and its vision for appropriate learning for all students. I provided a description of the service delivery models to help frame the roles and responsibilities that are expected for resource teachers.

To help understand burnout in education, I reviewed research studies that specifically address burnout in inclusive education. Although most of the research was based on education as a whole, it revealed that burnout is a real problem for teachers, including resource teachers or those in equivalent positions. The studies showed that relationships with school administration

and their understanding of inclusion is a significant factor in supporting resource teachers (Katz & Lamoureux, 2018).

To help identify burnout, a section on demoralization was included in the literature review. The research of Santoro (2018) demonstrated the differences between burnout and demoralization and that school leaders are key players in alleviating the issues that contribute to demoralization and, by extension, burnout. This section also highlighted the importance of professional development and forging partnerships with universities and colleges.

Lastly, I explored what the research said about recommended strategies to support resource teachers and their roles and responsibilities within a well-developed service delivery model. The message was clear: strong school leadership is essential in creating a service delivery model with clear roles and responsibilities that function as expected, where resource teachers are supported by relationships, collaboration, professional development, and well-being programming. These strategies contribute to the development of a healthy, positive school culture and, by extension, healthy and effective resource teachers.

Based on my research study and the four emergent themes I identified, I recommend more research to explore burnout and demoralization within the Canadian education context. Specifically, a closer look, with a larger population sample, at what resource teachers need to be most effective in their roles and responsibilities. If all parts of the school system are healthy, we will have healthy students who will be better able to enjoy their experience at school and achieve their potential because their scaffolds, teachers, and resource teachers will be strong enough to support them.

## **Chapter 6**

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **Provincial**

In light of the findings and discussion from this research, it is imperative for the education system in Manitoba to move away from the traditional medical model and transition towards a more inclusive approach that recognizes and celebrates the inherent strengths and development of every individual. The current focus on deficits and diagnoses often perpetuates a narrow view of students' abilities, leading to a disempowering and stigmatizing learning environment. Instead, embracing an inclusive approach will foster a culture of acceptance and appreciation for diverse learning styles, needs, and experiences, thereby creating a more equitable and supportive educational landscape.

By adopting an inclusive approach along with an inclusive funding model, the education system can shift its emphasis from solely addressing challenges and shortcomings to recognizing and nurturing the unique talents and potential of each learner. This paradigm shift encourages educators to identify and build on students' strengths, interests, and passions, fostering a sense of belonging and empowerment among learners. Such an approach would not only benefit students with special needs but also positively impact the entire student population, as they would thrive in an environment that values diversity and fosters holistic development.

To achieve this transformation, systemic changes are necessary, including redefining professional development for teachers and school leaders to prioritize continuous learning in the realm of inclusive education. Providing robust training on differentiated instruction, universal design for learning, and culturally responsive pedagogy will equip educators with the tools and understanding needed to effectively support every student in their unique learning journey. Furthermore, collaboration and mentorship between experienced educators and pre-service

teachers should be encouraged, allowing future educators to witness inclusive practices in action and develop a solid foundation in creating inclusive classrooms.

In conclusion, by moving away from the medical model and embracing an inclusive approach that recognizes and celebrates the inherent strengths and development of all individuals, Manitoba's education system can create an environment that fosters equitable learning opportunities and empowers every student to reach their full potential. This transformative shift will require dedication, collaboration, and ongoing support from all stakeholders in education. The rewards will be substantial, as we cultivate a society that values diversity, nurtures every learner, and paves the way for a more inclusive and enlightened future.

### **Division/District**

As a critical component of the larger education system, school divisions must take proactive steps to implement the recommendations outlined in this research, particularly concerning the hiring of school leadership positions, including student services/resource teachers. It is essential for school divisions to prioritize diversity and inclusivity in their hiring practices, seeking candidates who not only possess the necessary qualifications but also demonstrate a strong commitment to fostering an inclusive and supportive learning environment through lived experiences. Emphasizing the importance of leadership with a deep understanding of diverse learning needs, as well as expertise in collaborative problem solving, and teambuilding, will enable school divisions to create a robust leadership framework that aligns with the values of inclusion and student well-being.

In addition to reevaluating their hiring practices, school divisions should develop a comprehensive school leadership framework that places a strong emphasis on fostering an inclusive school culture. This framework should include ongoing professional development

opportunities for school leaders that focus on promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion in all aspects of school life. By equipping school leaders with the knowledge and tools to implement inclusive practices, school divisions can ensure that every decision, policy, and initiative is rooted in principles of equity and social justice. Moreover, school divisions should encourage collaboration and shared decision-making among school leaders, student services/resource teachers, and educators at all levels. Creating a collaborative school culture that values open communication and mutual support will foster a sense of belonging and purpose among all staff members, ultimately benefiting the well-being and academic success of students.

In conclusion, for the recommendations to be effectively implemented, school divisions must actively embrace the principles of inclusivity and equity in their hiring practices for school leadership positions, including student services/resource teachers. By emphasizing the importance of leadership that embodies an inclusive mindset and possesses the skills to build collaborative teams, school divisions can ensure that their schools become nurturing and empowering spaces for all students. Additionally, the development of a comprehensive school leadership framework that prioritizes ongoing professional development and collaboration will be instrumental in creating a school culture that celebrates diversity and supports the holistic growth of every learner. Through these efforts, school divisions can play a pivotal role in transforming their schools into beacons of inclusivity and excellence, fostering a more equitable and enriching educational experience for all.

### **School-based Leadership**

At the school level, principals and other school leaders play a pivotal role in shaping the overall culture and climate of the educational institution. It is crucial for school-level leadership to embrace the recommendations outlined in this research and proactively foster an inclusive

approach that recognizes and celebrates everyone's inherent strengths and development.

Principals should prioritize the creation of a service delivery model that emphasizes collaboration and communication among staff, clearly articulating its principles and strategies to support inclusion. By effectively communicating the service delivery model, principals can ensure that all members of the school community understand their roles and responsibilities in promoting inclusive practices.

In addition to adopting the service delivery model, school-level leadership should facilitate opportunities for mentorship and professional development with the intent to build teacher capacity and support the implementation of the model. Principals can encourage experienced teachers, including student services/resource teachers, to mentor their colleagues, sharing best practices and offering guidance on how to effectively address diverse learning needs. By investing in mentorship programs, principals can foster a collaborative learning environment where educators continuously support each other's growth and development, enhancing their ability to meet the diverse needs of their students.

Creating opportunities for staff to celebrate and problem solve together as a team is another essential aspect of school-level leadership in promoting inclusion. Principals should encourage regular team meetings and collaborative planning sessions, where educators can share successes, discuss challenges, and collectively find solutions to enhance inclusive practices. By providing a safe and supportive space for open dialogue, principals can ensure that staff members feel valued and empowered to contribute their perspectives and expertise, recognizing that no one person holds all the answers when it comes to inclusion. Inclusivity is an ongoing journey that will continue to evolve over time, and by working collaboratively, the school community can adapt and refine their approaches to better meet the needs of all learners.

In conclusion, school-level leadership, particularly principals, play a vital role in creating an inclusive and empowering learning environment. By embracing the recommendations to move away from the medical model and adopting an inclusive approach that recognizes and celebrates everyone's strengths and development, principals can cultivate a school culture that promotes equity, diversity, and social-emotional well-being. Prioritizing ongoing professional development, mentorship, and communication of the service delivery model will enable principals to build teacher capacity and effectively support the implementation of inclusive practices. By fostering a strong sense of community and collaboration, creating opportunities for celebration and problem solving as a team, and ensuring a safe space for open dialogue, school-level leadership can empower all staff members to work together towards enhancing learning and mediating challenges in an inclusive and continually evolving educational environment.

### **Postsecondary Institutions**

Postsecondary institutions that provide teacher training have a significant responsibility in preparing future educators to effectively navigate inclusive classrooms and meet the diverse needs of students in Manitoba. It is essential for these institutions to recognize their role in contributing to the development of inclusive pedagogy and theory at the pre-service teacher level. By offering quality training about inclusion, these institutions can equip aspiring teachers with the knowledge and skills necessary for creating inclusive learning environments that honour and celebrate each student's unique abilities and backgrounds. In addition to theoretical instruction, postsecondary institutions should also integrate practical experiences, such as practicum placements in diverse classrooms, to provide hands-on learning opportunities for pre-service teachers to apply inclusive strategies and gain a deeper understanding of teaching to diversity.

To further enhance the practicum experiences, postsecondary institutions should provide opportunities for pre-service teachers to work closely with resource teachers to learn about their role in a school's student services delivery model. Mentorship with resource teachers can offer invaluable insights into how to effectively collaborate and support diverse learners within a school setting. By engaging in mentorship experiences, pre-service teachers can observe firsthand how resource teachers address individual student needs, facilitate support services, and collaborate with classroom teachers and other educational stakeholders. This practical exposure to the student services delivery model can prepare aspiring teachers to seamlessly integrate into the school's inclusive framework and contribute effectively to the overall learning and growth of all students.

Furthermore, postsecondary institutions can enrich their teacher training programs by actively engaging and learning from students who have lived experiences with disabilities or special learning needs. These invaluable perspectives can offer unique insights into the challenges and strengths of inclusive education, providing a humanizing and authentic dimension to teacher training. By incorporating the voices of these students into coursework and practicum experiences, aspiring teachers can gain a deeper understanding of the diverse realities of their future students, thus fostering a greater sense of empathy and adaptability in their pedagogical approaches. Emphasizing lived experiences in the curriculum can cultivate a culture of respect, understanding, and advocacy for inclusive education, ultimately enhancing the preparedness of future educators to create inclusive and supportive learning environments for all students. By integrating mentorship with resource teachers and incorporating diverse perspectives into the teacher training process, postsecondary institutions can empower pre-service teachers to become proficient advocates and facilitators of inclusive education in Manitoba's schools.

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**APPENDICES****Appendix A:  
Letter to MART****Faculty of  
Education**

April 6, 2022

RE: Research Approval

Dear Vice President, Sabrina Melanson,

You are receiving this letter as vice-president of the Manitoba Association of Resource Teachers (MART), because I have an interest in conducting a research study with resource teachers who may be members of your association. I am writing to you as a graduate student from the University of Manitoba, not as an executive member of MART. I am a graduate student in the faculty of education, working towards a master's degree in education. The title of my research project is *Proactive Strategies for Preventing Resource Teacher Burnout*. The purpose of this research study is to, 1) investigate resource teachers' perceptions of challenges they face in their work roles and responsibilities, and 2) what strategies resource teachers proactively use to cope with the demands and pressures of their jobs to prevent burnout. This research has been approved by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba, Fort Garry campus.

I am interested in conducting my research with resource teachers from within the province of Manitoba. With your approval and support, I request your assistance in sharing materials I provide, to support me in recruiting five to eight resource teachers who I hope will invite to volunteer as participants. I will supply you with a letter and a poster that may be forwarded to all your members, with freedom to further share the information with colleagues. Should a participant withdraw from the study, I would ask you to assist me with replacing the participant by resharing the information. Interested individuals will be asked to contact me so that I can ascertain whether they meet the inclusion criteria for this study.

I understand that MART is a group of like-minded teachers, mostly currently working in the roles of resource teachers, who have an interest in professional development opportunities that promotes inclusion. In accordance with the MART constitution, I understand I have no authority over resource teachers in terms of their employment, that my roles as president has no bearing on who participates or not, and there is no influence or advantage for MART members who volunteer to participate regarding MART's business. To mitigate any perceived conflict of interest, it is important that I do not attend the general business meeting when this information is presented. This will allow you an opportunity to discuss with the executive committee my request without me.

The inclusion criteria are to have been employed as a resource teacher or equivalent roles for a minimum of five years. Participants must be able to participate in two focus group meetings via videoconference app, UM licensed version of Zoom, on [specific date and time & specific date and time]. The focus group will take place after regular school hours, virtually. Participants will need to have access to a device with a microphone and video capabilities, Wi-Fi, and the UM-licensed version of Zoom. The focus group will take between one to two hours, twice. The

first five to eight individuals to meet the criteria and sign the consent form will be selected to participate.

All data collected, including transcriptions (done by myself), recordings, and anonymized/coded documents will be kept strictly confidential. All data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet, and all digital data will be stored on a password-protected computer or smartphone. All identifying documents and anonymized documents will be stored separately in separate digital files or separate drawers at my residence. The division, schools, and participants will be kept confidential and a pseudonym will be used in my reports. Additionally, the transcription will be sent to each participant for checking accuracy. If a follow-up interview is required for clarification, it will be arranged at that time. All data will be kept until the completion of my thesis. This should occur no later than [specific date]. At that time, all data will be destroyed or erased.

Thank you kindly for your time. If you have any questions, I would be happy to clarify any details. I can be reached at [umyoun46@myumanitoba.ca](mailto:umyoun46@myumanitoba.ca) or (XXX) XXX-XXXX. Additionally, my faculty advisor is Dr. Rick Freeze, who can be contacted at Room 221C, Faculty of Education, University of Manitoba, (204) 474-6904, [rick.freeze@umanitoba.ca](mailto:rick.freeze@umanitoba.ca). I look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,

Ms. Jennifer Young

**Appendix B:**  
**Oath of Confidentiality**



**Faculty of  
Education**

**Participant Oath of Confidentiality**

**Research Project Title:** Proactive Strategies for Preventing Resource Teacher Burnout

**Researcher(s):** Jennifer Young, Graduate Student: Faculty of Education,  
University of Manitoba (umyoun46@myumanitoba.ca)

**Research Supervisor:** Dr. Rick Freeze, University of Manitoba  
([rick.freeze@umanitoba.ca](mailto:rick.freeze@umanitoba.ca))

I, \_\_\_\_\_, am a support to the research team involved in the research project entitled “Proactive Strategies for Preventing Resource Teacher Burnout” and will be present during the sharing sessions related to this research.

In participating in the sharing sessions in a support capacity, I hereby agree to:

- respect the privacy and confidentiality of all participants ;
- keep all information shared during the sharing sessions private and will not share any information from the sharing session with anyone.

**Participant’s Signature** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Researcher’s Signature** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix C:**  
**Participant Recruitment Poster for MART**



Faculty of  
Education

## Research Study

**University of Manitoba  
Department of Education**

The purpose of this research study is to, **1) investigate resource teachers' perceptions of challenges they face in their work roles and responsibilities, and 2) what strategies resource teachers proactively use to cope with the demands and pressures of their jobs to prevent *burnout*.** This research has been approved by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba, Fort Garry campus.

### **You are eligible to participate in this study if ...**

You are a **resource teacher** (or equivalent roles) with a minimum of 5 years of resource experience in Manitoba.

Have access to a computer or smartphone with internet/WIFI access and Zoom with an enabled microphone.

Consent to being recorded during two focus group meetings on Zoom. Your camera can be turned on or off. You can use your name or an alias during the focus group meeting.

### **What will you be asked to do?**

- Participate in 2 focus group meetings Zoom
- Focus groups will last between 1 to 2 hours
- Focus groups will occur on [date] and [date]
- After regular school hours
- Questions will be based on participants' experiences of work-related stress and strategies used in alleviating burnout.
- Oath of confidentiality
- Review transcripts of focus groups

### **Compensation**

There is no compensation for your participation.

**If you have any questions  
or are interested in participating, please contact:  
Jennifer Young at (XXX) XXX-XXXX or Email: [umyoun46@myumanitoba.ca](mailto:umyoun46@myumanitoba.ca)**

You may also contact:  
Rick Freeze, Academic Advisor at (204) 474-6904 or [rick.freeze@umanitoba.ca](mailto:rick.freeze@umanitoba.ca)

This poster may be shared with others.

**Appendix D:**  
**Participant Consent Form**



**Faculty of  
Education**

**Consent Form for Voluntary Participation**

**Research Project Title:** Proactive Strategies for Preventing Resource Teacher Burnout

**Researcher(s):** Jennifer Young, Graduate Student: Faculty of Education,  
University of Manitoba (umyoun46@myumanitoba.ca)

**Research Supervisor:** Dr. Rick Freeze, University of Manitoba  
([rick.freeze@umanitoba.ca](mailto:rick.freeze@umanitoba.ca))

**This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you a basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.**

**Please check each box, and sign and return this consent form prior to the first focus group meeting on *May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2022*.**

- Purpose of the Research:** The purpose of this research study is to, 1) investigate resource teachers' perceptions of challenges they face in their work roles and responsibilities, and 2) what strategies resource teachers proactively use to cope with the demands and pressures of their jobs to prevent burnout. This research has been approved by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba, Fort Garry campus.
- What will be asked of you in the study:** Participants will be asked to participate in two focus group meetings that will last between one to two hours, which take place approximately 7-14 days within each other. The focus groups will be hosted via videoconference application, UM licensed version of Zoom. Participants will engage in a focus group where the researcher will ask questions regarding work-related stressors and strategies used for coping and alleviating burnout. As a participant, you will need to have access to a device and internet connection, along with the ability to connect to the videoconference application, Zoom (a free website or app, however, you must register with

Zoom before use) with an enabled microphone. Participants will also receive a sample of interview questions prior to the focus groups for review to aid in preparing for the discussion. Transcripts of the sessions will be shared via email, after both focus groups have been completed, with 7 calendar days to respond. If no response is received it will be assumed that the participant agrees with what was recorded in the transcripts.

- **Risks and Discomforts:** There are minimal risks or discomfort from your participation in the research. Due to the nature of the focus group confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. Participants will be asked to not share information outside of the study. Participants will be asked to sign an Oath of Confidentiality.
- **Benefits of the research and benefits to participants:** The research will identify perceived stressors connected to the resource teacher occupation and the proactive strategies used by resource teachers in successfully alleviating burnout. The participant will benefit from reflecting on their experience as resource teachers (and frequently school leaders) and how their roles and responsibilities shape their work, and the strategies they employ in supporting (and having awareness of) their wellness and occupational longevity. This may offer new insights into issues faced by school boards and their human resources departments in supporting resource teacher attrition, resource teacher wellness, and student outcomes. Due to my roles on the Manitoba Association of Resource Teachers' (MART) executive committee, please note that I have no authority over resource teachers in terms of their employment, that my roles as president has no power over members or those who choose to participate or not, and there is no influence or advantage for MART members who volunteer to participate regarding MART's business or otherwise.
- **Voluntary Participation:** Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time during the focus groups. Participants can not withdraw from the research study after June 01, 2022 (once both focus group sessions are complete). Please inform the researcher in writing or in person if you decide to end your participation in this study. Your decision to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions, will not affect your relationship with the researcher. In the event you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed.
- **Confidentiality:** This research study is being conducted as my thesis paper, for a Master's in Education. The information collected will be coded. Any identifying information like school division, school, names, or other identifying information will be removed or changed to keep the identity of the participants confidential. The focus group will be recorded locally and immediately uploaded to the approved UM storage (cloud). During the focus group, participants may choose to use their real name or an alias. Participants may also choose to turn on or turn off their cameras. All records will be transcribed into field notes in a word document. All digital files and field notes will use a coding system for identifying the participants. The researcher, Jennifer Young, and academic advisor, Dr. Rick Freeze, will have access to all data. All data will be destroyed after the study, paper files will be shredded and digital files will be deleted. This should occur no later than September 30, 2022.

- Quoting:** Direct quotes from the focus group transcriptions may be used. Quotes will be referred to as a "resource teacher" or if additional details are needed, a "resource teacher from a (rural/urban) (elementary/middle/high) school in Manitoba".
- Recording:** The audio and video of the focus group on Zoom will be recorded.
- Questions/Debriefing:** There will be no formal debriefing sessions for the participants, including yourself, of this study. If participants want to know the results of the research of this study or have any other questions regarding this study, the participants may contact Jennifer Young via email [umyoun46@myumanitoba.ca](mailto:umyoun46@myumanitoba.ca) or phone (XXX) XXX-XXXX. For participants who request a summary of the results, the summary should be ready for the participants no later than September 30, 2022. The summaries will be sent to the email the participants provided to the researcher. The research will be disseminated (including thesis in MSpace). Once dissemination is complete, the research project may be referenced in further publications or presentations.
- Summary of Results:** Participants can request a summary of results, which would be a summary of the themes identified from the focus groups. Please inform the researcher via email or in person if you wish to receive a summary of the results, no later than June 01, 2022. The summary of results will be shared by June 01, 2022. No feedback will be required beyond this point.

**The checkboxes and your signature on this form indicate that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and/or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as to your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.**

**The University of Manitoba may look at your research records to see that the research is being done safely and properly.**

**This research has been approved by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba, Fort Garry Campus. My academic advisor, Rick Freeze, can be reached at (204) 474-6904 or [rick.freeze@umanitoba.ca](mailto:rick.freeze@umanitoba.ca). If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the abovenamed persons or the Human Ethics Officer at [humanethics@umanitoba.ca](mailto:humanethics@umanitoba.ca). A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.**

**Participant's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_**

**Researcher's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_**

**Appendix E:****Interview Questions**

1. In what ways do resources teacher face challenges?
  - a. Can you describe some of your roles and responsibilities?
  - b. Do you feel classroom teachers understand your roles and responsibilities well?
2. Describe strategies you have used to cope with challenges you face as resource teacher?
  - a. Are there any strategies you have heard of, but haven't explored them yet, or found they were the right fit for you?
3. Talk about the student services support delivery model(s) used at your school?
  - a. What kind of understanding do you believe classroom teachers have about the model?
  - b. What do you suspect your administrators understand about the support model you use, why and how it is implemented?
  - c. Has your student services team had meaningful conversation about the model used and how to implement it best?
  - d. Do you encounter misunderstandings about the model or the services provided through your roles and responsibilities?
4. Do you have any insights about what your school believes about inclusion?
  - a. Does your school have a clear definition of inclusion?
  - b. What is some of examples that support your school's beliefs about inclusion?
  - c. Do you believe classroom teachers and/or administrators understand inclusion as more than placement in the regular classroom?
  - d. Do you see principles of universal design for learning implementing in classrooms in your school?
  - e. How do you spend your time helping teachers differentiate lessons?
5. Talk about the diversity within your school.
  - a. What kind of diversity do you observe? (For example, cultural, financial, or identity.)
  - b. Has the diversity of your school changes over recent years?
  - c. How does school diversity impact your roles and responsibilities?
6. How wellness or mindfulness supported in your school?
  - a. How is your wellness supported by your school?
  - b. Are there any wellness leaders in your school?
  - c. What kind of programming or curricula do you see teachers use to support explicit teaching about wellness or mindfulness?
  - d. Are there any intention interventions used to support teachers/resource teacher wellness in your school or division?
  - e. Do you have access to outside wellness supports?
7. Do you feel like your school supports teacher wellness?

- a. How is teacher wellness factored into decision making?
8. Have you ever felt like you were close to *burning out*? What supported you from feeling imbalanced?
  - a. What helps to support a resource teacher's longevity in the roles?
9. If you could give one piece of advice to a newer resource teacher around preventing burnout, what would it be?
10. Do you have any advice for a resource teacher to re-enter the field after experiencing burnout?
11. Is there anything else you want to share or recommend about preventing burnout?

## **Appendix F:**

### **Collaborative Service Delivery Models from the Manitoba Support Documents**

#### **Adaptive Learning Environments Model (ALEM)**

This is one of the earliest of the more recent variations of collaborative consultation. The goal of ALEM is to eliminate the need for pullout programs by providing classroom alternatives that address the learning needs of all students. Extensive collaboration among parents, teachers, administrators, and other professionals is critical for the success of ALEM.

#### **Class-Within-a-Class (CWC)**

This delivery model strives to reduce dependence on pullout programs by serving students with exceptional learning needs full-time in general classes. Resource teachers go into the classroom during instruction to collaborate and consult with the teacher and provide additional support to students with exceptional learning needs in the classroom.

#### **Success-for-All (SFA)**

This is a comprehensive program aimed at preschool and primary levels. Its main purpose is to prevent failure by assuring reading success during the early school years. Individual tutoring, cross-age grouping, and extensive collaboration are important features of this program.

#### **Mainstream Training Project (MTP)**

This model uses in-service training for preparing classroom teachers at the secondary level to serve students who have learning difficulties. When classroom teachers have been trained in using effective teaching methods for students with learning and behaviour problems, the resource teachers work closely with them to monitor student progress and assist in the implementation of newly learned teaching techniques.

**Schoolwide Enrichment Model (SEM)**

This model is designed to provide more challenging learning experiences for gifted and talented students in the regular classroom. Classroom teachers and resource teachers collaborate in providing gifted and talented students with curriculum options and alternatives such as flexible pacing, enrichment, personalized instruction, and challenging group experiences.

**Special Education Consultant Teacher Model**

In this model, linking relationships are established among the consulting teacher, other professionals, parents, and teachers. These linking relationships allow for the delivery of direct and indirect services, with the consulting teacher affecting a spectrum of educational services. Certain conditions must be in place within the system if the model is to be effective, including mutual expertise, access to collaborative interactions, fluency with a shared professional vocabulary, time control, and administrator support.

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Manitoba Education (2012). *Student-Specific Planning: A Handbook for Developing and Implementing Individual Education Plans (IEPs)*, 55-56. Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Education. Available online at [www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/specedu/iep/](http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/specedu/iep/)

## **Appendix G:**

### **Co-Teaching Models from the Manitoba Support Documents**

#### **One Teach, One Observe**

In this approach, one teacher leads the lesson and the other gathers data on students to understand them better and make instructional decisions...Teachers can observe students' ability to pay attention, work independently, participate during instruction, and seek assistance when they have questions. However, this approach is used, each educator must sometimes take the primary teaching roles in the class while the other observes. In this way, both teachers can watch the class in action, and both have credibility with students as a result of leading instruction.

#### **Station Teaching**

In station teaching, three groups of students are arranged. Two stations include teacher-facilitated instruction; in the third station, students, alone or with a partner, complete a review activity or a project. If students cannot work independently, the last group can be eliminated. During the lesson, students move to each station. In an elementary school, an entire lesson based on stations may be completed in a single day; in a secondary school, a single station may take an entire class period or more. For example, in a ninth-grade math class, some of the students are working with the general education teacher to learn one method for solving quadratic equations. A second group is meeting with the special education teacher to learn an alternative method. The third group of students is working in pairs on an assignment. Each station lasts an entire class period.

#### **Parallel Teaching**

Sometimes when two teachers are present, they find it advantageous simply to divide a heterogeneous class group and have each teacher instruct half the class. In this format, called parallel teaching, every student has twice as many opportunities to participate in a discussion or respond to teacher questions. A teacher particularly skilled in presenting information through pictures can use this approach while the other teacher emphasizes learning through listening. Students who prefer one method to the other can be placed with the appropriate teacher. In an elementary classroom, this approach may be used to enable students to read different books based on their interests or skill levels. In a secondary classroom, this approach may give students more opportunities to respond during a discussion of a current events topic or enable teachers to present different points of view on a topic, which students then present to each other when the large group comes back together.

**Alternative Teaching**

In many classrooms, having one teacher work with most of the class while the other teacher focuses attention on a small group is sometimes appropriate. This co-teaching option is referred to as alternative teaching. Traditionally, the small group has been used for remediation, but many other options are recommended. For example, some students may benefit from pre-teaching, in which one teacher works with a small group of students who are struggling to learn. Information to be presented the next day or later in the same day or class is taught to these students to give them a jump start on learning (Munk, Gibb, and Caldarella, 2010).

Enrichment also works well in small groups. For example, as a unit of instruction on global warming is concluding, several students may have a strong interest in the topic. As the other students review and complete assigned tasks, this group may meet to discuss career opportunities related to environmental issues, write letters to obtain more information about research on global warming, or explore websites on related topics. The members in this group could include high-achieving students, students who have average academic achievement but a strong interest in this topic, a student with a behaviour disorder who would benefit more from this activity than from the assigned work, and a student with a moderate intellectual disability for whom the written task is not appropriate.

Grouping students for remediation is appropriate, but only when it is one of many grouping options and is used only occasionally. Otherwise, such an arrangement becomes the equivalent of running a special education program in the back of a general education classroom - an arrangement that undermines inclusive schooling.

**Teaming**

In the co-teaching option of teaming, the teachers share leadership in the classroom, and both are equally engaged in the instructional activities. For example, one teacher may begin a lesson by introducing vocabulary while the other provides examples to place the words in context. Two teachers may roles-play an important event from history

or demonstrate how to complete a lab activity. Two teachers may model how to address conflict by staging a debate about a current event. You reach the limits of teaming only when you run out of exciting ideas for creating instruction with two teachers instead of one. Co-teachers who use this approach find it the most energizing of all the co-teaching options, but you should also be aware that you and a co-teacher might not be compatible enough in terms of teaching style to use it. If that is the case, using several of the other approaches might be more effective.

**One Teach, One Assist**

Occasionally during instruction, one teacher is appropriately leading the lesson while the other is quietly assisting individual students. For example, while the special education teacher leads a lesson on a test review, the general education teacher helps students individually as they have questions about the vocabulary. Alternatively, while the general education teacher leads a lesson on the causes of World War II, the special education teacher helps keep students on task and responds quietly to student questions. The key to implementing this approach successfully is to use it sparingly. With overuse, one of the teachers, often the special educator, may perceive that she [or he] has no legitimate roles in the class and is mostly like a teaching assistant (Scruggs, Mastropieri, and McDuffie, 2007). In addition, if this approach to co-teaching is used too frequently, students may become overly dependent on the extra help that always seems to be available.

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Manitoba Education (2012). *Student-Specific Planning: A Handbook for Developing and Implementing Individual Education Plans (IEPs)*. 57-59. Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Education. Available online at [www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/specedu/iep/](http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/specedu/iep/)

## Appendix H:

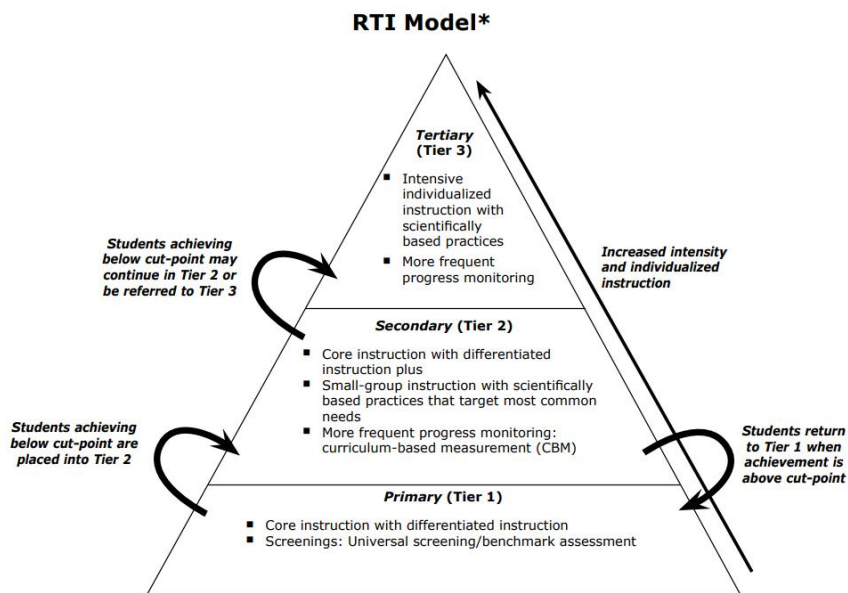
### Response to Intervention Model from the Manitoba Support Documents

The RTI model uses a three-tier service delivery model that represents a continuum of increasingly intense interventions that correspond to the responsiveness of students in both academics and social and emotional learning:

**Tier 1:** The instruction in Tier 1 involves the effective implementation of the provincial curriculum for all students in the classroom. Teachers assess students regularly to determine whether they are meeting curricular outcomes. Students performing below level are placed into Tier 2.

**Tier 2:** In Tier 2, students receive small-group instruction in addition to core instruction. Student grouping organization reflects common needs. Students are assessed regularly and are returned to Tier 1 if they achieve expectations. Students below expectations remain in Tier 2 or may be referred to Tier 3.

**Tier 3:** The instruction in Tier 3 is personalized and is usually provided by the resource teacher. The RTI model intends to remediate academic difficulties as soon as they are identified and to move students back to a lower tier when they are responding to intensive instruction.




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Manitoba Education (2012). *Student-Specific Planning: A Handbook for Developing and Implementing Individual*

*Education Plans (IEPs)*. 60. Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Education. Available online at

<[www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/specedu/iep/](http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/specedu/iep/)>

**Appendix I:**

**Universal Design Principles Model from the Manitoba Support Documents**

<b>Principles</b>	<b>Examples</b>	<b>Classroom Examples</b>
<p>1. Equitable Use</p> <p>The design is useful and marketable to people with diverse abilities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Power doors with sensors at entrances that are convenient for all users</li> <li>• Integrated, dispersed, and adaptable seating in assembly areas such as sports arenas and theatres</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allow all students to use a study carrel if they feel they need it.</li> </ul>
<p>2. Flexibility in Use</p> <p>The design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scissors designed for right- or left-handed users</li> <li>• An automated teller machine (ATM) that has visual, tactile, and audible feedback, a tapered card opening, and a palm rest</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allow students to complete an assignment in a variety of formats (e.g., written, oral, graphic/picture).</li> </ul>
<p>3. Simple and Intuitive Use</p> <p>Use of the design is easy to understand, regardless of the user’s experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A moving sidewalk or escalator in a public space</li> <li>• An instruction manual with drawings and no text</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide instruction on how to use a textbook effectively by using the table of contents, glossary, and index, reading and interpreting headings, subheadings, graphics, charts, and so on.</li> </ul>
<p>4. Perceptible Information</p> <p>The design communicates necessary information effectively to the user, regardless of ambient conditions or the user’s sensory abilities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tactile, visual, and audible cues and instructions on a thermostat</li> <li>• Redundant cueing (e.g., voice communications and signage) in airports, train stations, and subway cars</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide instructions on the board in written and picture form and show the class a completed example of the assignment.</li> </ul>

<p>5. Tolerance for Error</p> <p>The design minimizes hazards and the adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A double-cut car key easily inserted into a recessed keyhole in either of two ways</li> <li>• An "undo" feature in computer software that allows the user to correct mistakes without a penalty</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide any student who wants to rewrite a test an opportunity to do so.</li> </ul>
<p>6. Low Physical Effort The design can be used efficiently and comfortably and with a minimum of fatigue.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lever or loop handles on doors and faucets</li> <li>• Touch lamps operated without a switch</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read instructions aloud to students who have difficulty reading (to minimize the effort to participate in the learning activity).</li> </ul>
<p>7. Size and Space for Approach and Use Appropriate size and space are provided for approach, reach, manipulation, and use regardless of the user's body size, posture, or mobility.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Controls on the front and clear floor space around appliances, mailboxes, dumpsters, and other elements</li> <li>• Wide gates at subway stations that accommodate all users</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organize the classroom so that materials are "handy" and accessible to those who need them.</li> </ul>

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Manitoba Education (2012). *Student-Specific Planning: A Handbook for Developing and Implementing Individual Education Plans (IEPs)*. 61. Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Education. Available online at [www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/specedu/iep/](http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/specedu/iep/)

**Appendix J:**

**Three Block UDL Models from the Manitoba Support Documents**

Block Three: Systems and Structures	Block Two: Inclusive Instructional Practice
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inclusive policy—no “except”</li> <li>• Hiring administrators with expertise and vision; learning community</li> <li>• Distributed leadership</li> <li>• Professional development (PLCs [professional learning communities])</li> <li>• Staffing to support collaborative practice:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ collaborative decision making</li> <li>○ team planning time; scheduling in cohorts and teams</li> <li>○ resource allocations (e.g., of EAs) to classrooms and cohorts, not individuals</li> <li>○ co-planning, co-teaching, co-assessing</li> <li>○ consistent, authentic assessment across classes and with co-developed rubrics</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Budgeting               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ change from segregated practices and allocations of funding resources</li> <li>○ assistive technology</li> <li>○ multi-leveled resources</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integrated curriculum</li> <li>• Student choice</li> <li>• Flexible groupings and cooperative learning</li> <li>• Differentiated instruction</li> <li>• Differentiated assessment</li> <li>• Assessment for learning; class profiles; strategic teaching</li> <li>• Technology</li> <li>• Discipline-based inquiry</li> <li>• Metacognition, assessment as learning</li> <li>• Understanding by design; essential understandings</li> <li>• Social and academic inclusion of students with exceptionalities</li> </ul>

## Block One:

## Social and Emotional Learning: Developing Compassionate Learning Communities

- Respecting Diversity (RD) Program
- Developing self-concept
  - awareness of, and pride in, strengths and challenges
  - sense of belonging
  - goal setting and -planning; building a vision for the future; self-efficacy; hope
  - leadership skills; opportunities to lead
- Valuing diversity
  - awareness of the strengths and challenges of others
  - valuing of diverse contributions to the community
  - sense of collective responsibility for the well-being, achievement of all
  - empathy, perspective-taking, compassion
- Democratic classroom management
  - collective problem solving; recognition of rights and responsibilities
  - promotion of independent learning; student choice and empowerment; leadership
  - increase in student engagement and ownership

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Manitoba Education (2012). *Student-Specific Planning: A Handbook for Developing and Implementing Individual Education Plans (IEPs)*. 63. Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Education. Available online at [www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/specedu/iep/](http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/specedu/iep/)

**Appendix K:**  
**Research Ethics and Compliance Protocol Approval**



**University  
of Manitoba**

**Research Ethics and Compliance**

Human Ethics - Fort Garry  
208-194 Dafoe Road  
Winnipeg, MB R3T 2N2  
T: 204 474 8872  
humanethics@umanitoba.ca

**PROTOCOL APPROVAL**

Effective: April 4, 2022

Expiry: April 3, 2023

Principal Investigator:	Jennifer Young
Advisor:	Rick Freeze
Protocol Number:	HE2022-0019
Protocol Title:	<i>PROACTIVE STRATEGIES FOR PREVENTING RESOURCE TEACHER BURNOUT</i>

Julia Witt, Acting Chair, REB2

Research Ethics Board 2 has reviewed and approved the above research. The Human Ethics Office (HEO) is constituted and operates in accordance with the current *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans- TCPS 2 (2018)*.

This approval is subject to the following conditions:

- i. Approval is granted for the research and purposes described in the protocol only.
- ii. Any changes to the protocol or research materials must be approved by the HEO before implementation.
- iii. Any deviations to the research or adverse events must be reported to the HEO immediately through an REB Event.
- iv. This approval is valid for one year only. A Renewal Request must be submitted and approved prior to the above expiry date.
- v. A Protocol Closure must be submitted to the HEO when the research is complete or if the research is terminated.
- vi. The University of Manitoba may request to audit your research documentation to confirm compliance with this approved protocol, and with the UM *Ethics of Research Involving Humans* [Ethics of Research Involving Humans](#) policies and procedures.