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Teaching and Leading with Joy: A Narrative Inquiry

by

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*“To what avail is it to win prescribed amounts of information about geography and history, to win ability to read and write, if in the process, one loses his own soul: loses appreciation of things worthwhile, of the value to which these things are relative; if he loses desire to apply what he has learned, and, above all, loses the ability to extract meaning from his experiences as they occur?”*

*John Dewey (1938, p. 49)*

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**Abstract**

Student engagement has always been at the forefront of my thoughts as a teacher and as a principal during my over thirty years as an educator. Schooling experiences must be dynamic, interactive, personalized, and relevant to children while providing choice and honoring multiple ways of thinking. The intent of my study is to explore the essence of joy in teaching and leading. Specifically, I am curious about the ways in which joy is related to Dunleavy and Milton's (2010) conceptions of engagement, which includes social engagement, academic engagement and intellectual engagement. I used narrative inquiry to explore principals' and teachers' perspectives on joy in regards to teaching and leading. I recruited two principals and two teachers from a rural school division to elicit their insights and experiences of joy in teaching and leading. The findings illustrate the ways in which teaching and leading can create a joyful school culture and that these joyful conditions are most likely to be realized when social engagement is prioritized.

### **Acknowledgements**

Thank you to my four participants in my thesis research: Robert, David, Ellen, and Jake. I was overwhelmed with your generosity and willingness to expose your poignant insights and vulnerabilities. Your rich narrative accounts have immense potential to positively impact other educators who encounter this research and will be forever etched into my thoughts and perspectives.

Thank you to my entire SSES family, who have been instrumental in fostering a joyful school culture which is now entrenched into our daily existence. My deep respect and gratitude for you and your courageous efforts are immeasurable. You inspire me on a daily basis to strive to be the educational leader I hope to be, and you energize me by your kindness, compassion, dedication, and expertise. I feel blessed to be surrounded by staff who emulate the role models we need for our children in today's society. Thank you for the grace, dignity, and compassion you offer to our students, their families, and to your colleagues.

I would also like to thank my advisor Dr. Melanie Janzen for your wise words and insights during my research. I deeply appreciate all of the feedback and support you have provided to me. Thanks also to my two other committee members: Dr. John Wiens and Dr. Yi Li for your time and guidance. I am very grateful to have had the three of you along with me on this powerful journey.

**Dedication****To Paul, Britt, & Ali**

Thank you to my husband Paul for being my best friend and mentor, both personally and professionally. Your love and support has meant the world to me, and it has empowered me to evolve on a continuous basis. You are also the epitome of the educational leader to which I aspire, and I have such immense gratitude for how your vision and leadership has profoundly impacted my life and career. Thank you to my two lovely daughters, Brittany and Ali, who have made my dreams come true in every aspect. You have brought immense joy into my life and the love and pride I have for both of you cannot be adequately conveyed in words. The beauty you radiate by your sensitivity, compassion, intelligence, respect, and kindness towards others lights up every space you occupy and nourishes my soul. As you embark on the first few years of your noble careers as a nurse and teacher, respectively, I am grateful that your patients and students will also be so fortunate to have you in their lives. Thank you all for the unwavering support you have provided to me, especially during my graduate studies.

Thank you to my parents, Victor (d. 2008) and Margaret, for your unconditional love and for instilling in me a strong sense of goodness, morality and social justice. The values you have emulated have enriched my life in a multitude of ways and has provided me with a solid foundation in my quest to positively influence the lives of others.

**Chapter 1: Narrative Beginnings**

*“Nothing without joy” (Malaguzzi)*

How can it be possible that, despite having an acute and vivid memory of my childhood and school age years, I do not recall a time as a student where I felt a sense of deep engagement or joy at school? While Malaguzzi’s well known quote (above) could be perceived as a rather lofty, unrealistic expectation for life and work, one would think that an “A” student who had predominately positive experiences in school would be able to conjure up some memory of this emotion in an institutional setting designed to enhance the quality of the lives of students and their participation in society.

I recall enjoying the challenge of spelling tests, Mad Minutes, worksheets, workbooks, and written tests, because being a strong reader, writer, and memorizer, I was good at them. I could quickly figure out the answers based on the key words, how the question was posed, or from effortlessly recalling material we had just covered in class, but at a very superficial level. I had believed that completing my assignments quickly was an important piece of the criteria of being “smart,” so I always made sure that I was one of the first ones finished to retain my status. Also, the rewards were heaped upon me: high marks, positive feedback, respect, and free time.

Reflecting back on these years, despite being considered as a high achieving student and also being fortunate to have had so many excellent teachers, joy was predominately absent from my schooling experience. I hesitate to imagine what emotions prevailed for other students who struggled academically or were experiencing social emotional challenges. Perhaps partly because of this banal experience, throughout my years as an educator, I wanted more from my students than compliance and conformity. I wanted to ignite passion, curiosity, a voracious appetite for learning and discovering, as well as a desire to strive to make the world a better place.

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### Coming to my Research Puzzle

Student engagement has always been at the forefront on my thoughts and considerations in my over thirty years as an educator. I have always believed that it is important to make teaching experiences dynamic, inclusive, and relevant, while providing choice and honoring multiple ways of learning for all students. More recently, I have been intrigued by the notion of aligning three types of engagement: “social engagement (participation in the life of school) ...academic engagement (participation in the requirements for school success) ...” and “intellectual engagement (serious psychological and cognitive investment in learning)” (Dunleavy & Milton, 2010, p.6). Although academic excellence is extremely important, I feel that there is an overemphasis on academics in traditional learning settings that rely on conformity, compliance, and competition. I believe that in addition to being interested in learning and wanting to excel in school, it is essential that students feel that they are valued and respected in an inclusive community of learners. This inclusive culture transcends engagement and can enable students to develop a sense of purpose and agency, thereby enhancing their knowledge and skills to make learning meaningful. Fullan, Quinn and McEachen (2018), in their holistic, immersive action research which they refer to as deep learning, expand on this notion, stating that, “what gives humans meaning in life is a strong sense of *identity* around a purpose or passion, *creativity and mastery* in relation to a valued pursuit, and *connectedness* with the world and others” (p. 5) [italics in the original]. Shareski (2017) proposes that when learning environments are engaging, they are naturally joyful in that risk taking is encouraged along with pursuing personal interests. Although engagement is often inherent in an ideal learning setting, he argues that “joy has perhaps a higher purpose and one that is an outcome of engaging learning. Engagement can be a catalyst, but joyful learning is the real goal” (p. 16). I concur with

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Couros (2015) when he argues that although engagement is a good thing, it isn't enough unless students also have a sense of empowerment to utilize "knowledge and skills to pursue *their* passions, interests, and future" (p. 96) [italics in the original]. Having our students excel academically is not sufficient. Our schools need to be places which also exemplify the importance of inclusivity, belonging, love, and hope. They should be places that emulate a joyful community and serves as a model to strive for as a society. I am wondering if the alignment of these three levels of engagement are the catalyst to experience joy, and if experiencing this sense of joy will help to ensure that the quality of children's lives is enhanced and they are able to flourish.

### **Background of Study**

As an educational leader, I felt a sense that something was missing in our school; that perhaps we were all just "going through the motions" of teaching and learning. I had always been concerned with reaching students who were withdrawn or not persevering due to a variety of obstacles, such as challenging issues in their home lives with mental health, poverty, or fragmented relationships. I was also aware of those students who were deemed to be high academic achievers, and who were likely to be just as compliant yet disengaged in many of the similar mundane tasks as I was as a student. My vision of a thriving school was one where all students felt like they belonged, where all students would be able to be immersed in authentic, relevant, and engaging learning environments. I imagined a school where everyone, including students, staff and community members were empowered to co-exist in a joyful teaching and learning environment that enriched the lives of students and society as a whole. I wanted our school to be that place-although I was not sure how that would transpire, or what it would look like. I wanted to nurture this vibrant, harmonious, cohesive space so that every child and adult

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associated with our school would feel valued and included; a space that would serve an exemplary model for other learning institutions, families and community groups. I felt optimistic that the quality of our lives would improve, and that everyone immersed in this environment, who was able to experience this sense of belonging, passion, and efficacy would know a better society can exist, and would therefore be more likely to make efforts to recreate this essence in their own lives, spaces and communities. I believed that a school setting-and our school in particular-was the ideal place to emulate this; a vision realized with engaged, highly skilled, ethical, passionate, and caring educators.

“Children live this way. They live as if they were conduits of energy and ideas, rather than empty vessels seeking knowledge” (Gandini, Hill, Cadwell, & Schwall, 1998, p. 112). Although this may seem somewhat of a cliché today in terms of the empty vessel metaphor, it was compelling to me when I jotted it down in my university course for my master’s the summer after assuming my principal position. This course introduced me to the Reggio Emilia philosophy, an approach based on an early childhood educational philosophy that has been in place for over fifty years in a small town in Italy. This philosophy seemed to consolidate what I believed about teaching and epitomized my vision as an educator. The Reggio Emilia philosophy describes a learning place where:

young children are encouraged to explore their environment and express themselves through all of the available ‘expressive, communicative, and cognitive languages’, whether they be words, movement, drawing, painting, building, sculpture, shadow play, collage, dramatic play, or music, to name a few. From the beginning, there has been an explicit recognition of the relationship or partnership among parents, educators, and children. Classrooms are organized to support a

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highly collaborative problem-solving approach to learning... education is seen as a communal activity and sharing of culture through joint exploration among children and adults who together open topics to speculation and discussion. The approach provides us with new ways to think about the nature of the child as learner, the role of the teacher, school organization and management, the design and use of physical environments, and curriculum planning that guides experiences of joint, open-ended discovery and constructive posing and solving of problems.” (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1998, p. 7)

This philosophy depicted my vision of what schooling should entail and I was intrigued by its holistic perspective, which resonated with the beliefs I had buried somewhere in my complacent and lackluster practices. I invited my staff to join me on what I referred to as a messy path, one that was guided by what we felt was important and what really mattered in education, based on what we believed about teaching, but I was not exactly sure what that would look like or where it would take us. Despite the uncertainty of what might unfold, this messy path ironically produced a sense of clarity to me in many ways and a renewed sense of optimism, curiosity, and creative energy. I gently reassured myself that the many complicated decisions confronting me as a new principal would be much less intimidating if I focused on what I believed to matter most. Was it possible that I would also be less distracted and less constrained by the political and institutional pressures that so often seem to predominate and determine educational systems? I acknowledged that this would be challenging in many aspects due to societal tendencies to resist change, because it is inherent in the messages we unknowingly convey through our own rules, policies, actions and conversations. I envisioned a school that honored children as these conduits of

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energy, rather than from a deficit perspective. I felt energized, rejuvenated, and joyful, and the feedback that I received from many other staff members mirrored these sentiments.

Enlightened also by a plethora of professional literature recommended to me by my university professors and others, I imagined our school as a collaborative learning space which ignited curiosity and wonder; one where the “class is so excited, it’s like a birthday party in here” (Wien, 2008, p. 5). I wanted to explore a school culture that was more cohesive with the community and the environment and that viewed relationships as an integral foundation. I reflected on our current school culture and policies which seemed to rely too heavily on control, compliance, and order, instead of a learning community with “shared purpose and belonging” (Shareski, 2017, p. 36). Although at the time I did not employ the actual word joy, my vision was reflective of Shareski’s (2017) notion of joy, a school where there is “contentment and a sense of well-being” and “the opportunity and power of living and learning in community” (p. 36).

I was enthralled with Malaguzzi’s (as cited by Wien, 2008) notion, of a school as a “living organism” where there exists “interconnected living systems that requires sustenance, nurturing, room to move, grow, and house the pulse of life, instead of as institutions for the production of knowledge based in bureaucratic processes of regulation” (p. 7). This organic metaphor is further illustrated by the notion of reciprocity between children and teachers, “a mutual exchange, that is, a sharing power with living things that allows room for all to be included and each to have a voice” (Wien, 2008, p. 7). These metaphors powerfully resonated with me and helped to transcend the notion of school as a sterile building or a place where you go to learn. To me, a school should be so much more than a physical setting. It should be alive, organic, dynamic and reflective of our values, our beliefs, our culture, and our relationships with

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each other and the world. It should be a place where we thrive, where we flourish, where we model and try to emulate the society we want for our children.

Aligning our pedagogy with the divisional priorities and current research helped us to meander along on our own messy path without getting overwhelmed. Malaguzzi's (as cited by Rinaldi, 2006) metaphor, for knowledge as a "tangle of spaghetti" (p. 7) and the notion of redefining knowledge as a rhizome which "shoots in all directions, with no beginning, no ending, always in between" (p. 8) eloquently described my own state of thinking and beliefs about education. This image depicted my view on the acquisition of knowledge and skills. I believed that new information and ideas are continuously woven and layered with previous understandings, forming new connections in a similar way to the growth of the rhizome stem. These deposits stabilize and strengthen the stem which produces shoots and roots above and below the rhizome. Ideal learning conditions should provoke students to be curious, to wonder and to actively seek new ideas and ways of knowing, building on content, knowledge and skills. I marveled at how this slight departure from a very structured, traditional pedagogy was resulting in many teachers spontaneously sharing testimonials in my office, in our hallways, via e-mails, at staff meetings; gushing about how they were experiencing such a profound sense of joy in their classrooms and how it seemed to be reverberating throughout our school. I wondered if this was what Rinaldi (2006) had been referring to when she declared that education was a "search for meaning" (p. 16). Focus areas emerged from these priorities, as well as our initial provocation of the Reggio Emilia philosophy, that included an increased emphasis on nature and contemporary learning competencies such as creativity, collaboration, critical thinking, citizenship, character, and communication (Fullan & Langworthy, 2014). Infusing the Arts throughout the curriculum and intentionally eliciting students' emotions and ways of knowing through various art forms

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such as music, movement, dance, explorations and creations was the catalyst for transforming this culture as entrenched in this approach was an appreciation and celebration of diversity, inclusivity, respect, and love. Students and teachers began to take risks with their teaching and learning, which spurred wonder, curiosity, and a more joyful school environment. Joy was not explicitly sought after, but it was an unexpected and welcomed state which propelled teachers to replace mundane, meaningless tasks with lessons designed to provoke curiosity and wonder while weaving in the curriculum outcomes and essential learnings. This joyous energy was reciprocal as the more engaged and invested the students became, the more teachers felt that what they were doing was making a difference. A strong sense of efficacy surfaced in the teachers, students, and me as the principal, which continued to gain momentum, creating a seismic shift in the culture of our school community towards one of joy.

In addition to a strong focus on infusing the Arts into curricula and celebrating our diversity through the Arts, there were other changes which led to powerful insights instrumental in cultivating this joyful dynamic. Several teachers, buoyed by the momentum they were experiencing as educators, requested approval for changing the configurations of their classrooms to encourage a more collaborative learning environment. Desks were replaced with round tables and diverse seating areas including stools, tree stumps, benches, couches and standing tables. This physical alteration resulted in increased success for all learners as students were able to choose areas to complete their work and movement was increased throughout the day. The aesthetics of the entire school was gradually transformed as we replaced plastic items with natural features such as woven baskets and wooden bins. Outdoor learning excursions were increased and visits to the surrounding community, especially our school gardens and nearby forests and beaches, became a regular part of everyday learning.

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My first recollection of experiencing a feeling of joy during this journey occurred while conducting an evaluation on a new teacher who had eagerly embraced our engagements with the Reggio Emilia philosophy. There was nothing unique in the actual lesson, which was based on the science curriculum. It was the way in which Ms. Lee seemed so joyful and engaged, exuberantly posing the science outcomes as wonders, which seemed to produce a complete paradigm shift in the learning culture. After the boisterous students shared their predictions on the light and shadow investigation, Ms. Lee rose up from the carpet, skirted over to the window, and slowly, methodically, tugged on the tiny silver beads of metal cord, forcing the beige folds of the vertical blinds to simultaneously turn towards the classroom from their flattened state. Shadows and rays of light interspersed and leaped out, adorning their room with a myriad of dots, lines, and shapes. It was almost like they had been waiting impatiently to be welcomed in to the party and they were unable to contain their energy and excitement with the invitation. It was like a delightful layering of sprinkles on a birthday cake, tossed in to a world I had not known existed, but one in which I felt like I had just discovered. The class gasped and then erupted in a cacophony of excited chatter. I had been as surprised as the students to observe that the shadows continued to dance throughout the room, even after we turned on the lights and opened the blinds, but in a more subtle and subdued way. Despite being aware that light was required to create shadows, I was now seeing the classroom through a completely different lens than just minutes before. Was this a lens of wonder? Was this feeling one of joy? Whatever it was, I immediately knew that it was a feeling that we should try to infuse into our daily learning environment.

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### **Significance of the Study**

I feel that there has been an over emphasis on compliancy, competition, and test scores in our traditional schooling culture, one that has focused on labelling and sorting students rather than celebrating diversity and individuality. Schools should be places which empower students to demonstrate the many ways of knowing; asking students “How are you smart?” rather than “Are you smart?” Far too often, students are subjected to learning activities designed to acquire knowledge and skills that will become obsolete or irrelevant by the time they graduate, due to a rapidly advancing global society. There also seems to be more value placed on the content as opposed to the student, and on what is being taught, instead of what is being learned. Instead of a fixation on covering curricular outcomes, educators should be striving to uncover them, while teaching students, not curriculum. A holistic, student centered learning culture will foster more joyful schools.

**Joy=intellectual, social, and academic engagement.** Although it is important for students to be academically engaged to enhance their success in school, it should not occur in isolation from the other two levels of engagement. In traditional school settings that only focus on compliance, conformity, and competition, there is an over-emphasis on academic engagement which is detrimental to students and the culture of the school. I believe that when academic, social, and intellectual engagement are aligned and operating in sync, students can flourish and live a high quality of life. Sharon Friesen (as cited in Dunleavy & Milton, 2010) describes intellectual engagement as an “absorbing, creatively energizing focus requiring contemplation, interpretation, understanding, meaning-making and critique which results in a deep, personal commitment to explore and investigate an idea, issue, problem or question for a sustained period of time” (p. 7). Intellectual engagement, or engagement in learning entails authentic, challenging

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work, but also occurs when it is “highly social, and collaborative; when the ideas of each student are valued; and when the relationship between teacher and student, and among students themselves, is both reciprocal and generous in spirit” (Dunleavy & Milton, 2010, p. 8). I believe that there is an assumption within education for many that learning and enjoyment are mutually exclusive but it is my opinion that the exact opposite is true.

One of the many challenges as educators is how to merge our beliefs with successful practices when confronting the many obstacles that may exist. Although all students should be able to experience success in equitable learning environments, teaching practices, school policies, or rules too often perpetuate some of the complex challenges with which many are already faced. Students who are already marginalized or vulnerable due to issues with socio-economic status, learning disabilities, mental health, and issues with family break ups and home environments are already disadvantaged. It is one thing to believe in a philosophy or an approach, but having the insight, confidence, skills, and policies in place to successfully implement and navigate through the daily realities of a classroom, school, and community present another layer of possible obstacles. My hope is that my research will illuminate some of the ways in which we can make joyful schools a reality for both students and educators. I realize that there is reciprocity in my experiences and insights professionally and personally but more recently, it is what I have experienced as an educational leader that is profoundly impacting both aspects of my life, causing me to wonder about possibilities and implications for teaching and leading. Reflecting on my experiences as a learner (from early years schooling to my present situation as a graduate student), as an educator, as an educational leader, and from my readings of joy highlighted in my literature review, **I believe that joyful learning environments can enrich the quality of life for teachers and students and allow them to flourish. I feel that**

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**this environment is initially shaped by teachers and educational leaders but can become a reciprocal relationship, exponentially expanding as its impact reverberates throughout the community, having the potential to improve the quality of life for individuals and society as a whole.** Therefore, I feel a compelling desire to not only explore this phenomenon but to argue that joy is not a superfluous or trendy educational topic, but rather an essential and powerful component in teaching and leading.

### **Layout**

Through the stories of teachers and principals, I am interested in developing a deeper understanding of what joy entails and what effect it has on the quality of one's educational experience, as a leader, teacher and learner. Using a narrative inquiry approach, I will interview teachers and principals to reimagine what might be possible for our students and ourselves in traditional education systems that rely on conformity, competition, and compliance instead of cultivating joy.

Throughout my over thirty-year career as an educator, I have been very intentional in the consideration of student engagement as I believed that students who were motivated and engaged would be more successful in all aspects of their lives. I felt that engaged, motivated students, who have opportunities to learn in diverse ways and with some choice in how they learn and demonstrate their understanding would also have an improved sense of well-being. I felt that this experience would also positively impact their interactions with others and the quality of their lives in general. More recently as a principal, I have been very intrigued by the notion of an elevated sense of engagement, one that surpasses being invested in learning, but one that encompasses the feeling of joy. This wonder has emerged not in isolation, but within the many layers of the teaching and learning culture I have been striving to create and cultivate, through

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the lenses of contemporary learning competencies, education for sustainability, and the Reggio Emilia philosophy.

The purpose of this study is to better understand teachers' and principals' experiences of joy, to articulate this elusive concept through the words and experiences of teachers and leaders, and to foreground the importance of joy in schools. How might listening to stories shared by principals and teachers help us to develop insights into creating and cultivating joyful schools?

Considering these wonders, I have framed my research puzzle as an investigation into these specific research questions: What are the perspectives of principals and teachers on the notion of joy and its impact on their teaching and leadership? What are the conditions that exist for joyful teaching and leading to occur, and the obstacles that can get in the way? What effects do components such as political climate, divisional priorities, administrative leadership, school/class composition, school culture, demographics, and location play in one's ability to teach and lead with joy? To explore these questions, I will interview principals and teachers who identify as experiencing joy in leading and teaching and/or who are seeking to foster joyful school cultures in an effort to elicit their experiences in teaching and leading joyfully.

Through this narrative inquiry and by constructing stories of educators, I will explore their insights and experiences with joy and consider what we can learn from them in cultivating joy in our schools. I am also interested in resonant threads in my participants' stories in terms of their life experiences, mentorships, or general dispositions. What are their stories that illustrate how they fostered joyful teaching and leading experiences beyond that of joyful people being joyful? Have they experienced disillusionment and disengagement in their attempts to seek or create joyful schools and schooling experiences? Do joyful people tend to spread joy within their schools? These are some of my initial wonders as I embark on this research.

### **Theoretical Framework**

**Postmodernism.** A postmodern perspective is utilized to frame my thesis, as it revisits and challenges traditional educational perspectives where knowledge is considered emphatically true and certain. Institutionalized education systems have valued conformity and compliance and these qualities have tended to dominate much of the discourse, policy decisions and practices. This project departs from modernism which is characterized by pre-determined and standardized knowledge outcomes relying upon absolutes, order, clarity, certainty, and no grey areas. Schools have been run like factories for many decades where students are labelled and sorted by categories such as age, race, culture, test scores, perceived abilities, and socioeconomic status. Schwandt (as cited in Glesne, 2016) explains that “postmodernity is marked by globalization, the spread of information technologies, and the fragmentation of the nation-states...grand theories that have been relied upon as explaining how societies work and how people develop and interact are subjected to critique and distrust” (p. 13). Ironically, our schools which are educational institutions, are the slowest and most reluctant to adapt to this paradigm shift, rather than being the leaders of innovation and progressive thinking. Delamont (as cited in Glesne, 2016) writes that, “(P)ostmodernism argues that there are no universal truths to be discovered, because all human investigators are grounded in human society and can only produce partial locally and historically specific insights” (p. 13). Glesne (2016) discusses how deconstruction is the primary purpose of postmodernism and post traditions. Jane Flax, (as cited in Glesne, 2016) feels that, “postmodern discourses are all deconstructive in that they seek to distance us from and make us skeptical about beliefs concerning truth, knowledge, power, the self, and language that are often taken for granted within and serve as legitimation for contemporary Western culture” (p. 14). Therefore, I will be seeking to set aside the easily measurable and less impactful aspects

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of standardized, traditional schooling and attempt to deconstruct what is entailed in a joyful school culture.

Postmodernism reimagines what it means to be educated and to be successful in today's society. It revisits and honors the uniqueness of individuals while promoting respect for diversity, plurality, otherness, ambiguity, and interconnectedness. Until we exist in harmony with each other, the environment, and with our own consciousness, are we truly able to learn and to live a fulfilling life? I intend to argue that joy is essential to maximize our students' positive experiences at school and to enhance the quality of lives as a society

**Social Constructivism.** This thesis is grounded in the understanding that not all learning is linear and hierarchical. Like social constructivism and the Reggio Emilia philosophy, which has profoundly influenced my thinking and practices, I believe that knowledge must be redefined and compared to a rhizome, rather than a hierarchical staircase or tree, which have been common metaphors in educational discourse. Reggio scholars, such as Malaguzzi, (as cited in Rinaldi, 2006) refer to the idea of knowledge as a "tangle of spaghetti" (p. 7) where beginning and ends are obscure and not finite. The tangle of spaghetti metaphor represents openings to new ideas and a path that is not linear, one where ones' ideas and new learning are constantly interspersed. French philosophers Deleuze and Guattari's image of knowledge as a rhizome is expanded on by Dalberg and Moss (as cited in Rinaldi, 2007), who suggest that it somehow transgresses "notions such as universality, question and answer patterns, simple judgements, recognition and correct ideas" (p. 7). Unlike a staircase or a tree, metaphors that are often used in education, a rhizome is not hierarchical or linear. Eloquently depicting a constructivist approach which contradicts rote memorization and standardized testing cultures, a rhizome is described as:

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something that shoots in all directions with no beginning and no end, but always in *between*, and with openings towards other directions and places. It is a *multiplicity* functioning by means of connections and heterogeneity, a multiplicity which is not given but constructed. Thought, then, is a matter of experimentation and problematisation-*a line of flight* and an exploration of *becoming*. (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 8) [italics in the original]

These images redefine the understanding of knowledge which is typical of overly traditional school settings, one in which the teacher imparts their wealth of expertise and information to passive students.

Rinaldi (2006) argues that it is “the process of ‘becoming which is the basis of true education” (p. 80) and that “the knowledge-building process...is also an emotional process” (p. 54). Although students benefit from acquiring factual information and learning content, it should not be in a manner in which there is no reciprocity between the educator and the teacher or where there is no opportunity to connect this information with prior understandings and personal experiences. I believe that it is through this process, where one becomes so deeply connected to one’s inner self and others and able to learn in relation to others and the world around them, that the learning experience becomes emotional: powerful, joyful and meaningful. Social constructivism requires that we adhere to Malaguzzi’s (as cited in Rinaldi, 2006) admonishing message, encouraging educators to “get out from under this big blanket of conformism and passivity, and re-discover the desire to think and plan and work together” (p. 55). Malaguzzi (as cited in Rinaldi, 2006) also stated that:

If we take away the child’s ability, possibility and joy in projecting and exploring, then the child dies. The child dies if we take away from him the joy of

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questioning, examining, and exploring. He dies if he does not sense that the adult is close enough to see how much strength, how much energy, how much intelligence, invention, capacity and creativity he possesses. The child wants to be seen, observed and applauded. (p. 55)

This quote depicts the foundational pillar upon which the Reggio Emilia philosophy is based. It also conveys a powerful image of a child as strong and intelligent rather than the empty vessel metaphor discussed earlier. It does not suggest that children should be entitled or indulged in school, but rather respected, provoked and empowered. It offers promise and possibilities, rather than a bleak, passive existence. Rinaldi (2006) elaborates to include the impact this approach can have on educators as well, explaining:

when the child dies, the teacher dies as well, because the teacher's goal is the same as that of the children: to find meaning in her work and in her existence, to see value and significance in what she does, to escape from being indistinct and anonymous, to be able to see gratifying results from her work and her intelligence....The highest value and the deepest significance lie in this search for sense and meaning that are shared by adults and children (by teachers and students), though always in the full awareness of different identities and distinct roles. (p. 56)

The requirement for reciprocity and responsiveness is advocated in this quote. Despite the power differential and expertise of the educator, the desire for continuous learning and an openness to new ideas and ways of thinking must be embraced and entrenched in the school culture.

Dahlberg and Moss (2005) discuss how the Reggio Emilia approach has implemented a social constructivist lens to successfully challenge "modernity's idea of knowledge as an

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objective representation of a real world, in favor of knowledge” which is, according to Rinaldi (2006), “an interpretation of reality that is constantly evolving” (p. 11). Knowledge is thereby a “process of construction by the individual in relation with others, a true act of co-construction” (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 125) and well-aligned with Dewey’s view that, “learning is an active process and not transmission of pre-packaged knowledge” (p. 11). Therefore, although academic engagement is an important component of joyful schools, it does not occur in isolation or when it is void of intellectual and emotional engagement.

Fullan, Quinn, and McEachen (2017) propose what they call an “equity hypothesis” in that they believe that, “*deep learning is good for all but is especially effective for those most disconnected from schooling*” (Fullan, Quinn & McEachen, p. 5) [italics in the original]. They maintain that:

(S)students alienated from present society are the most distant from learning, but all students in today’s world need to figure out where they fit in a complex, global society. Many of these children and teenagers are truly hidden as street kids, foster children, and otherwise outside of mainstream society...each and every student, no matter how advantaged, will at some point find herself or himself at sea in today’s turmoil. (p. 8)

I argue that postmodern and social constructivist theoretical perspectives can inform school environments, providing critical foundations to ensure that all students are able to flourish. If these conditions are not present, a sterile, disconnected, and mundane learning environment is likely to prevail, one where there is little relevance, engagement, or motivation for either the child or the teacher. A joyless classroom or school is not likely to enrich a child’s school experience or their ability to live a high quality of life. Too often disadvantaged students facing

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social emotional challenges and/or those who are less privileged are assigned less engaging tasks in an effort to provide them with the basics needed to help them achieve success despite their setbacks. I believe that denying them joyful, engaging, and relevant learning tasks with their peers in an inclusive and diverse setting reinforces inequalities as their deficits or gaps are the focus, rather than their strengths and gifts. Educators must consider the whole child, fostering social constructivist environments to allow for joy to emerge.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The word joy has been prevalent in society, especially in discourses related to Christianity and the Christmas holiday celebration. Only recently have I encountered it situated within the context of education, its presence seamlessly infusing my thoughts and practices subconsciously more often than consciously, intertwined in my thinking both personally and professionally, particularly since having been introduced to the Reggio Emilia philosophy. Since selecting this topic for my thesis last summer, the concept of joy has seemed to proliferate throughout education dialogue and journals, appearing perhaps in response to the conflicting philosophies of education that seem to predominate educational discourses: traditional, “back to the basics” approaches versus holistic teaching environments which infuse contemporary learning competencies. I have selected literature which has employed the actual word joy, attempting to separate and isolate it from similar notions such as passion and engagement, which are seemingly more prominent.

Shareski (2017) expands on the definition of joy, stating that:

(J)joy isn't about being happy all the time. It isn't a fleeting emotion that comes and goes depending on changing circumstances. It is about contentment and satisfaction and expressing those feelings. Sometimes that expression is visible, and sometimes it's not. But joy requires an awareness that things are right. While it's a deeply personal state, it's also something that, when given the opportunity, will spread. Creating a culture of joy applies to both the environment and the learning itself. As it relates to learning, it's the outward manifestation of success, achievement, and being. It's learning for the sake of learning, not because of grade or compliance. These are the moments we naturally seek. (p. 15)

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The Reggio Emilia philosophy drew inspiration from the work of educational scholar, John Dewey, who was one of the first educators to promote an alternative to stifling, traditional teaching environments. Dewey (1938) argued that curriculum should be considered as a “point of departure” which centered on the “organic connection between education and personal experience” (p. 25). He firmly believed that schools should be social institutions where children learn “through and in relation to living” with a focus on the “process of living, rather than preparation for living” and that education must involve the “unity of social life and subject matter” (Fraser, 2012, p. 8). Malaguzzi’s (1994) comparison of schools to billiard games expands on the notion of how important it is for schools to adapt holistic education approaches which evoke wonder and joy. He further elaborates on the importance of joy, declaring that:

Both children and adults need to feel active and important—to be rewarded by their own efforts, their own intelligences, their own activity and energy. When a child feels these things are valued, they become a fountain of strength for him. He feels the joy of working with adults who value his work and this is one of the bases for learning. (Gandini, Hill, Cadwell & Schwall, 2015, p. 2)

Educators who strive to design authentic learning opportunities and school cultures that embrace diversity, reciprocity, and deep engagement not only positively impact their students but are able to also reap the benefits of a richer, more fulfilled existence.

Developing a deeper understanding of joy and the possible implications it may have to enhance children’s schooling experiences has guided this literature review and has elicited six key themes including emotional effect, student engagement, educator engagement, play, achievement, and human flourishing.

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### **Emotional Effect**

The complexities inherent in human emotions and interactions make joy a challenging notion to isolate and define without acknowledging the many other influences and variables. Archbishop Desmond Tutu (2016) distinguishes joy from happiness, stating that, “joy subsumes happiness. Joy is the far greater thing...even after the most painful labor, once the baby is out, you can’t measure the mother’s joy. It is one of those incredible things that joy can come so quickly from suffering” (Dalai Lama, Tutu, & Abrams, 2016, p. 32). This quote illuminates how powerful the emotion of joy is, and how it has the capacity to transform one’s life and quality of existence. Malaguzzi, (as cited in Gandini, Hill, Cadwell & Schwall, 2015) expands on the transformational ability of experiencing this emotion in the context of education, stating that:

The pleasure of learning, or knowing and of understanding is one of the most important and basic feelings that each child expects to receive from the experience he or she is living through: either alone, with other children or with adults. It is a constructive feeling that must be reinforced so that the connected pleasure lasts even when reality may prove that learning, knowing and understanding can be difficult and require effort. It is through this very capacity of overcoming the difficulty that pleasure transforms itself into joy. (p. 15)

This conveys the importance of academic, intellectual, and emotional engagement and suggests that pleasure is transformed to joy when they are all aligned. Rinaldi (2006) concurs with this interpretation, stating that “the knowledge-building process...is also an emotional process” (p. 54). Rinaldi believes that it is important to acknowledge emotions such as love, fear, joy, and disappointment because “emotions help children explore the world and help them understand and create relations,” (p. 95) despite making adults sometimes feel uncomfortable or afraid. The

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emotion of joy is also explored in situations referred to as peak experiences, considering it “an all-encompassing term to describe a significant positive experience” (Boniface, 2000, p. 55).

Within these moments of intense fulfillment and happiness, “there appears to be agreement that a distinguishing feature of peak experience is a feeling of great joy or ecstasy not present to such an intensity in peak performance or flow” (Boniface, 2000, p. 58). While peak performance refers to the “state of superior functioning...and the prototype of superior use of human potential,” (p. 58) Csikszentmihalyi (as cited in Robinson, 2009) refers to flow as the “state of mind when consciousness is harmoniously ordered, and (people) want to pursue whatever they are doing for its own sake” (p. 92). The presence of joy as an emotion has the potential to impact human experiences, interactions, and understanding.

### **Student Engagement**

The topic of joy is infused in educational dialogue in terms of student engagement, particularly with Csikszentmihalyi’s (1997) research with flow and Sir Ken Robinson’s (2009) work with what he refers to as being in the zone or element. Robinson (2015) explains that being in your element “is not only about finding your talents...it’s also about passion...profound things can happen when students are given room to explore their own interests and capacities” (p. 89). Robinson elaborates on how, despite the obvious benefits of being able to memorize ideas and information, students’ academic performances tend to be more dependent on their level of interest and engagement than skill or capacity. In a 1997 interview, Csikszentmihalyi (as cited in Whalen, 1999) expands on the flow theory in learning, explaining “if you don’t get intrinsically involved in what you do, then you may learn things because you are forced to; but, that type of learning is not very useful to you in the future. It’s not something that you would internalize, appropriate, and feel ownership over” (p. 5). Students’ experiences are optimized when they feel

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some connection or interest in the task or learning activity, and when they are more engaged, they will become more invested.

Some educational systems interpret the concept of engagement as compliance and “good behavior” on the part of students and is “largely interventionist in nature” (Dunleavy & Milton, 2010, p. 6). Promoting the three-dimensional framework of social, academic, and intellectual engagement, Dunleavy and Milton (2010) also argue that:

each of these dimensions—social, academic, and intellectual—frames the conditions and outcomes of engagement differently, and when considered together they offer distinct perspectives in their stance toward students. In many ways, however, the concepts are complimentary. Whether considered alone or in unison, they are commonly viewed as ways of thinking about proactive strategies that can mediate and strengthen the impact of curricular and instructional reforms. They draw increased attention to the importance of students’ experiences in school, show the connections among those experiences and a range of social, emotional and academic outcomes, and highlight aspects of school and classroom practices that contribute to healthy human development, motivation to achieve, sense of confidence, pride in success at school, and so on. (p. 6)

Many of the structures and policies in place, so deeply embedded into our institutional structures that we often do not even realize they exist, compete with this holistic and thriving view of what it means to be educated and to flourish as humans. Compliancy, conformity, and competitiveness are often dominating forces in aspects of traditional school systems. I feel that there has been an over emphasis on students being academically or institutionally engaged, most likely because the other dimensions of engagement, intellectual and social, may be considered to be frivolous,

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ambiguous, and difficult to measure. I believe that when these three levels of engagement; intellectual, social, and academic, are operating simultaneously and at high levels, a trifecta occurs which creates the optimum conditions for a student (and educator) to experience joy. When joy is prevalent, the mind and body are not only open to learning, but an insatiable desire and confidence to persevere and challenge oneself is likely to present, in addition to the benefits of feeling this desirable emotion and thereby experiencing an improved quality of life.

Exploiting educational strategies capitalizing on the motivation and high interest students may experience when playing games or immersed in technology is also discussed in some research. Bourain (2010) compares teaching and learning to the “the beautiful game” of soccer, arguing that they both can be “creative play” (p. 2). The rules and structures are in place—classrooms, lesson plans, textbooks, available equipment and resources, administrative policies, school rules...the game is learning, which is nothing if not a pleasurable and joyful activity” (p. 2). Norman (1996) states that:

to play a game well requires the same kinds of learning, studying, understanding, and practice as are required of any educational activity. There is no reason why the learning and studying required in education should not be as captivating and enjoyable as the learning and studying of the game. (p. 35)

Having fun and learning do not have to be mutually exclusive. Learning should be enjoyable, captivating, and challenging, just like games. Csikszentmihalyi (1997) explains how to find flow in everyday life and how the “flow experience acts as a magnet for learning—that is, for developing new levels of challenges and skills. In an ideal situation, a person would be constantly growing while enjoying whatever he or she did” (p. 33). Students who enjoy a

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learning experience or topic will be more likely to concentrate on their learning, make connections with their own thinking, and challenge themselves.

### **Educator Engagement**

Aligning with Csikszentmihalyi's (1997) flow theory and Robinson's (2009) notion of "being in the element." Wien (2008) offers the term "wind horse effect" for educators wishing to "uncover" curriculum outcomes, weaving in students' interests in a responsive approach to teaching younger students, referred to as emergent curriculum. Originating from Buddhist tradition, the "wind horse effect... refers to raising positive energy, the life force that whirls through us...the animation by emotion that occurs in emergent curriculum...initially a by-product of creative activity and then a kind of fuel for further learning and activity" (Wien, 2008, p. 15). The Reggio Emilia philosophy bases its beliefs on what founding educator, Loris Malaguzzi (1993) describes in his poem and famous exhibit, "The Hundred Languages of Children". This exhibit profiles how "Reggio educators believe...that reciprocity, exchange, and dialogue lie at the heart of successful education" and that this "multileveled and multimodal" learning environment "of one hundred languages," creates a "place of uninterrupted condensation of hundreds of subjective and objective experiences" (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998, p. 10). A key phrase in Malaguzzi's poem and exhibit is "The child has a hundred languages (and a hundred hundred hundred more)" (Fraser, 2012, p. 276). Fraser (2012) discusses how the educators in Reggio Emilia have "increased our understanding of how children use graphic, verbal, literate, mathematical, symbolic, and imaginative play 'and a hundred hundred hundred more' languages in making meaning of the world" (p. 276). She argues that "one of the greatest joys for a preschool teacher is being a part of the early experiences of young children as they make meaning of their world," (Fraser, 2012, p. 276)

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concluding that “for all of us, making meaning of our world is a lifelong endeavor” (p. 276). This notion, inspired by the Reggio Emilia educators, “expanded our awareness of the many languages children use to make meaning of their world, and as teachers, we have learned from them the importance of our role as mediators of both the physical and social environment in the lives of children” (Fraser, 2012, p. 277). In describing the Reggio Emilia school, Gandini (1993) describes a “place where adults have thought about the quality of the environment. Each school is full of light, variety, and a certain kind of joy” (p. 112). Educator engagement is a critical piece in joyful schools and is the catalyst for any paradigm shift away from a joyless and conformist learning environment.

The “joy factor” is considered when measuring levels of student engagement in a school improvement model called A+ Schools, an initiative implemented by a school district in North Carolina. In addition to the presence of three main drivers such as principal leadership, engaged faculty, and quality professional development, identified in the research as successful components in transforming school settings, the pilot program discovered that possessing what they referred to as the “joy factor,” an indicator “based on measures of student engagement” results in a “higher sense of teacher satisfaction and higher teacher capacity—a sense that they are empowered and capable as professionals” (Robinson, 2015, p. 197). The research revealed that it is essential to utilize a teaching and learning framework that systemically supports the vision desired for student learning, one which strives to achieve more than optimal standardized test scores but rather seeks “joyful engagement, completion of tasks, high achievement, well-rounded opportunities for learning” and a “culture and community visible and unique and valued in your school” (Robinson, 2015, p. 198). Extending the list of outcomes to include not only

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academic but intellectual and emotional engagement indicators positively impacted both the students and the educators.

Cziksentmihalyi, (as cited in Whalen, 1999) expands on the flow theory, advising teachers to:

try to enjoy your teaching as much as possible and work as hard and as ruthlessly as possible to free yourselves from all the bureaucratic and other impediments that prevent you from enjoying teaching. Because if you enjoy your teaching, it is going to help the children tremendously. (p. 6)

Students can easily sense when an educator is passionate and the teacher's attitude can profoundly affect the quality of the learning environment. In this interview, Cziksentmihalyi, (as cited in Whalen, 1999) explains how the two components to this enjoyment are "enjoying the subject matter and pushing the subject matter for its own sake," and enjoying "interacting with children and seeing them learn" (p. 6). Rinaldi (2006) highlights the critical importance of the educator's role in evoking joy to optimize learning, stating how Malaguzzi "always asked us to start from the children in our attempt to reformulate an epistemology of both learning and teaching, and the roles of the teacher and learner in the educational process" (p. 55). Students' experiences are enhanced when their teachers and educational leaders are inspiring and engaged as they influence the culture of the school. Sinek (2009) suggests that "great leaders...are able to inspire people to act...to give people a sense of purpose or belonging," (p. 6) and who therefore become deeply motivated. He believes that when people love what they do, including their jobs, they are "more productive and more creative" (Sinek, 2009, p. 6). As a result, not only does their quality of life in general improve, they are also likely to be beneficial to their company or organization. Sir Ken Robinson (2009) explains how "when people place themselves in

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situations that lead to their being in their zone, they tap into a primal source of energy” and that “being in your element, having that experience of flow, is empowering because it’s a way of unifying our energies” (p. 93). When educators are passionate and intentional when creating conditions where teaching and learning are pleasurable and joyful for students, they also enrich the quality of their own experiences.

### **Play**

Much of the educational literature on the importance of play in education alludes to evoking a sense of joy for optimal teaching and learning environments. Siegal and Bryson (2012) write about developing strong family relationships, stressing the importance of spending time together as a family, engaged in playful, fun, enjoyable experiences. They believe that establishing enduring, strong, sibling and family relationships is similar to that of a “math equation, where the amount of enjoyment they share together should be greater than the conflict they experience” (p. 133). Norman (1996) argues that, “there is no reason why the learning and studying in education should not be as captivating and enjoyable as the learning and studying of the game,” stating that the “activities for recreation education are essentially identical” (p. 35). Baurain (2010) compares learning to playing a soccer game, discussing how “soccer players cultivate a focused attentiveness and holistic awareness,” and citing Dewey (1938) states that teachers must be dedicated to “extracting at each present time the full meaning of each present experience” (p. 5). Citing Biesta, Baurain (2010) stated that “the process or in-betweenness of any game absorbs or transcends individual players” (p. 5) and creates this heightened state of being and desirable feeling. Exploring the flow theory in outdoor adventure activities, Boniface (2000) refers to Csikszentmihalyi’s understanding of “the human desire for novelty, discovery, and uncertainty, and the enjoyment gained from exploring the unknown and confronting the

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unexpected” (p. 63). Further research supports his findings that “those who are able to find enjoyment in adventure activities made on purpose to provide autotelic experiences, are more likely to begin to find flow in other areas of life as well,” (Boniface, 2000, p. 65) therefore improving the quality of their life. The element of play, although short term and often isolated from life events, is often inextricably linked to the emotion of joy, as in both cases, one is captivated by the experience.

### **Achievement**

High achievers and successful people, according to Duckworth (2016) need a combination of perseverance and passion that she refers to as “grit”. She clarifies that “nobody works doggedly on something they don’t find intrinsically interesting” and “most people stink even *more* at what they don’t *love*” (p. 106) [italics in the original]. She advises that, “*before hard work comes play*” and that “even the most accomplished of experts start out as unserious beginners” (p. 106) [italics in the original]. Challenging flow theory, Schweinle, Turner and Meyer (2002) argue that early year’s classroom learning environments are much more complex. They discovered two outcomes which contradicted the flow theory in their research. They found that, “challenge was perceived as a threat to student efficacy” and “the most positive experience was reported in a classroom in which skills far outweighed challenges” (p. 4). In early years classrooms especially, young children are in their formative years of schooling learn more powerfully through play-based experiences. It is essential to maintain a delicate balance so that students are challenged in a positive, encouraging approach which builds on their strengths, not their deficits. Boniface’s (2000) research explores the relationships between peak experience and peak performance, describing how they are “models of optimal human experiencing” (p. 57). His research highlights how the characteristics of peak experience, peak performance, and flow in

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sport all share attributes and characteristics such as “absorption, valuing, joy, spontaneity, a sense of power, and personal identity and involvement” (Boniface, 2000, p. 57). It is beneficial to be passionate and intrinsically motivated to enhance one’s experience in any activity, sport, or learning journey.

### **Human Flourishing**

Human flourishing and mindfulness have been at the forefront of mainstream literature due to multi-tasking, hectic lifestyle tendencies and excessive consumption in a vast array of aspects such as consumerism, media, and food. A generation that grew up in this context, including being “overparented,” and over protected, are also subjected to high anxiety and stress, despite having been coddled and supported by caregivers and society. This has led to many people, including those who are highly successful in terms of finances and careers, searching for a deeper level of satisfaction and meaning to their life. The topic of joy has become more prevalent in dialogue not only on a personal level, but in companies and organizations revisiting their culture to enhance productivity, often based solely on only monetary gains or number outputs. Czikszentmihalyi, (as cited in Robinson, 2009) states that he invested in “decades of research on the positive aspects of human experience—joy, creativity, the process of total involvement with life I call flow,” and describes how these “elements of enjoyment,” are “the components that comprise an optimal experience” (p. 92). Whalen’s (1999) interview with Czikszentmihalyi reveals how people of all ages can experience a high quality of life, provided they “follow their curiosity and their interests” and when “it’s something you feel particularly in sync with, something that attracts you, something that moves you, something that resonates with your interests” (p. 3). Quality of experiences is extolled over quantity, however, and Czikszentmihalyi (1999) clarifies that “people do get flow from gambling, violent sports, going

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to war, or cheating people. Flow is more like a source of energy that can be used for pursuing both positive and negative ends” (Whalen, 1999, p. 4). Human flourishing requires that people who are experiencing flow are involved in positive and fulfilling activities, not ones that are addictive, self-destructing, negatively impacting one’s relationships with loved ones, or diminishing the quality of one’s life.

Living a fulfilling life is much different than simply existing and going through the motions of day to day tasks. Rinaldi (2006) cautions on how not to be disillusioned by fear, violence, discriminatory, or hostile, urging society to:

Raise our level of listening, our dialogue and attention toward children, to observe them and stay close to them, but not to scrutinize them, spy on them, impede them from maintaining their privacy, and above all not to inhibit their curiosity and joyous outlook on the world...otherwise, I can see some enormous risks...To merely survive rather than to live. (p. 94)

Fullan, Quinn, and McEachen (2017) propose their “new conceptualization of the learning process” called “deep learning” stating that “if we want learners who can thrive in turbulent, complex times, apply thinking to new situations, and change the world, we must reimagine learning...creating environments that challenge, provoke, stimulate, and celebrate learning” (p. 13). They claim that in their work with deep learning, they “see more and more students from both advantaged and challenged circumstances flourishing: equity and excellence are feeding on each other” (p. 21). Fullan, Quinn, and McEachen (2017) argue that:

the “old” notion that students who have struggled with school must wait until they have mastered the foundations of literacy and numeracy are being replaced with effective programs that bolster foundational literacy and numeracy skills but

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simultaneously engross students in authentic tasks that engage them deeply while providing meaningful ways to learn critical literacy skills. We call this the *equity hypothesis*, noting emerging evidence that suggests deep learning is necessary for all but may be advantageous for those alienated and underserved by traditional schools. (p. 24) [italics in the original]

Fullan, Quinn, and McEachen (2017) in their research, focus on “equipping all students with six global competencies that will allow them to thrive while creating the conditions for learning” and also that “the pathway to well-being is through deep learning experiences that address equity and excellence” (p. 24). They are adamant in their belief that “(D)deep learning, positioned to engage the disconnected, could turn out to be a force for reversing the damaging effects of concentrated, intergenerational poverty and racism” (p. 24). In recent years and with an increase in anxiety, depression, and mental health conditions existing in society, re-evaluating the ways in which we have been living our lives has been a prominent topic in mainstream discourse. Although society, in general, is living more lavish and indulged lifestyles with more access to a vast array of resources, people seem to be lacking a sense of happiness and fulfillment.

The notion of joy has also been prevalent in religious literature and discourse throughout history and is a word that is used frequently in Christian Bibles and hymns. The Dalai Lama and Archbishop Tutu (2016) believe that joy is “not easy or superficial but one burnished by the fire of adversity, oppression, and struggle,” considering it to also be “our birthright and even more fundamental than happiness” (Dalai Lama, Tutu, & Abrams, 2016, p. 3). They compare happiness to joy, distinguishing that “(J)oy....is much bigger than happiness. While happiness is often seen as being dependent on external circumstances, joy is not” (p. 3). They discuss what the Dalai Lama refers to as life’s purpose which is “the goal of avoiding suffering and

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discovering happiness,” and share their wisdom of “how to live with joy in the face of life’s inevitable sorrows” (Dalai Lama, Tutu, & Abrams, 2016, p. 3). They also discuss ways to “transform joy from an ephemeral *state* into an enduring *trait*, from a fleeting feeling into a lasting way of being” (Dalai Lama, Tutu, & Abrams, 2016, p. 3) [italics in the original]. The quality of our experiences and the ability to live in positive, strong relationships with ourselves, one another, and the environment can have a profound influence on human flourishing and one’s ability to live a meaningful and rewarding life.

There are a variety of obstacles that impede success in schools, even for those educators who feel that having joyful schools is important. I concur with Dunleavy and Milton (2010) that, “the growing competitiveness for marks as measure of competence for entry to post-secondary institutions detracts from a focus on deep learning” (p. 8). They also state emphatically that it is only when “all students become competent and powerful learners for life,” that “we can fairly claim both excellence and equity in public education” (p. 8). It is my intent to augment this vision by proposing that students, as competent and powerful learners, are also provided the opportunities to experience a sense of joy throughout their school years. These perspectives of joy will be instrumental in collecting and analyzing the data collected for this thesis. Although joy is rather elusive in the educational literature, it is a human emotion which is unique to every individual. The above literature will help me to frame some of my understandings as I attempt to focus on other educators’ experiences with teaching and leading for joy in schools. My purpose is not to define joy more succinctly but rather to discover possible conditions or variables that might foster joyful schools and thereby enhance the quality of lives of our students, now and in their future.

### **Chapter 3: Narrative Inquiry as the Research Methodology**

Narrative inquiry is a relational methodology that has the potential to profoundly illuminate nuances in phenomenon that would likely not be exposed through other research methodologies. The insights and vulnerabilities of the participants and the narrative inquirer emerge through the narrative accounts in an attempt to understand in new ways, rather than to seek answers. Narrative inquiry is defined by Clandinin (2013) as:

a way of understanding experience. It is a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in the same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that made up people's lives, both individual and social. (p. 17)

The narrative inquirer's goal is to highlight a phenomenon that has been impactful to participants and through this lens, illuminate wonders and possibilities that emerge as they are intertwined in the lived experiences of their participants. To me, narrative inquiry presents a powerful tool in an educational context because, as Clandinin and Connelly (1990) state, "research work then becomes one of learning to tell and live our own collaborative researcher/teacher lives" (p. 12). This process epitomizes to me one of Dewey's well-known quotes which suggest that education is not an end point but rather a "process of becoming". Narrative inquiry is launched from the narrative inquirer's own life experiences and wonders but unlike other methodologies, the narrative inquirer's lived experience is entrenched in the unfolding of the data collection and is instrumental in what is uncovered and discovered due its relational methodology.

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Throughout the inquiry process, the narrative inquirer weaves her own narrative through the participants' stories, delving more deeply into the phenomenon and research puzzle.

Clandinin and Caine (2013) discuss how in narrative inquiry, the researcher must be “attentive to what it means to live as researchers in relationships, to live in collaborative ways in which we can co-compose and negotiate the living, reliving, telling, and retelling of stories” (p. 169). They also state the importance of understanding “narrative inquiry spaces as spaces of belonging for both researchers and participants; spaces that are always marked by ethics and attitudes of openness, mutual vulnerability, reciprocity, and care” (Clandinin & Caine, 2013, p. 169). Upon meeting each of my participants for the first time, even before we started to engage in our research conversations, I felt a deep sense of respect and an instant bond as we entered this space. I believe that my participants were able to detect this and were therefore more open and comfortable in our conversations.

Narrative inquirers embark on narrative inquiry “in the midst...of researcher’s ongoing lives, both personal and professional; in the midst of lives enacted within particular institutional narratives...and in the midst of social, political, linguistic, and cultural narratives” (Clandinin & Caine, 2013, p. 169). Entering “in the midst” with this sense of a shared experience was profoundly impactful for me as the narrative inquirer, as well as for the participants, as it created an environment where insights and new wonders and understandings in regards to joyful schools surfaced. Throughout the inquiry, as the narrative inquirer, I was mindful to carefully negotiate the entry point, the unfolding of the shared experiences, and the eventual exit, which can never completely occur due to the intimacy and relational nature of the methodology. Sensitively navigating through these sequences while respecting and honoring the experiences of my

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participants was challenging but engaging. I felt that their shared experiences were affirming my beliefs but also opening up possibilities for me to consider both personally and professionally.

The collaboration invited a dynamic co-construction of insights and reflections while provoking me to ponder the social aspects of the experiences shared during specific times and places, considering if and how they might be impactful to the study. Engaging in dialogue with the participants and member checking the transcripts, interim texts, notes, and annals, I internalized the experiences and perspectives of the participants, which fostered a constant re-shaping of the inquiry. Clandinin and Connelly (2013) propose what they refer to as a three-dimensional narrative inquiry space organized by temporality, sociality, and place. Temporality involves composing field texts “over multiple interactions with participants” as well as co-composing through both the “participants’ and researchers’ reflection on, and of their earlier life experiences” (Clandinin & Caine, 2013, p. 167). Sociality is considered to direct “attention inward toward the participants’ and researchers’ thoughts, emotions, and moral responses and outward to events and actions”. Place is defined as locations “where lives were lived” and also “places where inquiry events occur” (Clandinin & Caine, 2013, p. 167). Clandinin and Caine (2013) note that although these three different dimensions exist and require separate considerations, they require attention simultaneously, and are dependent on one another, revealing the depth of the experience. These three dimensions or commonplaces are “often intertwined and knotted” and “in some ways form the fabric of life experience” (Clandinin & Caine, 2013, p. 172) throughout the narrative inquiry.

Other qualitative touchstones proposed by Clandinin and Caine (2013) which can enhance the quality of a narrative inquiry include the negotiation of relationships; the co-constructing of the unfolding inquiry through the transitions from field texts, to interim, to final

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texts; and being attentive to the balancing of voice, signature, and audiences. Clandinin and Caine (2013) state that, “narrative inquiries are always filled with rich, temporally unfolding, narrative accounts as they represent the lived and told experiences of participants and researchers” (p. 175). As a narrative inquirer, it was critical that the participant(s) viewed me as someone that shared their passion and dedication to their profession, in addition to the ways in which that passion influenced their personal lives. Generating their narrative account was enriching to me as I was drawn to each of their lived experiences and subsequent vulnerabilities both personally and professionally throughout the three-dimensional narrative spaces in which we travelled together. While listening to their stories, it was also helpful for me to extract my own understandings through these lenses, moving myself out of my microscopic and egocentric existence towards a more encompassing and open-minded perspective. I also had to constantly refrain from generalizing and jumping to conclusions when creating and re-storying the narratives to avoid my tendency to adopt a causal explanation. I strived to not rely on only one or two key aspects as being pivotal to the research, being mindful that when conducting a strong narrative inquiry effectively, “one does not feel lost in minutia but always has a sense of the whole” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990, p. 7). Therefore, this negotiation of relationships, co-construction of research texts, and careful consideration of voice was pivotal in eliciting robust data that was commensurate with the rich experiences and perspectives of my participants and myself as the narrative inquirer.

Building a sense of respect and trust with the participants was essential in order to evoke authentic and vulnerable perspectives in the hopes of unveiling new understandings for the participants, the narrative inquirer, and the intended audience. Despite our limited contact, I feel that I was able to convey my deep respect for the participants due to our common professions

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and our shared interest in joyful schooling. I feel that my participants were also able to sense my passion and investment in the inquiry topic which may have resulted in them feeling more comfortable to expose their vulnerabilities or more sensitive experiences. The data or field texts composed from the research conversations, annals, and interim texts that I collected and developed continually generated new understandings, ways of knowing, and wonders. As a narrative inquirer, I attempted “to represent the multiplicity of voices and signatures” while being “filled with rich, temporally unfolding, narrative accounts as they represent the lived and told experiences of participants and researchers” (Clandinin & Caine, 2013, p. 175). It was important for me to acknowledge throughout the inquiry and my final work that, “our retold and relived stories...composed in the tensions of telling, living, and retelling, tensions that hold the fabric of our lives together...allow us to recompose and re-story our experiences in new ways” (Clandinin & Caine, 2013, p. 176). This unique collaboration is integral to narrative inquiry research methodology as the lived experiences and insights of both the narrative inquirer and the participant(s) merge in the inquiry. This intersection is instrumental because through these shared encounters, the narrative inquirer, in particular, is able to “seek ways of enriching and transforming that experience for themselves and others” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 18). Throughout the inquiry process, each participants’ story not only shaped my research, but left imprints on my own story and ways of knowing, resulting in new wonders and possibilities as I explored what constitutes a joyful school. Rather than moving towards discovering a clear solution to my research puzzle, I am left with even more questions, wonders, and ways of understanding the complexity of this phenomenon. However, I am not feeling bewildered or confused. Ironically, these seemingly diverse states have coalesced into a sense of enlightenment and hope.

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### **Why Narrative Inquiry?**

When designing my research and generating my narratives, I attempted to frame my inquiry with regard to what Clandinin (2013) refers to as personal, practical, and social justifications. I focused on why this particular research was important to me based on my own life story and experiences, how this research could positively impact current educational practices and how my discussions with teachers and principals might enhance the quality of school life and society as a whole.

Clandinin (2013) describes personal justification as when the narrative inquirer is “justifying the inquiry in the context of their own life experiences, tensions, and personal inquiry puzzles” (p. 36). As an educator for over thirty years, I have been reflecting on my own school experiences as a student, a teacher, and a school leader which, although mostly positive, were often lacking in authenticity, meaning, and a holistic way of understanding due to the disciplines and subjects being taught in isolation. This tension became prevalent only after I reflected back on these years when immersed in my graduate studies. Returning to the same university faculty, where the physical structure and décor was largely untouched, was also quite a profound experience and a sharp contrast in terms of my level of engagement, having gained some wisdom from my professional and personal experiences. As a school principal, I strive diligently to ensure that our school culture is thriving in such a way that we are able to teach foundational literacies such as reading, writing, and math in a holistic and joyful environment that engages students academically, intellectually and emotionally. Narrative inquiry has the potential to encapsulate the nuances and intricate layers of engagement which are inherent in this research study.

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Practical justification, according to Clandinin (2013), involves exploring possible ways to shift or change practice in an effort to better educate our children. The narratives in this research project will help to convey the importance and significance of holistic and joyful schools so that educators will consider that this approach does not require extra work nor detract from a focus on academic success. These stories will hopefully illuminate how impactful the essence of joy can be on all aspects of teaching and learning, and the quality of life for both the students and the educators.

According to Clandinin (2013), social justification consists of theoretical justification and/or social action. There is intense pressure on educators to ensure that their students are achieving academic success in reading, writing, and math based on empirical data such as report card indicators and standardized tests, but most educators would attest to the notion that without the social aspects, students are not able to achieve their full potential both academically or socially. Although fortunately there is a move towards valuing contemporary competencies such as critical thinking, creativity, character, and citizenship, it is also more challenging to assess and report on them due to their inherent complexities. For there to be a change in the education system, there has to be a consistent and clear emphasis on the social components of education. This research has the potential to dispel the notion that joy in schools is insignificant and would come at the expense of high academic achievement and student success.

As an educator, student engagement has been at the forefront of my mind and my research topic of joy has most recently resonated with me due to the increased pressures that society is currently placing on educators and students, in my view at the expense of human flourishing. My challenge as a school principal is to strive for academic excellence of course, but also to ensure that students' wellbeing and quality of life is enhanced, which I believe will

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optimize academic success. Selecting a research methodology that infused these social components through the lens of other educators' and my own experiences was critically important. Narrative inquiry allowed me to illuminate the essence of joy in education through my participants' stories in conjunction with my own powerful journey with holistic education. I am optimistic that using narrative inquiry as my research methodology will also profile other joyful narratives to make it become more prominent in educational discourse, thereby creating possibilities for a more holistic and joyful approach to leading and teaching.

### **The Narrative Inquiry Process with Four Participants**

For this research, I interviewed two principals and two classroom teachers in an attempt to collect data and construct narratives that would help inform a more robust perspective of joyful school experiences. The principals were recruited and interviewed during a qualitative research course and the two teachers were interviewed after my thesis proposal was approved.

**Recruitment and interview process--First phase.** As part of a qualitative research course in the fall of 2016 at the University of Manitoba, I conducted pilot interviews with two principals for this project. After receiving approval from the Education and Nursing Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba, I recruited two participants in October, 2016, from a school division which had been visiting my school on a regular basis to observe holistic learning in action. I decided to accept the first two principals who responded to my request and I had not established participation criteria because I felt that with the busy lives of principals, I would be fortunate to have even two people contact me. Prior to each scheduled interview, I provided the participants with the interview protocol I had designed and informed them that they could prepare in advance, but that it was not an expectation. I also invited each participant to share an

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artifact that was meaningful to them and that might represent a joyful experience in regards to teaching and leading.

I met my first principal participant, Robert, on a beautiful fall day in October 2016, after making arrangements via e-mail. He graciously offered to drive a couple of hours from his town to meet me at my school. I called him on his cell phone as he had not yet arrived at 1:00 pm to ensure he was able to locate the school and he pulled up in the school parking lot several minutes later. I greeted him at the school door and we proceeded on an impromptu brief tour of the building as we chatted casually, acknowledging that we had met before. We then headed to my office where we conducted the research conversation after signing the official research consent letter for my files.

David, the second principal participant, and I arranged to conduct the research conversation during our lunch hour later that same month while we were both at work using the computer software Skype. Although we were able to speak face to face via our computer screens and I could even see parts of David's office, not actually being in the same physical space seemed to detract a bit from our conversation, especially since we experienced a couple of technical difficulties including a distracting ringing noise that kept occurring. I also felt a bit more nervous as a narrative inquirer because my annoyance with the intermittent ringing noise in the background and losing our connection a couple of times was compounded with my concern about the interview being recorded clearly and completely. Despite these challenges and the heightened tension I felt at the possibility of being interrupted in my office in the event of an emergency or school issue, I was very pleased with the quality of our conversation and our ability to establish a relationship in the short time frame and geographical distance.

**Recruitment and interview process—Second phase.** For the second phase of this study, I made an amendment to my original ethics proposal and requested an extension on the data collected from the first two research conversations so that I could include them in my thesis research and contact them for member-checking when generating their narrative accounts.

In this second phase, I intended to recruit two teacher participants from the same division as the principals I had interviewed during phase one. I felt that that the collaborative relationship between that division and my school, regardless of whether the participants had been actually involved in one of the school visits, would provide rich data and would infuse some of the pieces of my own school's journey towards a holistic and joyful school. I knew that through the school visits and the nature of the questions that were posed to me and our staff by this division (and other visitors/colleagues), there were some deeper levels of understanding and insights that were surfacing that I could tap into for my research. I was not sure if I would know the participants or if they would recognize my name in the e-mail based on colleagues' previous visits to my school or professional development sessions they may have attended where I was presenting. Due to the efficiency of the superintendent who once again distributed my e-mail recruitment communication in a timely manner, I was fortunate to once again receive several responses within the first day of my request. I selected two participants, having received three replies that morning, (and two more later that day). I was grateful that both my new teacher participants, Ellen and Jake, were teaching at the early/middle years which would provide a range of perspectives of grades and which would complement the predominately middle/high school experiences of my principal participants, although specific grade levels were not something I was exploring at this point.

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I was able to arrange research conversations with the two new teacher participants at the University of Manitoba the following month in March 2018. I scheduled the interviews back to back as I had to drive over an hour and a half to meet them. I arranged to meet them in a cozy space with some comfortable chairs and tables by the bookstore and coffee shop. Ironically, my small token of appreciation for all of my research participants was a \$10 Starbucks gift card and we couldn't access any coffee because Starbucks was closed. Since it was a Sunday, I had hoped it might be a fairly quiet space as almost everything in the university was closed, but there was a very animated group of adults who were engaged in lively banter throughout the research conversations, which added to my stress of worrying about my devices capturing the audio and being audible.

I approached both Jake and Ellen who had situated themselves in proximity to Starbucks. Jake was sitting down in a comfortable chair and Ellen was standing by the window. They were easy for me to spot for some reason, even though there were several people in the area and people were coming and going in the nearby corridor area. I think it was because I had an idea they would be of a similar age to me based on their very brief descriptions of their teaching experience in their e-mail response. It became immediately evident to me that both Ellen and Jake were passionate, joyful people and that they had been eager to be a part of this research because they shared my beliefs that joyful schools were critical to education. I interviewed Ellen first and the interview went very smoothly although again, I was nervous about the research conversation recording despite having two devices, my phone and my hand-held recorder. I had an issue with the app that I was using so I decided to use Face Time audio as a back-up. Jake's interview also went well, and we talked well over the hour-long allotment we had established. Again, due to my inexperience with recording a more formal interview conversation, I did

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interrupt both of them a few times to check on the recording and it caused me to be a bit nervous, which may have detracted from the quality of our conversations.

I found it very easy to establish a bond with all four of my participants and wished that I had more opportunity to talk to them all again as I was fascinated with their lives and their openness to participate. I did feel more reserved than I normally would when conversing with colleagues however, knowing that my research process was formal and needed to follow strict parameters for ethics and protocol. My four participants and their current positions as educators are listed below and referred to by their assigned pseudonyms:

**Robert**: High School vice principal

**David**: Middle Year's principal

**Ellen**: Early Year's teacher

**Jake**: Middle Year's guidance counsellor

Having recruited these four enthusiastic educators who were willing to give generously of their time participate in my research made me feel appreciative, relieved and also excited!

**Creating field texts (data collection).** A starting point in the narrative inquiry research process, according to Clandinin (2013), is listening to participants tell their stories and building a relationship of trust, especially when sharing such personal information and insights. For this research project, my data collection began with listening to my participants' stories based on my interview protocol which I designed to provide a framework for our conversations but to not impede digressions when they occurred naturally during the interview. I shared a brief preamble with each participant at the beginning of each research conversation, attempting to position

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myself as a colleague who believed in the importance of the social aspects of education and as a narrative inquirer who was hoping to enhance teaching and learning environments. During all four conversations, I inserted a few brief comments about my own experiences when I deemed it to be an affirmation or acknowledgement of our shared experiences as educators, with the goal of not disrupting the flow of their thoughts or focus, but rather enhancing the authenticity of our conversation. Robert and David had prepared some notes in advance of our conversation and all four participants had selected an artifact or image that they felt was important to them and to the topic of joy.

I elected to utilize two types of field texts (Clandinin, 2013) for my research which I will elaborate on in this section. I audio recorded each conversation which was based on the interview protocol I had designed (see appendix F) and then transcribed them verbatim in an effort to preserve the authenticity of the dialogue. This was a laborious task and it took many hours to complete for each participant, especially as I wanted to ensure that every word was captured accurately. I used the same research journal from my two previous qualitative research courses as I felt that these notes, references and reflections resonated with my current research. Although I used my research journal to collect some notes and referred to it at times when writing my thesis proposal and final paper, I refrained from using it during the actual interviews because during the first few minutes of my interview with my first participant Robert, I felt that the act of writing was impeding our conversation and the quality of our interaction. Writing notes while engaging in a conversation was distracting and challenging to make eye contact as a narrative inquirer. I was already nervous about the interview being fully recorded and although I used both a handheld recorder and my phone, I was concerned that I might lose the important data and have

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to conduct the interview or segments over again. Therefore, I found it much more beneficial to write notes in my research journal after the interviews and also while I was transcribing.

**Creating interim and final research texts (data analysis).** After each interview, I transcribed our conversations verbatim and shared the field texts with each participant to ensure that I had correctly transcribed the conversations from their perspectives and to provide them with an opportunity to exclude or expand on comments or sections of our conversation. No one requested to revise, add or delete anything in the field texts although two of the participants commented on their conversation habits which I had included for both their responses and my own such as “ummmm” and “right”. (After having transcribed the second research conversation, I made a conscious effort to try to delete the word “awesome” from my vocabulary as it was not only an unnecessary word but rather annoying when used so frequently but have not quite achieved that goal).

In my research journal and on my copies of the transcripts, I made notes based on Clandinin’s (2013) three commonplaces framework of temporality, sociality, and place, listing possible questions or wonders of unexplored or incomplete areas that I might feel a desire to tap into later in my research once I generated their narrative. As I read through the transcripts to compose the narrative accounts, I considered these commonplaces and reflected on these social and personal pieces within each participant’s story and the possible implications for education.

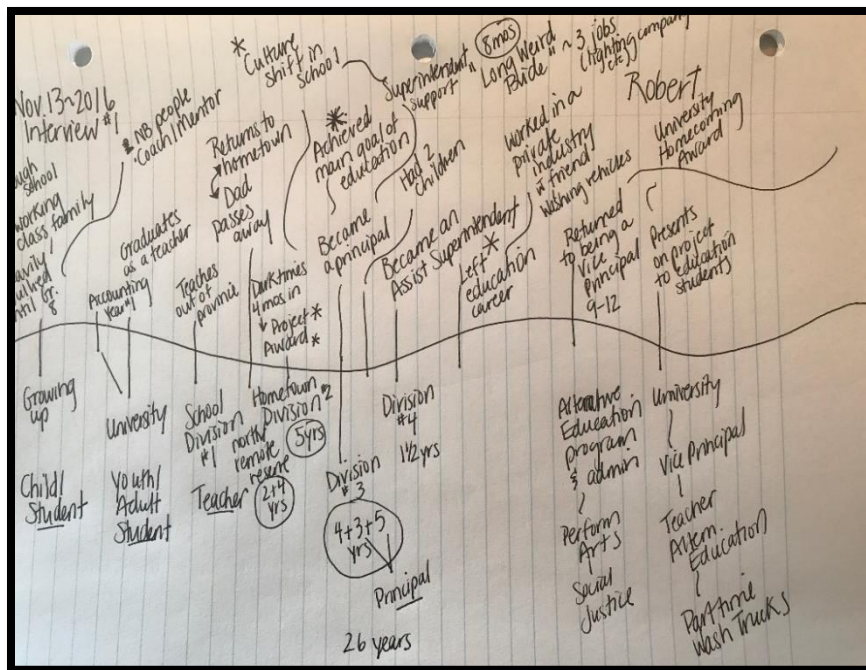
I decided to create annals to denote significant events, places, and people in the participants’ lives which would assist me in piecing together their narrative and provoke further questions or present gaps in which I could delve more deeply if necessary. According to Clandinin and Connelly (1990), “annals are a dated record of events in which there is no apparent connection between the events” (p. 9). Creating the annals also was helpful for me as it

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created a visual and timeline to explore themes as they emerged. I made one for each participant to organize the data and begin to explore possible patterns, trends and wonders in my data.

Below is an image of the annal that I generated for my first participant, Robert, after transcribing our interview conversation.

**Figure 1. Annal for Robert's Narrative Account**



When generating the narratives, I used the three commonplaces to organize and provide a framework for this text. To begin, I referenced the temporality or chronological order of the participants' stories to determine how their progression through their life and specifically their career might have affected their current view of education. The second commonplace was to identify influential or significant people in their life which is referred to in narrative inquiry as sociality. Finally, I explored places in which these important aspects occurred, which in this case, often centered around school. Once I completed the draft version of these narratives, I e-mailed them to member check, inviting the participant to review, extend and/or revise what they shared in regards to how they had been represented in the narrative. As I composed the final narrative

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especially, I reflected on the collection to determine if any common threads existed in all of these stories which I may want to explore on a deeper level to make my research more compelling.

The common threads that were apparent to me in all four participants' stories were the importance of developing and maintaining wellbeing, caring ethics, strong relationships, nurturing a strong sense of social justice, and efficacy. The participants all shared the same experience of having at least one person in their lives in which they were able to forge a strong, caring, and supportive relationship which would be instrumental in their abilities to live a fulfilling life. The importance of wellbeing and relationships was prevalent especially for students, but it was also referred to as being a significant factor for educators.

I began to explore what themes emerged from wellbeing and cultivating strong relationships in a school setting and the implications this might have on the importance of fostering more joyful schools. As I considered these threads more deeply, I felt compelled to return to the notion of this new knowledge and understanding as a rhizome. This metaphor is useful, in that, while all three commonplaces were instrumental, they were not necessarily causal and like a rhizome, they become about growth and openings to new understandings. These life experiences are dynamic and are constantly evolving while continuously being (re)interpreted over the course of their life journey. Like a rhizome, these experiences deposit and gather as a collection of lived experiences, but the telling and re-telling of our stories allows us to extend this new understanding to reach out to new ways of viewing the world, hopefully with a sense of optimism add hope, rather than with disillusionment and despair.

According to Clandinin (2013), "we as inquirers need to pay close attention to who we are in the inquiry and to understand that we ourselves, are part of the storied landscapes we are studying" (p. 30). I feel that each of my participants' stories were joined in some aspect to my

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own story, like offshoots of a rhizome. As a narrative inquirer, alongside my participants, I am living in relation to their unfolding lives and am deeply immersed in the complexities that exist in uncovering and learning from our storied lives and experiences. Like the rhizome, our experiences and ongoing reflections leave deposits that coagulate on the stems. Although they may eventually disperse or eventually break away, some granules remain and will forever impact the composition and structure of the rhizome, so that it never returns to its exact state of being. My hope is that these offshoots accumulate wisdom and a sense of hope, while creating openings and possibilities for a more joyful existence for our students and society as a whole.

The following chapters are comprised of my four participants' narratives, commencing with Robert, who is currently a vice principal in a rural high school. The second story is about David who recently accepted a position as principal of a middle year's school in the same division. Ellen, an early/middle years teacher is profiled in the third story. The fourth and final narrative is about Jake, a middle year's teacher who is now his school's guidance counsellor. I have used pseudonyms for the names of my participants and also other identifying information such as location, schools and communities to maintain anonymity. Their narrative accounts will be presented to construct and deconstruct what it means to foster joyful schools. Each participant's life and career will be explored through their narratives to offer perspectives on joyful schooling, on what it means to be educated, and the implications their insights may have for education.

**Chapter 4: A Narrative Account of Robert: A Sensitive and Passionate Leader**

It was a gorgeous fall day when Robert arrived at my school on Sunday, November 13, 2016, for our interview conversation. He had responded promptly and enthusiastically to my e-mail recruitment request, volunteering to make the drive to the resort town where my school was located. After greeting him at the side entrance doors, we went on a quick tour through the building before settling in my office to begin taping the research conversation. Robert had grown up in a rural town and came from what he described as a working class family. After graduating from university, he became employed in a northern school division in another province, also teaching for a couple of those years on a remote reserve. After several years, he returned to his community and was in charge of an alternative education program in the same school where he had been a student. He commented that at the time, teaching in his hometown felt a little bit “odd” to him, especially when assuming this position coincided with the passing of his father, which had been the reason he had come back home. After teaching there for five years and then in various schools in the area, he assumed a couple of principal positions, which had been a role he had aspired to as a career goal. Robert then became involved in various educational initiatives, eventually becoming an assistant superintendent in the same division. Although he admired his superintendent and loved the work, he decided to depart from this role and the education field itself because he noted that:

A year and a half in to that, I loved it but it was too much for my family and it was eating us up...in terms of our time...so I stepped away and I went into a private industry and I worked with a friend until I could figure out what I could do to try and balance things out a little bit.

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Having taken a break, Robert had reflected on how much he loved education. He then returned to the profession as a vice principal in the same division and is currently at the helm of an alternative education program which combines an off-campus program with an existing school program. At the time of the research conversation, he was deeply engaged in his career and especially one of his roles which was helping a large group of students experiencing intense issues with stress, anxiety, and self-regulation.

Robert had made the decision to become an educator because he felt that he could make a difference in people's lives, especially students who were being mistreated or bullied, like he had been. He also believed in following personal passions and being invested in what you do, both personally and professionally. He initially enrolled in accounting when he started university, but he knew immediately that it was not the path for him:

I hated it. And the first year of university I hated it...and sort of trying to break away from...I sort of knew...everybody sort of knew what I should be doing...which was education...I just, I was exposed to some really good teachers, and I was exposed to some really, really bad teachers, and that goes for principals too yes...and so I just decided if I could make a difference, and get on the right side of things, and help kids avoid some of the things I went through.

Robert continued sharing a poignant piece of his lived story, stating how he had been fortunate to have significant people in his life who mentored and supported him. His voice became softer and lower with emotion as he shared:

I was heavily bullied...as a kid until about Grade 8 and then, and so there wasn't a lot of joy in my early school years for sure. And then once I figured it out, it got

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better and better and better. I hooked up with...two really important people in my world. Yeah, so that changed, then eventually became a teacher. I've loved it.

I wanted to ask Robert more about his personal experiences with bullying, but I sensed that it was too painful for him to discuss in detail. Since Robert but did not elaborate, I wanted to be respectful and honor what he had been willing to share, without pressuring him to go in to the obviously painful details of this part of his life. Robert admitted that these past experiences were still difficult for him and caused him to be sensitive to situations where he felt that people were being treated in an unkind or disrespectful manner.

Cultivating a school culture that fosters and promotes wellbeing, caring ethics, strong relationships, and social justice was critical according to Robert. In his twenty-six years as an educator, Robert profiled Charles High School, a school he attended as a student and was employed in as both a teacher and a principal, as a highlight for him, due to the shift that occurred in the school culture. He described this experience, explaining that:

When I was a kid, it was a tough place. And when I taught there, it was a tough place. There was a fair amount of fighting and violence, there was bullying...there were still good people doing good stuff. So when I showed up as principal, I was able to get people on side, and the kids, and the teachers, and the parents...and we started making changes.

Robert discussed how after approximately five years, the improved culture at the school started to positively impact every aspect of the school. He felt that this was because "we just worked together with the kids, not at the kids". He shared how he and some of the teachers had set up an educational initiative to address the bullying but particularly two critical incidents which

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involved a stabbing and social media threats involving students at the school. Although he admitted that these were dark points, just four months in to the initiative, he described how:

Everything was up after that. We did so many good things. We had so much fun. And we could see kids were shining. And they were coming out and getting involved. Our attendance was way up, and our lates [meaning students arriving late] were down, and our suspension rate was way down...all those key kind of things that you look at. But there was also this sense...we can do it, and I think that's where the joy is right.

Robert acknowledged that there were still issues to address but that this particular school experience was definitely a highlight for him.

Making a difference in other peoples' lives and being a significant person or mentor to others was greatly valued by Robert. A celebration for Robert was having mentors and people who believed in him and his abilities as a leader, speaking affectionately about one superintendent in particular who had been that person for him when he assumed his first principal position. Robert recalled how she had said to him, "You're going to get the keys to the kingdom here...you've got to help them (students and staff) find energy and you get this place shined up again". Robert emphasized the importance of identifying these leadership qualities in others so that they can be impactful in spreading this positivity, stating that:

We've got to get the right people in the right seats, like Fullan says right? The right people on the bus, then in the right seats. Because these are the people that are going to bring us joy, they're going to bring us happiness, they're going to bring us a reason to be engaged.

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In addition to important people with whom he was fortunate to work with and/or share in some aspect of their success, he referred to his coaching experiences as being instrumental. Robert smiled when he recalled as a young boy, he had accompanied his dad in his custodial position at a local high school and how his dad had trusted a coach so much that he allowed Robert to spend time with him while he was running a teen summer program. That summer, the coach and a group of teenagers invited Robert to shoot baskets with them in the afternoons. In later years, when Robert himself was attending high school, he was struggling to find his way, having been subjected to incessant bullying for a prolonged period of time. What saved Robert from this anguish was that he ended up managing the volleyball team for that coach, and then things started to turn around in his life. He commented that “pretty much everything good in my life traces back to volleyball” and also how those experiences shaped Robert’s future in a positive way. Winning several championships and having the opportunity to travel all over, enriched his life in so many ways, and was also where he met his wife.

In discussing how he was able to transform the conditions at this school in his new role, Robert explained how some initiatives such as changing “Meet the Teacher” night to “Meet the Staff Night” were key to creating a new culture where everyone felt they belonged, valued, and part of the team. He also felt it was important to get to know the staff in addition to the students, despite being in a very large school. Another program he implemented was designed to increase the graduation rates so that students would have enhanced opportunities in their lives. Monthly meetings were held for the students where often only a little more than half of the class would show up, and involved practicing actually walking across the stage in preparation for the graduation ceremony. Robert felt that this important milestone was emotionally overwhelming for some students, particularly those who had been told by significant people in their life that

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they would never graduate, or that they were “screwed up”. He said that many of these students suffered from mental anguish and anxiety which was a huge obstacle for them, and that the message delivered in this program was simple and clear. He said this message was, “All I care about [is]...let’s graduate. So that you can have control of your life. You are worth more than \$11 an hour”. He stated how many of these students were very uncomfortable, even with just walking across the stage but that “the idea is...at some point, if they keep doing this, they start believing it right? And then they start to internalize it. And when they internalize it, all of a sudden it becomes normal. And away they go”. He then concluded that “it’s all about them (students) being loved”.

One of the biggest challenges Robert has faced as an educator, also occurred at the same school, which he describes as a negative mindset that he felt had been prevalent and detrimental to the success of the school. He shared how when he started there, the attitude was “this place is crappy...the kids aren’t good...the expectations were low...there were all sorts of things that were really defeating for the kids and for the teachers”. He described how the teacher turnover was high, resulting in a significant staff turnover each year. Changing the school culture by “flipping everything on its head...I put a chip on all of our shoulders and we just responded...and the kids, the kids came with us. That was the cool part...” also was impactful because staffing became more stable and consistent.

In a passionate, energetic, and excited tone, Robert expressed how his educational philosophy was based on only three things; “all I want to do is to be part of a team that helps create good neighbors, competent colleagues and great friends. That’s it...”. He was concerned about literacy and numeracy but felt strongly that education involves acquiring more than just these basic skills. He stated emphatically that:

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What it boils down to is actually...simple...good friends, honesty, empathy, trust...all those good neighbors. This whole thing has to be built on a foundation of trust, and engagement, respect, and relationships. If we can get kids, and teachers or staff...if we can get everybody in a place...where we can build relationships first, then we can trust each other, then we can risk take, we can do anything after that...it really is about letting kids know that they are cared about as people.

Robert discussed the ways in which he strived to foster these qualities in his own school, sharing how it is important to him that he is visible in the hallways all the time and saying hi to kids, especially those students who aren't accustomed to being acknowledged by others. He stated that in a school of close to eighteen hundred students, it can become a very lonely building for some kids. He laughed about how he enjoys having fun with some students and makes them feel a bit awkward by his daily and exuberant greetings. Robert explained in an animated tone with a smile breaking out on his face, that at first, some of the students are uncomfortable with his friendliness and do not know how to react, but then after a while, they shyly make eye contact with him in the hallway, adding a wave or a nod. He added that some of the students are actually waiting for him to come up to them to say hello each day, and still smiling, remarks how "that's part of where I get my juice, my joy. It's just that interaction of working with people, having fun". Being part of a team and building strong, trusting, and caring relationships will help students and staff achieve excellence.

Robert believed that student and staff engagement were key pieces in education. Student engagement, according to him was:

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massively important. If the kids aren't engaged in what we're doing...and they're just passive sort of passengers...that works with the sort of kids that have trained to be yes....I'll do whatever I have to do for the marks and then move on...but it's the kids that I most work with, and am used to, that don't. They don't conform easily.

Robert discussed how some academically engaged students become very uncomfortable in environments where educators are placing less emphasis on marks and competition, and more on learning, as they feel more comfortable and are good at “playing the game” of school. Despite this resistance, he marveled at how some “high achievers” suddenly became more alive, especially when they were out of the classroom and on field trips or excursions, free of the burden of assignments and the pressures of maintaining their marks. He extended the notion of engagement to include educators, stating that learning is rarely enjoyable for students unless teachers themselves are excited about what they are teaching and invested in what is happening in their classrooms and school. Robert felt that once the staff were engaged, the positive energy reverberates throughout the whole school and is impactful but admitted that as an educational leader, that was challenging to facilitate at times.

Robert expanded on the topic of joy and how he believes that some people may not pursue their true passions and may be overly motivated by money or status. He shared how some of his entrepreneur friends find joy in making a lot of money, but that this was definitely was not the case for him. His brief hiatus from education, 8 months which he referred to as “the long weird ride,” confirmed this for him. His experiences as an educator enabled him to help the organizations he worked in during that period to figure

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out some of their challenges which often revolved around employee engagement.

Through his conversations with the people he worked with in these other jobs, he gained some new insight on the importance of being engaged and wondered how he could get students “plugged in” with something that they were interested in and in an earlier phase of their school life so that they could lead happy and fulfilling lives. Robert described joy as the “feeling of fulfillment by helping other people reach a better place” and the importance of trying “to make every situation I encounter better”. He felt as though he has been achieving this goal and was proud knowing that he had positively impacted so many students, providing an example of how a quarter of the students on a current administrative council had been enrolled in his leadership mentorship program and were now positively influencing other educators and students. He added that making every situation he encounters better by just helping kids, especially those who were unlikely to have succeeded otherwise, was his joy.

Loris Malaguzzi’s quote, “nothing without joy” resonated deeply with Robert. He questioned that without joy, what would be the purpose of coaching, playing music, or even coming to school every day? He discussed how because of the absence of joy, many students avoid school and that there exists a constant tension between their outside and school worlds, due to systemic barriers. Robert felt that navigating between these two worlds was a constant challenge especially when students did not feel they belonged or were not engaged. He believed that as long as kids are learning and having a good time, then that is all that really matters. He talked about how joy is evident in some school spaces but that more attention needs to be placed on creating joyful spaces, citing

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educator burnout, apathy, and compliance and conformity to outdated teaching practices as issues that need to be addressed.

At the conclusion of our research conversation, Robert referenced a piece of literature which his dad had liked and was becoming even more meaningful to him now that he was older. He said the piece of writing was called “Desiderata” (1948) and that he would share it with his students when his time with them was over. He said that it contained some good lessons and that one of them was to “Relax. The universe is unfolding as it should. Just...believe”. Robert stated that there were other lines in the literature piece that could be analyzed but that it was that line that resonated with him, because it conveyed to him that we should relax because “It’s all good! Just do your part. Get in there. Believe in it. Be joyful. Celebrate what you...what we’re doing...because what’s the other alternative?” Giving back to others, spreading positivity and a sense of hope was critical to Robert and was something he aspired to do in his professional and personal life.

**Chapter 5: A Narrative Account of David: An Optimistic and Energetic Leader**

David was the second principal to respond via e-mail to my request for participation and although I recognized his name, although I do not believe we had met previously. We agreed to conduct our research conversation on Tuesday, November 15, 2016 at 12:45, via the computer using video conferencing software. I was a bit anxious about the tight time frame we had allocated for the conversation during the lunch hour, which often was a busy time for principals in schools, as well as the possibility that we might experience technological glitches. After establishing our video connection, David and I exchanged greetings, with both of us seated in our office desks. I was able to see David clearly perched at the edge of his chair to better position himself to the computer screen. and his office bookshelf filled with books and other items was visible in the background.

Currently in his first year as a principal at Westgrove School, after spending nineteen years in another division as a math teacher and then also an assistant principal, David shared how he had been positively influenced by several teachers in his life, particularly his coaches. He reflected on this experience:

I had some really good teachers in junior high that just enjoyed what they're doing. And I just...got involved in coaching pretty young as a kid...like right from junior high school on. So I think I just enjoyed working with kids, working with people, and it was fun.

David's celebrations as an educator were mainly comprised of his relationships with students, including his many successful coaching experiences. He reflected on the importance of relationships in his role as an educator, noting that his highlights had been

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“just the kids right...you don’t really remember the...lesson plans and all the stuff you do but the relationships you build. That’s what you remember”. David provided an example of one of these significant relationships by showing me a poster on his office wall, explaining that one of his students created it and presented it to him as a gift. The tone of his words softened as he read the words written on the image; “Coach David. Little vertical, huge heart,” despite having to project his voice across the room to the computer from where the poster had been proudly displayed. David noted that this student is now a parent and a coach with a sports team that has a chance to win a championship. David expanded on how impactful his coaching experiences had been, as a result of building strong relationships and spending so much time together in the gym.

Reflecting on his challenges as an educator, David identified mental health issues and his efforts to help students and families with complex needs. He described these challenges as being:

social economic situations where families are just struggling. So mental health is a huge part of it. Dealing with not so much the kids who are struggling but families that struggle with it. You can’t fix it...you just try to kind of manage it. You can manage your response to it and it’s just taking care of the kids in those situations. That’s been the biggest challenge.

Alternative teaching and learning environments were experiences in David’s career as an educator which had been impactful for helping students with complex needs who had become withdrawn, disengaged, or defiant. He described how he had been in charge of an alternative school settings for three years. These initiatives led to the development of one of the off-campus programs becoming what David referred to as “a

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full-fledged school,” with a primary mandate of just having students start to enjoy school again. Increasing graduation rates was also a goal of this programming. He marveled on how their efforts to build relationships with students and have them become more involved in school resulted in an increase from the initial five graduates to thirty. Being a part of helping students who otherwise would not have graduated was a highlight for David as an educator.

Caring ethics was an essential component to David’s philosophy of education. In preparation for his interview with his current position, he had ordered a plaque inscribed with his philosophical views, after having taken the time to reflect on his career. David stood up from his desk and carefully read the engraved words he had generated to convey his sentiments:

I have a caring heart for all children and genuinely show concern for their academic, social, and emotional growth. I am dedicated to including the community and the school on a daily basis to ensure children’s best interests are met through effective communication and consultation. I encourage all staff members to be leaders and to provide supports to ensure their professional growth. I strongly feel that all children have the ability to learn. Creating a school culture that is based on kindness and deep learning maximizes the potential for all children, staff, and the community.

David believed that caring ethics was foundational to enhancing the quality of education for students. He expanded on the notion of kindness, lamenting how the “bully” word is overused and that despite an increased awareness towards bullying, there continues to be a lack of effective responses to this issue. David suggested that the solution was not to

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use the word so freely and to “focus on teaching kids how to be kind and how to respond in kind ways”. For example, he recalled how his previous school was:

a really, really, at-risk school. I don't think people get how at-risk it is...with the kids and some of the things that they deal with. They just don't see that kindness at home very much. So giving the kids chances to be kind and to show how kindness helps...really changed that school around.

David elaborated on this quality, stating that:

Kindness matters. And that's sort of the message that I'm pushing with everything. And conflict with kids is huge...every conflict gets lumped in with the bullying stuff. And it's not...It's not the conflict that matters, it's the response to it that matters. For me, it's about how you respond kindly...with some kindness...like go online and read a comment section of a (local newspaper) article. They're awful. So, if we can teach kids how to do better than that, we're one step up.

In addition to demonstrating kindness, David also believed that a safe and trusting environment helped to shape the culture of schools in a positive way. He stated how he felt that in addition to physical safety, it was imperative that teachers put more effort into ensuring that students feel a sense of academic safety so that they can feel safe answering and asking questions in class. He expanded on this notion:

There's academic, there's physical, and there's emotional, there's psychological...there's all those types of safety. But I think...if we get kids there...I think we have a better chance. And engaging students.

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According to David, the two most prominent factors in creating “a happy school” were safety (physical, social-emotional, and academic) and student engagement.

David believed that happy schools were essential and that they consisted of students being actively engaged but also encouraged to extend their learning by supportive educators. He defined joy as “happiness...the way that kids are involved in their school...it’s a meaningful challenge”. He expressed concern with the word “rigor” which he felt was being overused in current educational approaches and dialogue, stating:

I hate the word rigor. I don’t think that it’s great for our kids. Kids hear the word rigor and the they think it’s too hard-they can’t do it...but it’s a challenge that they can get past...they have to push themselves and they have to fail a little bit, and it’s OK to fail. They’re getting cheered on by their teacher, getting cheered on by their classmates if they make a mistake.

David drew a parallel to depict how a coach’s and a classroom teachers’ approach can be similar. He described how he tells kids there are two parts to having fun, differentiating them by “the goofy sort of playing around fun...and the working super hard, getting dirty, getting sweaty kind of work” fun. David felt passionately about how these two types of fun need to occur in classroom settings so that although students are working hard, they are also having fun and learning. He believes that learning from mistakes is an important part. David argued that education no longer has to be the way it was in the 1950’s where it was common to hate school or going to certain classes. As a principal, if he walks into a classroom where teachers are teaching in the same way that they themselves hated as a student, it does not make any sense. He asked rhetorically and passionately, “Why are you doing the same things that you hated...like why...then do

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that to your kids? Let's make this somewhat fun and enjoyable and then maybe, you might get a different result!"

A sense of efficacy was heightened for David when he assumed a new position as an administrator at Westgrove. He recalled how receiving such a volume of positive feedback from his students, their families, and his colleagues, in addition to being selected for this leadership position, had been so affirming to him. According to David, becoming more empowered can also be a result of a more concerted effort by administrators and schools to spread the many stories of success and celebrations into their communities, utilizing a variety of platforms, including social media.

**Chapter 6: A Narrative Account of Ellen: A Kind and Dedicated Teacher**

Ellen responded quickly to my research recruitment e-mail when I sent it out in February, 2018 as I began to conduct the second phase of my research on joy. We established Sunday, March 11, at 11:30 as our meeting time which would take place at the University of Manitoba campus. It was a beautiful, bright and sunny spring morning and the campus was relatively quiet, except for the lively banter among the several groups of adult students who were congregated in the same seating area as I had chosen to meet with my next two participants. I noticed Ellen standing by the entrance to the coffee shop and greeted her warmly, invited her to the seating area I had selected to begin our research conversation.

Ellen was a very proud mother of four children who were all now in their twenties. She explained that she had begun her teaching career later in her life, having stayed home to raise her family until her youngest child started kindergarten. Completing her post-secondary degree mainly through distance education at the University of Manitoba, Ellen said that while completing her teaching practicum, her husband then stayed home and ran their home business while taking care of their two youngest boys. Describing each of her children's current education status and occupations, Ellen remarked on how her entire life has been centered around family, friends, and community. She noted that because of their spacious house and acreage, she and her husband often hosted large gatherings and events with friends and members of the community. Ellen felt gratitude for being able to accommodate so many people in what she felt was a safe and welcoming space for everyone, especially youth.

Ellen believed that it was important for students to have strong mentors and role models. She reflected on how she had often been called upon by her teachers to mentor other students at a young age in elementary school and she discovered through these experiences that she was able

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to explain things clearly to other children. Ellen felt fortunate that she had important adult role models, in addition to her own large family investing in her life as she was growing up. Ellen explained this investment as one where “interested adults that were kind and obviously had a compassion for youth, in lots of different ways, relationships-emotionally, socially, spiritually”. She described how she herself wanted to be that kind of a person and decided to become a teacher because it would give her the opportunity to do the same thing for other kids. She went on to discuss how her “whole life has been centered around investing in kids” and that “it still is that way, even with my own children being grown up, (this sense of) investment as a teacher, not just a teacher in the school, but in the community” where she is involved with the provincial youth justice system. The positive feedback Ellen received from parents and students caused Ellen to develop a stronger sense of efficacy. She provided an example of how several of her previous students had selected her as their role model for a high school assignment on the person they long to be. When these assignments were shared with her, she had noticed that the students’ writing was “always centered around having had a sense of peace in her classroom, a sense of joy in learning...because joy in learning...like why are we doing this right?” Ellen had felt a deep sense of pride by this acknowledgement, especially when it was occurring so many years after she had been their teacher.

When Ellen first started teaching, her principal warned her that when you teach in a community, the community sometimes feels as though they own the teacher. She said that she was fine with this because having that sense of trust with parents means a lot to her, and it is something she personally values and respects, although it can be very difficult at times. She described some heartbreaking situations where she received a phone call about a child planning to commit suicide and a dad struggling in a new marriage with complex family dynamics and his

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relationships with his child. Despite feeling challenged by these pressures, Ellen stated that she feels “blessed with the opportunity to invest in those things”.

Strong relationships were imperative, according to Ellen, and were integral components of Ellen’s many highlights as an educator, since graduating almost twenty years ago. She giggled as she recalled one of these highlights, which occurred in the very first position she assumed. She explained how when she walked in to the school on the first day, another teacher warned her that she had no idea what she was getting herself into, referring to her large class size of thirty-two grade 2 students who were rather rambunctious. Ellen felt strongly that what these students really needed relationships, which was embedded her own philosophy of education. She stated passionately that when:

you have that relationship with the children, learning is so much better. If they know that your classroom, your space is like a second home to them...and for some of them unfortunately, it’s a first home for them. You are their home for them. And they learn so much better.

Due to the relationship building Ellen had fostered with these students, she recalled how her principal requested that she teach these same students half time when they were entering grade six. Ellen had cherished this experience and the opportunity to spend another year with this class. Upon their graduation from high school, Ellen stated proudly that she received so much positive feedback and recognition from them, and their caregivers, affirming her idea of a long-term investment in building strong relationships.

Maintaining and fostering important relationships with children, especially with current lifestyles, was also presented as a challenge for Ellen, both personally and in her experiences as

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an educator. She wanted to ensure that she was adequately invested in both her roles as an educator and as a parent to her own children. But she was concerned as well about the diminishing quality of relationships between her students and their caregivers due to family lifestyles. She lamented how she found it difficult:

Coming to the realization that unfortunately... too many parents want to give their children everything, and invest a lot of money into them, but not time. And I found that hard. I found that hard not to criticize. I had to come around to going OK...that's their way. It just makes the need more clear to me to support these kids emotionally, and socially, and all those ways that they realize they are important when they don't feel that way from home. Not because they are bad parents. Not because they're not giving them everything financially that they can give them.

Ellen expanded on this concern, explaining how she felt that children were enrolled in too many formalized and structured activities, which was resulting in them lacking a freedom of imagination and imaginative play. She wondered about the repercussion for children's lives when overly structured schedules "encompasses all of your formative years...what happens?" Ellen believed that having opportunities, such as being involved in team sports, can be beneficial, provided it allows children with some free time to explore things on their own.

Providing an example of a caring relationship she had cultivated with both the student and the parent, Ellen referenced an e-mail she had received from the parent, with a photo of her child attached. In the picture, the young boy was smiling with his arms wrapped tightly around his dog. She explained how the dog had been named in honor of his grandma who had recently died from a terminal illness. Ellen described how this little boy was experiencing many other

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additional challenges, both socially emotionally and academically, and that this sad event for their family further compounded his struggles. Ellen had been so moved by this parent's gesture, and she conveyed how receiving this e-mail had validated to her the power of caring relationships, especially during difficult times for students and their families. She stated that there was "such a connection...between caring-the kid knowing they're cared for and the kid being able to learn. Because stress is huge, right? I don't think a stressed kid can learn. They can't". Caring relationships were instrumental to Ellen and were deeply embedded into her philosophy of education.

Supporting students in such a way that they are engaged and open to challenging themselves academically and socially was important to Ellen. She believed that it was necessary for educators to "raise the bar higher" in many circumstances. She explained how she feels that at times:

The curriculum can expect so little and the bar be so low that the challenge for the child is non-existent. Then we're basically telling the child...you can't do this and therefore I'm not going to expect you to, rather than always offering opportunities to be exposed to those challenging educational ideas...be it in whatever their learning channel is...it might be math, and it might be art, or writing or speaking or whatever it is...to always be exposing them to something a little higher, a little deeper, a little...beyond where they are right now, but in a way that engages them.

Ellen felt that when teachers present learning opportunities in an engaging way that is not overly discouraging or overwhelming, students will want to become more involved in the life of school. She related this feeling to joy, stating that it is "finding satisfaction in what you are doing but

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still being challenged and encouraged to continue to explore”. According to Ellen, “joy was so much about the exploring,” and she was pleased that her own children had been given the freedom to explore their surroundings while growing up, resulting in a more joyful family life.

When provided with freedom to explore, Ellen believed that children will become more imaginative and creative. She related how she felt it was important for children to have opportunities to be express themselves creatively and in a variety of different ways. She recalled how she first became aware of the importance of providing children with more freedom to explore, when her youngest child had been selected to participate in a provincial survey many years ago to determine the impact of rural children having limited access to parks and organized sports. Ellen relayed how the questions posed to her child by the interviewer caused her to consider more critically the benefits that less structure and more freedom to explore can have on children’s development.

My children were building forts...we had a playground at home for them...they were driving quads and dirt bike when they were all young. They all had jobs. They had chores at home. It wasn’t a matter of...all free...all scheduled sports...like it was a home...they invested in our home. They invested in our space. They enjoyed the space...this was truly their space.

Ellen balked at the interviewer’s question about whether she felt her children suffered because of their rural life, claiming that she felt imposing too much structure and organized activities was stifling. Ellen expressed how providing ample opportunities for children to freely explore ideas was important to her as a teacher as well and that she followed this philosophy when designing learning experiences in and outside of her classroom. She said that each year, students in her class eagerly anticipate the annual field trip to her home and the nearby wetlands. Ellen

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explained that the joy for her with this approach is giving students the chance to be removed from the digital world which she feels narrows their world perspectives, rather than broadening it.

An increased reliance on technology and changing lifestyles, according to Ellen, has impeded the quality of conversations in families. She discussed the importance of these conversations, stating how she felt it was essential that children listen to oral stories. She lamented on how she felt that:

homes have become so much less hospitable because we do our socializing outside of our homes...so when do kids visit and hear adults telling stories? Their concepts, visuals, exposure...and their vocabulary broadens through that. That doesn't happen anymore. And so... kids need it at school, because it's not happening at home. So that joy, and truly exploring their world.

Ellen elaborated on this insight, commenting that students seem to lack a basic understanding of concepts in their lives because:

their world is essentially so tiny, and digitalization has not broadened it. It's narrowed it and made it smaller, and so... to me, that has decreased their joy. It's made them sullen and hurt their empathy. It's limited that. We have an empathy program in our school to actually teach empathy because it's lacking. And I think that that full roundedness in education, but not just academic education, brings joy because you're an important person, but you're not the most important person...none of us are.

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Ellen described the ways in which she tries to bring joy in to her classroom by teaching her students to be kind and to help others. She discussed how faith was one way in which she and her family found personal fulfillment and that there is a need for children to be exposed to ways in which to create joy in their life, other than just focusing on themselves and their needs or wants. Ellen provided an example of some of the challenges within her own community which she referred to as a “bedroom community”. Located in close proximity to a nearby city, “bedroom communities” are enticing to families due to the amenities they can provide with a lower cost of living than city suburbs. The other benefit is that, although they have to commute, parents can be employed in higher paying jobs in the city. Ellen explained how the town in which she currently lives was basically like living in two communities because it was comprised of people who had “invested their generational lives there, and then the people who move in, entrust their children to the community” but live separate lives from their children. It creates a disconnect because the children’s lives are based in the community but not the parents’ lives, and in many cases, some of the parents don’t even know their own neighbors. Ellen feels that this separation causes these parents to become “less joyful...because they don’t feel they belong...the stress heightens in the home” and that she strongly believes that “relationships bring joy. Knowing where you belong, knowing who you are, knowing what’s important...and that’s not necessarily finances”. She acknowledged that sometimes of course, a lack of finances can also cause added stress and decrease joy for families.

Ellen believed there to be a difference between fun and joy. She explained how she shares this distinction with her students, stating that “you can enjoy something that is hard work...I enjoy work...it’s not a burden... and it’s hard!” Providing an example of how she explicitly teaches her students about the importance of joy, Ellen described how at the beginning

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of the year, she asks her students to create a poster about themselves and to include a section which depicts someone they consider as their hero. Based on the criteria she established, it must be a person that the students actually know, and it must also be someone in their life who encourages them, challenges them and brings them joy. If a student chose their mom or a family member simply because they do things for them and/or buys them things, she probed them to select reasons that resonated with them at a much deeper emotional level by asking them, “what inside of you makes you feel a sense of comfort, belonging, or encouragement?” Through this assignment, Ellen prompts her students to reflect on these type of feelings, in addition to how they feel when they do kind acts for others. Her philosophy of education in her classroom is centered around:

being that other person’s “bucket filler,” because that gives you joy. When you’re filling someone else’s bucket, you’re building your own joy and it’s reciprocal...if my sense of who I am, my sense of belonging, my sense of ...self-awareness, is not really about me...but it’s about who I want to be in that journey that I’m on, then it’s so easy to deal with people.

Ellen provided an example of how this philosophy has the potential to strengthen her students and their classroom community because when someone says something mean to another person, they are less likely to be hurt or offended. She described how her message to her students in this scenario was to offer grace to that person, because although people have different views and perspectives, it does not mean that they are accurate or true. Ellen felt that educators need to help students to work their ways through conflict and to embrace differences of opinions. She felt strongly that inclusive classrooms enrich students by providing opportunities for honoring and

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celebrating differences with the various challenges children experience in school, whether it be physical, cognitive or social emotional.

Providing students and parents with a toolbox of strategies to navigate successfully through the social and emotional aspects of their lives was important to Ellen. Teaching curriculum outcomes were important, but she felt it was not sufficient, especially when these young children were going to be “running the world” when they grew up. Ellen also shared some examples of how she placed pressure of some of her students’ parents who she had noticed were often backing out of promises they were making to their children such as attending school events and field trips. Acknowledging that these challenges were very difficult for her as an educator, Ellen admitted that she also found these experiences to be frustrating and heartbreaking at times. A strategy she employed to be proactive in this regard was to address this ongoing issue right at the beginning of the year. Ellen stated that at the fall “Meet the Teacher Night,” she boldly admonishes her students’ parents and caregivers, cautioning them before she dispenses her maternal words of wisdom. She advises them to “love your kid. Hug them before they go to school in the morning, spend time with them, and if you do your job, I can do my job”. Giggling as she recalled how many of the parents laugh nervously at the event when she speaks to them this way, she emphasizes the importance of their role as parents in helping her to support the children in all aspects of their lives, not just with academics.

Ellen admitted that she herself does not feel joyful as an educator when the other components of human flourishing are not interconnected with academics. Developing this shared commitment and a deep sense of trust with parents was essential to Ellen. She expanded on this by relaying how when she started teaching, her principal had warned her that often times, small communities “feel like they own” the teacher and have high expectations for their involvement

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community life. Ellen had not been concerned by this level of expectation from parents as although the pressure could be intense at times, she greatly valued and respected this sentiment. Providing an example of heartbreaking situation, Ellen told a story about once receiving a phone call on the weekend from a parent who was worried about their child planning to commit suicide. Despite the emotional toll and pressure, Ellen stated that she felt “blessed with the opportunity to invest in those things” because for her, she was dedicated to helping children flourish and be joyful in all aspects of their life.

**Chapter 7: A Narrative Account of Jake: A Compassionate and Insightful Teacher**

Jake was my fourth and final participant, having replied promptly to my recruitment e-mail in February 2018. After I had checked my recordings, organized my papers, and jotted down a few notes and observations in my research journal from Ellen's research conversation, I scanned the seating area and observed a male sitting alone in one of the comfortable chairs. As I approached him, Jake immediately stood up to greet me. We settled into the armchairs quickly and Jake noted that how we were positioned would work well for him due to his hearing impairment.

Jake was very passionate and committed to his career as an educator. His love for sports and the strong influence of his physical education teacher had been the reason he had decided to pursue his teaching degree, as he had dreams of also becoming a gym teacher and a coach. He explained that as a student, school had always been a very "up and down" experience for him, and he either really liked school or had a very hard time with it. Jake professed his deep love for sports, acknowledging that he was a self-proclaimed "sports junkie". Referring to himself as having been a "gym rat," Jake stated how he had tried out for every sports team possible while in school. His favorite teacher had been his social studies and physical education teacher who had mentored and supported Jake in sports. He had appreciated this teacher's calm and casual approach and how he had inspired Jake to love all kinds of sports, including volleyball and basketball. Jake smiled gently when he admitted that due to his naivety and mindset at the time, his prevailing thoughts were that it would be "pretty great to get paid to be involved with all of these sports and also get two months off in the summer". When he shared his decision with his father, a retired principal, Jake recalled his father cautioning him that although he would be "comfortable financially" and likely always have a steady job, he would never become wealthy.

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Jake considered his advice and decided that “comfortable” was fine with him, especially when he would be getting paid to “hang out” in the gym. Jake ended up enrolling at the University of Manitoba temporarily in the Faculty of Education, planning to transfer into physical education, but he never did. Jake said he was very pleased with how this scenario played out because he was fortunate enough to teach some gym classes and coach various teams throughout the years, and therefore, he felt that his dream was realized. He laughed when he declared that “in a sense I have fulfilled that dream of being paid to play!” Jake’s passion for sports, in addition to his mentorship by his gym teacher, had been impactful in both his personal and professional life.

Expanding on these important elements in Jake’s life, he discussed how his biggest celebrations in his over thirty years as an educator, were always centered around coaching and the relationships he had built in this role. He highlighted a special coaching experience in his first position at Brightson Collegiate where he anticipated that the group of boys on his volleyball team were going to have a phenomenal year. He explained that he had actively recruited these grade nine students, seeking out excellent hockey players especially, as he believed them to be the best athletes. He told the story of how this team “basically wiped out all of the other teams in Prairie Lake School Division,” having no teams that were viable opponents. Jake entered this same team into every volleyball tournament in the city which had the most competitive teams due to their population density, and throughout the province, and they still kept winning. He then made the decision to enter this team into a junior varsity grade ten and eleven tournament to challenge them, and the boys were all really scared, especially because they were not only older and more experienced, but they were a lot bigger physically. Jake proudly recalled that he pulled the players off to the side during the game and reminded them that they weren’t in a back alley fighting with these bigger guys but playing a sport in which they all

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excelled. He shared how this coaching relationship was so important and so strong that even now, when he meets these students, decades after this team existed, that he feels a sense of joy in this shared experience. Jake talked about this joy:

It happens to me all the time now. I've literally taught thousands of kids. Now their kids are in my class. It's just the whole circle of life. It's been such a joy even to age in this business and to see the kids that I taught flourish and become doctors, and lawyers, and teachers...and then to see their kids come in to my classes. Just to have that kind of feedback is just so rewarding.

I shared with Jake how his experience had really resonated with my own experiences, especially as I had remained in the same school division throughout my entire career and Jake and I were the same age.

Establishing a strong sense of identity while honoring the importance of diversity and social justice was important to Jake. In his role as counsellor, Jake discussed how he strived to help other teachers connect with their students and encouraged them to “build bridges” by establishing strong relationships, rather than focusing only on teaching specific lessons. He emphasized how when teachers invest time in getting to know their students and their interests, instead of only focusing on the curriculum, students will be far more invested in their learning, and work much harder because they feel this bond. He admitted that in his leadership role as a counsellor, he often finds it challenging to get some teachers, regardless of the grade level, to adopt a more holistic approach to teaching their students. Jake described how he feels a sense of despair when he observes classrooms where students are sitting in rows of desks, and the work in which they are immersed consists primarily of rote recall and worksheets. Jake added that he has

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the utmost respect for his colleagues, and that he works diligently to engage in conversations with them in order to keep the educational dialogue open, honest, and respectful.

Playing games and having fun together was one strategy that had been successful for creating this culture. For example, Jake shared how he felt it was important to “make a big deal out of celebrating everyone’s birthday” and how in his classroom, they would organize a monthly party where they danced, sang a silly birthday song, and brought snacks to share. Another fun activity that was a success for him as a classroom teacher was a daily class trivia game which had questions about some “silly facts,” but also consisted of content questions based on curricular outcomes. Jake was very proud of this initiative because of the excitement it generated while also enhancing the relationships within the class. He explained how he would allot a huge number of points for certain questions, regardless of their difficulty, and he laughed at how much the students enjoyed when he did this. His favorite part was how he individualized the questions to ensure that every student in his class had an opportunity to provide a correct answer, especially those who were rarely picked or who were not academically strong, and then were able to earn these inflated points for their team. This was a fun and special way for Jake to cultivate an inclusive, respectful, and joyful culture.

Telling stories was a strategy Jake employed joyfully and successfully when fostering relationships with his students. He believed that children love stories and are keenly interested in hearing stories about their teachers outside of their educator role. As a young child, Jake had felt privileged to live in the rainforest in South America with his family for four years when his dad had been teaching there. During this time, Jake had a pet monkey named Charlie who had been a big part of his life during this special time. Charlie became the main character in the stories Jake began to tell his students when first embarking on his teaching career and since then, Jake has

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been sharing these adventure stories with his students over the course of his entire career, including in his current position as a guidance teacher. At this point in our conversation, Jake reached over and carefully lifted up a handcrafted, stuffed monkey he had placed earlier on the table beside us. Holding it tenderly, Jake explained proudly how one of his students had sewn this monkey for him many years ago in their sewing class at school. Charlie, the monkey, was kept in Jake's office with him, and accompanied him on classroom visits at times. For example, Jake had recently been invited to tell stories at a grade seven class party. Jake marveled at how quiet and engaged the students were during these storytelling sessions based on his actual life experiences and sprinkled with the silliness and fun of Charlie's presence, these stories of his youth helped to enhance his relationships with these students.

Jake had developed a strong sense of efficacy and provided an example of how some principals had recognized this by asking him to assume various leadership roles. In addition to his deep love for children, Jake reflected on how he was able to connect more easily with students with complex needs. He referenced a specific alternative education program which he had been asked to pilot in his division, designed to address the issues they were having with students who seemed to hate school, were violent, non-compliant, and disengaged. Jake referred to this group of students as "the volatile, the broken, and the lost". He recalled how that September, his principal had assigned only ten students to his class because of the scope of their intense challenges. Jake laughed at how he had welcomed this professional challenge and how he actually greatly enjoyed it, stating that the class size grew from 10 to 35 students before the school year was over. He discussed how he had made sure that there was always a chair and a place for each child in the classroom so that they knew that they belonged and how important they were to him. Jake talked about how it was essential that regardless of some of the negative

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behaviors students may exhibit, he strived to show them on a daily basis how much he cared for them and wanted them to be in his room. Jake's sense of efficacy was so compelling that he had felt gifted. His voice softened, and his eyes looked downward as he said in a soft, gentle whisper, "I don't take this lightly...to love kids with no strings attached. I will love you and even if you tell me to f-off". Jake eloquently recited a quote he loved by J. Wilbur Chapman: "Look for strength in people, not weakness. For good, not evil. Most of us find what we search for". Jake believed that this feeling he had for students and their wellbeing emanated from him in such a way that his students were aware of how he was searching for their strengths and for the goodness within them, which enriched his relationships with them and with their peers.

Alluding to a deep sense of efficacy, Jake expanded on how as an educator, even with the most challenging students in front of him, he seeks to discover something strong and unique about each one of his students. Jake explained how he used what he learns about his students, including their interests and passions, as leverage to help them to be successful at school, socially and academically. He stated emphatically; "I will do it. That's my challenge, right? I'm not afraid to do that and I actually like doing it," acknowledging that in some cases it may take him until June until he is able to establish a strong relationship with some of his students. Jake then shared another profound quote, by Mother Teresa; "joy is strength". I was surprised that I had not come across these beautiful, eloquent words in my research on joy. Jake repeated the quote slowly and then inserted his own sentiments, "like in the midst of all this wrath?" with a hint of optimism and hope in his voice. He then expanded on this notion, commenting how he feels that despite the "sadness, and dirt, and sorrow and poverty, and wretchedness" that exists in the lives of some of his students and their families, hope and joy will prevail. Referencing a popular reality television show about gold mining, Jake drew an analogy to how mining for gold

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depicted the way in which he strived to help his students, particularly those with complex needs, saying passionately:

That's something I always have in my head...is dig for gold...like what do you see? Like you see mountains and mountains and mountains of dirt. And they're (the students) digging in dirt...that's all you see is dirt. What are they looking for? Little nuggets of gold. And that's how I see kids, right? Yeah, we can see what we see on the surface...sometimes they're even dirty because they come from poverty right. Sometimes they have a foul mouth, sometimes they just don't want to listen, sometimes they don't want to do the assignment. Dig for gold...There's way too much dirt. We can see the dirt...we can always find the dirt.

Jake completed this metaphor, stating how children are precious and valuable (like gold), and miners (like educators) are always searching for these gold nuggets, (their strengths and interests). He believed that it is our role as educators to find these valuable nuggets in students.

Another challenge that students with complex needs especially faced was dealing with feelings of shame, according to Jake, referencing another scholar's work, Berne Brown's (2010) research on this topic. He explained how dealing with issues of shame had negatively impacted many of his students and their abilities to flourish. Jake discussed that Brown argues that there are three manifestations of shame which consist of being defiant, withdrawn, or a people pleaser. The first manifestation, defiance, occurs when a student attempts to build a protective wall or barrier between him/herself and other people, and are not open to displaying their emotions or developing relationships with other. It can also present in such a way that the student portrays an aggressive, "rough and tough" demeanor, while behind this wall exists a lot of shame. He talked

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about how shame could also result in students not wanting to be noticed because they feel that life will be easier and safer for them if they are invisible. Another manifestation of shame, according to his explanation of Brown, was to become a people pleaser where students will focus on trying to please others to make themselves feel valued and to become visible to others. Jake reflected on how Brown's research work aligns closely with his own philosophy about education, especially in regards to how to help students with this heavy burden, claiming that the bridge to help these students, in Brown's words, is "joy and gratitude".

Jake expanded on the idea of gratitude, and its importance in helping students overcome their hardships. He referred to his experiences in the past when he was living in impoverished countries, explaining that:

the most generous people and the most joyful people, are the people who have almost nothing. I've seen it. I've lived it. So I believe that that is true. Why is a person that has rags on them, eating water, with one noodle in it, not ashamed for me to come into their home and share (their food), and sit down on the floor? It's that joy and gratitude. And the smile beaming on their face and the honor that they have shown me. It humbles me.

Jake revealed how having a sense of joy and gratitude has profoundly impacted him as an educator and that even though his role is that of a teacher, he learns just as much from his students on a daily basis. As a counsellor, he reflected on this, explaining how his students:

teach me stuff. I'm humbled by them and when they rise above their fears, and they're resilient beyond belief...it just so empowers me and so it teaches me...and

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so if I'm having a bad day, and I'm having a sad day, I'm like...Oh my goodness, you just filled me...my little friend.

Jake provided an example of a challenging time in his personal and professional life which had caused him deep pain. He experienced a significant loss in his hearing which was the reason he had to step away from being a classroom teacher to become a full-time school counsellor. When this happened to him, Jake connected what was happening with his job transition to an assignment he generated for his last class of grade 8 students. He asked his students to write about something personal that was negatively affecting them, but to be sure that they chose something that was deeply important to them. He proudly shared how a student in his room, who had been physically and emotionally challenged, and often the target of bullying, had gone in front of the class to present, as was the expectation, and had blown "the entire class out of the water because he talked about being bullied and about his story...he was so vulnerable...". This story had been a highlight for Jake because he said the whole class had given this boy a standing ovation and that it had positively impacted everyone, including the culture of the class. Jake expressed how this how this celebration "filled me full of just joy...and joy I believe, it's not just how happy...it's, I'm so proud of you...you even have tears well up in your eyes. That's part of joy right...being proud of somebody or that kind of stuff". Jake explained how he had utilized some sad and challenging experiences in his life and in those of his students to develop empathy and trust. Cultivating a safe and caring environment, where students felt comfortable sharing their problems and were able to be vulnerable, fostered an inclusive and more joyful class culture.

Mentoring and helping others was instrumental in empowering his students. Self-pity and feeling sorry for oneself was not productive channeling these negative feelings towards helping others was the key to living a more joyful life. He explained how he designed opportunities for

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students to mentor both older and younger children and how powerful this cross-age experience is for all involved. Jake believed that “joy has many faces. I can be sad but still full of joy...you can go through all your angst, and all your pain, but you’re always going to go back to joy. Joy is strength”. After pausing he added “and gratitude”. To illustrate how gratitude was embedded in this sense of empowerment, Jake embarked on another story to convey how he strived diligently to empower his students. He stated eloquently that “the bridge before shame was joy and gratitude”. Jake referred to a sad and serious incident that had occurred in his life the previous summer and how had had been concerned that he might have a setback because of his past and his ongoing issues with depression. He spoke about how for a sustained period in his life, he had been unable to circumvent feelings of anger and negativity. He explained how people fighting addictions are often trying to avoid feeling any emotion in order to protect themselves from experiencing further pain. Jake shared that he had been employing several coping strategies and during this tumultuous time, he had made a pact to himself. As a new year’s resolution, Jake had committed to daily jotting down on a piece of paper something he is grateful for place it in a gratitude jar.

Remarking on how he felt that he “had a heart for the lost,” Jake told another story which was associated with his gratitude entry the previous day. His gratitude note had expressed how proud he was of Ben, his foster son, for thoughtfully and respectfully replacing a frying pan that he had accidentally broken the week before. Ben was twenty-one years old and had been released from the foster care system because of his age. He had come to Jake’s hometown with his new girlfriend, who was the daughter of one of Jake’s friends, and he did not have a place to live. Ben had been abandoned by his mother when he was only eight years old, having had no contact with his father. After about three months of having Ben stay with him in his home, Jake announced to

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Ben that he could not be his friend anymore. Ben looked shocked but then became overjoyed when Jake laughed lovingly, and proclaimed, “I’m going to be your dad!” Jake had been previously married and had proudly shared that in addition to Ben, he also had two grown up children.

Jake believed strongly that classrooms should operate as though they were a family. He shared how, each September, as a classroom teacher, he would proclaim, “I’m the dad...whether you like it or not, even if you’re not happy with your dad, it’s still your dad, I’m in charge here. I run the ship!” Explaining how as a dad he would love and support them, he also added that their classmates should be considered as brothers and sisters. Their relationship with their siblings might be strained at times when they were not getting along, he continued, but just like a family, they would all still “have each other’s backs” and love one another. I wondered if some of his students felt resentful of this approach, especially if they were angry at their parents or had been abandoned or neglected. Jake responded that this issue did in fact occur regularly. Based on Jake’s experiences, especially as a counsellor, despite many fathers not living up to the ideal expectations of the child (or society), all of his students still had a deep, longing for a father. Jake stated that he feels there exists a current epidemic, one that he refers to as a “fatherless generation”. Providing an example, he told the story of a 14-year old boy who had who had “put up walls this thick, washing the floor with his tears”. Jake’s voice changed to a low whisper, as he assumed the character of the student pleading with him as he wept in his counsellor’s office, recalling his tender words; “Mr. Blass, who’s going to teach me to be good? I don’t have a dad. Will you teach me to be good, Mr. Blass? I’m so bad”. I reflected on how, as a principal, counselling was a big part of my role, and that when there are families struggling, it is important to me that I talk to them about the love families have for each other, especially between parents

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and children, especially in situations where the family is not living together and necessarily active in their child's life, for whatever reason.

Mental health and social emotional wellbeing presented the biggest challenges for Jake. He explained how throughout the years as an educator, he had encountered so many issues with students and their families, and how it remains an ongoing concern. Jake felt that for him, these challenges entailed:

reaching a child that just does not want to be anywhere near school...just has a real heaviness about them, and I know there's always something more behind it. Just to find a kid that seems so lost, and so challenged and to try to get that student to flourish, not necessarily academically but just as a person, to find some value in themselves because what I've found over the years is that children come in so young, to our classrooms, so broken...hurting and so full you know...hidden illnesses that we don't see.

He elaborated on these concerns, stating that mental illnesses such as depression, anxiety, and phobias present to some educators as misbehaviors. Jake reflected that with his accumulation of experience, he now can now more easily recognize these illnesses in his students. Jake shared how he had challenged himself his whole career to never view a child as a "bad kid" and proudly stated that he had not sent any students to the office for close to fifteen years, not because they have not misbehaved, but because he instead strives to demonstrate to his students how much he believes in them and values their contributions. Jake was proud of this accomplishment and continual daily challenge, which was an aspect he loved about being a teacher.

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Wellbeing for educators was essential according to Jake. Acknowledging his own significant personal struggles, Jake stated in a gentle, low voice that he had been like one of the youth he had referred to earlier with severe social emotional challenges. He offered, “Oh, that’s who I am...I can’t be anything else. I can’t be...I am one of those broken children...I have risen out of the ashes...I should be dead four times over”. Jake added that he had struggled emotionally as a young teenager and throughout his university years as well from the pain and anguish of having been a victim of abuse. He described slowly how this period had been “the worst time imaginable....and years and years...and how it led to drug and alcohol addiction and all that kind of stuff”. Jake stated that having “hit rock bottom,” he “really fought and clawed...at least for probably seven years” and that he had worked desperately hard to do whatever it took to get better. He described himself as “a survivor...” who had “taken on all my brokenness and...just flipped it on its head”. Despite his diminished state of wellbeing, Jake was able to graduate from high school obtain his university degree because he believed that he was resilient and “smart”. He recalled how he had been fortunate that concepts came easily to him and he therefore never had to study. Jake also credited his parents and revealed that they were not the source of his problems during these tough years. I felt so humbled to be a part of this powerful conversation with Jake, but I hesitated to delve more deeply in to this topic, as it seemed so sensitive and raw. I wanted to respect his privacy as he did not elaborate further, admitting that this was a part of his life story that he does not share with his students.

Maintaining a state of wellbeing was essential, especially for educators who are trying to help their students, according to Jake. He believed that self-care was important, and he provided an example of how he relied on his network of friends, including his mentor to replenish his social emotional needs. Allocating time to “just have fun” with important people in your life

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were critical pieces in maintaining a healthy state of wellbeing, as well as gratitude and joy, which he had mentioned earlier in our conversation. Jake emphasized that there was “not a day, not a single day, that I don’t find joy in my life...and that’s probably why I’m so resilient...because...like I’ve lived under a bridge...you know...warming my hands on a barrel...this is actually a pretty good day”. He acknowledged that although his struggles were relentless and still presented obstacles for him, having experienced these setbacks provided him with strong insight in helping his students, their parents, and other people in his community get their own lives back on track. Jake commented on how having gone through this healing process, combined with the love he has for his students, he knows what to do “when kids are broken and adults are broken”. He laughed when he added that “people love me...to get me to this point...it took some very special people to love this guy!” He explained that he is easily able to sense when people have built walls to protect their feelings, projecting anger and rage towards others, but that it often stems from this deep, sensitive place inside them where there exists so much fear and hurt.

Towards the end of our conversation, Jake revealed a brown leather bracelet with a silver band from beneath his shirt cuff. Inscribed on the plate was the word hope. As he showed it to me, he commented softly, “I think you always have to hope...right...anchor yourself with hope. I always have hope”. He again referenced the hopeless feelings he had talked about previously, providing an example of the young student who was crying in his office about his dad. As educators, we have to “plug in some hope...let’s plug it right now, today...and it’s crap, it sucks...let’s find some hope”. Jake had purchased the bracelet for himself to signify this important notion, and how he was always challenging himself to instill a sense of hope in his own and other’s lives.

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The following chapters will unpack the four narrative accounts that have been shared by Robert, David, Ellen and Jake to distill their insights and perspectives on teaching and leading with joy. These four poignant narrative accounts reveal the complexities inherent in education and illuminate the profound impact that joy can have in education and society as a whole. Acknowledging the social emotional aspects of education as foundational components in education will help to foster optimum conditions for students to live a high quality of life and a hopeful future. In chapter nine, I will also convey how these narratives have been impactful to me as a researcher and as a school principal.

### Chapter 8: Teaching and Leading with Joy: Key Narrative Threads

Teaching and leading with joy ensures that students will be provided with the optimal conditions to flourish in all aspects of their life. Joyful schools also have the potential to positively impact society as a whole, as joyful educators and leaders not only shape the culture that exists for students and teachers, but also for parents, families, and the community. In my final chapter, I share my interpretations while unpacking the narratives of Robert, David, Ellen, and Jake. Based on their educational roles and experiences, I will explore both the individual and shared perspectives of Robert and David as principals, and Ellen and Jake as teachers. As I consider the resonant threads that have been prominent in the field texts, I will illuminate some of the qualities in joyful schools that might be integral to teaching and leading.

The significant themes that emerged from this narrative inquiry were *wellbeing*, for students and educators; *caring ethics*, including students and educators; *relationships*, particularly in the contexts of a family and sports team unit; *social justice*, where all students experience an equitable and respectful school experience; and *efficacy*, particularly in the role as an educator. It became evident in the four narrative accounts I have constructed, that the same factors that are critical for students to flourish are also beneficial for educators. In optimum conditions, there is a reciprocity which gains momentum and enhances the qualities inherent in joyful schools. In other words, when educators are thriving, they are better able to cultivate a learning culture in which their students will also thrive. Prior to embarking on my research, I had believed it to be essential for educators to focus on student engagement to enhance the quality of students' learning experiences. I had become intrigued by the notion of other types of engagement presented by Dunleavy and Milton (2010), such as intellectual and social engagement. I began to wonder if an alignment of these three types of engagement should be an

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ultimate goal in education. Based on my findings, it seemed apparent that although an alignment of all three is ideal, social engagement supersedes academic and intellectual engagement. In fact, all of the resonant themes in my narrative accounts are related to social engagement. Intellectual and academic engagement without social engagement is simply not sufficient as they lack the moral and humanistic components we need to flourish as a society. Unlike my contention earlier that knowledge building is not linear, but rather is acquired in layers of understanding and ways of knowing, I believe that these three forms of engagement are in fact hierarchical, as social engagement must be prioritized. This notion brings us back to the opening quote by Dewey (1928), that at the risk of “losing our souls,” becoming educated must also entail the encompassing qualities of human flourishing, goodness, and joy.

I will provide an overview of each theme and then present how they are woven through the stories of my participants'. Infusing my own personal experiences and insights, I will illustrate how these experiences and insights fostered joyful teaching and leading experiences beyond that of joyful people being joyful. I will also include experiences of celebrations, disillusionment, and some obstacles that may exist in my participants' attempts to seek, create and nurture joyful schools and schooling experiences. Each of the narratives were unique and highlighted inherently complex and interwoven themes. Attempts to extract themes in isolation seem to minimize the depth and intricacy of each phenomenon. However, I believe it is extremely beneficial to consider these research findings and the ways in which they overlap, influence one another and can be reciprocal to consider ways in which we can enhance leading and teaching. My hope is to generate increased educational discourse which will create possibilities for more joyful schools.

**Overview of Themes**

The *wellbeing* of students is essential and until they are thriving socially and emotionally, students are not able to be open to learning and to interact successfully with others. The quality of experiences in all aspects of one's life is severely diminished without *wellbeing*, and they may become less able to make positive contributions to the world in which we live. It is imperative that educators must also have a high level of *wellbeing* to be impactful and to foster joyful school environments. *Caring ethics* ensure that all individuals feel loved and valued, and that these sentiments are expressed consistently both in words and in actions. Strong *relationships* develop when students and educators have a positive state of *wellbeing* and are the recipients of kind and *caring* actions. *Relationship* bonds that simulate that of a family or a team, where the educator or leader assumes the role of a parent and a coach respectfully, emerged as a powerful catalyst for fostering optimum joyful learning conditions from my participants' perspectives. This same relationship dynamic was also important for educators in their existing school and division. In addition to the mentoring and *caring* aspects of these *relationships*, the element of belonging was influential. Overlapping with these themes, *social justice* was also prevalent as educators sought to provide respectful teaching and learning environments in which equity, inclusion, and diversity was central. Lastly, the experiences and insights shared by the participants revealed that having a sense of efficacy was impactful and was instrumental in helping students also develop efficacy. When educators believe in their students and their abilities to be successful, as well as their own impact to make this happen, educators and students are able to thrive. Consideration to all of these aspects; *wellbeing*, *caring ethics*, *relationships*, *social justice*, and *efficacy* comprised both celebrations and challenges for my participants but were identified as being prominent qualities in joyful schools.

**Wellbeing**

I expected that my findings would reveal that wellbeing was an important factor in joyful schools. What I discovered however, was that the prevalence of wellbeing was foundational and pervasive throughout my participants' lengthy careers and past experiences, factoring in both their personal and professional lives. A lack of wellbeing seemed to occur in school settings when educational priorities were too focused on a narrow, prescriptive curriculum and at the expense of the other important components of education of the research themes; specifically, caring ethics, strong relationships, and social justice. More traditional education approaches, where efforts to achieve excellence is solely based on seeking compliance, conformity, competition, ranking, and the acquisition of high marks, exacerbates and perpetuates the very negative conditions in students' lives which may be part of the cause of their disengagement, apathy, or negative behavior.

**Students' Wellbeing. *Flexible, engaging, and compassionate learning environments.***

Incorporating elements similar to those of alternative or off-campus courses into mainstream school settings was deemed to be a successful strategy in fostering joyful schools where all students were able to be successful both academically and social emotionally. Some of these elements included utilizing and accessing more flexible and comfortable learning spaces such as conducting the graduation walk practice on the actual stage. Participants explained that this included an amplification on building trusting and caring relationships where students' social emotional challenges seemed to be more at the forefront of the class' daily agenda, rather than being only focused on academics. Robert, David, and Jake had taught in and organized alternative educational settings to address issues of mental health and wellbeing of students. Profiling these experiences as highlights in their career, they discussed how they had also strived

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to incorporate components of these environments into their roles as educators. For example, David attributed some of challenges that students faced, such as anxiety, domestic violence, and bullying, to disengagement, negative behavior and attendance issues. He noted that these negative behaviors were often prevalent in students experiencing lower socio-economic situations. David felt strongly that some of the anti-bully initiatives being promoted in schools to improve wellbeing tended to sensationalize the issue and exacerbate conflict rather than dealing with underlying causes such as a lack of kindness and empathy, especially in some home and school environments.

All four participants discussed how a single focus on academics can actually negatively impact students' abilities to flourish in all aspects of their lives, as it neglects other mitigating factors such as social emotional health and wellbeing. For example, David argued that becoming educated no longer has to be viewed in the way it was in the past, where hating school or going to certain classes was common for many students. He discussed how he felt frustrated and disillusioned as a principal if he walks into classrooms where teachers are teaching in the same way that they themselves hated as a student. He asked rhetorically and passionately, "Why are you doing the same things that you hated...like why....and then do that to your kids? Let's make this somewhat fun and enjoyable and then maybe, you might get a different result!" This stifling environment where students are expected to remain quietly in their desks, day after day, copying down notes, completing worksheets, and memorizing surface content, rather than delving into the big ideas of the curricular outcomes, is detrimental to students because it fails to ignite curiosity, wonder, and passion. Although some paper and pencil tasks are beneficial to learning in small chunks, students also need opportunities to explore, to engage in conversations, and have different modalities of learning incorporated into these sequences.

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All of my participants shared stories of ways in which they incorporated students' interests into the curriculum and employed strategies to actively engage them in fun and meaningful activities. Striving to make authentic connections to their life and to the curricular objectives especially benefits the most vulnerable students who may have developed coping mechanisms which present as negative, undesirable behaviors. But incorporating more meaningful and engaging learning activities is also beneficial to those students who are driven only by compliance, conformity, and the pursuit of high marks. It seems evident that when the social emotional wellbeing of students and educators is compromised or diminished, the full potential of their capabilities in all aspects cannot be realized. Challenges such as bullying, violence, disengagement, and apathy often present themselves in these circumstances creating further obstacles for learning.

I found it interesting that three of my participants had taught in alternative school settings. If only some students and select groups of students appear to be thriving in current school settings, careful consideration must be given so that the obstacles or barriers are dismantled. For example, Ellen and Jake discussed how a lack of strong relationships or being removed from class due to negative behaviors were significant issues, and David referred to a lack of engaging and relevant learning environments as being detrimental. As all participants discussed, there are a variety of reasons for students not being compliant in classrooms that are not engaging, ranging from a lack of relationship with the teacher, class culture, struggles in their home lives, and being forced to complete schoolwork that is not stimulating, relevant, or explained in such a way that they can be successful. Those students who appear to be flourishing will also benefit from more engaging and less compliant learning conditions. Ellen felt that students lacked opportunities to play, explore and be imaginative in their home life and felt that

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it was critical to embed these important foundational skills into our school settings. Jake, David, and Robert all discussed the importance of bringing more joy and fun into the classroom by playing games, telling stories, and providing opportunities for students to share their interests and passions with others. Evoking individual interests and passions in safe and trusting learning environment, similar to what is espoused in alternative learning settings, should be integral pieces in all classrooms, according to my research findings.

Greene (1978) felt that alternative schools “have not provided the safety valves some people expected, because, in fact, the malaise and the sense of insufficiency are linked to tendencies in the society at large” (p. 108). Although alternative schools often achieve their main goals of improving attendance and graduation rates, their very existence may perpetuate some of the root causes in society. Removing vulnerable students from our classrooms and schools, poses a risk of affirming to those students and society at large that these students in fact do not belong with mainstream society. Schools need to be places that embrace diversity. Everyone benefits from this mindset, even the students that are deemed to be successful. Every individual has strengths and unique gifts to contribute, and it is our duty as educators to strive to find these strengths, while redirecting, reteaching, and supporting. Perhaps the allocation of funds for alternative schools could be redirected to provide increased supports with student services to ensure sufficient resources are available for integral programming such as professional development and training, mentors/educational assistants, counselling and resource materials. Also, developing school programs which extend more supports to families in crisis to enhance school and home relationships is a key factor in student success and joyful schools. I believe we must delve more deeply into exploring the ways in which we can augment these resources for students, families, and educators in order to foster joyful teaching and leading.

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*Considering lifestyles and societal influences.* Family lifestyles influence students' and educators' sense of wellbeing. Ellen felt that an overly structured, hectic family lifestyle and a focus on the accumulation of monetary possessions were detrimental to students. Enrolling children into a plethora of organized sports and activities; buying them countless toys, gadgets, designer clothing and personal possessions, she believes, does not enhance the quality of students' lives and in fact, may be one of the causes of a reduced state of wellbeing. Ellen felt that some parents and caregivers were choosing to give their children every monetary item and opportunity that they can afford, but then are neglecting to spend quality time together as a family. Ellen tried to refrain from being too critical or judgmental of parents, stating that instead this observation reinforced for her the importance of supporting her students emotionally and socially. She acknowledged that a lack of monetary resources can also cause stress and "take away joy," but felt that a societal fixation with consumerism and the acquisition of material possessions was causing unnecessary stress.

Citing "bedroom communities" as an example of how families are becoming more disconnected, Ellen has observed how some parents/caregivers are experiencing heightened stress and a decreased sense of well-being due to working outside of their communities and away from where their own children are growing up. In these circumstances, Ellen felt that "parents become less joyful because they don't feel that they belong, and the stress heightens in the home". Although it is beneficial to provide children with a plethora of experiences and opportunities, it is equally important to ensure that they have ample time to be involved in unstructured, informal, imaginative play. If children and adults, like teachers, overschedule and impose too much structure into their day, the quality of their life is diminished as the focus is too task oriented, leaving little time to reflect and be mindful of the activity in which they are

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engaged. Finding a balance between structured and unstructured tasks will lead to a more joyful existence.

Jake referred to a mental health crisis which he felt was of epidemic proportions in today's society, called "fatherless generation". He explained how, as a result of fragmented family units, he has noticed that many of his students are experiencing significant emotional issues with a lack of a father and/or father figure in their lives and that this "deep longing for a father" is negatively impacting the quality of students' lives. Jake also discussed how, in his current position as guidance counsellor, it is especially important to connect with his students that have "a real heaviness about them" and who seem "so lost". Jake has noticed over the years that "children come in [to our classrooms] so young, so broken and hurting, and so full of hidden illnesses that we don't see". He discussed how with his acquired experience and training, he has realized that these mental illnesses such as depression, anxiety, and fears present as misbehavior in many students, and that he has challenged himself as an educator to "never see a kid as being a bad kid," striving continuously to find value in the child, and help them to see that they matter, that they are special, and that they are loved.

**Educators' Wellbeing.** A high level of wellbeing is crucial for educators as well. While it was presented as a critical component in education for students, it also posed as a significant challenge for all four participants in circumstances when a state of wellbeing was believed to be compromised in their own lives. All four participants expressed having had challenges with mental health and wellbeing throughout their careers, not just due to current societal issues. I had expected that issues such as addictions to technology devices and social media, a breakdown in family units, a focus on consumerism and monetary acquisitions, and hectic, overly structured schedules, would figure prominently in their challenges and obstacles. These societal concerns

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have been at the forefront of both media and educational discourse in recent years, propelling a huge wellness industry to combat the self-imposed diminished quality of lives that have occurred as a result of these issues.

In terms of his own personal struggles with mental health and wellbeing, Jake talked about how important self-care is to him. He stated that having a strong sense of faith, solid friendships, and taking the time to laugh and have fun were fundamental to his social emotional health and wellbeing. Jake described how he had been one of the “broken children” he had talked about, but was a survivor who “fought and clawed” back for approximately seven years when he “hit rock bottom” after being the victim of abuse. He stated how this experience “was the worst time imaginable” and that the emotional toll manifested itself into drug and alcohol addiction, despite having had a strong relationship with his parents. He described how people, including himself, who are experiencing mental health issues with depression, anxiety, and addictions are trying to cope by avoiding emotions. He stated that the key to recovery is being able to experience these emotions in a manageable way, with necessary resources and supports such as counselling, medication, family, friends, and lifestyle changes. Jake talked about how difficult it is to navigate through mental health issues and that hard work and perseverance is necessary in the recovery process, in addition to therapy and medication. For Jake, finding joy and gratitude in every day events gives him the strength he requires to flourish, and his involvement with his local Alcoholics’ Anonymous organization allows him an opportunity to give back by helping others, which he feels is critical.

These findings are aligned with Shareski’s (2017) notion of joy, conjuring an image of a school where there is “contentment and a sense of well-being” (p. 36). It is also substantiated in the literature review with respect to the student engagement and emotional effect by Rinaldi

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(2006) who acknowledges how “the knowledge-building process...is also an emotional process” (p. 54). Greene (1978) refers to the overly structured life mentioned by Ellen, commenting that:

we are all familiar with the number of individuals who live their lives immersed, as it were, in daily life, in the mechanical round of habitual activities... how few people ask themselves what they have done with their own lives, whether or not they have used their freedom or simply acceded to the imposition of patterned behavior and the assignments of roles. (p. 42)

An educator’s life is extremely busy and demanding and often the individuals who select this career have a very dedicated, compassionate, and caring disposition. Due to the humanistic quality of teaching and leading, it is often difficult to separate professional and personal lives. Reducing the number of tasks both personally and professionally to be able to be more mindful and reflective is one way to create a more joyful existence. Wellbeing needs to be a consideration in every aspect of teaching and learning, while also being receptive and responsive to societal changes and the needs of our students and their families. O’Brien’s (2010) research was my first recollection of wellbeing being presented as an educational outcome. She defines *sustainable happiness* as “[h]appiness that contributes to individual, community, and/or global well-being and does not exploit other people, the environment, or future generations” (p. 7). Based on the participants’ experiences and the increasing prevalence of mental health issues, it is evident that wellbeing needs to be at the forefront of teaching and leading in joyful schools, for educators as well as students.

### **Caring Ethics**

Caring ethics was prominent in my findings among all four participants, serving as a catalyst for creating joyful schools. Caring ethics, according to Noddings (2012), consists of the

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“central elements in establishing and maintaining relations of care and trust which include listening, dialogue, critical thinking, reflective response, and making thoughtful connections among the disciplines and to life itself” (p. 1). Cultivating these elements in classrooms and schools is important. Robert and David discussed caring ethics in their philosophical educational stances as administrators. For example, they both highlighted how helping others was something that enriched both the provider and the recipient. Robert defined joy in terms of caring, stating that joy was a “feeling of fulfillment by helping other people reach a better place”. He described how caring for others to help them experience a better quality of life was where he finds his joy and his “juice” because education to him is “all about students being loved”. Caring ethics was referred to by Ellen and Jake as an important factor in facilitating student flourishing in their teaching roles. Ellen described how moved she was to have recently received an e-mail from a parent with a picture of their child tightly hugging his dog. She explained how this child had experienced a particularly emotional year, as his grandma had recently died from cancer, and that this stressful time for their family further augmented his numerous other learning challenges. Ellen shared this story as an example of being strongly connected to students and to illustrate the importance of “the child knowing they’re cared for and the child being able to learn”. David shared a plaque in his office which he had inscribed with these phrases: “I have a caring heart for all children and genuinely show concern for their academic, social, and emotional growth” and also, “creating a school culture that’s based on kindness and deep learning maximizes the potential for all children, staff, and the community”. David believed that students need to know that caring and kindness matters, and he feels that it needs to be more promoted in schools as a lack of caring and kindness is an underlying cause of bullying and conflict among students.

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All four participants provided examples of how care ethics manifest in a school setting, and how qualities such as honor, respect, dignity, integrity and grace are entrenched in a caring climate. Robert and David both shared their experiences with alternative programming designed to embrace this ethic. They talked about the ways in which they were able to support students with complex challenges by being able to visualize themselves being successful, which increased their chances of living a higher quality, more fulfilling life. For example, Robert described how the simple act of walking across the stage to rehearse the graduation ceremony was employed as a strategy to help students develop a sense of accomplishment and control of their life. Obtaining a high school diploma also increased their employment opportunities which in turn could lead to improved financial stability. Ellen discussed how caring ethics can strengthen students and the entire classroom community, promoting diversity and inclusivity. She felt that there would be less disconnect and conflict if her students were to “offer grace” to one another and accept that there are different views and perspectives, even if and when they may not be true or accurate. Jake used a quote to convey how he felt that people need to look for strength and goodness in others, rather than weaknesses and evil. Sharing a story about his experiences in underprivileged communities, Jake marveled how in his opinion, the most joyful people were often those with the least material possessions because of a focus on caring for others, echoing Ellen’s concern with materialism. He told a story of how he had been welcomed into a home with dirt floors and a simple dish of water and noodles, and how the caring and hospitable manner in which he was treated was so moving.

Extolling caring ethics in education is addressed by several educational scholars, especially Noddings (2012), who emphasizes how a “climate in which caring relations can

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flourish should be a goal for all teachers and educational policymakers” (p. 7). It is in this climate, according to Noddings (2012), where educators can:

best meet individual needs, impart knowledge, and encourage the development of moral people. Every teacher is a moral educator, and social/moral issues should be discussed in every class as they arise. A climate of care and trust is one in which most people will want to do the right thing, will want to be good. We need to spend time in our classrooms talking about the moral problems we all face—the temptation to cheat, to feel envy, fear, anger—and ways to manage them. (p. 7)

Creating spaces where positive and negative emotions are welcomed in a safe and supporting manner empowers students. It is an integral piece of education and should not just be a consideration when students are exhibiting challenging behaviors. Kindness and caring, like the other resonant threads presented, does not need to come at the expense of high expectations and excellence in academic achievements. Katz, Dack, and Malloy (2018) discuss how “a culture of niceness” (p. 78) however, can impede an organization’s ability to achieve optimum success. They caution that if this culture exists in such a way that “people are so worried about hurting one another’s feelings that beliefs, ideas, and practices get superficially validated in collaborative exchanges,” (p. 78) they might “avoid professional conflict or challenge in order to protect the feelings of others” (p. 78). The result is that organizations may therefore lose opportunities for “critical challenge that can lead to deep understanding and changed practice” (p. 78). I believe that open, honest, and transparent dialogue among students and educators, in a safe, supportive, and caring environment produces the conditions necessary for fostering joyful schools.

Caring ethics is substantiated in my literature review and is threaded throughout my participants’ narrative accounts. Based on my findings in these narratives, caring relations needs

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to figure more prominently in educational discourses. It is a quality that is instrumental in creating joyful schools, where every child is able to experience the central elements such as care and trust espoused by Noddings' (2012) notion of care ethics. A caring school will create the conditions necessary for students and educators to experience joyful schooling experiences which will enhance their ability to lead a fulfilling and purposeful life.

### **Relationships**

An emphasis on high quality relationships was a theme I expected to surface in my research on joy, but I was curious about the nature of the relationships that might be considered to be more beneficial to teaching and learning for joy. Teams and families were two relationship units that became prominent in the narrative accounts. My participants discussed how assuming a role of a mentor/coach or as a parental figure had been instrumental in building strong, resilient relationships which were necessary for joyful schools.

**Coach/team-like mentoring.** Robert provided several examples of the ways in which he mentored colleagues as an educational leader, helping other professionals navigate successfully through some challenging situations. Being part of a team was important to Robert, and he described some successes that he experienced in transforming school cultures and changing staff and students' mindsets. For example, Robert described how he had been persistent with encouraging some of the educators he had been mentoring to embrace leadership opportunities, despite their inability to recognize these qualities in themselves. As a principal, David conveyed how important mentorship is both for students and educators, and that teachers also require supports for professional growth.

Mentorship, like coaching, entails two types of fun, according to David. One aspect of having fun is being playful and silly while the other kind of fun involves "working super hard,

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getting dirty, and sweaty”. Having fun, working hard, and stepping out of your comfort zone will encourage students to pursue more challenging tasks while enjoying learning. David also professed his distaste for the word “rigor” which has become a prominent word in recent educational jargon, as he felt that students often perceive this term in such a way that learning new concepts is too difficult and discouraging. He shared the same sentiments and discomfort with the use of this word in the context of education, believing that students should be presented with smaller chunks of manageable challenges where they can experience failure on a lesser scale, and in a risk-taking classroom environment where they are “cheered on” and supported by their classmates and teacher.

Experience as a coach was also highlighted as key factors for three of my participants. Robert, David, and Jake all proudly shared stories about students they coached who were now involved with championship teams, participating at elite levels. Being asked to coach by Sam, an important mentor in his childhood, became the catalyst for Robert to thrive, especially due to the trauma and distress he had experienced as a victim of bullying. Their narrative accounts portrayed the power of a coach’s role in developing caring, trusting, and respectful relationships and how they can be successfully transferred into more academic learning environments. My participants’ stories described how being part of a team and having a supportive coach was impactful to them. These coaching relationships support skill development and higher-level performances, especially when physical and social emotional skills are enhanced and aligned.

The participants spoke of the importance of having a significant person in students’ lives who believes in them and encourages them throughout the good and the bad times. Ellen describes a turning point in her life as a student when her teachers recognized her leadership qualities and she was provided with opportunities to be a student mentor. In addition to being

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raised in a large family, Ellen also had many adults in her life who were “investing in my life, in lots of different ways...relationships-emotionally, socially, spiritually-they were just interested adults”. I thought about the importance of children/young people receiving this feedback and support from adults in their families, schools and community. This is something that educators need to be conscious of, particularly for those students who may not be receiving this support in their home life, or worse, who are receiving messages explicitly or covertly that they are not worthy or valued.

**Parent/family-like mentoring.** Fostering a classroom and school environment that simulates a positive home-like environment with a strong sense of belonging was vital. Ellen explained that some students feel that their classroom space is like a second home to them, “and for some unfortunately, it’s a first home for them...you are their home for them”. Therefore, establishing a positive home-like environment, she believed, greatly enhances the quality of students’ experiences and their opportunities to experience joy. Ellen also highlighted the significance of establishing relationships similar to that of a family unit in her educational approaches. She shared examples of how she has assumed not only the role of a mentor and a parental figure to her students but often to the caregivers of her students as well. Ellen felt honored when parents sought her advice. Acknowledging that these were sometimes very difficult and awkward situations, Ellen said that she also felt “blessed with the opportunity to invest in those things” with families and being able to help them through some of the hardships with which they were faced. Lamenting the deterioration of the notion of family time, Ellen commented that “a lot of people don’t know how to do family anymore”. She emphasized the importance of preserving the integrity of this relationship unit in such a way that families allotted sufficient time in their schedules to just spend time together, listening to one another and sharing

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stories. Ellen felt that as a result of children and caregivers' overly structured and hectic lifestyles, in addition to increased time devoted to their technology devices, the quality of family interactions was lessened. While many children are resilient and able to thrive despite changes to their home lives and living arrangements, the added pressures placed on caregivers due to fragmented relationships, financial strain, and increased workloads (both at home and work) negatively impacts their wellbeing, making it difficult for them to parent in an optimal manner. Establishing positive home-like teaching and learning environments can help to minimize the negative effects this lifestyle tendency might have on students as it can provide the setting where students feel less stress and more connected to important role models in their life, such as their teachers and other educators.

Fostering a positive sense of family and a community feeling was also pivotal to Jake. He described how his educational approach reflected this philosophy, stating that in his home room setting, he was the dad who "ran the ship," and the students were part of the family. In this parental role, he would "have their backs" and how, like a family, there would exist some sibling rivalry with classmates, who are like brothers and sisters. Becoming a parental figure himself to a youth who had been living in foster care for most of his life was also a key role in Jake's life and an example of how strong relationships, especially mentoring and creating family units were key findings as strategies to promote human flourishing. Noddings (2012) compares the pivotal roles of educators and parents in relationships with children, declaring that:

good teachers, like good parents, hope that the personal relations formed will enhance the likelihood that their students will live in and promote a public climate in which caring relations will continue to flourish. An important task for teachers is to connect the moral worlds of school and public life. (p. 9)

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Reflecting the structure of positive familial relationships into school contexts creates greater opportunities for joy in schools. Both team and family units, in ideal circumstances, seek to provide environments that are caring, trusting, nurturing, and supportive. Joyful schools are more likely to occur when these similar qualities are present in the fabric of the culture.

### **Social Justice**

Social justice was intricately woven throughout all four narrative accounts and was a prominent thread in my findings. All research participants conveyed the importance of social justice in their stories, either through their role modeling as educators or in the cultures they fostered in their classrooms and schools. Social justice elements such as citizenship, celebrating and honoring differences, and advocating for all students, particularly those who do not conform or act compliant, despite the challenges that may present in a school setting were all highlighted.

**Citizenship.** All four narratives addressed the critical importance of social justice in joyful schools, and how it is important to instill a sense of belonging, respect, kindness, compassion, and citizenship in students. Fullan, Quinn, and McEachen (2018) consider citizenship as one of six global competencies for deep learning. They define citizenship as “considering global issues based on a deep understanding of diverse values and worldviews,” having a “genuine interest and ability to solve ambiguous and complex real- world human and environmental sustainability,” and demonstrating “compassion, empathy, and concern for others” (p. 17). For Jake, creating strong communities was an ongoing goal in his various roles. Nurturing a sense of togetherness was critical for teaching citizenship and having students take responsibility for their actions while helping others. Robert provided examples of how he had modelled these exemplary qualities as an educator and an educational leader, stating how a focus on being good citizens and role models was essential. Ellen felt that education must entail helping society become more

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responsible and respectful, describing her involvement in a provincial justice system for first offenders to help the youth of her community. In her work with helping youth rehabilitate, she expressed concern that digitalization has narrowed children's worlds rather than broadening them, thereby decreasing their joy. She felt that many children in today's society are "sullen and have limited empathy," and that "full roundedness in education, not just academic education, brings joy because you're an important person, but you're not the most important person...none of us are". Children need opportunities to be engaged in caring for others. Having students adopt a social justice lens which considers the needs of others while displaying kindness, generosity, and respect will help them to feel a sense of fulfillment.

**Celebrating and honoring diversity.** Jake discussed how he strived diligently to foster a welcoming atmosphere that valued everyone and therefore encouraged students to view themselves in a more positive light. He shared how he generated questions for his class trivia games to increase participation by eliciting correct responses from all of the students. This trivia game, in addition to his monthly birthday celebrations, were two strategies he utilized to create a feeling of togetherness and harmony. He shared proudly how his efforts to infuse social justice elements resulted in him welcoming over forty students who were not experiencing success in other classroom settings throughout the year, and how he was happy and willing to accept each and every student, despite the additional challenge of having such a large class. David also discussed how imperative it was to teach students how to communicate and interact respectfully, despite differences of opinions. He provided an example of how he has noticed disrespect and hostility in online comment sections and in newspapers, stating that he believed it was important to provide learning environments that embrace differences of opinions and seek to understand others' ideas and perspectives without necessarily having to agree. Ellen highlighted several

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examples of how she had cultivated strong relationships and a classroom culture that promoted diversity and inclusivity when she referenced the emotional e-mail she had received from one of her parents, as well as the success she had experienced with a particularly challenging group of students.

**Advocacy.** All four participants provided examples in their narratives of the importance of advocating for students and seeking ways to ensure their needs are being met, especially social emotionally. Robert provided an example of how he had intervened at a volleyball tournament when a coach was acting in a disrespectful manner toward several student volunteers who were refereeing, causing them to be embarrassed and humiliated in front of other students, coaches, and audience members. Robert felt that it was of critical importance of standing up for others when there is injustice, even if it is awkward or uncomfortable, and that it must be done in a respectful way. Robert described his desire to make a positive difference in students' lives and to help them "get on the right sides of things" so they could avoid having to go through what he experienced with having been a victim of bullying. In his current leadership assignment, he was involved in social justice initiatives and felt passionate about helping his students, colleagues, and families also develop a strong sense of advocacy. Giving back to his community was also important to Jake, as was evident in his volunteer work and his eagerness to welcome Ben (his foster child) into his home as a son. David reiterated this when he stated that a lack of focus on kindness and helping others is a root cause of bullying in society. Incorporating social justice elements such as taking responsibility and acting in such a way that empowers others through kindness and advocacy helps to bring joy into all school settings.

A social justice focus is becoming more prevalent in educational discourse, especially with ongoing political and social turbulence which is affecting all segments of the world's

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population. The *Manitoba Guide for Sustainable Schools* (2016) addresses the pivotal role of social justice and citizenship in education, stating that, “sustainable schools promote community cohesion by providing an inclusive, welcoming atmosphere that values everyone’s participation and contributions—irrespective of background, culture, age, religion, or ability—and by challenging prejudice and injustice in all its forms” (p. 39). Other educational initiatives, such as the action research of Fullan, Quinn, and McEachen (2017), convey the importance of social justice, arguing that “the pathway to well-being is through deep learning experiences that address equity and excellence,” (p. 25) and how “[d]eep learning, positioned to engage the disconnected, could turn out to be a force for reversing the damaging effects of concentrated, intergenerational poverty and racism” (p. 24). Deep learning is evident in all four narratives as Robert, David, Ellen, and Jake provide multiple examples of the ways in which they have strived to move beyond surface learning and rote recall. Incorporating contemporary competencies such as collaboration, citizenship, and character into their classrooms helped them as educators to provide more meaningful and relevant learning opportunities. As a result, their students became less disconnected and were more likely to experience success in all aspects of their lives, including obtaining employment which might pave the way towards a better quality of life.

Wiens (2010) refers to the notion of what it means to be educated, stating that we must ensure that we “take responsibility for the way the world is and try to make it better” (p. 4). He elaborates on how social justice entails “judging how to live a moral life and contributing to a world where we can all live moral lives,” which is about helping others and “doing the right thing at the right time in the right way for the right reasons” (p. 4). Robert illuminated the importance of this moral component with the example he provided of his actions while supervising the volleyball tournament. Ellen and Jake discussed this moral approach in their

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efforts to support the caregivers of their students when they were experiencing personal challenges. My research findings reveal that providing opportunities to consider the needs of others and to celebrate diversity enhances classroom and school environments. When classrooms are welcoming, inclusive, and safe spaces where teachers actively seek ways to establish strong relationships with all students, especially those with complex needs, everyone benefits. A social justice lens ensures that joyful classrooms and schools are fostered in such a way that rather than being challenged by differences, they are in fact, strengthened by a diverse composition of abilities, skills, personalities, race, and socio-economic status. Through modeling and explicit teaching, a focus on social justice elements such as treating others with kindness, compassion, respect, and dignity will permeate throughout the teaching and leading culture and thereby create more joyful schools.

### **Efficacy**

Efficacy as teachers and leaders was prevalent in all four research conversations. Robert and David both alluded to having a strong sense of efficacy in their involvement with teaching and leading, especially based on their successes with alternative school programs. Robert recalled how his role in transforming one of his previous schools was one of his biggest celebrations, referring to an interdisciplinary project he had designed and facilitated. This project had been transformational for his school and was included in one of the reasons provided for Robert receiving a prestigious educational award. Robert stated how he had felt such pride in how this project had evolved and that it had resulted in an increased sense of efficacy for him, the students and the involved staff. David's successful experiences in teaching and leading in schools where he felt he had been able to transform the school culture and change the mindset of staff and students in such a profound way helped him to realize the powerful impact he could

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have. The feedback and recognition David received from students, families, and administrators, especially when he was transitioning to another school division in his new role as principal, helped to increase his sense of efficacy.

Storytelling and generating narratives that focused on possibilities and a sense of hope surfaced in discussions regarding efficacy. David, Ellen, and Jake discussed the power of spreading positive messages to inspire others which cultivated feelings of unity and agency. Jake's artifact, a woven brown leather strap with the word "hope" inscribed on the silver plate, signified his optimism and self-efficacy. He shared that he had purchased it to remind himself when he felt deflated or discouraged, that having a sense of hope was the key, while also serving as a reminder that he needed to replenish this in his own life so that he could help others. Joyful learning environments help to foster a sense of efficacy for educators, because they are able to experience first-hand the profound impact they are able to have on enhancing the quality of students' lives.

**Chapter 9: Factors That Influence Teaching and Leading with Joy**

The purpose of this research was to better understand teachers' and principals' experiences of joy, to articulate this elusive concept through the words and experiences of teachers and leaders, and to foreground the importance of joyful schools. I was interested in exploring principals' and teachers' perspectives on the notion of joy and its impact, if any, on teaching and leading. I also wanted to determine some of the conditions that might foster more joyful schools, as well as obstacles which might hinder their ability to teach and lead with joy.

The conditions that must exist for joyful teaching and leading to occur, based on the narrative accounts, must include a high level of wellbeing, caring ethics, strong relationships, and a sense of social justice and efficacy. Wellbeing is foundational and provides optimal conditions for educators and students to become empowered. Caring ethics must be modeled and demonstrated consistently through words and actions, especially during more challenging situations. Reflecting on my experiences as a student, teacher, and now an administrator, it is apparent that caring ethics are not superfluous or an "add-on" once all the other aspects of education are addressed. Despite the many privileges and opportunities that I have been afforded in my own life, it is surprising to me how impactful kind and caring words and actions are to me, and conversely, the subsequent climate that occurs in the absence of this culture. I had not expected care ethics to figure so prominently in my research, but my findings reveal that it is inextricably intertwined with wellbeing. Developing strong relationships is imperative. The resonant threads illustrate that emulating the role of a parent or coach in the classroom, while simulating units such as family and teams, helps to create a feeling of belonging and togetherness. This relationship network also provides support and encouragement to students as they navigate challenges in their learning and social interactions. A focus on social justice to

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remove barriers for all students and to create more equitable learning opportunities helps to create optimal conditions. Providing students with opportunities to express their ideas which are honored and acted upon by the leaders and teachers in such a way that students develop a sense of agency fosters joyful schools. Finally, when a school culture nurtures these qualities, educators develop a stronger sense of efficacy which is reciprocal and continually elevates and enhances the other significant factors. Listening to Robert and David's views on efficacy caused me to reflect on the paradigm shift I had experienced after assuming my new position as a principal of my school. I recalled how I had begun to develop a heightened sense of efficacy when developing my school vision as a school leader while enrolled in a university course on the Reggio Emilia philosophy.

There are obstacles that exist which have the potential to distract or deter educators from focusing on these important aspects of education. Educators are constantly under a barrage of pressure from governments, school divisions and parents to ensure that their students attain curricular outcomes and predetermined empirical indicators, despite many challenges such as outdated teaching practices, classroom compositions, large class sizes, and students with complex challenges. Pressure to achieve academic excellence with a reliance on quick fixes, sorting, labelling, and competition discourages educators from spending valuable time on social aspects. Political climates that succumb to media attention which cast a negative light on education systems are the most concerning, as they can manipulate information or data to generate public interest, often in a controversial way. Governments are often overly fixated on high stakes testing that present schools, divisions, or jurisdictions in a deficit position, despite the limits and issues with their ability to measure students' knowledge and skills and to accurately depict the growth in their learning journey. Ministries of education, motivated by politics, often

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resort to quick fixes when this occurs, perpetuating the cycle of distracting educators from addressing the essential pieces highlighted in my findings. School culture, class compositions, socio economic issues, stress, and anxiety are just some of the factors that might impede students' success in schools and also the quality of students' lives. Standardized tests, which often simply capture surface learning, are extremely limited in their ability to measure important contemporary competencies, resulting in deficit-based practices such as ability sorting, ranking, competition, and labelling.

In addition to having a detrimental effect on engagement, social justice and equity is compromised, when class and school placements, as well as programming, are determined based on these superficial and inaccurate indicators. In many cases, socio-economic status can predetermine student success in schools, due to a variety of reasons. Often, students who are already disadvantaged must succumb to mundane “back to the basics” intervention programs, in attempts to “fill in the gaps”. These pull-out programs often perpetuate social injustices by removing students from the class setting and their peers. Students with complex needs and those who come from disadvantaged home settings may become even more disengaged when they are removed from their classroom and forced to complete worksheets and rote drills designed to “catch them up” to grade level or benchmark indicators and grouped according to “ability”. Principals and teachers, feeling pressured from this toxic climate and some divisional priorities which are often developed in response to these perceived deficits, in many cases adopt and comply with approaches that are contrary to their beliefs about education.

Time constraints and accountability practices also exacerbate this deficit culture. In this climate, many educators lack autonomy and a sense of efficacy, which negatively impacts the quality of their teaching and relationships with students, families and other colleagues. Parents

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who are not informed about more current educational research and practices may be skeptical and unsupportive of schools focusing more on social aspects of education, concerned that their children may not be receiving an adequate education when compliance, conformity, and competition are not at the forefront. Feeder schools might not value the importance of social and intellectual engagement, believing that the students arriving on their doorsteps are not prepared for their traditional learning environments, especially when their approaches rely solely on rote learning and pen and paper tasks. These are just some of the obstacles that educators may confront.

In stifling and oppressive climates such as those referred to in the previous paragraphs, joyful schools ironically may be viewed as a nicety or an extra, with no time or focus being allocated towards developing wellbeing, relationships, and class/school culture. As educators, we must remain focused on what it means to be educated so that all of our students are able to flourish. The complexities inherent in education and human flourishing require complex and deeply sophisticated approaches which are responsive to students and society. As educators, we must be diligent in our efforts to educate parents, policy makers and politicians in what we know about student learning and human wellbeing and ensure that we provide the conditions for all children to flourish. Joyful schools are the catalyst for achieving excellence in education and empowering students to lead fulfilling lives.

### **Surprises**

A surprise finding was that the infusion of the Arts, although alluded to throughout the research conversations, did not emerge more prominently in the research conversations, especially since it had been a catalyst in our own school's journey with joyful education. I wondered if the importance of the Arts heightened for me and became more profound in my life

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when I began to view the Arts as a universal language. Similar to what the Reggio Emilia philosophy refers to in their “hundred languages of children” belief, the Arts can be a vehicle that portrays an enhanced way of knowing and expressing feelings, emotions, and knowledge. The Arts can also transcend languages and culture, bringing more harmony and joy into the world. I wonder if it was not evident in my research texts because my participants did not identify as artists themselves. Although I have always greatly valued the Arts, including enjoying music and playing the piano, I do not consider myself to be artistic. I feel that the infusion of the Arts in teaching and leading for joy is an aspect of the research that should be explored further.

Another unexpected outcome in my research findings was how similar my experiences and views were to those of my research participants’. I found this surprising as I had expected that my newly developed insights as an educational leader were somewhat radical to other educators, especially those who were closer in age to me. I also wondered about students’ and educators’ dispositions and personalities, and the extent to which environment and culture can provoke or suppress their abilities to experience joy. What are the circumstances that occur or the conditions that exist which positively or negatively impact one’s ability to be joyful as an educator when joyful conditions may not have been present in their past? Is being joyful a choice? Why are some people able to live joyful lives, despite hardships or sadness they have encountered in their lives? Would educators who were not joyful and believed in fear, compliance and conformity as driving forces in education consider volunteering to participate in such research and if so, how would this research have been affected if their perspectives were presented?

I was surprised at how prevalent two relationship units--teams and families—were in my findings. Although I have greatly valued the caring and supportive qualities which usually exist

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in these relationship units, in both my professional and personal life, I did not expect them to be so profoundly illuminated in my research findings. Growing up in a small town as the youngest in a family of five, I was fortunate to always have a plethora of caring relationships including family, friends, neighbors, community members, coaches, music teachers and educators. In addition to having my siblings as role models, I was also provided with ample leadership opportunities by adults who saw leadership qualities in me. This network of caring people in my life enhanced my self-confidence, strengthened my sense of identity, and encouraged me to challenge myself, especially in my participation in music and sports. I was surprised to think back upon how impactful my involvement in sports had been while I was growing up especially, and what an influential role my coaches played in my life, usually (but not always) in a positive way.

Although I experienced many of the challenges of bullying, socio-economic stresses, addiction, and family struggles, upon reflection, I had the good fortune of leading a privileged life in other aspects, including being raised with family values that promoted respect, kindness, inclusivity and social justice. Other assets were my strong literacy and communication skills (in the dominant language of English) which allowed me to soar through school and be perceived as a high achiever, especially because of the traditional, narrowly focused curriculum and expectations for education during those years. All of the participants shared my concern with a hyper-focus on academics and the pursuit of high marks, at the expense of curiosity, wonder, and passion.

I was also surprised that most of the challenges discussed by Robert, David, Ellen, and Jake did not perseverate on recent societal issues such as consumerism, “helicopter” parenting, overly structured and scheduled lifestyles, and social media but resonated more with the

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experiences I had in my childhood and years as a student. Ellen and Jake did discuss materialism, but it was not presented as a major challenge for them as educators. Many of the concerns highlighted by my participants had been prevalent throughout their lifespan and resonated with my own personal and professional life experiences. As I co-constructed this insight alongside these narrative accounts, as a teacher and mother, I acknowledged that my husband and I, as parents, had experienced some of the stressful situations referred to by Ellen in our quest to expose our daughters to a wide range of rich opportunities. Enrolling them in a multitude of activities while trying to balance our careers, relationships, and personal interests was a challenge. I realized that this hurried, somewhat frantic, lifestyle was not unique to my own personal experience and while it has been an issue for decades, it also continues to be prevalent in today's society.

As I reflected on my participants' narrative accounts, I realized how the phenomenon of social justice has been my most revered focus as an educator. Perhaps due to my upbringing, I feel as though I have always considered this lens in my interactions with others, aspiring to conduct myself in such a way that honored its qualities. As a leader, I have thrived when I felt empowered to positively impact circumstances that provided more respectful and equitable opportunities for students, particularly those with complex needs. However, being morally guided by a social justice lens has also by far been my biggest challenge as an educational leader. Having to delicately navigate through numerous situations, especially those involving privilege and feelings of entitlement within a myriad of personal and professional relationships and networks has been, and continues to be, extremely challenging but imperative to me.

The themes that were presented in my literature review, which included emotional effect, student and educator engagement, play, achievement, and human flourishing, were all infused in

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the research conversations and resonant threads to some degree. These themes predominantly supported and affirmed the resonant threads of wellbeing, caring ethics, relationships, social justice, and efficacy. What was surprising to me was the depth of these themes, which was a contradiction to my assumption that perhaps they were clichés or insignificant factors in joyful schools. My findings speak to the critical importance of these notions as being foundational, rather than superfluous. They also suggest that instilling these pivotal qualities into teaching and learning cultures is imperative to ensure that all students can be empowered to lead meaningful, fulfilling and joyful lives.

### **Implications**

Based on my research, there are two implications for future consideration in education. The first is that being educated must be defined in such a way that it empowers students to live a better life, in harmony with other people and living things, and in such a way that their words and actions spread goodness into the world. We want students to excel in basic skills such as reading, writing, and math, and these foundational literacies must be infused into everything we teach in other subjects and disciplines. But having these skills is simply not sufficient. As educators, we must have higher expectations for students. We must teach in such a way that the acquisition of knowledge and the development of these foundational skills are embedded into purposeful, authentic, and meaningful work, transcending deeply into other ways of knowing. Education must embody what Greene (1978) refers to as a “wide-awakeness,” which entails:

equipping young people with the ability to identify alternatives, and to see possibilities in the situations they confront. It involves the teaching of principles, possible perspectives by means of which those situations can be assessed and appraised, *as well as* the norms...that must be appropriated by persons desiring to

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join particular human communities. It also involves enabling students to make decisions of principle, to reflect, to articulate, and to take decisive actions in good faith. (p. 50) [italics in the original]

Being wide-awake is being in tune with oneself, others, and the environment in which we live. It means being open and receptive to new ideas, ways of knowing, and to other's views with a sense of respect for humanity and living things. Alongside important curricular outcomes and skills, I concur with Greene (1978) that "moral directedness, imaginativeness, and awareness are integral, in addition to a sense of possibility, autonomy, and agency" (p. 51). As Dewey (1928) so eloquently stated in his well-known quote, "Education is not preparation for life, it is life itself".

Throughout my years as a teacher, I tried to reach out to those students whom Jake described, with some success, despite my lack of knowledge at the time about self-regulation and trauma. The changing dynamics of family life has been a prevalent issue for me as an educator, especially in the past decade as an administrator. In my experience, with the obvious exception of adopted/foster children, fewer children are living with their biological parents or in a consistent, stable, and healthy home environment. In some cases, children's basic needs are not being met in their home settings and must be accommodated at school in order to thrive in all aspects-physically, social emotionally and academically. When students have their basic needs met and are emotionally engaged, they are better able to also become intellectually and academically engaged, and in ways that bring goodness to their lives and the lives of others. Joyful schools embed a moral sense of "wide-awakeness" alongside of academic excellence.

The second implication is that schools need to be considered as living organisms and dynamic spaces that are strongly connected to the families and surrounding communities, serving

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as exemplary models of the society to which we aspire. I think that all schools should be designed to align with some of the aspects of alternative schools identified by the participants, such as a stronger focus on building relationships and more flexible learning environments. I felt pride that as an educator, and more recently as a principal, I facilitated a transformation of our school's physical environment and culture into one that was a more inclusive, stimulating, dynamic and welcoming space. For example, replacing desks with tables, adding flexible seating such as benches, couches, stools, rockers, and cushions, and incorporating lamps and natural light options creates a more inviting and collaborative environment. It also requires the teacher to rethink how they are teaching as the students are no longer sitting in rows at their desks and the classroom space is more conducive to collaborative interactions with learning resources, tools, and other classmates. Incorporating more field trips and outdoor excursions, weaving students' interests, passions and curiosities into learning outcomes, and a deeper focus on developing relationships will help to better engage students. Conformity and compliance should also not be the goal of our teaching. Redirection with support and understanding when negative behaviors occur, rather than punishment and exclusion, needs to be an integral component of all learning environments.

As educators we must embed learning spaces where everyone can thrive and where expectations far surpass what we as educators may initially feel is possible for our students and ourselves. Schools must be places where hope is a prevailing and relentless force. Schools must be at the center of communities and be an inviting and inclusive place that is responsive and receptive to the needs and culture of the surrounding area, while also being representative of the highest standards of excellence and ethics. Schools must be places where everyone, including students, educators, families, and the communities can breathe and feel alive.

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### **Final Thoughts on Joy**

Empowering students and enriching the quality of their lives by instilling an essence of joy will strengthen our students' social emotionally, intellectually, and academically. It is imperative that schools not only strive to create the conditions necessary for students to thrive and flourish, but that they serve as exemplars for all of society. The perspectives of Robert, David, Ellen, and Jake illuminate qualities of joyful schools that must be embedded deeply in to the teaching and learning culture such as wellbeing, student and educator engagement, caring ethics, strong relationships, social justice, and efficacy. All of these qualities are related to social engagement. When students are socially engaged, they are more open and receptive to becoming intellectually and academically engaged, in a deeper and more meaningful way that enriches their lives and the lives of others. This same paradigm exists for educators who are to design and cultivate this teaching and learning environment. Teachers need this same environment to be fostered by their principals, in joyful school settings.

Teaching and leading with joy brings me back to the rhizome image. A strong sense of wellbeing, caring ethics, relationships, social justice, and efficacy is contained within the stem and is strengthened by this composition. Like the stem which collects deposits and nodes, students accumulate new knowledge and understandings alongside foundational literacies such as reading, writing, and math. From these deposits and nodes, roots and shoots develop and extend towards deeper understandings and new ways of thinking, from an infusion of contemporary competencies such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and citizenship, becoming more connected with oneself and with the world around them. Deeply rooted with a strong identity, we are better able to feel a sense of "wide-awakeness" and reach out towards possibilities, hope, and goodness. This experience does not, however:

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save us from the inevitability of hardship and heartbreak. In fact, we may cry more easily, but we will laugh more easily too. Perhaps we are just more alive. Yet as we discover more joy, we can face suffering in a way that ennobles rather than embitters. We have hardship without becoming hard. We have heartbreak without being broken. (Dalai Lama, Tutu, & Abrams, 2016, p. 12)

Our schools must be alive and be conducive to fostering this sense of “wide-awakeness”. Being open and receptive, or “wide-awake,” creates the potential for more a more joyful life, despite the inevitable disappointments and sadness that may occur on life journeys.

Enlightened by the Reggio Emilia philosophy, I recall feeling as though a heavy burden had been lifted from my shoulders, taking with it overwhelming fragments of disillusionment, discouragement, and despair. This epiphany ignited a desire for me to embark on a messy path towards a joyful school, although I did not articulate or even know what that might entail. The principles of the Reggio philosophy, such as a rich and competent image of the child, the environment as a third teacher, and the hundred languages of children, which aligned with current research and educational discourse, were some of the lenses we explored as we began our layered journey. In my school, the infusion of the Arts and reconnecting students and staff to nature became powerful catalysts for this transformation. We use contemporary learning competencies, (critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication, character and citizenship) as a framework in an inquiry-based approach to help us to uncover rather than simply cover curricular outcomes. As a result, I believe that my school’s staff and students have developed a strong sense of engagement and autonomy. When evidence of the positive impact this new focus was having on the culture of our school began emerging, my self-efficacy

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strengthened. I felt as though there was a reciprocal force operating, as when I sensed an increase in efficacy on the part of staff and students, it further energized and empowered me.

In my vision as an educational leader, I had dreamed of a school that was organic and dynamic, similar to that of a living organism which I discussed earlier, comprised of the components which emerged in my research. Reframing the image of school as Malaguzzi's notion of a "living organism," as opposed to the traditional view of schools as bureaucratic institutions, ensures that issues of excellence, equity, and human flourishing are paramount. It creates a culture where we as educators are responsive to the diverse needs of all of our students and the complexities with which they are faced. As educators, we must uphold our professional and moral integrity and not succumb to political pressures that resort to seeking quick fixes for complex issues. Although foundational literacies such as reading, writing, and math are critically important, a reliance on compliance, conformity, and competition impedes success for all students and diminishes their quality of life. When students are socially and intellectually engaged, their emotions are evoked, and they are much more likely to immerse themselves in their learning, as well as to understand and remember key concepts. Joyful learning environments that exude qualities revealed in my research findings, such as wellbeing, will ensure that more students will experience success in all aspects of their schooling, and likely far exceed curricular expectations in these core disciplines. Wien (2008) believes that learning should be designed in such a way that it "wakes up schools and brings teachers, children, and administrators together in collaborative, creative processes of learning" (p. 5). In responsive, vibrant, joyful schools, students and the educators are more aware and receptive emotionally, and therefore more open to learning, and contributing positively to the world in which we live.

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Although our school maintained our strong focus on academic excellence in all curricular outcomes, we departed from practices that relied primarily on conformity, compliance, and competition. We began to place a higher value on qualities such as wonder, curiosity, creativity, relationships, reciprocity, process, nature, and art; which I had represented on my rock collection for the Reggio Emilia course pictured below.

**Figure 2. Word Splash with Rocks**



The word joy is noticeably absent in the words I generated, and I do not recall if I had included it at the time. I wonder if it was related to the cautious skepticism I had towards Malaguzzi's quote, "nothing without joy," which I had jotted down in my notebook, despite my newly discovered optimism? It is interesting to note that although the pursuit of joy was not initially articulated or deliberate in our school's journey, which we eventually began to refer to as our "deep learning journey," it emerged as the most profound and poignant. Reflecting on my research findings, I now realize that the messy, multifaceted journey in which we embarked embodied wellbeing,

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strong relationships, caring ethics, social justice, and efficacy, and it therefore led us to a joyful place. This journey also created a sense of “wide-awakeness” in all aspects of my personal and professional life which was intoxicating. My research findings on teaching and leading with joy, especially when combined with my experiences and insights from our school’s deep learning journey, are compelling and illuminate the necessity for teaching and leading with joy. Schools must be places where joy lives.



## Faculty of Education

Appendix A

### APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT DIVISION

#### SCHOOL DIVISION

January, 2018

SUPERINTENDENT,

Seeking permission to conduct research: *Teaching and Leading with Joy: A Narrative Inquiry*

Hello. My name is Rosanna Cuthbert and I am a Master's student in the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba. I am intrigued by the impact of joy in teaching and leading and am conducting research for my thesis on this topic.

I am requesting your permission to conduct this research study in your division with two teachers who are willing to participate. I am requesting your support and asking you to arrange for the distribution of the enclosed Letter of Recruitment with early year's schools in your division. I am interested in teachers' experiences, perspectives, and insight on the impact, if any, of the essence of joy on teaching and leading. As you are aware, many of your principals, teachers, and consultants have been visiting the school in which I am Principal; Sigurbjorg Stefansson School in Gimli, to observe/collaborate and gain insight designing and fostering a holistic and joyful school culture. I am interested in exploring these teachers' insights on the essence of joy as they depart from more traditional learning environments towards holistic teaching.

I would like to conduct a one hour interview with two interested teachers from your division to gain insight on their experiences with this paradigm shift as educators. (I will select participants based on their interests and responses and who are deemed to be a suitable candidate for my research.) I will provide each participant with a consent form to read, consider, and sign. I will review the consent form with the participant before the interview. I will also provide the participant with the questions that I am planning to ask prior to the interview. The interview will be conducted via Skype or Zoom, unless it can be easily arranged to meet in person during a school visit and audio recorded on my cellphone and another hand-held recording device. This will occur at a mutually agreed upon time during the months of February and March, 2018. I will ask teachers about their perceptions regarding joy in teaching and leading and to share some successes and challenges in regards to the notion of the presence (or absence) of joy. After the interview, I will e-mail them the transcript verbatim and the narrative generated from the interview and they will have one week to review it before returning it with revisions, additions or deletions.

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Dissemination of findings could compromise confidentiality because of the possible detailed description of the school, division, or geographical setting. In order to mitigate risk, the school, school division, and community names will be fictionalized. The interview could illuminate life circumstances (both personal and professional) of the participant that could reveal their identity. I will therefore be careful not to reveal personal information in any written reports or presentations that could risk revealing the identity of the participants. Prior to the study, this possibility will be addressed in the recruitment and consent forms for consideration before participation and throughout the research as it presents. Participants will be provided with a copy of the transcribed interview and invited to make changes which would take approximately one hour. This would provide them with an opportunity to further consider information that they shared which they feel may be too personal, sensitive, or risk revealing their identity. They may also decide to delete information that they no longer wish to be included in the study. Participants would have one week to review the transcript.

Participants will identify themselves by name directly but pseudonyms will be used in transcripts and in all subsequent reports or manuscripts in order to maintain the participants' anonymity. The electronic data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in my office on a USB key. The consent forms and identifying information will be stored separately in locked filing cabinets in my home office. The data will be deleted/destroyed in December, 2020.

Any identifying information (i.e. division, names, schools, colleague, community) will be anonymized. All anonymized data will be stored in separate locked filing cabinets from non-anonymized materials (such as contact information and consent letters). Original data will be printed and locked in a personal filing cabinet with a physical lock, and will be saved on a password protected hard drive. I will not use names or any other personal identifiers in any presentation or research paper. All hard copy or electronic documents containing personal information (such as the consent forms) will be destroyed December, 2020.

Should anyone enquire, I do not anticipate more than minimal risks to people who participate in this study, although some may feel uncomfortable and/or vulnerable sharing some reflections, insights, and sensitive experiences. Should anyone feel uncomfortable during the interview or any time during the research process, they may stop at any time by simply letting me know. Please be aware that I am required by law to report any abuse against children that may be revealed in the interview process. In addition to my thesis, I may also include the research as part of my presentations as an educational leader.

This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB). If you have any concerns or complaints about this project, please contact me or my M. Ed advisor, Melanie Janzen at [Melanie.janzen@umanitoba.ca](mailto:Melanie.janzen@umanitoba.ca). You may also contact the Human Ethics Coordinator (HEC) at 204-474-7122 or by e-mail at [humanethics@umanitoba.ca](mailto:humanethics@umanitoba.ca).

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Rosanna Cuthbert

[cuthberr@myumanitoba.ca](mailto:cuthberr@myumanitoba.ca)



UNIVERSITY  
OF MANITOBA

Faculty of Education

## APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT PRINCIPAL

### SCHOOL DIVISION

January, 2018

PRINCIPAL,

Hello. My name is Rosanna Cuthbert and I am a Master's student in the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba. I am intrigued by the impact of joy in teaching and leading and am conducting research for my thesis on this topic.

I am interested in principals' experiences, perspectives, and insight on the impact, if any, of the essence of joy on teaching and leading. I am interested in exploring principals' insights on the essence of joy for those educational leaders who are departing from more traditional learning environments towards holistic teaching. The insight that I have gained in these past eight years as a Principal at our school (Sigurbjorg Stefansson School in Gimli, MB.) with holistic learning inspired by the Reggio Emilia philosophy, has caused me to wonder about how a joyful school environment might enhance education and our beliefs about what it means to be educated. I am fascinated with what I have experienced in our school's journey exploring a more holistic teaching environment and am wanting to develop a deeper understanding of this phenomenon. For this component of my research, I am interested in the perspectives of Principals in terms of the impact that a sense of joy can have on teaching and leading, if at all.

I would like to conduct a one hour interview with each Principal from your division to gain insight on their experiences with this paradigm shift as an educational leader. (I will select two principals who respond who I feel will be suited to this research, based on their responses). I will provide each participant with a consent form to read, consider, and sign. I will review the consent form with the participant before the interview. I will also provide the participant with the questions that I am planning to ask prior to the interview. The interview will be conducted via Skype or Zoom, unless it can be easily arranged to meet in person during a school visit and audio recorded on my iphone and another hand-held recording device. This will occur at a mutually agreed upon time during the months of February and March, 2018. I will ask principals about their perceptions regarding joy in teaching and leading and to share some successes and challenges in regards to the notion of the presence (or absence) of joy. After the interview, I will e-mail them the transcript verbatim and they will have one week to review it before returning it with revisions, additions or deletions.

## TEACHING AND LEADING WITH JOY

Dissemination of findings could compromise confidentiality because of the possible detailed description of the school, division, or geographical setting. In order to mitigate risk, the school, school division, and community names will be fictionalized. The interview could illuminate life circumstances (both personal and professional) of the participant that could reveal their identity. I will therefore be careful not to reveal personal information in any written reports or presentations that could risk revealing the identity of the participants. Prior to the study, this possibility will be addressed in the recruitment and consent forms for consideration before participation and throughout the research as it presents. Participants will be provided with a copy of the transcribed interview and invited to make changes which would take approximately one hour. This would provide them with an opportunity to further consider information that they shared which they feel may be too personal, sensitive, or risk revealing their identity. They may also decide to delete information that they no longer wish to be included in the study. Participants would have one week to review the transcript.

Participants will identify themselves by name directly but pseudonyms will be used in transcripts and in all subsequent reports or manuscripts in order to maintain the participants' anonymity. The electronic data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in my office on a USB key. The consent forms and identifying information will be stored separately in locked filing cabinets in my home office. The data will be deleted/destroyed in December, 2020.

Any identifying information (i.e. division, names, schools, colleague, community) will be anonymized. All anonymized data will be stored in separate locked filing cabinets from non-anonymized materials (such as contact information and consent letters). Original data will be printed and locked in a personal filing cabinet with a physical lock, and will be saved on a password protected hard drive. I will not use names or any other personal identifiers in any presentation or research paper. All hard copy or electronic documents containing personal information (such as the consent forms) will be destroyed in December 2020.

Should anyone enquire, I do not anticipate more than minimal risks to people who participate in this study, although some may feel uncomfortable and/or vulnerable sharing some reflections, insights, and sensitive experiences. Should anyone feel uncomfortable during the interview or any time during the research process, they may stop at any time by simply letting me know. Please be aware that I am required by law to report any abuse against children that may be revealed in the interview process. In addition to my thesis, I may also include the research as part of my presentations as an educational leader.

This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB). If you have any concerns or complaints about this project, please contact me or my M. Ed advisor, Melanie Janzen at [Melanie.janzen@umanitoba.ca](mailto:Melanie.janzen@umanitoba.ca). You may also contact the Human Ethics Coordinator (HEC) at 204-474-7122 or by e-mail at [humanethics@umanitoba.ca](mailto:humanethics@umanitoba.ca).

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Rosanna Cuthbert

[cuthberr@myumanitoba.ca](mailto:cuthberr@myumanitoba.ca)



UNIVERSITY  
OF MANITOBA

Faculty of Education

## APPENDIX C: RECRUITMENT TEACHER

### SCHOOL DIVISION

January, 2018

#### TEACHER:

Hello. My name is Rosanna Cuthbert and I am a Master's student in the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba. I am intrigued by the impact of joy in teaching and leading and am conducting research for my thesis on this topic.

I am interested in teachers' experiences, perspectives, and insight on the impact, if any, of the essence of joy on teaching and leading. I am interested in exploring teachers' insights on the essence of joy for those teachers who are departing from more traditional learning environments towards holistic teaching. The insight that I have gained in these past eight years as a Principal at our school (Sigurbjorg Stefansson School in Gimli, MB.) with holistic learning inspired by the Reggio Emilia philosophy and Education for Sustainability, has caused me to wonder about how a joyful school environment might enhance education and our beliefs about what it means to be educated. I am fascinated with what I have experienced in our school's journey exploring a more holistic teaching environment and am wanting to develop a deeper understanding of this phenomenon. For this component of my research, I am interested in the perspectives of teachers in terms of the impact that a sense of joy can have on teaching and leading, if at all.

I would like to conduct a one hour interview with two teachers from your division to gain insight on their experiences with this paradigm shift as an educational leader. (I will select two teachers who respond who I feel will be suited to this research, based on their responses). I will provide each participant with a consent form to read, consider, and sign. I will review the consent form with the participant before the interview. I will also provide the participant with the questions that I am planning to ask prior to the interview. The interview will be conducted via Skype or Zoom, unless it can be easily arranged to meet in person during a school visit and audio recorded on my cellphone and another hand-held recording device. This will occur at a mutually agreed upon time during the months of February and March, 2018. I will ask teachers about their perceptions regarding joy in teaching and leading and to share some successes and challenges in regards to the notion of the presence (or absence) of joy. After the interview, I will e-mail them the transcript verbatim and they will have one week to review it before returning it with revisions, additions or deletions.

## TEACHING AND LEADING WITH JOY

Dissemination of findings could compromise confidentiality because of the possible detailed description of the school, division, or geographical setting. In order to mitigate risk, the school, school division, and community names will be fictionalized. The interview could illuminate life circumstances (both personal and professional) of the participant that could reveal their identity. I will therefore be careful not to reveal personal information in any written reports or presentations that could risk revealing the identity of the participants. Prior to the study, this possibility will be addressed in the recruitment and consent forms for consideration before participation and throughout the research as it presents. Participants will be provided with a copy of the transcribed interview and invited to make changes which would take approximately one hour. This would provide them with an opportunity to further consider information that they shared which they feel may be too personal, sensitive, or risk revealing their identity. They may also decide to delete information that they no longer wish to be included in the study. Participants would have one week to review the transcript.

Participants will identify themselves by name directly but pseudonyms will be used in transcripts and in all subsequent reports or manuscripts in order to maintain the participants' anonymity. The electronic data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in my office on a USB key. The consent forms and identifying information will be stored separately in locked filing cabinets in my home office. The data will be deleted/destroyed in December, 2020.

Any identifying information (i.e. division, names, schools, colleague, community) will be anonymized. All anonymized data will be stored in separate locked filing cabinets from non-anonymized materials (such as contact information and consent letters). Original data will be printed and locked in a personal filing cabinet with a physical lock, and will be saved on a password protected hard drive. I will not use names or any other personal identifiers in any presentation or research paper. All hard copy or electronic documents containing personal information (such as the consent forms) will be destroyed in December, 2020.

Should anyone enquire, I do not anticipate more than minimal risks to people who participate in this study, although some may feel uncomfortable and/or vulnerable sharing some reflections, insights, and sensitive experiences. Should anyone feel uncomfortable during the interview or any time during the research process, they may stop at any time by simply letting me know. Please be aware that I am required by law to report any abuse against children that may be revealed in the interview process. In addition to my thesis, I may also include the research as part of my presentations as an educational leader.

This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB). If you have any concerns or complaints about this project, please contact me or my M. Ed advisor, Melanie Janzen at [Melanie.janzen@umanitoba.ca](mailto:Melanie.janzen@umanitoba.ca). You may also contact the Human Ethics Coordinator (HEC) at 204-474-7122 or by e-mail at [humanethics@umanitoba.ca](mailto:humanethics@umanitoba.ca).

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Rosanna Cuthbert

[cuthberr@myumanitoba.ca](mailto:cuthberr@myumanitoba.ca)



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## APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT DIVISION TEACHER

Research Project Title: **A Narrative Inquiry into Joy: Teaching and Leading with Joy**

### Researcher:

Rosanna Cuthbert

[cuthberr@myumanitoba.ca](mailto:cuthberr@myumanitoba.ca)

### Research Supervisor:

Dr. Melanie Janzen

[Melanie.Janzen@umanitoba.ca](mailto:Melanie.Janzen@umanitoba.ca)

204-480-1451

### SCHOOL DIVISION:

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 the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you are interested in further detail, please let me know. Please take the time to read through this information carefully in order to clarify what is involved as a participant.

I am a graduate student at the University of Manitoba, pursuing a Master's of Education in Curriculum and Instruction. I am intrigued by the impact of joy in teaching and leading and am conducting research for my thesis on this topic.

I am interested in teachers' experiences, perspectives, and their insight on the impact, if any, of the essence of joy on teaching and leading. I am interested in exploring teachers' insights on the essence of joy for those educators who are departing from more traditional learning environments towards holistic teaching. The insight that I have gained in these past eight years as a Principal at our school (Sigurbjorg Stefansson School in Gimli, MB.) has caused me to wonder about how a joyful school environment might enhance education and our beliefs about what it

## TEACHING AND LEADING WITH JOY

means to be educated. I am fascinated with what I have experienced in our school's journey exploring a more holistic teaching environment and am wanting to develop a deeper understanding of this phenomenon. For this component of my research, I am interested in the perspectives of teachers in terms of the impact that a sense of joy can have on teaching and leading, if at all.

Teachers will be engaged in an informed consent process and signing of the informed consent form will take place prior to the interview. This interview will take place at a mutually agreed upon time via Skype or Zoom, (or in person if a time and location is able to be easily arranged despite the geographical distance between our school divisions). The interview will take place in the months of February and March, 2018 and it will be approximately one hour in duration. I will audio record the interview using both my cell phone and an audio recording device, in the event that one does not record. I will later transcribe the interview verbatim. I will also take some written notes which will help to support what is recorded in the audio transcript. A follow-up phone call or e-mail may be required for fact-checking or clarification. Teachers are welcome to bring an artifact or photo to share with me during the interview.

Participants will identify themselves by name directly but pseudonyms will be used in transcripts and in all subsequent reports or manuscripts in order to maintain the participants' anonymity. The electronic data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in my office on a USB key. The consent forms and identifying information will be stored separately in locked filing cabinets in my home office. The data will be destroyed in December, 2020.

I do not anticipate more than minimal risks to people who participate in this study, although some may feel uncomfortable and/or vulnerable sharing some reflections, insights, and sensitive experiences. Should anyone feel uncomfortable during the interview or any time during the research process, they may stop at any time by simply letting me know. Teachers will be provided with a copy of the interview questions and may choose to not answer some or any of the questions posed. The data I collect will be the transcript I generate from our interview. Teachers will have one week to review the transcript (which would take approximately one hour) so that they can read it over, revise, delete or add comments or reflections, and then return it to me. Teachers will receive a reminder e-mail to respond to it in this time frame and if there is a confirmation, or no response, it will be assumed that it is approved. Benefits to participants are an opportunity to reflect and celebrate successes which may propel them to gain a deeper, richer insight into teaching and leading. Please be aware that I am required by law to report any abuse against children that may be revealed in the interview process.

In appreciation for time and participation, teachers will receive a \$10.00 gift for Starbucks and this small gift is theirs to keep even if they decide to end their participation in the research.

The data from the interview will be used for my Master's thesis research. It will be shared with my thesis advisor and possibly during professional presentations, professional organizations, divisional leadership team discussions, staff meetings, and potential journal articles.

## TEACHING AND LEADING WITH JOY

Your signature on this form indicates that you are satisfied with the information you have received regarding your divisions' anticipated participation in this research and that you are in agreement with participating as a division. This signature does not waive your legal rights or release the research or involved institutions from legal and professional responsibilities. Participation is completely voluntary and teachers may withdraw from the research project at any time during the process. Teachers are under no obligation to answer any questions and are able to omit any without consequence. Please be aware that they are able to ask for clarification or seek new information throughout their participation and that their continued participation should be as informed as their initial consent to participate at the onset of this research study.

This research has been approved by the Education Research Ethics Board (ENREB). The University of Manitoba may look at the research records to ensure that the research is being conducted in a safe and appropriate manner. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this project, feel free to contact or my M. Ed advisor, Dr. Melanie Janzen [Melanie.Janzen@myumanitoba.ca](mailto:Melanie.Janzen@myumanitoba.ca). You may also contact the Human Ethics Coordinator (HEC) at 304-474-7122 or by email 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.

Superintendent's Name: (printed)

\_\_\_\_\_

Superintendent's Signature:

\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Signature:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ We wish to receive a copy of the thesis by e-mail.

**APPENDIX E: E-MAIL FOLLOW-UP CORRESPONDENCE DIVISION**

Hello Superintendent,

I recently sent a letter requesting permission to conduct research in your school division with principals and teachers on the notion of joy and its impact on teaching and leading. I have attached the official letter of request and the necessary ENREB Approval Certificate.

Please let me know by phone or via e-mail ([cuthberr@myumanitoba.ca](mailto:cuthberr@myumanitoba.ca)) whether or not you are able to grant permission for this research, or if you have any questions or concerns. You may also contact my advisor by phone (204-480-1451) or via email at [Melanie.Janzen@umanitoba.ca](mailto:Melanie.Janzen@umanitoba.ca).

Thank you so much for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Rosanna Cuthbert

**APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

**Preamble:** As you are aware, I am a graduate student at the University of Manitoba, pursuing a Master's of Education in Curriculum and Instruction. The intent of my study is to investigate the essence of joy in teaching and educational leadership, and its effects on student flourishing. The insights that I have gained in these past seven years as a principal engaged in a journey toward a more joyful education has caused me to wonder about how joyful learning experiences that provide opportunities for not only students, but staff, to experience joy, can transform education and our beliefs about what it means to be educated. I am fascinated with what I have experienced in our school's focus on joyful schools, inspired by the Reggio Emilia philosophy, and am wanting to develop a deeper understanding of this phenomenon in the context of education with my research. For this component of my research, I am interested in the perspectives of principals and teachers in terms of their experiences of joy on teaching and leading.

We have just reviewed the consent form that you have signed to ensure that you are aware of the process. Please let me know if you have any questions or wish to stop the interview at any time. Also, please remember that you are under no obligation to answer any questions in which you feel uncomfortable providing a response. I very much look forward to hearing your perspectives!

## TEACHING AND LEADING WITH JOY

1. Let's start off by you telling me about yourself.
  - a) Why did you decide to become an educator?
  - b) How many years have you been an educator?
  - c) What have been some of your celebrations or highlights as an educator?
  - d) What have been some of your challenges as an educator?
2. Tell me about the artifact or photo you have brought with you today and explain its significance.
2. What is your philosophy of education?
3. As you are aware, I am very interested in engagement with a particular focus on the essence of joy. How would you define joy?
4. I am wondering about how a sense of joy has impacted your experiences of teaching and leading (as a principal/teacher). Describe some experiences you have had a feeling a sense of joy.
5. What are the conditions that you believe foster joyful experiences for leaders? For teachers? For students?
6. What are the barriers that you have experienced in trying to foster joyful experiences as a leader and/or teacher?
7. Describe some experiences you have had feeling a sense of joy in your personal life.
8. A Reggio Emilia scholar, Loris Malaguzzi, was once quoted as saying, "Nothing without joy". What does that mean to you? Does it have relevance or resonant with you? If not, why do you feel that way?
9. Is there anything else you would like to share today that I have not asked, or that you did not get the opportunity to share?

## TEACHING AND LEADING WITH JOY

Thank you so much for participating in this research. I will transcribe this interview verbatim and will send you a copy to check over so that you can add, revise, or delete anything you wish so that you feel we have accurately expressed your ideas and responses. Please provide me with the e-mail address that you prefer me to use for this communication. Let me know if you have any further questions or require clarification. I am deeply grateful for your time and contributions.

**APPENDIX G: E-MAIL CORRESPONDENCE DIVISION**

Hello Superintendent,

In November 2016, I received permission from you to conduct research in your school division with principals on the notion of joy and its impact on teaching and leading. I would like to extend this research to include two teachers from your division. I would also like to request permission to contact the two principals who participated in the first phase of my research in order to ask them additional questions based on their responses from the interviews conducted in 2016. I have attached the official letters of request and the necessary ENREB Approval Certificate.

Please let me know by phone or via e-mail ([cuthberr@myumanitoba.ca](mailto:cuthberr@myumanitoba.ca)) whether or not you are able to grant permission for this research, or if you have any questions or concerns. You may also contact my advisor by phone (204-480-1451) or via email at [Melanie.Janzen@umanitoba.ca](mailto:Melanie.Janzen@umanitoba.ca).

Thank you so much for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Rosanna Cuthbert

**APPENDIX H: E-MAIL PRINCIPAL FOLLOW-UP**

Hello Principal,

In November 2016, I received permission from you and your division to conduct research with principals on the notion of joy and its impact on teaching and leading. I am completing my Masters thesis research and would like to request your permission to contact you for follow up questions, clarification or enhancement of the data collected from your previous interview to more fully develop my research. You would be provided with a revised consent form. I have attached the official letter of request and the necessary ENREB Approval Certificate.

Please let me know by phone or via e-mail ([cuthberr@myumanitoba.ca](mailto:cuthberr@myumanitoba.ca)) whether or not you are willing to participate in this research based on your previous interview. If you have any questions or concerns, please let me know. You may also contact my advisor by phone (204-480-1451) or via email at [Melanie.Janzen@umanitoba.ca](mailto:Melanie.Janzen@umanitoba.ca).

Thank you so much for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Rosanna Cuthbert



UNIVERSITY  
OF MANITOBA

Faculty of Education

## APPENDIX I: INFORMED CONSENT DIVISION PRINCIPALS

Research Project Title: **A Narrative Inquiry into Joy: Teaching and Leading with Joy**

### Researcher:

Rosanna Cuthbert

[cuthberr@myumanitoba.ca](mailto:cuthberr@myumanitoba.ca)

### Research Supervisor:

Dr. Melanie Janzen

[Melanie.Janzen@umanitoba.ca](mailto:Melanie.Janzen@umanitoba.ca)

204-480-1451

### SCHOOL DIVISION:

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 the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you are interested in further detail, please let me know. Please take the time to read through this information carefully in order to clarify what is involved as a participant.

I am a graduate student at the University of Manitoba, pursuing a Master's of Education in Curriculum and Instruction. I am intrigued by the impact of joy in teaching and leading and am conducting research for my thesis on this topic.

I am interested in principals' experiences, perspectives, and their insight on the impact, if any, of the essence of joy on teaching and leading. I am interested in exploring principals' insights on the essence of joy for those educators who are departing from more traditional learning environments towards holistic teaching. The insight that I have gained in these past eight years as a Principal at our school (Sigurbjorg Stefansson School in Gimli, MB.) has caused me to wonder about how a joyful school environment might enhance education and our beliefs about what it

## TEACHING AND LEADING WITH JOY

means to be educated. I am fascinated with what I have experienced in our school's journey exploring a more holistic teaching environment and am wanting to develop a deeper understanding of this phenomenon. For this component of my research, I am interested in the perspectives of principals' in terms of the impact that a sense of joy can have on teaching and leading, if at all.

As interviews have already been conducted with two principals in your division in November 2016, this phase of the research with principals will only involve contacting them for clarification, member checking, and/or enhancing the data which was generated from their one hour interview. Principals will be engaged in an informed consent process and signing of the revised informed consent form prior to contacting them to clarify, member check, or expand on their interview data. This communication will take place via e-mail or telephone.

Participants will identify themselves by name directly but pseudonyms will be used in transcripts and in all subsequent reports or manuscripts in order to maintain the participants' anonymity. The electronic data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in my office on a USB key. The consent forms and identifying information will be stored separately in locked filing cabinets in my home office. The data will be destroyed in December, 2020.

I do not anticipate more than minimal risks to people who participate in this study, although some may feel uncomfortable and/or vulnerable sharing some reflections, insights, and sensitive experiences. Should anyone feel uncomfortable during the interview or any time during the research process, they may stop at any time by simply letting me know. Benefits to participants are an opportunity to reflect and celebrate successes which may propel them to gain a deeper, richer insight into teaching and leading. Please be aware that I am required by law to report any abuse against children that may be revealed in the interview process.

The data from the interview will be used for my Master's thesis research. It will be shared with my thesis advisor and possibly during professional presentations, professional organizations, divisional leadership team discussions, staff meetings, and potential journal articles.

Your signature on this form indicates that you are satisfied with the information you have received regarding your divisions' anticipated participation in this research and that you are in agreement with participating as a division. This signature does not waive your legal rights or release the research or involved institutions from legal and professional responsibilities. Participation is completely voluntary and teachers may withdraw from the research project at any time during the process. Principals are under no obligation to answer any questions and are able to omit any without consequence. Please be aware that they are able to ask for clarification or seek new information throughout their participation and that their continued participation should be as informed as their initial consent to participate at the onset of this research study.

This research has been approved by the Education Research Ethics Board (ENREB). The University of Manitoba may look at the research records to ensure that the research is being conducted in a safe and appropriate manner. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this project, feel free to contact or my M. Ed advisor, Dr. Melanie Janzen ([Melanie.Janzen@myumanitoba.ca](mailto:Melanie.Janzen@myumanitoba.ca)). You may also contact the Human Ethics Coordinator (HEC)

## TEACHING AND LEADING WITH JOY

at 304-474-7122 or by email 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.

Superintendent's Name: (printed)

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Superintendent's Signature:

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Date: 

---

Researcher's Signature:

---

I wish to receive a copy of the thesis by e-mail.



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## APPENDIX J: INFORMED CONSENT PRINCIPALS

Research Project Title: **A Narrative Inquiry into Joy: Teaching and Leading with Joy**

**Researcher:**

Rosanna Cuthbert

[cuthberr@myumanitoba.ca](mailto:cuthberr@myumanitoba.ca)

**Research Supervisor:**

Dr. Melanie Janzen

[Melanie.Janzen@umanitoba.ca](mailto:Melanie.Janzen@umanitoba.ca)

204-480-1451

PRINCIPAL,

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 the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you are interested in further detail, please let me know. Please take the time to read through this information carefully in order to clarify what is involved as a participant.

I am a graduate student at the University of Manitoba, pursuing a Master's of Education in Curriculum and Instruction. I am intrigued by the impact of joy in teaching and leading and am conducting research for my thesis on this topic.

I am interested in principals' experiences, perspectives, and their insight on the impact, if any, of the essence of joy on teaching and leading. I am interested in exploring principals' insights on the essence of joy for those educators who are departing from more traditional learning environments towards holistic teaching. The insight that I have gained in these past eight years as a Principal at our school (Sigurbjorg Stefansson School in Gimli, MB.) has caused me to wonder about how a joyful school environment might enhance education and our beliefs about what it means to be educated. I am fascinated with what I have experienced in our school's journey exploring a more holistic teaching environment and am wanting to develop a deeper understanding of this phenomenon. For this component of my research, I am interested in the

## TEACHING AND LEADING WITH JOY

perspectives of principals' in terms of the impact that a sense of joy can have on teaching and leading, if at all.

As interviews have already been conducted in November, 2016, I am seeking permission in this phase of the research to contact you for clarification, member checking, and/or enhancing the data which was generated from this one hour interview via e-mail or telephone.

Participants will identify themselves by name directly but pseudonyms will be used in transcripts and in all subsequent reports or manuscripts in order to maintain the participants' anonymity. The electronic data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in my office on a USB key. The consent forms and identifying information will be stored separately in locked filing cabinets in my home office. The data will be destroyed in December, 2020.

I do not anticipate more than minimal risks to people who participate in this study, although some may feel uncomfortable and/or vulnerable sharing some reflections, insights, and sensitive experiences. Should anyone feel uncomfortable during this communication, they may stop at any time by simply letting me know. Benefits to participants are an opportunity to reflect and celebrate successes which may propel them to gain a deeper, richer insight into teaching and leading. Please be aware that I am required by law to report any abuse against children that may be revealed in the interview process.

The data from the interview will be used for my Master's thesis research. It will be shared with my thesis advisor and possibly during professional presentations, professional organizations, divisional leadership team discussions, staff meetings, and potential journal articles.

Your signature on this form indicates that you are satisfied with the information you have received regarding your divisions' anticipated participation in this research and that you are in agreement with participating as a division. This signature does not waive your legal rights or release the research or involved institutions from legal and professional responsibilities. Participation is completely voluntary and teachers may withdraw from the research project at any time during the process. Principals are under no obligation to answer any questions and are able to omit any without consequence. Please be aware that they are able to ask for clarification or seek new information throughout their participation and that their continued participation should be as informed as their initial consent to participate at the onset of this research study.

This research has been approved by the Education Research Ethics Board (ENREB). The University of Manitoba may look at the research records to ensure that the research is being conducted in a safe and appropriate manner. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this project, feel free to contact or my M. Ed advisor, Dr. Melanie Janzen ([Melanie.Janzen@myumanitoba.ca](mailto:Melanie.Janzen@myumanitoba.ca)). You may also contact the Human Ethics Coordinator (HEC) at 304-474-7122 or by email 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.

## TEACHING AND LEADING WITH JOY

Participant's Name: (printed)

---

Participant's Signature:

---

Date: 

---

Researcher's Signature:

---

 I wish to receive the transcript and summary by regular mail. My address is: I wish to receive a copy of my thesis by e-mail.



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## APPENDIX K: INFORMED CONSENT TEACHER

Research Project Title: **A Narrative Inquiry into Joy: Teaching and Leading with Joy**

### Researcher:

Rosanna Cuthbert

[cuthberr@myumanitoba.ca](mailto:cuthberr@myumanitoba.ca)

### Research Supervisor:

Dr. Melanie Janzen

[Melanie.Janzen@umanitoba.ca](mailto:Melanie.Janzen@umanitoba.ca)

204-480-1451

### TEACHER:

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 the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you are interested in further detail, please let me know. Please take the time to read through this information carefully in order to clarify what is involved as a participant.

I am a graduate student at the University of Manitoba, pursuing a Master's of Education in Curriculum and Instruction. I am intrigued by the impact of joy in teaching and leading and am conducting research for my thesis on this topic.

I am interested in teachers' experiences, perspectives, and their insight on the impact, if any, of the essence of joy on teaching and leading. I am interested in exploring teachers' insights on the essence of joy for those educators who are departing from more traditional learning environments towards holistic teaching. The insight that I have gained in these past eight years as a Principal at our school (Sigurbjorg Stefansson School in Gimli, MB.) has caused me to wonder about how a joyful school environment might enhance education and our beliefs about what it

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means to be educated. I am fascinated with what I have experienced in our school's journey exploring a more holistic teaching environment and am wanting to develop a deeper understanding of this phenomenon. For this component of my research, I am interested in the perspectives of teachers in terms of the impact that a sense of joy can have on teaching and leading, if at all.

Teachers will be engaged in an informed consent process and signing of the informed consent form will take place prior to the interview. This interview will take place at a mutually agreed upon time via Skype or Zoom, (or in person if a time and location is able to be easily arranged despite the geographical distance between our school divisions). The interview will take place in the months of February and March, 2018 and it will be approximately one hour in duration. I will audio record the interview using both my cell phone and an audio recording device, in the event that one does not record. I will later transcribe the interview verbatim. I will also take some written notes which will help to support what is recorded in the audio transcript. A follow-up phone call or e-mail may be required for fact-checking or clarification. Teachers are welcome to bring an artifact or photo to share with me during the interview.

Participants will identify themselves by name directly but pseudonyms will be used in transcripts and in all subsequent reports or manuscripts in order to maintain the participants' anonymity. The electronic data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in my office on a USB key. The consent forms and identifying information will be stored separately in locked filing cabinets in my home office. The data will be destroyed in December, 2020.

I do not anticipate more than minimal risks to people who participate in this study, although some may feel uncomfortable and/or vulnerable sharing some reflections, insights, and sensitive experiences. Should anyone feel uncomfortable during the interview or any time during the research process, they may stop at any time by simply letting me know. Teachers will be provided with a copy of the interview questions and may choose to not answer some or any of the questions posed. The data I collect will be the transcript I generate from our interview. Teachers will have one week to review the transcript (which would take approximately one hour) so that they can read it over, revise, delete or add comments or reflections, and then return it to me. Teachers will receive a reminder e-mail to respond to it in this time frame and if there is a confirmation, or no response, it will be assumed that it is approved. Benefits to participants are an opportunity to reflect and celebrate successes which may propel them to gain a deeper, richer insight into teaching and leading. Please be aware that I am required by law to report any abuse against children that may be revealed in the interview process.

In appreciation for time and participation, teachers will receive a \$10.00 gift for Starbucks and this small gift is theirs to keep even if they decide to end their participation in the research.

The data from the interview will be used for my Master's thesis research. It will be shared with my thesis advisor and possibly during professional presentations, professional organizations, divisional leadership team discussions, staff meetings, and potential journal articles.

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Your signature on this form indicates that you are satisfied with the information you have received regarding your divisions' anticipated participation in this research and that you are in agreement with participating as a division. This signature does not waive your legal rights or release the research or involved institutions from legal and professional responsibilities. Participation is completely voluntary and teachers may withdraw from the research project at any time during the process. Teachers are under no obligation to answer any questions and are able to omit any without consequence. Please be aware that they are able to ask for clarification or seek new information throughout their participation and that their continued participation should be as informed as their initial consent to participate at the onset of this research study.

This research has been approved by the Education Research Ethics Board (ENREB). The University of Manitoba may look at the research records to ensure that the research is being conducted in a safe and appropriate manner. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this project, feel free to contact or my M. Ed advisor, Dr. Melanie Janzen ([Melanie.Janzen@myumanitoba.ca](mailto:Melanie.Janzen@myumanitoba.ca)). You may also contact the Human Ethics Coordinator (HEC) at 304-474-7122 or by email 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 Name: (printed)

\_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Signature:

\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Signature:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ I wish to receive the transcript and summary by regular mail. My address is:

\_\_\_\_\_ I wish to receive a copy of the thesis by e-mail.

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