

UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

THE PRINCIPAL'S ROLE IN DEVELOPING  
AND MAINTAINING TEACHER COMMITMENT

39

by

Greg Meade

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of Graduate Studies in partial  
fulfilment of the requirements  
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**BY**

**GREG MEADE**

**A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of the University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of**

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine what principals say they do to develop and maintain teacher commitment. Particular attention was given to three general research questions:

1. How do principals describe a committed teacher?
2. What do principals believe to be the most important elements in developing and maintaining teacher commitment?
3. What do principals regard as the most important strategies to achieve and promote commitment within their teaching staff?

Six principals were randomly selected from three school divisions in suburban Winnipeg. A first interview was held with each principal that lasted about one hour. The interview was taped and then transcribed. A copy of the transcript was returned to each principal. A second interview was then scheduled to review the transcribed document. Following the second interview, the principals' responses to the specific questions were reorganized and transcribed to reflect the three research questions. The analysis of the finished transcripts compared the responses provided by the principals to the factors influencing commitment identified in the literature.

The principals viewed committed teachers as having a psychological predisposition to being committed. Committed teachers were viewed as being more intelligent and possessing a greater knowledge of the teaching profession. Principals also discussed the extra time committed teachers spend at work.

In the interviews the principals identified many of the same factors that influence commitment as identified in the literature. The principals discussed the importance of psychic rewards, teacher certainty, work meaningfulness and task autonomy and discretion as influencing commitment. One surprising feature of the responses from the principals was their lack of identification of student behaviour as a factor on commitment.

All the principals interviewed agreed they had a significant role to play in influencing commitment. To achieve this end, four of the principals

suggested that it was important to establish trust. The principals reported that they focused their work on the establishment of psychic rewards, the enhancement of teacher certainty and work meaningfulness, and the development of task autonomy and discretion. The analysis of the principals' responses to their role suggested a bias towards tasks that were categorized as being personnel issues.

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## CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Huberman (1990) hypothesizes a view of a school "as a bonded community of adults and children" (p. 1). The school is "a sort of vastly extended family comprising of at least a few hundred people, most of them unrelated to one another, all the children put together simply by virtue of living in the same neighborhood" (Huberman, 1990, p. 1). Unlike the children, the teachers do not come together by virtue of living in the same neighborhood but rather due to a desire to pursue careers in teaching. In schools the efforts of the teachers are of great importance. Rosenholtz (1989) suggests that "the quality of the teachers' contributions not only relates to student learning; it is the ultimate means through which schools acquire the necessary resources" (p. 421). The contributions of teachers enable schools to mobilize greater parental support and the other resources necessary to enable schools to function. This type of support is lacking in unsuccessful schools (Clark, Lotto, & Astuto, 1984; Rosenholtz, 1985).

"Central to a school's success is its ability to motivate teachers to make meaningful contributions to the school, rather than to some other non-school based endeavor" (Rosenholtz 1989, p. 6). Pivotal to the development of teacher commitment is the role taken by the school principal. The school effects literature suggests that the principal is crucial "as a middle administrator and instructional leader in the school system" (Binda, 1989, p. 23).

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to examine what principals say they do to develop and maintain teacher commitment. Particular attention was given to the following three general research questions.

1. How do principals describe a committed teacher?
2. What do principals believe to be the most important

elements in developing and maintaining teacher commitment?

3. What do principals regard as the most important strategies to achieve and promote commitment within their teaching staffs?

#### Commitment

For the purpose of this study, commitment was viewed as a willingness by a teacher to devote time to activities associated with teaching, rather than to some other pursuit. This commitment, it is proposed, is influenced by organizational conditions impacting on the teacher.

### **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

The research to be presented in this review provides the framework which shaped this study. Sufficient research exists that describes the inter-play between organizations and the personal needs of the teacher. In addition there is evidence that supports the view of the principal as an instructional leader within the school. Commitment is necessary for a successful school (Rosenholtz, 1989). To enhance commitment, certain organizational dynamics need attention, and the principal is pivotal to the structuring of these dynamics.

#### Theoretical Foundation of Workplace Commitment

Tyree (1991) presents a view of commitment that is sociologically oriented, and includes two perspectives: side bet theory and multiple-state organizational commitment typologies. These two perspectives focus on how socially-organized endeavors and dimensions of these endeavors organize and contribute to individual commitment.

Side-bet theory is described as a process wherein individuals invest their personal resources in maintaining an endeavor. As individuals bet more personal resources, not formally required by the endeavor, they demonstrate commitment. Tyree (1991) proposes that side-bet theory makes

two important contributions. "First, it explains how socially-organized activities and dimensions of individuals' lives might become linked. Second, side-bet theory suggests that patterns of behavior may create our *raison d'être*: existing commitments lead to more commitments" (p. 3).

The organizational commitment typologies "constitute a second sort of commitment theory, one that describes multiple dimensions of complex organizations to which individuals may become committed" (Tyree, 1991, p. 6). Kanter (1974) generalized that individuals might be committed to one or more of the following:

- 1) the ideology and norms of the organization (social control)
- 2) the social solidarity with organizational members (social cohesion)
- 3) the protection of personal and social investments individuals have made in the organization (continuance).

In addition to the sociological orientation, Tyree (1991) also reviews commitment from a psychological view. Psychological research defines commitment in terms of clusters of individual attitudes and behaviors. This approach combines three dimensions, "a strong belief in organizations or occupational goals, strong willingness to remain in the organization or occupation, and strong desire to maintain membership in the organization or occupation" (Tyree, 1991, p. 4). Psychologically oriented research assumes that organizations and occupations offer three dimensions, meaningful and coherent goals with which persons can identify, involvement opportunities, and encouragement for individuals to remain.

Both sociological and psychological traditions share general similarities on the multi-dimensional nature of commitment and the kind of dimensions that may underlie commitment to a social endeavor. But they differ in the assumptions about the respective roles of the individual and the social endeavor in organizing commitment.

In summarizing literature on commitment, Tyree (1991) has identified a number of common themes.

1) Commitment studies acknowledge the likely multi-dimensionality of commitment.

2) Commitment involves contextual complexity resulting from the variety implicit in the relationship between individuals and social endeavors. Commitment implies matches between individuals and endeavors.

3) Commitment may mean differentiated commitment to aspects of an organization or occupation. With respect to teaching, it would be necessary to understand with what aspects of their work teachers may involve themselves. Teacher may be committed to certain aspects of their jobs.

While Tyree (1991) provides both sociological and psychological views of commitment, the focus of this review and study is on the sociological issues influencing commitment.

#### Factors Influencing Teacher Commitment

The basic sentiment that compels a high level of commitment to work has been described as internal motivation (Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Rosenholtz, 1989). If people are highly motivated, their feelings will be closely related to how well they perform on the job. Good performance is self-rewarding and should provide an incentive to continue to perform well. Alternatively, poor performance is an occasion for distress, and reduced or alternate commitment. When people experience low internal motivation, they may feel dissatisfied and alienated and may engage in work behaviours that serve to reinforce their task failure, absenteeism, low effort expenditure, and workplace defection.

Hackman & Oldham (1980) present a behavioral approach to work referred to as job characteristic theory. The basic idea "is to build into jobs those attributes that create conditions for high work motivation, satisfaction and performance" (p. 59). The theory requires that the characteristics of job holders as well as the job itself be considered when work is assigned.

Duval & Carlson (1991) characterized teacher commitment as the

concern teachers have for the student and the time and energy teachers expend in teaching. Teachers with low levels of commitment have little or no concern for students, while committed teachers demonstrate a high level of commitment.

Rosenholtz (1989) claims "that work motivation and commitment have less to do with personal qualities people bring to the workplace than with the design and management of tasks within it" (p. 423). Rosenholtz's (1989) research on the teacher's work place proposed that attitudes and commitments to the workplace are shaped by specific organizational settings. To arrange her findings Rosenholtz (1989) developed a number of categories.

Psychic Rewards. For work to be motivating, people must have feedback concerning the success of their efforts. Feedback indicates to teachers the value others place on them and their value in the organization. Positive feedback fosters continued commitment to the task at hand. An absence of positive feedback could lead to disenchantment with their work and the workplace. The disenchantment may be manifest in absenteeism, lack of enthusiasm for the job, and a desire to leave the workplace. For individuals to perform well they need to feel good about themselves and to feel they have the knowledge to do a good job. People will avoid situations where skill inadequacy may be exposed with risks thereby to their self-esteem. Not only are people motivated to cast themselves in the best possible light, they are also motivated to feel that they can make things happen with their own efforts (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983).

Most teachers derive their strongest reward from positive and academically successful relations with individual students and from the external recognition they receive from colleagues, parents and principals (Lortie, 1975). This view was supported by Rosenholtz (1989) in her analysis of the teachers workplace.

The Carnegie Forum (1986) emphasized the importance of schools

providing work environments in which teachers can be successful. Failure to provide such an environment would cause teachers to become disillusioned. Regardless of their qualifications or pay, a poorly organized workplace decreases commitment. A workplace that does not provide the opportunities for teachers to receive their rewards will negatively impact on teacher commitment.

Conley, Bacharach & Bauer (1988) focused on the role of the organization in enhancing teacher commitment. They dispelled the notion that increasing compensation (merit pay, career ladders) would increase teacher involvement. They suggested that organizations employing professionals can only be successful when three requirements are met; quality people are hired, the organizational structure and the work activity are organized so the employees can achieve their goals, and professionals are rewarded for their accomplishments. Conley et al (1988) also stressed the need to attend to the factors preventing teachers from achieving intrinsic goals in the workplace, this increasing career dissatisfaction.

Managing Student Behavior. While student progress is an important source of psychic rewards for teachers, difficult relations create problems. Hubermann (1990) proposed that a primary source of teacher dissatisfaction is "the number of apathetic or disruptive cohorts of pupils one has to face each day or each year" (p. 28).

Collectively enforced standards for student conduct operate synergistically within a school by raising the general level of class-room control above the average of any one teacher working alone (Denscombe 1985). Conversely, disruptive students interfere with the process of teaching. As teachers desire the opportunity to succeed in their teaching, these conditions may lead them to abdicate responsibility for teaching as they see the situation as hopeless (Ashton & Webb 1986):

"In many unsuccessful schools, student misconduct is so pronounced that the goal of class-room order often displaces student learning as the definition of teaching effectiveness. Success in controlling students---sometimes using any means---becomes

synonymous with teacher's sense of efficacy, and class-room activities are related to goals of control rather than to student learning" (Rosenholtz, 1989, p.429).

Goal displacement has profound and pernicious consequences for teachers' learning opportunities.

Failure to deal successfully with student behavior is strongly related to teachers loss of workplace commitment (Rosenholtz 1989, Conley et al, 1989). The disruptive students upset the running of the school, producing greater uncertainty about a technical culture.

Increased Task Autonomy and Discretion. Both Rosenholtz (1989) and Rowan (1990) state that workplace commitment is enhanced when individuals experience personal responsibility for the outcomes of their work. In addition to the workplace providing freedom, independence and individual discretion in carrying out the task, Rowan (1990) argues that teachers need to be involved in collaborative decision making opportunities on issues that involve their work tasks. Jobs that give people more autonomy and discretion require that they exercise judgment and choice and in doing so, they become aware of themselves as causal agents in their own performance (Hackman & Oldham, 1980).

"Losing the capacity to control the terms of work, to determine what work to do and how the work is to be done or what its aim is to be, widens the gap between the knowledge of one's unique contributions and any performance-based self-esteem derived from it. The results of work no longer reflect individual efforts, and people become estranged and alienated, unwilling to accept personal responsibility for, or ownership of, their performance" (Rosenholtz, 1989, p. 423).

Rosenholtz (1989) cited a study that examined motivational change. By changing their situations and resources, teachers came to perceive they had choices and opportunities. As the teachers developed the sense they could control their organizational lives, it was reported their work investment, satisfaction and academic success with students increased dramatically (de Charms & Muir, 1978).

Discretion over critical matters related to class-room instruction allows teachers to accommodate the varied learning needs of individual

students within their classes. To interfere with this feature is to "unwittingly" program both students and teachers for greater academic frustration and failure (Rosenholtz 1987). The lack of success teachers experience with students earns them fewer psychic dividends and less self-congratulation (Rosenholtz 1985). Rosenholtz (1989) claims that professional independence and discretion bolsters motivation, responsibility and commitment, while a lack of workplace autonomy is frequently used as a reason for dissatisfaction.

Meaningfulness of Work. If work is perceived as meaningless, as unimportant, then no amount of feedback or autonomy is going to enhance commitment. Commitment is lost if opportunities for professional growth that challenge the teacher to improve are missing. Through professional development teachers are given the opportunity to further master their work tasks. In addition, this would create a greater sense of meaning, enhancing self-efficacy.

Once mastered, jobs become routine, tedious and monotonous unless there is a further challenge. Work opportunities that allow people to grow and develop give them a sense of challenge and personal accomplishment (Hackman & Oldham, 1980). The absence of opportunities to broaden instructional abilities is often cited by teachers as a reason for their absenteeism and attrition from work (Rosenholtz, 1989).

The extent to which people believe that their work will affect the lives of others also enhances the meaningfulness of work. If personal definitions of success are perceived by teachers as unfeasible to attain, work loses its meaningfulness, dissatisfaction and defections increase dramatically (Rosenholtz, 1989).

Teacher Certainty. Teachers' work has been described as a task without a technical culture, and this may lead to a level of teacher uncertainty. Teachers' technical knowledge involves the skills, procedures, and methods that assist students to progress academically.

"A technical culture is labelled uncertain if the outcomes of work are highly unpredictable; where, because of variability in

their students, for example, teachers do not reach automatically for solutions to the myriad learning problems they confront. Uncertainty means there are few well established techniques - codified technical knowledge - to help teachers meet students widely varying needs" (Rosenholtz, 1989, p. 4).

Because of this uncertainty, teachers' commitment may be threatened if they are not given task autonomy and discretion in order to develop self-efficacy.

Teacher certainty refers to the individual having the skills and knowledge to accommodate the increased work challenges. When teachers feel efficacious about their professional practise, they expend greater effort with their students. Should the challenge be perceived by the teacher as too great, then the teacher may be reluctant to become involved.

Teachers often cite the reason they entered teaching as a desire to work with children and to help them learn (Lortie, 1975). If teachers begin to sense that this desire to help children learn is not attainable, then work will lose its meaning, reducing commitment (Fullan, 1991).

Gecas and Schwalbe (1983) claim people have a need to make self-enhancing judgements of themselves. Teachers experiencing dissatisfaction in the workplace will redefine the term success. Instead of receiving recognition through job satisfaction, they begin to focus on methods to relieve the boredom, focusing time on social issues that Gecas and Schwalbe (1983) suggest is antiethical to productive work.

In addition to the five factors described by Rosenholtz (1989) as affecting commitment, a number of additional authors have outlined influences upon teacher commitment.

#### Additional and Related Influence

Tyree's (1991) research project proposed that occupational or organizational commitment usually required a demonstration of voluntary contributions by the teacher to the occupation or organization. The factors outlined by Rosenholtz (1989) would affect the nature of voluntary contributions. "Voluntary devotion of personal time to teaching reflects high involvement, a behavioral indicator of commitment" (Tyree, 1991,

p. 9). While the factors identified by Rosenholtz (1989) would most definitely affect the investment of voluntary time, it would also be reasonable to assume that commitment to the required tasks of teaching, the curricular endeavors, would also be influenced.

Sparkes (1988) also viewed commitment to work as a multi-directional and multi-faceted phenomenon, that would increase or decrease commitment depending upon the life circumstances of the individual. Sparkes (1988) examined the success a newly appointed department head had introducing structural changes into the curriculum. An interview process was used to determine staff reactions to the emerging innovations and the concerns the innovations raised.

In the Sparkes (1988) study individuals reported a highly motivated state when there was a personal belief in the benefits of the change. Others became involved for the purpose of enhancing career opportunities. According to Sparkes (1988) teachers make strategic choices as to the form of commitment emphasized at any given time. "Teachers are aware of the constraints of social structure and are not simply passive; indeed they are active creators and strategists within its boundaries" (Sparkes, 1988, p. 135). Both Sparkes (1988) and Tyree (1991) discussed the issue of side bets or the investment framework of commitment. Within this framework, teachers would measure the costs and benefits of increasing/decreasing commitment to the task or organization.

The Conley et al (1989) study found that role ambiguity and routinization are associated with career dissatisfaction. Low levels of authority and influence were also found to lead to reduced commitment. Low levels of positive supervising behavior, low levels of certainty about promotion opportunities, low levels of rationality concerning the promotion process, class size, high levels of student learning and behavior problems have also been identified by Conley et al (1989) as decreasing commitment.

Teachers who are denied the psychic rewards, professional discretion

and other criteria to maintain commitment will redefine their work (Rosenholtz, 1989). An increase in absenteeism and workplace defection have been identified as consequences of such dissatisfaction. Teachers have been found to converse more with their colleagues about non-teaching matters, and the poor working conditions, rather than conversations of teaching problems, their solutions and progressive ideas. "Organizational conditions of schools create some of the major problems associated with teacher quality and commitment and just as powerfully, these conditions mould the strategies that teachers find most acceptable and appropriate to use" (Rosenholtz, 1989, p. 427).

The absence of high levels of commitment by teachers to the job of teaching and to the educational workplace can have disastrous results. According to Rosenholtz (1988), a low level of teacher commitment makes the difference between successful and unsuccessful schools.

The Rosenholtz & Simpson (1990) study revealed a drop in teacher commitment across the teaching career. It was shown that the commitment of novice teachers and experienced teachers is influenced by different organizational conditions. The managing of student behavior and the buffering of professional work from various non-professional interruptions prove to have a much greater impact on the novice teachers. Experienced teachers were influenced more by organizational conditions that directly affect the performance of core tasks, particularly discretion and autonomy.

The commitment research has identified many organizational factors influencing teacher commitment. It appears justifiable to suggest that organizational structuring or re-structuring would influence the well-being of teachers. Schwartz and Olson (1986) have stated that "teachers can survive in stressful schools if proper procedures are initiated. These procedures include preparedness, opportunity for learning, sharing, morale, and crisis intervention" (p. 577). These authors reinforced the importance of the school principal in developing a successful workplace.

They highlighted that a source of teacher stress has to do with teacher expectations of the responsibilities of administrators in making the school system function well. Bruner & Felder (1983) identified the lack of support by the building administrator concerning student discipline as a major stress creating factor. Rosenholtz (1989) also identified problems with student discipline as a significant factor in the reduction of teacher commitment.

#### The Role of the Principal and the Enhancement of Teacher Commitment

Significant support can be found in current literature for the claim that the principal has a significant influence on school dynamics. Binda (1989) claims that "school effects research school effects research suggests that the principal is becoming even more crucial as a middle administrator and instructional leader in the school system" (p. 22). Effective principals prioritize and set clear achievable goals, evaluate results, have high expectations, moral norms, create orderly climate, seek out resources, attend meetings and seminars and are collegially interactive. According to Binda (1989) commitment like other situations in the school is the result of a negotiated relationship between the principal and the staff.

Rosenholtz (1989) proposed that opportunities to acquire teaching strategies depend in a large part on prevailing values and patterns of interaction between teachers and principals. "In many ways principals shape the organizational conditions under which teachers work and the definitions of teaching they come to acquire." (Rosenholtz, 1989, p. 427).

McNally (1992) reviewed the literature pertaining to the practises of effective principals and concluded that principals in effective schools devote more time to co-ordination and management of instruction and are more skilled in instructional matters. He also noted effective principals have strong human relations skills and help teachers achieve their performance goals.

Leithwood and Montgomery (1982) found that effective principals

established strategies that fostered teacher participation and involvement. It would be logical to assume that school climate could influence teacher participation; this was identified by McNally (1992) as being a factor for the principal to influence.

Short and Spencer (1990) outlined specific principal variables as being essential to having an effective school. These variables included having a clear vision of where the school is going and communicating it to students, teachers and parents. Establishing a safe, orderly environment and establishing and maintaining curriculum related to school goals. Recognizing quality instruction, working with teachers to improve instruction and monitoring school performance.

The work of Okeafor and Frere (1992) concluded that "beliefs of teachers about their principals confidence in teachers, and administrator - teacher interaction about instructional tasks potentially influence such important teacher variables as commitment, productivity, responsiveness to change, and job satisfaction" (p. 204).

This was supported by Whaley and Hegstrom (1992) who, using a leadership survey that examined five factors (a sense of mission, clear goals, feedback, rewards and support), found a significant relationship between how teachers perceive their principal's communication and how satisfied they are on the job. The authors recommended that principals would "be advised to develop structures, procedures and habits that would help teachers understand how well they are performing their jobs" (p. 229).

Both these studies lend support to the impact of the role of the principal. The teachers reported that principals could improve communication, and therefore might positively affect teacher satisfaction on the job.

Hoy, Tarter and Witkoskie (1992) identified trust as a key element in the development of productive group relations. Their study was based upon the premise that supportive leadership is likely a major element in fostering a professional culture of trust, teamwork, and respect. "When

professionals are part of a team characterized by mutual trust and respect, their work is more productive" (p. 38). Their results suggest that the more supportive the leadership of the principal, the more trust in the relationship among faculty, and the greater the perceived school effectiveness. The authors concluded that their study generally supported the notion that "effective school principals are actively engaged in the organizational life of the school and support the faculty. Such leaders are strong, active leaders who apparently affect the outcomes of schooling" (p. 42). Trust was identified "as an intrinsic element of the roles and actions that create and preserve the distinctive patterns of the school" (p. 42). In these organizations "the principal's role is supportive rather than direct. It is to develop a supportive environment in which teachers may make mistakes and not feel at risk" (p. 44).

Lane (1992) examined the school as a culture that influences the behavior of those involved. In this context the important, facilitating role of the principal has been identified. The principal has been described as a culture builder, reinforcing "moral, social, and technical traits of the school and whose success relies on the fit between the settings culture demands and the principal's skills in meeting them" (p. 88).

Hall's (1988) study examine the principal's role as a leader of a change facilitating team. The study showed that the principal does play a role in facilitating change. The extent and success was determined by the method which the principal selected to adopt as a leadership style.

Leithwood's (1991) paper looked at policy implementation based upon what he termed commitment strategies. Using interview data, it was concluded that the principal does make a difference. The study presented three insights about such leadership.

- 1) Leadership is often shared, distributed across several roles. Leadership which contributes to commitment tends to distribute leadership function based on expertise rather than authority.

2) The study suggested that for principals who act only as building managers, change appeared more difficult. The principal needed to monitor the change process and react to keep things moving forward.

3) According to Leithwood (1991) his study provided support for a transformational theory of leadership. The transformation depends on the leaders

- a) identifying/articulating a vision
- b) providing an appropriate model
- c) fostering the acceptance of group goals
- d) expressing high performance expectations
- e) providing individualized support
- f) providing intellectual stimulation.

Leithwood (1992) speaks to a shift to type Z organizations that emphasize participative decision making. This is accomplished "when teachers are helped to find greater meaning in their work, to meet higher level needs through their work and to enhance instructional capacities" (p. 9). "When a process makes people feel that they have a voice in matters that affect them they will have greater commitment to the overall enterprise and will take greater responsibility for what happens to the enterprise" (Sarason, 1990, p. 61).

To facilitate the type of change Leithwood (1992) is promoting, the principal has a key role to play.

"The collective action that transforming leadership generates empowers those who participate in the process. There is hope, there is energy. In essence, transforming leadership is a leadership that facilitates the redefinition of a people's mission and vision, a renewal of their commitment, and the restructuring of their systems for goal accomplishment" (p. 9).

Hackman & Oldham (1980) stress the need of the individuals to be trained to maximize their effectiveness. Any changes in organizational dynamics requires attention to the systemic properties of organizations. A key person in guiding the installation and follow-up of changes in jobs are the middle managers. "It is the middle managers who may be best positioned to alter ... managerial practices ... as key to the persistence

of work re-design effects" (Hackman & Oldham, 1980, p. 45).

To improve the individual-organizational relationship it is necessary to focus on the context in which the work is done. The idea is to make the organization a personally pleasant and socially satisfying as well as a productive place for employees. "The hope is that if the work environment is sufficiently congenial, attractive and convenient, then people will be both productive in their work and satisfied with their organizational experiences" (Hackman & Oldham, 1980, p. 3). These authors further suggest that by managing the contingencies between work behavior and organizational rewards, it is often possible to influence employee productivity directly and at the same time to create important spin-off effects on the quality of employee work experiences. It is proposed that the principal plays an important role in the orchestration of the individual-organizational relationship.

#### Enhancing the Workplace Environment

Koch (1982) examined the quality of working life described as a joint management/employee effort to deal with the intrinsic aspects of work. An essential element is the ability of individuals or groups to be able to influence their work environment. Other writers, summarized by Koch (1982), described quality of working life "as a process by which an organization attempts to unlock the creative potential of its people by involving them in decisions affecting their work lives. A distinguishing characteristic of the process is that its goals are not simply extrinsic, focusing on the improvement of productivity and efficiency per se; they are also intrinsic, regarding what the worker sees as self-fulfilling and self-enhancing ends in themselves" (p. 184). Quality of working life has also been described as the "degree to which work provides an opportunity for an individual to satisfy a wide variety of personal needs" (Koch, 1982, p. 185).

Mills (1975) offered four possible reasons as to why a more humanistic approach to work appears to be advantageous. He suggested that

alienation, boredom, and job dissatisfaction; decreasing motivation and increasing counter-productive behavior; rising expectations and declining institutions; and outdated mechanisms and changing ideas, can be addressed by involving staff. Koch (1982) citing a study by Blumberg (1973) concluded;

"There is hardly a study in the entire literature which fails to demonstrate that satisfaction in work is enhanced or that other generally acknowledged beneficial consequences accrue from a genuine increase in workers decision-making power" (p. 8).

Koch (1982) suggests that many "problems having to do with working conditions can be resolved at the workplace co-operatively" (p. 193). To implement an initiative for enhancing the quality of working life, Koch (1985) suggests the following:

- 1) decentralize decisions on teaching to the operational level (i.e., schools)
- 2) provide time off, consultants, and in-service education in process areas
- 3) joint staff-union and management committees to deal with qualities of working life
- 4) joint parent or community and school committees to deal with the quality of working life.

According to Rosenholtz (1987),

"performance based efficacy also depends on organizational conditions that facilitate the attainment of work goals' for teachers on conditions that optimize student growth. It follows then, that intrusive managerial tasks that pull teachers away from instruction are frequently culpable in the loss of their workplace commitment" (p. 541).

Effective schools research (Rosenholtz, 1985) identified the importance of primary rewards in encouraging teachers to maintain their commitment. Since teachers receive their primary rewards from the learning of the students, it is important for schools to pay attention to students' learning. Reduced student learning lowers teacher commitment, and in the worst case leads to chronic absenteeism and defection from teaching.

Often the professed goals of a school and its operational goals are at odds. Effective schools research (Rosenholtz, 1985) have identified ambiguous goals, unclear technology, and people leaving as factors influencing the success of the schools. These factors have also been identified as influencing teacher commitment. Teachers need to have clearly set goals, goals that are supported by the organization.

The setting of school goals is important as this activity communicates directly that the teacher is capable of improving student learning. Secondly, the setting of school goals may provide a basis for teachers to decide how to organize, to execute, and to evaluate instructional decisions. This has a positive affect on teachers' efficacy. Thirdly, without common goals, there can be little common effort expenditure by teaching colleagues and consequently little basis for professional dialogue. Huberman (1990) claims that the action for change in education exists between teachers with similar interests or concerns (i.e., same grade level, same department). Principals can assist in the change process, and facilitate goal setting and the establishment of learning priorities by providing opportunities to meet and interact.

The isolated nature of teaching has been well documented (Rosenholtz, 1988). Teachers' workplaces are characterized by teachers working alone, rarely having the opportunity to interact with other adults on mutual concerns. Teachers, as do many workers, need to protect their self-esteem (Hackman & Oldham, 1980, Rosenholtz, 1989). When faced with a sense of incompetence or weakness many teachers further isolate themselves and create boundaries around their working lives. Principals can be influential in removing the isolation from the teachers' working environment. More successful schools are able to develop a culture of collegiality. It becomes legitimate to seek out and to offer professional assistance. In successful schools "teaching is considered a collective rather than an individual enterprise; requests and offers of assistance among colleagues are frequent; and reasoned initiations, informed choices,

and collective actions set the conditions under which teachers improve instructionally" (Rosenholtz, 1989, p. 430).

Rosenholtz (1989) interviewed elementary teachers from collaborative schools, characterized by shared commitment to student learning outcomes and teachers from isolated schools where values and goals for teaching were highly idiosyncratic. Teachers from collaborative schools described teacher leaders as individuals who initiated new programs, tried new ideas, and motivated their colleagues to experiment.

The collaborative norms that are developed in a school do not just occur. They are the result of careful planning by a principal who believes strongly that committed teachers do make a difference. These principals involve teachers in problem solving and decision making that will have an impact on their success.

#### Creating Organizational Change

A weakness in educational reform according to Rosenholtz (1987) has been that change often failed to take into account the dynamics operating in the teachers' workplace. Rosenholtz (1987) stated "that interventions are apt to be implemented without the use of currently available knowledge about the teaching occupation - knowledge that strikingly contradicts many approaches to school reform currently underway" (p. 535). School improvement plans must attend to both student needs and teacher workplace needs to be successful.

Rowan (1990) has criticized school reform that has resulted in increasing bureaucratic control over schools. He states that this control is incompatible with the professional autonomy needs of teachers. Rowan advocates a wave of school reform that would decrease bureaucratic control and an increase in working conditions that would enhance the commitment and expertise of teachers.

Rowan outlined a school organizational strategy he referred to as a commitment model. This model rejects bureaucratic control as a mode of school improvement, developing instead innovative working arrangements

that support teacher decision making and increases teacher engagement in the task of teaching. "The assumption of this approach is that collaborative and participative management practices will unleash the energy and expertise of committed teachers and therefore lead to important student learning" (p. 354).

The collaborative view assumes that organic patterns of school management that rely on network structures of co-ordination and control and the expansion of teacher authority can enhance teachers' commitment and improve instruction. Walton (1980) suggested employee commitment and motivation can be increased when workers and managers have more authority, variety, and collegiality in their work. A hierarchical command system is replaced by the development of shared beliefs about values and goals. Rowan suggests that "if this pattern of management were implemented in schools, we would expect cultural controls to replace formal controls, and teachers to base their commitment to work on personal identification with the school mission rather than loyalty to superiors" (p. 357).

A fundamental principle behind a commitment strategy is the attempt to increase teacher participation in school decision making. A bureaucratic organization deprives teachers of important opportunities for decision making and also deprives the organization of a valuable source of expertise. Increasing teacher involvement in decision making would enhance both teacher commitment and school quality. Rosenholtz (1989) and others investigating teacher opinion on an increased role in organizational decision making clearly indicates that teachers feel they should have a significant role in decision making.

The view of a teacher as a major decision maker falls within a site-based management philosophy. Clune and White (1988) noted three themes within this view of management.

- 1) Most site-based management advocates recommend decentralization in three areas; budgeting, curriculum and staffing.

- 2) It is recommended that a school council be established to

assist principals in policy development and policy setting activities.

3) There is a need to make adjustments in the role of educational personnel, both teachers and principals.

Rowan (1990) suggested that despite problems that may exist in the implementation of site based management, the concept is worth pursuing. Research generally supports the wisdom of including teachers in decision making when such participation leads to increased influence over school policies. The study by Newman, Rutter and Smith (1985) found that a principal's leadership and responsiveness affected the amount of influence teachers had in school decisions and that schools with higher teacher influence had better staff morale, teacher efficacy and a sense of community.

Increasing teacher collegiality is done in an attempt to break down the patterns of teacher isolation caused by the cellular organization of the school. "Consistent with the literature on organic management, school reformers assume that collaborative arrangements will enhance a teacher's capacity for learning and problem solving, build solidarity, and cohesiveness and satisfy teachers' needs for affiliation" (Rowan, 1990, p. 374). To enhance a collaborative, collegial workplace, it is important that a culture that reinforces the norms of continuous improvement is developed.

Finally Rowan (1990) claims that in organic management, formal authority structures become less important in directing work, and informal structures come into effect. This process involves the development of shared values that unify the members of the organization into a common purpose. Bryk & Driscoll (1988) identified three core features of a school community; a shared value system, a common agenda of activities and collegial relations among adults. In the Bryk & Driscoll (1988) study schools that scored high on an index of communal organization showed higher teacher efficacy and satisfaction, higher staff morale, higher teacher enjoyment of work and lower teacher absenteeism.

### Summary

Some common themes are evident in the studies cited above. Work by Hackman & Oldham (1980) and Tyree (1991) show that commitment is multi-dimensional. Rosenholtz (1989) identified factors that influence the nature of commitment within the teacher profession. The research presented described the inter-play between organizational dynamics and the personal needs of the teacher. Tyree (1991) states that "given the likely contextual nature of commitment, some dimensions of commitment may be more important in occupational contexts than in organizational ones; and some dimensions may matter more in some kinds of occupations or organizations than in others" (p. 7).

The influence of organizational dynamics on commitment suggests that certain organizational and management philosophies may be used to enhance commitment. Rowan (1990) has proposed an organizational plan, a commitment model, designed to enhance commitment in the workplace.

The important role played by principals in the success of the educational endeavor has been outlined by numerous writers. Hackman & Oldham (1980) outlined the important role middle managers play in the change process of organizations. Binda's (1989) review of the effective schools research highlighted the leadership role necessary for principals. Rosenholtz (1985), Rosenholtz & Simpson (1990) and Leithwood (1991) also identified the principal as a key person in the development of an organization management structure. Rowan (1990) states in his commitment theory that "the assumption of this approach is that collaborative and participative management practices will unleash the energy and expertise of committed teachers and therefore lead to important student learning" (p. 354). Given the pivotal role principals hold, there is an important role for them to play in developing and maintaining commitment.

Taken collectively, the research lends support to the following set of assumptions upon which this study is based.

1. The research cited in this paper has clearly outlined a number

of identifiable factors that influence teacher commitment. By attending to these factors in a positive approach, teaching commitment should be enhanced.

2. The school principal has a leadership role to play in the school. The review by Binda (1989) and others clearly articulated the role of the principal as a leader in the school and the influence possible.

3. All of the authors cited in this paper suggest that organizational dynamics are a chief cause of reduced teacher commitment. Conversely, developing organizational strategies that are supportive should enhance teacher commitment.

4. School administrators need to be aware of these issues and they should be working to enhance teacher commitment.

These four assumptions have framed the three general research questions for this study. As stated by Rosenholtz (1989) committed teachers are important in making a school successful. It is important therefore that principals be able to identify the nature and extent of the teachers commitment. Furthermore it is an important role of principals to influence that commitment.

## CHAPTER 2

## METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The purpose of this study was to examine what principals say they do to develop and maintain teacher commitment. Specific attention was given to the principal's responses to the following research questions:

1. How do principals describe a committed teacher?
2. What do principals believe to be the most important elements in developing and maintaining teacher commitment?
3. What do principals regard as the most important strategies to achieve and promote commitment within their teaching staffs?

Data Collection

To address the three research questions, a set of interview questions (Appendix A) was developed. Interviewing was selected as the research tool because it was felt this approach would provide the most direct means of gathering the principals' views to the research questions. Gregory's (1992) review of the literature on interviewing supports this method of data collection. Interviewing has been described as "a process by which the researcher gathers data by verbal questioning of the study subjects to elicit data on the variables being studied" (Abdellah & Levine, 1986, p. 387). It is described as a preferred method for retrieving participants "beliefs and attitudes that would be difficult to obtain without asking the subject directly" (Gregory, 1992, p. 81). It was therefore felt that the best way to solicit principals' attitudes would be to ask them directly. "Interviewing is the preferred tactic of data collection when in fact it appears likely that it will get better data or more data or data at less cost than other tactics" (Dexter, 1970, p. 11).

It was recognized in the development of this study that the interviewing process may contain certain limitations. Gregory (1992) reported three potential threats to the collection and the analysis of the

data with the use of an interview technique. These threats "include the researcher, the behavior of the subjects, and the environment in which the research is conducted" (Gregory, 1992, p. 82).

To modify the influence of these factors, Gregory's recommendations were applied to this study.

1. Gregory suggested the interviewer maintain a non-judgmental and neutral approach to the interview, listen to the informants frame of reference and refrain from arguing. This approach was taken for all interviews.

2. As recommended, all interviews were tape recorded and interview summaries were sent back to the participants for clarification, additional comments and editing.

3. Prior to the start of the study, a pilot study was conducted to test the effectiveness of the interview questions.

4. Establishing rapport was identified by Treece & Treece (1986) and cited by Gregory (1992) as being the most important thing an interviewer must do at the beginning of an interview. To address this recommendation, interviews were scheduled at the most convenient time for the principals and all interviews were held in the principal's office. At the beginning of the interview, rapport was established by keeping the first few questions non-threatening. At this time the purpose of the study was explained, the participants were told that confidentiality would be maintained, and that their interviews would be given fictitious names in the thesis. In the first series of questions the principal discussed the school community, the school profile and talked generally about themselves. Following these "introductory" questions, questions addressing the research questions were asked.

#### Delimitations

A number of restrictions were built into the study to attempt to reduce its complexity.

1. To protect against possible influences resulting from the

language of instruction, the participants used in the study were principals working in English language schools.

2. There does exist research suggesting differences in the nature of commitment between teachers working in secondary schools and teachers working in elementary schools. Therefore, the principals in this study all worked in K-9 schools.

#### Limitations

1. While random selection was used in the selection of the participants, the principals interviewed in the study were all male. It is recognized that this may result in some gender bias in the study.

2. No attempt was made in the study to verify the accuracy of the principals' comments. The study treated the principals' responses as being reflective of their opinions and practises.

#### Participants

Six principals working in K-9 English instruction schools participated in the study. To select the participants, a list of principals working in three suburban school divisions was prepared. The names were then randomly selected from the list.

#### Procedure

After approval from the University Ethics Committee, the six principals were contacted for the study. A letter (Appendix B) was sent to the superintendent of each participating school division notifying them that the study was being conducted. The superintendent's letter informed them that I had selected a principal from their division to participate in the research. The letter contained a brief description of the research methodology and an invitation to contact me should they have any questions. I was not contacted by any superintendent.

The selected principals were sent a letter requesting their involvement in the study (Appendix C). A follow-up telephone call was made one week after the letter was mailed to ensure the principal received the letter and to answer any questions. In the letter a description of

the study was given, and their participation requested. A tear-off response was included in the letter and if the principal agreed to participate, they were asked to complete and return the response slip in the self-addressed envelope provided. Once the agreement to participate in the study was received, the first interview was scheduled.

At the first interview the principals were informed that the study investigated what principals say they do to develop and maintain teacher commitment. They were told the study was based on research that has identified a number of factors that affect the level of teacher commitment, as well as on research identifying the principal as being the leader of the school and possessing considerable influence in the organizational dynamics of the school. The first questions were designed to relax the principal and to get some information as to the profile of the school, the community, the number of years the principal had been at the school and the number of years the principal had been an educator and a principal.

In all cases the first interview was held in the principal's office, after regular hours and lasted for about one hour. From the tone of the principals' responses and their gestures, all principals appeared to be comfortable during the interview session. At the completion of the first interview the principals were asked how they felt during the interview. While three of principals did suggest they were nervous, all the principals stated they were satisfied with the answers they had given to the questions.

The principals' responses to the interview questions were tape-recorded and then transcribed. A copy of the transcript was returned to each principal with a covering letter (Appendix D) asking them to add or remove comments from the document. A second interview was then scheduled to review the transcribed document.

One principal cancelled the second interview indicating that he did not want to make any changes in the document so he did not see the need

for the second interview. The transcribed document was returned in the mail. The remaining five interviews were held in the office of the participating principal. No second interview lasted more than 30 minutes, with the actual time spent on the document being about five to ten minutes. The remainder of the time was spent talking about the study in general terms and what the research had to say about commitment and the role of the principal. The conversation during this second interview reinforced my opinion that the principals were interested in the topic and that they had treated the first interview seriously. All six principals requested a copy of the results of the study.

Of the remaining five documents, no changes were made in three of them. Of the two documents that were changed, one principal made some grammatical changes but did not add or delete any of the content. The other principal added more information concerning the role of the principal. The documents were collected from the principals at the end of the second interview.

Following the second interviews, the principals' responses to the specific questions were re-organized to reflect the three general research questions. These transcripts are reported in Chapter Three.

The analysis of the finished transcripts (Chapter Four) compared the responses provided by the principals to the factors influencing commitment identified in the review of the literature. The extent to which the principals attend to issues such as psychic rewards, student behaviour, teacher certainty, etc. were used to develop a portrait of the practises of current administrators.

## CHAPTER 3

## PRINCIPALS' INTERVIEWS

This chapter reports the interviews held with the principals. For the most part the interviews with the principals are reported using the principal's own words. Editing has been restricted to the elimination of repetition and the organization of the responses. Parts of the interview may appear at times to be grammatically incorrect. The responses have been organized around the three general research questions.

**Tim**

I have been a principal of the school for four years, and ten years as an administrator. I have been a teacher for twenty-two years.

The school is a very old school, in a well established community, a predominately professional community. Perhaps because of the background of the parents, there is a great deal of investment in the success of the school. Because of this pressure, or the expectations of the parents, the teachers probably feel some pressure to perform.

We have about 300 students in the school, with an equal distribution across the grades. We don't really have any special situations with respect to the students' learning needs.

The Committed Teacher

Now one thing that is kind of a give-away relative to commitment is excitement. The teachers seem excited about what they are doing. The truly committed teachers that I've seen get much more satisfaction from being with kids, from working with the kids and from feeling that they're doing a good job of the programs than from anything else. Teachers who feel the rewards in the job and state it as such. Now that may be just a symptom of committedness, it may not necessarily be one of the characteristics but it certainly is a give-away in terms of whether that person is committed or not. People who are needy, they're wanting to have their own personal needs met vis a vis working conditions. People who are

sort of self-centered and feel that the working conditions have to be just so are less inclined to be committed to the children, and that's the bottom line, is the commitment to the children in the classrooms and to delivering a program that meets their needs. The level of satisfaction, I think, is in part due to their ability, the committed teacher's ability to look at what they have done and are doing in their program and to devise ways of improving metacognition here, they are able to sit back, to take a step back and think about their thinking and about their practise and to go to some to devise some way to change it, so they are people who are continually evolving, I see as committed people. Their commitment is to growth, self-knowledge, self-development and so on and committed teachers, in my mind, have this meta-cognitive element.

I think the committed teachers that I've seen have a strong drive to develop a personal rapport with the kids. Those that stand back, sort of deal with the kids at arm's length and never really get to know them inside, are far less committed in an overall sense. The personal rapport that these committed teachers develop with the children can be shown or manifested through little things, all the little extras that they do, you know, acknowledging their birthdays, calling them at home when they're sick, all those little extras, perhaps even spending time putting on a band-aid on their knee when they should be or could be doing something else just to get that little bit of extra rapport with the child so that there's that commitment to make that connection and the teachers that I've had do that are the most committed. I think committed teachers go out of their way, put in the extra effort, partly based on the rapport they've established, to individualize programs for the kids. In creating or getting to the rapport stage, they come to see what the invisible needs of the children are and by going beyond some of the superficial needs they can actually do a much better job of meeting the individual program needs of the kids. The little extras could conceivably include things like extra-curriculars but not necessarily. I know some really committed

teachers who for whatever reasons are unable to do extra-curriculars but extra-curriculars can be another manifestation of the drive to establish rapport with the kids.

A committed teacher, I think, invests time and energy, time being the biggest thing. Energy, of course, at different times of the year is a big factor as well. They will spend a lot of time above and beyond the regular prep times getting ready to meet those individual needs that I talked about and to do the best delivery of the programs, so it's that commitment of time and energy beyond what is formally called for in the job that stands out in my mind as being one of the main characteristics of a really committed teacher.

Earlier I talked about excitement on about being an indicator; happiness is also a give-away as to whether or not a teacher is committed to what they are doing. The personal satisfaction that they show in their behaviour and in their expressions and so on is really a clue to whether, in fact, they are committed to what they are doing. The happiness could derive from several things but what I've noted is that it usually derives from something personal, relative to the kids, or relative to a feeling of achievement with the children. It's those little breakthroughs that the happiness can come from. Committed teachers generally make do with what they have. They make the best out of what they are able to get in the way of supplies, preps, working conditions, equipment in the classrooms. They don't grumble about not having the very latest equipment, about not having an ideally sited prep time, this sort of thing. They will obviously bring it to the attention of the administrator but they don't persevere, they don't persevere on these negative things in their working environment. Those teachers are the committed ones.

#### Factors Influencing Teacher Commitment

I don't know why one person is different than the next in terms of buying into a profession. You know, it may be where they were coming from when they undertook the training, maybe their mindset goes way back and

their perception is just what is involved in reaching is such and so when they get into it, it's a self-fulfilling prophecy. Others have wanted to be a teacher forever and over the course of years, they have really dug into and looked at, and thought about what is involved in teaching and when they get into the faculty, when they finally get into teacher training, they go at it with a great deal of vigour and you know as well as I that there's people in there just coasting, just doing the minimum to get by, and in the end they don't really come away with a true perception of what a profession should be and those people who go into the university training, the teacher preparation, with an open mind without any preconceived notions about what they can do and giving their all to it, generally come away with a better understanding.

I think that in terms of commitment, one of the biggest features, well there are several, but one is the entering mind set and the second is the actual student teaching experience. You know, at the faculty they provide them with a number of practical and theoretical ideas and if those students get into the field they meet the practising teachers out there who are less than committed, who are not practising the theory that they found at the university.

I think the dynamics of the community have quite an impact on whether a teacher is committed or not. Where parents have very high expectations for their kids and subsequently, of the teacher and of the learning that is going to take place, those teachers who aren't delivering are under considerable pressure from the community and from the administration via the community to become a little bit more committed to the actual learning of the kids.

I think you want to meet the expectations of the parents. You also want to be acknowledged and appreciated by the parents. The satisfaction of the job is going to be significantly influenced by both of those things. At 'meet the teacher' night you can very quickly get a sense of what the parents' expectations are of the children and of you and

similarly, if they are as concerned as they are in some areas they will keep tabs through their children, through other parents, the networking that goes on relative to what's happening in school is significant so in a neighbourhood where there is high expectations for whatever reasons, professional parents for example, you're going to find a higher level of monitoring of the activities of the school going on and more feed-back and now that feedback can be appreciative, positive and those professional parents know the benefits of positive reinforcement when good things are happening and too, they can be very, they can raise a ruckus pretty quickly because they are connected and because that network is established. So there is an element of fear to it but I think most teachers really have a sincere desire to live up to the expectations of their students' parents.

With the budget cuts, everybody is sort of depressed, everybody is kind of gloomy about it, and that's kind of an obvious one. You know, it's bringing everybody down.

At this point they're not ready to vote themselves out of any extracurricular activities. It's tough to maintain enthusiasm and commitment when you know that the board, your employers, are not acknowledging it and there ways they haven't acknowledged it. They haven't stated to the teachers that you know we're in all this together. We regret having to do this, that's the essence of it and here's what we are doing to try to make sure in the future it doesn't, we don't ever get in this position again.

Presently there are some plans afoot to change the physical plant and it's creating some dissatisfaction in terms of working conditions. I know I said earlier that the working conditions are not the be all and end all and the staff here obviously aren't in a terribly aesthetic environment and they have done a good job under the circumstances. The plan that's afoot to modify the school is universally disliked. They're going to remove windows, a lot of the windows, and psychologically that's

going to have implications for teaching and learning, that's one thing that perhaps is bringing the morale down a bit and of course when morale drops commitment can drop. So, it's an indirect effect on commitment. Uh, beyond that I can't think about a whole lot of things.

Teachers realize they have a choice, when they're not mandated to do such and so, their investment in it, their commitment it, is going to be greater. If they are the ones that have made the commitment to do or come up with the impetus for something, they will buy into it a whole lot deeper, the level of commitment will be greater, so I really like to provide them with choices. I try to encourage teacher leadership, you know we have formal leaders in science, language arts, computers, mathematics and so on, and I really try to encourage the staff to rotate through the leadership roles because in those roles they learn a little bit more about the process or content of a particular area like science or L.A. or so on, and feel a little more expert in it and with the level of expertise comes a feeling of confidence and once you've got a feeling of confidence you'll more readily commit yourself to anything new.

#### The Role of the Principal

The support of the administrator in developing commitment is very, very important. It might be physical support; going out of your way to provide the necessary equipment. That sort of physical evidence that the persons's working on your behalf to try to set it up so you can do the best job that you can possibly do, monetary support in terms of supporting ideas, providing extra P.D. fund beyond what is already available to the teacher to go and pursue some upgrading in a particular area. Teachers who feel they have been given that will have a little more commitment to the outcomes that result. Moral support is very important too, so letting them know that you know that they are going above and beyond and their commitment is not unappreciated.

Getting teachers to believe that what they are doing is valued. Parents do that in many ways, and certainly it's very important for a

principal to give the teacher a pat on the back, to acknowledge and let them know what they're doing in your perception has been valued, passing on comments from the parents to the teachers, positive comments about what has happened is something that will create the commitment.

A lot of it can be structured but a lot of it has to be ad hoc, for example, endorsement of risk-taking. Teachers who stick their necks out and get bitten by somebody who doesn't approve, be it a parent or administrator, is not going to try it again and if a teacher sticks a neck out and a parent tries to bite and you as an administrator feel that it is a positive thing, defend, support and make sure that parent understands that you endorse what the teacher is doing. I think that is a very important organizational trait.

Also, encouraging other teachers to be mutually supportive of that sort of risk-taking is important. The biggest one, I've got it written in big letters in my mind and that is time, organization of time is almost overriding, overarching everything, providing time for teachers that are showing evidence of commitment to follow through on that, to develop the area that they are becoming particularly committed to and providing them time to reflect on it and providing time for them to collaborate with other people and conceivably giving of your own time. This is one of those support things, providing, building in the time support for that teacher to develop the commitment, in an instance that I can think of that I do here, I provide time by going to the classroom myself and taking over the class so the teacher can go off to visit some innovative teacher in another part of the division or another part of the city, or in a couple of instances, to attend study group sessions around the division, or to attend workshops, and this is above and beyond any release time that is provided by the division and unfortunately time provided by that way is diminishing because of the budget cuts.

You know it's becoming even more important, building in shared prep times. If you have somebody on board with you, and you're dialoguing,

talking back and forth, bouncing ideas, your commitment's going to grow and one of the hard-core things is making sure that there are shared prep times with like-minded teachers, or teachers of the same level.

I also do a weekly newsletter. Making sure that they know what other people on staff are doing. It's a tough milieu to do nothing, so you know, I try to make sure that the teachers know what the other teachers are doing. As well, wherever possible, I try to turn back to them and have them reflect on their practise rather than be judgemental, trying to get them to go that extra step and think about what they've just done, to do an analysis of it themselves and arrive at their own conclusions rather than saying, "this is good, this is bad, you should be doing it this way", trying to work through and treat them as professionals, they have insights, they have an ability, most people have an ability to think about what they have just done, to think about what they were thinking at the time and so I make a real point of getting the teachers to reflect on what they've done.

I believe very much in teacher autonomy where decisions can be made by the teacher or by the teachers collectively. I make every effort to do that. I'm rarely arbitrary and I live with whatever decisions the staff make in a collective sense even if I'm not necessarily in favour of it. So, I've demonstrated a willingness to go with the consensus or with the majority in a lot of issues and you know as long as they have been thoroughly and professionally considered.

I believe strongly in professional responsibility in that sense and I really try to encourage them to make professional decisions and indicate that I'm willing to go with the decision that they collectively come up with. That's the one thing I do.

Administrators practising what they preach is very important. Make sure that the climate is a very amiable one so that the teachers are relaxed and willing to take risks. It's important for a principal to be visible. Management by walking around and being in and out of the

classrooms. Teachers know that you know what's happening. If they think you don't know what's happening could be less inclined to really push ahead.

If you show the teachers that you understand, you get into the classroom, you know the kids, you know what the individual needs are and you know specifically what the teacher is doing to address those individual needs. They'll say, "Hey, he's really on top of this, he knows what I'm doing. All those little extras, all these individual things are being appreciated!" they will continue to do so. And so walking around and making sure that as you walk around you give all these cues is very, very important. Modelling, I guess, is what it is, trying to model out these things as an administrator and where there are student problems, generally behaviour problems and/or learning problems, the way in which you intervene with the student or with the student's parents, visibly intervene is extremely important. The message that you send to the teachers about whether you endorse what they are doing is going to become manifest at that point. They will see that you understand what they are doing when they did this research project. The parent objected to it, the kid objected to it, but you as an administrator know what it was all about and you are able to articulate that to the parents and do an effective intervention with this kid who is buying into it. That more than anything will maintain the level of commitment.

I've created what I call a study group and it's taken off. I no longer am the chairperson of the study group and every six weeks we get together and discuss educational activities, just in a general sense. To this point of the year we've done five different topics, and teachers get a chance to express themselves and to sit and hear what other people have to say, so philosophically they get into a much deeper understanding of the other staff members, where they're coming from and the study group's been just tremendously well received, so that's one specific thing. And you know, it started small and we're up to, well I would guess, two thirds

to three quarters of the staff show up for the study groups and you know, we'll look at current issues; retention for example, de-streaming.

Trying to get teachers to overcome the imposter syndrome is a big hurdle. You never know everything about everything and so they say, "Hey, I don't want to put myself up as an expert." They are hesitant to share because they don't know everything about a particular topic and helping them realize that they are as close a thing to an expert that we have around here and encouraging them and helping them share some of their expertise is a real big boost to their confidence and it helps the flavour of the school, you know it helps the staff feel a lot more confident and consequently, a lot more committed.

#### Terry

First of all, the average age of the classroom teachers in my school is forty-seven. It's a very old teaching population, so one of the difficulties I expected I might run into and haven't is commitment. I thought I might have gotten people near the end of their career who are playing out the stream of their last 2, 3, 4 or 5 years, but that has not been the case.

We've got 280 children this year. We've got roughly one class of every grade, although there's a primary multi-age class because we have a bulge at our primary and there is an extra class at junior high which isn't a static class but we split up all the junior high classes for some of the subjects some of the time to allow for small group work. It's a really interesting community in the sense that we have an upper class and a lower class and there really isn't a whole lot of the middle class. It's quite different than anything else I've ever encountered. There doesn't appear to be much in the middle so we have a number of students who academically are quire good, come from homes, very supportive parents, many professional parents in the area in that segment of our population. We have a large number of level two children because of behaviour, the highest proportion in the school division but there's, the middle isn't

there as much as one would expect in the schools.

I have been a principal for eight years, and I'm finishing my first year at this school. I have been a teacher for twenty-one years.

#### The Committed Teacher

I think some of most committed people are some of my more senior people. They are virtually all over the building with all of the classrooms doing things at 8:00 in the morning, doing things at noon hour, doing things after school. One teacher that I have in mind is in classes all the time, he does his prep outside of school hours because school hours are when the kids are there and he wants to work with the kids, not with himself, during that time. He does things on weekends. If I were to sum up what I think he does and the kind of person he is I would basically use words like self-motivated and self-starter. He's the one who goes to look for things he should be doing, he doesn't wait for somebody to tell him or somebody to ask him.

He believes he makes the difference, and he can demonstrate that he makes a difference. He can see the sparks, he can see the kids doing things, he can see things happen after a while that he didn't see happening initially. It's pure presumption on my part, but I believe that he knows if he doesn't do a good job, that will matter too. Whereas I think the non-committed teacher believes that he doesn't really make a whole lot of difference so whether he does a marvellous job or not so marvellous job, the kid will be doing just as well.

With the non-committed teacher's career, things have happened where either he didn't feel he was making a difference, where people complained or had real concerns, or he tried, thought he was making a difference and ran into an administrator or someone else who told him point blank that he wasn't doing a good job and things weren't going well. He ran into somebody who complained about what he was doing with great regularity, rather than somebody who said, "listen, you know, this is nice here, maybe we can expand that to make it better" instead of building on strengths

that he may have had, somebody may have started to criticize some of the things he was doing that he wasn't doing as well. Instead of expanding his abilities, somebody had him contract or constrict what it was that he was doing and he probably reached the stage either that where he feels that what he's doing is futile or isn't going to change things and that's.... whereas the other teacher, I think at some point, had a parent or a student who came and things worked and he realized, "yeah, this happened" and even having a parent come up to you and say or having a kid come up to you even 10 years later and saying, "You made a difference in my life." That kind of thing can really help give you a boost and it may have been something as overt as that or something as covert as just seeing some kid excelling later on because you were able to help them somewhere along, or at least you believe you were a part of it.

I don't think you can teach well and not be committed. I think you then get back to the idiot proof teaching that may have been common in the fifties in the sense that you have a textbook or something that tells you the questions to ask, the answers to expect, yeah anybody can teach. Society has changed to the point where we want to get children thinking that not only is that not good enough, that just isn't good period. And so you can get teachers teaching in that mode but that's idiot proof and they have formulas and they just do, and the things come and they just mark and, yeah, something will happen, the kids will learn anyway, anywhere. Kids learn best when they've got teachers who care because kids know when the teachers care. The kids will work for teachers who care and for teachers who are committed.

#### Factors Influencing Teacher Commitment

I think the key element is that people have to feel valued and valuable and I think that is a main part of my role in that my job is making people aware that I value their contribution, what they're doing with the kids, what they're doing in the classroom and seek out ways to help them to do things better. My job isn't to criticize what they're

doing but my job is in fact to try to make them do what they're doing, better. They have to feel that not only I value them and that they're valued in the school and in the system but they are in fact valuable, that what they do matters, makes a difference to their kids, to the community, to the parents, to society as a whole and that gets back to what I was saying before about commitment and teachers believing they can make a difference so my role is to try and promote these two things. In one of the questions you asked previously about commitment, when people feel no matter what school, no matter what gender, no matter what profile or anything, that what they're doing isn't valued or isn't valuable that the commitment goes straight out the window. My primary function is to make people feel valued and valuable. I think I would probably say that whatever I can do to make their job easier or better I have to be doing.

I think you can overbook and overtime teachers. I think you can have too many meetings and make sure that you have meetings that run for three or four hours. I think you can ask for lots of paperwork, I think you can have announcements every ten or fifteen minutes over the entire P.A. system disrupting class time, I think that you can ask teachers over to do these and you can ask teachers to do too much and have teaching loads that are exorbitantly overbooked, people doing things from, well you know, you teach half-time kindergarten plus you teach junior high basic French and you do this in the middle somewhere where all of a sudden you're having to change gears at all times and this doesn't seem to be working for them or may not work for them. I think those kinds of things and this goes back to what I said before about roadblocks, often things that tend to make their jobs harder rather than easier are the things that'll get in the way.

You need to involve the teachers in decision making. I see happening too often in the division and other places where we decide what it is that we're going to do before we decide why it is that we're going to do it. We often develop procedures or plans for doing things before

even thinking about whether we should be doing them or how we should be doing them. I think that everything that we do, anybody does, should stem from their belief system, what they believe and what they believe is right, what they believe is good, what they believe works so I think, I thought, and will think that the first thing that you have to do in dealing with an issue is to clarify your beliefs about it and then decide what it is you want to do and whether what it is that want to do in fact matches your beliefs. I often tend to think that we go in the opposite direction, the school is guilty of this in the sense that they develop procedures or policies for things without really thinking about what it is that they want to do first. The beliefs then tend to come from the policy or tend to come from the procedures as opposed to the other way around. This makes teachers feel part of the solution.

We're starting off with: What do we believe about behaviour, and the stage we're at right now is that we have four statements about behaviour, behaviour of adults and of kids, anybody in the building. Here are things that we believe. It's taken us a couple of days of slogging through to get to these fair statements of what we believe. The next step is: how can we fit our practices to these beliefs? If we believe that everybody has a right to a safe environment what does that mean in practice? What should we be doing in the school to try to ensure that, not that you can ensure everything, but to try to ensure and increase the possibility of this happening, what kinds of things can we do? So we've got our statements of belief and from there we're going to move to practices and take a look at the kinds of things that we are doing or can do that will help these things so that's our next step.

#### The Role of The Principal

My primary concern when I came in was to get a handle on the building, a handle on the people in the building, a handle on the community and develop an understanding for what it is that I'm dealing with before I could make some decisions as to what it is that I might want

to do with the place, with the people in it and the kids in it and everything else. My primary concern is to build credibility amongst the groups; students, teachers and community so that they see me as being somebody whose credible, supportive, child-oriented, willing and able to do things pro-active. When I came last year one of the things I did was I gave people a list of timetable preferences, i.e. when do you want to have your preps. My job, a big part of my job, is to make their teaching and their lives easier and not more difficult. A big part of what I do should be trying to remove roadblocks from teachers.

I often see myself as a buffer between the board office and teaching staff so that if a request comes down from above for all teachers to do x,y, or z, if I can get secretarial staff or someone else to do it instead of the teaching staff, I'll do that. If I can eliminate the request, which can happen a reasonable number of times, I will try and do that so that there is a buffer there, they feel that people are going to try and help them do things if they're asked to do thing it is really important enough that they do have to do it.

I think its important that you want to buffer some staff from parents maybe all staff from parents, or from particular parents. It often takes, you can have 25 kids in your room and have 24 parents come to you and say you're doing an absolute marvellous job with my child but the one parent out of 25 who come and rants and raves and screams and does everything else like that, can throw the other 24 out the window as far as the teacher is concerned, so in situations like that I try and make a point of sitting in on parent-teacher interviews. Most particularly I'm there to help the kids, have to believe what they're doing for the kid is right. But I'm there on their side and that I will go to the wall for them if I need to and if they need me to.

I think it is really important you have to have fun doing what you're doing. So I will create situations where we have fun where things are up, where we have a good time where there is as much humour as there

possibly can be in the jobs that we have. Its a serious job but we have to at times not take ourselves as seriously as we often do and we have to spend a fair amount of time laughing. I think it reduces stress and it makes people feel good about themselves and what they're doing and it tends to build a little more collegiality amongst people when you can share a laugh and can do things together and can enjoy each other together. I think that's really important and I go out of my way to do that.

I firmly believe that the principal's role is virtually make or break in terms of teacher commitment in the school. I don't think its instant but I think if you can have someone in the school for 2 or 3 years you can significantly decrease the level of commitment in a school and I think you can have someone in the building who in 2 or 3 years can significantly increase the level of commitment.

A lot of it is planned in the sense that as I get to know the building, as I get to know teachers, as I get to know kids, I get a sense of something that I believe could or should be happening here. And what I then try and do is give teachers opportunities to move into that area. The staff here is virtually computer illiterate. They've done almost nothing with computers, the computers are sitting in the classrooms and they aren't being used, or they're being used rarely and people barely know how to turn them on. And when I came, I realized very quickly that this was an area of need. I see there being numbers of ways of approaching this. One of them being simply, "we have to work on computers, the first in-service is going to be on computers then we're going to do this and that." And in many cases these people have been in-serviced and they've had the division do these things and everything else and for whatever reason they haven't caught on or it hasn't connected. Things just aren't happening. So I've taken more of a background role in doing this and coming in the back. They know that I'm interested and I'm intrigued, so what I've tried to do is give them examples, not give them,

have them see examples of how computers can really work well in their class, work well for them as teachers or make their lives easier, better for their kids' lives, easier or better. And in many cases it starts off by getting one teacher doing something or on to something. The person who may have been motivated but has never gotten the help or anything else to do anything, you get them going and they start doing and saying things in the room and the other teachers say, "Well, gee, that's really interesting. What are you doing here?" And they share and they go and they have a discussion and go, "What can I do? Can I help can I get..." And then you get somebody else going and you get 2 or 3 other people going to the point where, at the last staff meeting I've had a couple of people talk to me about access to computers and the fact that they want to do some things.

They don't know what computers in school they can use or how they can have access to anything and I asked them how interested they were in my setting up a teacher work station that was just for them, with a portable computer that they could take home with them and use and bring back. And I had about three quarters of the staff heartily endorse the idea. This is something they want, knowing that, and I told them that its going to have to come from somewhere, so I mean you may be able to spend the money on something else, do you want that or do you want to do this, and they really want to do this. So I've got a level of commitment starting, the excitement is there, and one of my jobs is try and increase it and the other job is to make sure I don't screw it up which is entirely possible by doing something that will all of a sudden turn them off. And that's easy.

If people don't trust me or don't believe in me it can destroy commitment. If I encourage people to do something because I think its going to be interesting for them or their kids and then I mandate a result like all your kids better be doing this on computers by this date, all of a sudden I've blown the trust and the sense that I've tried to work

towards that it's a growth process, it's not a mandated process and they should be this because they believe it's good for themselves. It's pretty easy with low trust, you can do the wrong thing and I could make a commitment to parents and say, I mean, I could stand up before home and school meeting and say that by next year every teacher in this school will have a computer in their classroom that is running the majority of the day and kids will be on it the majority of the day. It may seem like a reasonably simple commitment but the reality is all of a sudden I have a lot of teachers saying, "Whoa, I don't know if I can do that in my classroom." "Well, he's told the parents you have to do it." "Oh, ah", and then they're onto them, they may get something going but they're going to begrudge it, and they're going to be really angry about having to do it because you force them to do it. In most cases, if you force people to do something you'll get surface compliance. On the surface they'll do it or appear to be doing it and when we're out of the room or the door is closed, they go back to doing what it is they want to do.

Going back to behaviour. I generally chair the meetings in the sense that I'll be standing up and saying, "O.k.", I set the agenda to an extent that I see behaviour plans across the divisions that aren't behaviour plans or discipline plans but that are procedures for dealing with children who misbehave....and if a kid screws up, here's what you do and I have a strong personal belief that I don't think that's useful and the staff believe that, or at least we believe that they believe that, so as I told them, I said, "We need to have a behaviour plan." There needs to be some consistency in the school which they agree with. "How can we go about it?" I suggest that how I would go about it. Some of them suggested how they would like to go about it and we find consensus about what we want to do. I tend to facilitate our meetings and I will tend to determine when they start or stop because in a lot of things if somebody doesn't say, "O.k., we have another half hour to deal with this issue" then it can go on forever. They can decide where it is that they're going

and one of the things that's happened through this exercise is that the faith I have in the teachers has been so incredibly reaffirmed because the things that they're coming up with are, in essence, things that I believe in and they're obviously the things that they believe in solidly too and it's nice to see that. They're not choosing expedience, they're not choosing things that are easy, they're choosing things that are sound and fundamental, at least I believe they're sound and fundamental, so that's good.

**Ron**

The school was built in 1972, and has a reputation as being one of the better schools in the division. As a result, we have a number of students in the building that have been transferred in from other parts of the school division.

For years the school served a traditional middle class community, but we are starting to experience a change in the profile of our student population. This has created some stress on staff members who have been here for a long period of time. They are being asked to change some of the things they have traditionally been doing.

I have been an administrator for six years, five in this school, and three years as the principal. I have been in the teaching profession for twenty-three years.

The Committed Teacher

Committed teachers are usually people who have far higher expectations than could ever be set up by an administrator. They tend to be people you might have to call off and slow down rather than motivate. They are people who are such good teachers it wouldn't matter what their assignment. They could be put into almost any teaching responsibility. They have a tremendous amount of knowledge. If you took my best teacher, I would rather have that teacher teach a subject they know very little about because of their personality and their ability to work with the students. The committed teachers set their own personal goals and they

place high demands on themselves. These teachers are not hung up on the specifics of the assignment they are given but are more interested in the process that is involved in the learning of the kids. They are more interested in providing a good experience for the kids. You could give these teachers an antiquated textbook and they would find something good about it. They would have some fun with it, the kids would learn something and it would be a rich process for the kids.

A committed teacher has a good understanding of learning, they have a good understanding of the kids, they like kids and they are able to skilfully engage them in the learning process. They involve them and prod them and motivate them as opposed to filling empty vessels with knowledge.

Committed teachers are enthusiastic, energetic and bring high energy into the classroom. They are not laid-back but fill the classroom with interest and energy. Their commitment moves outside the fine work they do in the classroom. They give their time outside of class time and take on many more responsibilities.

The difference between the committed and the non-committed teacher stems from what is probably a cliché. The non-committed teachers suffer from a low level of self esteem. Teachers that I have encountered that are not very committed are teachers who like to stay within a very prescribed set of guidelines. They usually have taught for some years so they feel safe and don't like to venture outside of that safe area. They tend to be more providers of information, holding more of the power and letting go in disbursements to kids and then test the kids of that little bit of information. Pretty traditional stuff. There is no excitement in their teaching. These teachers see themselves as the source of the information. These are people that you will find doing lots of notes, lots of activities that are probably directed more at maintaining class control as opposed to stimulating learning. They are not people you will see in learning centres and the classroom is probably more set up to meet their needs than the kids needs.

### Factors Influencing Commitment

There are people in the teaching business that perhaps got into teaching for the wrong reason. I don't think you can place the responsibility on the training as both good and bad teachers have come out of teacher training systems. Perhaps the non-committed teachers are those people that got into teaching for the benefits, such as the time-off, rather than because of a desire to really do the job. I don't think they really have a burning desire to work with the kids. I have found they very often have difficulty relating to the kids and discipline becomes a problem.

Committed teachers are people who have a history of being achievers. They did well at college, and if their personal lives are examined, they are good by most standards. They are involved in their communities and they are involved with kids outside of school. In their own schooling they were leaders and are people that have had a history of being confident and successful. The cause of that kind of success seems to come from their parents and the environment from which they were raised. They would probably be committed to anything they did, not just to teaching.

Age may also be a factor in commitment. Some teachers, as they get older, certainly know their trade. They take no less pride or have no less intensity in the classroom, but it is outside the classroom where their commitment seems to decline. They are no longer prepared to take on all the other things they use to do.

The school profile also has an effect on the level of commitment of a teacher. This is related to the types of supports the school is able to provide, to assist the teacher in meeting the special needs that might be involved at the school. When you have a group of teachers that are committed, they are able to form a network and form a team, and as a result, they are able to turn the entire school around. But it is necessary to have the supports in place. If you are in a very tough profile school and you were committed but on your own it would be tough to

sustain. If there was the support of peers or administration or parents then it would be possible to maintain the commitment.

It is also important to have a school level expectation that gives the message that teachers are expected to become involved. It is also helpful to have on the staff people who are committed to working with the kids. Staff need to be selected because of their commitment. To keep things fair, it is important that the tasks are divided up among all the people. By having a small number of people doing all the work, the commitment of those people is probably going to decline. Built into this is the need to have a school vision. Staff need to have a sense of where their school is going and what they should be spending their time doing. It gives the teachers a framework from which to operate.

#### The Role of the Principal

It is important that as the principal I have an expectation that people will become involved. Most of my time relating to commitment is more involved in ensuring that I don't lose the commitment that the committed teachers bring to the school.

For a school to be successful you need more than academics. You require a school picture that includes a variety of different activities. You want to have something for every kid. It doesn't matter whether it is academics, the debating club, or the chess club, whatever. When you look at all that and what it means it is a big pie that you have to cut up. At this school all that dividing up is done up at the beginning of the year. As the principal I have responsibility to ensure the climate is right and the tasks are shared with all the staff. To perform all these extras a committed staff is necessary.

To get all the people to become involved you have to be creative. When you have a teacher that volunteers to become involved but doesn't feel that they have the skills to become a coach, as an example, then you need to find a task for them to do. You need to find little jobs that make use of the teacher's interest and makes them feel good about their

involvement. If you can find a way, then people don't mind being committed and assisting the school.

The principal needs to create a vision of the school, what the staff would like the school to look like, what people would like to see happen. It is best that the vision is created by a collective vision of the staff. As the principal you have some influence on that vision but it must be a group decision. With a vision of the school, the staff is able to make decisions on the many activities in the school, such as what the PD program for the school will look like.

It is important that the teachers know that as principal I feel they have the most important job in the school. It is important that as a principal the teachers know that I value what they do and it would not be possible for me as principal to perform without the efforts of the teachers. It is the principal's job to support the teacher.

To show the support, weekly review meetings are held with each teacher. The message given to the teacher is to share what their needs are, what is happening with the kids, what problems they are experiencing. Do you need to help them with intervention, equipment? The teachers are to bring items forward that they need support on.

The teachers appear to appreciate support on the discipline matters when there is support from the administration. The teachers appreciate support when there is conflict with parents. It is important that the teachers know the administration is committed to them and to the school and that enhances their willingness to commit or take chances.

If you want things done in the school, if you want teachers to move in a direction in the school regardless of what the direction is, you need to support interested teachers. I think people make a mistake by giving a message that everybody is going to become involved in a new direction. Instead, if you have some interested teachers, then you need to give them some money for professional development, promote the initiative and what the teachers are doing. At staff meetings the teachers report what they

are doing and share with their peers the excitement they are experiencing by becoming involved. For example, rather than requiring that all the teachers move into student-led interviews, support was given to those interested. As a result, the movement grew and more and more teachers became involved. Promoting and encouraging as opposed to demanding tends to get more commitment with more people.

In addition to having an attitude that creates commitment, there are some concrete organizational things that can be done to influence commitment. Timetables can be developed that permit teachers to meet and work together. It is also important that the timetable attempt to allow teachers to teach at the best of their ability. Teachers are asked to provide ideas for the creation of the timetable.

It is important for the administrators to teach. By doing this, you get a sense of what is happening in the school. It is also important that you do duty like everybody else, such as recess. This gives the teachers the sense that you are prepared to work hard and to contribute to the "extras" that are necessary to make a school function.

One of the areas that we worked on and had to deal with was discipline. The discipline policy is basically having kids involved in as many activities as they can and then catching them at it and then recognizing their successes and their participation. This idea also is involved when working with teachers. I try lots of ways to recognize when people are doing well.

I think one of the best investments of the PD budget is giving teachers release time to plan, to visit other schools, rather than spending it on sending people to conferences. If you can get a teacher who is keen on something and you find somebody that is working in the area the teacher is interested in, then it is helpful if you can support the teachers interest. Give them some time to visit that teacher during the regular day by supplying them with a substitute. This type of use of the money is far superior to the spending the money on conferences.

It is important that teachers are able to spend their time teaching and not have to give time in supervisory tasks. To help, this money is raised or IAs are used to release the teachers. The teacher should teach. Others can do the lunch hour duties. It is great at recess and at lunch hour to go to the staff room and find the teachers laughing and having a good time. You know that when they return to the classroom you are going to get your bang for the buck because the teachers are feeling charged and recharged and energized and ready to go. I think teachers have got only so many good hours anyway and if that is spent in supervision or record keeping or stuff, then it is going to be lost in instruction, so through using budget creatively or teacher-aid budget creatively, I try to eliminate as much of that as I can and I think teachers appreciate that. I want teachers to be teaching and working with kids and not to be doing secretarial type work.

I think it is also important that I work with teachers that are not as committed as perhaps I would like them to be. I think you can encourage them and you can work on some of them. They usually have reasons, reasons why they're not committed. I think you have to be patient and respect a teacher if they say to you that they cannot get involved in something. On a yearly basis I can deal with that. It is hard to bludgeon somebody into being committed and sometimes you have to accept that at face value. I offer them release time, help in areas that they might be having difficulty, and try to help them begin to feel better about what they are doing. Hopefully things can be fixed so that the commitment can come back in the future.

By having a committed staff, it makes for a better place to work. I think the people that work here have a sense that the school is a very good place to work. The teachers have a lot of pride in the place and that is half the battle.

#### **Jerry**

I have been a principal for seven years, four at this school. I

have been a teacher for twenty-four years.

This school is a K-9 school, with approximately 430 students. The population is divided fairly evenly with approximately two rooms per grade.

The socio-economic background would be a school in transition, with a number of students coming from homes that are blue collar, and an increasing number coming from low income subsidized housing.

We have two groups predominantly making up the mosaic of the school. Added to that, we have a pretty stable, but significant native population, and a significant number of ESL students. The ESL students basically come from all over the world. They come in at all age levels and grade levels and they have a varied background in their skill level in the English language.

#### The Committed Teacher

I would see that person as intelligent, knowledgeable about curriculum, very strong interpersonal skills. I think that they're hard working, they have a sense of humour, they have a sense of honesty and integrity, people see them as being trustworthy, they understand what it means to be ethical which allows for relationships to be built that are meaningful both for kids and other colleagues. I see that they're life-time learners. They'll take chances and work towards implementation or at least try things out in their class, realizing that if it doesn't go well they may need to make adjustments and change. They're prepared to do that. I see that person as willing to involve parents in the process and willing to take the time to share with parents how students are doing and give them accurate information and not just pay lip service to how students are doing.

They are contrasted to the non-committed teacher in that the non-committed teachers are tired. They've been ground down by what they may perceive as being the pressures of the job. They may be real or they may just have allowed those pressures to get the better of them. They've lost

the energy, the fire which once they very well may have had and so they are going through the motions.

I think that part of what seems to happen is many of them get into a rut. Lets say you've got a grade one teacher. They've been teaching grade one for many, many years, maybe ten or more years. They become very comfortable in what they're doing. They have a routine and a package of information that have worked well for them in the past and with very little effort they can, it's almost like going through the motions. They can just move through one unit or one discipline to the next and they almost do it in a rote-like kind of thinking kind of a way. I see them as being at least at the point in their lives just the opposite of the person I described earlier to you. They, again, don't have the energy, the inclination, the drive to want to be the kind of person who's on the cutting edge. Part of it again too is that life has taken them in different directions maybe, the fact that you have kids of your own. Those kids cause you to take on different responsibilities. They put pressure on your time and it limits what you, after having to balance careers, a home, there's a price that one pays. It's, I think that we have in this school in particular, far more females on staff than males. Many of them are career women. Some of them have families. They have obligations too. Others are in situations where marriages have broken down, they're now single parents so they have added even more responsibilities now as caregivers for their own kids. They just don't have any more energy to give.

I think there are personality types that are probably better suited to education than others and there are some people who have balance to their life. When they're at work they can give one hundred percent to their job and they're efficient and effective and they get results. And they can also see that when the day ends, I can get on with my other life, and in that I've got a place for things that are important for me, whether it be going to aerobics class or going for a beer with a friend at the end

of the day or just finding time to go shopping. So I think balance is a critical component.

#### Factors Influencing Teacher Commitment

For every player on your team, there may be some differences, but I think the leadership in the building will play a factor and that a big part of it is the relationship that player has with the administrator in the building and I think that if they see that the relationship is one that promotes and empowers people to be able to do the kinds of things that their hoping and striving to do, and that the administrator is a supporter and a remover of obstacles that get in their way, is a supporter of risk-taking, I think that that fosters an environment that promotes commitment on the part of teachers. An administrator has to be able to articulate what it is these teachers should be committed to so we talk about vision and direction. From a physical point of view are they in a spot that they're happy with or that they feel challenges from? Are they tied in with partners where there is collegiality, opportunity for peer partnering and are there the professional staff, I'll just call them student services staff, and other support kinds of staff, the kind of people that can be supporters of what these people are trying to accomplish? One word that comes to mind is synergy if you've got people that will be promoters of people who are trying to move in a very positive direction. I think that you need a supportive central office to be able to try to get the balances in place with staffing, to be able to get the right personalities in place to try to take people that are the rollers and shakers and connect them with the people that may be willing to move in the area, be more committed and if they had the right situation, they would be able to move and if administrators are given the opportunity to match people up appropriately, I think your ability to keep people committed and increase the number of people that are committed would grow significantly.

Sometimes they need dollars, dollars for equipment, dollars for

release time for professional development which may mean the need for gaining more information which is one level of professional development, and the money to meet the professional needs of the individual. I think that there are sometimes physical things that can get in the way of somebody being successful. Just something that we're working on right now is that we've got a new art program coming into the school and you have a classroom, an existing classroom that doesn't have proper sinks and storage facilities and that's important to that person, and they need tables instead of desks. I guess one way to deal with that person who's coming into your school who seems to be very enthusiastic and very committed to the art program is to say "you can't have it" or "I'm too busy now to deal with petty things like tables and sinks and you'll make do until I can get to you". Or you can spend time with that person to hear them out, give them, if what they're saying really makes good sense to you, you can empower them to take responsibility for what they want themselves and direct them to possibly the building superintendent to be able to design the kind of room that they see and speak to people in the superintendent's department to get them a start-up grant so that they can get the supplies and materials and I think that if you take away those kind of roadblocks and you give them some opportunity to be involved, to take ownership for the planning, I think that helps to develop the initial commitment that you want and I think if you keep treating people that way, the commitment will stay there. Well I think it creates the, a nurturing environment we have the best chance to keep the level of commitment high.

#### The Role of the Principal

I think that my personality is such that I care about people a great deal. So I see that there's three parts to what I do in the school. One is the human resource management which to me is extremely important. The second component is you are the manager of a building and you do a lot of paper and pencil types of things and the third is you are an instructional leader. You are a supporter of curriculum implementation and you have to

keep the balances and checks in place and give attention to each area, but I strongly believe that we're in the people business and if you nurture your human resources, and you can't make the whole world happy, but I think that the way you talk to people and the way you deal with people can be nurturing, at least I hope that it's perceived that way, and that people will respond by taking up the challenges that you extend to them in the areas of curriculum and they will feel empowered to be able to do the kinds of things that need to be done to be impact players.

As a principal, the teachers have to see you as a person with integrity. It has to do with trust, and if people don't trust you I think you've got a problem and I think it's serious. It's your type of communication skills and I think that a big chunk of what goes on here is you have to be a good listener and you have to be able to give people an opportunity to be able to talk about their ideas and hopes and wishes and dreams. I think the other part of it too is that if it is perceived to be top down they will respond in kind one way. If they are perceived to be, that their ideas are valued and that their input is valued and sought, that that input is genuinely taken into consideration in the decision making process, and if it's not people, if it's explained to people why, then I think you foster a certain kind of commitment and I think I try to do those kind of things.

Sometimes it is very difficult to assist some teachers. I see two situations that come to the top of my mind immediately. There are teachers that are at the very end of their teaching career and they are a year or two away from retirement. They are set in their ways and they do an adequate job. I think we have an obligation to try but if there's a considerable amount of resistance and people seem to be doing an adequate job then I think one has to look at what's in the long term in the best interest for education. I think that there are another group of teachers that I've worked with that are not well and I want to talk about two types of people that I've dealt with that, maybe three types. One of them is

simply put, mentally ill, and that's not a value judgement on my part. That's a diagnosis that's been made by psychiatrists. As long as they are not in stressful situations these psychiatrists seem to think that the medication will work. Somehow, they don't seem to perceive that education is a stressful environment and these people have not been able to perform very well because frankly, this is probably the most highly stressful job that there is so the ability to work with them and to affect change is extremely minimal. There are also teachers who, I'll downscale this considerably, are having personal problems, which I think we sometimes use the term "burnout", but emotionally they are fragile and instead of working on things like commitment I would prefer to look at what kinds of supports need to be put in place so that these people can get some emotional stability back into their lives and so that they're well and so that maybe over a longer period of time they can look at commitment again too.

In the case of the teachers I was referring to, I think that in both cases the teachers were sensitively counselled out of education. I think that when you're dealing with people that are having mental health problems it's not easy to be definitive as to how to deal with the problem. Lets say as if you were dealing with a staff member, went out on sick leave because they had a heart attack. Somehow we deal with physical types of problems, I think, more objectively than people that are having emotional types of problems. So processes are put in place to try to support and help these people. Sometimes we don't even realize that they're having these problems until after a number of years where they've been in a classroom and the situation just gradually deteriorates and we're trying to talk about visions and goals and commitment, and they're struggling to deal with what may not be a readily diagnosable illness, and so I find that has been a problem that.. It doesn't occur that often, but it's there and the teachers though that are, they're highly frustrated, fragile emotionally, and they've burning out. There are, it seems to me,

ever increasing numbers of them so the question and the challenge becomes trying to work with these people and I explained to you earlier that it has lots to do with trust and relationship building as to what, if the problem is primarily a result of educational issues and not other contributing factors and as a school based team member, what kinds of things can be done to help that person to get beyond the, I'll just use the term, "the rut" they're in and so that becomes an important challenge. I think we can do some things for that person. One of them is being a good listener, again I think indicating that we genuinely care. I think that there's ways that we can put supports into that classroom, though, it's getting tougher and tougher to do, that in terms of instructional assistants or regrouping of kids or bringing in resource or counsellors to support that situation. I think that there are ways that we can help to support those people, again we're limited by what the system gives us though we're always asked to be creative.

#### **Jerome**

There are approximately 500 students, K-9, spread over 20 classes. The economic status of most of the families in the neighborhood would be in the middle class area. There would be some lower income earners, but I would expect to find a very small part of our population characteristic of this area.

The staff at the school are in the middle, in terms of age, between six and fifteen years of experience. Very few of the teachers would be new teachers, and we have very few teachers nearing retirement.

I am completing my first year as the principal of the school. I have been an educator for nineteen years, seven years as an administrator.

#### The Committed Teacher

The most committed teachers that I can think of is a fairly experienced person actually who really very obviously puts quite a bit of thinking doing what she does. She really looks at the individual kids in her classroom. You see very clear evidence of her shaping and reshaping

and reshaping her plans as she goes along as they don't always fit the best with the kids she's got and then she looks at what she's doing and tries to see how it could be better for them. She's really willing to accept the challenges of different kids and different situations. She's somebody that even though she has quite a bit of experience, and she has a great deal of confidence is also one of the people who is always wanting to find out more and know more about a whole bunch of things so a very healthy risk in those ways. She will always do the things that need to get done. She will find very meaningful roles and involvement for parents. I think the real warmth and caring for the kids that she's got and the business that she's in are important elements for her, a very healthy person.

I have come across people who I think have a lesser understanding of the scope of what they need to be doing to be meeting children's needs. It's lack of experience, lack of knowledge, lack of perspective which is part of experience but it's also part of personal growth kind of thing. There's some, when I think of it, there would be a substantial degree of lack of development in terms of the professional business of teaching, so the exposure has been very narrow. They do not appear as committed.

One of the teachers I'm thinking about has been locked into a specialty area since he started teaching. He's a fairly new teacher still, so the experience isn't very broad and the other experience worked O.K. so I think he never saw a need to develop some other skills in some other background areas and that's the piece now. What he also struggles with now, having moved into some distinctly different areas, is what is the purpose of this stuff, what is the reason behind it because it's a little out of his realm and where he's falling right now, is he's falling to the textbook image of what should be and it's not working very well so it's been a little bit of a painful experience because I think what's been challenged is beliefs of what the job is because he's been moved to another area. Another person sees herself as quite a renowned expert in

a narrow area and I think that has been probably a bit stifling because a lot of what has been again isn't working and there's been a fair amount of blame put onto kids for things not working where I think it's really an experience base that's not there, so once again, skills and strategies haven't been developed that allow success in terms of meeting a wide variety of student needs. In both cases I think people are beginning to move towards thinking about needing to expand a little bit. I think the person in a new area is probably more open to some new strategies but I think they're both moving towards the realization that it isn't just these kids, there's more to it than this.

I think there are two other pieces that I value more than a teacher being knowledgeable. One of them is the understanding of the developmental growth of an individual. I think in both cases that I gave you one of the difficulties that those people face is that they face the difficulty of not understanding that you have a room full of people in front of you and those people are really very different from each other in so many different ways and that's why one thing doesn't work and that's why one expectation doesn't work. That you're dealing with people and you have to know the people in order to meet their needs and in knowing those people it's very important to understand who they are or where they're coming from and then how that happens with human beings.

#### Factors Influencing Teachers Commitment

I think a teacher's sense of commitment is very strongly influenced by their perceptions of what the right thing is to do and how well they're doing it and it's that perception of what the right things are to do that I think a lot of people struggle with. I think that comes back to this school as a unit, when you look at a school, and having a school that can articulate what it's about and actually have people committed to that articulated set of goals or objectives. I think where you have people who feel that they've been a part of the determination of what is felt to be important and that they really do value that importance, I think you've

just won the game because I think people are really driven by that.

To some degree, organizational factors are the things that help you or hinder you from trying to accomplish what you want to accomplish. The organizational factors are probably the kinds of things that help you or hinder you from becoming a unit.

I think about schools as separate entities to develop that sense itself and what it is and what it's about, so I think you can hinder that by disenfranchising people from that discussion. I think you can hinder that from not having sincere and honest opportunity for people to look at who they are, where they are and what things are about, whom they work with and why. I think you can hinder that by trying to import somebody else's plan or ideas so that the people who you're with don't feel as though they played any role in that. I think you can help all of that stuff by being honest and by being upfront and by trying to provide opportunities for people to look at the things that are important to them by trying to bring those kinds of common threads together, by helping people to see where their commonalities are where there values are and sort through them so there is a sense of what can be important or is important. I think you can help that by helping people to see how they are in fact valued and how what they do does impact in an important way on the lives of other people and I think the organizational things or the structural things are in pieces that you build to help do those things.

I think another critical issue is being happy about working successfully in school. With people in our profession, we need to continuously develop, so to me one of the main roles in support of building a commitment, in building a plan, has to do with the way staff development is addressed. Professional development ties all the other things into the business of doing our jobs. So when I talk about a school plan, that school plan really needs to involve everything that we think about and everything that we don and the way we get our plans to work is by us learning the skills and strategies that we need to have in order for

the plan to work.

### The Role of the Principal

As a principal I feel that I have a very important role to play in enhancing commitment. At the present time I am spending a great deal of time figuring out the mystery of this school, where the teachers are coming from, clarifying my beliefs and thoughts and sharing with direct action what needs to be done.

Climate setting was the initial energy that I was spending. I have since begun to develop a plan so the next bout of energy is going to be spent bringing people on board at an awareness level about what I mean about making a plan and then getting people to a starting point for these kinds of things

So, rather than everything following some kind of path that didn't really look like it was determined by anybody, it looks like a whole bunch of people are saying, "I wonder if it should be like this, you know, I wonder if there some other things or there are some other ways or I'm just wondering in general what do you think?"

I guess the other thing is that I now have some practical experience with the people that are here and I can really see some of the good things that they're doing. It doesn't, I don't think it looks lumped as a whole yet, but I think there are some things that they are doing very, very well that they may not even be aware of and I think that's a really nice starting point, because there's a long way to go in a whole bunch of areas, but that's a nice starting point.

I think as a principal, I can set up opportunities for all those things to happen. I can't make them happen but I can set up the opportunities for those things to happen. I think you have to build trust so I guess in that way one of the things that, one of the strategies that we've had is we give all information that we have. There are no secrets, there are no mysteries. I try to demystify things, ensure that people are aware of, play a role in decision making where it makes sense and are

aware of the things that are beyond our control and where they are so that I think people will hopefully feel empowered about the situations we're in, that everybody in fact does play a part in the determination of things and certainly everybody is as fully informed as everybody else, that just one thing. I think another whole part that has a little bit of that is also just the modelling of the climate that you expect. So you know, you just expect people to perform with certain valued and I think you have to do that yourself so if any particular person has a difficult child to work with I think you have to go in and you have to be prepared to do that work too, you have to be able to do it, you have to be able to show, I think you can't back away from difficult things you need to deal with.

I feel I need to assist teachers who are experiencing difficulty. I would hope by trying to provide support through talking about possibilities, trying to see the whole picture, trying to provide different alternatives, trying to fit the situation to the person and playing whatever role the person needs you to play to some degree. I probably could give you a hundred thousand different examples, so one might be helping a particularly difficult student in one context or another, to helping work through the kind of plans with the teacher that make things work with that particular student, helping them see how things can be different, what needs to be different, helping them have, I guess, a context of limitations and consequences and all the different parts that others can do as well to assist.

**Tom**

The school is very new, it has only been open for two years. It is located in a new housing development, of predominantly middle to upper class families.

We have very few behaviour problems, and therefore spend very little of our time discussing behavioral issues.

I have been the principal of the school since it opened, which means twenty-one years as an administrator and thirty-three

years as an educator.

I was also in the unique position of being able to hire all the staff for the school. They are a variety of ages, but are highly motivated.

#### The Committed Teacher

It's really quite an interesting dynamic. My task this year was to kind of slow it down and control things. They were meeting morning, noon and night and the problem was to try and slow them down. The teachers were trying to do too much.

For example, this is our professional development committee and what I said at the beginning of the year and am planning in August, "Let's confine our PD to Wednesday noon." We've got 16 leaders in the school. Everything from science to computer to English language arts, mathematics club, performing art. "Here's what we'll do. It's a sign-up thing for Wednesdays. Take, you know, focus your PD that you have to offer to staff from this leadership committee into Wednesdays, not Mondays, Tuesday, Wednesday, just Wednesday. I mean we have other committee meetings during the week but PD, please, on Wednesday instead of randomly this week.

The committed teachers that I have observed have had a history of a leadership position, whether it was math, language arts, computer. They had all shown some initiative to be in a leadership position.

The committed teachers that I have been with are extremely hard working. They work hard while at the school and look for opportunities to improve.

#### Factors Influencing Teacher Commitment

As I mentioned earlier, a teacher's commitment will not be on a high plane forever. Other responsibilities, family as an example, require that the teacher focus there rather than at the school. So I think it's going to be an uneven thing.

Why do some have more commitment than others? I have to go back to people that I'm reviewing now. I just have been in a classroom and spent

the last week with a teacher and we did our first kind of review of what I'd written over the weekend for her and my opening comment was, "I don't think I can use our division form here. It's not doing you justice." This is a master teacher in the superior range. I think we have to be more creative here when we not only identify her strengths but her needs. She's already in a leadership position. She is always looking for ways to expand her horizons. She's looking for opportunities to share and to learn all the time. So she is committed to making herself the best teacher she can be.

The non-committed teacher maybe hasn't had the trigger, the right switch, pulled. I think the vast majority, 95-99%, of the people in education want to be good. They want to be the best they can be, but maybe they haven't had the right environment, maybe it's the students, maybe it's their grade level, things haven't been positive, haven't worked, they haven't been encouraged to press on. I think those first few years are really critical and if you're not into a situation where you think you're making a difference maybe you do kind of withdraw and go into your maintenance coast mode. We all need some rewards and some feedback and some positive vibes and if you don't get it in the classroom, maybe you get it by joining a service organization or whatever, do things outside the school.

I think the young teachers that we're seeing are really talented people. They do anything, literally, in extracurricular that they have to do and they usually come with backgrounds of athletics or music or whatever, so I think the calibre of the incoming members of the profession is very high. Inherent to that is commitment to kids and interest in their development, and hopefully that's why we're all here. And whether it's just awareness, or the fact nobody's really sat down with that individual to analyse what's going on, I'm not sure. Maybe there hasn't been a good role model or the person really shouldn't be in education and it's possible they're in it for the wrong reasons. My answer is that a

teacher should be committed to working hard and improving. If this commitment is not there and an administrator can't develop it in a teacher, then perhaps a career change is in order.

#### The Role of the Principal

First of all, I would see that as certainly one of the responsibilities of the building administrator, to be aware of where the teachers were in terms of their commitment to kids and to education and to doing the best job they can in the classroom and where as a building administrator I can cross someone who is not showing that commitment or interest. Then it should be a priority for me to work with that teacher to make sure that I've read the situation properly and then to be, with the door closed, to be quite frank about what I see. At the beginning of the year I'm sure in every school the administrators lay out some extracurricular opportunities and some obligations of the staff and various committees, everything from teacher society work to school PD to special events in the school, athletics, music, and ask for commitment. And that's only one slice of commitment but that's also a significant indicator. If year after year I have people saying, a person saying, "sorry, I don't have time for this", then I think that's a topic for us. We want this school to be alive and vibrant and we all have to make a contribution to the fabric of the school beyond the classroom. The days of coming in just before class and driving away right after, you can't do that. I think that I put in long hours and that the teachers I know put in very long hours, business people work incredible hours and that's a fact of life. I think the changes in the curriculum and the demands any classroom teacher faces with thirty kids. There's a lot on everybody's plate and it takes time and effort to be your best.

I guess as a teacher dealing with students or any administrator dealing with staff, you emphasize the positive where you can find it and you look for it. As an administrator I think I have to be visible. I have to be around the building before and after hours, as well as during

the day to figure out who's doing what. And just like you catch a kid doing something good, you catch the teacher doing something good and reinforce it, stressing the contribution that it's making to that child. That's really valuable for the students and that's what we're here for. The performance review cycle is a wonderful opportunity to congratulate people who are really doing a terrific job and I certainly want to use that as I'm doing with this teacher I referred to earlier. The flip side of that is if someone isn't involved and I see that person doesn't demonstrate a commitment in the classroom or outside the classroom, there's an opportunity to review that.

I don't think you can run a school without collaboration between staff and administration. We're not two camps, we're in this together. We help each other. We help each other with everything from school assemblies to committees to PD opportunities.

We try to block time for teachers to meet with each other. That's three slots and they're all prep, that's once a week they have an hour and a half prep, three of them. This is our weekly bulletin to staff. There's a meeting at lunch, K-3 staff, and 4-6 staff.

Each school is asked to nominate a head teacher. There's a small stipend, a very small stipend that goes with it. There's no release time but there's recognition from the board.

I see it as a leadership position. I want to develop some people and bring them into leadership roles whether you want to call it a steering committee or an administrative council.

I guess I'm kind of harnessing the energy. We have an environmental project called "Kid'sNet" that we started last year and we really ran with it, and in K-6, with a different environmental focus at each grade level and it was really terrific. We've got an enrichment program that's been laid down that we have to inservice staff on that's moving from itinerant into classroom based that we're facilitating in the school. We've got a violence committee report that's just been filed. I've sat on that

committee. Each school is going to be asked to develop its own behaviour plan. We're a new school and we are planning to expand by 4 rooms this summer. The staff priorities is to do what we have to do and then make some decisions about what we can do with the rest of our time.

To protect against teachers doing too much and burning out I work with them to set the priorities and make the decisions of what we can and cannot do. I haven't even touched on the demands of a classroom teacher which I think are really high and getting higher given curriculum, given concerns parents have and demands that parents make on the school system whether it's this school or any other. So just to run a good classroom is a more complex job than it was a few years ago.

I wish I had the time to spend with each individual teacher that I'm spending with five people I'm doing a review on now. I think it's that kind of feedback on a regular basis that doesn't happen enough in education and I think people should be recognized for what they're doing.

I think the principal has to be visible, and I think that when things are going on, e.g., the lady in the library with the computers, I've got to drop by and acknowledge what she's doing by my presence, by asking questions, by showing an interest, and that's with that project or any other project in the school. This school is small enough at this stage that I can do that. When it grows and there's a vice-principal here, we will systematically sit down and say, "O.k., what are you doing this week. What am I doing?" So we can try and cover what's going on. We're not going to do it 100% all the time but I think you have to try. Recognition through presence, recognition through a note similar to the form that I'm showing you here and in the newsletters that we're sending out and trying to feature staff.

## CHAPTER FOUR

## ANALYSIS OF PRINCIPALS' RESPONSES

In this chapter the principals' responses are analyzed with respect to their reported understanding of commitment and their role in the enhancing that commitment. While the analysis has continued to organize the responses according to the three research questions, there does exist overlap between the three questions. As a result the analysis will, on occasion, move between the research questions.

The Committed Teacher

In the review of literature Tyree (1991) presented a psychological view of commitment, describing commitment as a cluster of individual attitudinal and behavioral dimensions. The multi-dimensional nature of commitment may underlie the commitment shown by an individual to a social endeavor.

The views presented by the principals very much reflect the description of commitment outlined by Tyree (1991). According to the principals' comments, commitment may be rooted in a cognitive or personality trait that manifests as specific observable behaviour.

All the principals interviewed described the committed teacher as a person having a high level of intelligence and knowledge about teaching and learning.

Four of the principals interviewed described the committed teacher as a risk-taker whose risk-taking leads to the gathering of the new skills and ideas. Jerome and Tom spoke of how committed teachers take initiative and benefit from taking leadership positions that foster development of their skills. Jerry identified the committed teachers as being life-long learners and as Tim described, their self-growth leads them to do things differently.

As described by the principals, committed teachers are able to reflect on what they are doing and change their practise to better meet

the needs of the students. According to three of the principals, committed teachers focus on the educational process, understand learning and are able to motivate the students to work. Both Ron and Jerome spoke of the understanding these teachers seem to possess about children and their ability to develop a rapport with the kids. In a similar sense, Jerry suggested that committed teachers seem to have a personality that is better suited to education.

Rosenholtz's (1989) research identified teacher certainty as a key factor in the development of commitment. To enhance teacher commitment, a knowledge of the technical skills, procedures, and methods that enhance learning are important to the teacher. The committed teacher described by the principals clearly possesses this understanding.

Perhaps influenced by their high level of knowledge, committed teacher were described as feeling they are making a difference in their jobs. Hackman and Oldham (1980), Rosenholtz (1989) and others identified the importance of work meaningfulness to teacher commitment. The description of the committed teacher identifies the importance of a strong sense of self. Tom described the committed teacher as a person looking for a leadership position and taking initiative. Tim and Jerry discussed the committed teacher as focusing on self-growth and having strong interpersonal skills. Ron suggested committed teachers set high goals for themselves and are able to adapt to change. All these descriptions suggest a strong individual with a positive sense of self-worth.

The second theme put forth by the principals in their descriptions of committed teachers deals with observable behaviours in and around the school. All the principals cited examples of how committed teachers spend extra time at their work. The extra time spent by teachers was clearly viewed as a measure of commitment.

The principals' identification of time spent outside of the classroom as a measure of commitment was clearly articulated by Tyree (1991). Tyree described this phenomena as side-bet theory. As

individuals get more personal resources, they demonstrate commitment. As the teachers described by the principals appear to be highly committed, they appear to be demonstrating "a strong belief in organization or occupational goals, strong willingness to remain in the organization or occupation, and strong desire to maintain membership in the organization or occupation" (Tyree, 1991, p. 4).

The portrait of the committed teacher put forward by the principals consists of two dimensions. Firstly, the committed teacher is described as having a personality that contributes a high level of knowledge and understanding of the teaching endeavor. Their high knowledge level increases the teachers' sense of certainty and their perceptions of the meaningfulness of their task. The high sense of efficacy is demonstrated in behaviours explained by Tyree (1991) in his side-bet theory. These individuals, having a high level of self-worth, devote more time and energy to their teaching. While what they comment on may differ, all principals described these teachers as spending time doing something extra with students.

The principals' description of the committed teacher was characterized by a description of teacher certainty and work meaningfulness. This description links the description of the committed teacher to the specific factors influencing commitment. In addition, their description of the committed teacher parallels the principals' views as to the role they play in enhancing commitment. This will be discussed more fully in the section on the role of the principal, but there does exist a clear relationship between what the principals describe as a committed teacher and what they focus on as a principal to enhance commitment. Increasing teacher certainty and giving work meaning clearly are viewed by the principals as being important factors in their work.

#### Factors Influencing Teacher Commitment

The literature reviewed for this study identified a number of factors that influence the level of commitment demonstrated by the

teacher. In order for principals to influence commitment, they would need to be aware of these factors.

Psychic Rewards. The literature described the importance of feedback concerning the success of a person's efforts. Positive feedback indicates to the teacher the value the organization places on them and will foster continued commitment. The importance and significance of psychic rewards was identified by all the principals interviewed.

The need to feel valued was a key factor for Terry. He commented on the importance of people feeling valued, that their work has meaning, and that they are making a difference.

Jerome stated that people are very strongly influenced by their perceptions of what is that right thing to do and how well they are doing. According to Jerome, this is assisted by having a school articulate what it is all about. This process alludes to a role for the principal, enhancing teacher certainty. The articulated vision, according to Jerome, would assist the teacher to becoming committed to the school direction. The process of involving teachers in the discussions of where the school is at and how well the school is doing would provide the opportunity to receive feedback on their performance.

The Carnegie Forum (1986) emphasized the importance of a school providing a work environment in which teachers can be successful. A workplace that does not provide the opportunities for teachers to receive their rewards will negatively impact on teacher commitment. In their discussions, three of the principals identified the working environment as a contributing factor. Jerry spoke of the importance of the administrator being a supporter of risk-taking, offering encouragement and allowing the people to be successful. Jerome feels teachers need an environment that allows them to gain confidence and ideas. "I think you can help that by helping people to see how they are in fact valued." Tom alluded to the importance of the environment and the need for feedback. He summarized his thoughts by stating "we all need rewards and some feedback and some

positive vibes, and if you don't get it in the class-room, maybe you get it by joining a service organization or whatever, do things outside the school." These principals reflect what Conley et al (1988) stressed, the need to attend to those factors that prevent teachers from achieving intrinsic goals in the workplace.

Tim added a couple of other dynamics, all addressing psychic rewards. He made mention of the need for a positive student teaching experience, that allows the individual the opportunity to work with good people, getting good feedback. He also made mention of the role of the community providing feedback from the parents to the school. The teachers want to be acknowledged and appreciated by the parents and the parents can be a significant source of feedback. While this feedback might be positive, it is possible it could take the form of negative feedback. This dynamic could create other problems, reducing rather than enhancing commitment.

Ron discussed the experience base that the teacher possesses. He spoke of people as having a history of being successful. This success perhaps creates within the individual a greater sense of self-confidence and an ability to gather the rewards from a task done well.

Teacher Certainty. Teacher certainty represents the second fundamental category spoken of by all the principals. By definition teacher certainty involves the technical knowledge, in essence, the skills, procedures and methods that teachers use to assist students academically. There is clearly a link between the teacher's need for certainty and the impact of psychic rewards. When teachers feel efficacious about their professional practise, they expend greater effort with their students. Rosenholtz (1989) claimed that teacher certainty and self-esteem will shape teacher perceptions and behaviours. The value of the feedback, the perception of success, the sense of feeling valued would most definitely influence the level of teacher certainty.

The issue of self-efficacy was spoken of by Tim when he discussed

the individual always wanting to be a teacher. He talked of the person having a mind set when they got into teaching. Self-efficacy also speaks to a level of self-confidence, and Ron referred to committed teachers having a history of being achievers. The confidence level that these individuals developed because of their achievements had a positive effect upon the teacher's level of self-esteem.

The issue of valuing people was a very strong theme in the responses of the principals. This dynamic was important in providing feedback via a variety of psychic rewards, and it also impacts on teacher certainty. Terry discussed the importance of people feeling valued. Jerome also spoke of the need to discuss how staff development is addressed. Jerry also identified professional development as a significant influence on teacher certainty. Through professional development, the level of teacher competence with respect to the technical knowledge can be positively influenced. Jerry added that professional development creates a synergy for people impacting on the level of knowledge and the sense of confidence of the individuals. These factors all influence commitment.

Ron discussed the impact of the staff having a sense of where the school is going and on what they should be spending their time. "It gives teachers a framework from which to operate." Putting this into the context of the current discussion, this may increase the level of teacher certainty by increasing the individual's comfort level with the procedures of the school. Jerry and Jerome also discussed the importance of the school articulating what it is all about. The school needs to establish a vision, set of goals and objectives. All this leads, as discussed by the five principals, to the need to involve teachers in decision making. This process influences teacher certainty and impacts on the teacher's sense of autonomy and discretion.

Increased Task Autonomy and Discretion. The literature suggests that workplace commitment is enhanced when individuals experience personal responsibility for the outcomes of their work. The workplace should

provide freedom, independence, and individual discretion in carrying out tasks. As teachers develop the sense they can control their work lives, their performance improves and their satisfaction with the work increases. This is facilitated by having teachers involved in collaborative decision making opportunities.

Five of the principals identified involving teachers in decision making concerning tasks that influence their work as influencing commitment. This feature was spoken of in a variety of ways. Tim spoke of teachers having a choice causing their investment in the task to increase, in essence their commitment grows. An example given by Tim referred to the use of teacher leaders in the different curricular area. A teacher involved as a curricular leader would be given the opportunity to have significant input into the outcome of their work. In addition, this opportunity would enhance those factors identified as impacting teacher certainty. Terry, Jerry and Jerome all spoke of teacher involvement in decision making activities as influencing commitment.

Tim identified the influence parents might have on teacher commitment in either a positive or negative fashion. While parents may provide positive feedback, influencing the psychic rewards, their involvement may also have a restricting effect on the amount of autonomy the teacher might expect. A parent group or committee attempting to exert control or influence on the school might negatively affect commitment. Tim's statement of the pressure exerted by parents suggest that the teacher may want to become a bit more committed to the actual learning of the kids. However, I suggest there may be an equal likelihood that commitment could be eroded.

Tom did not speak directly to the issue of task autonomy, but during his discussions he chose to describe the work of a master teacher. He outlined the kind of work this teacher did, and the fact she is already in a leadership position and that she is always looking for opportunities to share and learn all the time. All of these descriptions seem to speak to

a person being given and benefitting from task autonomy and discretion.

Meaningfulness of Work. The factors discussed, psychic rewards, teacher certainty and task autonomy and discretion all contribute to the issue of work meaningfulness. If work is perceived as meaningless, then no amount of feedback or autonomy will enhance the commitment. Issues of professional development, the need to make the work interesting and exciting, and the opportunities to grow and meet new challenges have all been identified in the literature as influencing commitment. Five principals discussed issues relating to work meaningfulness.

Tim spoke of people always wanting to be a teacher and having a certain amount of drive or enthusiasm in the endeavor. These people seem to have a heightened sense of the value and meaning of the work. Ron shared a view somewhat similar to Tim's. Ron also suggested that teachers are committed because of the motivation that led the individual into teaching. Individuals that got into teaching because they wanted to do the job, are deemed by Ron to be more successful.

Work opportunities that allow people to grow and develop give them a sense of challenge and personal accomplishment. The absence of opportunities to broaden instructional abilities is often cited by teachers as a reason for their absenteeism and attrition from work. Jerry identified the influence of putting a teacher into a "spot" they are happy with and they feel challenged. Tim spoke of the non-committed teacher not having had the trigger, the right switch pulled. Some people have not been placed in the right environment. Things just have not worked out. These opportunities lead to a synergy because of the energy created by working with enthusiastic people. This dynamic would enhance the opportunities to broaden instructional abilities enhancing commitment. The absence of these types of opportunities is cited by teachers as a reason for absenteeism and attrition from work (Rosenholtz, 1989). The contribution of professional development opportunities has been discussed relating its contribution to teacher certainty.

Jerome identified the need for people to be able to look at who they are. This speaks to giving individuals the opportunity to grow and reflect on what they are doing. His description grew from his belief that teachers need to be valued, improving psychic rewards, enhancing commitment.

Work meaningfulness is affected to the extent people believe their work will affect the lives of others. If personal definitions of success are perceived by teachers as impossible to attain, work loses its meaningfulness, dissatisfaction and defections increase. Terry spoke of the overbooking of teachers having them involved in activities that take away from their work. Tim identified the effect budget cuts are having on people. Jerome further identified the need to be happy about working successfully in the school and to be given the opportunity to enhance the teacher's development. They see these organizational actions are devaluing the teaching endeavor, reducing a sense of meaning and eroding commitment.

Managing Student Behavior. Student progress was identified in the literature as being a source of psychic rewards for teachers. Conversely, difficult student relations create problems. It was proposed by Huberman (1990) that a primary source of teacher dissatisfaction is "the number of apathetic or disruptive cohorts of pupils one has to face each day or each year" (p. 28).

The surprising finding with respect to this factor was its absence from the responses of the principals. This was more unpredictable given the time student behavior is currently being given by teachers and administrators in schools in suburban Winnipeg. At the time of this study, many teacher groups were involved in the development of behavioral plans, at the school and the divisional levels. Contract negotiations for many teacher groups have involved discussions on the inclusion of behavioral expectations and teacher rights.

Terry spoke about behavior, but his reference to behavior was an

example of how staff was involved in discussions on issues that influence their work. It was interesting that Terry did not identify behavior as a factor influencing commitment given that his staff was spending a significant amount of time discussing a behavioral plan for the school.

Tim and Ron did refer to school profile as an influence on commitment. Tim's reference was to parents and the pressure they may place on the school. He made no reference to behavior. Ron suggested school profile and the types of support the school is able to provide. He discussed the need of supports to assist the teacher in meeting the special needs involved at the school. He made the comment that "if you are in a very tough profile school and you were committed but on your own, it would be tough to sustain." Ron's focus was on developing the supports for the teacher. Behavior was mentioned by principals when they were discussing their roles.

Additional Factors Influencing Commitment. The principals identified factors that were not highlighted in the literature. Both Tim and Ron made reference to the student teaching experience as influencing commitment. Tim suggested that the difference in commitment between people may begin when they undertake their training. He claims that in terms of commitment, the biggest features are the entering mind set and the student teaching experience. Tim's reference to teacher training suggested that you cannot place the responsibility on the training as both good and bad teachers have come out of teaching training systems.

There is literature, though not reviewed for this study, that age and career stages will influence the nature of the person's work. Ron was the only principal that identified age as a factor in commitment. According to Ron, some teachers, as they get older, certainly know their trade. However, they no longer involve themselves in devoting their personal time to the teaching endeavor.

A value underlying this study was that the enhancement of commitment was a fundamental principle for all organizations. A low level of

commitment or misplaced commitment would be an undesirable feature. However, Tom suggested that a teacher's commitment would not be on a high plane forever. He suggested that other responsibilities, such as the family, would require that the teacher focus there rather than at the school.

Generally the principals' responses suggest they have an appreciation for the existence of factors that influence commitment. Collectively, their comments can be grouped into the categories indicated in the literature. Where they differ is in the specific examples they give to identify each factor.

#### The Role of the Principal in Enhancing Commitment

A significant amount of literature supports a strong leadership role for the principal. Given the nature of commitment combined with the principal's role, it is logical to propose that the principal could have a significant influence on teacher commitment. All principals interviewed agreed they had a significant role to play in the development of commitment.

The literature review presented a number of key concepts that are reflective of the principals' comments.

- a) Effective principals established strategies that foster teacher participation and involvement.
- b) Principals need to establish a clear vision of where the school is going, establish a safe orderly environment, and maintain curriculum related to school goals.
- c) There needs to be a developed sense of trust between the principal and the teacher.
- d) Principals need to develop structures that help teachers understand how well they are performing.

The fundamental structure that describes their work as reported by the principals is collaboration. Rowan (1990) outlined an organizational strategy referred to as a commitment model. "The assumption of this

approach is that collaborative and participative management practices will unleash the energy and expertise of committed teachers and therefore lead to important student learning" (p. 354). Much of the reported work of principals in this study involves setting up structures and opportunities to address the issues impacting on commitment.

Four of the principals discussed the need to develop trust. Terry suggested that people have to have trust and that it was important for people to have trust in him as a principal. For Jerry it was important for the teachers to view the principals as a person of integrity. A principal must possess good communication skills, good listening skills. Jerome was spending time analyzing the dynamics of the school before proceeding with strategies to address the issues. Part of this is the need to build trust, which he does by giving teachers all the information he has concerning the school and related issues. Jerome suggested the need to model the kind of climate that reflects the sense of values you possess as the principal. Ron seeks the trust of his staff by becoming involved in teaching and doing his share of the various duties in the school.

The development of trust provides the foundation from which the principal can begin to address the issues impacting on commitment. It would be difficult for the principals to address the commitment issues constructively without first developing a sense of trust.

The Principal and Psychic Rewards. The need for rewards was identified by all the principals as a significant factor influencing commitment. Five of the principals spoke to the need that they involve themselves in activities that increase the psychic rewards of teachers. Tom felt it was important for the principal to give feedback to the teacher, to ensure the teacher feels valued. He accomplishes this by being supportive of the work of the teacher. Tim encourages risk-taking, and to facilitate this he concentrates on organizing opportunities for teachers to collaborate, providing praise and creating a supportive environment.

Ron feels it is necessary for the staff to know that he values them and is supportive of their efforts. Ron believes that for a school to be successful it requires more than just academics, it requires a variety of activities. Ron articulates this to his staff and then organizes the school to make things happen. He stated that it is important that the teachers know that he feels that their job is the most important in the school, and that it is his job to support them. He holds weekly meetings with the teachers to discuss how things are going and what are the areas they need support. For Ron it is important that the teachers know the administration is committed to them and to the school because that enhances their willingness to commit or take chances.

Jerry spoke of the need to "nurture your human resources" through your ways of communicating. Teachers will then be more prepared to respond to the challenges that are presented to them. Jerry gives a sense of valuing his teachers and establishing structures that provide teachers the opportunity to become involved. He feels his teachers become empowered to do the things that are needed.

Jerome focused on the need to involve himself in climate setting. His strategy for doing this is to model the type of climate to be developed in the school. To have people perform with certain values he feels he has to have them himself. This is reflective of the comments by Lane (1992) claiming a principal can influence culture. Jerome uses the example that if a teacher has a difficult child to work with

"I think you have to go in and you have to be prepared to do that work too, you have to be able to do it, you have to be able to show, I think you can't back away from difficult things you need to deal with."

These actions would assist in the development of a positive work environment, enhancing the sense in the teacher that the organization values them, fostering commitment.

As an administrator, Tom feels he must be visible. He is around the building before and after hours. He feels it is important to reinforce a teacher when they are doing something good. In doing this he stresses the

contribution the teacher is making to the child. Tom also uses a performance review cycle as an opportunity to congratulate people who are doing a good job.

The commitment literature clearly identified psychic rewards as a factor in commitment. Evolving from the development of trust as a fundamental foundation for the principal's work, the focus on people and the providing of feedback and support should have a positive effect on the level of psychic rewards and commitment. Hoy, Tarter and Witkoskie (1992) identified trust and stated that "when professionals are part of a team characterized by mutual trust and respect their work is more productive" (p. 38). This dynamic is reported in the work of the five of the principals.

The Principal, Teacher Certainty and Work Meaningfulness. As discussed earlier in this paper, teacher certainty involves the technical knowledge, the skills, procedures and methods that assist students to progress academically. According to the literature, effective principals establish strategies that affect the climate and work with teachers to improve instruction. Okeafor and Trece (1992) stated that "beliefs of teachers about their principal's confidence in teachers, and administrator - teacher and teacher - interaction about instructional tasks potentially influence such important teacher variables as commitment, productivity, responsiveness to change, and job satisfaction" (p. 204). All the principals in the study spoke of aspects of their work that would influence teacher certainty and work meaningfulness.

To enhance teacher certainty, Tim outlined the importance of supporting ideas, providing extra professional development. Tim also supports the teacher who is a risk-taker by buffering the teacher from parents who do not understand what the teacher is doing. He is trying to create a culture that has teachers being supportive of each other. He allows teachers to visit other teachers and assists this by going into the class-room himself. Tim also creates a weekly newsletter allowing him to

help teachers be aware of what other people are doing. This process is facilitated with the study groups that have been created in his school providing opportunities for teachers to express themselves and to hear and learn from their colleagues.

Terry views himself as a buffer and a facilitator : "A big part of what I do should be trying to remove roadblocks from teachers." He states he has a fundamental responsibility to make their teaching easier. He does this by having other people perform non-teaching duties, leaving the teacher to teach. Ron also identified the need to have teachers spend time teaching. He buffers staff from parents and works to maintain the integrity of the teacher.

To influence teacher certainty, Ron and Terry discussed individualizing their work with the teacher. Ron stressed the need to find extra curricular tasks with which the teacher can be successful. Ron supports teachers interested in following a specific direction by providing individual support. This strategy was also reported by Terry as his approach to developing computer skills within the staff. Both Ron and Terry provide money for professional development, for release time to visit other schools. Both report finding time to spend individually with staff who are expressing difficulty or are working on a project.

Jerry described that a part of his role was as a supporter of curriculum implementation. He described his activities when assisting a teacher in difficulty, and from his description, his value system of a supportive principal becomes apparent. As did the other principals, Jerry spoke of providing supports to assist the teacher. The supports or opportunities to assist teachers were also highlighted by Jerome. Both Jerry and Jerome report working individually with teachers to address the possibilities, trying to provide alternatives. Tom provides the position of head teacher. This appointment is viewed as a leadership position and provides for the teachers an opportunity to enhance their personal skills.

Based on the responses of the principals, there is some commonality

with respect to their reported work with teachers on enhancing teacher certainty. All principals reported doing something that would be classified as influencing teacher certainty and the meaningfulness of the work. Where the principals differ is in the types of strategies or activities they employ. There was strong support by the principals to work with teachers in the field of professional development. This included teachers visiting other schools and providing time for reflection. One principal developed a newsletter, and study groups. Three of the principals saw working individually with teachers to assist them in their teaching as an important role.

Three of the principals spoke directly to influencing the culture of the building. Through their influence on the building culture, these principals are able to become involved in the activities that they value. As well, three of the principals reported that an important role was buffering the teachers from parents and students and supporting the teacher who is the risk-taker. The buffering was extended to include protecting teachers from tasks that detract from teaching.

The analysis of the principals' comments with respect to teacher certainty and work meaningfulness has a significant relationship with psychic rewards. While the analysis treated the two factors separately, there is in fact a great deal of overlap. The factors of valuing the teacher, focusing on the climate, and becoming directly involved with their staff influence both categories.

The Principal, Task Autonomy and Teacher Discretion. Teachers' commitment is enhanced when they are involved in decision making. Five of the principals identified the need to provide task autonomy and teacher discretion in their schools. In their discussions, the principals identified a number of tasks that need to be done in a school, and the strategy they all found was to involve teachers in the discussions. While the sixth principal did not identify task autonomy and discretion as a factor, his descriptions of how his school operates indicates an

involvement of the staff.

Four of the principals stated that an important task was the setting of a vision or direction for the school. Within this concept, three of the principals spoke of the need to set a school climate. Ron, and Tom discussed the need to set the standards that will provide a framework for the school. All of these endeavors should have a positive effect on the commitment level of the staff.

The principals discussed the role they have in the development of a plan to set the vision. The key to this process was the involvement of the teachers. As outlined by Jerome, the solution must not be top down. The principal has a responsibility to prepare a strategy that will involve the teachers.

The foundation for this reported collaborative thrust is perhaps made possible because of the attention given by four principals to the development of trust and integrity. From the collaborative structure the principals are provided with the opportunity to involve teachers in a variety of issues impacting the school. According to the principals, by involving the teachers they begin to accept personal responsibility for the outcomes of their work and have individual discretion in carrying out the task.

In discussing teacher involvement, the principals focussed on issues that were impacting their respective schools. Jerry and Tim identified the need to focus on instructional issues as being an important role for the principal. The teachers need to feel that they understand what they are doing and that what they are doing has value. Tim spoke of encouraging teachers to be supportive of each other and to be risk-takers. Jerry discussed giving teachers opportunities to talk about ideas, their teaching, and to develop their own strategies for improvement. All the principals spoke to giving teachers the autonomy they need to become involved in the school. Terry, for example, recognized the illiteracy his staff had concerning the use of computers. He made the point that he did

not mandate that the staff would develop skills, but rather involved the staff and gave the staff the autonomy to create a plan. Terry articulated the need and involved the staff in the solution.

The strategy reported by the principals to enhance teacher certainty and autonomy is very clear. There is a significant culture of involvement of staff in the functioning of the school. It is interesting that one principal did add a qualifier to the involvement. Jerome suggested that he involves teachers where it makes sense.

#### A Summary Profile

The descriptions provided by the principals of their role suggests a significant personnel management function. Following the discussions I was left with the feeling the principals were very concerned with the well-being of the staff. Perhaps this concern leads the principals to focus, as they report themselves doing, on the psychological aspect of the teacher's performance. A majority of the principals clearly stated a need to have the teacher feel valued. This appears to be achieved in a variety of ways, perhaps depending on the personality of the principal or the needs of the school.

To facilitate the feeling of teacher well-being the majority of principals focus firstly on developing trust. This allows the principals to then engage the staff in the process of collaborative decision making, leading to the creation of a vision for the school. The underlying strategy reported by the principals while working with the staff appears to reflect Rowan's (1990) commitment model. The assumption appears to be that this approach will empower teachers and improve student learning.

The principals' strategies and the issues that staff focused upon differed perhaps as a reflection of the needs of the school. The principals clearly identified the need to have teachers involved in professional development activities. This involvement included planning and the participation in the activity. Professional development opportunities should increase teachers' self-confidence and lead to the

enhancement of work meaningfulness and teacher certainty.

Two principals referred to buffering as an important role for them to adopt. Buffering of teachers from non-teaching duties or parents has been identified in the literature as a necessary task in improving commitment. The buffering activity should increase the teachers' sense of self-worth and being valued.

In addition to the personnel role described, the principals made some reference to a task that might be best described as managerial. Tasks associated with this role tend to involve more of the fundamental building management issues. Tasks such as creating a time-table that permitted staff to get together was referred to by a couple of principals. The time-table was seen as one way the principals could facilitate staff meeting and planning together. It was viewed as a means of operationalizing the commitment to a collaborative philosophy.

Related to the time-table issue, Tim created a position of teacher leader in the school. By structuring the management function of the school, Tim reported being able to increase the teacher sense of involvement in the leadership of the school.

Taking care of the building was also discussed by the principals. To this end for example, Ron discussed his work in ensuring sinks, etc. are placed in the art room. He felt very strongly that by looking after these issues, the chances of success by the teacher in starting up the new art program could be increased.

The principals in this study report a leadership style that Leithwood describes as transformational. Much of their reported activity is in keeping with current beliefs about leadership and the enhancement of commitment. Their apparent organizational philosophy may best be described as a type Z organization, which emphasizes participative decision making. According to Leithwood (1992) a type Z organization is accomplished "when teachers are helped to find greater meaning in their work, to meet higher level needs through their work, and to enhance

instructional capacities" (p. 9). Their apparent bias to a type Z organizational philosophy may meet the goals of enhancing the workplace as outlined by Roch (1982) and in Rosenholtz's work.

## CHAPTER 5

**CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

In this section, a brief summary of the study will be presented and recommendations made as to the application of the results to further study.

The summary of literature provided the following set of assumptions upon which the study was based.

1. There are a number of identifiable factors that influence teacher commitment. By attending to these factors in a positive approach teacher commitment can be enhanced. These factors are:

- a) Psychic Rewards
- b) Managing Student Behavior
- c) Increased Task Autonomy and Discretion
- d) Meaningfulness of Work
- e) Teacher Certainty

2. The school principal has a significant role to play in the school. The review by Binda (1989) and others clearly articulated the role of the principal as a leader in the school with tremendous influence on the school activities.

3. The research suggests that organizational dynamics are a chief cause of reduced teacher commitment. Conversely, organizational strategies that are supportive should enhance commitment.

4. School administrators need to be aware of these issues and they should be working proactively to enhance teacher commitment.

Guided by a multi-level, social interaction perspective of commitment, interview data were collected from principals concerning their opinions with respect to three general research questions:

1. How do principals describe a committed teacher?
2. What do principals believe to be the most important elements in developing and maintaining teacher commitment?

3. What do principals regard as the most important strategies to achieve and promote commitment within their teaching staff?

Six male principals working in K-9 English instruction schools participated in the study. Taped interviews, lasting approximately sixty minutes, were held with each principal. Once the interview was transcribed, a second interview was held with each principal for the purpose of making any changes or additions to the interview transcript.

The principals' comments were analyzed and comparisons made to the literature on teacher commitment and to the role of the principal. While the study set out to address the research questions separately, the principals' responses revealed the related nature of the issues. It must be noted that this study made no attempt to validate the accuracy of the principals' responses. The responses were treated as being an honest representation of what the principals know and do about commitment.

The principals described the committed teacher as having a psychological predisposition to being committed. The committed teacher was viewed as being more intelligent and possessing a greater knowledge of the teaching profession. This enables the teacher to address many of the issues that influence commitment. Committed teachers have a higher level of certainty about their job because of their greater knowledge. They are able to make greater sense of their job, creating a greater sense of meaningfulness in their work. The high level of commitment is marked by the extra time and energy they bring to the job. It is suggested in the literature that because of the higher of intelligence and knowledge influencing the commitment factors, the committed teacher is not negatively influenced by the forces that detract from commitment.

The literature identified variables that influence the commitment level of staff. In the interviews, the principals identified many of the same variables. The principals discussed the importance of psychic rewards and teachers receiving feedback concerning the success of their efforts. The principals identified the need to ensure teachers feel

valued. They report trying to accomplish this by working with the teachers, and providing a positive work environment. Issues relating to teacher certainty and to work meaningfulness were also identified by the principals as factors influencing commitment. Providing increased task autonomy and discretion was identified by five of the principals as influencing teacher commitment. The principals discussed the importance of teachers being involved in decision making on the issues impacting of their work lives. One surprising feature of the responses from the principals was their lack of identification of student behavior as a factor influencing commitment. Two of the principals spoke about student behavior not as an influence on commitment but as an example of related issues.

The literature suggests that principals can enhance or maintain commitment by focusing their efforts on those factors that have been identified as influencing commitment. All the principals interviewed agreed they had a significant role to play in influencing commitment. To achieve this end, four of the principals suggested that it was important to establish trust as a foundation. From this foundation the principals reported that they focused their work on the establishment of psychic rewards, the enhancement of teacher certainty and work meaningfulness, and the development of task autonomy and discretion.

Task autonomy and discretion has been identified as influencing commitment. One principal suggested that parents might influence commitment in both a positive and negative direction. The dynamic of task autonomy might be that any situation, such as curriculum, principal leadership style, Board policy, might infringe on teacher autonomy. For the principal, the challenge would be to modify the negative influences on the teacher.

The analysis of the principals' responses to their role suggested a bias towards tasks that were categorized as being personnel issues. Issues referred to as managerial in the analysis were reportedly done for

the purpose of supporting those factors that influence commitment. The leadership style suggested by the responses of the principals is described by Leithwood (1991) as transformational.

Overall, the study suggested that the principals describe the committed teacher using many of the same descriptions used in the current literature. The principals appear to have a good understanding of the factors that influence commitment. In addition, the principals' descriptions of how they work to enhance teacher commitment is reflective of much of the present literature. Based on their responses, they all appear to be proactively involved in improving commitment within their school.

#### Recommendations

1. This study did not attempt to verify the accuracy of the principals' responses or the success of the initiatives. It would be of value to repeat the interview process using a sample of teachers from the same schools. This information, when compared with the comments of the principals, would provide a portrait of the school's effectiveness in addressing teacher commitment issues.

2. While the focus of the study was to examine commitment, the results suggest that commitment is a subset of an organizational philosophy of educational leadership that may have influence on a variety of educational components. In this study the principals' responses suggest a leadership style reflective of what has been described in the literature as transformational. The application of the study might be extended by examining the principals' leadership style and its effectiveness related to other educational factors.

3. Organizations are only as strong as the people working within them. Without a committed staff of teachers, educational excellence may be impossible to achieve. Enhancing commitment must be a focus of the entire organization. While schools are the local work organizations for the teachers, I suggest that they may reflect the culture of the division.

A further extension of this study would be to analyze division or district actions towards teacher commitment and the relationship this may have on some identifiable factor (i.e., teacher absenteeism, teacher transfers, student achievement).

4. It is claimed in this thesis that by giving attention to factors influencing commitment, teacher commitment can be enhanced. It is proposed that by attending to these factors, as they pertain to children, may enhance student commitment. A study that reviews commitment and its relationship to student commitment might extend the application of this thesis.

#### Conclusion

It was the premise of this study that teacher commitment is at the foundation of the success of the teaching enterprise. Principals have been clearly identified as having a very influential role to play in the culture of the school. It is the responsibility of the principal to maximize those variables that increase the success experienced by the students. Fundamental to that success is a high level of commitment by the teachers. Principals must value, as a significant part of their responsibility, involvement with teachers and the influencing of those factors that can impact on the teachers' commitment level.

How the principals go about addressing teacher commitment speaks to the type of leadership style they possess. Given the importance of a high level of teacher commitment, principals must have the leadership skills to facilitate commitment. Organizational training must update the principals to this type of leadership. To achieve this, organizations must have a culture that promotes the use of a transformational style of leadership. This culture must be seen to influence all aspects of the work of the organization. Principals who are involved in decision making at the divisional level would be more inclined to participate in this style of leadership at the school level. As Corey (1990) states, "involvement leads to commitment" (p. 42).

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## APPENDIX A

Interview Questions

I. The first set of questions will be used to gather some background information on the school, the students, and the staff. Questions pertaining to:

1. the size of the school - number of students - number of teachers
2. Socio-economic profile of the community the school serves
3. The age of the staff
4. How long the principal has been at the school
5. What are the principal's primary concerns related to the school? To what is the principal devoting most of their time?

II. Research Question #1: How would you describe a committed teacher?

Interview questions:

1. Would you describe one of your most committed teachers?
2. How would you compare the committed teacher with a teacher you feel has a low level of commitment? How are they different?
3. Why do you feel this difference has occurred?
4. What motivates a committed teacher?
5. Do you think (age, experience, gender, school profile, career stages) have any bearing upon teacher commitment? Explain. Can you provide examples to clarify your opinion?
6. What is the level of commitment among your staff?

III. Research Question #2: What do you believe to be the most important elements in developing and maintaining teacher commitment?

1. Could you identify key elements or factors that influence the development and serve to maintain teacher commitment?
2. Are these factors more organizational or personal in nature?
3. Could you expand on the organizational factors? On the

personal factors? How do you feel they influence (positive or negative) commitment?

IV. Research Question #3: What do you regard as the most important strategies to achieve and promote commitment within the teachers?

1. Can you, as a principal, do anything to promote, enhance commitment?

2. If question #1 is yes...

Describe what can be done.

Describe what you are doing.

Describe strategies that you are currently using.

What role do you play?

Have you, are you, doing anything organizationally to enhance commitment?

How do you know what you have done is working?

3. If question #1 is no...

Why do you feel you have no influence on teacher commitment?

Who is responsible for enhancing teacher commitment? elaborate?

4. In your school, what is being done that influences commitment?

What role are you playing?

## APPENDIX B

Superintendent's Letter

Dear

I am writing you to inform you of a study I am conducting as part of my studies towards a Master of Education Degree at the University of Manitoba. The study is entitled "The Principal's Role in Developing and Maintaining Teacher Commitment."

The research involves interviewing six principals randomly selected from within Suburban Winnipeg. The interviews will focus on the principal's views relating to three general questions:

- 1) How would you describe a committed teacher?
- 2) What do you believe to be the most important elements in developing and maintaining teacher commitment?
- 3) What do you regard as the most important strategies to achieve and promote commitment within teachers?

As a result of the selection process, I have identified a principal working in your School Division as a potential participant in the study. I will be contacting that person by letter in the next few days.

To ensure the anonymity of each participant, only I will be aware of their identity. Each principal in the study will participate in an interview lasting about one hour. The interview will be held after school hours. The taped responses to the interview questions will be transcribed and then edited. A second interview lasting approximately 30 minutes will then be held to give the participants the opportunity to review their responses. At the completion of the study, all tapes will be destroyed.

In the writing of the thesis the respondents comments will generally be treated collectively in an attempt to create a portrait of principal's actions. At no place in the thesis will individuals be named or identifying features reported.

Should you wish to discuss this study in greater detail, please do not hesitate to contact me at [phone number] (work) or [phone number] (home).

Sincerely,

Greg Meade

## APPENDIX C

Letter to Participating Principals

Dear

I am writing to you to request your participation in a study I am conducting as part of my studies towards a Master of Education Degree at the University of Manitoba. The study is entitled "The Principal's Role in Developing and Maintaining Teacher Commitment."

The research involves interviewing six principals randomly selected from within Suburban Winnipeg. The interviews will focus on their views relating to three general research questions:

- 1) How would you describe a committed teacher?
- 2) What do you believe to be the most important elements in developing and maintaining teacher commitment?
- 3) What do you regard as the most important strategies to achieve and promote commitment within teachers?

Should you agree to participate in the study, I will conduct an interview with you lasting about one hour. The taped responses to the interview questions will be transcribed and then edited. The editing process will be used to create transcripts clear of repetitions, pauses, etc. A second interview lasting approximately 30 minutes will then be held to give you the opportunity to review your responses and to make any changes if desired. At the completion of the study tapes will be destroyed.

Your anonymity will be assured. In the writing of the thesis the respondent's comments will generally be treated collectively in an attempt to create a portrait of principal's actions. At no place in the thesis will individuals be named and no identifying features will be reported.

Once the tapes have been analyzed, all participants will have the opportunity to review them before the final draft of the thesis is completed. All participants will be offered a summary of the results of the study.

Should you wish to withdraw from the study, you will be free to do so at any time.

If you are willing to assist me with the study, please sign the consent at the bottom of this letter. I will pick up the consent letter at our first interview.

I will follow up this letter with a phone call within the next couple of days.

If you require further information, please do not hesitate to contact me at [phone number] (work) or [phone number] (home).

Sincerely,

Greg Meade

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I \_\_\_\_\_ hereby give my consent to participate in the study being conducted by Greg Meade entitled "The Principal's Role in Developing and Maintaining Teacher Commitment." I am aware that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX D

Second Letter to Principals

Dear

I have attached to this letter a copy of the transcript of our interview. I will be in touch with you in the next few days to schedule our second interview.

In preparation for the second interview, please read the interview transcript. Should you want to make any changes or additions to your responses, please feel free to do so. During the second interview we will review the transcript to ensure it reflects accurately your feelings to the interview questions.

It is my expectation the second interview should take between 15 and 30 minutes.

Sincerely,

Greg Meade