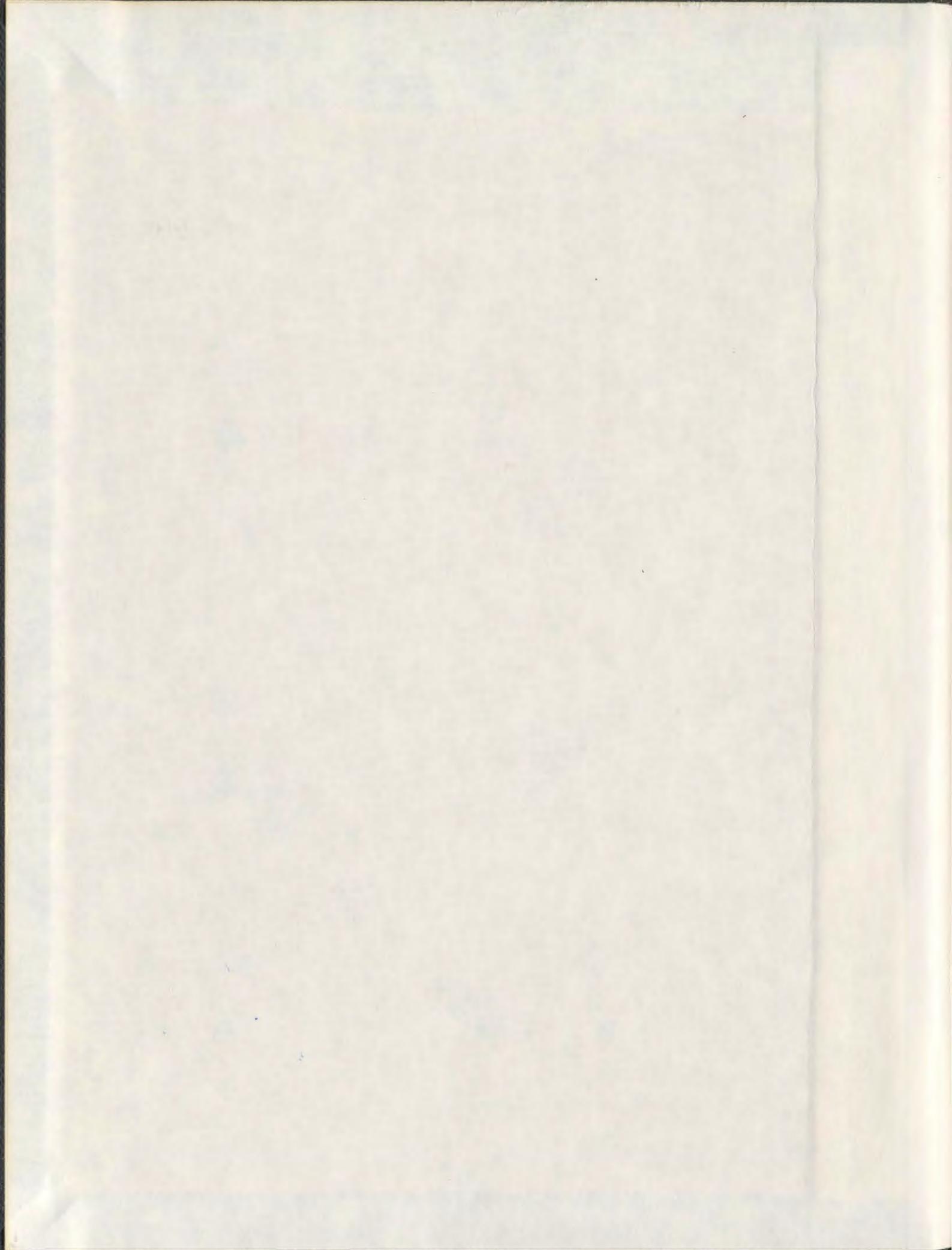


"MOTHER OF TWENTY-ONE"  
PRIMARY AND ELEMENTARY TEACHERS'  
WORKLOADS AND HEALTH IN RURAL AND  
URBAN NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

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001311



**“Mother of Twenty-One”  
Primary and Elementary Teachers’  
Workloads and Health  
in Rural and Urban Newfoundland and Labrador**

by

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## ABSTRACT

Research has shown that many primary and elementary teachers in Newfoundland and Labrador and elsewhere struggle with heavy workloads (Dibbon, 2004; Schaefer, 2003) that can impact their health and well-being (Messing, Seifert, and Escalona, 1997; Younghusband, 2005). Teachers' workloads are strongly shaped by gender (Acker, 1996) and place, including rural and urban contexts. However, most research on teacher workload has an urban focus, with little rural-urban comparison (Abel and Sewell, 1999).

The purpose of this study was to examine primary and elementary teachers' workloads and health in rural and urban areas of Newfoundland and Labrador. I was guided by a theoretical framework based on a social determinants of health approach, and focusing on the importance of gender and place as determinants of health.

My methodological approach is a feminist action research framework that divided the research into advisory, research, and feedback stages, and included writing a report for the provincial teachers' union. I conducted individual interviews with twenty-four primary and elementary teachers and six representatives of other groups in education, including parents, administrators, student assistants, the teachers' union, school boards, and the Department of Education. I also had the participating teachers complete detailed one-day task-diaries, which we then discussed in the interviews. I questioned participants on their perceptions of primary and elementary teachers' teaching and domestic workloads, the consequences of this work for their health and well-being, and their suggestions for how these workloads can be improved. Participants were invited to offer feedback on the summary report, which was incorporated into the report and this thesis.

The teachers in this study identified five main areas of concern related to their teaching workloads: the intense and all-consuming nature of their work; emotional labour; specific tasks such as supervision duty, paperwork, planning, preparation and correcting, student evaluations, and implementing the 'Pathways' program; lack of human and material resources; and a persistent sense of invisibility. In addition, I found that teachers, particularly those with young children, were struggling to balance their teaching and domestic work. Years of experience, rural or urban location, and gender were all important factors affecting these workloads. In fact, I describe primary and elementary teaching as a "mothering profession" to reflect the way that this work is gendered so strongly around mothering. Teachers also raised a number of concerns about the effects of their workloads on their families' well-being as well as their own. These concerns included tiredness; guilt; feeling overwhelmed, rushed, or stressed; lack of time for themselves; physiological problems, such as headaches, voice problems, and lower limb pain; and difficulty taking time off when ill. Based on this research, I discuss the need for a wider understanding of the concept of well-being that takes into account teachers' and women's "ordinary suffering." Finally, I discuss teaching as a profession, and show how the changes in teachers' work reveals important insights about the relationship between gender and professional work.

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## ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

<b>CIHI</b>	Canadian Institute for Health Information
<b>CEWH</b>	Centres for Excellence for Women's Health
<b>CRT</b>	Curriculum Reference Test
<b>ESL</b>	English as a Second Language
<b>ISSP</b>	Individual Support Services Plan
<b>NAPE</b>	Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Public Employees
<b>NLSBA</b>	Newfoundland and Labrador School Boards' Association
<b>NLTA</b>	Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association
<b>NTA</b>	Newfoundland Teachers' Association (previous name)
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization

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**PART ONE: INTRODUCTION, THEORY AND METHODS**

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### 1.0 Introduction

In Newfoundland and Labrador, as in most of the world, we almost all spend much of our early lives in school, being guided, directed, disciplined, and cared for by teachers.

However, a large body of research throughout Canada and the world has shown that, on a daily basis, many teachers of young children are struggling with heavy workloads

(Dibbon 2004; Belliveau, Liu, and Murphy, 2002; Harvey and Spinney, 2000; Messing, Seifert, and Escalona, 1997; Naylor, Schaefer, and Malcomson (eds.), 2003). Such

workloads can seriously impact many aspects of teachers' health, including their

physical, mental, emotional, and social well-being (King and Peart, 1992; Leithwood,

1999; Messing *et al*, 1997; Schaefer, 2003; Younghusband, 2005). Research has also

consistently demonstrated that teachers' work is strongly shaped by gender (Acker, 1996;

Drudy, 2008; Gannerud, 2001; Messing *et al*, 1997; Vogt, 2002). However, much less is

known about the importance of place in teachers' workloads, and there has been very

little comparison of the challenges faced by rural and urban teachers (Abel and Sewell,

1999). In this doctoral thesis, I examine the workloads, health and well-being of primary

teachers (those who teach children from Kindergarten through Grade 3, aged

approximately 5 to 9 years) and elementary teachers (teaching children in Grades 4

through 6, aged approximately 9 to 12 years) in the province of Newfoundland and

Labrador, Canada, with a gender-based analysis and a comparison of rural and urban

issues.

This project is guided by a feminist action research framework, and is structured into advisory, research, and feedback stages. Using task-diaries, in-depth individual interviews, and a written feedback process, I questioned primary and elementary teachers throughout Newfoundland and Labrador on their perceptions of their teaching and domestic workloads, the consequences of their workloads for their health and well-being, and their ideas for how their workloads could be improved. I also interviewed individual representatives of other groups within the education system, including parents (through the provincial schools' council), student assistants, school administrators, the regional school boards, and the provincial Department of Education.

### **1.1 Research Questions**

My research questions were the following: What are Newfoundland and Labrador primary and elementary school teachers' perceptions of their teaching and domestic workloads? What are primary and elementary teachers' perceptions of the consequences of those workloads for their health and well-being? How does gender shape primary and elementary teachers' accounts of their workload and its consequences? How do primary and elementary teachers' accounts of their workloads differ in rural and urban areas? What are rural and urban primary and elementary teachers' suggestions for ways to improve their workloads and promote their health and well-being?

### **1.2 Thesis Overview**

This thesis is divided into five parts: introduction, theory and methods; work; place; health; and final discussion and conclusion. As I will explain, work, place, and health are

key concepts in this thesis, along with the overarching concept of gender, which is woven throughout the text. This thesis also includes eleven chapters and fifteen appendices, as well as a list of references cited.

Part One (Introduction, Theory, and Methods) includes Chapters 1 through 3. Chapter 1 introduces the topic of primary and elementary teachers' workloads and health in rural and urban Newfoundland and Labrador, and gives some beginning thoughts on why it is so important to study this group of workers, their workloads, and well-being. This chapter also includes the main research questions for the study, and this thesis overview. In Chapter 2, I explain how this research is structured around a social determinants of health approach. I also review the existing research relating to the four key concepts around which this project is centred: work, health, gender, and place. In Chapter 3, I discuss the main principles of feminist action research, and I explain how I used this approach to conduct this research project. I discuss the selection process that I used to identify and contact the twenty-four primary and elementary teachers and six representatives of other education groups who participated in this study. I also go through the advisory, main research, feedback, and analysis stages of the research project, explaining the benefits and challenges of using individual in-depth interviews and task-diaries, and how and why the original methods plan was changed. In addition, I discuss the importance of reflexivity in this research project, and how my own personal connections to this research affected my perspective. Finally, I end Chapter 3 with a consideration of the ethical issues in this study.

The section *Part Two: Work* includes two chapters focused on teachers' work, including their teaching workloads (both at school and at home) and domestic workloads. Chapter 4 focuses on the main teaching workload issues that teachers identified, including the intense and all-consuming nature of their work; emotional labour; specific tasks such as supervision duty, paperwork, planning, preparation and correcting, student evaluations, and implementing the Pathways program<sup>1</sup>; lack of human and material resources; and invisibility. In this chapter, I also make note of the particular workload challenges faced by Kindergarten teachers. In Chapter 5, I turn to teachers' domestic workloads, including tasks such as housework, childcare, and eldercare. I discuss the gendered division of labour in domestic work, the negotiations over domestic work between spouses, the particular challenges faced by teachers who are also mothers of young children, and teachers' struggles to find a sense of balance between their work at school and their work at home.

In *Part Three: Place*, three chapters examine the way that teachers' work is shaped by the different social locations, or 'places,' in which they find themselves. In Chapter 6, I

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<sup>1</sup> The 'Pathways to Programming and Graduation' was introduced into the primary and elementary system in Newfoundland and Labrador in 1996. 'Pathways', as it is generally known, is a five-part framework "that enables teachers to tailor curriculum to meet the individual strengths and needs of all students" (Department of Education, 2008). Pathway 1 refers to the standard curriculum, which is followed by most students. Pathway 2 refers to the provincial curriculum with accommodations or support (such as different teaching methods, materials, or evaluations). Pathway 3 refers to a modified course, based on the provincial curriculum but with different learning outcomes. Pathway 4 refers to an entirely different course that no longer resembles the original course from the standard curriculum. Pathway 5 refers to an entirely different curriculum, based on daily living skills, for example, rather than academics (Department of Education, 2008).

compare new and experienced teachers' workloads, and examine some of the reasons why teachers' level of seniority may be so important to their workload experiences. In Chapter 7, I explore gendered issues in primary and elementary teaching. I compare women and men teachers' workloads, giving special attention to the unique position and challenges for men in primary and elementary teaching. Most importantly, I explain why I describe this occupation as a "mothering profession," looking at the ways that primary and elementary teaching is gendered specifically around mothering. In Chapter 8, I compare rural and urban areas, examining the different types of teaching and domestic workload issues that teachers identified in rural parts of the province as compared to the issues identified in cities. I also look at some of the important underlying economic issues that shape conditions for living and working in rural and urban areas of the province, particularly high unemployment and low wages.

*In Part Four: Health* I turn to a discussion of teachers' health and well-being, and of the ways that teachers in this study feel that their well-being has been impacted by their workloads. In Chapter 9, I begin by examining the concerns that teachers expressed about how their workloads affect their families, including their spouses, children, and elderly parents. These family impacts also play a part in the main concerns that teachers identified as affecting their own health and well-being: tiredness; guilt; feeling overwhelmed, rushed, or stressed; lack of time for self; physiological problems, such as headaches, voice problems, and lower limb pain; and difficulty taking time off when ill. I also discuss the importance of developing a broader understanding of health and well-

being, and question the way that the health concerns of teachers and of women are taken less seriously than they ought to be because they are seen as 'ordinary suffering.'

*In Part Five: Final Discussion and Conclusion* I begin with a chapter bringing together many of the ideas that I have introduced throughout the thesis. Chapter 10 discusses the debate surrounding teacher's status as professionals and the arguments surrounding deprofessionalization. I then move on to introduce a relatively new theory that focuses on the distinction between professionalism 'from within' and professionalism 'from above' (Evetts, 2003), and I explain how this is useful for understanding many aspects of primary and elementary teachers' workloads. Finally, I bring the discussion to an examination of gender, and the gendered mechanisms that shape teachers' status as professionals. In the final chapter of the thesis, Chapter 11, I begin with a review of the most important points raised in the thesis. I then highlight some of the limitations of this study, and suggest a number of areas that particularly stand out as deserving of future research. I also discuss the feedback that I received from the teachers and other education participants in this study on the report that I prepared for Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association. Finally, I conclude by outlining the recommendations made by teachers in this study for improving their own teaching workloads and those of their colleagues. I expand on this to discuss further implications and recommendations to help ease the burden of teachers and of all who face the daily struggle to balance multiple workloads without sacrificing their well-being.

## CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL APPROACH

### 2.0 Introduction

My theoretical approach to this research focuses on the concepts of work, gender, health, and place. Specifically, my focus is on the ways that primary and elementary teachers' workloads are shaped by gender and place and, in turn, the relationship between differently situated workloads and teachers' health and well-being.

One important element of this theoretical approach is examining workload, gender and place as social determinants of health. This health determinants focus is a way of understanding the social and cultural factors that affect women's and men's health and well-being. The World Health Organization (WHO) has identified ten social health determinants as particularly important: the social gradient (socioeconomic status), stress, early life, social exclusion, work, unemployment, social support, addiction, food, and transport (Wilkinson and Marmot, 2003). The WHO also emphasises that these social determinants of health are very closely intertwined with issues of social justice, and that in order to address health inequities, action must be focused on improving these social issues (Commission on Social Health Determinants, 2008). One concern that has been raised about the social determinants of health approach is the risk of losing a holistic understanding of health and instead conceptualizing each determinant as a completely separate entity. As Gustafson (2005) explains, it is important to remember that health determinants are not simple, separate causal factors, but "social and political constructs...that are, in the living of them, complex and interconnected" (p. 272), and that can affect different women's and men's health in widely varying ways.

Teachers are an interesting group to study from a social health determinants approach, in part because they are a relatively privileged group of workers. Teachers enjoy advantages related to many social health determinants. For example, the fact of being securely employed and of enjoying a relatively high income, education level, and socio-economic status would tend to benefit teachers' health. From an occupational health perspective, it could be theorized that if teachers are experiencing a large number of health concerns, this may indicate that a health determinant such as workload is eroding the positive health benefits of these areas of privilege.

The concept of workload also requires further explanation. I chose to focus this thesis on the concept of workload for two reasons. One is that workload is an important concept in both the occupational health and education fields. The second is that teachers themselves, including the provincial teachers' union, are currently focusing strongly on the concept of workload, and this concept has also been the focus of a recent quantitative survey of Newfoundland and Labrador teachers (Dibbon, 2004). However, I recognize that framing this research around "workload" also has its limits – particularly because it tends to draw attention away from exploring the positive elements and joys of teaching. I discuss this further in Chapter 11.

In this research, I used "workload" in a complex, multi-faceted sense. I understand workload as more than the total number of hours that a worker works or total number of tasks she or he completes. Instead, workload is a complex concept that takes into account the importance of the paid and unpaid work of a job as well as unpaid domestic and

volunteer work, the balance between these different types of work (Hochschild, 2003); the diversity, complexity, intensity, and interrelatedness of the activities that make up work; the sense of control and autonomy over work; the fit between expectations and experiences of work; and the fit between skills, training, and work (Messing, Neis, and Dumais, 1995; Messing *et al*, 1997; Messing, 1998). Rather than simply counting primary and elementary teachers' work hours, in this research I was interested in exploring with them the everyday struggles and joys that make up their workloads, how these vary over time and space, and their strategies and resources for dealing with them.

Overall, my focus is on the diversity of workloads as described by teachers and the ways that they are situated in particular locations in regards to gender and place. I look at the ways that teachers' work is gendered, and at the differences in women and men primary and elementary teachers' workloads at school and at home. I also examine the ways that primary and elementary teachers' workloads vary by place, by which I mean the historical, cultural, geographical and organisational context in which teachers live and work. Specifically, I focused on differences between new and experienced teachers, and between rural and urban teachers. The commonalities among primary and elementary teachers' workload are very important, but my emphasis on the concepts of gender and place also keeps diversity at the forefront.

In this chapter, I review the literature on work, particularly professionalism, as well as gender, health, and place. I examine the global and local literature on the changing work of teaching, the gendered nature of primary and elementary teachers' teaching and

domestic work, the potential impact of work on primary and elementary teachers' health and well-being, and the particular geographical, historical, cultural, and organisational context of primary and elementary school teaching in Newfoundland and Labrador, including the importance of rural and urban differences.

## **2.1 Work**

Primary and elementary teachers are a very important group of workers to study. Around the world, primary and elementary teachers occupy a uniquely conflicted position in the world of work. In ways similar to other women-dominated caring professions such as nursing, midwifery, and social work (Armstrong, Amaratunga, Bernier, Grant, Pederson, and Willison, 2002; Benoit, 1987, 1989; Messing *et al*, 1995), primary and elementary teachers are caught between the idealised advantages of professional work (Larson, 1977) and the taken-for-granted challenges of 'women's work' (Messing, 1998).

Although there is a lack of consensus today on the definition of a profession (Evetts, 2003; Wilkinson, 2005), the classic definition includes characteristics such as greater control and autonomy over their work than most other groups of workers, and competition with other occupations to set and enforce rules, in collaboration with government bodies, about who is allowed to join the profession, what work can be considered the domain of the profession, and how that work will be carried out (Abbott, 1988; Larson, 1977, Tilly and Tilly, 1997). Professional workers, including primary and elementary teachers, also benefit from advantages such as higher pay, benefits packages, job security, and pension programs.

Despite these privileges, however, many researchers have argued that in recent decades, there has been a strong trend towards deprofessionalization. The argument is that, to varying degrees, professions are experiencing the effects of neoliberal restructuring, and are losing many of the privileges once associated with professionalism (Apple, 1986; Braverman, 1974). Larson (1980) explains that, as opposed to the historical ideal of the 'autonomous professional', most professional workers today must sell their labour to a capitalist or state authority, and most work within large bureaucratic organizations where their own personal level of control over their work is quite reduced. Across Canada and around the world, dominant neo-liberal ideologies have meant cutbacks to public institutions that have resulted in reductions in the numbers of professionals, support staff, and resources, and thus more intensified work for those who remain (Armstrong *et al*, 2002; Cossman and Fudge, 2002; Leithwood, Steinbach, and Jantzi, 2002). Larson (1980) argues that this 'work intensification', with increased pressure to do more work in the same amount of time, "represents one of the most tangible ways in which the work privileges of educated workers are eroded" (p. 166).

This process of intensification can be seen in education systems throughout North America, where a number of recent changes to the education system have emphasized 'restructuring' in order to reduce the costs of the education system as much as possible (Acker, 1996; King and Peart, 1992; Leithwood *et al*, 2002; Sears, 2003). In many ways, these policy changes "have some important parallels with the restructuring efforts of large corporations" (Leithwood *et al*, 2002, p. 110), as well as similarities with the increasingly common corporate model of health care (Gustafson, 2005). Often implemented as part of a large-scale reform process, such policy changes, or what Sears

(2003) calls 'lean production methods', include cutting back on the number of teachers employed, reductions in support staff, and reductions in other human and material resources. In fact, Canadian research indicates that this intensification is particularly strong in women-dominated 'caring professions', such as teaching, nursing, and social work, where chronic work overload is becoming a common working condition (Armstrong *et al*, 2002; Dibbon, 2004; Messing *et al*, 1995; Messing, 1998).

Overall, primary and elementary teachers in Canada still enjoy many of the privileges associated with a professional, unionised occupation, and their work is considered to be one of the highest-prestige occupations for women (Messing *et al*, 1997, citing Asselin, Gauthier, Lachapelle, Lavoie, Duchesne, Jean, Laroche, and Nobert, 1994). However, many studies (e.g. Belliveau *et al*, 2002; Dibbon, 2004; Harvey and Spinney, 2000; Naylor *et al*, 2003) have shown that teachers in this country are dealing with heavy workloads, and that their work is becoming more and more intensified. For example, in a questionnaire-based study of 1500 British Columbian teachers, Schaefer (2003) found that nearly nine in ten teachers described the size of their workload as a source of stress (p. 65), and two thirds of teachers reported that their workload had increased in the past five years (p. 60). However, Canadian and American researchers have noted that many of the physically, emotionally, and cognitively difficult aspects of primary and elementary teaching are taken for granted, often in the context of gendered ideas about what is 'natural' work for women (Acker, 1996; Messing *et al*, 1997).

## 2.2 Gender

In this province and around the world, primary and elementary teachers' work is not gender-neutral, but is shaped in many ways by a gendered division of labour and by gendered ideas about teaching (Acker, 1996; Drudy, 2008; Gannerud, 2001). Up to the early 1800s, teaching was considered a man's job in many countries, and teachers at all levels were mainly men (Acker, 1996). Throughout the nineteenth century, however, many Western countries saw a dramatic increase in the number of women teachers. For example, in the United States by the 1920s, 86% of all teachers were women (Acker, 1996, p.116). The gendered division of labour shifted back and forth throughout the twentieth century, depending on the specific dynamics of each country or jurisdiction. Many men re-entered teaching during the Depression, for example, when preference was given to men in many jobs. In many areas until the latter half of the twentieth century, marriage bars prevented women teachers from working once they had married (Acker, 1996). Today, most teachers in most Western countries are women, and the younger the student, the more likely that their teacher will be a woman. In fact, as Cognard-Black (2004) has noted, "school teaching is meaningfully divided into two occupations similar in length of training and requisite skills but dramatically different in sex composition" (p. 114). The two occupations that he refers to are high school teaching and primary/elementary school teaching; while numbers of high school teachers tend to be divided evenly between women and men, elementary school teachers are predominantly women. Drudy (2008) points out that the dominance of women in teaching young children is a global phenomenon, and one that is linked to "economic development, urbanisation, the position of women in society, cultural definitions of masculinity, and the value of

children and childcare” (p. 309; also Drudy, Martin, Woods, and O’Reilly, 2005).

In fact, research from Canada and the United States shows that women and men teachers tend to do very different types of work, with women concentrated at the pre-school, primary, and elementary levels, and men in high school, colleges, universities, and administration (Acker, 1996; Cognard-Black, 2004; King and Peart, 1992; Krahn and Lowe, 2002). In Newfoundland and Labrador, women comprise two thirds of all teachers, 80% of primary and elementary teachers and over 95% of kindergarten teachers (Newfoundland and Labrador Statistics Agency, 2001; Statistics Canada, 2006a).

Although the gender balance in subject areas is beginning to even out, men still tend to be concentrated in technical or physical subjects such as math, sciences, and physical education, and in administrative positions, while women are more likely to teach languages and social studies, and are less likely to be in leadership and administrative positions (King and Peart, 1992; Krahn and Lowe, 2002; Messing *et al*, 1997). The number of women in administrative positions is slowly increasing in Canada, though even elementary school principals still tend to be men. This contrasts with other areas of the world, however, such as Mexico and Israel, where most primary and elementary principals are women (Acker, 1996; Addi-Raccach, 2002).

In fact, throughout the world, women and men tend to be employed in different industries, in different jobs within the same industry, and even at different tasks within the same job. Women are more concentrated in jobs in the service industry and the caring professions, in low-paid, part-time, routinized, contingent work, while men are more

concentrated in unionised work, higher-paid positions, in jobs requiring technical training, and administration (Armstrong and Armstrong, 1990; Cockburn, 1985; Dubeck and Dunn, 2002; Messing, 1998; Messing *et al*, 1995). In part, this is related to women's and men's different work histories and seniority levels, particularly because many women have had to interrupt their paid work to take care of children (Armstrong and Armstrong, 1994). In recent years, however, it has been noted that many of the traditional privileges of men's work are disappearing, and that with the processes of corporate restructuring and downsizing, many men's jobs are now becoming more and more like traditional women's jobs (Armstrong, 1995).

Primary and elementary teaching, like many other occupations, is still defined in strongly gendered terms. As I mentioned above, teaching young children is often seen as 'women's work' and conflated with mothering (Acker, 1996; Gannerud, 2001; Messing *et al*, 1997). As Messing *et al* (1997) point out, primary teaching involves "many elements that closely resemble women's traditional 'natural' work: take care of sick or unhappy children, give unlimited support, be satisfied with few opportunities for advancement, and do unpaid work" (p. 58, citing Gaücher, 1983). One of the consequences of this association of teaching with mothering, according to Acker (1996), is that we tend to forget that the school is also a workplace, in the process undermining primary and elementary teachers' efforts to have their work problems taken seriously. Teaching's connection with a discourse of mothering can also be problematic because of the implications associated with a mothering discourse: the assumption that women are morally responsible for children's care, the expectation of unlimited self-sacrifice, the

connection to an ideology of 'intensive mothering' (Hays, 1996), and an oversimplification of the complex diversity of ways that women have mothered throughout history and around the world (Doucet, 2006).

Women and men primary and elementary teachers may also experience different types of benefits and challenges in their work, and may do their work in different ways (Messing, 1998; Vogt, 2002). The gendered nature of primary and elementary teaching, then, can cause difficulties for both women and men primary and elementary teachers (Acker, 1996; Vogt, 2002). Connell (1985) uses the concept of a "gender regime" to describe how the gendered division of labour in schools organizes masculinity and femininity, linking this to the larger society's social reproduction of gender, and he explains that such regimes can create tension and conflict for both women and men teachers. Connell's (1985) research showed that women in a head teaching position experienced discomfort in asserting authority, and research from the 1990s indicated that men in primary school teaching felt "caught in a contradiction of being 'real men' doing 'women's work'" (Acker, 1996, p. 137; citing Coulter and McNay, 1993, p. 411). However, in teaching as in many other women-dominated positions, men tend to experience the 'glass escalator' effect: they tend to move more quickly into positions of privilege and "are more likely than women to be promoted into administrative occupations" (Cognard-Black, 2004, p. 113). In fact, as Acker (1996) explains, "[p]olicies need not contain the intentional discrimination of marriage bars to have differential impacts on women and men" (p. 119) - for example, in some countries, enticements are offered to teachers in math or physical sciences, which tends to privilege men, since they are more concentrated in these

subjects. In addition, policies that base promotion primarily on seniority tend to privilege men, since many women must take off time in order to have children. Ironically, however, in much education research and policy, even that which specifically deals with primary and elementary school teachers, the issue of gender is minimised (Acker, 1996; Addi-Raccah, 2002; Gannerud, 2001; Jenson and Rose, 2003).

In addition to paid and unpaid professional work, women and men who teach are also responsible for unpaid domestic work, which is strongly divided along gender lines as well. This labour, including housework, childcare, and elder care, and volunteer activities, is an important but often overlooked part of an individual's overall workload (Dubeck and Dunn, 2002; Hochschild, 2003; Mackintosh, 1988; Messing, 1998). In a 2004 discussion paper by the Law Commission of Canada, it is estimated that in 1998, “the value of unpaid work in Canada per person was \$12,256.” The Commission explains that “[o]nly 37 percent of females’ productive time occurred in the market and was therefore captured in conventional economic statistics. The remaining two-thirds (29.7 hours per person per week) was unpaid and remained hidden” (Law Commission of Canada, 2004, p. 11, citing Hamdad, Statistics Canada, 2003). Thus, most of women’s work, and their workloads, are invisible.

In North America, research has shown that the gender divide in unpaid domestic labour is most visible in households headed by an opposite-sex couple, while same-sex couples tend to share household work more equally (Kurdek, 1993, 2007; Solomon, Rothblum, and Balsam, 2005). A Statistics Canada study based on time-diaries conducted as part of

the 2005 General Social Survey showed that women aged 25 to 54 are continually increasing their time in the paid workforce (an average of 4.4 hours per day in 2005, compared to 3.3 hours per day in 1986), while men in the same age range are slowly increasing their domestic work responsibilities (2.5 hours per day in 2005, up from 2.1 hours in 1986). Overall, however, the study found that women are still doing nearly two hours more domestic work per day than men (Statistics Canada, 2006b; see also Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer, and Robinson, 2000; Hochschild, 2003; Sanchez and Thomson, 1997; Statistics Canada, 2006b), even among professional women who are the family's main breadwinners (Statistics Canada, 2006b). This additional unpaid work at home has been referred to as women's 'second shift' (Hochschild, 2003).

Canadian and American research has shown that in opposite-sex couples, women and men tend to divide household tasks along stereotypical gender lines. Women tend to be responsible for routine, everyday work such as cooking, cleaning, bathing children, and paying bills, while men tend to take on discretionary, occasional tasks such as making household repairs, maintaining a car, or playing with children outdoors (Bianchi *et al*, 2000; Hochschild, 2003). In contrast, American research has shown that same-sex couples tend to share domestic labour more equally: either sharing the same tasks, or dividing tasks according to interest or skill (Kurdek, 1993, 2007). However, in some cases ideas about gender roles may also play a part in the division of labour of same-sex couples (Giddings, 1998).

### 2.3 Health

Work of all types, paid and unpaid, teaching work and domestic labour, has potential consequences for women and men primary and elementary teachers' health. Research shows that work generally has a positive impact on many health indicators (McDonough, Walters, and Stohschien, 2002). However, under certain conditions, work can have serious negative effects on health and well-being (Messing, 1998). Throughout North American and other western countries, one of the main negative health consequences identified for both paid professional work and domestic work is stress. Numerous studies have found that teachers experience very high levels of psychological distress (Johnson, Cooper, Cartwright, Donald, Taylor and Millet, 2005; Punch and Tuettman, 1990). Johnson *et al* (2005) compared twenty-six different professions, and found that teachers scored second-highest (next to ambulance workers) on physical and psychological symptoms associated with stress.

Stress is a difficult concept to define, particularly because of the confusion between stress as a cause ('stressor'), and stress as a response (Pithers, 1995). In this thesis, I use the term 'stressor' to indicate cause, and when I use the term 'stress', it is in the sense of 'psychological distress' (as used by Messing, 1998 and Messing *et al*, 1997), which is more encompassing of the many mental and emotional health problems that have been associated with paid and unpaid work, including burnout, depression, anxiety, and fatigue (Acker and Armenti, 2004; Armstrong and Armstrong, 1994; Dibbon, 2004; Hochschild, 2003; Leithwood, 1999; Luxton, 1980; Messing *et al*, 1997; Walters and Denton, 1997; Youngusband, 2005). Researchers increasingly recognise psychological distress as a

serious occupational health issue, affecting physical and mental health over the short-term and possibly the long-term as well (Lazarus, 1999; Messing, 1998; Sauter, Murphy, Colligan *et al*, 1999; Van Dick and Wagner, 2001).

When explaining the relationship between work and psychological distress, it is important to try to strike a balance between identifying structural, sociological explanations as well as individual, psychological explanations. Coburn and Eakin (1993) argue that most research on health and illness has studied the causes of health concerns such as stress as isolated factors, separate from their social context. They argue that there needs to be more attention to the social determinants of health. Sociologists are attuned to social explanations, but as New (1996) has pointed out, it is also important to be careful not to focus solely on social structural factors while ignoring the importance of psychology. From a psychological perspective, stress is generally conceptualised as involving cognitive, motivational, and emotional aspects (Lazarus, 1999). For teachers, then, much research emphasises that individual coping strategies and social support, particularly from co-workers can be an important way for teachers to reduce stressors and to cope with their experience of stress (e.g. Griffith, Steptoe, and Croypley, 1999).

Likewise, the response to teacher stress tends to be very individualised, focusing on offering programs to help distressed teachers learn about wellness and coping strategies (King and Peart, 1992).

Many studies that examine teachers' experiences of stress make the statement that being female is linked to higher levels of psychological distress, and then 'explain' this by

saying that women may either be more likely to report distress than men, or they may experience more work-family pressures. In these accounts, the reasons behind women's higher levels of distress are often not thoroughly questioned or examined (e.g. Moreno-Abril, de Dios Luna-del-Castillo, Fernández-Molina, Jurado, Gurpegui, Lardeli-Claret, and Gálvez-Vargas, 2007, Phillips, Sen, and McNamee, 2007, Kovess-Masfety, Rios-Seidel, and Sevilla-Dedieu, 2007). For example, Moreno-Abril and colleagues (2007) studied the mental health of Spanish schoolteachers, and stated that 'female sex' is associated with psychiatric morbidity among teachers. By way of explanation, they say that women may be exposed to more job stress, but they do not explain why this might be the case. The other explanations that they offer include that women have personalities that are more prone to psychiatric problems, are more 'sensitive' to psychological stress, are less well adapted to "life events or to the family or work setting", or are influenced by their female hormones to be more prone to psychiatric troubles (p. 199).

I am highly critical of these 'explanations', which do nothing to explore the reasons why women and men teachers might experience different working conditions, both at school and at home, and thus differ in their susceptibility to distress (Messing, 1998). In fact, I would argue that for teachers who are parents in particular, work and family pressures may be so intertwined that in order to explain either, there is a real need to understand both. Furthermore, one of the main findings of Moreno-Abril *et al's* (2007) study is that temperament and personality characteristics, including "a negative perception of the work environment" statistically 'explain' much of the psychiatric morbidity. In other words, the conclusion is that teachers who report higher levels of stress and mental health

problems are those who are less able to deal well with stressors. In addition to the problems of assuming any causal linkages in a cross-sectional study, I would argue that this is not a satisfactory explanation. It does not explore the conditions that may lead to a more negative perception of a work environment – such as differences in the actual work environment - and how this might lead to more psychological distress. Certainly, the psychological perspective is extremely important, but there is also a risk of individualising the experience of stress so much that the discussion borders on blaming individual teachers for being stressed and not coping well enough. In other words, it is not just that some teachers are more prone to psychological stress or need to learn time management (though these may be factors in individual cases), but that *the occupation of teaching is structured in such a way that, to varying degrees and for varying reasons, it tends to create stressful working conditions*, and furthermore, that this is related to the gendered nature of this job.

Despite the importance of the issue of stress, however, it is important to strive for a much more holistic understanding of primary and elementary teachers' health. The health problems associated with teachers' workloads are not limited to stress, nor to issues that can be diagnosed and defined in medical terms. In Walters and Denton's 1997 study, which surveyed 356 Ontarian women and interviewed 32, the most frequently reported problem of all was tiredness. Although tiredness did not necessarily affect morbidity and mortality rates in a detectable way, it did clearly reduce women's sense of well-being. Walters and Denton (1997) argue that "[t]he problems women face are increasingly being validated in terms of their effects on health. But such definitions can become limiting rather than expansive; if the misery, alienation, lack of control, job insecurity, and so

forth, that women experience are not associated with impaired health, they may not be recognized as legitimate problems" (p. 66).

Although the literature on women's occupational health tends to be more open to broader understandings of health and well-being (e.g. Messing *et al*, 1995; Messing, 1998; Walters *et al*, 1998), the larger field of occupational health research and the field of health research in general still shows a very strong trend towards the medicalization of health problems (Armstrong and Armstrong, 1996; Gustafson, 2005; Morgan, 1998). For example, in her groundbreaking book on women's occupational health, *One-Eyed Science: Occupational Health and Women Workers*, Messing (1998) talks about presenting at an international congress on occupational health. Her presentation was on "Fear and distress among bank tellers after a robbery," and she asked that it be put in a session on violence at work. However, upon arriving at the conference, she found that the organizers had put her in a session on "post-traumatic stress syndrome" – a medical diagnosis, and one that did not fit at all with her focus on the importance of working conditions (pp. 169-170).

Among the most important elements of the trend towards medicalization are an emphasis on the ultimate authority of physicians (over other health professionals as well as over 'patients' and the general public); an insistence on conceptualizing health only in Western 'scientific', organic terms - understanding the body as separate from the mind; and a strong tendency towards viewing bodily processes as discrete medical events to be treated with medications that target each specific biochemical process (Armstrong and

Armstrong, 1996; Gustafson, 2005; Morgan, 1998; Rail and Beausoleil, 2003). There have been both benefits and negative consequences of medicalization. However, since medicalization is a largely patriarchal process, women have tended to suffer disproportionately from its negative effects (Gustafson, 2005; Morgan, 1998; Rail and Beausoleil, 2003).

Morgan (1998) proposes that two main paradigms of medicalization have developed: the "bio-medical model of the human body", which focuses on the individual human organism, treating health separately from the social conditions which shape it; and secondly, the "'natural pathology' view of women", which treats the natural processes of female bodies (such as menopause) as problematic variants of the 'normal' male body that must be dealt with using medical technology. The bio-medical model tends to marginalize the social factors that help to explain differences in women and men's health (Jones and Rothney, 2001; Gustafson, 2000). In fact, health research as a whole has tended to look at biological and social explanations separately, but it has been argued that what is needed is attention to the ways that social processes *interact* with biological health differences (Bird and Rieker, 1999; Messing, 1998). As Messing (1998) puts it, researchers need a theory of "clay pegs in clay holes," avoiding either biological or social determinism by examining the complex interactions between biological, social, and political factors that shape women's and men's health (p. 24). As for the 'natural pathology view of women,' Gustafson (2005) gives a good example of this paradigm, citing Mauthner's (1999) work on postpartum depression. In the process of medicalization, Gustafson explains, "(n)ew motherhood is defined as a psychiatric illness

grounded in women's supposed biological uniqueness rather than understandable in the context of women's lives, their relationships, social supports, and institutionalized expectations" (p. 270).

The medicalization of health is also taking place in the context of widespread neoliberal restructuring of public institutions such as the health care and education systems, as I discuss in Chapter 10 (Gustafson, 2005; Rail and Beausoleil, 2003). One of the concerns that have been raised with this 'restructured', medicalized system is that it supports an individualized view of health. Rail and Beausoleil (2003) argue that in our society, "a number of dominant discourses are structured in such a way as to feed unhealthy obsessions with health, obscure or mystify patriarchal, socio-cultural and political explanations for health problems, and focus undue attention on pharmacological, individualised or privatised solutions" (p. 2). Furthermore, drawing on Foucault's (1973) concept of 'regimes of truth', Rail and Beausoleil (2003) argue that these discourses serve to set the limits on health language and practices and support dominant power relations. Today, then, many people believe that we are each responsible for our own health (Gustafson, 2005), and we are encouraged in this belief by the health care system itself (Lock, 1998). In some ways, this message can be empowering, yet there are important implications to focusing on health as solely an individual issue. In particular, "(o)veremphasizing individual responsibility for poor health outcomes amounts to blaming the victims, and also serves to downplay the social determinants of health and undermines the potential to improve women's health" (Jones and Rothney, 2001, p.1).

Furthermore, this individualized conceptualization of health is far from universal, and Gustafson (2005) specifies that such an understanding in fact comes from "a predominantly white masculinist perspective" (p. 266). For women, she says, this is of particular concern because a health care system based on a masculinist perspective does not address structural inequities between women and men, and thus is unable to explain or address many of women's health problems. Instead, she and other researchers argue that it is important to understand health in broader terms, in particular by looking at not only individual, medical explanations, but at social explanations of health. This is why a holistic social determinants of health approach is so important in my research study. Most importantly, looking at broader understandings of health and well-being allows us to be more open to primary and elementary teachers' own definitions of the ways that their workloads affect their lives. In doing so, it also illuminates the links between teachers' well-being and the well-being of women more generally.

Existing research from across Canada has identified many different working conditions that can erode primary and elementary teachers' health and well-being. These include a lack of support from administrators, conflict with parents, student behavioural problems, inclusion of special-needs students in regular classrooms, overcrowding, a lack of autonomy and participation in decision making (particularly regarding curriculum development), emotional labour and other invisible tasks, lack of preparation and collaboration time, lack of resources to meet curriculum demands and student needs, and the overall multi-tasking nature of the job (Dibbon, 2004; King and Peart, 1992; Leithwood, 1999; Messing *et al*, 1997; Schaefer, 2003). Physiological factors can also

negatively impact primary and elementary teachers' health. These factors include back strain from leaning over small children's desks, exposures to allergens and chemicals such as cleaning products and chalk dust, and temperature and humidity problems (Messing *et al*, 1997). Exposure to harassment and violence (Younghusband, 2005) and discrimination based on ageism, sexism, and heterosexism can also contribute to teachers' workload and stress in particular ways (Connell, 1985; Redman and Snape, 2002; Shortall, 1998). As Messing *et al* (1997) argue, it is generally not one extreme factor that causes primary and elementary teachers' psychological distress, but the accumulation of a large number of smaller stressors.

Unpaid work in the domestic sphere may also negatively impact health and well-being (Walters, Beardwood, Eyles, and French, 1995). Canadian and American researchers have found that combining paid employment and domestic work is a serious strain for many women and men (Duxbury and Higgins, 2003; Roxburgh, 2004, 2006). A recent Canadian survey of over thirty thousand Canadian workers reported that nearly sixty percent expressed high levels of difficulty in combining employment and domestic work, and that this was associated with poorer mental and physical health, including higher levels of stress, depressed mood, and fatigue (Duxbury and Higgins, 2003). Women workers in this study, particularly professionals, reported higher levels of such problems than men (Duxbury and Higgins, 2003). Likewise, a survey of Ontario nurses found that those who expressed greater concern about combining paid employment and domestic work were also more likely to experience health problems, including exhaustion, headaches, lethargy, insomnia, back pain, fatigue, and depression (Walters, Eyles,

Lenton, French, and Beardwood, 1998). In Québec, Carpentier-Roy (1991) argues that women primary teachers with young children experience particular emotional suffering from combining teaching and domestic work. With the strong continuity between their work at school and work at home, these teachers face a "16-hour workday" where they must be "mothers all the time and everywhere" (pp. 30-31, translated by Messing *et al*, 1997, p. 45).

## **2.4 Place**

One of the most important messages from the literature is that work and health are situated concepts. They are situated in terms of gender, but also in terms of 'place'. Place is a broad concept that includes not only an individual's physical location, but social location as well. Thus, 'place' can be used to refer to factors such as age, ethnicity, sexuality, history, geography, culture, and organisational environment (Canadian Institute for Health Information [CIHI], 2006; Centres for Excellence for Women's Health [CEWH], 2006). In this study, I also include gender as a type of place when analyzing the various factors shaping teachers' workloads and well-being.

An alternative concept that I could have possibly used to structure this research is "space." "Space" as a concept that is garnering increasing attention in sociology as a way of understanding the relationship between physical space (particularly the built environment) and social interaction (Kidder, 2009). The concept of space can be divided into physical, mental, and social space, in order to understand the ways that the way that we think and behave impacts the environment in which we live, and vice versa (Lefebvre,

1976). For instance, social theorists of space emphasise that buildings are spaces that are contested, that shape the relations and interactions of the people within them (Gieryn, 2002; Kidder, 2009). In terms of teacher workload research, this could be an interesting way to look at schools, for example, and how their design shapes the interactions between teachers, students, parents, and principals. Despite the potential usefulness of this concept, however, I prefer to use the concept of “place” for this study, particularly because I believe that it fits better with a focus on rural and urban areas, and also because of the comparative implications that I associate with the term ‘place.’ While ‘space’ strikes me as a more fluid term, ‘place’ implies a very particular location, whether geographical or social, and can thus be more directly compared to other particular locations or ‘places.’

There is a large body of research that links place and health (e.g. Pampalon, Hamel, De Koninck, and Disant, 2007; Parkes and Kearns, 2006; Ross, Tremblay, and Graham, 2004; Stafford, De Silva, Stansfeld, and Marmot, 2008; Wiggins, Joshi, Bartley, Gleave, Lynch, and Cullis, 2002). As well, research on teachers has found that the neighbourhood where teachers work is associated with the quality of teachers’ working conditions and with teachers’ health. Virtanen, Kivimaki, Elovainio, Linna, Pentti, and Vahtera’s (2007) survey of 1862 Finnish schoolteachers found that lower socioeconomic status of the school neighbourhood was associated with poorer psychosocial working conditions, including higher mental workloads and lower teaching efficacy. Teachers in schools in the poorest neighbourhoods also reported higher alcohol use and had a higher probability of reporting a doctor-diagnosed mental disorder.

#### **2.4.1 The Newfoundland and Labrador Context**

This focus on place as an important social health determinant means that the particular context of Newfoundland and Labrador teaching is potentially very important in understanding primary and elementary teachers' workload and its consequences for their health and well-being.

##### *The Current Structure of the Education System in Newfoundland and Labrador*

Similarly to other jurisdictions across Canada, the public school system in Newfoundland and Labrador is divided into thirteen grades: Kindergarten through Grade 12 (with Grades 10 through 12 also sometimes referred to as Levels 1 through 3). Kindergarten through Grade 3 are called "primary" grades; Grades 4 through 6 are "elementary" grades; Grades 7 through 9 are "junior high" or "intermediate" grades; Levels 1 through 3 are "senior high" grades. In urban centres, there are often separate schools for each of these four categories, while in rural areas, there is often an elementary school (K-6) and a high school (7-12). Many different combinations of grades are possible, however: for example, an elementary school may include students up to Grade 5, with Grades 6, 7 and 8 in an intermediate school and Grades 9 through 12 in a high school. In rural areas, many smaller communities have "all-grade" schools for all students from Kindergarten through Grade 12. In many of these small schools, teachers are responsible for multi-grade classrooms where students from two to four grade levels are combined. In total, there are 72,084 students in 280 public schools in Newfoundland and Labrador, along with five private schools and three First Nations' schools. According to the most recent statistics available, there were also 114 students being home-schooled in the province (Department of Education, 2009a).

The school year in Newfoundland and Labrador is 190 days in length, which is similar to other jurisdictions across Canada (ranging from 178 to 200 days) (Canadian Education Association, 2009). Although the precise schedule is set by each school district, generally school in Newfoundland and Labrador begins after Labour Day in September and continues until the end of June, with approximately nine weeks of summer holidays, and a week to ten days of holidays at Christmas and Easter. This is similar to other jurisdictions across Canada, but differs from other regions of the world, such as much of Europe, New Zealand, and Australia, which have a trimesterized school year schedule. For example, New Zealand's school year is similar in length to that of Newfoundland and Labrador (193 days), but is divided into four terms of nine to ten weeks in length, divided by about two and a half weeks of holidays each, with six weeks of summer holidays (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2009).

Children in Newfoundland and Labrador are legally required to attend school between the ages of 6 and 16 years. Public school is free, but parents are responsible for providing individual school supplies<sup>2</sup> for their children, and there are also often "school fees" to cover items such as field trips, extra-curricular activities, voluntary fundraising activities, enrichment programs, graduation ceremonies, *et cetera*<sup>3</sup> (Department of Education, 2009b).

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<sup>2</sup> Including "pencils, pens, paper, exercise books, folders, markers, crayons, glue, scissors, geometry sets, calculators, book bags, pencil cases, and gym clothing" (Department of Education, 2009b).

<sup>3</sup> The full list of items for which schools are allowed to charge includes "Costs associated with enrichment programs and materials required for local courses which are not prescribed by the Department of Education (e.g., local courses in aquaculture, musical theatre, photography, web design, or Workplace Health and Safety); Travel associated

The education system in Newfoundland and Labrador is structured hierarchically, and includes the provincial Department of Education, five regional school districts (Eastern, Nova Central, Western, Labrador, and the small French-language board), school administrators, teachers, and student assistants. The Department of Education and school boards representatives in this research explained that the provincial Department of Education is responsible for setting educational policy, programs, and curricula. The five school districts are responsible for hiring and evaluating teachers and other staff and for implementing the policies of the Department of Education. School administrators, or principals, are responsible for the day-to-day running of the schools. Classroom teachers are responsible for educating the students in their classes. Student assistants are responsible for physical assistance for students with special needs. However, unlike the teacher assistants found in some other jurisdictions across Canada (such as Ontario and Alberta), and internationally, student assistants have no teaching responsibilities. The education system also includes specialists in various areas, such as guidance counsellors, speech-language pathologists, and itinerant teachers who specialize in particular curricular areas.

#### *Historical Changes in the Education System in Newfoundland and Labrador*

In Newfoundland and Labrador's early history, teachers dealt with crude working conditions, poverty and often extreme isolation. Nineteenth-century teachers

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with co-curricular/extra-curricular activities, field trips; Pizza days, book fairs, etc. (The nature and frequency of these activities is determined at the school level.); School clothing, graduation ceremonies, school rings, school photos, etc.; Rental of musical instruments; and, Voluntary fundraising activities for a specific purpose - such as student travel, sports uniforms, playground equipment, etc.” (Department of Education, 2009b).

faced a 12-month working year punctuated -- and sometimes terminated -- by plagues (mainly diphtheria and typhus), peripatetic colleagues, fires, balking stoves, wet coal, miserable weather and pupils withdrawn unceremoniously from school to dig potatoes, mind siblings, salt fish, spread caplin or go fishing on the Labrador. Crowded onto roughly made, narrow wooden benches, the wood biting into their bottoms, their short legs dangling and their backs aching, pupils often had little incentive for work when they were in attendance (Pitt, 1990, p. n/a).

At that time, about sixty percent of teachers were women, but they were expected to leave the occupation once married, and were paid a lower salary than men (Pitt, 1990). In 1890, the Newfoundland Teachers' Association (NTA), a provincial teachers' union, was formed. It immediately began to lobby the government for improved working conditions and higher pay. After Confederation in 1949, the NTA became much more powerful and, in 1954, successfully negotiated equal pay for women and men in teachers' contracts (Pitt, 1990). As the twentieth century continued, the education system in Newfoundland and Labrador changed significantly. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the old structure of large urban schools and tiny denominational outport schools began to give way to a more regionalised system where student populations were consolidated and amalgamated into larger regional schools (Pitt, 1990).

#### *Recent Changes in the Education System in Newfoundland and Labrador*

In the past decade, in a broader national and international context of neo-liberal restructuring, secularization, privatisation, and cutbacks to public institutions (Armstrong *et al*, 2002; Cossman and Fudge, 2002), the education system in Newfoundland and Labrador has seen particularly dramatic changes. From 1995 onwards, partially in response to the 1992 Royal Commission on Education Report, which recommended the elimination of denominational education (Dibbon, 2004), hundreds of schools were

closed and amalgamated. The total number of schools in Newfoundland and Labrador was reduced from 472 to 326, and to 280 by 2009; the number of school boards was reduced from twenty-seven to five; district-level administrators were cut from 193.5 to 90; and the number of teachers was decreased from over 7,000 to about 5,800 (Dibbon, 2004, p. 1; Department of Education, 2007a; Department of Education, 2009b). At the same time, the government began to implement a number of new programs and curriculum changes, following eighty-six recommendations from the 2000 Ministerial Panel on Educational Delivery in the Classroom (Dibbon, 2004). The Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association (NLTA) expressed concern about many of these changes (NLTA, 2000), and according to Dibbon (2004), many believe that the combination of cutback to teachers and resources with the aggressive implementation of new programs has "had a negative impact...on teacher workload, as a significant amount of administrative work was downloaded to the school and the classroom" (p. 1).

Recent philosophical changes in education have also affected teachers' workloads in Newfoundland and Labrador. Specifically, demands on teachers have increased with policies of inclusion, individualization and the overall shift from a 'teacher-centred' classroom to a 'child-centred' classroom.

In the mid-1990s, following broader trends of deinstitutionalisation and integration or inclusion (Armstrong *et al*, 2002; Dobrowolsky and Saint-Martin, 2005), the philosophy of teaching special-needs children shifted from one emphasising separate classrooms to a policy of inclusion. Today, the official goal of this province's education system is to

integrate all students into the classroom, no matter what their physical, cognitive, emotional, or behavioural needs (Department of Education, 2008; Dibbon, 2004; Younghusband, 2005). This means that students with special needs are now included as much as possible in the classroom with the rest of their grade-level peers, and so regular classroom teachers now face classes of students with a much wider range of academic, behavioural, physical, and emotional needs.

Unfortunately, resources for support and care did not flow from the institutions to the classrooms with deinstitutionalization and the new 'inclusion' policy. Without such additional support, as well as other resources to help with the various accommodations required for special-needs students, teachers have found that they simply cannot stretch far enough to do justice to all of their students. In Dibbon's (2004) questionnaire-based survey of Newfoundland and Labrador teachers, over half of all the teachers surveyed expressed dissatisfaction with the composition of their classes (p. 24). Dibbon (2004) explains that teachers tend to support the idea of 'inclusive' classrooms, but they also need enough support staff to include special needs students in regular classrooms, in a way that will be beneficial to all students (also Leithwood *et al*, 2002). Related to this, there have been serious concerns raised in the media in Newfoundland and Labrador in recent years about the level of support services available for students with special needs (Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Public Employees, 2006).

Secondly, educational policies in Newfoundland and Labrador and throughout Canada have also been shifting towards a philosophy of individualization. The Newfoundland and Labrador education system now uses the 'Pathways to Programming and

Graduation,' described as "a framework that enables teachers to tailor curriculum to meet the individual strengths and needs of all students" (Department of Education, 2008).<sup>4</sup>

This is a program that requires teachers to adapt their teaching to meet the learning needs of each individual student, some of whom require one-on-one assistance. Teachers are therefore responsible for preparing and teaching multiple programs at once (Dibbon, 2004). Again, while research has shown that teachers generally believe it is important to meet each child's different learning needs, they also feel that it is extremely difficult to do so with large numbers of students, given the diversity of students in their classrooms, and without sufficient support and resources (Dibbon, 2004; Englebrecht, Oswald, Swart, and Eloff, 2003; Mastropieri and Scruggs, 1997; Naylor *et al*, 2003; Younghusband, 2005).

Thirdly, both the policies of inclusion and individualization are part of a larger shift from 'teacher-centred' classrooms to 'child-centred classrooms.' This transition to a "child-centred social investment perspective" has been taking place in education systems across Canada and around the world (Dobrowlosky and Saint-Martin, 2005). This perspective focuses on advancing society through investing in programs to improve children's well-being, including in the education system (Dobrowlosky and Saint-Martin, 2005), and has also tended to be associated with a neoliberal emphasis on individual investment rather than social investment, as well as the trend towards restructuring and cutbacks as described above. The philosophy of a child-centred classroom, as Dibbon (2004) explains, requires that the teacher work to "enable multiple sensory stimulation in a

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<sup>4</sup> The 'Pathways' program is described in more detail in footnote 1 and in section 4.4.5.

collaborative work environment where students focus on inquiry-based and authentic real world experiences.” This was meant to rectify the problems associated with a historically ‘teacher-centred’ education system where the teacher was simply seen to ‘deliver’ information to students, and less attention was given to the particular learning needs of children (Dibbon, 2004). Considering the serious problems associated with the historical ‘teacher-centred’ approach, including a school culture that left students extremely vulnerable to exploitation and abuse (the history of abuses in residential aboriginal schools across Canada<sup>5</sup> and at Mount Cashel<sup>6</sup> in Newfoundland are just two examples), there is no doubt that there are many positive implications and advantages of this new ‘child-centred’ focus. However, I would argue that there has not been enough attention to the need for additional resources and supports required for teachers to implement the day-to-day realities of this child-centred focus within their classrooms. As well, I note that there is a risk of removing focus entirely away from teachers, and particularly from teachers’ health and well-being. For example, I have noticed on multiple occasions that whenever health concerns in schools, such as the presence of toxic mould in school buildings, are covered in the media, the attention is entirely on the well-being of students. While children’s health is clearly extremely important, the health of the adults who care for them should not be completely forgotten. In fact, I have never heard the issue of school mould exposure mentioned in the media in terms of the

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<sup>5</sup> See <http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/truth-reconciliation/>

<sup>6</sup> See <http://www.cbc.ca/canada/story/2004/05/28/cashel040528.html>

occupational health of teachers (or school administrators, student assistants or other support staff, for that matter)<sup>7</sup>.

An additional implication of the shift to a “child-centred” classroom is that much of the increased work involved for teachers is ‘invisible’ labour. Dibbon’s (2004) survey of 695 primary, elementary, and secondary teachers across the province reported that teachers work an average of more than fifty-two hours per week at their jobs. Much of this work is invisible to the general public, as it is frequently carried out outside the classroom and outside of school hours. This work includes preparing lesson plans, correcting student work, collaborating with other teachers, meeting with parents, and supervising students (Dibbon, 2004, p. 12; King and Peart, 1992; Messing *et al*, 1997; Younghusband, 2005). As governments have downloaded responsibilities for social issues (such as unemployment and health behaviours) to the education system (Dibbon, 2004; Dobrowolsky and Saint-Martin, 2005), activities such as counselling, guiding, and comforting have also become a more important part of teachers’ workloads. In Newfoundland and Labrador, teachers are expected to help their students deal with issues such as “living with a single parent, poverty as a result of no working parents, and parents migrating back and forth between another province or country in order to get work” (Dibbon, 2004, p. 2). However, the resources and supports needed for teachers to address these social issues are not always available (Dibbon, 2004; Younghusband, 2006).

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<sup>7</sup> For example, <http://www.cbc.ca/canada/newfoundland-labrador/story/2008/03/07/mould-lascie.html>

To summarize, one of the important implications of all of these philosophical changes in the education system is that, as some researchers have argued, as teachers' roles are expanded, shifting power dynamics have the potential to reduce teachers' authority and control. As I mentioned above, there was clearly a need to alter the historical power dynamics that allowed certain individuals with the authority of teachers to terrorize children. However, it may be that the power dynamics have now shifted so far that in some cases, 'child-centred' teaching has become part of a discourse that reinforces ideas about women's 'natural' inclination to sacrifice their own needs for those of the children in the care. For example, Acker (1996) sees "child-centred teaching as part of this trap for women: It privileges the child over the teacher, thus making power in the classroom a contested and shifting property" (p. 123, citing Walkerdine, 1986, pp. 54-55).

#### *Current Attention to Teacher Workload in Newfoundland and Labrador*

This province's history of high unemployment rates and few opportunities for higher-paid work, make it a generally unsympathetic environment for acknowledging the workload problems of a relatively high-paid<sup>8</sup>, high-status, secure occupation such as teaching. However, today the issue of teacher workload in this province is receiving increasing media attention, particularly since the recent release of several studies of

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<sup>8</sup> The federal government's Labour Market Information (2009) website calculates a Newfoundland and Labrador primary/elementary teacher's starting salary, not including the work teachers do outside of school hours, to be \$21.60 per hour. As a rural primary teacher put it, "*not bad pay, for a woman*" (cited in section 8.3). This is comparable but somewhat lower than the rate of \$27.35 per hour for registered nurses and \$23.89 for social workers, also considered to be women-dominated "caring professions." Newfoundland and Labrador has the highest rate in Canada of workers being paid the minimum wage - \$9.00 per hour in 2009 (Battle, 2003; Department of Human Resources, Labour, and Employment, 2008).

Newfoundland and Labrador teachers' workload and stress (Dibbon, 2004; Younghusband, 2000; 2005). For example, a pilot study by Younghusband (2000) reported that 74% of the teachers surveyed in the Eastern School District felt stress most of the time due to 'role overload'; 95% described their job responsibilities as increasing; and 29% said they dreaded going to work lately. Younghusband (2005) later went on to write a PhD thesis on high school teachers' stress, based on a series of interviews with teachers who identified as 'stressed', the findings of which were well covered by the media (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2006). In January 2006, the NLTA organised a public meeting on the topic and invited Younghusband to speak at the event. After the meeting, two high school teachers who had spoken up about stressful working conditions were suspended by the Eastern School District, who termed their remarks 'insubordination.' A week later, following a day of protest by teachers and an official union grievance by the NLTA, the district reversed the suspensions (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2006).

In the current climate, the provincial government has begun to acknowledge teacher workload as a problem. Three Commissions have recently released reports on education issues, including teacher allocation, the math program, and the 'Pathways' program for students with special needs (Department of Education, 2007b; Department of Education, 2007c; Department of Education, 2007d), all of which involved consultation with various groups in education, including teachers. These reports made many recommendations that are intended to improve teachers' workloads, although only a portion of these will be implemented by the provincial government. In addition, while these issues are important,

they are just three elements of the complex set of conditions that make up teachers' workloads.

#### **2.4.2 Gendered Teaching in Newfoundland and Labrador**

The gendered nature of primary and elementary teachers' work in this province has received little attention in existing research. Neither of the two recent studies of Newfoundland and Labrador teachers' workload (Dibbon, 2004; Younghusband, 2005) undertook a gender analysis. However, as I indicated above, statistics show that primary and elementary teaching in this province is a strongly women-dominated occupation. Eighty percent of primary and elementary teachers are women, while only twenty percent are men (Newfoundland and Labrador Statistics Agency 2001). Furthermore, even among primary and elementary teachers, there is a clear gendered division of labour, with women concentrated at kindergarten and the primary grades, and men concentrated in the higher grades and in administration (Department of Education, 2007a). In other words, women and men primary and elementary teachers in this province do different types of work. It is very important, therefore, to carefully examine the ways that Newfoundland and Labrador primary and elementary teachers' workloads and health may differ between women and men.

#### **2.4.3 Teaching in Rural and Urban Newfoundland and Labrador**

Finally, with over half of the population in this province living in rural<sup>9</sup> areas (Rural

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<sup>9</sup> In this project, I use the definition of rural recommended by Statistics Canada and the Rural Secretariat: "the population living in towns and municipalities outside the commuting zone of larger urban centres" (Statistics Canada, 2002, p. 8). According to the federal Community Information Database (2009), in this province urban regions

Secretariat, 2005), the issue of rural and urban differences in teacher workload is an important part of the Newfoundland and Labrador context. Canadian health research has shown that there are a number of differences between the health of rural and urban populations, as well as between women and men in each area. Differences in socio-cultural factors such as income, education, and access to specialists and other health services contribute to higher overall mortality rates and different illness patterns in rural regions (CIHI, 2006; CEWH, 2006). Canadian research has also indicated that there may be a need to recognise additional health determinants for rural women, such as rural change, rural culture, and rural pride (Leipert and George, 2008). In terms of health and well-being, it is also important to examine differences between rural and urban areas because recent reforms to the health care system across Canada have meant that more and more health care has been moving away from rural areas and centralizing in urban cities (Romanow, 2002). Yet Leipert and George (2008) argue that, “[m]uch of the current literature focuses on how these health determinants affect urban populations, with limited priority given to how health determinants affect rural populations or to determinants that are unique to rural people and contexts” (p. 210).

American researchers note that most research on teacher workload or stress has tended to have an urban bias (Abel and Sewell, 1999; Rottier, Kelly, and Tomhave, 1983). My own search of the *Academic Search Premier* and *Sociological Abstracts* article indexes turned up only one comparative study of rural and urban teacher stress, and this study

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include the metropolitan area around St. John’s and Mount Pearl, Gander, Grand Falls-Winsor, and Corner Brook, and the towns of Marystown, Stephenville, Happy Valley-Goose Bay and Labrador City. All other areas are considered rural.

was limited to secondary school teachers (Abel and Sewell, 1999). A questionnaire-based survey of ninety-eight American teachers, this study found that teachers in rural and urban areas may experience different types of stressors, due to differences in their working conditions, resources, and relationships with the wider community (Abel and Sewell, 1999; Rottier *et al*, 1983), and suggested that urban teachers identify student discipline as a more important stressor than do rural teachers, while time pressure is a more significant stressor for rural teachers (Abel and Sewell, 1999). Dibbon's 2004 study in Newfoundland and Labrador did not undertake a specific rural/urban comparison, but noted that student discipline problems were more frequent in the larger classrooms of urban schools, with half of all teachers dissatisfied with the size of their classes in schools with more than six hundred students (p. 23), while dissatisfaction with assigned preparation time (the most important predictor of overall job satisfaction) was extremely high in the smallest schools with less than fifty students, in rural areas (p. 16).

Younghusband's (2005) study of teacher stress in Newfoundland involved interviews with 16 high school teachers in rural and urban schools of the Eastern School District, but did not include a systematic rural/urban comparison (Younghusband, 2005). Rural/urban differences may also be masked in official statistics. For example, as enrolment declines throughout Newfoundland and Labrador, official student-teacher ratios remain low, at just 13.9. However, this is not an indication of the number of students per classroom, which is closer to an average of 22.3<sup>10</sup>. Furthermore, even this average masks important differences between rural and urban schools. While classes in isolated rural areas might

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<sup>10</sup> The student-teacher ratio cited by the government is based on a 'full-time equivalent teacher' value that includes educational psychologists, itinerant teachers, principals, guidance counsellors, and many others. The ratio I report is instead based on the number of classroom teachers, which was 3500 in 2006 (Department of Education, 2007a).

have less than ten students, urban classrooms regularly include more than thirty (Younghusband, 2005). Although rural teachers often have smaller class sizes, however, they face (and help their students face) many other challenges, including school closures, commuting, out-migration, multi-grade classrooms, and reliance on distance education. These may all have an impact on rural teachers' workloads, and further research is needed in this area.

A brief look at Newfoundland and Labrador statistics on domestic labour (Statistics Canada, 2006b, 2001) indicates that the overall patterns for domestic labour in Canada hold true in this province as well. However, there may be important differences in women and men primary and elementary teachers' teaching and domestic labour in rural parts of the province as opposed to urban. Issues such as difficulty in access to health services (CEWH, 2006; CIHI, 2006), lengthy commuting distances, availability of childcare, and differing cultural expectations of working mothers and fathers, may pose unique challenges for primary and elementary teachers balancing work at school and work at home in rural Newfoundland and Labrador.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODS

*If people could only see what our day looks like, and everything that we do ...*

**Rural primary teacher**

### **3.0 Methodological Framework: Feminist Action Research**

The methodological approach that I use in this study is based on a 'feminist action research' framework. Feminist action research combines important elements of feminist and action research approaches (Maguire, 2001; Reid, 2004; Reinharz, 1992). Action research is a process where researchers and those being researched work together to understand a problem and look for solutions (Baum, MacDougall, and Smith, 2006; Greenwood and Levin, 1998; Kemmis and McTaggart, 2000). This type of research is based on "the affirmation that all human beings have detailed, complex, and valuable knowledge about their lives, environments, and goals" (Greenwood and Levin, 1998, p. 109; also Baum *et al*, 2006). Feminist research comes in a wide variety of forms (Reinharz, 1992), but many of the goals that unite feminist approaches fit very well with the framework of action research (Greenwood and Levin, 1998; Maguire, 2001). These goals include emphasising respect for everyday experience and local knowledge, listening to diverse voices and multiple identities, and challenging and changing power relations (Greenwood and Levin, 1998; Maguire, 2001; Reid, 2004).

The guiding principles of feminist action research can be summarised as inclusion, participation, action, social change, and reflexivity (Reid, 2004). The first principle, inclusion, refers to efforts to bring together people with different types of skills and knowledge to learn from one another, making room for a wide diversity of perspectives

and voices (Greenwood and Levin, 1998; Maguire, 2001; Reid, 2004). In my research, I have worked to include as much diversity as possible in terms of teachers' backgrounds, family situations, and teaching experiences. In addition, I have attempted to pay attention to diversity within each individual teacher's perspectives, and to encourage teachers to express a wide variety of perspectives on their workloads. The second principle, participation, means that the people being researched are also encouraged to give input into, or even take control of, the research process (Baum *et al*, 2006; Kemmis and McTaggart, 2000; Reid, 2004). As Reid (2004), points out, there are many different levels of participation, and different ways to balance control between researcher and researched. In some cases, "true collaboration" (p. 9) is the ideal goal, where the researchers and researched share responsibility for the research equally. However, this is not possible or desirable in every feminist action research project. I had a double goal for this research project: in addition to producing this thesis, I wrote a report (*See Appendix I*) for the provincial teachers' union (the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association, or NLTA) on Newfoundland and Labrador primary and elementary teachers' workloads and health, with input from the participants in my study. I also encouraged teachers to participate in the research by giving me input before, during, and after the research was conducted. Of course, because I needed to set a certain timetable for the research in order to meet the time and financial constraints of my degree program, I had to maintain control over final decisions on the scope of the research. This meant that although I always strived to keep the collaborative ideals of feminist action research in mind, the degree of collaboration of the participants in this study was much more limited than I would have liked. These ideals were also limited because of teachers'

sense of vulnerability and reluctance to participate openly and actively in a research study. In fact, confidentiality was a very important issue in this research, and teachers told me that they feared that truly active participation, particularly in a group setting, might have put them at risk. In an ideal situation, I would have liked to have designed the study equally alongside a collaborative team of teachers, and to have been able to change and add to the goals of the study to meet the needs that they identified. However, I still believe that this study benefited greatly from the input of my key informant and the NLTA into the planning and goals of the research.

The third and fourth principles, action and social change, indicate that feminist action research is not conducted for intellectual reasons alone, but in order to lead to specific actions that aim to create social change. In particular, feminist action researchers aim to increase participants' control over their own life situations by creating "new relationships, better laws, and improved institutions" (Reid, 2004, p. 10; Reinharz, 1992). As mentioned, I guided this research towards the production of a concise, reader-friendly report on primary and elementary teachers' workloads and health in this province, and provided this report to their union, the NLTA. The goal was for primary and elementary teachers, through this organization, to be able to use this report to increase understanding of their workloads and well-being, in order, where necessary, to help to change their working conditions. Finally, the fifth principle, reflexivity, points to the importance for feminist action researchers to critically examine their own roles and power in the research process (Reid, 2004). Reflexivity also includes making explicit the values that guide the research. Feminist action researchers argue that the idea of value-free research "covers

up all kinds of oppressive social arrangements under the mask of an impartial, scientific ideology” (Greenwood and Levin, 1998, p. 182). I discuss reflexivity in this project further in the ‘Analysis’ section below, and describe how it was important for me to critically examine how my perspectives on primary and elementary teachers’ workload are shaped both by years of observation as a primary and elementary teacher’s daughter, and even more importantly, as I now realize, by my new perspective as a mother.

### 3.1 Qualitative Methods

*[T]he hours that a teacher puts in can’t be counted.*  
**Rural primary teacher**

Qualitative methods are very important to this feminist action research approach, because their strength is in providing rich, detailed descriptions that aim to capture an individual’s point of view and experiences and examine the social structures that shape and constrain them (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p. 6). Many feminist action researchers use qualitative methods in order “to generate in-depth understandings of women’s experiences and put women’s diversity at the centre of the analysis” (Reid, 2004, p. 4). In the case of research on teachers’ workloads, much of the existing research, such as the rural/urban comparison of Abel and Sewell (1999), has been exclusively based on quantitative methods such as questionnaire and telephone surveys. This research built upon a recent quantitative study of Newfoundland and Labrador teachers’ workloads (Dibbon, 2004), which collected information on demographic characteristics, job satisfaction, class size, class composition, preparation and supervision time, curriculum implementation, professional development, and other teaching-related tasks. My study complements this

quantitative study, providing qualitative data that can offer a more detailed understanding of rural and urban primary and elementary teachers' domestic and teaching workloads, and the consequences of these workloads for teachers' health and well-being.

### **3.2 Methods Plan and Process**

Originally, I planned three stages to this research project: an advisory stage, the main research stage, and a feedback stage. Fitting with feminist action research principles, my idea was that this would allow groups of primary and elementary teachers to give input on the research process as it unfolded.

#### **3.2.1 Originally-Planned Advisory Stage**

I planned to begin with an advisory stage, consisting of four semi-structured discussion groups, each with a maximum of eight primary and elementary classroom teachers. These discussion groups were to be held in two rural areas and two urban areas in different parts of the province. I sent advertisements for the discussion groups by facsimile to a total of thirty-two primary and elementary schools in four different regions of the province. In the advertisement (*See Appendix II*), I described the study and asked primary and elementary teachers who were interested in participating to contact me. I explained that these 'advisory discussion groups' were intended to help to plan the research project, as well as to gather teachers' perspectives on their workload, its consequences, and potential solutions. I also noted that these groups would have the opportunity to give feedback on the research findings before they were made public. Finally, I emphasised the importance of hearing the opinions of as wide a variety of teachers as possible: women and men, teachers from all age groups, with or without

spouses (same or opposite-sex), with different levels of childcare and eldercare responsibilities, new teachers and experienced teachers, teachers of all grade levels from kindergarten through grade six. I also made it clear that I was interested in teachers who are content with their workloads as well as those who are experiencing problems. This was important, not only to include diversity, but also to discuss factors that ease teachers workload as well as those that lead to overload. Finally, in the rural areas, I offered a small travel stipend (\$20) to offset the costs of travel to and from the community where the advisory discussion group was to be held.

In order to facilitate discussion and allow for each person to have the opportunity to speak, I planned that the maximum number of participants in each group would be eight. I planned to arrange a time to meet that would be convenient for all participants. Since it can be very important for participants to be located in a setting with which they are comfortable (Madriz, 2000), I planned to conduct the group sessions in a neutral location, such as a community centre or church basement. In order to devote my attention to facilitating the discussion, I planned to have a research assistant help me take notes, and that if all of the teachers gave their consent, I would also audiotape the sessions in order to be able to transcribe them as accurately as possible. I planned to use a semi-structured discussion group design, beginning by discussing my ideas for the research and asking for input, and loosely following a set of tentative topics and questions rather than a strict interview guide (*See Appendix III*). In this way, I would try to be open to teachers' own definitions of how their workload affects their health and well-being.

Advisory discussion groups would have been an advantage to my research design for a number of reasons. Generally, focus groups have the advantage of collecting information about a large number of people in a relatively brief time, interaction between participants can be observed, interaction between participants can develop a great deal of detail on a topic, and participants in a focus group are also more likely to develop their own topics and themes, with the potential to bring attention to issues of which the researcher may not have been aware (Madriz, 2000; Morgan, 2002; Wilkinson, 2004). This emphasis on participation and respect for participant knowledge is particularly important within a feminist action research framework (Greenwood and Levin, 1998; Reid, 2004). A group discussion setting may also have the advantage of being more comfortable for a women-dominated group such as primary and elementary teachers, because it may be more familiar and more like an everyday conversation (Madriz, 2000). If so, this should provide an atmosphere where teachers can question and encourage each other, commiserate, and remind each other of things they wanted to say. I hoped that by encouraging attention to the diversity of teachers' perspectives, following the feminist action research principle of inclusion, the discussion groups would generate a wide variety of ideas and issues that are important to teachers in different social position that could be pursued in the next stage of the research.

However, focus or discussion groups have limitations and disadvantages as well. It would have been important for me to be aware that this group setting could lead to a sort of forced agreement about certain issues, reflecting the ideas of the stronger speakers more so than those who may be shy or hesitant to speak. As well, although feminist

action research aims to rebalance the level of control between researcher and researched (Maguire, 2001; Reid, 2004), I would have needed to strike a careful balance between allowing teachers to raise their own concerns and issues, and ensuring that the discussion remained relevant to the topic under study (Madriz, 2000; Wilkinson, 2004).

Unfortunately, the advisory stage did not work out at all as I had planned. I had only one response, from an urban elementary teacher, to all of my ads for the four discussion groups. After discussing the issue with participants in this study, as well as other researchers of teachers, I believe that there are a number of reasons for the lack of response to invitation to participate in discussion groups. For one, most teachers' workloads are so full that they are unlikely to be motivated to try to fit in a voluntary event such as this, particularly when they are not invited personally. As well, most of the teachers in this study said that they would not have been comfortable discussing workload issues in a group setting, because they would be concerned about confidentiality. These concerns were heightened at the time I sent out my invitation because it had only been a year since two teachers were suspended for speaking out in a group discussion about teacher workload. I discuss teachers' confidentiality concerns in more detail in Chapter 4.

In the end, I had to completely eliminate my planned discussion groups and instead focus on the individual methods. I decided to ask the one teacher who had volunteered for the discussion group to participate in the individual stage instead, and she agreed.

In addition, I had to completely redesign the advisory stage. Instead of formal meetings with discussion groups, the new advisory stage consisted of informal meetings and discussions with a number of different individuals. These included other researchers who have studied teacher workload, a key informant, and the NLTA representative. I looked to all of these individuals for practical advice and input on the research methods plan. The researchers included Dr. David Dibbon and Dr. Karen Messing on my supervisory committee, and Dr. Lynda Younghusband. They each offered me advice on various aspects of the study design from their own experiences.

My key informant in this research was my mother, Gail Temple, who has thirty-five years of experience in primary and elementary teaching in rural Newfoundland, and was at that time in her last year before retirement. She advised me on many different aspects of the research design, including very specific details such as the best times of the school-year to contact teachers, and also read over and offered edits on a draft version of every document that I sent out to the participants. I discuss more about this important personal key informant relationship in section 3.2.5 on reflexivity below. The NLTA representative also offered advice on several aspects of the research design and the research goals, and brought a draft methods proposal for this project to a meeting of the NLTA's board of directors for their approval.

### **3.2.2 Main Research Stage**

After the advisory stage was completed, I moved on to the more individualised methods in my research. In total, I conducted thirty interviews: twenty-four with primary and elementary teachers from all across Newfoundland and Labrador and six with

representatives of other groups in the education system, including parents, student assistants<sup>11</sup>, administrators, the NLTA, the school boards, and the Department of Education. It was important to me to interview representatives of these other groups because they offer very different perspectives on teachers and their work. As the student assistant representative described it, "*when you're on the outside looking in, you see a whole lot and you hear a whole lot.*" I also asked the primary and elementary classroom teachers to keep a detailed task-diary of their teaching and domestic work for a period of one day, which I then discussed with them in some depth in the interview.

I contacted the teachers using publicly available information<sup>12</sup> (mainly school and Education Department websites). I purposively selected equal numbers of urban and rural teachers from areas all across the province, being careful to include a variety of grades and a mix of women and men. In the first two waves of selection, in the spring of 2007, I contacted ninety-six teachers by written letter to their school addresses. In ten cases, I was unable to find the names of teachers at these addresses via the websites. Thus, these letters were generically addressed to, for instance, 'Grade 2 teacher' at the relevant school address. None of this latter group of teachers responded, and so I am not certain whether or not these letters were ever received. Twenty-nine teachers responded to my letter, with twenty of these agreeing to participate in the study. Of the nine who

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<sup>11</sup> These are non-teaching, unionized workers who are hired to provide individual support, including physical help such as toileting, as well as other types of support, such as encouraging a child to keep on task, to children with a range of physical and cognitive disabilities.

<sup>12</sup> This strategy was to ensure that no one but me would know who was being contacted for this project. This was an important measure to again increase teachers' confidence that their participation was confidential.

contacted me but did not participate, two had already retired, two were on maternity leave, two explained (in some detail) that they were too busy, one had been chosen for another study of teachers and did not want to participate in two studies, and two initially agreed to participate, but later fell out of contact – one because she was injured at work, a second for unknown reasons. Including the teacher who had initially volunteered for the discussion group, I now had twenty-one teacher participants. However, I was concerned that none of the participants were from Labrador. To remedy this, in the fall of 2007 I contacted ten Labrador teachers by e-mail, with the same letter I had used in the mail-out. I chose to use e-mail as the contact method in this case in order to expedite the process. This was because I had found that the length of time between my initial mail-out, the response from the participants, my second mail-out with the task-diary and instructions, and finally meeting with the teachers for an interview, was often quite considerable. Three additional teachers agreed to participate, bringing the total to twenty-four.

In the initial contact letter (*See Appendix IV*), I described the research project, indicated that participation was free and voluntary, assured confidentiality, and asked if she or he would be willing to participate. I also explained that I was interested in teachers who had heavy workloads as well as those who were not experiencing problems. I included a letter of support from the president of the NLTA (*See Appendix V*). I asked each teacher to contact me by mail (and included a self-addressed, stamped-envelope), telephone or e-mail by a certain date if they wished to participate. I used this strategy to help to ensure that teachers would not feel unduly pressured to participate, and I hoped that the letter of support would help to allay fears of disciplinary action from their employers.

Once the teachers agreed to participate, I mailed each of them a blank form for what I called a “task-diary” (*See Appendix VI*), along with instructions, and followed this up with a telephone call in order to answer any questions about how it should be completed. For a period of one day, I asked teachers to report all the different types of tasks and activities that they engage in, including leisure activities as well as all types of work: schoolwork (in the school building and at home), as well as volunteer work and domestic work, such as childcare, elder care, and domestic chores such as shopping, food preparation, and housework. I asked teachers to report whether the day was more, less or equally busy to most other weekdays (Messing *et al*, 1997). I asked for a description of all activities because the definition of ‘work’ is very ambiguous, particularly when multi-tasking or when engaged in an activity that could be seen as leisure or as work, such as spending time with children. I intended for the inclusion of all activities to help to incite discussion of issues such as the continuity between teaching and mothering (Acker, 1996; Gannerud, 2001) in the interviews.

The task-diaries were similar in some ways to time-diaries that have been used in many studies of teachers’ work (e.g. Bartlett, 2002; Messing *et al*, 1997; Naylor *et al*, 2003). However, I decided to modify the time-diary method to create my own research tool that would fit better with the goals of this study. In the literature that I have read, time-diaries generally focus only on teachers’ official work as teachers, and aim to quantify the amount of employment-related work that teachers do. For my study, however, while I was interested in estimating the number of hours that teachers spent in different types of activities, including teaching and domestic work, work, my primary goal was to examine

and discuss the different types of work that teachers do, including unpaid domestic tasks. For this reason, I designed the task-diary tool that I described above, and also decided that the task-diaries should be completed before the interviews so that I would have to opportunity to discuss the task-diaries in-depth with the participants. As I conducted the research, I found that the task-diaries also served as an excellent tool for stimulating discussion of teachers' different types of work and workload experiences. In fact, I found that the task-diaries were truly invaluable in opening the door for me to ask about, and for participants to elaborate on, all aspects of their lives, not just their work as teachers. The task-diaries also helped me to understand the truly multi-tasking nature of teachers' teaching and domestic workloads, as I will explain in Chapters 4 and 5. This helps to explain why indeed, from a methodological perspective, "*the hours that a teacher puts in can't be counted.*" In addition, teachers would often compare their tasks on the day they had recorded to their tasks at other times of the week, year, or other stages of their career. This meant that the combination of task-diaries with a follow-up discussion in a face-to-face interview was also very helpful for understanding the ways that teachers' workloads vary at different times. From an occupational health perspective, this also helped me to grasp teachers' "cumulative exposure" to various workload concerns. Overall, I found that the combination of task-diaries with follow-up discussion in a face-to-face interview was a very fruitful methodology to use with a qualitative, sociological approach to understanding workload. A sample completed task-diary, with identifying details removed or changed, can be found in *Appendix VI*.

Once the task-diaries were completed, I conducted in-depth individual interviews with each of the twenty-four teachers. I mailed consent forms to each participant to read prior to the interview, and then during the interview, we reviewed the consent form together and I answered any questions the participants had. The twenty-one interviews conducted in the spring were all face-to-face interviews, which took place in a mutually-agreed-to location, such as the teacher's home or a community centre. The three interviews in the fall were conducted via telephone, as I was in the latter stages of pregnancy at that time and preferred not to travel. In this case, I reviewed the consent form with the participants over the phone, and had them mail the forms back to me, along with their task-diaries. I recorded twenty-two of the interviews with a digital audio recorder, and later transcribed them verbatim. Two of the teachers preferred not to be taped, and I instead took notes throughout the interview and wrote them up in a more detailed form immediately following the interview. The interviews were semi-structured, guided by a general list of topics rather than specific questions (*See Appendix VII*). In each interview, I asked the teacher about her or his perceptions of their teaching and domestic workloads, the health consequences of these workloads, and their ideas for how their workloads could be improved.

I understand interviewing to be an 'active' process, where both the interviewer and the respondent are always actively involved in making meaning (Gubrium and Holstein, 1995). By discussing the task-diaries, for example, I encouraged teachers to explore their perspectives on the different types of work that they do in different parts of their lives. As Gubrium and Holstein (1995) explain, "[r]ather than searching for the best or most

authentic answer, the aim is to systematically activate applicable ways of knowing – the possible answers – that respondents can reveal, as diverse and contradictory as they might be” (p. 37).

Individual interviews with teachers were important to my research design because they gave me the opportunity to talk to teachers in person and one-on-one about the workload issues that were most important to them. This enabled me to better understand how workload affects teachers' lives individually. The individual setting also meant that I was able to talk to teachers about issues that some might not have felt as comfortable talking about in a group. As well, each teacher had all of my attention; we both had the opportunity to ask questions or have certain points clarified. Individual interviews, however, can be quite intense (Gubrium and Holstein, 1995; Weiss, 1994), and so I had to be prepared for the variety of emotions that teachers expressed. Several teachers became tearful during the interview, and many expressed frustration or anger. Before the interviews, I made a list of resources that are available to teachers who might express a need for counselling or other types of support. However, none of the teachers I interviewed expressed a need for this information.

Following a feminist action research framework, my main research stage also included participation of others who are directly concerned with the issue of primary and elementary teacher workload. I conducted individual interviews with purposively-selected representatives of the school boards, the Department of Education, the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association, parents (through the provincial

school councils' organisation), student assistants (through the union representing these employees), and primary and elementary school principals. These interviews were also semi-structured (*See Appendix VIII*). They were intended to help me develop a preliminary understanding of how the various organisations involved in the education system are structured, how teachers' work is organised, as well as how primary and elementary teachers' workload is understood by people in different positions in the education system. Ideally, it would have given me a broader sense of the alternative perspectives on teachers' workloads if I had been able to interview a larger number of individuals in other positions in the education system. I discuss this further in section 11.1, Limitations of this Study, at the end of the thesis. These interviews were conducted in-person or by telephone, as appropriate, and were all audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

### **3.2.3 Feedback Stage**

As I have explained, fitting with a feminist action research framework, this research was guided not only towards the production of a doctoral thesis but also a summary report on this project for the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association (*Appendix I*). Originally, I had planned that in the feedback stage, I would meet again with the four advisory groups to give a presentation to each group on the first draft of the research report, in order to incorporate their feedback into the final draft of the report. However, since my discussion groups had to be cancelled, I instead incorporated a different means of feedback into my research.

As I explained above, before the research had begun, I discussed with the NLTA representative what type of report would be the most useful for that organization, and what expectations they had for the report. I also submitted a brief research proposal (*Appendix IX*) to the NLTA, which was approved by their board of directors. Later, during the interviews, I spoke to each of the participants about this report during their interview, and asked them for their suggestions on the general shape that the report should take. This helped me to develop an understanding of how to organize the report to best meet the needs of teachers and their union. Once I had written a first draft of the report, in May 2008, I sent it out to each of the thirty participants for feedback. As well, although all identifying information had been removed, I wanted each of the participants to be able to have the opportunity to remove anything they had said that I had included in the report, and to let me know if they had any concerns that any of the information in the report could potentially identify them. Therefore, I included with the draft report a message explaining that this draft was confidential and should not be shared with anyone outside of the study at that time. I asked the participants to get back to me by July with any feedback that they might have. This date was given so that teachers would have some time after school ended to read the report, as I was aware that the last months of school are generally an extremely busy time. In the end, fourteen participants responded with comments, corrections and suggestions for the report. I incorporated the participants' feedback into a final version of the report, which I sent out to them, as well as to the NLTA, at the end of July 2008. I discuss this feedback further in the conclusion to this thesis.

I recognise that, given a relatively small sample, it is not possible to generalize broadly from the findings or for the report to fully represent all Newfoundland and Labrador primary and elementary teachers' perceptions and experiences of workload. However, I should repeat that, as a largely qualitative study, the objectives for this research are different from those of a quantitative study. Instead of verifying the data in a statistical way, my intention is that teachers' participation in writing and revising the report has helped it to 'ring true' for as many of them as possible. In traditional social scientific terms, receiving this kind of feedback is also a way of 'validating' the research results. In a feminist action research framework, however, it is perhaps better thought of as part of the co-creation of research findings (Guba and Lincoln, 2005), with the goal of improving the trustworthiness and credibility of the research report (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005).

#### **3.2.4 Analysis**

Although I list the 'analysis' stage here at the end of the other research stages, in practice, I began to analyse the data as soon as I began the research process (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998). Two research assistants aided me in transcribing the interviews. As each of the transcripts was completed, I went through it manually, using a process of multiple readings. I would first read through the transcript, along with any notes that I had taken at that time, to establish an overall understanding of the teacher's perspective. I then read through a second time and corrected any typographical errors in the transcript. During the third reading of the transcripts, I carefully went through each page and divided the statements that the teacher had made into four categories: teaching workload concerns, domestic workload concerns, health and well-being, and recommended solutions. I did

this by highlighting the statements (electronically) in different colours. I also did the same for the notes that I had taken during the interview, including notes I had taken while the tape recorder was turned off, but that the teachers permitted me to use in the study. (Some teachers made certain comments that they asked me not to report.) Finally, I read through the transcripts a fourth time and copied and pasted the highlighted statements into documents headed by topic (for example, 'supervision duty' or 'tiredness'), and organized the documents into separate folders that were titled according to the four categories mentioned above. As I analysed the transcripts, I continually referred back to the research literature in order to situate the new understandings that I developed into the context of previous theory and research (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998). For example, when I realized how much emphasis participants had placed on feeling that others did not see or recognize much of the work that they were doing, I reviewed more research on 'invisible' work (e.g. Messing, *et al*, 1995; Messing, 1998).

To analyse the task-diaries, I used two different methods. First of all, as I went through each transcript, I simultaneously analysed that teacher's task-diary as well, going through it carefully to get an understanding of the types of tasks that that teacher did at different times throughout the day. I added relevant information from the task-diaries to the same categories that I was creating from the transcripts. The second method that I used to analyse the task-diaries was to divide the activities in each diary into five main general types of time-use: schoolwork, domestic work, leisure time, commuting, and sleep. I then entered the total amount of time for each type of activity into an Excel worksheet, and compared the data for the group of teachers as a whole, as well as between groups

such as women and men, newer teachers and more experienced teachers, and teachers with children and without. The times recorded were all estimates, since teachers varied in the amount of detail they included regarding the time spent on each activity (when in doubt, I consulted the interview transcripts, since our conversations often revealed more detail), and teachers' frequent use of multi-tasking meant that I had to use my best judgement as to how to record each time period. For example, it was sometimes unclear whether or not an activity (such as bringing children to a sports event, for example) would be considered domestic work or leisure. To decide how to code such examples, I would re-read the transcript of the teacher's interview (in which we discussed the task-diary) to discover the context of the activity. When necessary, I also re-listened to the recording of the interview as well. It was important to me to understand the general trends in time-use among the group of teachers in this study. However, with this method, I want to make very clear that these task-diaries cannot be used to make statistical generalizations about the amount of time that Newfoundland and Labrador teachers in general spend on different tasks. Instead, I use the quantitative data only in context with the qualitative information from the study, in order to help better understand the daily workloads of the teachers in this study.

### **3.2.5 Reflexivity**

Throughout the analysis, I strove to be reflexive about my research. I continuously and carefully reflected on my presence in the research, and how I am involved in co-creating the interviews with the participating teachers in each stage (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998). I also kept in mind that the way I approach and understand my research, or my 'analytic lens' (Chase, 2005), is shaped by many factors. These include my background in a

particular academic discipline (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992), in this case sociology, my feminist perspective, my background working as a research assistant in the area of occupational health research for the past five years, and my particular historical, cultural, gender, and class position, particularly since I grew up in rural Newfoundland and attended small rural schools, all three of which have now been closed.

As I have discussed above, I also have personal connections to the research topic. When I initially planned this project, and even as I conducted the research, I felt that the strongest factor in shaping my ideas about teachers' workloads and well-being was my lifelong experience as a daughter observing her mother's struggle to balance the workloads of teaching elementary school and raising four children. This perspective was strengthened by my mother's direct involvement in this project as a key informant. For me, working with my mother on this project was extremely valuable. On the most practical level, I found it very convenient to have such easy access to a key informant who was always willing, at a moment's notice, to review a draft task-diary, to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of various research questions, or simply to clarify a technical pedagogical term. On a more personal level, I also enjoyed being able to have my mother involved in such a meaningful way in the project, especially since my interest in this topic is in large part due to years of hearing about her experiences, challenges, and joys. I was also surprised to find that, despite the many conversations we had had about teaching prior to this project, I learned even more about my mother and her experiences as a teacher through our many discussions throughout this project. For these reasons, I greatly value my mother's contribution to this project, and I believe that this study is

much stronger, and more attuned to teachers' everyday lives, because of this. For example, discussions with my mother gave me the idea of asking teachers whether there was anything about teaching that they felt others, outside of the profession, did not understand. This question ended up proving to be extremely fruitful in the interviews, and I found that it really helped the teacher participants to open up and to identify some of the aspects of their work that were of the greatest concern to them. However, despite the many advantages of involving a family member as a key informant, I was also concerned to avoid the potential pitfalls associated with this close relationship.

Throughout this project, I was careful to constantly re-examine my assumptions to make sure that I remembered that my mother's perspectives are hers alone, and that I was not unconsciously acting or writing with the belief that she represents the perspectives of all primary and elementary teachers. In addition, I also tried to never assume that, because of my own experience as a teacher's daughter (and even simply my experience as a student in rural Newfoundland schools), I knew more about teaching and the education system than I actually do. Finally, I tried to always acknowledge that my relationship with my mother and sympathy for the challenges that she has faced also gives me sympathy for the challenges of teachers in general.

Despite this very important personal connection, as I have been writing this thesis, I have slowly come to realize that this perspective as a daughter is no longer the most important influence on my understanding of teachers' workloads. I realized that my primary lens changed over the course of the research from that of a daughter to that of a mother. My understanding of my mother's experiences, while important, was indirect, while the birth

of my daughter in January 2008 had a very real and direct impact on my perspective on teachers' efforts to balance their teaching and domestic workloads. In fact, this entire research process was, for me, intricately tied up with the process of becoming a mother. It was right in the midst of the research stage of this project, about three quarters of the way through the interviews, when I first found out that I was pregnant. I finished the research and the analysis stage throughout my pregnancy, and gave birth just after I had finished the main analysis. After a four-month maternity leave, I began writing my thesis. However, I was still at home, and had to fit my writing into short blocks of time around the unceasing demands of infant care. I was forced many times to face the irony of analyzing other people's challenges in balancing employment and domestic work while I myself was struggling to write a research report and a thesis, as well as work part-time as a research assistant, while taking care of my baby daughter. Never was this irony so clear as when I was propped up on the chesterfield, with my baby nursing in one arm while I worked on a laptop with the other! Although I was already interested in the balance of employment and domestic work from an intellectual perspective, my new perspective as a mother has deepened my appreciation immeasurably for the challenges faced by the mothers and fathers of young children in this study. In particular, this new perspective very much helped me to see and understand the linkages between teachers' concerns about the impact of their workloads on their own families, and the impacts that they talked about for their own health and well-being. Just as was necessary for my perspective as a daughter, however, I also had to be careful not to assume that my own experiences as a mother were universal. In addition, although I greatly appreciate the autoethnographic tradition (Chase, 2005; Denzin, 1997; Ellis and Bochner, 1996; Holman

Jones, 2005), I wanted to make sure that I walked a fine line between analyzing my own perspectives and recognizing the co-creation of this research account, and making sure that the primary focus of this research project remained on the teacher participants, and not on me.

I should emphasise that I see these personal connections to the research topic as an advantage rather than a disadvantage. In contrast to the goals of traditional, positivist social science, in which any admission of values in research is discouraged in the belief that it contaminates researchers' neutrality (Kirk and Miller, 1986; Smith, 1991), I argue that all research involves values, and that we create knowledge in particular historical and cultural locations. It is important to take our values out of hiding so that we can think about how they shape our research: examining and explaining our perspectives and beliefs as well as our gendered, historical, cultural, and social context (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Mauthner and Doucet, 1998; Denzin, 1997; Reinharz, 1992). In fact, in a way, researchers create ideas about those we study as well as creating ourselves as researchers (Reinharz, 1997). This means that it is important to unpack and understand our own perspectives along with the perspectives of the people we are studying. As I alluded to above, a researcher can bring her or his perspective and experiences into the analysis of the research to a greater or lesser extent, depending on the goals and structure of the research. In this project, my goal is that by developing an awareness of "the 'unconscious' filters through which we experience the world" (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998, p. 122), I can better communicate the ideas and experiences of the people I am

studying, as well as offer a comprehensive explanation of these ideas and experiences in a theoretical way (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998).

As I conducted the research, I also reflected on the relationships that I was establishing with the participants, and on how I felt about the research process itself. Long before the research began, I started to feel very nervous about how it would go. This was my first major research project, and I was anxious about adding to the workloads of people who were already so busy. Once the research started, however, I quickly realized that this would instead be an experience that I would cherish. Teachers welcomed me into their classrooms and their own homes with amazing openness. They offered me tea, snacks, and the privilege of learning about their work, their concerns, their joys, and the intricate routines of their everyday lives.

As I reflect on this research experience, I believe that I was generally able to establish a good relationship with the participants quite quickly. I think that there are three main reasons for this. One is simply that, being from rural Newfoundland myself, I share the same language and basic cultural experiences with the participants. Although every region of the province has its differences, I felt familiar and comfortable with the expressions, gestures, and customs I encountered, and had no difficulties in understanding or making myself understood. This contrasted with my experience conducting Master's research with mainland Canadian university students, where I sometimes found that there was a barrier in terms of language (even though we all spoke English), and in customs for social interaction. Secondly, I realized that it created an

additional level of comfort for teachers when they found out that I was the daughter of a teacher. I made a point of mentioning this at the beginning when I introduced myself and explained why I was interested in the topic. The participants responded positively to this, and almost all of them asked more about my mother. I sensed that it made them feel like I was less of an outsider to the teaching profession, and that it was a bit safer to talk to me. Finally, I think the mere fact that I am a student was an important part of the relationship I established with the teachers. Given that they have all been, and some currently are, university students themselves, I had the impression that many of the participants could relate to my position and felt good about helping me further my own education by participating in the project.

### **3.3 Ethical Considerations**

I received ethical approval for the proposal for this project from the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research from Memorial University on January 31, 2007 (*See Appendix XV*). [N.B. The “minor issue” mentioned in the letter was an issue of wording placement in the focus group ad, and was corrected and approved by e-mail.]

I listed the potential harms and benefits of participating in the research in the consent form that all participants signed as part of the ‘informed consent’ process. I also discussed these harms and benefits with each participant verbally before they signed the form. I let participants know that this research would not necessarily benefit them personally, but that the overall aim is to work with participants to develop knowledge that could be beneficial for teachers as a group. I also made certain to make it very clear to

participants that their participation was voluntary, that they could refuse to answer any questions, that they could leave at anytime during the interview and that any information they had provided would be destroyed if they so requested. The research deals with a potentially very personal and possibly upsetting subject matter, and in fact, several participants became upset during the interviews. However, these same individuals also told me that they found it very beneficial to have an opportunity to talk to me about issues that were bothering them at school or at home.

Confidentiality was a particularly important issue in this research, as I discuss further in Chapter 4. While some participants were more comfortable, and had even discussed their participation in the study with their colleagues, many others expressed concern about their ability to speak out without reprisal from their employers. In fact, two of the participants asked not to be tape-recorded for this reason, and many others asked me to turn off the tape at certain points so that they could tell me things that they felt were more sensitive, or potentially controversial. In order to ensure confidentiality, I had to be very careful at each step of the research. The research participants' names and personal information were kept confidential, and are known only to me. I did not even share the names with my research assistants, although they of course heard many details as they transcribed the interviews. When I travelled to different areas of the province to conduct interviews, I was keenly aware that in a small community, neighbours might be aware of my presence as a researcher. I attempted to minimise this threat to confidentiality by giving the interviewee the choice of where the interview would be conducted, so that if desired, the interview could take place outside of the community. As well, for similar

reasons, when booking accommodations as I travelled to different regions of the province, I always tried to stay in a different community than the one where I would be conducting the interviews. I even made the bookings in my husband's surname, just in case someone later heard about this study and made the connection. Interestingly, one confidentiality challenge that I had not foreseen before beginning the research was the fact that the Newfoundland and Labrador teaching community is a rather small one, and many teachers have taught in multiple schools, and so many participants were quite curious as to whether I had interviewed anyone else they knew! When this situation arose, I simply had to explain that I could not talk about any other teachers or schools, as everyone's participation was confidential.

In order to further safeguard participants' confidentiality, I offered all participants the opportunity to read and offer feedback on the report that I wrote for the NLTA. I told the participants during the interviews that they would have this opportunity, and many seemed reassured because they would be able to see for themselves if there were any identifiable details in the report before it was made public. In fact, writing both the report for the NLTA and this thesis also presented a challenge for the confidentiality of this research. As I discussed above, the context of teachers' lives is so important for understanding their workloads. For this reason, it is tempting to illustrate many points by describing the specific factors that shape an individual's life and work. However, I had to be careful not to offer too many specific details that could be potentially used to identify an individual. This is particularly so because, as I mentioned above, the teaching community in this province is so small and there is a sense that 'everyone knows

everyone.’ In the end, I was reassured that teachers’ confidentiality was well-protected when several participants told me that they had difficulty even identifying themselves!

One final ethical issue that I dealt with in this project was the balance between the individual teacher participants’ rights to confidentiality, and the rights of their employers, the school boards, to be aware that research was being conducted with their employees. Before I began the research, I sent a letter (*See Appendix X*) to each of the four English-language school boards to let them know that I would be conducting research with teachers in their districts. The only response that I received came from the Eastern School District (*Appendix XI*), which is also the district that has experienced the most controversy related to teacher workload research in recent years, as I mentioned in Chapter 2 (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2006). This board asked me to complete an application for approval of my research, which I did, and they sent me a letter of approval (*Appendix XII*) on February 16<sup>th</sup>, 2007. I also sent a letter (*Appendix XIII*) to the provincial Minister of Education, to inform her about the project and to ask if she would provide me with a memo of support that I could include with my contact letter to the teachers, similar to the memo provided by the NLTA. Her response, indicating that she did not think it would be appropriate for the Department of Education to provide a letter of support, can be found in *Appendix XIV*.

**PART TWO: WORK**

## **Introduction to Part Two: Work**

In this second part of the thesis, I focus on one of the key concepts in this study – work. The World Health Organization (WHO) considers work to be one of the most important social determinants of health (Wilkinson and Marmot, 2003). In this study, I examine primary and elementary teachers' workloads as teachers, including the work that they do during school hours and in the school building, as well as the teaching work that they do after school and on weekends, often in their own homes. I also look at teachers' domestic workloads, including tasks such as housework, grocery shopping, home maintenance and repairs, childcare, and elder care. As I show in the following chapters, the participants in this study told me that for teachers of young children, there is a great deal of overlap for them between both types of workloads, particularly for those who also have children of their own at home.

## CHAPTER 4: TEACHING WORKLOADS

### 4.0 The Participants in this Study

The twenty-four teachers who participated in this study are from all four English-language public school boards (Eastern, Nova Central, Western, and Labrador) and all grades from Kindergarten through Grade 6. Eleven are from rural areas and thirteen from urban areas. Nineteen of the teachers are women and five are men, which is representative of the profession in this province. The teachers ranged in age from 31 to 63, with an average age of 46. This is older than the average age of primary and elementary teachers in the province, which was 41.5 for the 2006-2007 school year (the year this study took place) (Department of Education, 2007a). Likewise, this was a very experienced group, with an average number of years of experience in the teaching profession of over 20 years, and ten of the participants within five years of retirement. Only three participants were within the first five years of their teaching careers. There are many likely reasons for this high level of experience among the participants. One of these is simply the method that I used to contact teachers. School websites tend to be updated only sporadically, and some of the sites were several years out of date. This means that it was less likely that new teachers would be named on the site. As well, new teachers tend to change teaching positions and schools frequently, due to their lack of tenure and seniority. For this reason, it was less likely that they would still be teaching at the school where I sent the letter. In addition, new teachers may also be dealing with particularly heavy workloads, and, lacking tenure, they may feel less comfortable speaking out about their workload concerns. This might mean that newer teachers were less likely to respond. All of these factors likely had an influence on the low numbers of

new teachers in this study. Ideally, I would have liked to have a list of all the teachers in the province from which I could draw, since this might have reduced this methodological problem. However, such a list was not available to me because of privacy issues. This lack of newer teachers in the study also means that the findings likely reflect better the perspectives of more experienced teachers. However, for the reasons that I discuss in Chapter 6, I still believe that I was able to pull out many of the important concerns facing newer teachers. In any case, it would still be very useful, as I suggest in Chapter 11, to conduct a study that focuses solely on the challenges faced by new teachers.

In terms of family situations, seventeen of the teachers were married or living with a common-law partner (all were in heterosexual relationships). Seven were living without a partner, of which five were divorced and two single. Twenty of the teachers are parents, fifteen of whom have children eighteen and under living at home, and eight of whom have children aged twelve or younger. In order to protect the identities of the participants, the only details that appear in this report, unless mentioned specifically by a teacher herself or himself in a quotation, are teachers' grade level, their years of experience and their location in a rural or urban area.

Of the six other participants in this study, five work or volunteer as representatives of provincial or regional organizations within the education system. These include the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association (NLTA); the Newfoundland and Labrador School Boards' Association (NLSBA); the Department of Education; the Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Public Employees (NAPE), which represents

student assistants; and the Provincial School Councils' Association, in which parents play an important role. The principal representative was recommended to me by a representative of the NLTA's school administrators' council.

#### **4.1 Introduction: Teaching Workloads**

The main teaching workload issues that teachers identified were: the intense and all-consuming nature of teaching; emotional work; specific demanding tasks, including supervision duty, paperwork, preparation and correcting, student evaluations, and implementing the 'Pathways' program for students with special needs; lack of material and human resources; and the overall sense that teachers and their work are, in many ways, invisible.

#### **4.2 The Intense and All-Consuming Nature of Teaching**

*I think that teaching's a job that's never really done. If you spent five hours a night doing it, it's still never really done. There's more you could do and things you could do better if you had time or the resources to do it.*

**Rural elementary teacher**

*September comes, you step into a whirlwind. ... everything is coming at you left, right, and centre. Then you're spit out again in December. You don't really get enough time Christmas to unwind from it. You're back in again. And then you go again in January, right up to Easter - that's even shorter. And then by June, I don't think there's a teacher who wouldn't say to you, "If I leave school June 22nd, I'm probably definitely into July or mid-July before I realize, 'So now I can relax.'*

**Urban primary teacher**

Canadian research has shown that teachers' work is becoming increasingly intensified, with teachers' roles expanding and more work being expected in the same period of time (Hargreaves, 1992; Leithwood *et al*, 2002). Across Canada, many studies have reported that teachers' work is becoming more and more intensified (Belliveau *et al*, 2002; Dibbon, 2004; Harvey and Spinney, 2000; Naylor *et al*, 2001). Expectations of teachers have expanded greatly in the twentieth century, with an increase in responsibility for students' emotional and social well-being as well as their academic growth (Dibbon, 2004; King and Peart, 1992).

In fact, one of the most important difficulties that researchers have identified in teachers' work is that it is by nature all-consuming, with no easily definable limits (Connell, 1985; King and Peart, 1992). In this present study as well, the number one challenge that teachers talked about was the way that teaching consumed so much of their time and their lives. They talked about the work that they do outside of school hours, the lack of breaks in their day, the interruptions that make their schedule even busier, the large number of small additional tasks for which they are responsible, the mental intensity of teaching, and the time that they spend thinking and worrying about their students.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> I note here that I fully recognize that, while the teachers in this study all appeared to be very diligent, hard-working, and committed to their jobs and the children in their classes, there do exist a small number of teachers who are less exemplary. As in any occupation, there are some workers who, for any number of reasons, are less diligent and committed, and may conduct themselves with less integrity than most. The intensity of any one particular teacher's workload will clearly vary according to such factors, particularly since teachers enjoy some level of flexibility in their jobs compared to many other groups of workers. However, my belief is that individual cases of workers who are not performing their jobs to an acceptable standard should be dealt with individually, while policy (which is one of the main concerns of this research) should be designed with the assumption that the majority of workers conduct themselves with integrity.

Teachers explained that they do a great deal of their work, such as planning, preparation, and correcting, as well as meeting with parents and co-workers, outside of regular school hours. Dibbon's (2004) study showed that in addition to 27.5 hours of classroom teaching per week, teachers spend almost as much time again preparing lesson plans, correcting student work, collaborating with other teachers, meeting with parents, and supervising students, for a total average of 52.32 hours per week (Dibbon, 2004, p. 12; see also King and Peart, 1992; Messing *et al*, 1997). As Dibbon (2004) points out, this works out to a 7.5-hour workday, 7 days per week, for the 39-week school year (p. 33). This study offers more support for these findings, with the task-diaries showing that the average number of hours that the teachers spent doing schoolwork on the day recorded was nearly nine and a half hours (See *Table 1*). This, of course, only takes into account weekday working hours, and teachers told me that they do a great deal of work on weekends as well. In fact, teachers also talked about working during their Christmas and Easter holidays, and about preparing for new classes during the summer (see also Naylor *et al*, 2003). Much of this work could be considered unpaid, yet it is complicated to come up with an exact total of unpaid hours worked by teachers in this province. This is because, as opposed to some other jurisdictions, the NLTA representative explained that in Newfoundland and Labrador, teachers' workday, and the number of hours they are required to work per day or per week, has not been defined. In contrast, in Québec, teachers are specifically paid for working 27 hours per week, and researchers estimate that they work an average of 16 unpaid hours in addition to this (Messing *et al*, 1997). To estimate Newfoundland and Labrador teachers' unpaid work, Dibbon (2004) uses Newfoundland and Labrador Treasury Board's calculation for annual salaries for public

sector workers: 1,820 hours per year, or 35 hours per week. On a weekly basis during the school year, this would mean 17 hours of unpaid work. In addition, even though the school year is 39 weeks long, Dibbon calculates that teachers still work an average of 2,042 hours per year, or a total of 222 additional unpaid hours per year (p. 33).

Regardless of the exact hourly calculations, however, it is clear that teachers do a great deal of work above and beyond school hours and school days. As one urban primary teacher explained,

*every night you have schoolwork to do. I don't know any other way to do it, I just don't. And on the weekends you have schoolwork. And if you don't, if you say 'I'm just not!' then, guess what? Then you've got a bigger pile next time you sit down.*

Teachers also described their work as all-consuming in the sense that they have very few breaks, even for a few minutes, during the school day. This is particularly so when teachers are on supervision duty, as I will discuss below. However, the task-diaries showed that even when teachers were not 'on duty', scheduled breaks such as recess and lunch were often taken up with work tasks. For example, in one rural primary teacher's task-diary, she listed the following activities during her twenty-minute recess 'break': *monitored a child with special nutrition needs, set homework for absent children, spoke to the special needs teacher about supplementary work for a student, did some correcting, tidied materials in the art room in preparation for a later class, spoke to a parent who came to her classroom, and called the secretary for the parent.* This lack of breaks is particularly important in relation to occupational health, since research has shown that breaks can be a very important factor for workers' well-being (International Labour Office, 2009; Takahashi *et al*, 2004).

**TABLE 1: TASK-DIARIES - OVERALL SUMMARY**

<b>Time in Minutes</b>	<b>Teaching Work</b>	<b>Domestic Work</b>	<b>Commuting</b>	<b>Leisure</b>
<b>Participant</b>				
1	590	270	20	120
2	520	155	40	305
3	665	140	60	140
4	540	335	20	170
5	555	405	120	30
6	445	375	20	90
7	565	365	30	60
8	460	165	50	165
9	505	275	30	180
10	630	200	40	120
11	585	425	40	30
12	460	240	20	280
13	665	285	40	30
14	450	570	30	30
15	570	60	30	270
16	No longer in classroom; did not complete a task-diary			
17	530	320	20	90
18	570	140	10	300
19	750	260	10	30
20	565	265	40	150
21	650	280	20	30
22	495	390	30	45
23	665	245	50	75
24	560	220	50	90
<i>Average in Minutes</i>	<i>564.78</i>	<i>277.61</i>	<i>35.65</i>	<i>123.04</i>
<b>Average in Hours</b>	<b>9h25m</b>	<b>4h38m</b>	<b>36m</b>	<b>2h3m</b>

Although teachers have some professional flexibility, they are also governed by a rigid school schedule that divides the day into increments of a certain number of minutes per period, in which the Department of Education requires teachers to teach subjects for a specified percentage of time. For example, a rural elementary teacher explained that 16% of instructional time at her grade level is to be spent on Math,

*which works out to eight periods a week, eight 28-minute periods of math. Which amounts to two days when you've only got one period of math, and there is no possible way to get through the math, so you take periods from other classes. ... If you look at all the guides that you get from people at board level and people at the Department of Education, they assume that you have a full hour for math every day. We never, ever have a full hour.*

In ways eerily similar to the rigidly separated and scheduled work organization scheme of Frederick Taylor (Braverman, 1974), this means that teaching is a job where your time is scheduled by the bell, and you have to carefully watch both the clock and the calendar.

Yet, as an urban primary teacher explained:

*your lesson plan for the week is not going to include all the stuff that happens. ... you're in the middle of a lesson and the secretary might buzz down and say 'I got so-and-so on the phone, she's one of your [Grade] parents, she missed the meeting, she's wondering can she swing by lunch time and pick up the take home package.' ... Or you're in the middle of a lesson and somebody's knocking on the door because they're looking for something that rolls or they're looking for something that they remember seeing in [your] room. Or somebody's brother or sister has a message for them, and they just come down whenever's convenient for them.*

In fact, one rural primary teacher commented that is normal for her day to have a lot of interruptions, but that she had not realized how frequently she was interrupted until she recorded the interruptions in her task-diary. Another rural primary teacher explained how, as she wrote in her task-diary, even a simple issue such as a child having a headache can create a lengthy interruption:

*During Language I had to call another parent, because another little child was complaining that he had a headache, and I can't give Tylenol without permission. So I had to call, track down his mom, and ask if I could give him Tylenol. And then I had to jot down a note to the secretary and sign it saying I had spoken to the mom and she could give him a Tylenol, and sign it. ... And then I had to call this parent again, because the child had decided that he wanted to go home, he didn't want to stay.*

In other words, teachers observed that the constant interruptions that are part of their daily work make their workloads even more intense.

Teachers also told me that their workloads are made more intense by all of what they called the “extras” for which they are responsible – the numerous additional small tasks that they do outside of their actual teaching duties. As an urban primary teacher put it,

*[T]here's always something other than your teaching. There's ten thousand other things that you have to do, and it is stressful because you're always — I'm always afraid I'm forgetting something important and so you never relax and say it's all done. I've always got another list. I get through one list and I've got another one coming behind it. There's no end to it.*

An experienced rural elementary teacher argued that,

*for the first twenty years of my career, teaching was the main focus of everything. Teaching was the first thing. I don't see it as that anymore. I see teaching now taking a back seat to school development, to the ISSP process.<sup>14</sup> ... most teachers still love the classroom, it's just that they don't like what goes with it.*

An urban primary teacher put it this way,

*If we could go in now and teach the children, things would be great, but ... You spend time on the phone, you spend it doing the homework, you're speaking to the parents, you do the forms ... The hats that we wear ... there's so many. And the teacher hat I think has gotten smaller and smaller and smaller.*

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<sup>14</sup> ISSP refers to an Individual Student Support Plan, and it is the specific plan designed for each child with special needs (those on Pathways 2 through 5).

A rural primary teacher agreed, saying that all the little 'extras' of teaching really add to his workload: everything from recess orders, to supervision duty, book orders, ISSP meetings, staff meetings, school development activities, fundraising activities, and extracurricular activities such as sports, dances, and graduations. He explained, "*I do enjoy teaching, but I wish I could just teach; I wish I could just go in there and do my teaching all day.*"

These 'extra' tasks mean that teachers have a large number of tasks, plans, and information to keep track of at any given time, which they explained can make teaching very mentally intense. A rural primary teacher explained that this intensity is compounded by the many practical, logistical things that teachers constantly have to remember and monitor.

*And you know, you have that sort of thing where it can't go out of your mind, because you need containers for Science, or you need maps for Social Studies, or you have to pick up straws for an experiment at the store ... So you can't! Cause it's there! You have to do this, you've got to do that, you don't have this lesson finished, you have to do a worksheet for that, there's something you need to print off there, you have to research this on the internet, you need something for arts and crafts! ... How do you let it go? You can't let it go! And if you do, you're guaranteed to go in the next day and say, 'I forgot to bring in containers!'*

A rural elementary teacher explained that teaching is also mentally intense in the sense that teachers also must constantly keep track of what each of their students are doing, or not doing. While going through her task-diary, she explained that as she had finished a math class, she realized,

*[b]ut there was still one student who didn't have the sheet done. He never asked me how to do it. What I did was explain it to the class before I started, and then I was walking around. So anyone who had a question, I*

*re-explained it. I felt like I explained it twenty-odd times, and he still didn't have it done. That happens to me so often. I think, 'Okay, everybody's working now,' and there will bound to be one who will just slip through and not get it done.*

Seven teachers in this study indicated that changes to the school schedule would help to improve the intense and all-consuming nature of their work. In particular, there was interest in a semesterized school year, as opposed to the current September to June schedule. As I described in Chapter 2, this would involve a rotation of about ten weeks of school followed by about three weeks of holidays, with six weeks in the summer, as is done in many other parts of the world, such as much of Europe, Australia, and New Zealand. Others felt that their workloads would be improved by changing the school day to give teachers more flexibility, rather than the current situation where teachers must follow the clock and the bell (which indicates the end of a teaching period, so that teachers feel like they are, as an urban elementary teacher described it,

*up and down, up and down, look at the clock, 'Oh jeez, 9:30, I got to go,' 'Got to go, boys and girls, go on, you got to go to Music now,' and they might have been just right in the middle of ... something, but it's like everything is operated by the half hour on the clock.*

Not only is teaching intense during the school day, however, but teachers said that their work stretches to encompass almost all of their time. Many of the teachers referred to teaching as “a 24-hour job”: a job that in your mind, you never really walk away from. In fact, teaching at this level depends in large part on forming and maintaining relationships with small children (Hargreaves, 2001; Messing *et al*, 1997), and so the teachers in this study also spend a great deal of time thinking and worrying about their students. As an urban primary teacher put it, “*You can't walk out of there at four o'clock in the afternoon*

and turn them off until the next morning." A rural primary teacher explained how much her care and concern for her students affects the rest of her life:

*I have spent many a sleepless night, I have brought it home with me and I've had it for supper. I have dealt with everything from learning disabilities to suspected abuse, over the twenty-five years. ... It all falls on the teacher. .... There's nights when ... I've woken up and this child has been on my mind. And I'm thinking, 'What are we going to do for them? ... We have to find something.'*

In fact, the emotional work of primary and elementary teaching was itself another important challenge identified by the teachers in this study.

### **4.3 Emotional Work**

*I'm going to have to make sure [a chronically ill child] is okay, and I have to make sure the little boy who I feel is weak is okay, and the little boy who could drive a nail in somebody or himself is okay ... You don't know when they leave in the run of the day if anybody loves them, or if anybody's hugged them. And in a time when it's not right to hug, I hug.*

#### **Rural primary teacher**

*I just felt bad because I wanted to give [an international student] more, but I couldn't, because I couldn't devote all my time to him. I had other children who needed so much help. And even your children who are your best students, they deserve part of you as well.*

#### **Urban primary teacher**

While education has sometimes been seen as strictly intellectual, cognitive work, many argue that teaching is in fact deeply emotional as well as intellectual (Hargreaves, 2001; also Acker, 1996, citing Freedman, 1990; Dibbon, 2004). Hargreaves (2001) states that teaching and learning are "irretrievably emotional" activities, and that we cannot understand teaching without understanding what he calls its "emotional geographies." He explains that emotional geographies include the various sociocultural, moral,

professional, physical, and political ways that we relate to others: "the patterns of closeness and distance in human interactions that shape the emotions we experience about relationships to ourselves, each other, and the world around us" (p. 1056). For example, sociocultural distance between teachers and students can create certain emotional challenges, while physical closeness with students' parents (frequent meetings, for example) can sometimes help to bridge misunderstandings.

Teaching, then, frequently involves intense 'emotional labour' - work required to manage one's emotions: to mask certain feelings or 'perform' a certain way for others (Hochschild, 1985). This emotional labour can also include caring for students and developing relationships with them, and can be one of the most fulfilling and motivating aspects of teaching (Hargreaves, 1992; Messing *et al*, 1997). As Connell puts it, "[t]eaching can also be an exhilarating and joyful experience, expanding the teacher's life through skills or human relations, or both. Teaching well is a thrill" (p. 127). However, emotional labour is not always joyous for teachers - it can often be emotionally demanding to maintain discipline (Connell, 1985), to connect with the children so they will learn (Messing *et al*, 1997), or to keep oneself calm when dealing with parents (Hargreaves, 2001). In fact, Connell (1985) argues that there seems to be an antagonism between students, parents and teachers built into the way that schools are structured, with children and parents often making contradictory emotional demands on teachers. In other words, emotional labour can be a source of fulfilment for teachers, but it can also be burdensome and stressful - particularly under conditions where resources are lacking.

In terms of their emotional work, the main issues identified by teachers in this study were their feelings of caring for and mothering their students, the challenge of meeting children's diverse academic needs, the importance in their work of caring for students' emotional and social needs, the emotional work of keeping students engaged, discipline, their relationships with parents, and their relationships with their colleagues and administrators.

Teachers in this study spoke of the joys of caring deeply for their students, of hugging them and comforting them, and many said that they feel very motherly towards their students, as illustrated by a rural primary teacher: "*They're my children when they walk into the school.*" She said that what many people do not understand about primary and elementary teaching is that,

*It's personal. ... I have nineteen children in that classroom and I am responsible for them. And at the end of the day, they spend more time with me than they do with their parents. And that's a big deal, and it's a bigger deal now that I'm a parent. They're mine, and they know.*

Maintaining relationships with their students is an integral part of teachers' work, and almost all the teachers in this study said that they love teaching and that they love the children whom they teach. An urban primary teacher enthused, "*I love what I do. The kids are unbelievable. ... They keep me young. They're hilarious. It doesn't matter if I get a strong group or a not-too-strong group, just watching them is amazing.*" One rural primary teacher who was about to retire mused about her relationship with her students, saying:

*That's what I'm going to miss the most, is their coming in in the mornings and telling me all kinds of stories and calling me 'Mom' all the time, and*

*wanting you to do this, showing you this, and they hurt this, and they want you to tell them that it's going to be okay.*

In fact, many of the teachers, both women and men, reported that their students often accidentally call them “*Mom.*” As I discuss further in Chapter 7, male primary and elementary teachers described doing work that could be termed “mothering” work, but also talked about how this work can pose problems for them as men, particularly with regard to worries about physical contact with children.

Teachers also talked about the satisfaction and joy that comes from being able to help children learn, explore, and discover new things. A rural primary teacher observed that she finds it very satisfying,

*When I see them go ‘Oh yeah!’ That’s right, the light just went on. They’re innocent, but they’re also brilliant sometimes, the things that they say. They always make me smile. ... and if it wasn’t for them, and that odd little picture, and little note, I would have given it up long ago.*

Similarly, another rural primary teacher observed,

*The best part of teaching is just the satisfaction of looking at those smiling faces every day. ... I know at the end of the day that I taught somebody how to do something. The reading level is coming up. I can see somebody, all of a sudden the spark went off, and then they're doing something with their writing. A little kid today, we were doing math problems, and he was getting it! And he couldn't do that before. The wheels were turning and all of a sudden you're getting through to them. The little kid who had no friends in the classroom, all of a sudden you see them with somebody. ... And the kid who finally learned to tie his laces, looking up at you with the big smile, saying ‘I did it!’ Little stuff. ...especially in the Primary, you can see progress everyday. You got your little behaviour issues and that, but overall you know when they leave in the afternoon that they've had a good day. And they're all smiling and high-fiving you on the way out.*

At times, the joy that teachers get from their work and from their connections with their students means that they are also willing to add to their workloads in order to better

connect with their students. For example, an urban primary teacher described her typical morning at school,

*I go down in my room as soon as [the children] come in. We're not required to be in our rooms until 8:45, but I'm there at 8:30. When they come in, I'm there puttering around, they're coming in and talking to me: 'Miss, guess what my neighbour's dog did yesterday?' A lot of teachers stay in the staff room until the bell goes. I'm not like that. I say 'Good morning' to every single one of my kids.*

In terms of the joys of teaching, many of the teachers observed that the actual teaching was what they enjoyed, but it was just that they felt that all the 'extras' of teaching, as I discussed in the previous section, overwhelmed the personal teacher-student dynamic that they enjoyed. A rural elementary teacher agreed: *"I've never been sick of the teaching. Like I said, I was pretty stressed this year, but it wasn't the teaching. It was just all the little things that went along with it. But the teaching is the fun part."*

What teachers also explained, however, is the irony that this personal, emotional connection is what makes teaching simultaneously incredibly rewarding and incredibly challenging. Teachers said that it is *because* they care so deeply about their students that they work so hard for them, and that caring for their students is also why teachers find it so difficult when they feel unable to meet their students' needs. Teachers said that it is particularly draining to try to meet all of their students' diverse academic needs with limited resources. A rural primary teacher observed that the hardest part of her job is

*being able to reach all of those children, every day, without exception ... If it were my child there, I would ... want to know that the teacher was [meeting my child's needs]. So, believing that, and trying to accomplish that, as a teacher, I think that is the hardest thing that I have to do. Because I don't have the tools, lots of times. I don't have what I need, I don't have the support ... It's overwhelming.*

The teachers in this study also made it clear that taking care of children's emotional and social needs has become a significant element of their work. A rural primary teacher said that she speaks to each child differently, depending on what is going on in his or her life:

*If you care, you know every student so well, and you have to pick your words based on their life. ... And if not, I know that they go home and cry. I don't know when I teach. Somewhere in between I teach, and I get the curriculum done, but there's so many other things to teach about. Really so many other things.*

In fact, an urban primary teacher said that the hardest part of teaching for him is the emotional attachment he has to the children, and seeing all the difficult things that they go through in their own lives and families. He talked about a child he had taught who had been physically abused, and how hard he had found it when that child left the school, because he no longer knew how the child was doing. He said that he tells his fellow teachers to never blame a child for their behaviour, because school might be the best part of their day: *"You really don't know where you're sending them when they're going home. That's the hardest part: taking them in, kind of owning them, and then knowing that you really have no say once they leave."* Others talked about and recorded in their task-diaries activities such as monitoring the anxiety level of a child with emotional problems, making time to talk with a child who has an ill father, bringing clothes for a child from an impoverished family, hugging a withdrawn child who recently came to the country as a refugee, or calming a mentally-challenged child having an angry outburst. All of this is emotional labour (Hochschild, 1985) that adds to teachers' daily workloads.

Another element of emotional work that teachers consistently mentioned is the effort that they have to put into keeping children engaged and motivated in their work. As one urban elementary teacher put it, “*It’s like you’re on stage all day.*” In fact, many teachers said that they feel that there are new challenges for keeping children interested, since they are so used to being passively entertained by video- and computer-games. A rural primary teacher put it this way:

*We have to compete with Nintendo and Playstations ... for their attention, and computers and all this stuff, and you have to make it as appealing as possible. You practically have to do a song and dance everyday to get their attention and keep them on track.*

Researchers of the effects of video games on children generally agree that, as Gentile and Gentile (2007) put it, “schools begin with several disadvantages in comparison with the media ... it is difficult to imagine a lesson on multiplication of fractions being so vivid or arousing to create widespread excitement about math or to be a means to widespread popularity” (p. 137). Studies indicate that in the United States, at least, primary and elementary school girls play video games for an average of 5.5 hours per week, and boys of the same age play such games for an average of 13 hours per week (Anderson, Gentile, and Buckley, 2007; Gentile, Lynch, Linder, and Walsh, 2004). Time spent playing video games has been linked to poorer academic performance (Anderson *et al*, 2007; Gentile *et al*, 2004). However, in contrast to the opinions of teachers in this study that video game play should be reduced, it has been suggested that since “video games are excellent teachers,” a better way to deal with children’s interest in such games might be to invest in incorporating these and other new technologies into educational programs and classrooms (Gentile and Gentile, 2007, p. 128).

Discipline is also an issue that makes up part of teachers' emotional workloads, as it relates so directly to the relationship between teacher and student. While from a parent perspective, it may be very important to have a child thoroughly included in a classroom, despite learning or behavioural problems, teachers in this study talked about how disruptive, and even sometimes physically dangerous, it can be to deal with just one child with severe behaviour problems in a class. An urban primary teacher in this study talked about one child in particular at her school who is quite unpredictable and violent, endangering other children and teachers. *"It was common practice that year that when the little boy would have a fit, the teacher would have to send all the children to ... come to my room. He was running, and you didn't know what he was going to throw. We had teachers with bruises!"* She said that she found it very emotionally draining to deal with this child. Many teachers said that they feel that the issue of discipline involves the relationship with their students' parents as well. An urban elementary teacher said

*And the children, in regards to discipline, they don't like to hear the word 'No' anymore. And for the most part, they're an only child, mom and dad are working full-time, it's easier to say 'Yes.' So then where they're faced with me and I'm like, 'I'm sorry, you can't do this, or go there,' it's not always well received. So that is a challenge that is difficult.*

A rural elementary teacher said that it makes it extremely difficult to discipline students when parents are not supportive: *"It makes it stressful when you got a child coming in as if to say, 'Well, Mom's not willing to come pick me up after school, so I guess you can't keep me.' And that's the attitude. It gets to be a little bit difficult when they know that can do pretty much what they want."* A very experienced rural primary teacher said that she feels that children's attitudes have changed over the years because parents are quick to blame the teacher if there is a problem, rather than to find out if their child is at fault:

*"I've been here long enough to know that they've changed. ... Because even when I had thirty-eight students, I didn't seem to be as stressed as sometimes I am now, because your children are different. ... their behaviour is definitely an indication of the fact that they can pretty well do what they want a lot of times."* Although it is unclear whether or not children's behaviour in school has actually changed due to generational differences in childrearing practices, as these teachers hypothesized, research does indicate that parental involvement in their child's primary/elementary school (including activities such as attending school events, visiting the child's classroom, and attending parent-teacher meetings) is associated with improved child-teacher relationships (Dearing, Kreider, and Weiss, 2008).

In fact, relationships with parents are also an important part of teachers' emotional work. Teachers said that the majority of parents are supportive, and several said that they felt very fortunate to have excellent relationships with the parents of their students.

However, teachers explained that the relationship between parents and teachers is inevitably emotional. It seems that the shifting power dynamics within the classroom (Walkerdine, 1986), and shifting responsibilities for various aspects of children's care (Dobrowolsky and Saint-Martin, 2005; Acker, 1996) is connected to a certain amount of tension in the parent-teacher relationship. This is particularly the case if the child is having a problem, as a rural primary teacher elaborated:

*I'm the one who's gotta say there's a problem. And nobody wants to hear that their child's not perfect. It hurts. I've had more parents sitting across from me at the table crying after the first report card. ... You just have to try not to become emotional about it yourself, you have to let it go, but you can't minimize it either because for these parents, these children are the centre of their universe.*

An urban primary teacher also talked about how careful she is in talking to parents about problems their child is having: *"You're suggesting as gently as you can 'If it was my child, I'd really recommend that you look into this.'"* Others, like this rural primary teacher, talked about the stress of parent-teacher interviews: *"Parent-teacher interviews are the most stressful thing that any person could ever go through because you are one right after the other, from one o'clock in the afternoon 'til nine at night and even the ones you think you'll have good interviews with will have a concern."* As well, several of the teachers in this study had dealt with parents who had become angry with them, some to the point that the teacher felt intimidated or threatened. An urban primary teacher said that, *"it can make your day horrible or your year very challenging,"* when parents are *"in your face."* She described the way some parents speak to her: *"'My child didn't do that, they were provoked by this child!' 'How come this child didn't get a detention? I don't want my child to get a detention! Don't you write my child's name down in the detention book!' And they get really upset."* An urban elementary teacher spoke in some detail about an angry father who frightened her:

*I find a lot of pressure, there's a lot of accountability on teachers these days too. And if a child is not performing, 'Well, why isn't my child performing? They did okay last year, they're not doing okay this year. It must be you,' and that kind of thing. ... Actually, I did have a meeting with a parent who was very, very upset, to the point where I felt my safety was endangered. That was just this past term. ... Their child wasn't performing, and I don't know what happened, the information had been going home all year, the child hadn't passed a Math test. ... It was only the dad who showed up to the meeting. I don't know ... if he didn't understand what was happening, but he certainly shot the message out! ... Oh yes, he was screaming! ... I asked him, I said, 'Maybe it's better if you came back at another time when you're less upset,' but he refused to leave. And it was the first time that I had been placed in that type of situation. I should have removed myself from the situation, and said 'Okay, if you're not leaving, I am. And when you cool down, I'd be happy to speak to you about it then. But obviously this is not a good time for*

*you.’ ... Well, I mean, he was accusing me of doing things that had not actually happened, and I was pretty upset over that.*

Relationships between colleagues were identified as another aspect that could either improve or add to the strain of teachers’ emotional workloads. Several teachers in this study talked about having conflicts with other teachers who they felt were less diligent. For example, an urban elementary teacher said that she had to work closely with one colleague who she did not feel was reliable, and she said that this made her feel frustrated. Teachers also indicated that personality conflicts between teachers can be very stressful. Two rural teachers talked about avoiding the staffroom at break times, for example, because they did not get along with some of their colleagues. An urban primary teacher explained that while she now is in a school where she gets along well with the other teachers, in the past she had been in a school where conflicts between teachers made her uncomfortable: *“you’d go down to the staffroom, and instead of it being a break, for those few minutes, you were just putting yourself in stressville, because of the dynamics.”* In contrast, another urban primary teacher talked about the staffroom as a ‘comfortable’ place: *“Even in the staffroom here, the staffroom is a place to go and relax and to sort of vent your frustrations. ... it is a comfortable place to be.”* In fact, almost all of the teachers talked about their relationships with their colleagues in a very positive light. It is likely that some teachers did not feel comfortable talking to me about their colleagues in a negative way, particularly since some of the interviews took place in a school setting. However, it was also clear that mutual support is a very important part of teachers’ relationships, and many teachers talked about the need for more opportunities to meet and consult with their colleagues in their own school and with teachers in other

schools. Teachers told me that the support that they provide for one another helps them cope with their workloads. The experienced teachers in particular said that they make an effort to support newer colleagues. An experienced urban elementary teacher said,

*my co-worker teaching next door, she's been teaching less than I have. She reminded me of myself a few years ago: she was correcting everything, she was always here an hour in the morning. She stressed out over things. And I used to say to her, 'Let it go.' And I really made an impact on her, 'cause she tells me that. She doesn't take things to heart so much as she used to.*

A new urban elementary teacher said that he really appreciated a more experienced teacher on staff who took him aside at the beginning of the year and gave him a place to vent. Others talked about how much it helped them to have formed close friendships with some of their colleagues. A rural primary teacher said, "*I got some good buddies too on the staff*", and she talked about chatting with them on the telephone in the evenings to vent their frustrations from the school day, and about the important emotional support her colleagues gave her when her father had been ill.

Finally, the relationship between teacher and principal was also an important aspect of the emotional workloads of teachers in this study. Principals themselves have heavy workloads, the principal representative explained, and in most rural schools they have teaching duties in addition to their administrative responsibilities. The principal's role is a very important one, and it can impact teachers' relationships with their colleagues as well, particularly when a principal is perceived as singling out certain teachers for favour or criticism. A rural elementary teacher explained: "*Principals have a lot of influence. They set the tone for the atmosphere of the whole school.*" An urban primary teacher agreed: "*I think ultimately the principal will determine the climate of the school.*" This

means that a principal who is perceived to be supportive can do a lot to help teachers deal with their workloads, emotional and otherwise. However, when a principal is perceived to be overly authoritarian, disorganized, or simply ineffective, it can lead to a very challenging relationship. An urban primary teacher spoke at length about the different principals with whom she had worked. She said that she feels that the current principal at her school is very disorganized, comes up with a lot of ideas but does not follow them through, which can be frustrating for teachers.

*[A previous principal] was really organized but ... [y]ou didn't know if he was your friend or your mortal enemy; you really had to be careful around him. ... That's it; principals get their own pressure. Principals get all the calls from parents, the disgruntled parents, and they have to deal with the school board.*

One urban elementary teacher hesitated and appeared nervous when she started to tell me about the staff-principal relationship at her school. I assured her that she did not have to tell me, but she then whispered,

*This is a very difficult school. The kids are really, really good, but ... the type of administration that's here ... good people, but just the way that they administer ... your professionalism is taken away from you, there's no decision-making on your part at all! Even if you sent home a letter, it has to be passed in to the office first to be read; you don't get any say in where we'd like to go next year, or what you'd like to see happen in the school. It's all dictated. And that was very difficult for me: when I came here last year, I cried every day when I went home. I just didn't understand! ... We've had a number of new teachers come this year, and they've found the same thing - very, very difficult.*

In contrast, other teachers talked about how wonderful it was to have a supportive principal. A rural primary teacher, for example, talked about the encouraging “*pep talk*” that her principal had given her to make her feel better when she was feeling guilty about being unable to help a child who was missing a great deal of time at school. Another rural primary teacher talked about how much the principal in her school helps to set a

comfortable atmosphere in the school that helps to relieve some of the pressures of teachers' workloads:

*This is a great school to work in and I've got a really great network of friends and colleagues here. The new principal is fantastic! I hope we don't lose him. He's really good. He's always there to help and take some stress off your shoulders if you think you need some help or whatever. It hasn't always been that good!*

An urban primary teacher who is also working with a new principal enthused that she has really improved the working conditions for teachers: *"I think she has a gift of letting you operate as an adult ... she lets you do your job. ... It's much more empowering as a teacher ... you can see the difference in the staff."*

Clearly, emotional work, and "emotional geographies" (Hargreaves, 2001) are a very important and complex element of teachers' workloads.

#### **4.4 Specific Tasks**

Besides these overarching challenges, teachers in this study described a number of specific, demanding tasks that they felt added considerably to their workloads. The most important of these are supervision duty, paperwork, preparation and correcting, student evaluations, and implementing the 'Pathways' program for students with special learning needs. These closely match the main challenges identified by teachers in Dibbon's (2004) survey of Newfoundland and Labrador teachers' workloads.

##### **4.4.1 Supervision Duty**

*The most difficult period is when you have to go in right after lunch duty ... you just need a chance to unwind and you can't. Because you're going around policing, with your adrenaline up, just waiting for something to happen that you have to deal with ... and then the bell rings*

*and you go in class and you've just got to switch gears suddenly and be an enthusiastic teacher of this subject. It wears your patience, so then you've got no patience left for the rest of the afternoon.*

### **Rural elementary teacher**

Supervising children during breaks, especially at lunchtime, is a serious issue for twenty of the teachers in this study. Dibbon's (2004) study showed that Newfoundland and Labrador teachers spend an average of nearly four hours per week supervising students (p. 14). However, as teachers in this present study pointed out, the problem with supervision duty is not so much that the amount of time is too onerous, but that it reduces or eliminates a teacher's breaks. The frequency of supervision duty varies widely among different schools, and depends on many factors, including the teacher-student ratio in the school, the particular physical layout of the school, the number of children who ride the bus or who go home for lunch, *et cetera*. In this sample of primary and elementary school teachers, some are on duty at some point every day, whether this is before school, at recess, at lunchtime, or after school; others (especially those in smaller schools) may only be on duty once a week, but for every break during that day. Different teachers have different preferences for the duty arrangements, but nearly all agreed that lunch duty is particularly onerous. Teachers explained that after working with children all morning, they need the break to clear their heads. On days when they have to supervise children during the lunch period, teachers talked about and wrote in their task-diaries about gulping down their lunch as quickly as they could, eating while walking around supervising, or even skipping lunch altogether. As illustrated in the example above, teachers described it as very fatiguing to go straight from the classroom to being on duty, to a very rushed lunch, and back to the classroom again.

For rural teachers in some areas, supervision duty has increased as schools have been closed, and children are bussed further, and thus no longer return home for lunch. As the NLTA representative explained,

*supervision has increased because we've closed a lot of small schools, and bussing has become the norm. First when I taught we always got a lunch hour break because kids went home, so you'd have probably an hour and a half for lunch. Now, while that was a break away from kids, it gave teachers an opportunity to do a bit of correcting or to unwind ...*

A rural primary teacher agreed, saying that

*[l]unch duty is a killer, and we were talking about it in the staff room today, because when I started teaching up here, the kids all went home to lunch. ... I used to go home every day. But since [students travel from farther away]... they cut the lunch hour down and all we seem to do is lunch duty ... It's exhausting: it's a long day.*

Three of the rural teachers in very small schools, however, said that supervision is not as much a burden for them as for teachers in larger schools because they are responsible for only a small number of students. In contrast, in some urban schools, teachers supervise hundreds of students at a time. One urban primary teacher commented:

*I'm tired by the time I come home. I need to get out and just clear my head. There's no time to do that! Because if I'm on lunch duty, yes, I can go out to the playground, but I certainly can't clear my head. Now I've got three hundred youngsters to watch and break up the fights and this one pushed this one, that's just non-stop then for half an hour.*

Whether they work in rural or urban areas, however, teachers in this study almost universally describe "duty days" as being extra rushed. Another urban primary teacher explained:

*We do duty because we have to do it, but boy it's not easy. No, it's not easy. You count down the duty days ... I've done it, 'My gosh, how many*

*duties do I have left now?’ And it’s rush, you’re always beating the clock, get up the stairs, you’re on your way down, you’re late getting to class cause you’re up there dealing with an issue.*

Teachers also talked about how the lack of breaks on a ‘duty day’ makes it difficult to find the energy for other tasks such as correcting, preparing lessons, or attending after-school meetings with colleagues or parents.

Finally, teachers in this study suggested that relief from supervision duty, particularly during their lunch break, would make a significant difference to their workloads. During the interviews, I asked teachers to identify the main solutions that they would like to see implemented in order to improve their workloads. I included a list of the top ten most frequently mentioned recommendations in the report that I prepared for the NLTA (*See Appendix D*). Relief from supervision duty was among teachers’ top ten recommendations.

#### **4.4.2 Paperwork**

Many of the teachers in my study also described being overwhelmed by the amount of paperwork they have to do for student evaluations, the Pathways programs, school development activities, and other administrative requirements. I heard over and over again that teachers feel that paperwork of all kinds is taking up much too much of their time. Those who had been teaching for many years generally agreed that paperwork has increased quite dramatically in recent years. As one urban elementary teacher noted, *“in the last few years we have so much paperwork, it’s unbearable.”* A rural primary teacher who was away from the profession for many years said,

*I find now, this time back, there's a lot more demands in terms of paperwork from the school board as well as in terms of records of the kids and a lot of things are so individualized. And there's a lot of paperwork with meetings and professional development kind of things that we didn't have when I was back teaching earlier in the '80s. There's a lot of extra things interfering with my job of teaching.*

An urban elementary teacher talked about how part of the pressure of paperwork is increasing concerns with accountability:

*In this whole world of legalities and suing ... There's always, in the back of your mind, you're always hoping and praying that no one's going to, in five years time, say 'You didn't recommend [a student] for a Pathway 3 or 4 and he should be - why didn't you?' ... You're in a very vulnerable position...you're educating a child and everything has to be documented and it's okay if you did, but what happens if you didn't, and then realize the child is really struggling in [the next grade]? You often second-guess yourself sometimes. ... You're a little bit afraid of what's going to happen if you don't do something [on paper].*

The task-diaries also showed most teachers spending an hour or more during breaks and after school completing paperwork of various kinds. One urban primary teacher stated that paperwork is the most time-consuming part of her workload, between Pathways forms, report cards, and the 'personal growth' plans that teachers have to complete. In addition, she said,

*Then they came out with the Language Arts Profile. Two pages, double sided, so four pages, it's actually an 11'' by 17'' page, in addition to the report cards! That has to be on-going this year. ... That's all paperwork! ... I kept saying to myself, why does it seem like I have more and more schoolwork? It's the paperwork, piling up and up and up!*

I will discuss the link between paperwork and increased accountability standards for teachers further in Chapter 10, and explain how an increase in emphasis on accountability and paperwork can be better understood by examining professionalism in teaching as an ideology.

A reduction in paperwork was also a very high priority for the teachers in this study – again, it was one of the top ten recommendations that teachers identified.

#### **4.4.3 Planning, Preparation and Correcting**

Teachers also explained to me that their jobs require a great deal of time for planning and preparing activities, lessons and evaluations, and for correcting student work. Teachers said that the amount of time allotted for these tasks in the school day varied greatly from school to school – while some of the teachers in this study have thirty minutes of “prep time” every day, others have as few as four periods in a 14-day cycle. In fact, Dibbon’s (2004) study found that eighty percent of primary and elementary teachers have less than thirty minutes of prep time per day, yet they spend an average of 9.25 hours per week on preparation tasks (p. 14).

One urban elementary teacher explained that correcting alone can be “*very time-consuming*” with thirty students: she says that it takes her at least three hours to correct thirty math tests. Prep time also tends to get whittled down pretty quickly by all of the ‘extra’ tasks that teachers have, as one urban primary teacher explained, “*But even when you have prep time, it’s like thirty minutes, and by the time you tie up the last shoelaces, or you’ve got a call to make home to somebody, or you’ve got something that you get paged for from the office ...*”

Teachers explained that going into a classroom unprepared makes the day quite difficult. They have a number of different strategies that they use in order to keep up on their planning and correcting. Many stay late after school and work in the evenings and on

weekends, often returning to the school in order to do so. Others try to work as much as possible through their recess and lunch breaks. Particularly for those with young children, as I discuss below, this can mean cramming in schoolwork whenever and wherever they can: teachers who are also parents talked about doing their schoolwork after their children are in bed, working until 10:30 p.m., midnight, or even up to 1:00 or 2:00 a.m. In fact, one rural primary teacher fits in her correcting by working in the car during her lengthy morning and afternoon commute with her carpool.

Increased preparation time was also one of the top ten recommendations made by teachers in this study. Teachers said that they require at least one period set aside in each school day that they can dedicate to preparation activities. Dibbon's (2004) study supports this suggestion, recommending a minimum of 180 minutes per week of preparation time for all teachers (p. 33, citing Hargreaves, 1992).

#### **4.4.4 Student Evaluations**

Over and over again, I heard that, as one urban primary teacher put it, "*report card time is crazy.*" Teachers talked to me in great detail about the pressure they feel at report card times, and the many hours they spend working on students' report cards. In fact, Dibbon's (2004) study showed that Newfoundland and Labrador teachers spend an average of 23 to 29 extra hours on preparing report cards over each two to three week reporting period (p. 18). With three reporting periods per year, the work of tabulating grades, writing comments, and entering report card information into their school district's reporting system is a very important workload concern for most primary and elementary teachers in this study. One urban primary teacher described the reporting process: "*It's*

*so time-consuming, but you don't have any time to do it!"* She and other teachers explained that the only time that they have to work on report cards is in the evenings and on weekends, and that the challenge of fitting many extra hours of work into an already very busy schedule makes report card time incredibly stressful.

Again, one of teachers' top ten recommendations to improve their workloads was allotted time for completing report cards and other student evaluations. In the words of one urban primary teacher,

*one of the things I'd like to see ... is some time for the evaluation that they expect. ... At least give us a day each term to do our report cards ... at least something to alleviate that pressure at reporting time, that's phenomenal.*

Other types of student evaluations, such as running records, where teachers keep on-going records of students' progress in reading throughout the year, are also very time-consuming. As one rural primary teacher explained:

*At the beginning of the year, in January, I had to do a reading assessment on all of my children. ... now I've got to go back and do it sometime again before the year is finished, and it's a long process, for every student. It's not just reading. You have to test their reading, you have to test their vocab, you have to test their phonics, all those kind of things. And then there's a four-page analysis that you have to do on all the students, at the end of the year. It's really in-depth, and that's really time-consuming too.*

These evaluations are also difficult because teachers are expected to evaluate individual students while the others are working, which is very challenging with young students who often need help with their work.

Standardised evaluations, such as the provincial curriculum reference tests (CRTs) are also a workload concern for teachers. In addition to the concern about how students will

place in comparison to the rest of the students in the province, the testing process takes several weeks. This requires a lot of effort on the part of the teacher to keep students motivated. One rural primary teacher clarified that, *“it’s not administering the test as such that’s the big deal for me, it’s the constant encouragement, the constant talking I have to do to keep the children upbeat and happy about what they’re doing.”* Teachers also expressed concern that the evaluations might be seen as a reflection of their own work. However, the Department of Education representative strongly countered this view, explaining that the evaluations are used solely to assess students’ learning, in cooperation with teachers, and never to evaluate teachers themselves.

#### **4.4.5 ‘Pathways’ Program**

The ‘Pathways to Programming and Graduation’ was introduced into the primary and elementary system in Newfoundland and Labrador in 1996. ‘Pathways’, as it is generally known, is a five-part framework “that enables teachers to tailor curriculum to meet the individual strengths and needs of all students” (Department of Education, 2008).

Pathway 1 refers to the standard curriculum, which is followed by most students.

Pathway 2 refers to the provincial curriculum with accommodations or support (such as different teaching methods, materials, or evaluations). Pathway 3 refers to a modified course, based on the provincial curriculum but with different learning outcomes.

Pathway 4 refers to an entirely different course that no longer resembles the original course from the standard curriculum. Pathway 5 refers to an entirely different curriculum, based on daily living skills, for example, rather than academics (Department of Education, 2008). ISSP refers to an Individual Student Support Plan, and it is the specific plan designed for each child with special needs (those on Pathways 2 through 5).

The recent Commission study of the ISSP and Pathways program (Department of Education, 2007c) did a very thorough examination of the problems with this program, and so I will not go into too much detail on this topic. The Department of Education representative put it this way:

*I think what we've heard is the whole Special Ed area is what contributes the most [to teachers' workloads]. And we haven't really provided them the tools to manage it better. When we introduced the ISSP-Pathways model, there was in-service, but it wasn't sufficient to ask teachers to make judgements on programming for children when they don't have a Special Education background. So they're quite right when they say that this is a huge undertaking, because when you look at it, an individual plan for a child, then you want to get it right. So we're sensitive to that, but [fixing the 'Pathways' system] would require a lot of work because it's a very complex system. ... But we're working towards it. There are seventy-five recommendations in that report, so that will give you an indication of how complex it is.*

The teachers in this study echoed the same concerns that were raised in the Commission report – primarily, that although they support the goals of accommodating different learning needs in their classroom, the Pathways program is far too complicated and time-consuming, and that not only is it a very heavy workload burden for teachers, it fails to meet the needs of many students. As a rural primary teacher put it, *“What we were told Pathways was going to be and what they turned out to be is just so insanely different. And it's not meeting the needs of anyone.”*

Many of the teachers with whom I spoke had to make special accommodations for up to one third to one half of their students, and felt that they simply did not have the time or resources to do justice to all of these children. As well, as shown in the example below, teachers talked about the need for more time to offer general remedial help for students

who need just a little extra tutoring help in order to succeed. An urban primary teacher talked about the time and effort that she puts into even just the initial step of informing parents that their children may need to be put on an alternative 'Pathway':

*Of my thirty-one, I had nine children to be tested and those parents will have to be contacted and the ones who qualify for service will come in for ISSPs and the ones who don't, we have to call and have a conversation. Now, your conversation on the phone is usually half an hour, because they have questions and they want to know what they can do. Because what you're saying to them is [their children] are not quite meeting the outcomes, but they don't qualify for service, so who's going to fill in this gap here? Well, we don't have remedial teachers anymore, reading recovery or anything like that, so the parents have to fill in the gap. So that's not something that you can call and say in five minutes.*

Changes to Pathways were another of the top ten recommendations that teachers identified to improve their workloads. It is important to reiterate that teachers feel that the necessary changes to Pathways are not just a matter of reducing meeting times and paperwork, although these are very much needed. For teachers, one of the most important points is that the whole special needs system is too complicated, and that they need to be able to give students extra support without going through a lengthy process. Finally, teachers also talked about sometimes being frustrated by their lack of decision-making power in regards to the Pathways program. One rural primary teacher, for example, spoke at length about how bad she felt for not meeting one of her student's needs, and talked about the frustration of having to implement a program that she did not believe was in the child's best interests. She had a child in her class who she felt was "completely lost" but,

*No one will hear me! ... This person [at the board office] is telling me she has to be kept on the regular program, Pathway 2 - he's never met her! He's reading a file about her ... he's never actually sat down and talked to her, and seen her in action, in class. But I have!*

In fact, this sense of not being listened to was very common among the teachers in this study, as I discuss further in section 4.6.

#### **4.5 Lack of material and human resources**

*It's not like you don't want to share. But you're just so strapped for money to buy these things, that if they're lost, or missing, or have to be replaced, well, where's it going to come from? All you ever hear from the school is 'We don't have enough money. We don't have enough money.'*

**Urban primary teacher**

As I discussed in Chapter 2, in Newfoundland and Labrador, as in much of the rest of North America, the education system and other public institutions have been 'restructured' in recent years. This has taken place within a conservative or neo-liberal business approach, with the goal of reducing the cost of public institutions as much as possible. This has meant cutbacks to both human and material resources, with the goal of making the education system (like the health system, and other aspects of the public sector) more 'efficient' (Acker, 1996; King and Peart, 1992; Leithwood *et al*, 2002; Sears, 2003).

In this study, a lack of human and material resources was a very common concern that teachers said they believe has an important effect on their workloads. Teachers talked about the extra work it takes to find material resources when those that are provided are insufficient. They also talked about the cost and work associated with buying their own materials for their classrooms; the place that fundraising now takes in their workloads; the problems caused by outdated or poorly maintained technologies; and the challenges faced when there is a lack of support staff.

In terms of material resources, teachers told me that many of their learning resources are out-of-date or do not match up with the learning outcomes that teachers are expected to follow. An urban elementary teacher talked about the extra work it takes when learning resources are insufficient: “[Y]ou have to pull resources from everywhere. And that takes time ... I try to get my Outcomes covered like I’m required to but with a totally different set of materials because you can’t use the texts that’s provided for you.” A rural primary teacher said, “We need more resources in many ways, shapes and forms. I’m using books in my kindergarten classroom that my own kids used twenty years ago, and that’s all I have.” In addition, another rural elementary teacher said that sometimes, course materials are not available to teachers until the school year has started.

*I want to go back in September with my course prepared for the year. This is something else that has really burned me up for the last 7, 8 years: doing courses, texts not in until September. If a publishing company can't produce our texts and have it ready for June, you know what? We're better off putting it off until the next year. Teachers should not be given texts in September.*

Finally, teachers explained that there is very frequently a lack of fit between the learning outcomes that teachers are expected to follow and the learning resources that are provided. A rural primary teacher stated,

*I would really like to see if they could get a textbook and design the outcomes from the textbook. Just make it match. Because you have to make up for stuff that's not in the book, and then children are trying to study for a test, they don't have it in the book. Parents are confused. ... And we're busy enough anyway. ... at the end of the day you've got to prepare for eight or nine classes for the next day.*

Teachers also talked about the work of gathering resources such as the hands-on learning materials needed for classes like Math and Science, particularly in rural areas where there are limited supplies available. A rural primary teacher observed,

*If I were to bring in, each morning, what is asked for in a lesson, every morning I'd be going off with an armload of things. ... I'm always lugging in things for Math, and for Science. I'm lugging in potatoes, and I'm looking for little toys, and all the different shapes that they're looking for, and the different little objects. And I tell you, lots of the time, you can't find most of the little things they're asking for, anyway. I mean, it's fine for them to have a book there, and every lesson, they're calling for these materials, and then different ones for the next one, but it's just totally unrealistic. You just can't do it.*

Teachers in this study reported that many teachers end up spending their own money on resources for their classrooms, up to \$150 or more. Teachers explained that there are wide differences between the resources available in different schools – largely based on the socio-economic status of the families attending the school, since those who are better off financially can afford to pay higher school fees. An urban primary teacher who has worked in many different schools, and who frequently spends her own money on extra materials that the school cannot afford, explained how much schools differ:

*At [one urban school], we got \$125 and all we had to do was bring in the receipt, and you could buy things throughout the year. But at [another urban school], we don't get anything. The requisitions were used by the school to pay for the children who couldn't pay their school fees.*

For new teachers, who change positions and schools frequently, this can end up being particularly costly. If they are not teaching the same grade from year to year, they may not be able to re-use their resources from year to year.

A lack of material resources can also cause tension among staff, as illustrated in the opening quote in this section. Furthermore, because of this lack of resources, as one rural primary teacher explained, *“Fundraising becomes a huge part of the school. And it should never be. ... the children in this province should be better funded.”* Involving students, parents, and teachers in raising funds for the school, for extra-curricular activities, computer equipment, or other events or items deemed appropriate by the school administrator, is a common practice in schools across Newfoundland and Labrador. This might be done through selling tickets, holding a benefit concert, selling candy or chocolates, or other activities. A rural primary teacher explained that fundraising creates extra work for teachers,

*Because we may not always be directly involved in the fundraisers, but there’s always money coming in that you gotta keep straight. You’ve got to make sure it goes out and there’s always someone who’ll call you and download on you that they don’t want another fundraiser, and that kind of stuff. It’s just another stress on your shoulders that you really shouldn’t have to have.*

Problems with resources such as computers and photocopiers were also reported to create workload problems for many participants. One female urban teacher described photocopying as *“another huge source of frustration.”* She explained that, *“half the time you’re in the middle of the photocopying and the machines shut down or they’re jamming up or they get overheated so the paper crinkles, and nothing ever works the way it’s supposed to.”* Another female urban teacher argued that, *“every school should have new [photocopying] machines, because they’re always terribly, terribly frustrating to work with. They’re the teachers’ nightmare.”* Several teachers explained that the frustration of working with poorly functioning photocopiers was made worse by the fact that paper

consumption is monitored and controlled. Computers were also frequently described as “slow” and “unreliable”. The task-diary of one female urban teacher showed that her computer broke down that day, and so she was unable to complete the work that she had planned for the afternoon. Computers that are designated for students often do not work well either, and so teachers cannot depend on having computer classes run smoothly. A rural elementary teacher explained, *“I went upstairs recently just to do some work myself in the computer lab and there were three kids ahead of me, and I went in and one of them looked at me and said, ‘Miss, I don’t think there’s any more computers working,’ in a lab of twenty computers.”* Another noted in her task-diary that the first ten minutes of computer class (over a third of the twenty-eight minute period) were spent fixing problems with the computers. A rural primary teacher said that she could not help but compare the computers at her school to those in other public institutions: *“You’d never find a computer sent to a hospital lab that somebody used in an office somewhere and decided it wasn’t up to their standard. It’s like the poor cousins, you know. You can have the junk.”* She also explained that in rural schools technology problems are also sometimes exacerbated because equipment is given to the school, but there is no staff member with the proper training in its use. Her school was given a networkable photocopier, for example, that is barely used because, *“nobody knows how to use it”*.

Improved material resources were another of the top ten recommendations made by teachers in this study. Teachers across the province expressed the need not only for more resources, but also for improvements in those they use now. An urban elementary teacher said that too much of teachers’ time is taken up trying to make up for insufficient

resources: “[T]hey’re all great initiatives, as long as they give you the resources, give you time. Give us resources and time to get through the programs. ... We’re all so stressed out over what we don’t get done, because it’s impossible to get through it all.”

Teachers also identified a lack of human resources, including support staff, as contributing to their workloads. Shortages of student assistants, and specialists such as educational psychologists, speech language pathologists, and guidance counsellors were discussed. Many said that there were simply not enough specialists to serve the needs of all the students in their school, and so the waiting times for services such as speech therapy were extremely long. In the meantime, teachers try to help students the best way they can. One rural elementary teacher explained that in her school, the guidance counsellor is only there one day per week, which means that is the only day that ISSP meetings can be held. She said that if that day also happens to be the day she is on supervision duty, it is “*terrible*” because she must work through the whole school day without a break, and then go to one or more ISSP meetings after school.

The student assistant representative to whom I spoke explained that there are not enough hours allotted for student assistants for all of the students with needs, and that it takes several months at the beginning of the year to get all the student assistants in place. This means more work for student assistants as well as for teachers: “*It’s not impossible for us to have a turnover of three or four different people working with that child in the first two or three months of school. And that’s chaos.*” A rural elementary teacher explained that student assistants and challenging needs teachers are assigned on the basis of the general

student population, not the population of students with special or remedial needs. She said this means that remedial assistance has to be prioritised, so that in schools with many very weak students, there is only time for those with the most severe needs.

*The student assistants are assigned to a school and then it's up to the school to decide how the time is distributed. So most of the time [the special needs children in my class] are on their own. There's never anyone in with them during Health. Last year when they were in my room it was constantly changing ... the first period of the day, [two challenging needs students] were in with me without a student assistant and then they were gone until the period before lunch. Then the student assistant would come in with them for about ten minutes. And then she would go for her break, so I would have them on my own for about ten minutes, which was difficult when we were doing Art because they'd be into an art project and then all of a sudden I'd have no help with them and I would have to be helping them do the art project and get materials and stuff. And I remember one time, I would just not leave them on their own, [but] one of the students needed a sheet of construction paper and I went quickly to the staff room [just across the hall] and in that split second, I heard a 'bang'. One of the challenging needs students had gotten up out of her seat and fell against the door. She wasn't hurt, but I said 'Never again!' That was a big fright.*

The need for more human resources, particularly in order to offer remedial help to more students and to more fully address special needs, was another very important recommendation for many teachers. As well, teachers argued that the formulas for allocating student assistants and special education teachers should be based on need rather than on the general student population. As a rural primary teacher explained,

*We need to have student assistants; we need the formula changed. ... If I had a student assistant, then I could plan things for that little girl [with special needs] to do there in the classroom. I would have somebody who could scribe for that little boy ... I could plan that maybe the student assistant could sit with these students, and I could read to him every day. But with one body, and all of these children, I can't do it.*

The parent representative agreed: "I'd like to see ... more teachers in the classroom and more remedial assistance for students that are struggling"

Finally, a rural primary teacher explained that when schools have sufficient resources, it shows respect from the public for teachers and their work, something that she feels is sorely lacking.

*I do think there needs to be a massive infusion into schools, maintenance and supplies. When its perceived that what you're doing is valuable to society and the community, then I think its makes it easier to put up with the hard stuff you have to deal with.*

In fact, a general lack of respect for teachers was a very important concern among the teachers in this study. I discuss this below.

#### **4.6 Invisibility**

*In my thirty years of teaching, most of the years I just felt like when I left in June nobody appreciated anything that I did that year. And I don't think I'm the only one that feels that way.*

**Rural primary teacher**

*We've been taught to keep our mouths closed. ... Nobody wants to be reprimanded and generally, most teachers are working hard, right? [Pause.] And it's just easier; it's easier just to go with the flow than to fight it.*

**Urban elementary teacher**

In Canada and the United States, the relative status of teaching as an occupation has actually remained quite stable over the years (Lortie, 1975), and teaching tends to be ranked quite high compared to other women-dominated occupations (Messing *et al*, 1997, p. 60, citing Asselin *et al*, 1994). Despite teachers' status, however, their level of autonomy and decision latitude is in some ways quite restricted, and Canadian studies consistently show that teachers feel that they have very little real input into the

development of curricula and other educational programs (King and Peart, 1992; Leithwood *et al*, 2002; Messing *et al*, 1997). As I mentioned in Chapter 2, the education system in Newfoundland and Labrador is quite hierarchical, with teachers subordinate to school administrators, who are subordinate to school district officials, as well as to the provincial Department of Education.

In this study, perhaps the most striking finding of all is that the teachers to whom I spoke feel that their work is, in many ways, invisible. Teachers said that they sense a lack of respect for their work from the public and even from their employers, and they talked about the multitude of 'extra' tasks for which they are responsible, but which take place after school hours, and are unseen by the public. Teachers also connected the invisibility of their work to a feeling that many had that they were unable to speak out about workload concerns.

Many of the teachers in this study talked about how there seems to be very little understanding of the difficulties and challenges that teachers face. One urban primary teacher argued that, "*for the most part, people have no idea in the run of the day what we do. ... It's very demanding mentally, and I don't think people realize that.*" An urban elementary teacher agreed, saying that even teachers' own families and friends do not fully realize all the things that they have to do.

*They don't see the day-to-day things that we have to deal with in the corridor, it's a constant. You're trying to please everybody, you're trying to make sure that everyone's okay, everybody's learning what they should. The responsibility that's involved, people don't truly understand.*

Teachers explained that it is easy to overlook the difficult aspects of their work because it is made up of so many different, small tasks – tasks that individually, would be manageable, but that in combination can be quite overwhelming. In fact, as they reviewed their task-diaries, many teachers commented that it simply had not been possible to write down every single task that they do in the run of a day. Over and over again, teachers told me that they do not just teach – they counsel, advise, settle conflicts, wipe tears, apply band-aids, calm tempers, and are constantly changing from one role to the next. A rural primary teacher explained it this way: *“All day long, I’ve said many times, ‘You’re a nurse, you’re a doctor, you’re a psychologist, you’re a social worker,’ and some days it’s too many hats. It’s way too many hats.”* One urban primary teacher argued strongly that the ‘extra’ tasks that primary and elementary teachers do are taken for granted as part of their “mothering” role: *“These extra duties, under the umbrella of motherhood, have to be recognized as not just babysitting. Because sometimes that’s what people think of us as.”*

Many teachers felt that the lack of respect or appreciation that they perceived for their work is linked to the resentment that many other workers feel because of the vacation time that teachers have, which includes a two-month summer break. However, teachers told me that they did not think they would be physically or mentally capable of teaching year-round, without breaks to rejuvenate from the intensity of their work. As one urban primary teacher put it,

*People have said things, like, ‘Oh, you’ve got it made; you’re a teacher, you’ve got all this time off.’ ... I know some brilliant, dedicated, unbelievably hardworking teachers, but if their job was September to August, they could not do it at that intensity. And there would be no such*

*thing as a good teacher, and you'd have a big shortage of teachers. It's a job you can't do without some breaks. You just can't, not to do it properly.*

A rural primary teacher agreed:

*I definitely don't think that people understand being with children all day, and the demands that they put on you. I think that they look at us, and they see the Easter holiday, the Christmas holiday, the summer, the weekends off, and we're not working shift work, and they sort of think, 'Man, you've got it good!' As a matter of fact, people have said it, 'You've got it good.' 'Okay, you think so, huh?' I think that if they had to walk in our shoes for a week they would change their minds, but they definitely have a misconception of what we do in the run of a day, and it isn't as easy as they think it is. And even though they might be the very one who will say, 'Oh, I can't wait for the Christmas holidays to be over, for the youngsters to get back!' And I always try to say, 'Well yeah, you think of us now, after they're back. 'Cause you're dealing with one, and we're dealing with 17, 18, 20, 25. So remember that!'*

A rural elementary teacher said that even though his wife is a teacher, he did not realize what was involved until he became a teacher himself:

*It was a rude awakening for me. I really didn't know that there was as much involved as what it is. I really didn't. ... I've been living with my wife all this time, and she's teaching – and she used to come home in the night time and she'd be at all this work, and she'd be saying 'Oh, I'm so tired', and all this stuff. But I still didn't realize, or have a great appreciation of what she was doing in that classroom. And most parents, I feel, don't.*

Many teachers said that the lack of respect they feel is one of the most frustrating aspects of being a teacher. This urban elementary teacher sees a lot more public support for professions such as nursing than for teaching:

*... and I don't want a pat on the back ... I don't need that, but I would really like for people to be not so judgmental ... And I hear it all the time, even from my own brothers and sisters! 'Oh you got the summer off, you got 'er made' ... I wouldn't do this if I didn't enjoy it, but those are some things that people really need to open their eyes to. Don't be so quick to say, "What a slack job!" And I think people really are saying it a bit more now. It's in the media, it's everywhere.*

Overall, I found the tension and lack of communication between the different levels of the education system to be quite worrisome. The school board representative and Department of Education representative in this study spoke with profound respect for teachers and their work. However, almost all of the teachers expressed a lack of confidence in and mistrust of these organizations. Over and over again I heard statements such as this one from a rural elementary teacher: *"Sometimes I think the Department of Education is in there trying to think of more work for teachers;"* and this one, from an urban elementary teacher: *"I think the school board is constantly coming up with 'make-work projects' for teachers. ... it's just something you have to go through the motions of doing. ... you just do it, it's a farce."* Teachers also talked about feeling a lack of respect for their professional judgement from their employers and from others in the education system. The NLTA representative explained that this can make teachers feel "helpless": *"Teachers have frequently felt that policies are top-down and that they don't get an opportunity to give input into the policies, and if they do on their own initiative, try to, they are perceived as over-stepping their boundaries."* The Department of Education representative, however, saw the relationship with teachers quite differently. She said that the Department of Education is made up largely of former teachers, and works very closely with current teachers in program and policy development. She explained that,

*It's an interesting relationship, because our teachers deliver our curriculum, but they are also participants in the development of the curriculum. We have consultants here at the department, in all of these areas, and the model that we use for developmental work is that we would bring together a working group of practicing classroom teachers. And so the lead for a piece of curriculum or a public exam would be the consultant at the department; however, we rely very heavily on the expertise of our teachers, both from a content perspective and from the student perspective ... So there's a close relationship that's hidden. The*

*public wouldn't see that the department and teachers do work together, but we do.*

However, the issue of problems with the curriculum was a very important one for teachers in this study, and many linked it very directly to teachers' lack of input into curriculum development. The Math curriculum was identified as being particularly over-filled with outcomes, and many teachers felt that the entire philosophy of the Math program was not working. I spoke with an itinerant teacher who was hired to help other Math teachers with the program, and she argued that "*there's just too much there in the curriculum.*" She added, "*It gets frustrating when you finish a unit on something and realize there's two or three kids that really didn't get it, and you really should go back and teach those kids, but you have to have another unit done in another two weeks, so do you take the time?*" I will not go into detail on this issue, as an entire Commission study has been dedicated to the topic (Department of Education, 2007d). However, many of the teachers in this study expressed frustration saying that they felt that teachers had been telling the government for years there were serious problems with the Math program, and that they felt it was only when parents got involved and vocal that the issue was finally addressed. Indeed, their frustrations with the curriculum were certainly not limited to Math. An urban elementary teacher explained that learning outcomes are set by the Department of Education, but that teachers need flexibility because the expectations are simply not realistic in a real classroom situation with so many diverse needs, academic and otherwise:

*Yes, in an ideal situation where every child is average intelligence or above, yeah, you could probably cover all that, but they don't take into consideration the fact that we have to re-teach sometimes. Because you walk in on Monday morning and you've got a child practically crying*

*because they haven't got their homework done, because they couldn't get it. And then once you get that out of them, there's three or four more who have the nerve to say, 'Well, Miss, I didn't get it either.'*

There was continually a strong contrast between the image of the relationship between teachers and the Department of Education that I heard from teachers as opposed to the Department of Education representative. As I mentioned, the Department of Education representative emphasised the close relationship between teachers and her Department, stated that she herself had previously been a teacher, and observed that at the Department of Education, “*we're fully appreciative of the life of a teacher,*” and “*we are sensitive to the workload of teachers on a daily basis.*” However, many of the teachers in this study talked about feeling as though programs and initiatives are being imposed on them by far-removed officials in the education system, who do not understand the challenges and dynamics of classroom teaching. For example, a rural elementary teacher expressed her distrust of the Department of Education by saying,

*[An acquaintance] told me when she worked at the Department of Education, that the people in the Department of Education got no respect for teachers. She couldn't believe it. And it seems like the people who rise to those administrative positions, whether it's at board level, or at the department level ... are people who don't like to be in the classroom. ... Then they've become so out of touch with how things actually work in a classroom that they're making all these decisions that are not possible to implement.*

This perception of employers as distant and out-of-touch with classroom realities was echoed by an urban elementary teacher, who described her experiences of dealing with school district officials this way:

*I remember when I was in [Rural Area], you'd have a visit from the coordinator at the school board every couple of months or whatever. They'd come and see how you're doing, and of course you'd have your kids all ready, their best work out, you got the best lesson ever prepared,*

*and they come in and you impress them and they're so, 'Oh wow, this is going great' and all that stuff. 'Why don't you try this?' and 'Why don't you try that?' ... and I'm [thinking], 'Yeah, right, with this class? In your dreams, it's not going to happen.' But they don't care because they came out and they made a few suggestions and they figured they're doing their jobs, and they go off home and you go like, 'Yeah, but you're not in the real world to suggest that to this class. That would never work here.'*

A sense of invisibility also seems to be a problem for teachers in the sense that almost all of the teachers in this study expressed concern about being able to speak out about problems with their workloads, or with the education system in general. In fact, most were anxious to know the details of how I would keep their identities confidential, and two asked me not to tape-record their interviews at all. Almost all of the teachers asked me at some point to turn off the tape so that they could tell me something without being recorded. An urban primary teacher explained why she thinks that primary and elementary teachers do not generally speak out about their workloads:

*To have to take on another issue is just overwhelming. Because if you decide that you're going to take an issue with something, it's going to take time. It's going to take energy, it's going to take emotion, and it's going to take from what you are doing. Because remember, you're always on maximum!*

Several other teachers connected this lack of willingness to speak out to the fact that theirs is a female-dominated profession. Several teachers said that they feel that one reason why primary and elementary teachers' workloads have become so heavy is because, as women, they tend to simply accept the burdens put on them, and not to protest when they are asked to take on more. A rural elementary teacher said that when she attends meetings where teachers' contract negotiations are discussed, the men teachers are always much more vocal than the women. Another urban primary teacher put it this way:

*I think that being women, you don't speak up enough. We're our own worst enemies. ... Because I know the men that we have on staff are a bit more vocal. But...we take on that role, with the little kids, and we're expected to take it on, and we do it, just like mothers do with their own kids. ... Whether it's afraid to say no, or don't want to say no. [Pause]. I don't know what it is. But we're all guilty of it.*

The NLTA representative explained that the NLTA discourages teachers from making public criticisms and encourages them to instead seek a meeting with their employer to discuss their concerns. In fact, the NLTA representative, school board representative, and Department of Education representative explained that a process for teachers to raise concerns exists through the NLTA, or through their district school board. However, most of the teachers in this study either knew very little about this process, or believed that it was too time-consuming and ineffective. This lack of clarity translates into a sentiment that was expressed over and over again by teachers – a sense of powerlessness to be able to make changes to improve their workloads and their working conditions.

In such a climate, teachers' sense of control and decision-making ability tends to be limited to the four walls of their classroom. As one of the primary teachers in Messing *et al's* (1997) study explained, "Being a teacher in a classroom is like being the lady of the house. You run everything as long as you stay in the house" (p. 60). This restricted level of control may contribute to the frequently noted tendency for teachers to take an individualised approach to their work (Lortie, 1975) - what Hargreaves (1992) calls a "deep-seated culture of individualism and classroom-centredness" (p. 99). Many of the teachers also talked about the desire to retreat into their classrooms. A rural primary teacher described this feeling:

*I always say, 'When I go in, and close the door, and everyone else is gone: the parents are gone home, the principal is in his office, the board office is far away! ... that is the best part of it, right there.'*

Likewise, an urban elementary teacher observed, "*in the perfect world, all teachers would have to do is go in the classroom and teach. ... just let me go in my room, close my door, and let me teach.*"

In the report that I prepared for the NLTA, I argued that there is a culture of mistrust in the education system in Newfoundland and Labrador today. I believe that this is in large part linked to the invisibility that teachers perceive, and the lack of autonomy that teachers told me they experience in many areas of their work. Teachers in this study and others have talked about the impacts on teachers' workloads when the government imposes new education policies without sufficient consultation with teachers (Leithwood *et al*, 2002; Leithwood, 1999). For example, they talked about feeling that they must implement a curriculum into which they have no input and with which they do not agree. In fact, research done elsewhere in Canada has found that teachers often have little input into the development of the curricula that they teach, since government bodies frequently develop these programs, as well as detailed lists of student outcomes, with minimal teacher participation (Messing *et al*, 1997; Leithwood, 2002). This lack of participation in decision-making can create a tension between teachers' obligation to implement official curricula, and the compromises that they feel they have to make in order to adapt externally-imposed programs to the needs of their own class (Messing *et al*, 1997).

While researchers argue that teacher input is crucial to reforming school structures (Connell, 1985, Leithwood *et al*, 2002), many teachers feel that they have very little say in such reforms (King and Peart, 1992; Leithwood *et al*, 2002). As Leithwood *et al* (2002) explain, this lack of control and input also creates, "[t]urbulent, uncertain environments" for teaching that "are the breeding grounds for emotional exhaustion, feelings of significant professional loss or depersonalization, and among many, a reduced sense of personal accomplishment. These psychological states, in extreme form, result in 'burnout', which in turn produces feelings of alienation, indifference, and low self-regard" (p. 27).

Overall, the recommendation that teachers in this study felt could contribute most to improving their workloads was providing a means to give them more of a voice in the education system. As an urban primary teacher put it:

*I certainly think teachers should have more of a voice. I don't know how, but I think teachers should be able to speak up more and say it like it actually is without being reprimanded. I think they need to speak their realities of teaching. And I don't think that's done enough, and I certainly don't think it's done enough for primary and elementary.*

#### **4.7 Note on Kindergarten Teachers**

Of the twenty-four teachers in this study, six currently teach kindergarten (two in a multi-grading situation). However, two others talked about having taught kindergarten in the past as well, and compared that experience to teaching the higher grades. Overall, these teachers agreed that one specific program – KinderStart – is adding a great deal of work to kindergarten teachers' workloads. KinderStart is the preschool program that

introduces four-year-olds and their parents to the kindergarten classroom in four to nine sessions (depending on the school) throughout the year.

Although some of the kindergarten teachers said that they enjoy working with the pre-school children, they explained that it can be very time-consuming to be responsible for both kindergarten and KinderStart, particularly for those who have large classes. As an urban kindergarten teacher explained,

*The first two times the KinderStart children come here, their parents, whom you've never met before, for many of them it's their first experience with a child in school. They want Kindergarten to be warm and fuzzy and they want you to be special and they want everything to be perfect. And they're sitting there watching you trying to teach their children, whom you've never met before, and ... it's really stressful.*

Kindergarten teachers also said that the requirements for the KinderStart program have been increasing. One urban kindergarten teacher said that when the program began, she had to prepare two KinderStart sessions per year, but that she is now required to do eight sessions. Another urban kindergarten teacher said that teachers had raised their concerns about the program early on, but that they had not been listened to.

*[When the KinderStart program started], nobody ever did eight sessions in town, I don't think. Some places out around they did, but in town we were told early when we requested the meeting and sort of said, 'This shouldn't be our responsibility; they should be a totally separate program with early childhood people delivering it. Do it in the daycares if you have to, do it somewhere in the community, but it shouldn't be a school initiative.' And that went nowhere.*

In fact, one of the top ten recommendations of the teachers in this study was that KinderStart should be a separate program that is not the responsibility of Kindergarten teachers.

In schools where there are only enough kindergarten students to make up one class, many kindergarten teachers face the additional challenge of teaching another grade half-time. A rural kindergarten teacher described a previous year when she did not have enough kindergarten students to teach full-time:

*That year I had twenty-four kids in my classroom, and then I went out and taught Grade 5 Language Arts and Art and Health in the afternoon. So you already had that added responsibility, and had two classes basically in my classroom, dealing with them all at one time. I still had the same number of report cards to do, parents to meet with, amount of Xeroxing to do and then take another course load on top is really difficult. That's the really hard part of kindergarten, when you get into smaller schools and you only have half-classes.*

#### **4.8 Conclusion**

These five areas - the all-consuming nature of teaching; emotional work; specific tasks such as supervision, paperwork, planning, preparation and correcting, student evaluations, and the Pathways program; lack of material and human resources; and invisibility – represent the main teaching workload concerns raised by the participants in this study. Teachers expressed the hope that if these areas of their work could be addressed, their workloads could be much improved. However, it was also clear that teachers have many concerns regarding their unpaid domestic workloads, and that there is a great deal of overlap between the two. In the following chapter, I address this very hidden but very important part of teachers' everyday workloads.

## CHAPTER 5: DOMESTIC WORKLOADS

### 5.0 Introduction

Thus far, I have only dealt with the work that teachers do *as* teachers – the paid and unpaid work that they do as employees. However, as I discussed in the literature review in Chapter 2, an individual's workload also includes domestic work for which they are not paid (Dubeck and Dunn, 2002; Hochschild, 2003; Mackintosh, 1988; Messing, 1998) including work to maintain a household, such as cooking, cleaning, and shopping for groceries; work to raise children, such as getting them ready for school, preparing their lunches, helping them with their homework, and bathing them; and work to care for elderly relatives, such as shopping for them, helping them with errands, and bringing them meals. The participants in this study did all of these types of work, and much more. I should note that volunteer work is also an important aspect of workload as well. In this study, teachers' volunteer activities associated with school are considered under their teaching workloads, while other types of volunteer work in the community are considered, for ease of organization, under domestic workloads. However, the busy schedules of these teachers meant that they had little time for volunteer work outside of school.

As I discussed in Chapter 2, research has shown that, although men are increasing their time in domestic work, domestic labour still tends to be divided along gender lines, with women aged 25 to 54 spending about 4.3 hours per day on "unpaid work in the house" compared to 2.5 hours for men in the same age range (Statistics Canada, 2006b; Duxbury and Higgins, 2003). Women tend to be responsible for routine tasks such as cooking,

cleaning, bathing children, and paying bills, while men tend to take responsible for discretionary, outdoor-oriented tasks such as household repairs, car maintenance, or playing with children (Bianchi *et al*, 2000; Hochschild, 2003).

Overall, the teachers in this study recorded an average of over four and a half hours of domestic work on the day they recorded their task-diaries (*Table 1*), and in the interviews, they talked to me in great detail about their challenges in and strategies for balancing their work at school and their work at home, as well as negotiating their domestic work with their partners and children.

### **5.1 “Her Housework”: The Persistent Gendered Division of Domestic Labour**

According to the teachers in this study, in the large majority of their households, it is the women who are almost always responsible for the majority of domestic work. This uneven gendered division of domestic labour seems to be a very common, and stressful, feature of heterosexual relationships, even when both partners also work outside the home (Hochschild, 2003; Statistics Canada, 2006b). As I mentioned in Chapter 3, this is in contrast with research done with same-sex couples, which has found that both gay men and lesbian women tend to share domestic work equally, based primarily on interest in performing household labour (Kurdek, 1993, 2007).

In this study, I was unable to interview the partners of the participants (as did Doucet, 2006, for example), in order to obtain a more balanced view of the division of domestic labour between spouses. However, the participants in this study gave many examples,

both intentionally and unintentionally, about the inequitable sharing of domestic work within their families. For example, an older male rural teacher commented that his wife often gets stressed about getting “*her housework*” done. However, as I mentioned above, statistics indicate that over time, men are slowly taking on more domestic responsibilities (Statistics Canada, 2006b), and so there are likely strong generational differences in the division of domestic labour. A younger male urban teacher and father of a young child talked about trying to share domestic work equally with his wife - for example, making breakfast for his daughter while his wife got ready for work.

Many women teachers said that their husband ‘helps’ them with the housework and childcare, for which they feel fortunate. However, the women also generally expressed the sense that they have the ultimate responsibility, or what Doucet, 2006 refers to as “moral responsibility,” for the tidiness of their homes and the well-being of their children. An urban primary teacher described a situation like this in her household when she said,

*I really do believe that we have more on our plate than men do. I don't think my husband is thinking about if gym pants are clean for my son. I'm sure he doesn't. ... I am a firm believer that we do have more to organize, more to contend with, more to have things flowing.*

She gave the example that her husband sometimes goes away for several weeks to work, and she takes care of the children and all the household work. “*But I really think that if I had to leave my home for a couple of weeks, when I came back there would be a lot of things for me to do. Things that [men] don't even see.*” In fact, it was clear in this study that women not only felt like they had to take on more and more work as teachers, but that at home, they also felt pressure to ‘do it all’. This was the situation described by

another urban elementary teacher said that it is an accepted reality that women have a lot to do.

*But it's just that, maybe it's like my mother I suppose, you got this 'to do' list, and you're never finished your 'to do' list because you're always adding to it. And I suppose really it's true: there's times I'll say to someone else, 'Are there more hours in your day than there is in mine? Because I can't get it all done.'*"

However, this is not to say that women teachers in this study simply accepted total responsibility for domestic work. Indeed, they often talked about negotiating their domestic work with their spouses, and sometimes their teenaged children. For example, an urban elementary teacher who described one of the most equitable divisions of domestic labour said that she and her husband negotiate the housework and childcare according to their interests:

*I do most of the housework - the laundry and the housework - my husband does most of the groceries and the cooking, thank goodness. And he'll do the supper dishes and all that while I do the kids' homework. ... Normally on Sundays he'll prepare 2 or 3 meals for the week that we freeze so I don't have a lot of cooking to do*

One urban primary teacher said that she makes a conscious effort not to take on too much. She said that some of her women friends do take on all of the work at home, but that she tries to make sure that she and her husband both take responsibility. She said that it can, however, be a struggle. She negotiates with her husband to trade off with him for time on her own, but complained that he does not always understand why she needs time to herself. An urban elementary teacher also negotiates with her husband for time to themselves for physical activity. However, she said that while her husband manages to find time for physical activity, she cannot. She said,

*My husband says, 'If you did work out, you'd have a lot more energy.' 'Cause he [works out] four days a week no matter what. The house could be crumbling down, he takes that time for himself. And I'm thinking, 'Oh my, I need your help.' But he needs that time. I filled out a membership a couple times, brought it home, filled it all out and it's still sitting around.*

Other women teachers said that while they try to negotiate domestic work with their male partners according to their interests, they feel that the male partner simply chooses to do the tasks that he enjoys, while the woman is left with the more monotonous tasks. A rural elementary teacher put it this way, "*Well, you know, most times he does whatever he feels like doing, and I do the rest.*"

Participants' domestic workloads also varied greatly depending on their particular 'place' in life. For example, as I will discuss in detail below, mothers with young children talked about struggling with very heavy domestic workloads. In contrast, young single teachers living on their own and older teachers whose children have grown, often compared themselves to those with young children and recognised that their domestic work was greatly reduced in comparison. For example, the task-diaries showed that, in contrast to the very busy mornings of teachers with children, an older male rural elementary teacher with no children at home could enjoy leisure activities, such as watching television in the morning. In fact, in the interview, this teacher said that mornings are the most relaxing time for him. Likewise, a young single rural elementary teacher explained that she has very few domestic work responsibilities because she has no partner, no dependents, and is living with relatives: "*I know for sure that I wouldn't be able to do what I'm doing if I had a family and my own home and stuff. It wouldn't be possible. I would just be way too busy and something would get neglected.*"

## 5.2 Mothers of Young Children

*I've always said that I've got two of the most thankless jobs in the world. I'm a mother. And I'm a teacher.*

**Rural primary teacher  
and mother of three**

*I'm a full-time mom, full-time wife, full-time teacher.*

**Urban primary teacher  
and mother of two**

In this study, I found that teachers who are mothers of young children (as well as one exceptional single father) deal with particularly heavy workloads. Their work in caring for young children at school continues directly into work caring for their children at home, creating an almost unending workday (Carpentier-Roy, 1991). In fact, although the numbers are very small, it is interesting to note that the task-diaries showed that the mothers with young children (those aged twelve and under) do over three hours more domestic work per day than those with no children, and only one mother of young children, a teacher who did nearly eleven hours of schoolwork on the day recorded, did less domestic work than a teacher without children at home. In addition, the mothers of young children in this study recorded an average of only a half hour per day for themselves, as compared to an average of over three leisure-time hours for those with no children at all. Only one teacher with no children at home had as little leisure time as any mother of young children, and this was a new teacher who put in the highest number of teaching hours of any participant: an incredible twelve and a half hours on the day recorded (*Table 2*). Overall, these data from the task-diaries paint a picture that is very reminiscent of Artazcoz, Borrell, and Benach's (2001) finding that "working class women 'finance' the double burden of job and family demands with reductions in their

**TABLE 2: MOTHERS OF YOUNG CHILDREN AND  
TEACHERS WITH NO CHILDREN AT HOME**

<b>MOTHERS OF YOUNG CHILDREN (&lt; 12 years)</b>				
<b>Participant</b>	<b>Teaching Work</b>	<b>Domestic Work</b>	<b>Commuting</b>	<b>Leisure</b>
5	555	405	120	30
7	565	365	30	40
14	450	570	30	30
21	650	280	20	30
22	495	390	30	45
<i>Average in Minutes</i>	543	402	46	35
<b>Average in Hours</b>	<b>9h 3m</b>	<b>6h 42m</b>	<b>46m</b>	<b>35m</b>
<b>TEACHERS WITH NO CHILDREN AT HOME</b>				
1	590	270	20	120
3	665	140	60	140
4	540	335	20	170
9	505	275	30	180
12	460	240	20	280
15	570	60	30	270
18	570	140	10	300
19	750	260	10	30
<i>Average in Minutes</i>	581	215	25	186
<b>Average in Hours</b>	<b>9h 41m</b>	<b>3h 35m</b>	<b>25m</b>	<b>3h 6m</b>

personal time” (p. 645). Although teachers are generally considered to be middle-class, this statement certainly applies well to the teachers with young children in this study.

It is very important for employers and policymakers to be aware of this extra burden for the many teachers with young children. In fact, I would go even further than the “16-hour workday” of teaching mothers discussed by Carpentier-Roy (1991) to argue that in a sense, teachers who are mothers of young children work twenty-four hours a day. The task-diaries showed these women at work even in the middle of the night: comforting a toddler at 3 a.m., being woken in the middle of the night to give medicine to an ill child, and lying awake trying to figure out childcare arrangements for the next day.

I should note that I heard a great deal about the challenges for mothers of young children not just from these mothers themselves, but from others observing their colleagues in this situation, as well as from mothers of grown children who compared their workloads at present with their workloads when their children were young. This comment from a rural primary teacher with grown children exemplifies the sentiment that I heard over and over again: “*And to think back over it, my God! ... with small kids, I tell you now, I kind of wonders, ‘How did I do it?’*” She added, “*I think when you're teaching you almost needs a nanny ... And a maid.*” Another rural primary teacher, whose children are also now grown, explained,

*I find that I'm more relaxed in my job now than I was then. I just found that then there was a whole lot of pressure, because you knew you had to get everything ready for your next day at school, but you also knew that you've got children. You had to balance your school, your work and your family, and sometimes your family definitely has to come first.*

Many teachers talked about their strategies for balancing teaching and domestic work, as I will discuss below. However, mothers of young children in particular spoke in great detail about the effort they put into fitting in their domestic work wherever and whenever they can. For example, in her task-diary, an urban elementary teacher with two young children described the activities that she fits into what she considers a typical morning, between 7:00 a.m. and 8:15 a.m.: getting herself ready for school, getting her children up, making breakfast for everyone, making the beds, making school lunches, hanging out clothes, putting more clothes in the washer, and putting out the dog. After school, her activities between 4:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m. were equally packed – dropping off recycling, getting groceries, preparing supper, doing dishes from the morning, tidying up, taking in laundry, helping one child with homework, bringing another child to and from soccer practice, weeding the garden, and getting the children ready for bed. After 9:00 pm, her schoolwork began again, and continued past her husband’s bedtime, until 10:40 pm, when she could finally take some time to herself by watching television in bed for half an hour before she went to sleep.

Childcare is a serious workload issue for many teachers. The mothers in this study talked about loving their nurturing role, but also about finding it incredibly difficult to be with children constantly, all day long, every day. One rural primary teacher said that she feels guilty that others are taking care of her young children during the weekdays and so, when she is not in school, *“I honestly do nothing that doesn't involve my children.”* Another rural primary teacher agreed. Talking about when her now-grown children were younger, she said that when she would come home she was so tired, but her children always

needed something. After all day with children, she admitted, *“I had a lot more patience with other kids than I had with my own.”*

An urban elementary teacher also talked about the feeling of being constantly needed, by her students, her husband, her children, her mother, even the children’s group with which she volunteers: *“... sometimes I’m, like, ‘Oh my god, count to 10.’ There’s always somebody that’s needing you. ... there’s always someone demanding a little bit of your time and space and energy. Always.”* She said that even her own children know that she finds it hard sometimes being with children all day: *“My god, they have heard me say [it] like a broken record. Like at bedtime, one of them will say, ‘We know, Mom, you had thirty kids in your class all day and you need to have a break before you go to bed!’”*

Even for teachers with children in their teens, the feeling of being constantly needed can at times be overwhelming, as this rural primary teacher explained:

*I find there are times I come home in the afternoon and – if I had what I really needed, I would be alone, and nobody would even know I existed. That’s the truth. Because I’m mentally drained! And I have said to the girls, ‘Can you give me one half hour, and not ask for anything?’ Because I come home in the evening, and it’s ‘Oh Mom, I need you to sign this!’ ‘And oh yeah, we’re going to this!’ ‘And we need \$20 for this!’ And it’s normal, I’m their Mom, and they’re waiting for me to come home. ... I think it’s just that I’m drained from answering these questions. And I’m tired of explaining things over and over again.*

Another workload issue that many of the teachers with young children found particularly fatiguing was, perhaps ironically, helping their children with their homework. These teachers said that after having already worked all day teaching children, they found it difficult to have to come home and continue doing schoolwork with their own children.

A rural primary teacher with school-aged children said, *“It’s hard. And I got normal*

*kids, who don't like doing homework. It's a bit of a battle sometimes ... It's almost like when you're in school trying to get kids to work and they don't want to.*" An urban elementary teacher's task-diary showed that she spends between an hour and a half and two hours with her special-needs child on homework, as soon as she gets home from school. This teacher admitted that she finds this so tiring that she purposely stays at school for an hour or so, because it is more of a break than going home:

*I usually don't go home until about 4:15, and basically, what I find, to be quite honest with you, is that's kind of downtime for me. To leave school at 3:15 is too busy for me, because when I get home, then things start all over again!*

She sighed and said, *"Homework, of course, is a nightmare. It's a nightmare for kids and it's a nightmare for parents!"* Another urban elementary teacher agreed, saying that her son needs a lot of help to study, but she always feels torn because *"the only thing is, if I'm spending three hours studying with him on Sunday afternoon, that's time away from me at my work."*

Ironically, because of the extremely heavy combined workloads of teaching mothers with young children, they may be even less likely to speak out about their workload problems. Many of these teachers said that there was really nothing that could be done to help them with their workloads: that they did not have time to worry about changing their situation, they just had to keep going. For example, one urban elementary teacher and mother of three talked about how earlier in the year, she had been so overwhelmed that she was coming home every day and crying with frustration and exhaustion. She had a very large class with many special needs, and she felt that the administrators at her school were extremely demanding and were making things more difficult rather than better. Even

though she had quite a bit of experience, she had even considered leaving her job, but she knew that she needed it to help support her family. She said that eventually she realized that there was no use in complaining because there was nothing she could do to change her situation: *“And you say, I either have to get out of it or I have to live with it! And if I live with it, this is what I have to do!”*

### **5.3 Balance?**

Teachers in this study talked a great deal about trying to balance their schoolwork and their household work. In addition to negotiating domestic work with their spouses, as described above, teachers told me about the strategies and shortcuts they have developed to try to manage their teaching and domestic workloads, including routine and organization, multi-tasking, and short-cuts and compromises.

Many teachers said that they depended on routine and very careful organization of their time in order to balance their teaching and domestic work. An urban elementary teacher said, *“For me it’s just routine, everything has to be very rigid, and if you go off the routine at all, it just creates chaos. Everything has to be done on a time schedule.”*

Teachers talked about trying to organize almost every waking moment in order to get their work done. A rural primary teacher explained: *“Any two minutes that I have, it’s pretty well planned out. ... for me that’s what I need to do to be a good mom and be a good teacher all at the same time.”* This teacher’s task-diary also showed that she prepared breakfast the night before, which she explained that she does in order to have a less-rushed morning for her children: *“It takes a lot of planning. Our night-time, half hour to an hour every night is getting breakfast and getting everything ready for the next*

*day. So everything is done when we leave in the morning.*" Another talked about a colleague with young children who set her alarm for 4:00 a.m. so that she could do her schoolwork in the morning before her children woke up. However, as an urban elementary teacher described, even the most careful planning cannot eliminate problems:

*You manage your time better [but] even then, you feel frazzled. You plan for things and you think things are going to fall into place and they don't always. You have to have a certain amount of organization or it's going to be very chaotic, [at school] and at home.*

One of the areas where the task-diaries were particularly useful was in documenting the complex multi-tasking that teachers use to get through both their domestic and teaching work. In fact, the task-diaries made it evident that it can sometimes be nearly impossible to distinguish between time spent on teaching work, time spent on domestic work, and leisure time. Multi-tasking was perhaps the most important strategy for these teachers, an integral part of their daily lives and their management of their teaching and domestic workloads. For example, teachers wrote in their task-diaries about correcting while they were doing the laundry; glancing at the news while they made supper and comforted a child; keeping an eye on their children while they did schoolwork; and going over options for helping a student while doing the dishes. One urban elementary teacher illustrated her multi-tasking skills as she told me about her day: "*While doing schoolwork, I can also get home-made supper ready, as well as supervising the children with ... their schoolwork for the evening.*" Yet this multi-tasking that teachers use to manage their workloads can also be very fatiguing, as I will discuss more in the section on health and well-being. One rural primary teacher explained to me in detail the various multi-tasking strategies she has come up with to manage her teaching workload, a lengthy commute,

and caring for two young children. She said, *"I don't have a horrific work load. ... It's a lot of work, but it's all things that you have to do."* But later she admitted how tired she feels, and said quietly, *"Maybe I'm run ragged ... Yeah, I pretty well am."*

Finally, teachers also talked about the shortcuts and compromises they come up with in order to try to manage their workloads. The NLTA representative told me that he has dealt with several cases of young female teachers with small children becoming overwhelmed with the demands put on them, and they have asked to cut back to half-time or three-quarter time positions in order to cope. All of the teachers in this study, however, were working full-time. Many of them talked about trying to cut down on their schoolwork as much as they could while still doing a good job. Others talked about limiting participation in school committees and in extra-curricular activities with students. As a rural primary teacher explained,

*I honestly don't do a whole lot for my school, and that's okay for right now for me, because all my extra time is spent making sure the children are taken care of. ... I have to make sure that I'm not taking away from the kids in the class and to balance home life with the kids [at school].*

An urban elementary teacher said that she closes her classroom door so that she does not chat with other teachers, in order to make sure she can get as much work done as possible before she goes home with her children. Others work through their lunch and recess breaks in order to have time for their own children after school. As one urban primary teacher explained: *"So I'm going to put in my 45 minutes of correcting, going frantic, lunchtime. It's a juggling act, it is a juggling act."*

While teachers offered many ideas for how their teaching workloads could be improved, none of the teachers offered suggestions to improve their domestic workloads. In fact, the overall sentiment that teachers expressed to me was that no matter how difficult their domestic workloads became, there was simply nothing that could be done to help them. A rural primary teacher with two young children, for example, said that although she is extremely busy, she simply cannot expect it to be any other way. She said, "*I'm working as hard as I can. Nobody can help me. ... There's no other way.*" I noted that such attitudes also seemed to be connected to women's sense of "moral responsibility" for their children and household, so that they are also unwilling to let others take over this work (Doucet, 2006; Hochschild, 2003).

Teachers also expressed the sense that their workloads, though heavy, were very typical and ordinary for teachers and for employed women in general. An urban elementary teacher with three children looked over her task-diary with me, which was packed with work tasks from morning until night. She exclaimed,

*It does sound really hectic, doesn't it? When you read it. But it is. ... But I would imagine that most teachers' schedules are pretty much the same! I wouldn't imagine that it would differ very much from that. I don't think it's very exceptional, at all. I think it's pretty typical!*

As I will discuss further in Chapter 9, it seems that the 'ordinariness' of teachers' and mothers' heavy workloads tends to undermine the perceived seriousness of the suffering that such workloads can cause.

**PART THREE: PLACE**

### **Introduction to Part Three: Place**

In this third part of the thesis, I take a closer look at the way that teachers' work is shaped by the different 'places' in which they find themselves. As I described in Chapter 2, the term 'place' is a concept that includes both physical and social location, including elements such as age, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality, as well as historical, geographical, cultural, and organisational environment (Canadian Institute for Health Information [CIHI], 2006; Centres for Excellence for Women's Health [CEWH], 2006). Although I heard many similarities in teachers' perceptions of their workloads, no matter what their age, gender, or community, teachers also made very clear to me that these three factors are particularly important in structuring their working conditions, their own understandings of their work, and their overall workloads. In the following three chapters, I examine the implications of teachers' place relative to their colleagues in terms of their teaching experience; their place in the gendered structure of our society; and their geophysical place in terms of whether they work in a rural or urban region.

## CHAPTER 6: NEW AND EXPERIENCED TEACHERS

### 6.0 Introduction

The teachers in this study made it clear to me that the number of years of experience that a teacher has in the profession is an important factor that shapes their workload. As I discussed in Chapter 3, due to the methods used in this study and possibly the hesitance of untenured teachers to speak out, I had difficulty in recruiting newer teachers in this study. Just five of the teacher participants had less than ten years of experience in the teaching profession. This meant that the average number of years of experience in teaching among the participants in this study was 20.5. This compares to an average of 14.7 years of experience among teachers in this province in general (Department of Education, 2007a). However, despite the low number of new teachers in this study, I still heard a great deal about the challenges faced by teachers early in their careers. In fact, I found it very striking that almost all of the teachers in this study, both new and experienced, spoke to me about the many difficulties that they see newer teachers experiencing in managing their workloads. This has also been a trend noted in other studies of teacher workload (e.g. Belliveau *et al*, 2001; Chaplain, 2008).

### 6.1 New Teachers

*I remember my first year teaching, I used to call my mom and say, 'I don't think I can do this'. And I'd be basically panicking because I'd be bringing home two book bags ... I just felt completely, completely overwhelmed. ... I'd leave school 4:00, 4:30, go home, cook, eat supper and then I was in the books until I gave up and went to bed 12:00 or 12:30. ... I just couldn't see any end to it.*

**Rural elementary teacher, 3 years experience**

*New teachers now, the workload that they have is crazy. ... I worry about them; I don't know if a lot of them will do their thirty years. The pace and the demands on them. ... Well, if they do it, they'll have to give up their personal life or their family life, because you cannot do it. And it's as simple as that.*

**Urban primary teacher, 20 years experience**

In looking at the experiences of new teachers, it is important to understand that a teacher does not normally begin his or her career with a permanent, full-time position, because such positions are not generally immediately available. Many new teachers begin by substituting or by taking part-time or replacement positions. This means that new teachers often have to find a new position every year, wherever one comes up, and thus they tend to have to move from position to position and school to school each year. A rural primary teacher, for example, told me that she had worked in seven different positions, at seven different schools in the first seven years of her teaching career. Since teachers must have two consecutive years of teaching in a full-time permanent position with the same school board in order to achieve tenure (NLTA, 2008) participants told me that it may take five or more years to achieve the security of a tenured, permanent job. In fact, one urban elementary teacher in this study with five years of experience was considering leaving the profession because he was so frustrated with the lack of job security. Another urban elementary teacher with nearly fifteen years of experience revealed that she still did not have tenure because she and her family had moved to a region with a different school board, and as a result she had to leave her permanent position with her former board. In addition, because new teachers do not yet have permanent positions and thus often live outside of the community where they work, they may tend to have longer commutes than their more experienced colleagues. This was the

case in this study. While one new teacher had relocated to an isolated rural community in order to take her present teaching position and thus had a very short commute of just ten minutes, overall the five teachers in this study with less than ten years of experience in the position recorded spending an average of an hour per day commuting to work. In contrast, all but one teacher with more than twenty-five years experience recorded spending between twenty and forty minutes on their daily commute (*Table 3*). Again, these numbers are very small, but it would be well worth looking into this issue further. Commuting not only brings with it a financial burden, but research has shown that commuting can itself be a significant cause of stress for workers, largely because it directly reduces leisure time (Costa, Pickup, and Di Martino, 1988). For example, an urban primary teacher who had recently moved closer to her school, reducing her daily commute from 30 minutes each way to just 5 minutes, observed that she “found a huge difference in trying to balance ‘normal’ school and home life,” and felt much less rushed throughout the day.

Teachers, new and experienced, told me that without permanent jobs, new teachers tend to feel more pressured to take on extra duties to prove themselves. The task-diaries show that teachers with less than ten years of experience spent an average of over an hour and a half more per day on schoolwork than experienced teachers with more than twenty-five years of seniority. As an urban primary teacher described: “*When I came to [urban area] in the last ten years, I was working all night long because I had to prove who I was because I wanted a permanent job with this board.*” Several teachers also talked about feeling unable to speak out about issues that concern them until they got a permanent

**TABLE 3: NEW AND EXPERIENCED TEACHERS**

<b>NEW TEACHERS (&lt; 10 years)</b>				
<b>Participant</b>	<b>Teaching Work</b>	<b>Domestic Work</b>	<b>Commuting</b>	<b>Leisure</b>
3	665	140	60	140
5	555	405	120	30
19	750	260	10	30
23	665	245	50	75
24	560	220	50	90
<i>Average in Minutes</i>	639	254	58	73
<b>Average in Hours</b>	<b>10h 39m</b>	<b>4h 14m</b>	<b>58m</b>	<b>1h13m</b>
<b>EXPERIENCED TEACHERS (&gt; 25 years)</b>				
1	590	270	20	120
2	520	155	40	305
8	460	165	50	165
9	505	275	30	180
11	585	425	40	30
12	460	240	20	280
13	665	285	40	30
15	570	60	30	270
20	565	265	40	150
<i>Average in Minutes</i>	547	238	34	170
<b>Average in Hours</b>	<b>9h 7m</b>	<b>3h 58m</b>	<b>34m</b>	<b>2h 50m</b>

position. An urban elementary teacher said, "*Because I'm not a permanent teacher, you're not going to rock the boat too much ... you're kind of constricted a little bit. Don't want to be the mouthpiece.*" A rural elementary teacher said that sometimes this means that new teachers, lacking tenure, feel that they cannot refuse extra work. She said that one young teacher at her school was asked to do the principal's supervision duty so many times that she broke down in tears one day from frustration. She said that when you do not have tenure, you have no choice: "*Principals have that much authority, they can tell you to do anything ... And they soon learn who it is they can pick on. And I mean, you've got to be careful anyway because there's such a thing as insubordination.*" Research has shown that reluctance to refuse extra work responsibilities is a common concern in 'precarious' or insecure forms of work (Clarke, Lewchuk, de Wolff, and King, 2007).

New teachers may also face the challenge of having to combine two part-time positions in different grades and different subjects, or even at different schools. An urban primary teacher talked about how some of her newer colleagues are working two part-time positions, each at different schools. One young teacher at her school eats her lunch in the car every day as she commutes between schools. Another young teacher she knows alternates days between two different schools, a situation that is not unusual for new teachers in either rural or urban areas, according to the teachers in this study. A rural elementary teacher said that working multiple positions only compounds the workloads faced by new teachers, but that they often feel they must take any position that they can get so they can work towards getting tenure.

An additional pressure for many new teachers, as for many new workers in any occupation, is paying back their student loans. For example, one new rural elementary teacher in this study works a part-time retail job at night and on weekends, up to twenty hours per week, in addition to her full-time job, in order to pay off her loans. She found this quite difficult to manage at times, but felt that it was necessary in order to alleviate her debt load. Several other teachers talked about newer co-workers who are thinking about leaving the province and even the teaching profession in order to pay off their student loans. Although teachers are relatively highly-paid compared to many other groups of workers, a number of teachers suggested that higher salaries for new teachers are needed. Right now, some teachers feel that, as one rural primary teacher put it, *"It's definitely not enough for what you have to go through."*

Many of the more experienced teachers were concerned that these pressures would make it difficult to keep new teachers in the education system. This certainly seemed to be the case for the urban elementary teacher I mentioned above who is considering leaving the profession, as it was for many of the new colleagues mentioned by the more experienced teachers in this study. For example, a rural primary teacher talked about a new teacher in her school who is already becoming overwhelmed in his second year. She said, *"You should be able to look at a new teacher and say, 'You're in for the best ride of your life!' But I look at him and I just hope that he never asks me."*

## **6.2 Experienced Teachers**

*That's the amazing thing about retirement for teachers – they seem to get younger. They leave in June with that crease in their brow and the*

*stress on their shoulders, hunched over and everything. And you see them a couple years later and its like they've spent two years in a spa somewhere. So I'm hoping it's going to work for me!*

### **Rural primary teacher, 1 year left to retirement**

Compared to many other groups of workers, primary and elementary teachers are quite privileged in terms of their access to retirement and pension benefits. Teachers in Newfoundland and Labrador may retire after 30 years of teaching experience, or they may take early retirement, with a reduced pension, if they have 25 years of experience and are at least 55 years old (Pensions Administration Division, Department of Finance, 2009). In addition, the generation of teachers who are currently retiring often began their teaching careers at a very early age – 20 years or younger. This means that many teachers are able to retire at the age of 50, or even younger. However, this is less so the case for those teachers (particularly women), who took significant periods of time off from teaching in order to raise children.

Nine of the participants in this study were very experienced teachers, with more than twenty-five years in the profession. Eight of these teachers reported that they were within three years or less of retirement. Experienced teachers generally counted themselves as fortunate compared to their newer colleagues, since they had the benefit of many years of developing tools and strategies to manage their workloads. Experienced teachers are also tenured and this job security gives them more confidence in deciding what tasks have to be done and which can be reduced. However, almost all of those who were close to retirement said that they felt that in some ways it was more difficult as they got closer to the end of their careers. An urban elementary teacher explained:

*I'm three years away from retirement, and the closer you get the more difficult it gets. Because I really think in this job, twenty-five years is enough. ... Can I take three more years of this? ... I'm still conscientious, trying to do a good job for the kids, but I don't have the enthusiasm that I once had. ... I wouldn't take [extra-curricular responsibilities] on now simply because I'm tired. ... But I am really wanting the next three years to be over. There is a certain amount of stress when you look ahead and say [taking a breath], 'Three more years'.*"

A rural primary teacher with just one year left before retirement agreed: *"I guess I'm on the count-down. So when you're on that count-down you know the amount of days you've got left in a position. It makes you more anxious for it to happen. I think that's part of my problem too, now."*

In addition, more experienced teachers said that it has become more difficult for them because teaching young children requires so much energy every day, and they feel that they can not keep up as well as they could when they were younger. As an urban primary teacher put it, *"Once you get to be fifty, you don't have the energy level, you just don't have it like you had it when you were younger."* An experienced rural elementary teacher described it this way:

*I don't like the last couple of periods because I'm tired and they're tired. I have to be enthusiastic for these subjects and they could care less. It wears me out – four periods in a row of trying to be excited about something. I don't know how new teachers do it, because I've got so much stuff that I can draw on and I'm still worn out. ... At the end of the day, you put them on the bus and walk back in the school and think, 'Phew, I survived another day!'*

In contrast, one experienced primary teacher in a very small rural school said that she was very much enjoying the last year of her career, and was thinking about some of the things that she would miss about teaching. She said that it was easier

to manage her workload now that her own children were grown, and that she was quite content and comfortable in her school. She had taught there since the very first year of her career, and she knew all of the children in the school and had taught many of their parents as well.

### **6.3 Conclusion**

The teachers in this study emphasised how much their teaching workloads are shaped by the number of years of experience that they have in the teaching profession and, in particular, whether or not they have procured a permanent position and achieved tenure. However, I also noted that unpaid domestic work likely compounds the heavy workloads of many new teachers. Newer teachers are also often younger teachers, and frequently have young children at home. Thus, there are many teachers in the position of balancing the heavy school workload and employment uncertainty of a new teacher with the heavy domestic workload of a mother of young children. A report from 2001 showed that half of all teachers with less than five years of experience were considering leaving the teaching profession in Newfoundland and Labrador (Dibbon and Sheppard, 2001, p. 125). Clearly, much more needs to be done to address the needs of new teachers in this province.

## CHAPTER 7: A MOTHERING PROFESSION

### 7.0 Introduction

Although I have been discussing gender throughout this thesis, in this chapter I specifically focus on some of the most important gender issues that arose in this research, beginning by directly comparing the women and men teachers in this study.

As I have noted, the gender breakdown of the teacher participants in this study is nineteen women and five men. This is representative of the 80/20 ratio of women and men primary and elementary teachers across the province. It is worth reiterating here, however, that with the small numbers in this study, a quantitative comparison of the responses of different groups (such as women and men, or new and experienced teachers in the previous chapter) would not be in any way statistically representative. With a focus on qualitative methods, however, the teachers in this study helped me to understand the way that gender shapes their work and they identified a variety of different issues faced by women and men primary and elementary teachers.

When I initially went through the data from the task-diaries, I was interested to find that despite the fact that the teachers in this study identified a persistent gendered division of labour within their own households, an examination of the quantitative data from the task-diaries alone shows very little difference between the work of women and men teachers in this study. The number of hours that women and men teachers recorded in teaching and domestic work were quite similar (*Table 4*). At first, I thought that this contradicted the consistent finding that women in Canada still do significantly more

**TABLE 4: MEN AND WOMEN TEACHERS**

<b>MEN</b>				
<b>Participant</b>	<b>Teaching Work</b>	<b>Domestic Work</b>	<b>Commuting</b>	<b>Leisure</b>
2	520	155	40	305
6	445	375	20	90
12	460	240	20	280
23	665	245	50	75
24	560	220	50	90
<i>Average in Minutes</i>	530	247	36	168
<b>Average in Hours</b>	<b>8h50m</b>	<b>4h7m</b>	<b>36m</b>	<b>2h48m</b>
<b>WOMEN</b>				
1	590	270	20	120
3	665	140	60	140
4	540	335	20	170
5	555	405	120	30
7	565	365	30	60
8	460	165	50	165
9	505	275	30	180
10	630	200	40	120
11	585	425	40	30
13	665	285	40	30
14	450	570	30	30
15	570	60	30	270
17	530	320	20	90
18	570	140	10	300
19	750	260	10	30
20	565	265	40	150
21	650	280	20	30
22	495	390	30	45
<i>Average in Minutes</i>	574	286	36	111
<b>Average in Hours</b>	<b>9h34m</b>	<b>4h46m</b>	<b>36m</b>	<b>1h51m</b>

unpaid domestic work than men (Statistics Canada, 2006; Duxbury and Higgins, 2003; Law Commission of Canada, 2004). This also differed from the qualitative data in the task-diaries and the interviews, wherein participants described the gendered division of domestic labour within their own families. It may help to explain that the small sample of five male teachers in this study would not be representative of all men in terms of their living and family situations, and thus their average domestic work hours would not represent the average for men in the majority of dual-partner households. Specifically, three of the men in this study lived alone, without partners, and were thus responsible for all of the domestic work in their single household. One of these was a single father of children under the age of 12. The other two men in the study also had children under the age of 12, but lived with female partners. I note, however, that these two fathers with young children still did two hours less domestic work on the day recorded than the average for *mothers* of young children. Furthermore, as I have indicated, the qualitative information that teachers shared with me in the interviews and in the detailed descriptions of their domestic work in the task-diaries revealed many differences, as I illustrated in Chapter 5. In addition, it was clear that there are also many aspects of primary and elementary teachers' teaching work that are strongly gendered – and gendered very specifically as *mothering*.

### **7.1 A Mothering Profession**

**A man's work is from sun to sun,  
but a mother's work is never done.  
- Author unknown**

While many researchers refer to women-dominated professions, such as teaching, nursing, and social work, as the 'caring professions' (Armstrong *et al*, 2002; Messing *et*

al, 1995), it struck me over and over again throughout this research that it would be even more accurate to call primary and elementary teaching a '**mothering profession**'. In this chapter, I explain that this term emphasises the strongly gendered nature of the job – both because of the fact that it is highly women-dominated, as well as because of the strongly gendered elements of the work, whether being performed by women or men. Most importantly, this term indicates that primary and elementary teaching is gendered in a very specific way: as mothering. In fact, I show that teachers in this study identified many overlaps between teaching and mothering young children, and closely identified their work with the work of mothers. This strong connection that teachers identified between teaching and mothering has both positive and negative implications, however. I use the term 'mothering' carefully here. I am mindful of Doucet's (2006) discussion of the problematic implications this term may carry, including the risk of reinforcing the assumption that women are morally responsible for being primary caregivers to children, the connection to an ideology of 'intensive mothering' (Hays, 1996), and the failure to recognize the diversity and complexity of mothering practice and identity. I also want to emphasise that my focus on mothering does not imply that primary and elementary teachers' work is *limited* to mothering labour, any more than nurses' work is limited to caring labour. In fact, my intention is for the term 'mothering profession' to draw attention to what I see as an inherent irony in primary and elementary teaching: teachers of young children find themselves caught between the privileges and responsibilities of a profession, and the overlooked and undervalued work of mothering in western society.

As I discussed in Chapter 2, the gendered division of labour in teaching is quite strong, with women concentrated at the primary and elementary levels. While 80% of all primary and elementary teachers in Newfoundland and Labrador are female, this percentage increases as the grade level decreases. Teachers in this study talked about how strongly women-dominated their profession is. In many rural schools, for example, teachers noted that there is only one male teacher on staff – the principal. In fact, across Canada, the majority of administrators in primary and elementary schools are men (Acker, 1996). However, perhaps the most important way that teaching is gendered has less to do with the ratio of females to males in the profession, and more to do with the way that the work itself is seen, understood and enacted in gendered ways – “*under the umbrella of motherhood*”, as one urban primary teacher put it. Sandra Acker (1996), a Canadian sociologist who has published a great deal on the topic of teachers and gender, points out that “(m)aternal imagery is very strong in discussions of teachers and teaching generally, especially at elementary levels, and has deep historical roots” (p. 120, citing Sugg, 1978). In a study of Irish students and student teachers, Drudy and colleagues (2005) found that the most common reason given for why so few men choose primary teaching is the perception of teaching young children as a woman’s job, and as related to a mother’s role. American and Swedish research has also found that teachers themselves construct their work as ‘mothers’ work’ (Rogers, 2001; Gannerud, 2001). Rogers (2001) argues that teaching has traditionally been seen as an ideal, flexible type of work for women caring for children, despite the heavy demands on time reported by both men and women teachers. She also points out that, for much of the history of teaching, low pay

has been supported by the assumption that women's work provides only a secondary, supplemental income.

As I described in the section on emotional labour in Chapter 4, teachers in this study, both men and women, talked about their work in the language of mothering, and talked about the joys and challenges of mothering their students. Over and over again, they illustrated the point made by Messing and her colleagues in their 1997 study: much of the work of teaching young children echoes the work of mothering young children. Indeed, both at home and in school, teachers in this study talked about working long hours, constantly monitoring children's physical, emotional, and mental well-being, and sacrificing their own needs for those of the children in their care. In one sense, teachers' use of the discourse of mothering to describe their work serves to reinforce the ideology of women's natural inclination to nurturing and self-sacrifice. However, in another sense, teachers' use of a mothering discourse seemed at times to be used quite strategically (though perhaps not entirely consciously) to resist the dominant ideology of the superiority of "gender-neutral" professional knowledge. This use of a discourse of mothering as resistance was illustrated, for example, by the rural primary teacher who I quoted at the end of section 4.4.5 on the 'Pathways' program. That quotation was part of a lengthy conversation wherein this teacher described her frustration that a school board official was insisting that she implement a program for a little girl that she did not believe would help the child. She argued that the school board official was simply "*reading a file*" about the child and was trying to follow prescribed rules and standards. In contrast, this teacher argued, she herself truly cared for the student as one of "*my children,*" and

knew what she needed, both emotionally and academically, much better than could a far-removed official who had never even met the child.

As I noted in Chapter 4, teachers observed that students themselves seem to recognise the closeness of the roles of mother and teacher, as an urban elementary teacher noted: "*On a daily basis I have five that say 'Mom.'*" Interestingly, this overlap seemed to be most evident of all to those who were mothers themselves. "*I'm a mom all day long,*" one rural primary teacher commented. In fact, many of the mothers in this study talked about being mothers to their own children at home as well as to the children in their classes, as did this rural primary teacher: "*I'll often say, 'my children' and 'my girls', so they know I'm talking about my family when I say 'my girls', and when I talk about 'my children', that's my class.*" Teachers also talked about how the caring feelings that they have for their students echo the love of a mother for her children. An experienced urban primary teacher recalled how difficult it was for her to say goodbye to 'her' children at the end of the school year:

*I can remember, my first year teaching, you get so attached to little kids, you can't help it. And I remember when I started teaching, when I was teaching in [Rural Town] the first year, I had forty kindergartens, twenty and twenty, and I had never taught before, and this was really new to me. ... I was trying to do the best I could, and I remember in June when they left, I just cried and cried. Because you knew, not only were they leaving you, but you weren't going to see them anymore.*

Several teachers, like this rural primary teacher, also said that being mothers had made them better teachers:

*I always thought that the best teacher [was]... the one [who] just got out of university and had so much time and had no family, and now I think the best teachers are the teachers with children, because I'm a better teacher*

*because I have children. Not that I was mean before [laughs], but I'm really nicer to the children. I know that when my nineteen children leave at the end of a day, that I've spoke to each and every one of them personally in the run of the day.*

An urban elementary teacher agreed, saying that because she has a child the same age as her students, *"I know exactly what they're going through, I know exactly where they're coming from because I deal with it during the day and then at night as well."*

As Acker (1996) points out, "(t)eachers spend long hours with 'their' children, as mothers do with theirs, often in relative isolation from other adults" (p.121). These long hours can be stressful for mothers and for teachers, as I discuss in Chapter 9, and many teachers in this study talked about the pressure created by their feelings of caring for their students as they do for their own children. For example, one rural primary teacher referred to herself as a *"mother of twenty-one"* to explain how she was trying to look after the needs and well-being of all the children in her class, as well as her own children at home. It is clear that these strong gendered discourses in primary and elementary teaching also serve the education system by creating huge expectations of self-sacrifice, echoing those of 'intensive mothering' (Hays, 1996). Primary and elementary teachers told me that they feel an enormous amount of responsibility for the children in their classes, and they feel that they should push themselves as far as they can to try to meet their students' needs. However, like the quest to be "supermom", teachers' struggle to be *"superhuman"*, as one urban primary teacher put it, has consequences for their well-being. One urban elementary teacher illustrated this by saying that for her, the hardest part of being a teacher is,

*Feeling guilty, because you probably lost your patience, and probably snapped at a child, and you know that you hurt their feelings. That's hard. Hard to deal with. Because I try to treat all the children that I teach the same as my own children. That's kind of the law that I live by.*

## **7.2 Men in a Mothering Profession**

Women and men do different work (Messing, 1998). Even within the same occupation, women and men tend to be further segregated into different tasks, and indeed often face different requirements even when they are officially assigned to the same tasks.

Therefore, these men and women often do the same work in different ways, and under different constraints (Messing, 1998). In this section, I examine the ways that the gendered nature of teaching shapes the workloads of male primary and elementary teachers.

First of all, in terms of financial benefits and prestige, men in women-dominated primary and elementary teaching still tend to be advantaged compared to women. Cognard-Black (2004) argues that "(t)here does appear to be a glass escalator upward for token men who teach. Despite any disadvantages that may exist for men who teach in elementary schools, they benefit in one real, important way from their status as men: They are significantly more likely to advance upward into prominent school administrative positions" (p.133). An urban primary teacher in this study confirmed this in his own experience. He was enthusiastic about how much he enjoys working with young children, and he said that he feels fortunate to have many extra opportunities as a male primary teacher. For example, he said that he is often asked to be on school board

committees and to be involved in developing programs, because he represents a minority perspective. He said,

*I feel I'm in a very unique position, being a male [primary] teacher. I get very, very different views and bringing this, the male component, it's different. ... I know how lucky I am. I know what advantages I have being what I've chosen to do. I made these decisions consciously. I could have done what a lot of guys did. I remember my older brother, when he finally accepted the fact that I'm going teaching, he said, 'Well, do elementary, because there's not many men in elementary.' ... I got into a school and realized I was way more interested in the primary [level] ... Luckily, that turned out and advantaged me.*

Not all of the male teachers with whom I spoke felt advantaged in their profession, however. Cognard-Black (2004) notes that men teachers, though they tend to earn more than women teachers, earn less prestige and lower salaries than they could in 'male' jobs. This was definitely the sentiment of one rural elementary teacher I interviewed, who was very concerned about earning a high enough salary to support his family. Whereas many of the women teachers I interviewed, especially in rural areas, felt that teaching was the best-paying job they could hope to have, this male teacher compared his salary to that of male family members in high-paying trades occupations, and found it sorely lacking. He explained his frustration by saying,

*I think that's probably the biggest regret like that that I have, is that it was difficult trying to raise a family on one salary. It was more than difficult at times. ... I think some of the problems that we had in our marriage came from the lack of economics to raise a family the way we should, and I think that certainly impacted our relationship. ... I think the biggest way it's affected my life, our life as a family, and where it led me to the most stress was when I had to watch other people around me that had so much less education being able to do so much more. And I think the most hurt was probably when their kids could go down with brand-name sneakers, and mine couldn't.*

This teacher also showed clearly how much expectations about masculinity and breadwinning are tied (see also Power, 2005), along with the idea that women's salaries are, or should be, supplemental. He lamented that,

*There was a time in Newfoundland and pretty much in Canada, probably North America, when a man, a man's salary, could look after his family. And it's a sad situation also for a society, because I really believe there was a time when a lot of the female workforce, at least they were getting extra for their family. Now it's a situation where a mother has to go out to work just to [get by]. And I think that's society gone down hill.*

There are also real difficulties for men in a profession that is gendered strongly around mothering. Talking about the importance of caring work in their profession, the women teachers often assumed that it was the fact of being female that made them concerned with mothering their students. For example, one urban elementary teacher, talking about how she worried about the well-being of her students, said, "*Being a female, too, it's just the mothering instinct.*" Yet the men teachers in this study also talked about their work in the language of mothering, as did this urban primary teacher, talking about how throughout his day, he had to switch from teaching to discipline to caring work: "*Hold on now, I got to take off that hat and put on this hat. I need to be someone's daddy now, or someone's mommy.*"

As I have discussed, the gendered associations of caring work have tended to mean that caring is taken for granted as 'natural' for women teachers, as an extension of their role as mothers. For men, however, caring is often seen as out of character with a masculine identity (Vogt, 2002; Cognard-Black, 2004; Doucet, 2006). For the men teachers in this study, this created a number of problems. The concern that seems to bother men primary

and elementary teachers the most is the dilemma of how to nurture small children in a society that looks upon physical contact between men and children with suspicion (see Doucet, 2006; Vogt, 2002). Vogt (2002) found that there were particular difficulties with gendered notions of caring, specifically because men primary teachers were not seen to be motherly like their women colleagues. In fact, the men in Vogt's study also expressed particular concern about developing strategies to be able to be 'caring' to their students without risking suspicions of sexual abuse. In this present study, it was particularly noticeable that, as I mentioned in Chapter 4, while the women teachers so often talked about taking great pleasure in embracing their young students, for men physical contact with their students was seen much more as a threat. For example, a male urban elementary teacher also talked about having to be constantly vigilant about close contact with students: *"So in the back of your mind you're always like, 'We're in a different world now.' You don't hug kids; you don't take them by the shoulder and lead them; you keep that distance."* Another male urban elementary teacher talked about how teaching is an emotional job, and said that he teaches *"from the heart"*, but that as a man he has to be very careful about how he interacts with students. He said that his biggest fear as a teacher is being accused of sexual abuse, and so he is very careful about not showing physical or verbal affection to his students. He said that in his opinion, this fear is a large part of the reason that there are so few men in the profession. A male rural primary teacher said that he also enjoys the close relationship with the young children in his class (and calls them *"my kids"*), but while his female colleagues are comfortable hugging their students, he has to be more cautious:

*Of course, you know in [primary] they're always hugging you. ... I found that really hard, at the beginning, especially. Because, especially*

*nowadays, you've got to be so careful. And my kids are always coming up and giving you a hug.*

In contrast, a female primary teacher said that she hugs her students, like her own children, every day: *"These are little kids. They need their bit of love. Oh my goodness, how many times do I hug my child in the run of the day when I'm home."* Clearly, the men in this study are working in a "mothering" profession, but their identity as men prevents them from doing some of the nurturing and caring work that is so much a part of their profession.

Perhaps for this reason, Coulter and McNay (1993) found that men teachers sometimes felt pressure to exhibit 'masculine' ways of disciplining and leading their students.

Likewise, in my study, one urban elementary teacher said that he has the 'punishment classroom' for younger students, since they are more intimidated by a male teacher. In other words, if primary children misbehave in their own classrooms, with their female teacher, then they may be sent to his class as punishment.

Men primary teachers in particular may also face stereotypes, coming up against homophobic suspicion about their sexual orientation or their masculinity. One urban primary teacher, for example, talked about encountering the stereotype that male primary teachers are gay, or that there is something wrong with them. These stereotypes also add to the pressure on male primary teachers to behave and interact with their students in particular ways (Coulter and McNay, 1993).

Finally, male primary and elementary teachers may also be pressured into taking positions in higher grades, because of deep-seated ideas about women being more suited to teaching young children. In fact, both of the male primary teachers in this study talked about being pressured to move into higher grades, despite the fact that they both very much enjoy working with young children. One of these teachers explained that he had been pressured time and time again by his family, by administrators, and by his employers, to move to higher grades. But he has always refused, saying that he loves teaching primary and has no desire to leave:

*This is what is me. But that being in [primary] — people find it funny. When the school board has asked me many, many, many times, with your [education], why can't I put you in Junior High ... ? Because I don't want to go there and I'm not going there.*

### **7.3 Conclusion**

As Drudy (2008) argues, if “many countries are concerned at the increasing feminisation of teaching and perceive that a decline in male teacher numbers signals teaching’s more general loss of appeal as a career, then it clearly indicates that women themselves still have significantly lower levels of status in those societies” (p. 319). It is clear that both women and men primary and elementary teachers face challenges related to the gendered nature of teaching and its strong connection to mothering. In Vogt’s (2002) study of men and women primary teachers, she found that men and women primary teachers valued their caring work equally. She argued that caring should thus be acknowledged as an important part of primary teachers' identity without linking it solely to femininity and mothering. However, I argue that it is equally important to challenge the very idea that caring work should be devalued simply because it is associated with women.

In Chapter 10, I return to this concept of a mothering profession to explain how teachers of young children find themselves caught between the worlds of mothering work and professionalism, and the implications of the devaluing of mothering work for teachers' workloads and well-being.

## CHAPTER 8: RURAL AND URBAN TEACHERS

### 8.0 Introduction

In addition to level of experience and gender, teachers' workloads and health are impacted by the very particular geophysical and political place where they find themselves, including their particular geographical location, the era in which they live, and the political climate of the education system in which they work.

As I discussed in Chapter 2, there has been very little rural/urban comparison in most studies of teachers' workloads (one exception I noted was an American study of high school teachers by Abel and Sewell, 1999), and much of the research has had a solely urban focus (Rottier *et al*, 1983). In Newfoundland and Labrador, I argue that it is particularly important to compare rural and urban areas, since over half of this province's population lives in small rural towns and isolated outports all around the perimeter of the island, as well as along the coast of Labrador (Rural Secretariat, 2005).

My goal in this study was to involve equal numbers of rural and urban teachers, and, as I explained in Chapter 3, in the selection process I made sure to contact the same number of teachers from rural as from urban schools. In the end, the participants are indeed roughly split between rural and urban: eleven teacher participants work in rural areas, while thirteen teach in urban areas. As well, eight teachers in my sample had worked in both rural and urban areas throughout their careers, and offered very thoughtful insights into the differences between the two. In rural schools, these differences include the relative lack of material and human resources in rural areas, including the tendency for

high staff turnover; the distances travelled daily by students and by teachers; the challenge of getting a break from one's identity as a teacher in a small community; multi-grade classrooms; and the pressure to take on extra responsibilities in a small school. In urban schools, important factors include large class sizes; teaching ESL (English as a second language) students; and different relationships with parents. Teachers with children in rural and urban areas also talked about their differing challenges for managing childcare.

### 8.1 Rural Concerns

One of the most important issues in rural areas is the lack of resources relative to urban areas. As the Department of Education representative explained,

*If you're working here in St. John's, then you've got ready access to all of the resources that are at the university, for example. If you're working in a small community on the south coast of Newfoundland ... your resources are really what's available to you through the Internet. . . . So the level of resourcing is vastly different and the geography is a challenge and is always going to be a challenge. ... you can never have a level playing field with the resources. The teacher is the leveller."*

This means, of course, that there is increased work for teachers in trying to 'level' students' learning experiences. For example, a rural primary teacher talked about how difficult it is to find resources for her students for subjects like science and math, which require a lot of hands-on learning materials. She said,

*You have to be constantly looking for things to use. ... One of the things that we needed was modelling clay. And of course, [in this] area, where are you going to get modelling clay? I made some homemade playdough stuff, but it didn't work! ... I really needed the modelling clay. I remember saying to my husband, 'We're going to have to go to [Urban Town].' 'Why?' 'I need modelling clay.'" She added, "I mean, if I'm in [Urban Town], visiting my daughter, I'm looking for things that I need for this or that or something else. So it never goes away. ... there were times when*

*we literally were calling [Urban Town], or calling around to see if there's anybody going to [Urban Town] – 'Would you pick this up?' ... It's not like you can pop out to the Dollar Store and pick it up!"*

In rural areas, she added, there are also few places to bring children for field trips, and the Newfoundland and Labrador climate is not always conducive to outdoor activities.

A rural elementary teacher agreed, saying that the availability of resources is

*not real good here on the coast. We don't have a library, a working library. We have the internet and that drives me crazy when it comes to kids researching and learning things and finding out things, because they'll just go and find something that they can't even read and copy and paste and stuff like that. There's not a lot of resources; there's not a lot of stuff at our fingertips. And it's really hard to get money to buy extra resources, lots of good reading stuff.*

In terms of human resources, rural teachers also talked about the increased turnover in staff and administration in rural schools, and how this impacts their work. More specifically, they talked about how difficult it is when the principal changes frequently, because teachers have to keep getting used to a new approach. One rural primary teacher said, *"Every two years we got another principal. ... Come September it could be two new personalities in the office and I think the personalities in the office really dictate how the school goes."* Furthermore, special needs teachers are a scarce resource in some isolated rural schools, as a rural primary teacher explained: *"Where we don't have full time special education teachers, we can't get them down here full time, we have to do what we can with individuals who need extra assistance."* Rural teachers also talked about taking on subjects, such as Music or Art, for which they have no training, simply because there is no one else available. This is what Dibbon (2004) refers to as "out-of-field teaching", and he says that it is an area that needs more study to explore the implications for both teachers and students.

Rural teachers also talked about how school closures have affected their work. Seven of the eleven rural teachers brought up the difficulties they experienced when their schools had closed. Leaving a community school can be stressful, and one rural primary teacher even described it as “*traumatic*”. In addition, there is the increased mental and physical work involved in packing and unpacking the belongings of a closing school, as well as the emotional work of bringing multiple schools together. Another rural primary teacher described the transition from a small community school to a larger central school as extremely difficult: “*The first four or five years we were in this building it was hell. It was hard, really, really hard. ... a very difficult transition.*” She said that one of the most difficult parts of the change, in addition to the extra work of packing and unpacking, the longer commute, and the emotional loss of her own community school, was the challenge of bringing two different groups of teachers together. A rural elementary teacher agreed, saying that she found it very difficult dealing with the personal and political dynamics associated with combining two different staffs. This teacher said that she was on the verge of taking stress leave in the year after her community school had closed and she had to move to a new school. She had a longer commute, she said that she very much missed the close-knit atmosphere of her old school, and she found it upsetting that the new school was, in her opinion, much poorer quality, both in terms of its physical structure and in terms of the overall education it offered. She said, “*[t]he quality of education for the students in this area went downhill, definitely, with the closing of [former school].*” Other rural teachers talked about the worry of being laid off when their school closed, and about trying to decide whether or not to move their families or

whether they could manage a lengthy commute when offered a new position in a distant school.

Indeed, teachers said that with the closing of a large number of rural schools in the province in recent years, both teachers and students are travelling longer distances. One rural primary teacher said that since the school she was teaching in was closed and she was transferred, she feels guilty about the time she spends commuting because it means even more time away from her young children. She said, "*I'm farther away than I wanted to be. Fifty minutes is a fair chunk of time. That's two hours in the run of a day. So that's why the guilt sets in sometimes.*" Another rural primary teacher said that she had spent years trying to get a position at a school closer to her home. She said that at one school, about forty-five minutes away,

*I enjoyed teaching over there, but I found it stressful, still a long drive, getting up in the morning, and driving, especially in the wintertime. ... And then up in the night looking out the window, wondering what kind of weather you were going to have to drive in the next morning.*

Another primary teacher in a particularly isolated rural area explained that it is very time-consuming in her region to attend many professional development activities, because it takes so long to travel to other communities. In fact, most travel has to be by airplane. Even to go to a day or two-day workshop, she said, means a week away from her class. Finally, yet another rural primary teacher explained that for the teachers who do live in the same community as their school, there is sometimes an additional feeling of responsibility when most of the other teachers commute. At this teacher's school, students travel in from over a dozen different communities, and most of the other teachers commute from an urban area nearly an hour away.

*Something else that's difficult here is that most of the teachers don't live in the area and neither one of the administrators live in the area. I doubt they could even tell you where to go for to follow a bus route. So they'll come to us who live in the area and that puts added stress on us too because even if you're not responsible for it you feel like you're responsible.*

The nine rural teachers who currently or had previously lived in the same community where they teach talked about particular challenge for rural teachers in this situation: the experience of never leaving their work lives behind. All said that they receive telephone calls from parents and children at home in the evenings and on weekends. One rural elementary teacher estimated that she receives fifteen to twenty calls per week, in the evenings and on weekends. She explained that, *"In a small community, you have so many people calling you, and kids picking up the phone and calling you, 'Miss this and Miss that; Miss something else,' that it would be very hard not to take it home"*. A rural primary teacher who had recently been transferred said that even though she would prefer not to commute, she finds it much better not living in the same community with the parents of her students. *"Well, there is no way to get away from [your work], when you live in the community. And I did that for years. And as I said, many times, you're just out for a walk, out to the store, out to the post, and somebody is calling you over to a vehicle...."* She still gets a number of phone calls, perhaps three or four per weekend, *"But a phone call is still different from having to think, 'Should I go in the store or not?' If I see a certain vehicle there, 'I don't need this. Should I drive up the road and come back?'"*

Twenty-four percent of teachers in Newfoundland and Labrador are responsible for teaching multiple grades (Dibbon, 2004, p. 27, citing the Department of Education). This challenge is particularly common in smaller rural schools. In this study, five teachers were responsible for multi-grade classrooms, with two to four grades in one class. These teachers explained that teaching multiple grade levels at once adds quite significantly to their workloads. They explained that multi-grade teachers are responsible for a large number of courses, and have to teach the different learning outcomes for up to four different grades in the same subject. One primary multi-grade teacher said that new teachers often come to her school for just a short time, because while they enjoy the lack of behaviour issues and learning problems there, they are overwhelmed with the multi-grade workload.

*You'll find that newer teachers find it really difficult in this kind of a school when they have to come here and do twelve or thirteen courses and they're going in and teaching [Grade] Seven, Eight and Nine Math at the same time, then they're probably leaving that class and going to teach a [Grade] Four, Five and Six Math at the same time. It gets a little bit overwhelming.*

Another primary multi-grade teacher said that it is sometimes very difficult to get all the content covered for all the grade levels when you have multi-grading. *"Sometimes you've got to keep one group busy while you're working with another group. And sometimes you'll have things that they can do on their own and not be too noisy, having too much fun and disturbing the other ones."* A rural elementary teacher agreed, saying that teaching multiple grades is the most challenging part of her workload: *"Because if I'm finishing a Math unit, I have two Math units that I'm finishing and I have two Math tests to write at home. ... I find that can be very time-consuming. And you have to be familiar*

with two curriculums.” She added that the combination of multiple grades and the

‘Pathways’ program can be particularly difficult:

*And not only do you have multi-grading, but within those grades ... in [one grade], I have a Pathway 3 student ... and in my [other grade] I have a Pathway 3. So when I'm teaching [one grade] Math or Language, I have to do [Pathway] 3 stuff to give that student, and then in [the other grade], I have to do the same thing. So the numbers seem really, like, ‘Wow, nine kids’, but it's not that easy.*

A rural primary teacher said that she believes that kindergarten should always be a separate grade, even if there are only a few children.

*I feel that Kindergarten should be completely on its own because it's a different kind of a mindset, for the children. Usually with Kindergartens it's an introductory year to school and there's more emphasis on play and relaxing, kind of thing. And when you get in Grade One, you're getting into more content. ... When you have to combine grades, the Grade Ones are wanting to play if I have Kindergarten playing, and then they're distracted, especially when you got a small space. But I really feel that the Kindergarten is just such a difference in their age group, even though it's one year. So then you got Kindergartens who are four years old until December, and the Grade Ones are—they feel so much bigger. And it's just really hard to combine it.*

Finally, rural teachers also talked about the pressure to take on extra responsibilities in a rural school. A rural elementary teacher explained,

*Because in a small school, obviously, you've still got to have all the committees, but you don't have the staff, and then you only have one or two who want to volunteer, and you're not obligated to volunteer. ... But it gets pretty hard when things have to be done ... in the school. And somebody's got to do it. And so I don't know if it's really realistic to say, ‘don't do it’. And it hurts the kids.”*

Similarly, a rural primary teacher talked about feeling obligated to coach a soccer team at her school, although she had no interest or experience in sports. There was simply no one else to do it.

In addition to the challenges of rural schools, teachers also talked about some of the aspects of small community schools that make their workloads more manageable. Many enjoyed the feeling that the school is an important part of the community. For example, the principal representative talked about how the school Christmas concert is still an important community event in small communities. The eight teachers who currently or previously taught in the same community where they lived said that it can be an advantage knowing all of the students, their siblings, and parents. In fact, four teachers had even taught the parents of their students, and one had taught the principal at her school! A rural primary teacher said that she really appreciates the small numbers (fewer than fifty) in her school, which she feels helps her cope with behavioural issues. She said, *“It’s good especially with small numbers because you got this closeness with them.”*

## **8.2 Urban Concerns**

Large class sizes were by far the most important workload concern for the urban teachers in this study. Ten of the teachers in this study (nine in urban areas) had twenty-five or more students in their classroom, and four (all in urban areas) had more than thirty. As an urban elementary teacher explained:

*You can just look around. You put thirty bodies in here ... they take up a lot of physical space; they have big voices. And I don’t have a big voice and I don’t like to be yelling. But it’s physically demanding, never mind the mental part of it all. But the physical part, just trying to get to everybody, all the needs.*

This teacher also talked to her co-workers about the issue and said that almost all agreed that class size was the biggest concern for their workloads. *“The number of students that I have to teach and the number of needs that I have to meet are the major, major*

*challenge. That is the most difficult part, trying to do justice to the large number that's in your classroom.*" A primary teacher, living in an urban centre but working in a rural community, said that it would be easier to balance her work at school and work at home if she was teaching closer to home. However, she had previously taught in the urban centre, with twenty-eight students, and found that the workload was so overwhelming that she did not feel she was doing justice to all her students. The Department of Education representative also recognized that class size is a very important concern in urban areas. She said,

*It is challenging. You've got twenty-five alive and energetic children, and within the classroom today you do have—we do have an inclusive model of education, so you have a very diverse group and that's what creates some of the difficulties around the ISSP. You can have a child with autism; in the same class you could have a child that's physically disabled, you could have another child that's hearing impaired, you may have a child that has an allergy, you may have a child that is diabetic. This is in a range of twenty-five children. You could have five or six exceptionalities and you have to provide programming for all of the children. So that's a challenge and more so in urban than rural only because of the numbers.*

The need for a reduction in class size was one of the top ten recommendations made by teachers in this study, particularly by teachers in urban areas. The Commission on teacher allocation recommended class size maximums of 18 in kindergarten, 20 in Grades 1-3, and 23 in Grades 4-6. In multi-grade situations, it recommended a maximum of 12 in primary grades and 15 in elementary and secondary grades (Department of Education, 2007b). However, the class sizes the government has adopted are higher than this: 20 for each group in kindergarten, and 25 for Grades 1-6, phased in over three years. As well, these are 'soft caps', which can be increased in different circumstances. Unfortunately,

as one urban primary teacher explained, even a few more students makes a big difference:

*I really don't think in Primary it should be over twenty. ... I'm trying to do individual reading programs for those kids and teach them how to write. I can't get to twenty-four kids every day. ... The years that I've had twenty, or one year I had eighteen, that was pure heaven. You really felt in June, okay, I got them. ... I've really done justice to all of them. You throw another half dozen into the bunch and then you're getting into the crowd control and noise levels and everything else.*

In addition, four urban teachers said that they are challenged with teaching students whose first language is not English. Although teachers said that they found this work very rewarding, they were also frustrated that they were not able to give these students the attention that they needed. An urban elementary teacher, for example, talked about the wide range of needs among the five children in his class who had recently come to Canada from different countries. Several could not speak or understand any English when they arrived, and one of them had come to the country as a refugee after being exposed to incredible violence. An urban primary teacher has four English-as-a-second-language students who require one-on-one assistance. She tries to work with them in a small group, but said that it can be very difficult to find the time because she also has special-needs children in her class. Her international students, as well as a number of her other students who come from difficult family situations, need extra emotional support. She said, *"I think, with some of these children, school is an oasis from home ... That's the key: I think kids need to know that they're cared [for]. Unfortunately, I think a lot of our children don't know that. They have a rough time with that."*

One very interesting rural/urban difference that I found in this study was that the urban teachers talked a lot more about difficult relationships with parents, particularly in terms of parents' tendency question teachers' professional judgement. As I discussed in section 4.2.2 on emotional labour, teachers explained that the relationship between parents and teachers is emotional by nature. For example, an urban primary teacher talked about dealing with parents' conflicting opinions on how she is teaching: "*Well, I don't think they're getting enough homework, says one parent. And another parent says, 'This is enough homework, I wouldn't want to see any more.' And you're trying to meet the needs of the group.*" An urban elementary teacher said that she found a huge difference coming to an urban school after over fifteen years teaching in rural Newfoundland. She explained, "*But the teaching is a lot different. I find in town there's way more pressure from parents.*" She said the upper middle-class parents in the urban area where she works have questioned her teaching methods, and even go to the school and Department of Education websites and find out the outcomes for each subject, and then come to her and say, "*You haven't got all the outcomes covered and it's the end of March already.*" Another urban elementary teacher put it this way:

*One of my girlfriends ... was talking about her boss and I said, 'You know, [friend], I have sixty bosses. ... Actually, I have more because most of my kids have a mother, a step-father, a father and a step-mother'. ... Ultimately I do. I have sixty of these, at least, who are watching every move we make. And luckily, they haven't pounced, but the potential is there.*

As I discussed in section 4.2.2, this potential tension between parents and teachers appears to be exacerbated by changes in the power dynamics between children and teachers (Walkerline, 1986), as well as changes in expectations for who is responsible for educating children morally, socially, and emotionally, as well as academically

(Dobrowolsky and Saint-Martin, 2005; Acker, 1996). In regards to rural-urban differences, more research is needed into how and why parent-teacher dynamics might vary between cities and small communities.

Finally, finding adequate childcare is also an important workload issue that brings different concerns for the rural and urban teachers in this study. I found that the rural teachers tended to depend heavily on female family members such as mothers, sisters, and aunts, to help them with childcare. In contrast, most urban teachers did not have this support and depended more on hired babysitters. In fact, I found that the urban teachers with school-aged children usually managed by having the children come to their own classrooms after school so they could supervise them while working. The lack of extended family support was an issue that several teachers who had moved to urban areas from rural communities found particularly difficult. One urban elementary teacher, for example, talked about how stressful it was for her if one of her children suddenly fell ill, because she was used to having her mother to depend on in a rural community. She said, *"I don't have anybody in town to look after them."* Another urban elementary teacher said that her life is more hectic now that she lives and teaches in an urban area rather than the rural area that she came from. She said,

*When you're working and have a child it's always busy no matter where you're living. ... [But] I don't have an extended family here, which we did in [the rural town], where we moved from. My mom and dad lived there. That makes a big difference: even just a place to drop off your kids for a couple hours if you want to. So that really makes a difference as well and I really miss having them around.*

### **8.3 Economic Climate in Newfoundland and Labrador**

In this study, I did not specifically ask teachers about how they thought the economic climate in rural and urban Newfoundland and Labrador influenced their workloads. However, quite a few teachers brought up their own analyses of how current politics, educational philosophies, and the local economy had impacted their work. To conclude this chapter, I discuss some of the important elements of the economic climate in Newfoundland and Labrador today that shape the conditions within which the teachers in this study work and live.

The economic realities of working in Newfoundland and Labrador are inevitably part of the specific 'place' in which urban and rural primary and elementary teachers in this study work. Despite the recent excitement promoted by the current Progressive Conservative government about the province's ascension from a 'have-not' province to a 'have' province (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2008), the economic conditions in this province remain challenging, particularly with the recent economic downturn. These conditions include an unemployment rate that, at 15.1%, is twice the national average (Statistics Canada, 2009a), lower than average wages (Statistics Canada, 2009b), and a rapidly aging population, with declining numbers of children in rural areas (Ommer and the Coasts Under Stress team, 2007; Storey and Greenwood, 2004). In this study, I noted two specific economic realities that shape primary and elementary teachers' workloads in important ways, particularly for teachers in rural areas. One is the high proportion of workers, mostly male, who work away, either offshore, or in other parts of the country, particularly Alberta (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2007). The

second is the stark lack of well-paying job options for women in rural parts of Atlantic Canada (Corbett, 2007; Porter, 1985, 1993; Binkley, 2002).

In many rural parts of Newfoundland and Labrador and the Maritimes, large numbers of the male working population are away for weeks or months at a time. Some of these workers are offshore, working on oilrigs, while others are in Ontario, British Columbia, or more frequently in recent years, in Alberta oil sands towns such as Fort McMurray and Grande Prairie (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2007). For primary and elementary teachers in rural areas, this often means that a number of their students are without their fathers for large chunks of time, which can be quite emotionally difficult for young children (Fowler and Etchegary, 2008; Hiew, 1992; Mauthner, Maclean, and McKee, 2000), and challenging for their mothers (Collinson, 1998; Lewis, 1988; Morrice and Flin, 1978; Sutherland and Flin, 1989). A rural primary teacher explained that when her students' fathers are away, they sometimes come to school quite upset, and need extra emotional support. She said, "...a lot of the dads where I'm working go to Alberta to work, and I've told the parents, 'Let me know if they're sad in the morning' and I've had notes come in saying, 'I'm going away for a week, can you give so and so extra love this week?'" In addition, four of the teachers in this study had husbands who were working away as well. They talked about how challenging it is for them to manage their household work and childcare all alone for weeks or months at a time, in addition to their teaching workloads. One of these teachers admitted that it is sometimes more difficult when her husband returns, since it disrupts the routine she has had to create to manage on her own.

A second important economic element that I noted as impacting teachers' work is the fact that there are simply very few alternative job opportunities available to women in rural areas – particularly jobs that pay well. In fact, this is an area where the intersection of gender and rural issues in impacting work and health is starkly clear. Although, as I have discussed, employment is a huge challenge for men in rural communities as well, the rural women teachers in this study expressed the sense that their options are even more limited. As I noted in Chapter 7, some men teachers consider themselves poorly paid in comparison to what their male peers earn in trades occupations. However, as one rural primary teacher explained, teaching is actually one of the very few options that rural women have to earn a good salary and still live in a rural community.

*It's like this: I don't know what I could've done that would've brought me home - because I'm from here in the bay - given me full-time employment for thirty years ... helped me raise my kids. I worked every day, not bad pay, for a woman. ... If I was working at the fishplant or working at Wal-Mart or whatever, I couldn't have lived on my own, couldn't have maintained the home that [my children] have today.*

This teacher explained that for women, teaching offers a career that will give them a salary, benefits and a pension – in other words, the ability to support themselves without needing to depend on a husband. She illustrated this very colourfully, saying,

*When we were getting educated ... there was a man who lives down here ... who said to Dad, 'What a waste of money, educating three girls! Total waste of money!' Dad said, 'Well, I looks at it this way, b'y. If either one of them ends up marrying an asshole like you, she won't have to stay with him if she don't want to!' So that's the way I think about my education after all these years."*

I should also note that this is not just an issue for rural women. An urban elementary teacher in this study said that at one point in her career, she had considered quitting her job because of serious problems with parents of her students. She was very unhappy and

disillusioned with the profession. As a divorced woman living alone, however, she just could not imagine how she could have survived financially: “*Would I have to sell my car, sell my house? It’s scary.*” She realized that she had no choice but to continue teaching.

In fact, it is interesting to contrast this sense of limited options with the perspective in the following quote from a male urban elementary teacher:

*To me ... the great thing is now, when you see a new teacher, if they stay for three to five years, you're very fortunate because they're not in it for the money. They love it. And if they love it, they'll stay. If they don't love it, they'll have many more choices to make a lot more money in less stressful situations. So the people who stay — you have to love it. If you don't love it, you can't do it.*

Primary and elementary teachers’ perceptions of how much choice they have to stay in the profession, based on the range of other options available to them, may be very strongly shaped by both place and gender. Furthermore, this sense of reduced job options for women has important implications for teachers’ workloads and health. If women teachers do not feel that they have any other options open to them, they may be even less likely to bring attention to concerns or problems in their workloads. They may be also less likely than men to feel that they can leave their job if it becomes unbearable. This is important to keep in mind when teachers’ satisfaction with their jobs is measured by their attrition rate (as in Cognard-Black, 2004, for example), since women teachers, particularly those in rural areas, may be less likely to leave the profession no matter how overwhelming their workloads become.

#### **8.4 Conclusion**

Rural and urban teachers in Newfoundland and Labrador share many of the same workload concerns, but they also identified many important differences. Furthermore, there are also many differences within rural and urban areas that may affect teachers' workloads. For example, a teacher in a large regional school in a rural community on the Avalon Peninsula, near a large centre such as St. John's, does not face the level of isolation, lack of opportunity to interact with colleagues, or lack of access to resources that are part of the everyday working conditions of a teacher in a tiny local school in a roadless community on the south coast of Newfoundland or along the coast of Labrador, for example. It would be very worthwhile to delve into these issues in more depth by undertaking a more focused study on teachers in the more isolated rural communities in this province.

**PART FOUR: HEALTH**

### **Introduction to Part Four: Health**

Up to this point in the thesis, I have focused on primary and elementary teachers' workloads, both teaching and domestic, and the challenges and joys associated with them. I also examined the way that teachers' work is shaped by place, broadly defined. In Part Four, I move the focus away from work, and towards health. I discuss the main findings in this study regarding primary and elementary teachers' health: the consequences that teachers believe that their work has for the well-being of their families, and the consequences that teachers identify for their own health and well-being. I also explain how these findings show that researchers need to broaden our understanding of what is meant by 'health' in order to more fully capture the complex relationship between work and wellness for primary and elementary school teachers.

## CHAPTER 9: HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

*I would love to go to bed at 10 because I need more sleep than I'm getting, and I'm tired all the time, and I'm sort of at a point now that I never feel rested. I never feel like I'm in bed long enough ... From September to June, you never relax because you've always got so much going through your head that you're trying to remember.*

**Urban primary teacher**

*And all teachers feel that way. You go home, and you feel bad and feel guilty cause you can't do more for those kids.*

**Urban elementary teacher**

*My eleven-year-old, he's always asking why do I have to be a teacher. Because before I was a teacher, at least I was there sometimes. 'But now', he says, 'Every time I look at you, you're there at the table, with books.' And he feels like we're not spending enough time with him. ... And we're not. We're really not getting the time we need to spend with the kids.*

**Rural primary teacher**

### 9.0 Introduction

Studies from across the continent have noted that "teaching is part of a category of occupations - interpersonally intense occupations such as nursing, social work, and the like - in which practitioners are known to be especially susceptible to stress and burnout" (Leithwood, 1999, p. 29; also Dibbon, 2004; Farber, 2000, Johnson *et al*, 1990; Van Dick and Wagner, 2001). In particular, the high demands of such occupations, combined with low levels of control and autonomy, have been linked to increased levels of stress (Karasek and Theorell, 1990; Messing, 1998). In fact, as I indicated in the literature review above, much of the research on teachers' well-being has focused almost

exclusively on stress. This is indeed a very important concern, particularly considering that all of these occupations, sometimes referred to as 'caring professions', are women-dominated, and stress is one of the most important health problems identified by women (Walters and Denton, 1997). However, while I recognize the importance of stress as a key concept in the literature on teachers' health, in this study I also focus on wider issues related to teachers' sense of health and wellness.

In this study it was clear that being healthy and feeling well are about more than just the absence of illness or injury (Walters and Denton, 1997). Most of these teachers described themselves as generally being in good physical health. In fact, during the interviews, when I would first ask a question about their health and well-being, many teachers would immediately respond that they did not have any health problems. However, as the conversation went on, most would slowly begin to reveal more and more problems that they felt impacted their physical, emotional, mental, and social well-being. For example, one rural primary teacher at first stated quite confidently that she did not think that her work affected her health. However, as the conversation continued and she talked about how she felt throughout the school day and after, she eventually revealed numerous concerns that she linked to her work: fatigue, headaches, foot pain, urinary tract infections, feelings of anxiousness, guilt, frustration, and feeling "*addled*". Among other things, this indicated to me that this teacher, and others in this study, felt that their daily suffering was too normal or ordinary to be considered a 'health' problem, which many of them specifically associated with diagnosable conditions such as high blood

pressure. As I discussed in Chapter 2, this limited view of health is also very present in the research literature on teachers' workloads.

I begin this discussion with the impacts that teachers identified for the families' well-being, since the concern that teachers have for their families seems to compound the impacts that teachers feel their workloads have on their own well-being.

## **9.1 Implications for Family**

*I think the family of teachers are affected their whole life by having a parent or [spouse] as a teacher. Because you get pulled in, it's like being a parent! Just like being a parent, teaching can be a twenty-four-hour job, if you wanted it to be! There's not enough hours in the day.*

### **Urban primary teacher**

#### **9.1.0 Introduction**

Acker (1996) says that the English primary school teachers she studied "seemed to live their lives in a whirl of activity ... [and] believed school influenced home life much more than the reverse ... The husbands tended to underestimate the strain of teaching, however, and generally made few contributions to housework and child care" (Acker, 1996, p. 131, citing Acker, 1992). Similarly, Dinham and Scott's (2000) survey of British, Australian, and New Zealand teachers found that teachers felt that their heavy workloads took away from their family lives. Harvey and Spinney (2000) also found that three quarters of the teachers they surveyed worried about the lack of time they had for their family. Because of this lack of time, the teachers in that study felt guilty and resentful of their workloads, and felt anxious about living up to the competing demands of family and work. The teachers in my study also talked about their concerns about

how the nature of their work and their workloads have affected the well-being of their families, including that of their spouses, their children, and their parents.

### **9.1.1 Spouses**

In regards to their spouses, many teachers talked about how difficult it can be to find time to spend with their husband or wife. One urban elementary teacher said, *"I'm sure there's days when my husband doesn't even see me."* A rural primary teacher agreed, illustrating how difficult it could be for her and her husband to find time as a couple:

*"The only one who gets left out of the mix I think is my husband. ...[He] says in passing, 'Hi, how are you?' ... I told him twelve years from now, when the kids finish school, I'd love him again!"*

Many teachers said that when the balance between home and school becomes difficult, conflicts with their spouse can arise. In fact, over and over again, I heard women teachers saying that their husband cannot understand why they have so much work. A rural elementary teacher talked about how frustrated her husband sometimes gets because even on the weekends, she rarely has time to go out with him and socialize. Similarly, an urban primary teacher told me that her husband's lack of understanding of the time she has to devote to schoolwork has caused quite a lot of tension between them, and numerous arguments: *"And [husband] will say, 'Can't you do this and this and this?' And I'll say, 'No b'y, I can't. To do the job right.'"* An urban elementary teacher talked about how, because her husband works only with adults, he really cannot understand why she needs a break so badly when she comes home: *"God, they come home and they forget about work. ... Men don't have a lot of sympathy or empathy for what we do; they don't*

*really see what has to be done. And he wouldn't be able to do this job if it paid him a million dollars a year."* A rural elementary teacher who had recently left classroom teaching for an itinerant position<sup>15</sup> said that her husband did not want her to go back to the classroom:

*He had a hard time too, of course, because when you come home you bring your moods home. ... He knew as soon as he came into the house whether I had a good day or a bad day. And that was just it.*

An urban elementary teacher married to another teacher talked about how difficult it was when both he and his wife had a bad day at school, and thus both needed to vent their frustrations. He said that it has gotten to the point where they just cannot talk about school to each other anymore, because it creates too much negativity between them.

### **9.1.2 Children**

As I indicated in the section on domestic work above, many of the teachers worried that their work was taking away too much of their time and energy from their own children. In fact, one urban elementary teacher said that he feels like he spends more time parenting his students than he does his own child.

A rural primary teacher also said that she found it difficult to maintain patience for her own children when they were young. *"If you had a bad day, sometimes that would spill over into what you had to do"* at home, she commented, suggesting that this sometimes meant that she had less patience for her own children than she did for the children at

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<sup>15</sup> An itinerant position is one that is not connected to one particular classroom or even one particular school. In this case it refers to a teacher who specializes in a particular curricular area and travels between a number of schools, helping teachers with any difficulties they are having in that subject area.

school. An urban elementary teacher said that when he thinks back over his years of teaching, he gets upset thinking about how much time he has had to spend working on evenings and weekends, rather than with his children. He said, *"I resent the way that it took away from the time I could have spent with my children when they were younger."* Because of this concern, many of the teachers I spoke with make great efforts to try to reduce the impact of their work on their children. A rural primary teacher said that she tries to arrange the day carefully so that her children do not feel rushed and so that they do not feel like she has only a limited amount of time for them. She gets up earlier herself in order to make time to spend with them in the morning, which is important to her sense of being a mother: *"I'll get them up, and I always do their hair. So that's five minutes with each of them, I just feel like I'm more of a mom when I do that stuff, which is good."* An urban elementary teacher talked about how painfully torn she feels when she puts her young son to bed. He always wants her to stay with him for a while, she said,

*It was always my time to cuddle him, and bedtime was just so, so good. But when you're really busy, and I know there's stuff in my schoolbag that needs to be pulled out, sometimes when I put him to bed he'll say, 'Mom, do you have any homework to do?' And most of the time I'll say, 'No' because I don't want to make him feel like I have to hurry up and get out, but he'd rather for me to stay until he's gone to sleep ...*

### **9.1.3 Parents**

The teachers in this study who had caring responsibilities for their elderly parents were also concerned about the lack of time they have for their parents. One urban primary teacher said she tries to make sure she still finds time for her widowed father, even if it means staying up later to do her schoolwork. If her father wants to spend time with her, *"I don't say no to that, even though deep down I'm saying, 'Oh my God, he was here for five hours this afternoon, what am I going to do? I never got my correcting done!'"*

Another urban primary teacher described her *“huge responsibility”* for taking care of her elderly, housebound mother. She said that she tries to spend Saturdays with her mother to take care of her housework and groceries, but *“I just can’t give her any more time”*. She wishes she could do more, but *“... if I had to go out there every day after school, I just would not make it. I’d be a pool right there on the floor. Because I just can’t do it. I can’t. Because every night you have schoolwork to do.”* In one case, an urban primary teacher talked about how even when her father passed away it was difficult to take time off because *“there’s so much to what you do in a day that you think nobody else can come in and do it, or you think somebody is going to forget something important.”* In fact, in her case, the substitute replacing her had accidentally caused a serious incident because she did not know the children well, and the possibility that this would recur now worried this teacher whenever she had to leave her class.

## **9.2 Impacts on Teachers’ Own Health and Well-Being**

Overall, the most frequently mentioned problem, discussed by almost all of the teachers in this study, was that they feel that their work is making them tired, even to the point of exhaustion. Other important concerns, listed in order according to the importance and frequency of these concerns among teachers in this study, included: feeling guilty; feeling overwhelmed, anxious or stressed; lack time for themselves; and lack time to use the washroom. Some blamed the lack of time to use the washroom for urinary tract infections, and also linked their workloads to difficulty eating well or exercising, strep throat and other contagious illnesses (including the problem of working while ill), voice problems, headaches, and high blood pressure.

I note again here that although this research focuses on the health and well-being of primary and elementary school teachers, the concerns that they raise may be relevant to many other groups of workers, particularly women, who are striving to balance employment, domestic work and well-being.

### 9.2.1 Tiredness

Tiredness is a problem almost all of the teachers in this study described to some degree – many to the point of feeling exhausted. Lack of sleep is part of the problem, but most said that it was more a matter of feeling mentally and emotionally drained. By the end of the week, especially, teachers talked about feeling completely worn out. As one urban primary teacher explained:

*Friday nights is a wipe-out. It's a total wipe-out. Because you've given, given, given, given all week, and then on Friday ... at some point it will catch up with you and you're just totally exhausted! Totally! It's just the strain of it all, really.*

An urban elementary teacher told me that she and her co-workers are always talking about being tired:

*One teacher said she went home and she fell asleep on the couch with her coat on. She woke up an hour later when her husband walked in the door. ... there's something to that, when people are that tired. ... We come in here Monday mornings and we're supposed to look refreshed, when everyone's looking at you like, 'Oh my God, you look some tired.'*

Many teachers talked about how difficult it was to get out of bed in the morning, about putting their head down on their desk to close their eyes after school, having trouble staying awake while commuting, and being too tired to socialize on the weekends. One rural primary teacher said that when she was having a particularly stressful semester,

*I went to bed with the children every night from September to December. I ate, fell asleep in bed with them, every night ... Just couldn't function. ... Really, between 8:00 and 8:30 every night, in bed asleep until 6:00 the next morning. Crawl out of bed and start again.*

Struggling to stay awake or even falling asleep while doing schoolwork in the evenings was especially common, and in one urban primary teacher's task-diary, she noted that she had actually fallen asleep that evening at 8 pm while doing her correcting on the couch. She woke up a couple of hours later just to get herself ready for bed. Restless nights, often because of worries about work, were also a concern mentioned by many teachers. A rural primary teacher talked about a conflict that she had had with a parent over a child who was suffering emotional difficulties saying,

*And that's the thing, you go home that night and even though there's nothing you could've done about it, that's the stuff that keeps you awake. And every [teacher] is going to get it in some form or other. There are always going to be those ten or so incidents per year when you're going to have sleepless nights.*

Another rural primary teacher said that even in the morning, she often still feels tired:

*"And sometimes I sits up on the edge of the bed and I could cry, because I says, 'Oh my, I have a mind to call in sick because I'm so tired.'"*

The teachers told me that they felt that the busyness of their workdays was what made them so tired. At the end of her task-diary, an urban primary teacher wrote that now that she could see how much she did in the run of a day, *"I now realize why I am so tired."*

Another urban primary teacher said,

*I have to sleep and sleep and sleep, to get my energy back ... It's just that you have to extend and put out all this energy, and output, then it catches up. It has to. All the discipline and the parents and the expectations. Oh my goodness, you could just go crazy thinking about it.*

A rural primary teacher, whose spouse is also a teacher, agreed:

*I hear [my spouse] saying it all the time: 'God, I'm so tired. I wonder what's wrong with me?' But it's just being so busy all day long, physically – but not only physically but it's mentally demanding too. ... [I]f you're constantly getting tired, if you're getting tired every day and you're feeling like you're drained, that's got to have an effect on your physical well-being ... I feel that if I were doing something other than teaching, I wouldn't be feeling the physical tiredness and that kind of thing that I feel now.*

In addition, as an urban elementary teacher pointed out, the tiredness that teachers' experience from their teaching work is compounded by the demands of their domestic work, particularly for mothers of young children:

*There's a lot of things going through your mind every night when you go to bed. Not only from your job, but 'Is everything ready for my kids for school tomorrow?' 'Is their homework done?' 'Is their clothes ready?' 'Are their gym pants clean if they have gym tomorrow?' And so on. ... Some mornings when I wake up, I am still very tired, and getting enough sleep is such an important thing. And sometimes I can't get in bed until 11 p.m., and your mind is still in overdrive. So you have to be so careful that it doesn't affect your health.*

Tiredness in turn impacts other aspects of teachers' work and their lives. An urban elementary teacher said he feels “*really exhausted*” on days when he does not have preparation time, especially if he has done supervision. Because of this, he has decided not to take on extra-curricular activities with students as he once did. A rural elementary teacher talked about how being tired affected her ability to do her job: “[*Y*ou're going to be useless anyway. What you do have planned won't go. So it takes a lot of patience and if you're not rested then you don't have that patience and tolerance for the children.”

Tiredness was also one of the main health concerns identified by Ontarian women in Walters and Denton's (1997) study, and the authors argued that, because of the dominance of an individualized, medicalized approach to health in our society, there is a real lack of recognition for the misery that such problems can cause.

### 9.2.2 Guilt

Besides tiredness, the most commonly mentioned mental health problem for teachers was a constant, nagging sense of guilt – guilt about not being able to meet the needs of all the students in their classes, as well as guilt about spending so much time away from their families. Guilt is a serious issue because it so profoundly affects teachers' day-to-day sense of well-being, and their sense of satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) with their work and their lives. This was illustrated all too clearly by one rural primary teacher, the mother of two young children, who said that she is at the point where she feels guilty every time she sits down. The previous year, she explained, had been "horrific" because she felt so guilty about missing time from her young children: "*It was just difficult to be with children all day when you knew yours were home.*" She commented that she "*couldn't wait to be sick*" so she could stay home. She described how desperate she felt:

*I would have said to [my husband] every Sunday, 'I will do anything if you would like to break my arm, I won't have to go back tomorrow.' Isn't that funny? And that's not me, because I really love what I do, but last year I didn't. ... I didn't feel like I was a good teacher, good enough for me, and I didn't feel like I was a good enough parent for me, and I didn't feel like I was a good enough wife for me.*

Teachers talked about feeling guilty about trying to get all their schoolwork done. An urban elementary teacher said that a colleague of hers talked about her briefcase as her 'griefcase' – teachers take their grief home with them. Trying to meet all their students'

needs was another major source of guilt for the teachers in this study. A rural primary teacher talked about how guilty she felt about not being able to do enough for a child in her class who was missing a lot of school without explanation. She said,

*At one point, if he would miss, I would try to find some time during the day to do his homework with him, and go over all [his work] - but it was too much for me. I had to give it up, because ... I was failing the other children, they couldn't get enough of me, and this one wanted this done, and this one had a question, and here I was trying to get this little kid's homework done with him, and it was just too much.*

Meeting all their students' needs can be particularly difficult with larger class sizes. An urban elementary teacher explained that the hardest part of a teacher's job is that teachers,

*want to help every child achieve their potential. And when you're one, and you have thirty or thirty-two, 'cause thirty-two is pretty typical in [Urban Area], it's very difficult. ... I know myself, you just beat yourself up over it, you say, 'I wish I'd done more.' 'Why didn't I do this?' 'I should have done that.' So that makes it very difficult.*

Clearly, guilt is one area where the impacts on teachers' families overlap with the impacts on their own well-being, and where teachers' sense of "moral responsibility" for their students and their own children is clear (Doucet, 2006). Teacher after teacher talked about feeling guilty about their work taking time away from their families. For example, a rural primary teacher whose husband works in mainland Canada part of the time talked about feeling guilty when her husband is home and she needs to get her schoolwork done. In a way, she said, it is easier when he is gone: *"I don't find it as stressful getting school work done when [my husband] is away because I got more time, whereas when he's home you kind of feel guilty."* Guilt in relation to their children was even more significant to the teachers in this study. Teachers with children said that they often felt

guilty about their work taking them away from their children. One rural primary teacher said she is relieved when her teenage children go out in the evenings because then she can get her schoolwork done without feeling guilty.

### 9.2.3 Feeling Overwhelmed, Rushed, or Stressed

*We're all so stressed out over what we don't get done, because it's impossible to get through it all.*

#### Urban elementary teacher

Many teachers also talked about feeling frequently overwhelmed, rushed, or stressed. In fact, the teacher who had recently left her classroom job to take an itinerant position said that she had done so specifically because she had found classroom teaching so stressful.

The administrator representative said he has observed high stress levels among teachers. He said, *"A lot of people are getting drained. And I see it. As the year goes on, as the principal sitting back and watching your staff, you can see when they need a break ... at some point, they get burnt out."* A rural primary teacher agreed, saying that,

*... it's not uncommon at all. You're in your staffroom, or you're outside with the students, and teachers are saying 'I just don't know how I'm going to get it all done.' 'How am I going to get it all finished?' It seems like you're always in a big panic, and there's a fair amount of stress. Yeah, it is stressful, because you're always thinking about it. And I really can't see there's very many teachers who don't go away in the night time and they're not thinking about their schoolwork and the children. Cause once you're there, there's no escaping it ...*

As noted in the section on tiredness, many teachers, such as this urban elementary teacher, described waking at night with worry:

*My mind is always thinking school, even when I'm home. ... Two Thursdays ago, I woke up with pains in my stomach - just gut feelings,*

*saying, 'Oh my God', you're almost sick, saying, 'I got to do something. [A student] just got a 40 and a 41 and a 25'- well, what am I going to do?'*

Teachers also talked about feeling like they are constantly rushing around, even when they make a conscious effort to slow down. I heard over and over again that there is “*never enough time to get your work done*”, as one urban elementary teacher put it. She added,

*It's just never, ever finished. There's no teacher that goes to bed and says 'I have no work to do.' It just doesn't happen. You just have to accept that as part of the job. ... and there's always things that you never get to. And you just say 'Well, yeah, that's it!' [sigh]”*

Teachers talked about trying not to bring their stress from school into their homes. One rural primary teacher said that her husband tells her just not to think about school when she is at home: “*What's up to school, leave up to school.*” But she said that it is not as easy as that, because school concerns are “*always in the back of my mind.*” A rural primary teacher said that he thinks about schoolwork and his students “*all the time.*”

*I find, on the weekends, I could be out mowing the lawn – honestly, this is the truth – ... and I could be thinking, 'What am I going to correct tonight? How much work am I going to have to do this weekend?'... You're wondering in your mind, 'Am I getting through to those students? Am I doing the job that I'm supposed to be doing? How come I can't get all the things done that I have to do?'*

#### **9.2.4 Lack of Time for Self**

*It's all about the children, and whether that's at home or at work, it's all about the kids. And when my children at home get a little older, I'll take time for me. Right now I've got too much to worry about. Nineteen [at school], two [at home]. I have twenty-one children.*

**Rural primary teacher**

Ultimately, teachers told me, and their task-diaries portrayed very clearly, that time for themselves always comes last. Task-diaries showed that, as I illustrated in the section on mothers with young children, leisure time for teachers in this study tends to be broken up in small snippets. For example, the only time in an urban elementary teacher's day when she was not working was twenty minutes in the morning and twenty minutes in the evening, when she was chatting with her husband. For the rest of her day, this teacher was constantly working to meet the demands of the children in her class and her children at home. In fact, when I asked about her time to herself, she replied that she barely knew what it was like any more to have her own time:

*"There's no time. ... Every minute of the day is counted for. I don't watch any TV; don't listen to any radio."*

An urban elementary teacher also talked about how she does not get much time to relax, or time for herself, and she finds trying to balance work and family life "terrible." *"I should be able to find half an hour to go to the gym. I don't. Everything else is more important. I got to make sure the wash is done; I got to make sure this is done; I got to make sure the kids' homework is done."* This same teacher talked quite a bit about her efforts to ensure that her work did not impact her family, but time for herself was very rare. She said that she stays up quite late to do her work after the rest of her family is in bed, often until 12:30 a.m. and sometimes even until 2:00 am. That way, she explained, her early evenings could be spent with her family:

*Because if you don't do it, and you do all work, then you're going to be upset inside because you didn't take the time to spend the time with your dad, or spend the time playing with the kids, or spending time going out with your husband ... If I can get my work done after hours ... after the*

*kids are finished, and after my husband is gone to bed ... so that it doesn't affect anybody else except myself.*

While this teacher talked about how her husband was able to have leisure time to himself, her task-diary showed that she herself had virtually none.

Finally, time was especially short for those trying to further their teaching education.

A number of the teachers I interviewed were considering or were already doing university courses to upgrade their qualifications, since the pay scale in teaching is directly linked to their post-secondary education attainment. However, teachers told me that adding one more element to their busy lives was extremely challenging, and thus they usually sacrificed time for themselves. An urban primary teacher who was currently working on her Master's said that she had found it very difficult to find any time to relax since she started her programme, and that this was taking its toll.

*The past two years has been work life plus university. That's been tough at times, very tough. Like I said, [my husband] has been good most of the time, but there are times when it's been really hard, and then I go and I get stressed. ... I remember sitting down ... and going out there to write the one last paper, and I got out the keyboard, and I started crying. I said, 'I can't handle this anymore!'*

### **9.2.5 Physiological Problems**

Of all the physiological problems that teachers reported, urinary problems, which teachers linked to the lack of time that they have to visit the washroom during the school day, were the most frequently mentioned. Thirteen teachers talked about lacking enough time in the day to use the washroom. As one rural elementary teacher explained, on days when she has supervision duty, there is no bathroom break at all. *"You started at 8:20, you finished at 2:30 and you were not off for one minute. Not one. ... I don't think anybody should have to go from 8:30 in the morning to 2:30 in the evening without even*

*a pee break.*” An urban elementary teacher talked about how her doctor had told her that her recurrent urinary tract infections were due to her lack of bathroom breaks at school, and that he had noticed this was a common problem among teachers.

An urban primary teacher said that she does not leave her class to go to the bathroom unless she absolutely can not wait, because she knows that she is responsible for the class should an accident happen in her absence. Another urban primary teacher said she has had to condition herself to have “*a twenty-four-hour bladder*” so that she does not go to the bathroom during the entire school day. She said, “*It’s hardly human, really.*” One teacher actually had to take sick leave because a medical condition meant that he had to empty his bladder every few hours, and this was simply not possible for a classroom teacher.

An urban elementary teacher talked about how freeing it felt when she was at a professional development workshop, because she realized that she could go to the bathroom whenever she needed to, which is just not possible when she is teaching.

*[At the workshop], if we were halfway through something, and ... ‘Now I got to go to bathroom,’ you could get up and go to the bathroom. And we felt so free, because you can’t [at school]. What do you do? You got twenty-eight youngsters here and, if it’s an emergency, okay, fine. You go out into [another teacher]’s classroom and you go ‘[Teacher], I got to go, watch my kids.’ But you can’t make that a regular thing. And you’re still responsible for them.*

With an overall lack of time for themselves, it is not surprising that teachers talked about difficulty finding the time to eat well. Particularly at lunchtimes, teachers often had trouble finding the time to eat well. For this reason, they try to find something to bring

for lunch that they can eat as quickly as possible. For example, one rural elementary teacher wrote in his task-diary that he had had only ten minutes to eat his lunch that day. He explained this in the interview: *"I prepared a test for a student who came in late, came in the last minute just before the period was over, so ... then I had to go right away and try to find him a place to go and give him his test. ... Of course, that cut down on my time, so I only had really ten minutes to warm and eat my lunch; bolted it, really."* A rural primary teacher said that when she was on duty, she had only 15 minutes for her lunch, and so she found that there was very little she could eat in that time without hurting her stomach. *"So normally, if I'm on lunch [duty], I'll just take yogurt and a piece of fruit, because I'll have to just inhale it. If it's something like a bowl of soup or a sandwich, you're eating it so fast that your stomach is just hurting for the rest of the afternoon."* Another rural primary teacher said that she works through her lunch, eating just some fruit and cheese, in order to minimize the amount of schoolwork she has in the evenings and to maximize the time she has for her young children. *"It's just because I don't want to sit to eat. I would rather work as hard as I can work so that when I come home I'm done."* Exercise was also something that many of the teachers in this study said that they wished they could find the time for, but which they simply could not fit into their schedules. Several teachers actually said that although they had bought gym memberships, they had not had time to go.

Other problems mentioned by teachers that they linked to their work included headaches, voice problems, strep throat and other contagious illnesses, lower limb pain, high blood pressure, and allergies. Four teachers said that they had headaches that they felt were

caused by the stress of their work, as well as by the fluorescent lighting in their classrooms.

Studies have shown that teachers are particularly prone to many types of voice and laryngeal problems (Russell, Oates, and Greenwood, 1998; Smith, Kirchner, Taylor, Hoffman, and Lemke, 1998). In a case-control study of 905 schoolteachers that included a complete laryngeal exam, the prevalence of vocal disorders, including vocal overstrain, nodular lesions, and hyperfunctional dysphonia, was found to be 57% (Preciado-Lopez, Perez-Fernandez, Calzada-Uriondo, and Preciado-Ruiz, 2006). In Venezuela, voice problems are a recognized occupational health problem for primary school teachers, and there are a number of prevention measures taken to help avoid voice disorders (Escalona, 2006). In my study, four teachers mentioned that they lose their voices frequently during the school year, especially during stressful periods at school.

Six teachers mentioned contagious illnesses as a hazard associated with working with young children. Strep throat was particularly common, and three teachers said that they had contracted this illness multiple times. An urban elementary teacher said,

*Health-wise, you can get run down easy. I had strep throat there a couple of weeks ago and it took a long time to get over it. ... You really need to be able to say, 'I'm going to stay home and rest for two or three day,' and you don't tend to do that. ... [and] I should be quiet. Well, I can't be quiet, I've got to talk all day long. And I'm on my feet all day. So it takes longer to recover from the common head cold. And I'm also dealing with twenty-four kids with runny noses all the time and don't wash their hands enough. ... So whatever's on the go, we get.*

Pain in the legs, knees, and feet, which teachers attributed to standing all day, as well as kneeling beside their students, were other problems mentioned by three teachers.

Teachers said that there was very little time to sit down, particularly for those teaching the youngest children. High blood pressure was also a concern that two teachers linked to their stressful working conditions. As I describe in the conclusion, one rural primary teacher who retired a couple of months after the study wrote me a year later to say that although she had been on blood pressure pills for the last ten years of her teaching career, once she retired, her doctor told her she did not need to take them anymore. Finally, allergies and asthma among teachers have been found to be a significant occupational health issue in numerous studies (e.g. Gervais, 1993; Mazurek, Filios, Willis, Rosenman, Reilly, McGreevy *et al*, 2008). In this study, two teachers said that they attributed their allergies and asthmatic-type reactions to chalk dust or to overall poor air quality in their schools.

### **9.2.6 Difficulty Staying Home When Ill**

Finally, teachers also talked about how hard it was to take time off when they were ill. Many said that they frequently go to work when ill because it is easier than preparing work for a substitute teacher who does not know their class, their routines, nor all of the specific details they have to remember. Such details include the accommodations made for special needs students, the directions for which children go on which bus, and even which group of children gets which book to bring home. As one urban primary teacher explained, you cannot just wake up in the morning and realize that you are sick, because you need to have lesson plans prepared and delivered to the substitute teacher. She said,

*When I was off two days with strep throat, I had to have full- done lesson plans. So that would take me a good hour and a half to do, because you've got to do it in detail; you wouldn't do it the same way you're doing it for yourself. So you just can't be sick, you got to be sick and write up work. And then you got to get the plan into school, so my husband's got to go drop it off.*

The thoughts of one urban elementary teacher also show how challenging it can be to prepare work for a substitute. She talked about lying in bed worrying about how she could manage to either take time off or find childcare for her son if he was too ill in the morning to go to school.

*And then of course, I was wondering, 'Well, what am I going to do if I stay home? How am I going to get my lesson plans in?' Of course, when you leave school, unless you're planning on not coming in, you don't have lesson plans done up for a substitute. And because my class is so large, so many needs in the classroom, the routine has to be very rigid, it takes a long time to get set up. So then I was thinking what kind of activities that I could get them to do that would be worthwhile, but, at the same time, wouldn't be too difficult to get completed. So I drifted off thinking about that!*

In many rural areas in the province, finding a substitute teacher is a challenge. As explained by the principal representative,

*I've already had one morning so far this year that I couldn't get a substitute to come in. I find there's more and more teachers when they call in now, asking, saying, 'Well, I really feel terrible. I don't feel well enough to come in. However, if you can't get a substitute, call me back and I'll see what I can do.' So to me, that's a lot of undue pressure on teachers.*

In fact, in some isolated rural areas, the problem is even more severe because there simply are no trained substitute teachers available. One rural primary teacher explained:

*It's harder preparing for somebody else than it is for yourself, especially where we don't have trained people ... We don't have somebody around that you can rely upon who knows what to do, and so everything's got to be spelled out and I try to ... adapt something that they can cope with. ... It could be a recent high school graduate or ... you might be lucky,*

*sometimes you'll have somebody who's spent a couple of years in university ... But, no, it's pretty hard."*

She added that in her school, teachers try to cover for each other during their prep time if one is ill, but if two or three are out at the same time they have to *"really work hard at keeping it going. And we don't have the class space to double up the classes anymore. We just have to ... juggle around the best way we can."*

### 9.3 "Survival Mode"

*I can't do anything about it. I've just got to live with it; I've just got to do it. Just do it. ... There's no use in complaining, because it's not going to get done until you do something about it, no matter how much you complain.*

#### Urban elementary teacher

As the above quote illustrates, one last implication for teachers' health and wellness is that in order to manage with their heavy workloads at school and at home, when teachers get too tired and frustrated, they go into what an urban primary teacher calls *"survival mode."* For some teachers, this means taking shortcuts, and cutting out everything that they can so that they can get by. An urban primary teacher said, *"For me, I hate to say it, but I'm going to have to start taking shortcuts. I'll have to. Forced into it. It's not like a hamster on a wheel, eventually I'm going to burn out. I can see that coming."* An urban elementary teacher said that he has begun taking more shortcuts now that he is in his last few years before retirement:

*There was a time when I would never leave the building before 5 [p.m.] and I'd take things home with me, but after twenty-seven years I'm consciously cutting back on doing things like that. There was a time when I'd go home and I'd always take my schoolbag with me, and there'd always be things there because a teacher always has work from September to June and I'd always have things there that I can do. And I would find*

*that, even if I was planned for the next day and had all the important things corrected and it was all done in school, when I got home if I didn't take something out of that bag and do something I really felt guilty. ... Honestly, I went through years of that, and in the last few years its gotten to a point where I do very little at home. I get most done at school because it's just cut into my life so much.*

For others, it means they just keep pushing themselves on and cannot even stop to take a break, because they feel like they do not know if they will be able to keep going if they stop. A rural primary teacher said, *"I don't need downtime. [Pause.] That's not true, I do need downtime, but I don't accept it. ... This is how I need to go and go, go, go."* An urban elementary teacher said that when she needs to, *"there's days I've done all-nighters with reports"* but she just keeps on going the next day at school because, *"once I start, I'm on my feet, I don't even see that I'm tired."*

#### **9.4 Conclusion: Ordinary Suffering**

As I demonstrated throughout this chapter, primary and elementary teachers sometimes overlook the impact that their work has on their well-being, brushing it off because they believe that although they are suffering, it is *ordinary* suffering - there are so many others who are also struggling in the same way.

I acknowledge that the term "suffering" is a strong one, and I use it intentionally because I believe that teachers' and women's wellness has been too long overlooked and not taken seriously. I fully recognize that some may oppose the use of such a powerful term to describe the well-being of a privileged group of workers in a privileged area of the world. However, I defend my use of the term "suffering" to describe the way that many

teachers in this study told me that they were feeling: that although there are many aspects of their work that they love, their workloads were affecting their well-being to the point that their enjoyment of their families and their lives is being eroded. When a person tells me that she is going home and crying every day, or lying in bed night after night feeling sick with guilt and worry, I call this suffering. While I completely recognize that these individuals may not be suffering physically or emotionally in the same sense as someone living with a serious debilitating illness, in abject poverty, or through a civil war, I do not believe that any of us is in a position to try to compare or rank another person's misery.

I also want to repeat that although this study focused on the health and well-being of primary and elementary teachers, I believe that many of the findings are not specific to this group of workers. In particular, the discussion of teachers' domestic workloads, and the impacts that teachers described on their health and well-being can also offer insights into larger issues of women's health and well-being. In fact, the suffering described by teachers in this study also says a great deal about the ordinary suffering of so many people in our society who are becoming overwhelmed by the precarious balance of all their different types of work.

Although women's occupational health research has made great strides in addressing women's health concerns (e.g. Escalona, 2006; Messing *et al*, 1995; Messing, 1998; Walters *et al*, 1998), as Walters and Denton (1997) have argued, because middle-class women are relatively privileged, their health problems are still sometimes neglected even by health researchers. I add to this that researchers and the public in general have also

neglected women's health problems because they are seen as ordinary, and therefore unimportant. It seems that the 'ordinariness' of teachers' and mothers' heavy workloads tends to undermine the seriousness of the suffering that such workloads can cause. However, the heartfelt words of the teachers in this study make it clear that the fact that their suffering is common does not make it any less distressing.

With this in mind, I argue that there is a real need for more research that helps us to understand the way that domestic work, and the struggle to balance paid employment and domestic work, impacts for health and well-being of women and men. As I have explained in this chapter, primary and elementary teachers' work is structured in a way that tends to create stressful conditions. However, in our society, the relationship between paid employment and domestic work is also set up in such a way that creates stressful conditions, and the gendered division of paid employment and domestic work tends to mean that this balance is disproportionately difficult for women. This struggle has real implications for people's lives, as the teachers in this study have described. Therefore, it is very important for researchers to keep the concept of health as open as possible. Otherwise, the seriousness of this 'ordinary suffering' will continue to be overlooked, simply because it is so much a part of our everyday lives.

**PART FIVE: FINAL DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

## **CHAPTER 10: FINAL DISCUSSION - TEACHING, MOTHERING, AND PROFESSIONALISM**

### **10.0 Introduction**

One of the strongest findings in this research in regard to the teaching workloads of primary and elementary teachers in Newfoundland and Labrador is that teachers believe their workloads have intensified. In addition, these teachers talked about a lack of respect for their work, and a lack of respect for themselves as professionals. These findings seem to fit well with a theory of deprofessionalization, which asserts that professional occupations are increasingly losing the privileges and benefits associated with professionalism. However, this study also shows clearly that teachers' work is becoming more complex, with a high level of intellectual and emotional demands. In this chapter, I examine the debate surrounding teaching and professionalism, and look at how a theory based on deprofessionalization would explain teachers' workload concerns. I then change focus to a recent theory from the sociology of professions, based on examining who is controlling professionalism as an ideology. I show how this seems to better explain the complex nature of teachers' work. Finally, I bring gender back into focus, and explore the tension between teachers' mothering work and their status as professionals.

### **10.1 Teaching as a Profession**

Education researchers have long expressed concern about the status of teaching as a profession (e.g. Apple, 1986; Beck, 2009; Drudy and Lynch, 1993; Drudy, 2008; Gannerud, 2001; Leithwood *et al*, 2002). Teachers in this study also talked about their concern that teaching no longer has the respect, status, and privileges of a profession.

Many teachers stated outright that they did not feel that teachers are treated like professionals, by the public or by their employers. As the NLTA representative described it, *“We’re brought up to think that we are professionals, and then there’s always a debate of if we are professionals or not.”*

The debate as to whether or not teaching is a profession is made more complicated by the lack of clear consensus on the definition of a ‘profession,’ or on which occupations should fit into this category (Evetts, 2003; Wilkinson, 2005). As I explained in Chapter 2, the classic definition of a ‘profession’ specifies that these workers enjoy many privileges, including a higher level of autonomy than other occupational groups (Abbott, 1988; Larson, 1977, Tilly and Tilly, 1997). This also includes a high degree of control over the training, qualification, and regulation of their profession (Beck, 2009; Benoit, 1989; Wilkinson, 2005).

In certain ways, teaching indeed seems to be structured as a profession: teachers in Newfoundland and Labrador are represented by a professional association, and benefit from advantages such as higher pay, benefits packages, job security, and pension programs. However, in other ways, teaching clearly does not share the level of professionalism of the historically male-dominated professions such as medicine and law. Teachers’ training and work has generally been controlled by others (Beck, 2009; Lortie, 1975), and teaching has also tended to be much more bureaucratized than the male-dominated professions (Drudy, 2008).

Teachers in my study gave many examples of ways in which they felt that primary and elementary teaching does not seem to have full status as a profession. For example, while professionals are involved in developing policies that govern their work, many teachers in this study feel that educational policies are imposed on them without meaningful consultation. This sentiment has also been echoed in other studies of teachers (e.g. Nieto, 2003; Younghusband, 2005). The NLTA representative explained that,

*Teachers believe that teaching is a profession, and as part of a profession there is some ownership over the whole policy-making side of your profession. And teachers have frequently felt that policies are top-down and that they don't get an opportunity to give input in the policies. And if they do on their initiative try to, they are perceived as over-stepping their boundaries. And of course that brings with it a lack of involvement with new initiatives, and teachers often feel that policies are developed by people that aren't in the classroom and don't fully understand the environment that the policy is brought into.*

Teachers also said that they feel they do not have the high level of autonomy and control over their time and their work that is the privilege of other professionals. Like midwives working in hospitals (Benoit, 1987; Benoit, Wrede, Bourgeault, Sandall, De Vries and van Teijlingen 2005) teachers work within a hierarchical and bureaucratised education system where their time and the methods and content of their work are largely organized by higher-level bureaucrats. Teachers particularly highlighted the lack of flexibility that they have in their work schedules. In Chapter 9, I gave examples of teachers talking about finding it difficult to take time off when ill. In addition, I also found that teachers talked about the difficulty of taking time off for any other reason, such as family needs. They said they felt this reflected a lack of respect for teachers as professionals, as though they are not trusted to be able to use their own judgement, but instead are treated like children by their employers. This is similar to the sentiments of teachers in Nieto's

(2003) study. This researcher studied American teachers who had been recognized with awards for their teaching skills, but found that they still felt that their employers sometimes treated them like children (Nieto, 2003). In my study, one urban primary teacher talked about how she felt that the fact that she has to go to the doctor to get a note when she is sick is evidence of a lack of respect and trust on the part of her employers: *“That's the thing, you have to have a stupid note to be sick. That's unbelievable that they won't trust me that I'm sick.”* This teacher also talked about her frustration when she was not able to go for a trip with her mother on a long weekend because she would have needed to take a Friday afternoon off school in order to make the flight schedule. She said,

*But you just about need a note from God to do that. You can't say, 'I'm just going to take the afternoon.' ... In a lot of ways, they treat you like a kid. ... You can't bank in the extra hours like a normal job that says, 'Okay, I just spent three hours in there on Saturday and I just spent two hours on your website and I just did this.' You can't do that.*

## **10.2 Deprofessionalization**

This lack of control and autonomy, lack of meaningful consultation, and the intensification of teachers' work all seem to fit well with theories of deprofessionalization. As I explained in Chapter 2, the basic premise of the deprofessionalization argument is that professional occupations are losing the very privileges that once defined them as professions. Theorists of deprofessionalization connect this in large part to the effects of neo-liberal restructuring, and in particular, the associated cutbacks to professional workers, support staff, and material resources (Apple, 1986; Braverman, 1974; Sears, 2003). One of the most important results of

deprofessionalization that has been highlighted is the intensification of professional work (Armstrong *et al*, 2002; Larson, 1980; Leithwood *et al*, 2002).

Teachers said that they have seen the results of cutbacks of this kind throughout schools in Newfoundland and Labrador. For example, in the section on lack of human and material resources in Chapter 4, teachers gave examples of trying to 'make do' with insufficient materials (with some teachers even spending their own money on classroom resources), frustration with poorly-functioning technologies, and the constant need for more student assistants. As the parent representative in this study put it,

*with the initial restructuring of the education system and the reforms from denominational to non-denominational, and one of the many promises that was made to us with the changes and downsizing in education it was going to mean a better quality education for the students. And it seems like that every year as it progresses we have to fight harder and lobby louder to get more resources for the kids. Like I said, that's not only frustrating for the parents and the students, but certainly for the teachers as well.*

Despite the usefulness of the concept of deprofessionalization to highlight the intensifying effect that cutbacks have had on teachers' work, the findings of this study show that this concept also has its limits when applied to primary and elementary teachers' workloads. Most importantly, this concept does not explain well the reasons why teachers believe that their work is increasing in complexity and in intellectual and emotional demands. To better explain this finding, I turn to the recent work of British sociologist Julia Evetts.

### **10.3 'Professionalism from Above'**

Evetts' (2003) article in *International Sociology* turns the argument away from a focus on

deprofessionalization and instead towards different forms of professionalism, and towards the ways that professionalism is used as an ideology. Specifically, she borrows from McClelland (1990), to distinguish between professionalism 'from within' and professionalism 'from above.' Evetts (2003) particularly focuses on the way that the 'appeal' to professionalism is used, and how this impacts various occupations. In her usage, "professionalism from within" refers to the situation where the occupational group itself initiates the appeal to professionalism. She explains that these groups, such as physicians, lawyers, and accountants, have been able to use the discourse of professionalism to their advantage to create a professional identity, promote their occupation to their 'clients' and to the general public, and to negotiate with the state and secure and maintain the ability to regulate their profession.

In contrast, Evetts (2003) explains that the most common type of professionalism, and the one that I would argue best explains the situation for teachers, is "professionalism from above." She says that,

In the case of most contemporary service occupations, however, professionalism is being imposed 'from above' and for the most part this means the employers and managers of the service organizations in which these 'professionals' work. Here the normative values (of dedicated service and autonomous decision making) are part of the appeal of professionalism. These values are inserted or imposed and a false or selective ideology is used to promote and facilitate occupational change and as a disciplinary mechanism of autonomous subjects exercising appropriate conduct. This ideology of professionalism is grasped by the occupational group since it is perceived to be a way of improving the occupation's status and rewards collectively and individually. However, the realities of professionalism 'from above' are very different (p. 409).

More specifically, she argues that

the reality of professionalism that is actually envisaged in new and

existing occupations includes financial constraints and budgetary devolution; often a reduction in personnel but a work force which is disciplined and more highly trained and credentialized; an enlarged and expanded work role and the need to demonstrate the achievement of externally (and often politically) defined targets; in bureaucratic, managerial and hierarchically organized places of work (p. 408).

For teachers, this concept of “professionalism from above” helps to explain many factors that a theory based solely on deprofessionalization does not fully capture. As Evetts (2003, 2006) explains, the ideology of professionalism is being used by the employers of teachers and other service workers to encourage and convince these workers to work in ways that the institution considers to be fiscally efficient. This includes an expectation to do more work, and to do more types of work (thus, intensified and complex workloads); and to meet accountability standards set by the institution (thus, more paperwork). This conceptualization of professionalism also helps to explain why, despite claims that teachers are professionals, they find themselves in a bureaucratized and hierarchical system that allows little room for the ideal of the autonomous professional. As Acker (1996) puts it, “[i]t seems that in acting for the interests of the economic elite, the state is motivated to control and rationalize tasks performed by workers of all statuses, and many professionals work in bureaucracies where their autonomy can be severely compromised” (Acker, 1996, p. 107).

Furthermore, this “appeal to professionalism” is done in such a way that teachers, like other professional workers “are very keen to grasp and lay claim to the normative values of professionalism” (Evetts, 2003. p. 411). This may be particularly the case where occupations have faced an onslaught of cutbacks, and thus want to protect the benefits

and privileges that remain. In addition, this call to professionalism appeals to the need to promote the interest of the profession's 'clients' - in this case, students. For this reason, I argue that this appeal may be particularly effective in occupations such as the women-dominated 'caring professions,' where care and concern for those they serve is an integral part of the job and of professional identity. Teachers in this study clearly hold to the view of themselves as professionals, and are willing to make sacrifices for their students both as mothers and as professionals. A rural elementary teacher said, "*I do think in the true sense of the words, teachers are the only professionals in the world. ... there's no one anywhere that could pay a teacher what they're worth, if they're doing a good job.*"

However, as Evetts (2003) explains and as teachers talked about throughout this research, the ideal of professionalism that is held up is far from the reality of teachers' day-to-day workloads. In a more recent article, Evetts (2006) specifically mentions education as one of the fields where these changes in the concept of professionalism are visible. She says,

These occupational changes are often perceived by the workers concerned as more paper work and additional responsibilities but with no corresponding increase in either collective or individual status or salary – the rewards usually perceived to accrue from professionalization (Larson, 1977). Often such occupational changes are interpreted by workers as increased bureaucratization (i.e. more form-filling) but, as a consequence, the quality of the service to the client is perceived by the workers to decline (Evetts, 2006, p. 139).

This description fits well with the sentiments expressed by the teachers in my study, who talked about feeling overwhelmed with the seemingly ever-increasing requirements for paperwork and the pressure for accountability in every area of their work, as well as frustrated with being unable to meet the needs of their students in the way that they felt was best.

The issue of who has decision-making power and control in a profession is also the topic of a very recent article on the British education system. Beck (2009) argues that the language of professionalism is being appropriated by the British New Labour government in order to mask the ways in which it is actually taking more control over teaching. He refers to this as “co-ercive re-professionalization”, and explains that, “[t]he discourse and the institutional embodiment of professionalism itself have also been appropriated by government ... This project has certain contradictory aspects. On the one hand, there is New Labour’s charm offensive: addressing teachers as ‘partners,’ as members of a ‘modernised profession,’ as the kind of professionals who ‘accept accountability,’ as ‘trusted’ colleagues, and so forth ... But on the other hand, there is the iron fist within this velvet glove” (pp. 10-11). Specifically, Beck talks about how the government has taken control of teachers’ ‘official’ knowledge through setting their own standards for teachers’ professional development, and how they have set up a ‘professional’ association for teachers that in reality has only an advisory capacity.

Cecilia Benoit (1987, 1989) expresses a similar concern about the control of knowledge in another women-dominated profession – midwifery. Benoit has argued that midwifery’s professionalism suffers in situations where midwives are employed in highly bureaucratic hospitals. She says that in such settings, midwives are under the supervision of medical specialists and bureaucrats, which leads to the scientization and masculinization of midwives’ esoteric knowledge, a narrowing of midwives’ occupational role, deskilling of their practice, a loss of autonomy and a loss of midwives’ ability to organize their caring work around the concerns of their patients. This very

much echoes many of the concerns that teachers in this study raised regarding how the increasing bureaucratisation of teaching tends to undermine their ability to organize their caring, mothering work around the concerns of their students.

To carry this a step further, borrowing from Benoit *et al* (2005, p. 723), I argue that the social location of primary and elementary teaching also reveals something about the value that our society places on mothering work in general, and its ideas about women as autonomous professionals within the education system. Indeed, the gendered nature of teaching is an integral part of its troubled link with professionalism.

#### **10.4 Gender and Professionalism**

Evet's (2003) article does not explore the gendered aspects of professionalism.

However, I noted that the occupations which benefit from the "professionalism from within" that she describes tend to be male-dominated, while the service occupations that are structured by "professionalism from above" tend to be female-dominated. In my study, it is clear that gender plays a key role in shaping primary and elementary teaching as a profession. Indeed, in many ways, professionalism itself has been set up as a 'masculine' domain of authority and control, and women-dominated professions, such as nursing and midwifery (Benoit, 1987, 1989) have struggled to find their place within this domain.

Within a 'mothering profession,' primary and elementary teachers are caught between two very different worlds of work: the 'feminine' work of mothering, with its high value

on caring and emotional investment, as well as its tendency to be undervalued and often invisible, and the 'masculine' work of a profession, which tends to be highly specialised, well-paid, high-status, and privileged in many ways. The irony is that while caring work is very highly valued by teachers in this study and others (Cognard-Black, 2004; Gannerud, 2001; Messing *et al*, 1997; Rogers, 2001; Vogt, 2002), its strong connection with mothering can work against teachers' claims to respect as professionals (Gannerud, 2001; Rogers, 2001; Vogt, 2002). As Vogt (2002) puts it, "caring has been conceptualised as highly gendered and as set in opposition to paid work, training and professionalism" (p. 262).

Primary and elementary teachers talked about how their professionalism is undermined by the lack of appreciation they often sense from the public for the challenges of their mothering work. For example, an urban primary teacher said,

*These extra duties, under the umbrella of motherhood, have to be recognized as not just babysitting. [pause] Because sometimes that's what people think of us as. ... Even if you're reading a story to a group of children, you have to command their attention, you have to keep their attention, you have to keep the story interesting as you're reading it. It's not just a freebie. I think that some of the things we do, the routines we have in primary, are sometimes underestimated. And they are valuable things for a group of children in a setting such as a school to be doing together. I find that sometimes people belittle that.*

The lack of value placed on teachers' mothering work, and the associated lack of many aspects of professional status has many implications for teachers' workloads and for their health and well-being. One of the most important of these is connected to the undervaluing of the intense emotional work that teachers do. Emotional labour is an invisible element of primary and elementary teachers' work, in part because it is assumed

to be 'natural' work for women (Gannerud, 2001; Messing *et al*, 1997; Tancred, 1995). The teachers in this study talked about the serious impact that such work can have on their well-being yet, if such caring work is overlooked, then so are the health impacts of such work. If the importance of such work is not recognised by policymakers, particularly in a climate where teachers do not have meaningful input into educational policy development, then policies may be put into place that do not take into account the emotional elements of teaching. Such policies can negatively impact teachers' well-being (Hargreaves, 2001; Younghusband, 2005). For example, restructuring policies that increase classroom sizes ignore the importance to teaching of creating a relationship and emotional connection with their students. Being unable to do so can result in frustration for teachers and the feeling that they are not able to meet students' needs, and this can cause stress (Hargreaves, 2001). As well, teachers tend to resist any policy changes that they see as detrimental to their students' needs (Leithwood *et al*, 2002; Vogt, 2002; Younghusband, 2005). In order to reduce teachers' stress, therefore, Hargreaves (2001) argues that educational policies must take seriously the emotional aspects of teaching:

Policy must refrain from putting teachers back in their classroom boxes by overloading the curriculum, increasing the content focus, creating a profusion of learning standards, limiting teachers' time out of class to interact with others, and standardizing their interactions with those around them. ...Instead, policy must provide a framework that gives teachers the discretion, the conditions, the expectations, and the opportunities to develop and exercise their emotional competence of caring for, of learning from, and of developing emotional understanding among all those whose lives and actions affect the children that they teach (p. 1077).

When the challenges of teaching are devalued, then so is teachers' suffering, both by others and by teachers themselves. As Acker (1996) argues, in elementary teaching, there is often a "conflation of teaching with mothering" - where, just as it is forgotten that

the home is a workplace for homemakers, it is also forgotten that the school is a workplace for teachers” (p. 121). In regard to health implications, the irony, as Messing (1998) points out, is that emotional labour such as caring, which teachers often identify as among the most important and most satisfying aspects of their work, can also be the most draining. The words of one urban elementary teacher demonstrate very well the general feeling among the women in this study: *“The nurturers, the caretakers, ultimately it is us. And I probably wouldn’t have it any other way, because I like doing it. But at the end of your day it is taxing and you are tired.”*

Another implication of the devaluing of teachers’ professional mothering work is that it is linked to a lack of consideration for their domestic workloads. Rogers (2001) aptly illustrates the irony of women teachers’ image as mothers in light of their unpaid domestic labour: women teachers are idealized as mothers in the classroom, yet there is no recognition of or allowance for their responsibilities and labour for the children they may mother at home. As Rogers (2001) explains, “[t]eachers’ mothering is reserved for students; their own families are not acknowledged by a policy that disavows the connectedness of the private and public realms by increasing teachers’ work time” (p. 84).

As I discussed in Chapter 4, a number of teachers also connected their profession’s connection with mothering to their hesitance to speak out about problems with their work. An urban primary teacher said that while high school teachers sometimes do speak out, giving the example of the two teachers who were suspended in St. John’s in 2005, primary and elementary teachers tend to keep accepting more and more without protest. She said, *“I think teachers in the primary and elementary profession are our own*

*enemies because, and I say it again, as women, we tend to take it on, because we're supposed to. We don't stand up.*" She said that at a staff meeting another teacher advocated taking on extra responsibility by saying that, as teachers, they are like mothers to their students: *"and I was thinking, why, why? I mean, then you're digging your own grave here. Digging your own grave."* Such expectations are linked to an ideology of 'intensive mothering' (Hays, 1996), and to what Rogers (2001) refers to as "the selfless-teacher ideology," within which teachers are held up to the model of the 'ideal mother', and are expected to sacrifice their own needs for those of their students. Although many teachers embrace this image, it can also create problems by encouraging the assumption that primary and elementary teachers should make unlimited sacrifices of their own time and energy for the well-being of their students. As I illustrated in Chapter 9, many teachers in this study talked about feeling rushed, overwhelmed, and pressured by the sense that their time is not their own. Their comments suggest a situation that is very similar to Gustafson's (2005) discussion of cutbacks and work intensification in the healthcare system. Under such conditions, in both health care and education, time is used to organize caregivers, primarily women - and time is treated as a "personal property appropriated for the common good" (Gustafson, 2005, p. 20). This may well be a common consequence of Evetts' (2003) "professionalism from above."

## CHAPTER 11: CONCLUSION

### 11.0 Review

The main objective of this thesis was to examine primary and elementary teachers' workloads and health in rural and urban areas of Newfoundland and Labrador. As I conclude the thesis, I begin by reviewing the most important findings from this research.

Teachers spoke extensively about the complex nature of their work, and identified five main areas of concern in regard to their teaching workloads, including: the intense and all-consuming nature of teachers' work; emotional labour; specific tasks such as supervision duty, paperwork, planning, preparation and correcting, student evaluations, and implementing the Pathways program; lack of human and material resources; and a persistent sense of invisibility. These findings add much greater detail to the findings of the survey on teacher workload conducted by Dibbon (2004), and highlight the importance for teachers of issues that are not generally well-captured in questionnaires, particularly concerns regarding emotional labour and invisibility.

This study also contributed to an expansion of the focus of teacher workload research by exploring teachers' domestic workloads, which have received very little attention in existing research. I found that many teachers were struggling to balance their work at home and their work at school, using strategies of careful organization and routine, multi-tasking, and taking shortcuts and compromises. I also noted that there was a great deal of overlap between teachers' domestic and teaching workloads, particularly for teachers who were also mothers of young children. These findings also have important policy

implications, highlighting the need for policy-makers to consider the wide range of both teaching and domestic workload pressures faced by primary and elementary teachers.

In addition, I found that primary and elementary teachers' level of experience, rural or urban location, and gender were all important factors mediating these teachers' workloads. The findings in this study indicate that much more attention is needed to the concerns faced by new, untenured teachers, to the particular challenges faced by both women and men teachers in an occupation that is strongly gendered around mothering, and to the very real differences in the concerns of rural and urban teachers. Some of these rural/urban differences are straightforward, such as the challenge of multi-grade teaching in rural schools, or the large class sizes typical of urban schools. However, other rural/urban concerns are more complicated, and perhaps even less visible to policymakers. These include the emotional impacts of school closures on teachers, and the subtle but very important differences in the dynamics of relationships with parents in rural and urban areas. The comparison of rural and urban teachers is a particularly important addition to the literature, because the large majority of research on teacher workload has focused only on urban teachers (Abel and Sewell, 1999; Rottier *et al*, 1983).

Health and well-being of both teachers themselves and their families was an important focus in this research. Teachers talked about their concern for how their workloads affect their spouses, their children, and their elderly parents, and also explained the toll that these concerns then have on their own well-being. Teachers identified a number of consequences that they feel that their workload has on their health and well-being,

including: tiredness; guilt; feeling overwhelmed, rushed, or stressed; lack of time for themselves; physiological problems, such as headaches, voice problems, and lower limb pain; and difficulty taking time off when ill. These findings indicate that researchers' attention should be drawn beyond the issue of 'stress', which is so dominant in teacher workload literature, to encompass a broader understanding of the concept of well-being that takes into account the importance of teachers' and women's "ordinary suffering."

Finally, the findings in this study regarding the intense and complex nature of teachers' workloads also helps to improve our understanding of the debate surrounding teachers and professionalism, moving it beyond a focus solely on deprofessionalization. The findings surrounding the complexity of teachers' work offer support for Evetts' (2003, 2006) theory of the "appeal to professionalism," and also illustrate the ways this appeal primarily serves the interests of the state rather than teachers themselves. Finally, this research points to the importance of understanding the ways that neoliberal restructuring and the gendered nature of teachers' work shape teachers' workloads and the complicated relationship between teaching and professionalism.

### **11.1 Limitations of this Study**

There are a number of limitations of this study that are important to recognize. The first is that, as I explained in Chapter 3, given the relatively small number of participants, the findings here do not statistically represent all Newfoundland and Labrador primary and elementary teachers' perceptions of their workloads. However, it is important to reiterate that this study is based on qualitative methods, and is meant to complement a recent large survey study (Dibbon, 2004). Rather than offering broad statistical generalizations, this

present study is designed to describe teachers' perceptions of their workloads and health in more detail, and to provide a more in-depth, vivid understanding of teachers' day-to-day lives, and the ways that various elements of those lives affect their health and well-being.

This group of teachers is also a very homogeneous sample in terms of ethnicity (Anglo-Saxon) and sexual orientation (heterosexual, or at least in heterosexual relationships<sup>16</sup>). In order to more closely examine the workload concerns of gay, lesbian, and bisexual teachers, transgendered teachers, or teachers from a wider variety of cultural backgrounds, it would be necessary to use very purposive selection methods. This was the strategy used in a 1998 study of gay, lesbian, and bisexual high school teachers in the province (Shortall, 1998).

In addition, despite my best efforts at recruitment, there was a lack of newer teachers in this study. As I explained in section 4.0, this is likely due to a number of factors, including new teachers being less likely to be contacted via the selection methods that I used, as well as the heavy workloads and reluctance to speak out that participants in this study identified as concerns for new teachers. It would be worthwhile to conduct a study that focused solely on new teachers in order to better understand the workload concerns of this group. One interesting way to do this might be to follow a group of final-year education students through the first year or two of their careers.

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<sup>16</sup> The issue of sexuality is, of course, extremely complex (Temple, 2005), and I did not ask teachers to identify their sexual orientation. However, all of the partners of the teachers were opposite-sex.

I was also unable to thoroughly compare women and men teachers, given the small percentage of men in primary and elementary teaching and the small numbers in this study. Although participants certainly identified many important gendered issues, it would also be valuable to conduct a wider study to compare larger numbers of men and women in this profession.

Another serious limitation of this study was its teacher-centred focus. In part, this was intentional, since, as I discussed in Chapter 2, I found that the perspectives of teachers tend to be very much ignored even in literature on teachers' workload, and particularly in the lack of public and media attention to teachers' occupational health. However, it remains very important to explore alternative perspectives on teachers' workloads. While I attempted to explore the perspectives of others in the education system, the small number of interviews meant that I was only able to gain a very preliminary understanding of the perspectives of other players in the education system: both those above and below teachers in the education hierarchy. The teacher-centred focus means that I was not always as able as I would have liked to offer a critique of teachers' perspectives from an alternative point of view. A more comprehensive study that conducted interviews with large numbers of parents, student assistants, principals, school board administrators, and Department of Education officials would be better able to grasp the many facets of the education system.

This study is also constrained by its focus solely on the concept of "workload." Although I believe that this is a very useful way to frame primary and elementary teachers'

concerns in a way that is relevant to them, it is also limited. Using the concept of “workload” means that this research was focused much more on the difficult and negative aspects of teaching rather than the positive and joyful aspects. I attempted to bring out some of these positive elements in teachers’ accounts, particularly in the section on emotional labour, where rewards and challenges are so intricately intertwined. However, one important area for future research would be to examine teachers’ work and lives in a broader way – for example, using a life history methodology, and perhaps focusing the research on teachers’ narratives of their careers from beginning to present.

Finally, this study addresses only the perceptions of participants. With the exception of the one-day task-diaries, there is no observation or measurement of specific factors in teachers’ working environment that might impact on their workloads. Therefore, there is a lack of attention in this study of the impact of physical factors on teachers’ workloads. It would be very useful to repeat in this province the type of research carried out by researchers at the Université du Québec à Montréal (Messing *et al*, 1997). These researchers used a comprehensive ergonomic analysis of work activity, including interviews and systematic observations to understand many different types of physical and psychological factors that impact teachers’ level of distress. The physical factors addressed included temperature, humidity, and classroom set-up, along with indicators of cognitive activity such as body posture and eye fixations.

## 11.2 Feedback

Employing a feminist action research framework means that the goal of my research became wider than my own goals as a student to complete a project, write a thesis, and obtain a degree. As I explained in Chapter 3, a key part of feminist action research is a commitment to the participants in the study to work with them to develop action to bring about social change. In this case, the limitations of graduate student research meant that my goal was modest: to prepare a report about this study for the NLTA that would help them to increase understanding of rural and urban primary and elementary teachers' main workload concerns and the impacts on their well-being, and to identify potential solutions to improve teachers' workloads.

In May of 2008, I distributed a draft version of this report to the thirty participants in this study. As I described in section 3.2.3 I received feedback from fourteen participants. I received corrections, edits, advice, stylistic suggestions and, in addition, updates on what had transpired in the participants' lives since their interviews the previous year. For example, one participant had talked in the interview about feeling that her teaching workload had contributed to her high blood pressure. She retired the year following the interview, and told me when she sent her feedback that she had been feeling much more relaxed since she retired. She reported that her blood pressure had improved to the point that she no longer needed to take medication, which she believes is linked to the reduction in stress that came with retirement. Another participant who was frustrated with the lack of job security in his profession also wrote to tell me that he had since been hired in a permanent position with a different school, and was hoping to achieve tenure

within a short time. He reported that he was happier in his job, and no longer planned to leave the profession.

Participants also told me that they were quite satisfied with the way the report described their workloads and the challenges that they face. A rural primary teacher, for example, said, *“I found [the report] really interesting and it gave a true picture of what is going on in the teaching profession. I could really relate to the content and especially the quotes. Thanks for sharing it with me.”* An urban elementary teacher also observed that the report was true to her own experiences: *“I have read [the report] through a few times and I am very pleased with it. ... [I]t really does show the problems, frustrations and limitations that face teachers today ...”* The parent representative also expressed satisfaction with the report saying, *“You have touched on many of the concerns that have been echoed by teachers for years.”* This type of feedback was very important to me because it helped to validate the research results by ensuring that my description of teachers’ perceptions ‘rang true’ for the participants themselves (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005).

Teachers also expressed the hope that their participation in the research study would be valuable. They said that they hoped that the report would bring about change – specifically, through influencing both their employers’ (and the public’s) understanding of teachers’ workload concerns. A rural primary teacher said, *“I hope people in the right places will pay attention to all teachers and what they have to say.”* The representative

of teachers' employers, the school boards, also offered thoughtful feedback, saying that the report,

*[C]ertainly raised questions for School Boards and board administrators. Of course, this type of research on teacher workloads, lack of resources for teachers, et cetera will be very controversial and will meet with approval as well as opposition. ... There is a lot of food for thought in your research ... We all know that teachers are undervalued for the work that they do - how to rectify this is a challenge for all school boards across the country.*

These comments indicate that there may indeed be an openness to improving teachers' workloads on the part of their employers. On the other side of the bargaining table, the NLTA representative told me that the Association would be using the report in their then-upcoming contract negotiations with the provincial government.<sup>17</sup>

### **11.3 Final Conclusions and Recommendations**

The purpose of this study was not only to look at the problems associated with primary and elementary teachers' workloads, but to identify solutions. In the interviews, I asked teachers for their ideas as to how their workloads could and should be improved. In the report that I wrote for the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association (*Appendix D*), I identified the ten recommendations that teachers in this study mentioned most frequently. These include: more of a voice for teachers to express concerns about their work and to participate in the development of educational programs and policies; relief from supervision duty; a reduction in paperwork of all kinds; reduction in class size maximums; increased preparation time; improved material resources, especially

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<sup>17</sup> Just before this thesis was submitted for examination, it was announced that teachers had voted to accept a new contract proposal with the provincial government, including a 21% wage increase over four years, matching the increases offered to other public sector workers. However, details regarding any agreement on workload issues were not immediately available.

textbooks; more human resources; changes to simplify the Pathways program for special needs; more time for student evaluations; and changes to the KinderStart program to relieve Kindergarten teachers of this responsibility. I also added a recommendation to establish a simplified, well-publicised process for teachers to raise any concerns they have about their work, and that serious effort be put into improving the relationships and communication between teachers, administrators, the school boards, and the Department of Education, in order to reduce teachers' sense of powerlessness in this hierarchical system. Finally, I emphasised the importance of emotional labour in primary and elementary teaching, and stated that "any solution must also take into account the importance of teachers' relationship with their students, and must respect the fact that care and concern for students is both the biggest joy and the most difficult burden for teachers of young children" (*Appendix I*, p. 28).

I also recommend that teachers' teaching workloads could be improved through a recognition of the problems associated with the strongly hierarchical education system, with power concentrated at the level of government and school board officials. I recommend the reorganization of the education system and the development of a more democratic process for teachers to contribute to the structure of their work and their workloads. In addition, despite the important advantages of reorganizing the education system to a "child-centred" focus, I would recommend that education policymakers closely examine the implications of this focus to make certain that the health and well-being of teachers are not completely overlooked in this approach, and to ensure that there are sufficient material and human resources and supports provided in order for teachers to be able to adequately implement this approach. Finally, on a provincial (and even

national and international) scale, the impacts of restructuring the education system towards a focus on individual investment rather than social investment, cutting back the numbers of teachers, staff, and schools, need to be carefully examined and rethought.

In Chapter 5, however, I made note that none of the participants were able to think of any solutions to suggest to improve their domestic workloads. Instead, participants felt that they simply had to cope the best that they could, no matter how difficult a burden their domestic workloads became. I also believe that it was difficult for participants to come up with solutions for their domestic workloads because, while teachers' school workloads may be able to be at least somewhat improved through the very specific, practical, one-time changes listed above, changes to domestic labour at home require much wider and more comprehensive changes to ideas, attitudes, efforts, and social structures. For example, a national childcare system, developed with the needs of both urban and rural parents and children in mind, would go a long way towards easing the domestic workloads of teachers and other employed parents. For teachers in particular, I suggest that a childcare centre adjoining their school, providing both pre-school and after-school care, would be extremely helpful.

Overall, I argue that we need radical changes in the gendered division of labour in both paid employment and domestic work. In particular, I believe that more respect is needed for the value of all types of "mothering" work, including both the work of primary and elementary teaching (and other occupations involved in caring for young children, such as early childhood education, nursing, and social work) as well as work in the home,

including caring for children and elders and the many chores involved in maintaining a household. If mothering work is truly valued and seen as vital to the well-being of our society, it will open the door to the possibility of developing innovative and thoughtful solutions for balancing paid and domestic work, and to finally recognize and address the 'ordinary suffering' that has become a taken-for-granted part of women's lives.

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## **APPENDICES**

**APPENDIX I: REPORT FOR THE NLTA**

# Primary and Elementary Teachers' Workloads and Health in Rural and Urban Newfoundland and Labrador



**A report for the  
Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association**

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### **Note**

The proposal for this research has been approved by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR) at Memorial University.

## Introduction

*"I do think in the true sense of the words, teachers are the only professionals in the world. ... There's no one anywhere that could pay a teacher what they work, if they're doing a good job. Because the hours that a teacher puts in can't be counted, and they certainly can't be paid for."*

**Rural primary teacher,  
29 years experience**

A recent survey of teachers' work reported that teachers in Newfoundland and Labrador work an average of more than fifty-two hours per week (Dibbon, 2004), and that teachers' work is becoming increasingly intense and stressful (Dibbon, 2004; Younghusband, 2005). But what kinds of work do teachers actually do? How do teachers feel that their work affects their health and well-being? What do teachers believe can be done to improve their workloads?

These questions are not simple ones, because in the past few years, the issue of teacher workload in this province has been quite controversial. In fact, in 2006, two high school teachers were suspended (and later reinstated) after speaking out about workload issues at a public meeting on the topic (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2006). In 2007, the provincial teachers' association, the NLTA, ran a television ad campaign to raise awareness of teachers' workloads.

The main goal of this present study, which was carried out as part of a PhD program in Sociology at Memorial University<sup>18</sup>, is to better understand primary and elementary teachers' perspectives on their workload, its impact on their health and well-being, and potential solutions. I chose to focus solely on the K-6 level because research has shown that primary-elementary teaching is quite different in many ways from high school teaching (Vogrinetz, 1997; Cognard-Black, 2004). In order to understand the various perspectives in the education system, I also spoke with representatives of parents, student assistants, school administrators, the NLTA, the school boards, and the Department of Education.

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<sup>18</sup> This report summarizes only the main results of the research project dealing with teachers' paid work. In my PhD thesis, which I am currently writing, I also discuss teachers' unpaid work at home, such as housework and taking care of children or older relatives. The thesis will also include a detailed analysis of gender issues in teachers' work, as well as a more thorough comparison of rural and urban issues.

## Methods

Between April and December 2007, I conducted a total of thirty individual interviews, twenty-four of which were with primary and elementary classroom teachers. The teachers also completed detailed one-day task-diaries to outline all the different types of tasks and activities that they do, both at school and at home.

The teachers were selected through stratified random sampling. Using publicly available information (mainly school and Department of Education websites), I selected equal numbers of urban and rural teachers from areas all across the province. I contacted a total of 96 teachers, the majority by written letter to their school addresses, along with a memo of support from the NLTA, and a small number by e-mail with the same letter. Thirty-three teachers responded to the letter, with twenty-six agreeing to participate in the study. (Two later were unable to do so.) The remaining twenty-four teacher participants represent all four English-language school boards (Eastern, Nova Central, Western, and Labrador) and all grades from Kindergarten through Grade 6. Eleven are from rural areas, thirteen from urban areas. Nineteen of the teachers are women, five are men, and they ranged in age from 31 to 63. In order to protect the identities of the participants, the only details that appear in this report are teachers' grade level, their years of experience and their location in a rural or urban area.

I mailed each teacher a task-diary, and for a period of one day, I asked them to report

all the different types of tasks and activities that they engaged in, including leisure activities as well as all types of work. I also asked them to report whether the day was more, less or equally busy to most other weekdays (as done by Messing et al, 1997). The primary goal of the task diaries was not to count the number of hours of work, but instead to examine and discuss the different types of work that teachers do, including unpaid domestic tasks.

Once the task-diaries were completed, I conducted in-depth individual interviews with each of the twenty-four teachers, as well as the six other education representatives. Twenty-four interviews were face-to-face and took place in a mutually-agreed-upon location, such as the participant's home. The final six interviews were conducted via telephone, as I was unable to travel at that time. I taped twenty-eight of the interviews with a digital audio recorder, and took notes only for the two teachers who preferred not to be taped. In each interview, I asked the participant about her or his perceptions of teachers' paid and unpaid workload, the health consequences of this workload, and their ideas for how their workloads can be improved.

The participants in this study also participated in the feedback stage of the research. Once I had written a draft version of this report, I sent it out to each participant. I asked for their comments, suggestions, and criticisms, and then incorporated their feedback into the final draft of the report.

## Note on Education in Newfoundland and Labrador

The education system in this province has undergone dramatic changes in recent years. From 1995 onwards, partially in response to the 1992 Royal Commission on Education report, which recommended the elimination of denominational education (Dibbon, 2004; Department of Education, 2007), hundreds of schools were closed and amalgamated. The total number of schools was reduced from 472 to 326; school boards were reduced from twenty-seven to five, and teachers from over 7000 to about 5400 (Dibbon, 2004, p. 1; Department of Education, 2007). At the same time, the government began to implement a number of new programs and curriculum changes, following eighty-six recommendations from the 2000 Ministerial Panel on Educational Delivery in the Classroom (Dibbon, 2004).

As well, recent concerns have led to Commissions on Teacher Allocation, on the Pathways program for special needs students, and on the Math program (Department of Education, May 2007; June 2007; November 2007). The reports on all three commissions were released this year, with recommendations to develop a new teacher allocation formula, to completely rework the Pathways program, and to replace the current Math program. It remains to be seen exactly how the provincial government will implement these recommendations.



## Main Workload Issues

### The Intense and All-Consuming Nature of Teaching

*“I think that teaching's a job that's never really done. If you spent five hours a night doing it, it's still never really done. There's more you could do and things you could do better if you had time or the resources to do it.”*

**Rural elementary teacher,  
3 years experience**

*“September comes, you step into a whirlwind. ...everything is coming at you left, right and centre. Then you're spit out again in December. You don't really get enough time Christmas to unwind from it. You're back in again. And then you go again January, right up to Easter—that's even shorter. And then by June, I don't think there's a teacher who wouldn't say to you, if I leave school June 22, I'm probably definitely into July or mid-July before I realize, ‘So now I can relax.’”*

**Urban primary teacher,  
20 years experience**

Across Canada, many studies have reported that teachers' work is becoming more and more intensified (Belliveau, G., Liu, X, and Murphy, E., 2002; Dibbon, 2004; Harvey, A. and Spinney, J., 2000; Naylor, C., Schaefer, A. and Malcomson, J. (Eds.), 2001). In this present study, the number one challenge that the teachers talked about was the way that teaching consumed so much of their time and their lives. They talked about the work that they do outside of school hours, the lack

of breaks in their day, the interruptions that make their schedules even busier, and the time that they spend thinking and worrying about their students.

Teachers explained that they do a great deal of their work, such as planning, preparation, and correcting, as well as meeting with parents and co-workers, outside of regular school hours. The task-diaries showed that the average number of hours that the teachers spent doing schoolwork on the recorded day was nearly 9 and a half hours. As one urban primary teacher explained,

*“every night you have schoolwork to do. I don't know any other way to do it, I just don't. And on the weekends you have schoolwork. And if you don't, if you say ‘I'm just not!’, then guess what? Then you've got a bigger pile next time you sit down.”*

Teachers also described their work as all-consuming in the sense that they have very few breaks, even for a few minutes, during the school day. This is particularly so when teachers are on supervision duty, as I will discuss below. However, the task-diaries showed that even when teachers were not ‘on duty’, scheduled breaks such as recess and lunch were often taken up with work tasks. For example, in one rural primary teacher's task-diary, she listed the following activities during her twenty-minute recess ‘break’: monitored a child with special nutrition needs, set homework for absent children, spoke to the special needs teacher about supplementary work for a

student, did some correcting, tidied materials in the art room in preparation for a later class, spoke to a parent who came to her classroom, and called the secretary for the parent.

To further intensify matters, although teachers have some professional flexibility, they are also governed by a rigid school schedule that divides the day into increments of a certain number of minutes per period, in which the Department of Education requires teachers to teach subjects for a specified percentage of time: for example, a certain percentage of instructional time at each grade level is to be spent on Math. This means that teaching is a job where your time is scheduled by the bell, and you have to carefully watch both the clock and the calendar. Yet, as an urban kindergarten teacher explained:

*"your lesson plan for the week is not going to include all the stuff that happens. ...you're in the middle of a lesson and the secretary might buzz down and say 'I got so-and-so on the phone, she's one of your KinderStart parents, she missed the meeting, she's wondering can she swing by lunch time and pick up the take home package.' ... Or you're in the middle of a lesson and somebody's knocking on the door because they're looking for something that rolls or they're looking for something that they remember seeing in the Kindergarten room. Or somebody's brother or sister has a message for them, and they just come down whenever's convenient for them."*

In other words, the constant interruptions that are part of teachers' work make their workdays even more intense.

Many of the teachers referred to teaching as "a 24-hour job": a job that in your mind, you never really walk away from. In fact, teaching at this level depends in large part on forming and maintaining relationships with small children (Hargreaves, 2001; Messing et al, 1997), and so the teachers in this study also spend a great deal of time thinking and worrying about their students. As an urban primary teacher put it, *"You can't walk out of there at 4:00 in the afternoon and turn them off until the next morning."* A rural primary teacher explained how much her care and concern for her students affects the rest of her life:

*"I have spent many a sleepless night. I have brought it home with me and I've had it for supper. I have dealt with everything from learning disabilities to suspected abuse, over the 25 years. ...It all falls on the teacher. ...There's nights when I've been...asleep, but I've woken up and this child has been on my mind. And I'm thinking, 'What are we going to do for them? ...We have to find something.' ...So you're constantly working at your work."*

In fact, the emotional work of primary and elementary teaching was itself another important challenge identified by the teachers in this study, as I discuss below.

Finally, several teachers connected the all-consuming nature of primary and elementary teaching with its association with motherhood (Acker 1996; Messing et al, 1997). For example, one urban primary teacher talked about how at a staff meeting, one of her colleagues advocated taking on extra responsibilities by saying *"we're like their mothers."*

Many teachers embrace this image, as I explain below, but it can also create problems by encouraging the assumption that primary and elementary teachers should make unlimited sacrifices of their own time and energy for the well-being of their students.

## Emotional Work

*"I'm going to have to make sure [a chronically ill child] is okay, and I have to make sure the little boy who I feel is weak is okay, and the little boy who could drive a nail in somebody or himself is okay... You don't know when they leave in the run of the day if anybody loves them, or if anybody's hugged them. And in a time when it's not right to hug, I hug."*

Rural primary teacher,  
10 years experience

*"I just felt bad because I wanted to give [an ESL student] more, but I couldn't, because I couldn't devote all my time to him. I had other children who needed so much help. And even your children who are your best students, they deserve part of you as well."*

Urban primary teacher,  
28 years experience

While academics have called women-dominated occupations such as teaching, nursing, and social work the 'caring professions' (Armstrong et al, 2002; Messing et al, 1995), I think it is even more accurate to call primary and elementary teaching a 'mothering profession'. As I mentioned above, teachers spoke of caring deeply for their students, of hugging them and comforting

them, and many said that they feel very motherly towards their students, as illustrated by a rural primary teacher: *"I have 21 children. ...They're my children when they walk into the school"*.

Children seem to recognize the closeness of the teacher-mother role as well. Many of the teachers, women and men, reported that their students often accidentally call them "mom". In fact, male primary and elementary teachers described doing mothering work, but also talked about how this can pose problems for them as men, particularly with regard to worries about physical contact with children. One urban elementary teacher talked about how teaching is an emotional job, and said that he teaches *"from the heart"*, but that as a man he has to be very careful about how he interacts with students. A rural primary teacher said that he also enjoys the close relationship with the young children in his class, but while his female colleagues are comfortable hugging their students, he has to be more cautious:

*"Of course, you know in [primary] they're always hugging you. ...I found that really hard, at the beginning, especially. Because, especially nowadays, you've got to be so careful. And my kids are always coming up and giving you a hug."*

Maintaining relationships with their students is an integral part of teachers' work, then, and almost all the teachers in this study said that they love teaching and that they love the children whom they teach. What they made clear, however, is the irony that this personal, emotional connection is what makes teaching both so rewarding and so challenging.

One important part of teachers' emotional workloads is the emotion involved in trying to meet all of their students' diverse academic needs with limited resources. A rural primary teacher said that the hardest part of her job is

*"being able to reach all of those children, every day, without exception... If it were my child there, I would...want to know that the teacher was [meeting my child's needs]. So, believing that, and trying to accomplish that, as a teacher, I think that is the hardest thing that I have to do. Because I don't have the tools, lots of times. I don't have what I need, I don't have the support...It's overwhelming."*

The teachers in this study also made it clear that taking care of children's emotional and social needs has become a significant element of their workloads. As one rural primary teacher explained, she speaks to each child differently, depending on what is going on in their lives:

*"if you care, you know every student so well, and you have to pick your words based on their life. ...And if not, I know that they go home and cry. I don't know when I teach. Somewhere in between I teach, and I get the curriculum done, but there's so many other things to teach about. Really so many other things."*

Others talked about and recorded in their task-diaries activities such as monitoring the anxiety level of a child with emotional problems, making time to talk with child who has an ill father, bringing clothes for a child from an impoverished family, hugging a withdrawn child who recently came to the country as a refugee, or

calming a mentally-challenged child having an angry outburst. All of this is emotional labour (Hochschild, 1985) that adds to teachers' daily workloads.

## Specific Tasks

Teachers in this study described a number of specific tasks that they felt added considerably to their workloads. The most important of these are supervision duty, paperwork, preparation and correcting, student evaluations, and implementing the 'Pathways' program for students with special learning needs.

### Supervision Duty

*"The most difficult period is when you have to go in right after lunch duty...you just need a chance to unwind and you can't. Because you're going around policing, with your adrenaline up, just waiting for something to happen that you have to deal with...and then the bell rings and you go in class and you've just got to switch gears suddenly and be an enthusiastic teacher of this subject. It wears your patience, so then you've got no patience left for the rest of the afternoon."*

**Rural elementary teacher,  
30 years experience**

Supervising children during breaks, especially at lunchtime, is a serious issue for almost all of the teachers in this study. Dibbon's (2004) study found that teachers in this province spend nearly four hours per week supervising children (p. 14). However, teachers told me that what is most difficult about supervision duty is

not the amount of time it takes, but the fact that it reduces or eliminates their much-needed breaks. Teachers explained that after working with children all morning, they very much need the lunch break to clear their heads. On days when they have to supervise children during the lunch period, teachers talked about and wrote in their task-diaries about gulping down their lunch meal as quickly as they can, eating while walking around supervising, or even skipping lunch altogether. As illustrated in the example above, teachers described it as very fatiguing to go straight from the classroom to being on duty, to a very rushed lunch, and back to the classroom again.

For rural teachers in some areas, supervision duty has increased as schools have been closed and children are bussed further, and so no longer return home for lunch. One rural primary teacher said that

*“Lunch duty is a killer, and we were talking about it in the staff room today, because when I started teaching up here, the kids all went home to lunch. ...I used to go home every day. But [now], all we seem to do is lunch duty... It's exhausting, it's a long day.”*

Whether in rural or urban areas, teachers in this study almost universally described “duty days” as being extra difficult and tiring, making it difficult to find the energy for other tasks, such as attending after-school meetings with colleagues or parents.

## **Paperwork**

Many of the teachers in this study also described being overwhelmed by the amount of paperwork they have to do for student evaluations, the Pathways program, school development activities, and other administrative requirements. Those who had been teaching for many years agreed that paperwork has increased quite dramatically in recent years, as one urban elementary teacher noted, *“in the last few years we have so much paperwork, it's unbearable”*. I heard over and over again that teachers feel that paperwork of all kinds is taking up much too much of their time, and *“interfering with my job of teaching”*, as one rural primary teacher put it. One urban primary teacher said that paperwork is the most time-consuming part of her workload: *“I kept saying to myself, why does it seem like I have more and more schoolwork? It's the paperwork, piling up and up and up and up!”*

## **Planning, Preparation and Correcting**

Teachers explained to me that their jobs require a great deal of time for planning and preparing activities, lessons, and evaluations, and correcting student work. The amount of time allotted for these tasks in the school day varies greatly from school to school – while some of the teachers have thirty minutes of “prep time” every day, others have as few as four periods in a 14-day cycle. In fact, Dibbon's (2004) study found that 80% of primary and elementary teachers have less than thirty minutes of prep time per day, yet they spend an average of 9.25 hours

per week on preparation tasks (p. 14). In this present study, one urban elementary teacher explained that correcting alone can be “*very time-consuming*” with 30 students: she says that it takes her at least 3 hours to correct 30 math tests. Prep time also tends to get whittled down pretty quickly by all of the ‘extra’ tasks that teachers have, as one urban primary teacher explained, “*But even when you have prep time, it's like 30 minutes, and by the time you tie up the last shoe laces or you've got a call to make home to somebody or you've got something that you get paged for from the office...*”

Teachers explained that going into a classroom unprepared makes the day quite difficult, and so in order to keep up on their planning and correcting, they have a number of different strategies. Many stay late after school and work in the evenings and on weekends, often returning to the school in order to do so. Others try to work as much as possible through their recess and lunch breaks. Particularly for those with young children, this can mean cramming in schoolwork whenever and wherever they can: teachers who were also parents talked about doing their schoolwork after their children are in bed, working until 10:30, midnight, or even up to 1:00 or 2:00 am. In fact, one rural primary teacher tries to find time for correcting by working in the car during her lengthy morning and afternoon commute with her carpool.

### **Student Evaluations**

Over and over again, I heard that, as one urban primary teacher put it, “*report card time is crazy.*” Teachers talked to me in

great detail about the pressure they feel at report card times, and the many hours that they spend working on students’ report cards. In fact, Dibbon’s (2004) study showed that teachers spend an average of 23 to 29 extra hours on preparing report cards over each two to three week reporting period (p. 18). With three reporting periods per year at this level, the work of tabulating grades, writing comments, and entering report card information into their school district’s reporting system is a very important workload concern for most primary and elementary teachers in this study.

Other types of student evaluations, such as running records, where teachers keep on-going records of students’ progress in reading throughout the year, are also very time-consuming. As one rural primary teacher explained:

*“At the beginning of the year, in January, I had to do a reading assessment on all of my children. ...now I've got to go back and do it sometime again before the year is finished, and it's a long process, for every student. It's not just reading. You have to test their reading, you have to test their vocab, you have to test their phonics, all those kind of things. And then there's a four-page analysis that you have to do on all the students, at the end of the year. It's really in-depth, and that's really time-consuming too.”*

These evaluations are also difficult because teachers are expected to evaluate individual students while the others are working, which is very challenging with young students who often need help with their work.

Standardised evaluations, such as the CRTS, are also a workload concern for teachers. In addition to the concern about how students will place in comparison to the rest of the province, which can feel like a reflection on the teacher themselves, the testing process takes several weeks. This requires a lot of effort on the part of the teacher to keep students motivated. One rural primary teacher clarified that

*“it’s not administering the test as such that’s the big deal for me, it’s the constant encouragement, the constant talking I have to do to keep the children upbeat and happy about what they’re doing.”*

### **Pathways Program**

The recent Commission study of the ISSP and Pathways program (Department of Education, June 2007) did a very thorough examination of the problems with this program, and so I will not go into too much detail on this topic. However, the teachers in this study echoed the same concerns that were raised in the Commission report – primarily, that although they support the goals of accommodating different learning needs in their classrooms, the Pathways program is far too complicated and time-consuming, and that not only is it a very heavy workload burden for teachers, it fails to meet the needs of many students.

Overall, nearly 16% of students in this province receive some form of special education (Department of Education, 2008), and this varies quite a bit between schools and classes. Many of the teachers to whom I spoke have to make special accommodations for up to one third to one half of their students, and feel that they

simply do not have the time or resources to do justice to all of these children. As well, teachers talked about the need for more time to offer general remedial help for students who need just a little extra tutoring help in order to succeed. Finally, teachers also talked about sometimes being frustrated by their lack of decision-making power in regards to the Pathways program. One rural primary teacher, for example, spoke at length about how bad she felt for not meeting one of her student’s needs, and talked about the frustration of having to implement a program that she did not believe was in the child’s best interests. She had a child in her class who she felt was “completely lost”, but

*“No one will hear me! ... This person [at the board office] is telling me she has to be kept on the regular program, Pathway 2, he’s never met her! He’s reading a file about her...he’s never actually sat down and talked to her, and seen her in action, in class. But I have!”*

In fact, this sense of not being listened to was a very common one among the teachers in this study, as I discuss below.

### **Lack of material and human resources**

*“It’s not like you don’t want to share. But you’re just so strapped for money to buy these things, that if they’re lost, or missing, or have to be replaced, well, where’s it going to come from? All you ever hear from the school is ‘We don’t have enough money. We don’t have enough money.’”*

**Urban primary teacher,  
28 years experience**

A lack of human and material resources was a very common concern among the teachers in this study. In terms of material resources, teachers told me that many of their textbooks and learning resources are out of date, or do not match up with the learning outcomes that teachers are expected to follow. An urban elementary teacher talked about the extra work it takes when learning resources are insufficient: *"you have to pull resources from everywhere. And that takes time...I try to get my Outcomes covered like I'm required to, but with a totally different set of materials, because you can't use the texts that's provided for you."* A rural primary teacher said, *"We need more resources in many ways, shapes and forms. I'm using books in my kindergarten classroom that my own kids used 20 years ago, and that's all I have."*

A lack of material resources can also cause tension among staff, as illustrated in the opening quote. Furthermore, because of this lack of resources, as one rural primary teacher explained, *"fundraising becomes a huge part of the school. And it should never be. ...the children in this province should be better funded."* She said that fundraising creates extra work for teachers,

*"Because we may not always be directly involved in the fundraisers, but there's always money coming in that you gotta keep straight. You've got to make sure it goes out and there's always someone who'll call you and download on you that they don't want another fundraiser, and that kind of stuff. It's just another stress on your shoulders that you really shouldn't have to have."*

Problems with resources such as computers and photocopiers created workload problems for many participants as well. One urban primary teacher described photocopying as *"another huge source of frustration"* and explained that *"half the time you're in the middle of the photocopying and the machines shut down or they're jamming up or they get overheated so the paper crinkles, and nothing ever works the way it's supposed to."* Another urban primary teacher argued that *"every school should have new [photocopying] machines. Because they're always terribly, terribly frustrating to work with. They're the teachers' nightmare."* Several teachers explained that the frustration of poorly-functioning photocopiers was made worse by the fact that paper consumption is monitored and controlled. Computers too were frequently referred to as "slow" and "unreliable". The task-diary of one urban elementary teacher showed that her computer broke down that day, and so she was unable to complete the work that she had planned for the afternoon. Computers that are designated for students sometimes do not work well either, and so teachers cannot depend on having computer classes run smoothly. A rural elementary teacher explained, *"I went upstairs recently just to do some work myself in the computer lab and there were 3 kids ahead of me, and I went in one of them looked at me and said 'Miss, I don't think there's any more computers working', in a lab of 20 computers."* Another rural elementary teacher noted in her task-diary that the first 10 minutes of computer class was spent fixing problems with the computers.

Teachers also identified a lack of human resources, including support staff, such as

student assistants, and specialists such as educational psychologists, speech language pathologists, and guidance counsellors, as an issue that increases their workloads. The student assistant representative to whom I spoke explained that there are not enough hours allotted for student assistants for all of the students with needs, and that it takes several months at the beginning of the year to get all of the student assistants in place. This means more work for student assistants as well as for teachers: *"it's not impossible for us to have a turnover of three or four different people working with that child in the first two or three months of school. And that's chaos."* As well, a rural elementary teacher explained that student assistants and special education teachers are assigned on the basis of the general student population, not the population of students with special or remedial needs. She said that this means that remedial assistance has to be prioritised, so that in schools with many very weak students, there is only time for those with the most severe needs.

Finally, a rural primary teacher explained that when schools have sufficient resources, it shows respect from the public for teachers and their work:

*"I do think there needs to be a massive infusion into schools, maintenance and supplies. When it's perceived that what you're doing is valuable to society and the community, then I think it makes it easier to put up with the hard stuff you have to deal with."*

In fact, a general lack of respect for teachers was a very important concern in this study, as I discuss below.

## Invisibility

*"In my 30 years of teaching, most of the years I just felt like when I left in June nobody appreciated anything that I did that year. And I don't think I'm the only one that feels that way."*

**Rural primary teacher,  
29 years experience**

*"We've been taught to keep our mouths closed. ...Nobody wants to be reprimanded and generally, most teachers are working hard, right? And it's just easier, it's easier just to go with the flow than to fight it."*

**Urban elementary teacher,  
20 years experience**

Of all the concerns raised by teachers in this study, what struck me most is teachers' sense that their work is, in many ways, invisible. They spoke of experiencing a lack of respect for their work from the public and even from their employers, and talked about the multitude of 'extra' tasks for which they are responsible, but which are unseen by the public. Teachers also connected this invisibility of their work to a feeling that many had that they were unable to speak out about workload concerns.

One urban primary teacher argued that *"for the most part, people have no idea in the run of the day what we do. ... It's very demanding mentally, and I don't think people realize that."* An urban elementary teacher agreed, saying that even teachers' families and friends do not fully realize all the things that they have to do.

*"They don't see the day-to-day things that we have to deal with in the corridor, it's a constant. You're trying to please everybody, you're trying to make sure that everyone's okay, everybody's learning what they should. The responsibility that's involved, people don't truly understand."*

Teachers explained that they had so many different small tasks to do, that they could not even write down all of them in their task-diaries. Over and over again, teachers told me that they do not just teach – they counsel, advise, settle conflicts, wipe tears, apply band-aids, calm tempers, and are constantly changing from one role to the next. A rural primary teacher explained it this way: *"All day long, I've said many times, you're a nurse, you're a doctor, you're a psychologist, you're a social worker – and some days it's too many hats. It's way too many hats."* One urban primary teacher argued that the 'extra' tasks that primary and elementary teachers do are taken for granted as part of their mothering role: *"These extra duties, under the umbrella of motherhood, have to be recognized as not just babysitting. Because sometimes that's what people think of us as."*

Invisibility also seems to be a problem for teachers in the sense that almost all of the teachers in this study expressed concern about being able to speak out about problems with their workloads, or with the education system in general. In fact, most were anxious to know the details of how I would keep their identities confidential in this study, and two asked me not to tape-record their interviews at all. An urban primary teacher explained why she thinks that primary and elementary teachers do not generally speak out about their workloads:

*"to have to take on another issue is just overwhelming. Because if you decide that you're going to take an issue with something, it's going to take time. It's going to take energy, it's going to take emotion, and it's going to take from what you are doing. Because remember, you're always on maximum!"*

Several other teachers connected this lack of willingness to speak out to the fact that theirs is a women-dominated profession. Another urban primary teacher put it this way:

*"I think that being women, you don't speak up enough. We're our own worst enemies. ...Because I know the men that we have on staff are a bit more vocal. But...we take on that role, with the little kids, and we're expected to take it on, and we do it, just like mothers do with their own kids. ...Whether it's afraid to say no, or don't want to say no – I don't know what it is. But we're all guilty of it."*

Finally, teachers also talked about feeling a lack of respect for their professional judgements from their employers and from others in the education system. The NLTA representative explained that this can make teachers feel "helpless": *"teachers have frequently felt that policies are top-down and that they don't get an opportunity to give input in the policies and if they do, on their own initiative, try to, they are perceived as over-stepping their boundaries."* In fact, overall, I found the tension and lack of communication between the different levels of the education system to be quite worrisome. Although the school boards representative and Department of Education representative in this study

spoke with profound respect of teachers and their work, and assured me that former teachers make up a large percentage of those working in higher levels of the education system, almost all of the teachers in this study expressed a lack of confidence in and mistrust of these organizations. Over and over again, I heard statements such as this one from a rural elementary teacher: "Sometimes I think the Department of Education is in there trying to think of more work for teachers" and an urban elementary teacher: "I think the school board is constantly coming up with 'make-work projects' for teachers." The teachers in this study expressed the sense that decisions were being made about their work by people in higher positions in the education system who do not fully understand the dynamics and challenges of classroom teaching.

## Rural/Urban Differences

Eleven of the teachers in this study teach in rural areas, while thirteen teach in urban areas. As well, eight teachers had worked in both rural and urban areas throughout their careers, and they had reflected quite a bit about the differences between the two. The teachers identified a large number of differences, but in this report I will concentrate on the most important of these, and how they impact rural and urban teachers' workloads.

One of the most important issues in rural areas is the lack of resources relative to urban areas. As the Department of Education representative explained,

*"If you're working here in St. John's, then you've got ready access to all of the resources that are at the university, for example. If you're working in a small community on the south coast of Newfoundland...your resources are really what's available to you through the Internet. . . . So the level of resourcing is vastly different and the geography is a challenge and is always going to be a challenge. ...you can never have a level playing field with the resources. The teacher is the leveler."*

This means, of course, that there is increased work for teachers in trying to 'level' students' learning experiences.

Rural teachers also talked about how school closures have affected their work. Many of the rural teachers brought up the difficulties they experienced when their schools had closed. Leaving a community school can be stressful, and there is increased work in bringing multiple schools together. A rural primary teacher described the transition from a small community school to a larger central school as very difficult: *"The first 4 or 5 years we were in this building it was hell. It was hard, really, really hard. ... two staffs coming together, so obviously that was a very difficult transition."*

As well, with the closing of a large number of rural schools, both teachers and students are traveling longer distances. One rural primary teacher, who had taught in seven schools in the first seven years of her career, said that since the school she was teaching in had been closed and she was transferred, she feels guilty about the time she spends commuting because it means even more time away from her

young children: *"I'm farther away than I wanted to be. 50 minutes is a fair chunk of time. That's two hours in the run of a day. So that's why the guilt sets in sometimes."*

In addition, as several teachers pointed out, when students are so far from home, there are more losses of instructional time due to poor weather conditions, and it is also much more difficult to find times to fit in remedial help, since students cannot miss the bus.

A number of rural teachers who do live in the same community where they teach talked about the difficulty of leaving their work lives behind. Many receive telephone calls from parents and children at home in the evenings and on weekends – 15 to 20 calls per week, one rural elementary teacher estimated. She explained that *"in a small community, you have so many people calling you, and kids picking up the phone and calling you, Miss this and Miss that, Miss something else, that it would be very hard not to take it home"*. A rural primary teacher who had recently been transferred said that she finds it much better not living in the same community with the parents of her students. *"Well, there is no way to get away from [your work], when you live in the community. And I did that for years. And as I said, many times, you're just out for a walk, out to the store, out to the post, and somebody is calling you over to a vehicle...."*

Multi-grade teaching is a responsibility for 24% of the teachers in this province (Dibbon, 2004, p. 27, citing Department of Education), and is particularly common in smaller rural schools. The teachers in this study explained that teaching multiple grade levels at once adds quite

significantly to their workloads. One rural primary teacher explained that multi-grade teachers are responsible for a large number of courses, and have to teach the different learning outcomes for perhaps four different grades in the same subject. She said that new teachers often come to her school for just a short time, because while they enjoy the lack of behaviour issues and learning problems there, they are overwhelmed with the multi-grading workload:

*"you'll find that newer teachers find it really difficult in this kind of a school when they have to come here and do twelve or thirteen courses and they're going in and teaching [Grade] Seven, Eight and Nine Math at the same time, then they're going probably leaving that class and going to teach a [Grade] Four, Five and Six Math at the same time. It gets a little bit overwhelming."*

Finally, rural teachers also talked about the pressure to take on extra responsibilities in a rural school. A rural elementary teacher put it this way:

*"Because in a small school, obviously, you still got to have all the committees, but you don't have the staff, and then you only have one or two who want to volunteer, and you're not obligated to volunteer. ...[B]ut it gets pretty hard when things have to be done...in the school. And somebody's got to do it. And so I don't know if it's really realistic to say, 'don't do it'. And it hurts the kids."*

For urban teachers, class size was by far the most important issue. While the Department of Education website states that *"We can boast an average K-9 class*

size of 19.9 students” (Department of Education, 2008), for many of the urban teachers I spoke to, classes of 30 or more were the reality. As an urban elementary teacher explained:

*“You can just look around. You put 30 bodies in here... they take up a lot of physical space, they have big voices. And I don’t have a big voice and I don’t like to be yelling. But it’s physically demanding, never mind the mental part of it all. But the physical part, just trying to get to everybody, all the needs”.*

This teacher also talked to her co-workers about the issue, and said that almost all agreed that class size was the biggest concern for their workloads. *“The number of students that I have to teach and the number of needs that I have to meet are the major, major challenge. That is the most difficult part, trying to do justice to the large number that’s in your classroom.”*

## **Specific Groups Of Teachers**

### **New Teachers**

*“I remember my first year teaching, I used to call my mom and say, ‘I don’t think I can do this’. And I’d be basically panicking because I’d be bringing home two book bags... I just felt completely, completely overwhelmed. ...I’d leave school 4:00, 4:30, go home, cook, eat supper and then I was in the books until I gave up and went to bed 12:00 or 12:30. ...I just couldn’t see any end to it.”*

**Rural elementary teacher,  
3 years experience**

*“New teachers now, the workload that they have is crazy. ...I worry about them, I don’t know if a lot of them will do their 30 years. The pace and the demands on them. ... Well, if they do it, they’ll have to give up their personal life or their family life, because you cannot do it. And it’s as simple as that.”*

**Urban primary teacher,  
20 years experience**

Although most of the teachers in this study were quite experienced (averaging more than twenty years in the job), I was struck by how many teachers, both new and experienced, spoke to me about the difficulties newer teachers are experiencing. With statistics showing that 1 in 2 teachers with less than five years of experience is considering leaving the teaching profession (Dibbon and Sheppard, p. 125), it is essential to understand the challenges facing new teachers.

In addition to having to ‘learn the ropes’ in a new career, beginning teachers do not yet have permanent jobs, and so often move from position to position and school to school each year. Because of this lack of security, one of the new teachers in this study, an urban elementary teacher, was seriously considering leaving the profession. Teachers new and experienced told me that new teachers tend to feel more pressured to take on extra duties to prove themselves, as an experienced urban primary teacher described: *“When I came to [urban area] in the last 10 years, I was working all night long because I had to prove who I was, because I wanted a permanent job with this board.”* Several teachers also talked about feeling unable to speak out about issues that concern

them without a permanent position. An urban elementary teacher said, "*Because I'm not a permanent teacher, you're not going to rock the boat too much...you're kind of constricted a little bit. Don't want to be the mouthpiece.*"

An additional pressure for many new teachers is paying back their student loans. For example, one new rural elementary teacher works a part-time retail job at night and on weekends, up to twenty hours per week, in addition to her full-time job, in order to pay off her loans. Several other teachers talked about newer co-workers who are thinking about leaving the province and even the teaching profession in order to pay off their student loans.

### **Mothers of Young Children**

*"I've always said that I've got two of the most thankless jobs in the world. I'm a mother. And I'm a teacher."*

**Rural primary teacher,  
25 years experience**

Although I do not have the space to discuss this issue in detail here, I found that teachers who are mothers of young children (as well as an exceptional father who is a primary caregiver) deal with particularly heavy workloads. Their paid work in caring for young children at school continues directly into unpaid working caring for their children at home, creating an almost unending workday (Carpentier-Roy, 1991). In fact, task-diaries showed that the mothers with young children (12 and under) did nearly three hours more of unpaid work than those with no children, and had an average of only thirty minutes per day for

themselves, as compared to over three hours for those with no children at all. It is very important for employers and policymakers to be aware of this extra burden for the many teachers with young children.

### **Kindergarten Teachers**

Kindergarten teachers have the important responsibility of introducing the youngest children to their very first year of school. The kindergarten teachers in this study told me that they have now become combined Kindergarten/ KinderStart teachers, and that for many, this is making their workloads more much difficult to manage. KinderStart is the preschool program that introduces 4-year-olds and their parents to the kindergarten classroom in four to nine sessions (depending on the school) throughout the year. Although some of the kindergarten teachers enjoy the program, they explained that it can be very time-consuming to be responsible for both kindergarten and KinderStart, particularly for those who have large classes. One kindergarten teacher explained, for example, that this means she has to keep 80 children and their parents in her head!

In addition, in schools where there are only enough kindergarten students to make up one class, many kindergarten teachers face the addition challenge of teaching another grade half-time.

## Health and Well-Being

*“I would love to go to bed at 10 because I need more sleep than I'm getting, and I'm tired all the time, and I'm sort of at a point now that I never feel rested. I never feel like I'm in bed long enough... From September to June, you never relax because you've always got so much going through your head that you're trying to remember.”*

Urban primary teacher,  
30 years experience

*“And all teachers feel that way. You go home, and you feel bad and feel guilty cause you can't do more for those kids.”*

Urban elementary teacher,  
20 years experience

*“My 11-year-old, he's always asking why do I have to be a teacher. Because before I was a teacher, at least I was there sometimes, but now, he says, every time I look at you, you're there at the table, with books. And he feels like we're not spending enough time with him.”*

Rural primary teacher,  
5 years experience

Being healthy and feeling well is about much more than just the absence of illness or injury (Walters and Denton, 1997).

Most of the teachers in this study described themselves as generally being in good physical health. However, almost all of them also talked about their work making them tired, even to the point of exhaustion. In fact, teachers described many problems that impact their physical, emotional, mental, and social well-being. Besides tiredness, the most frequently mentioned problems were feeling guilty, feeling overwhelmed, anxious or stressed, lack of time to relax with family and

friends, urinary problems, and difficulty taking time off when ill.

### Tiredness

Tiredness is a problem that affects almost all of the teachers in this study to some degree – many to the point of feeling exhausted. Lack of sleep is part of the problem, but most said that it was more a matter of feeling mentally and emotionally drained. By the end of the week, especially, teachers talked about feeling completely worn out, as one urban primary teacher explained:

*"Friday nights is a wipe-out. It's a total wipe-out. Because you've given, given, given, given all week, and then on Friday...at some point it will catch up with you and you're just totally exhausted! Totally! It's just the strain of it all, really."*

An urban elementary teacher told me that she and her co-workers are always talking about being tired:

*"One teacher said she went home and she fell asleep on the couch with her coat on. She woke up an hour later when her husband walked in the door. ...there's something to that, when people are that tired. ...We come in here Monday mornings and we're supposed to look refreshed, when everyone's looking at you like, 'Oh my God, you look some tired.'"*

Many teachers talked about how difficult it was to get out of bed in the morning, about putting their head down on their desk to close their eyes after school, having trouble staying awake while driving home, falling asleep while doing schoolwork in the evenings, and being too tired to socialize on the weekends.

## **Guilt**

Besides tiredness, the most commonly mentioned problem for teachers was a constant, nagging sense of guilt – guilt for not being able to meet the needs of all the students in their classes, as well as guilt for spending so much time away from their families. One rural primary teacher, the mother of two young children, said that she is at the point where feels guilty

every time she sits down. The previous year, she explained, had been "horrific" because she felt so guilty for missing time from her young children: *"I didn't feel like I was a good teacher, good enough for me, and I didn't feel like I was a good enough parent for me, and I didn't feel like I was a good enough wife for me."* Guilt was a serious issue because it so profoundly affected teachers' day-to-day sense of well-being, and their sense of satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) with their work and their lives.

## **Feeling Overwhelmed, Rushed, or Stressed**

Overall, many teachers also talked about feeling frequently overwhelmed, rushed, or stressed. The administrator representative said that he thinks *"a lot of people are getting drained. And I see it. As the year goes on, as the principal sitting back and watching your staff, you can see when they need a break...at some point, they get burnt out."* A rural primary teacher agreed, explaining that,

*"...it's not uncommon at all, you're in your staffroom, or you're outside with the students, and teachers are saying 'I just don't know how I'm going to get it all done. How am I going to get it all finished?' It seems like you're always in a big panic, and there's a fair amount of stress. Yeah, it is stressful, because you're always thinking about it. And I really can't see there's very many teachers who don't go away in the nighttime and they're not thinking about their schoolwork and the children. Cause*

*once you're there, there's no escaping it..."*

Many teachers, such as this urban elementary teacher, described waking at night with worry:

*"My mind is always thinking school, even when I'm home. ...two Thursdays ago, I woke up with pains in my stomach—just gut feelings, saying, 'Oh my God', you're almost sick, saying 'I got to do something. [A student] just got a 40 and a 41 and a 25'- well, what am I going to do?"*

Dealing with the combined demands of teaching and parenting can be particularly stressful, as a rural primary teacher explained:

*"I find there are times I come home in the afternoon and – if I had what I really needed, I would be alone, and nobody would even know I existed. That's the truth. Because I'm mentally drained! And I have said to the girls, 'Can you give me one half hour, and not ask for anything?' Because I come home in the evening, and it's 'Oh mom, I need you to sign this. And oh yeah, we're going to this. And we need \$20 for this!' And it's normal, I'm their mom, and they're waiting for me to come home. ...I think it's just that I'm drained from answering these questions. And I'm tired of explaining things over and over again."*

### **Lack of Time for Self and Family**

Teachers also talked about a lack of time for themselves and for their families.

Task-diaries showed that teachers' leisure time, especially for those with children, tended to be broken up in small snippets, for example, 20 minutes watching the news before starting schoolwork again. An urban elementary teacher talked about how she does not get much time to relax, or time for herself, and she finds trying to balance work and family life "terrible.":

*"I'm sure there's days when my husband doesn't even see me. ...I should be able to find half an hour to go to the gym. I don't. Everything else is more important. I got to make sure the wash is done, I got to make sure this is done, I got to make sure the kids' homework is done."*

Ultimately, time for themselves always comes last. The same teacher talked about making time for her children and husband by doing her schoolwork late at night:

*"Because if you don't do it, and you do all work, then you're going to be upset inside because you didn't take the time to spend the time with your dad, or spend the time playing with the kids, or spending time going out with your husband... If I can get my work done after hours... after the kids are finished, and after my husband is gone to bed... so that it doesn't affect anybody else except myself."*

### **Physiological Problems**

Physiological health problems that the teachers in this study attributed at least partially to their workloads include difficulty eating well or exercising, strep throat and other contagious illnesses,

voice problems, stomach pains, headaches, and urinary problems. In fact, lack of time to visit the washroom was a very frequently mentioned problem, with many teachers saying that they sometimes had to go the entire school day without being able to relieve themselves. As one rural elementary teacher explained, on days when she had supervision duty, there was no bathroom break at all. *"You started at 8:20, you finished at 2:30 and you were not off for one minute. Not one...I don't think anybody should have to go from 8:30 in the morning to 2:30 in the evening without even a pee break."* An urban elementary teacher talked about how her doctor had told her that her recurrent urinary tract infections were due to her lack of washroom breaks at school, and that he had noticed this was a common problem among teachers.

### **Difficulty Taking Time Off When Ill**

Finally, teachers also talked about finding it difficult to take time off when they were ill. Many said that they frequently go to work when ill because it is easier than preparing work for a substitute teacher who does not know their class, their routines, and the huge number of important little things that they have to remember and keep track of, from the accommodations made for special needs students, to directions for which children go on which bus. As one urban primary teacher explained, you cannot just wake up in the morning and realize that you are sick, because you need to have lesson plans prepared and delivered to the substitute teacher. She said,

*"when I was off two days with strep throat, I had to have fully done lesson plans. So that would take me a good hour and a half to do, because you've got to do it in detail; you wouldn't do it the same way you're doing it for yourself. So you just can't be sick, you got to be sick and write up work. And then you've got to get the plan into school, so my husband's got to go drop it off."*

In many rural areas in the province, especially off of the Avalon Peninsula, even finding a substitute teacher is a challenge, as the principal representative explained:

*"I've already had one morning so far this year that I couldn't get a substitute to come in. I find there's more and more teachers when they call in now, asking, saying 'Well, I really feel terrible. I don't feel well enough to come in. However, if you can't get a substitute, call me back and I'll see what I can do.' So to me, that's a lot of undue pressure on teachers."*

In fact, in some isolated rural areas, the problem is even more severe because there simply are no trained substitute teachers available. One rural primary teacher explained that in her school, teachers try to cover for each other if one is ill, but if two or three are out at the same time, they have to *"really work hard at keeping it going. And we don't have the class space to double up the classes anymore. We just have to...juggle around the best way we can."*

## Recommendations

A number of teachers in this study expressed concern that their ideas for solutions are only “a dream”. Many said that in their experience, changes in the education system take a long time to be realized, and they believe that teachers’ voices are often not taken seriously. However, they identified a number of potential solutions that they felt could improve their workloads. The ten most important recommendations, those that were discussed by the most teachers, are described below.

### 1. More of a voice for teachers

Perhaps most importantly of all, teachers believed that they should feel able to voice their concerns about their workloads and about other issues in education. As an urban primary teacher put it,

*“I certainly think teachers should have more of a voice. I don't know how, but I think teachers should be able to speak up more and say it like it actually is without being reprimanded. I think they need to speak the realities of teaching. And I don't think that's done enough, and I certainly don't think it's done enough for primary and elementary.”*

The NLTA representative explained that the NLTA discourages teachers from making public criticisms, and encourages them to instead seek a meeting with their employer to discuss their concerns.

In fact, the representatives for the NLTA, school boards, and Department of Education explained that a process for teachers to raise concerns exists through the NLTA, or through their district school board. However, most of the teachers in this study either knew very little about this process, or believed that it was too time-consuming and ineffective. For this reason, I recommend a simplified, well-publicised process for teachers to raise any concerns they have about their work.

As well, I strongly recommend that serious and sincere effort be put into improving the relationships and communication between teachers, administrators, the school boards, and the Department of Education. The culture of mistrust that appears to exist, and many teachers’ sense of powerlessness in this hierarchical system, strikes me as very damaging not only for teachers and their work, but for the education system as a whole.

### 2. Relief from supervision duty

Teachers in this study almost universally agreed that relief from supervision duty, particularly during their lunch break, would make a significant difference to their workloads. Most importantly, it would give them a guaranteed break in the middle of the day in order to refresh themselves to return to their students.

### 3. Reduction in paperwork

A reduction in paperwork was also a very high priority for the teachers in this study, including student evaluations, the Pathways program, and school development activities.

### 4. Reduction in class sizes

Particularly in urban areas, teachers recommended a significant reduction in class sizes in order to make their workloads more manageable and to better meet the needs of their students. The Commission on teacher allocation recommended class size maximums of 18 in kindergarten, 20 in Grades 1-3, and 23 in Grades 4-6, and in multi-grade situations, a maximum of 12 in primary grades and 15 in elementary and secondary grades (Department of Education, May 2007). However, the class sizes the government has adopted are higher than this: 20 for each group in kindergarten, and 25 for Grades 1-6, phased in over three years. As well, these are 'soft caps', which can be increased in many different situations. Unfortunately, as one urban primary teacher explained, even a few more students make a big difference:

*"I really don't think in Primary it should be over 20. ...I'm trying to do individual reading programs for those kids and teach them how to write. I can't get to 24 kids every day. ...The years that I've had 20, or one year I had 18, that was pure heaven. You really felt in June, okay, I got them. ...I've really done justice to all of them. You throw another half dozen into the*

*bunch and then you're getting into the crowd control and noise levels and everything else."*

### 5. Increased preparation time

Teachers said that they very much need at least one period set aside in each schoolday when they can work on preparation activities. This recommendation is supported by research in Ontario, which showed that elementary teachers who were guaranteed 180 minutes per week of preparation time reported reduced stress, more time for their lives outside teaching, and the ability to work better (Dibbon, 2004, p. 33, citing Hargreaves, 1992).

### 6. Improved material resources

Teachers across the province expressed the need for more and improved material resources, as illustrated by one rural elementary teacher:

*"I would really like to see if they could get a textbook and design the outcomes from the textbook. Just make it match. Because you have to make up for stuff that's not in the book, and then children are trying to study for a test, they don't have it in the book. Parents are confused. ... And we're busy enough anyway. ...at the end of the day you've got to prepare for 8 or 9 classes for the next day."*

## 7. More human resources

The need for more human resources, particularly in order to offer remedial help to more students and to more fully address special needs, was also a very important recommendation for many teachers. As well, teachers argued that the formulas for allocating student assistants and special education teachers should be based on need rather than on the general student population. As a rural primary teacher explained,

*"We need to have student assistants; we need the formula changed. ... If I had a student assistant, then I could plan things for that little girl [with special needs] to do there in the classroom. I would have somebody who could scribe for that little boy... I could plan that maybe the student assistant could sit with these students, and I could read to him every day. But with one body, and all of these children, I can't do it."*

The parent representative I spoke with agreed: *"I'd like to see...more teachers in the classroom and more remedial assistance for students that are struggling"*

## 8. Changes to Pathways

As I discussed above, this issue has been dealt with much more thoroughly in the Commission report (Department of Education, June 2007). But it is important to reiterate that teachers feel that the changes to Pathways is not just a matter of reducing meeting times or paperwork,

although this is very much needed. For teachers, one of the most important points is that the whole special needs system is too complicated, and that they need to be able to give students extra support without going through a lengthy process.

## 9. Time for student evaluations

Teachers also talked quite a bit about the tremendous amount of time they spend on student evaluations, particularly report cards. One of teachers' main recommendations was allotted time for completing report cards and other student evaluations. In the words of one urban primary teacher,

*"one of the things I'd like to see...is some time for the evaluation that they expect. ...At least give us a day each term to do our report cards...at least something to alleviate that pressure at that reporting time, that's phenomenal."*

## 10. Changes to Kinderstart

Teachers recommended that KinderStart should be a separate program delivered by early childhood educators, and not added to the workloads of kindergarten teachers.

In addition to these ten most frequently-recommended solutions, the following recommendations were made by two or more teachers in this study, and merit further study:

- More time for teachers to consult one another, both within their own schools

and among teachers in the same grade  
in different schools

- Smaller, localized school boards
- More support for multi-grade teachers
- A semesterized school schedule with breaks after each semester
- Better salaries for new teachers
- A specific definition of teachers' workday
- Reduction in school development activities, which were generally seen as too time-consuming
- Incentives to attract more teachers and substitute teachers to rural areas

## Conclusion

*“It is frustrating! As I’m talking to you, I’m starting to remember more and more things over the years that have been frustrating - as teachers we were never, ever listened to.”*

**Rural primary teacher, 29 years experience**

Teaching young children – keeping them interested and motivated, maintaining discipline, accommodating all of their different learning styles, and looking after their emotional needs, all while making sure they are learning a specific set of outcomes – is demanding and complex work. However, a great deal of teachers’ work is done behind the scenes: in their classrooms after school, in the staffroom during their breaks, at their own dining room tables in the evenings, and, almost constantly, in their own minds. In fact, so much of teachers’ work is invisible to those outside the classroom that the difficulties, challenges, and health impacts of teachers’ work are easily overlooked and taken for granted.

The teachers in this study identified five main areas of concern with their workloads: (1) the intense and all-consuming nature of their work, which tends to spread into almost every aspect of their lives; (2) the emotional work of teaching young children, which is simultaneously very satisfying and extremely challenging; (3) specific demanding tasks, such as supervision duty, paperwork, planning, preparation, and correcting, student evaluations, and implementing the Pathways program for students with special needs; (4) a lack of material and human resources, which

tends to exacerbate other workload problems; and (5) the invisibility of their work, especially the lack of respect that teachers sense from the public and from their employers.

Across Newfoundland and Labrador, primary and elementary teachers told me that many of the challenges they face are the same, no matter whether they work in St. John’s or in an isolated community on the Labrador coast. However, they also noted many important differences between rural and urban areas that they feel have an impact on their workloads, including: the lack of resources in rural areas compared to urban; rural school closures and amalgamations; lengthy commutes in rural areas for both students and teachers; the difficulty of getting away from one’s work in a rural community; multi-grading; the extra responsibilities associated with being part of a small staff in many small rural schools; and the large class sizes found in so many urban schools.

Teachers in this study also noted three specific groups of teachers who face particularly challenging workloads: new, untenured teachers who are just beginning their careers; mothers of young children, who face an almost unending workday at school and at home; and Kindergarten teachers, who

are responsible for children's all-important first year at school. Each of these groups very much deserves its own study to more fully explore the challenges that they face and the innovative solutions that are needed to improve their workloads.

As Acker (1996) points out, we do not often think of a school as a workplace. Perhaps because of this, then, it is easy to forget that teachers are workers, and that their heavy workloads are an occupational health issue. In fact, teachers in this study identified numerous impacts that their work has on their health and well-being, and that affect their lives in very real ways: tiredness, even to the point of exhaustion; a constant sense of guilt; feeling overwhelmed, rushed, or stressed; lack of time for themselves and their families; physiological issues such as urinary problems, difficulty eating well or exercising, strep throat and other contagious illnesses, voice problems, stomach pains, and headaches; and difficulty taking time off when ill.

There is no solution that will make primary and elementary teachers' work simple or easy, and no *one* solution that will make all of these teachers' workloads more manageable. While it is important to address specific issues, such as was the goal of the Commissions on teacher allocation, the math program, and the Pathways program (Department of Education, May 2007; June 2007; November 2007), improving teachers' workloads is a challenge that will require many changes, some small and some much more comprehensive.

A critical start to improving primary and elementary teachers' workloads in this province is to address the ten main recommendations made by the teachers in this study. These include: (1) more of a voice for teachers to express concerns about their work and to participate in the development of educational programs and policies; (2) relief from supervision duty; (3) a reduction in paperwork of all kinds; (4) reduction in class size maximums; (5) increased preparation time; (6) improved material resources, especially textbooks; (7) more human resources; (8) changes to simplify the Pathways program for special needs; (9) more time for student evaluations; and (10) changes to the Kinderstart program to relieve Kindergarten teachers of this responsibility.

Furthermore, any solution must also take into account the importance of teachers' relationship with their students, and must respect the fact that care and concern for students is both the biggest joy and the most difficult burden for teachers of young children.

Finally, teachers make many sacrifices for the benefit of their students. Their own well-being should not be one of them. In order to achieve real change that will improve primary and elementary teachers' workloads and well-being, it is absolutely essential for teachers to feel that they are respected both within the education system and by the general public. Above all, teachers must be allowed to raise their voices to express their concerns and to contribute in a meaningful way to any changes and developments in education that impact upon their work and their lives.

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**APPENDIX II: FOCUS GROUP AD**

**Invitation to a Discussion Group:  
Primary and Elementary Teachers'  
Workloads and Health in Rural Newfoundland**

My name is Julie Temple, and I am a PhD student in the Department of Sociology at Memorial University. I am planning a study of primary and elementary (K-6) teachers' workloads and health in rural and urban areas of this province. I will be holding discussion group meetings in four different regions of Newfoundland and Labrador. The goal of these discussion groups is to help plan the research project, as well as to gather primary and elementary teachers' perspectives on their workload, its consequences for their health and well-being, and potential solutions. Once I have finished the research project, I will also give the discussion groups the opportunity to give feedback on the research findings before they are made public.

I am interested in hearing the opinions of a wide variety of K-6 teachers, including those who are experiencing heavy workloads as well as those who are not experiencing problems.

This discussion group will be held in [Town] on an evening or weekend in April, at a time and place that is convenient for all participants. If you are a primary or elementary teacher in this area and you would like to attend this meeting, you may contact me by telephone at (709) 777-8744 or by e-mail at [jtemple@mun.ca](mailto:jtemple@mun.ca) by **March 24th, 2007**.

**A travel subsidy (\$20) will be provided  
to offset the cost of transportation to this meeting**

**APPENDIX III: DISCUSSION GROUP AGENDA AND QUESTIONNAIRE**

## **Discussion Group Agenda**

### **1. Consent Forms**

### **2. Demographic Information**

The participants will be asked to complete a short questionnaire requesting basic demographic details, e.g. age, gender, teaching experience, *et cetera*

### **3. Description of Research Project Plan and Purpose**

### **4. Introductions**

### **5. Discussion**

Themes/Issues to be raised in discussion group discussion:

- a. Teachers' accounts of the different types of work that make up their workloads (paid and unpaid);
- b. Teachers' suggestions of which workload issues are most important;
- c. Teachers' accounts of impacts of their workloads on their health and well-being;
- d. Teachers' suggestions as to how workload could be reduced; changes that they would like to see.

### **6. Review of Draft Research Tools**

- individual interviews
- task-diaries

### **7. Questions?**

### **8. Thank You**

## Demographic Questionnaire

This questionnaire is designed to help me compare the backgrounds and teaching experience of participants in our discussion groups with those of Newfoundland and Labrador primary and elementary teachers as a whole.

### Demographic Information

Age \_\_\_\_\_

Sex M \_\_\_\_\_ F \_\_\_\_\_

Present marital status (check appropriate answer)

Single \_\_\_\_\_

Married or Common-Law \_\_\_\_\_

Divorced \_\_\_\_\_

Widowed \_\_\_\_\_

Other \_\_\_\_\_

Number of children \_\_\_\_\_

Ages of children \_\_\_\_\_

Community where you are currently living? \_\_\_\_\_

Community(ies) where you are currently teaching? \_\_\_\_\_

School(s) where you are currently teaching? \_\_\_\_\_

Grade(s) currently teaching \_\_\_\_\_

Number of students in your main classroom \_\_\_\_\_

Subject(s) currently teaching \_\_\_\_\_

Number of years experience teaching \_\_\_\_\_

Highest education level you have attained \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX IV: INITIAL CONTACT LETTER TO TEACHERS**

Dear ,

My name is Julie Temple, and I am a PhD student in Sociology at Memorial University. I also work at SafetyNet, an occupational health research centre. I am writing to tell you about a study that I am doing on primary and elementary teachers' workloads and health in rural and urban Newfoundland and Labrador. My goal is to produce a report with concrete solutions for K-6 teachers' workload issues, and to increase understanding of the work that primary and elementary teachers do. I realize that it is very difficult to find time in a busy schedule to take part in a research project, but I hope you will consider participating in this study.

I found your contact information on your school's website, and selected you randomly as one of 30 Newfoundland and Labrador teachers who I am asking to participate in this research. In recent years, you may have heard reports about the high number of hours that teachers work in this province and across the country. In this study, I would like to learn more about teachers' experiences behind these numbers. I am interested in talking to primary and elementary teachers like you in order to find out your perspectives on your workload (including the balance with your personal life and work at home), how your work affects your health and well-being, and any suggestions you may have for improving your workload. Whether or not you are experiencing problems with your workload, I am interested in hearing your perspective.

There are two parts to this stage of the research: a one-day task-diary, and a telephone interview. If you agree to participate, I will mail you a form to fill out to list your work tasks and other activities for a period of one day. Once this is complete, I will set up a time to do a telephone interview with you. The length of the interview will depend on your interest but will probably last about an hour. We can arrange the telephone interview at a time that is convenient for you, such as in the evening or on a weekend.

This project has been approved by the NLTA. Participation in the study is voluntary and **completely confidential**. Only my research assistant and I would ever know your name or the name of your school and community. This information will not be shared with your school board, the Department of Education, the NLTA or anyone else, and your name or any identifying information will not be used in any of the reports or publications produced from this study. If I write about something you have said in any of the publications from this study, I will omit or change any details that might allow someone to identify you.

If you agree to participate in this study, please let me know by **Monday, April 23, 2007**. As well, if you have any questions or concerns, or would like more information, you may reach me by telephone at (709) 777-8744 (you may call collect), or by e-mail at [jtemple@mun.ca](mailto:jtemple@mun.ca).

Thank you very much for taking the time to consider participating in this study.

Sincerely,

My funding for this project comes from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Canadian Institutes for Health Research through the RURAL Centre, with support from SafetyNet. The proposal for this research has been approved by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR) at Memorial University.

**APPENDIX V: NLTA MEMO**



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## MEMORANDUM

Office of the President

January 20, 2007

**TO:** Members of the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association

**FROM:** Kevin Foley  
President

**RE:** Research into Primary and Elementary Teachers' Workload in  
Newfoundland and Labrador

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The Table Officers of the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association has reviewed a research plan by Julie Temple, a doctoral student in the Department of Sociology at Memorial University, on the topic of Primary and Elementary Teachers' Workload in Newfoundland and Labrador. The Association supports Ms Temple's work, and if you are asked to participate in her research, we ask that you find time in your already very busy schedule to provide her with the feedback she is seeking.

I thank you, in advance, for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kevin Foley', is written over a horizontal line.

**APPENDIX VI: SAMPLE COMPLETED TASK-DIARY**

**Task-Diary Instructions:**

1. Choose a day to complete the task-diary. Enter the date in the space provided above the table.
2. Throughout the day, whenever you have the opportunity, please record your activities next to the approximate times when the activities were carried out. Please include all types of activities, including teaching tasks, chores at home, leisure activities, volunteer work, meals, and sleeping times. You may include as much or as little detail as you wish.
3. When the task-diary has been completed, please indicate whether or not the day was equally busy, more busy, or less busy than a typical weekday.
4. There is also a space provided after the end of the table for any notes that you would like to mention about the day.

*Thank you very much.*

*Your time and effort in participating in this study are greatly appreciated.*

# SAMPLE ONE-DAY TASK-DIARY

NOTE: This sample completed task-diary is based on the task-diary of an urban elementary teacher participant in this study, with all potentially identifying details deleted or changed.

Date: April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2007

**Compared to my typical weekday, today I was:**  
*equally busy*

TIME	TASK or ACTIVITY
Before 6 am	Sleeping
6:00 am	6:30 am – Alarm goes off. Shower, get dressed, make bed.
6:30 am	
7:00 am	Called up younger child Go downstairs, got breakfast ready Unloaded dryer, loaded up dryer and washer Folded clothes while child had breakfast 7:30 am – Got lunches ready for two children Called up older child for school Cleaned up from breakfast Made the children's beds
7:30 am	
8:00 am	
8:30 am	Got kids to begin getting ready for school – brush teeth, wash face, and comb hair. Put on outside clothes. Had a cup of tea and slice of toast while talking to mother on the phone. Got kids into the car and went to school. 8:30 am – Arrived at school

	<p>Greeted the children and listened to stories they had to tell  Went to computer lab to get a copy of a Math worksheet for this week  Ran to office to take off 30 copies  8:45 am – Read to the students for 15 minutes  Checked homework and answered questions  Gave out stickers to students with homework completed</p>
9:00 am	<p>Took lunch order  Began lesson in Health  Had students finish a worksheet</p>
9:30 am	<p>Walked around answering questions  9:30 am Language Arts  Asked twelve spelling words, collected tests  Administered a spelling check-up. Collected these. Corrected last week's spelling work as a class. Collected the students' poems.</p>
10:00 am	<p>Gave out spelling for next week. Went over words to make sure they knew how to read them. Provided instructions. Students worked until 10:30. Assigned for homework. Any "free" time is spent with a child in class who has a severe developmental delay and needs one-on-one assistance.</p>
10:30 am	<p>10:30 Recess Duty. Supervising 75 children on the playground.</p>
11:00 am	<p>10:45 am Math  Students had a Math quiz today. Gave the quiz and helped a student who needs assistance with writing tests.  Introduced the next unit in Math: decimals.</p>
11:30 am	<p>11:50 am Students wrote down homework. I went around to stamp agenda to ensure that it is done properly and no one 'accidentally' leaves anything out. Students are not permitted to go to lunch unless agendas are stamped. Assisted child with severe developmental delay to get homework typed on computer.</p>
12:00 pm	<p>Lunch Duty (again) from 12:00 to 12:25. Supervising 150 children in the cafeteria, with another teacher</p>
12:30 pm	<p>12:25 – 12:45 Gulped down my lunch in the staff room, while making 30 copies of a Religion worksheet. Photocopier jammed so almost late getting to class.</p>
1:00 pm	<p>12:45 pm Social Studies. Continued with the lesson from last day.  1:15 pm Prep Period. (Finally got to the washroom!) Started correcting Math tests. Interrupted by school board worker</p>

<b>1:30 pm</b>	who came to install two new whiteboards (unannounced). I had to find another room for my students, then take 15 minutes to remove posters from my walls to accommodate the workers. Corrected a few more tests, then cleaned up classroom from whiteboard installation.
<b>2:00 pm</b>	1:45 pm Religion. Began new lesson. Students finished questions.
<b>2:30 pm</b>	2:15 pm Art. Took students to the Art Room to do a painting project. 2:45 pm Back to class for dismissal. Had students clean up classroom and get ready to go. Completed behaviour form on child with severe developmental delay (daily form) to be sent home to be signed. Gave out spelling tests.
<b>3:00 pm</b>	3:10 pm Met with another teacher to discuss next year's classes and determine numbers, placement, etc.
<b>3:30 pm</b>	3:30 pm Went over Math lesson for tomorrow and finished tidying classroom
<b>4:00 pm</b>	4:00 pm Left for home 4:15 pm Got home and started immediately on homework with older child, who had an exam the next day. Younger child complained she was sick and hot. Not feeling well. Gave her some medication and she lay down for a while. Read to her to make her feel better.
<b>4:30 pm</b>	
<b>5:00 pm</b>	5:15 pm Got supper ready, while still helping older child with homework. Husband got home and helped with supper.
<b>5:30 pm</b>	
<b>6:00 pm</b>	6:00 pm Supper. Younger child feeling better. 6:30 pm Have cup of tea with husband.
<b>6:30 pm</b>	Playtime with younger child, watch the news out of the corner of my eye.
<b>7:00 pm</b>	7:30 pm Got younger child ready for bed. Brush teeth, wash and get into bed. Read to younger child for about 30 minutes.

<b>7:30 pm</b>	
<b>8:00 pm</b>	<b>8:10 pm Tidy up house.</b>
<b>8:30 pm</b>	<b>8:30 pm Take out Math tests. Corrected these and the spelling tests until 10:45 pm</b>
<b>9:00 pm</b>	<b>Correcting</b>
<b>9:30 pm</b>	
<b>10:00 pm</b>	<b>Correcting</b>
<b>10:30 pm</b>	<b>10:45 pm Watch some of nighttime news – sit, breathe and chat with my husband</b>
<b>11:00 pm</b>	<b>Got ready for bed. Cannot sleep because younger child continues to cough. Thinking about what I will do if she is too sick to go to school. How will I get lesson plans completed and into school? ...as I don't know anyone to look after her. What will I have the students do with me not there? Finally drifted off to sleep.</b>
<b>11:30 pm</b>	
<b>After 12 am</b>	<b>3:00 (am) Younger child wakes me up complaining she is sick. I get her a drink of water and some cough medicine. She settles in bed with me and quickly goes to sleep. So do I!!</b> <b>6:30 am Alarm goes off and I get to do it all over again!!!</b>

**NOTES: I have 31 students in my class. 7 are on Pathways, including one who has a severe developmental delay.**

**APPENDIX VII: INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW AGENDA – TEACHERS**

## **Individual Interview Agenda - Teachers**

Note: These interviews are semi-structured. This means that this agenda is a general guide rather than a strict list of questions. As much as possible, I will let each teacher talk about the issues that she or he feels are most important, while keeping an eye on the main topics that I would like to cover.

### **1. Introductions**

### **2. Consent Forms**

### **3. Demographic Information**

The participant will be asked for basic demographic details, e.g. age, gender, teaching experience, *et cetera*

### **4. Beginning Discussion**

Begin by asking about when the participant first decided to go into teaching; why she or he decided to become a teacher; what his or her expectations of teaching were.

### **5. Task-Diary**

- Examination of each task throughout the day
- Elaboration of what is involved in each task; which tasks are more difficult, less difficult
- Other types of work that she or he does on other days (i.e. not recorded in the task-diary)
- Whether the participant feels she or he has enough time for different types of tasks/activities
- Best and worst parts of the day; what types of work she or he likes the most/least and why

### **6. Topics to Cover**

- Different types of work that make up her or his workloads (paid and unpaid);
- Suggestions of which workload issues are most important to her or him;
- Impacts of workload on her or his health and well-being;
- Suggestions as to how workload could be reduced; changes that she or he would like to see.

### **7. Questions?**

### **8. Thank You**

**APPENDIX VIII: INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW AGENDA - REPRESENTATIVES**

## **Individual Interview Agenda – Representatives**

Note: Again, these interviews are semi-structured. As much as possible, I will let the participant talk about the issues that she or he feels are most important, while keeping an eye on the main topics that I would like to cover.

### **Introductions**

### **Consent Forms**

### **Demographic Information**

The participant will be asked for basic professional details, e.g. position, years of experience, *et cetera*

### **Topics to Cover**

- Relationships between the group represented and primary and elementary teachers
- Opinions on the issue of primary and elementary teachers' workload
- Suggestions of which primary and elementary teachers' workload issues are most important;
- Suggestions as to how workload could be improved; changes that she or he would like to see.

### **Questions?**

### **Thank You**

**APPENDIX IX: RESEARCH PROPOSAL FOR THE NLTA**

## **Primary and Elementary Teachers' Workload in Rural and Urban Newfoundland and Labrador**

### **Research Proposal**

As part of the requirements for my PhD degree in Sociology, I am planning a study of primary and elementary teachers' workloads in Newfoundland and Labrador. Using focus groups, task-diaries, and in-depth individual interviews, I will question primary and elementary teachers throughout the province on their perceptions of their paid and unpaid workloads, the health consequences of these workloads, as well as their ideas for how their workloads can be improved. This research will build upon a recent survey of Newfoundland and Labrador teachers' workload (Dibbon, 2004) that collected information on the number of hours that teachers work. My study will complement this quantitative data that has been gathered with qualitative methods that will provide a more detailed understanding of teachers' work tasks and working conditions in rural and urban Newfoundland and Labrador.

I will begin my research with an advisory stage, consisting of four semi-structured focus groups, each with a maximum of eight teachers. The groups will be held in two rural areas and two urban areas in different parts of the province. I will advertise these meetings to all primary and elementary teachers, whether or not they are experiencing problems with their workloads. These advisory focus groups are intended to help to plan the research project, as well as gather teachers' perspectives on their workload, its consequences, and potential solutions.

In the second, main stage of the research, I plan to conduct in-depth individual interviews with thirty primary and elementary teachers. I will use random and purposive methods to select these teachers from rural and urban schools across the province. I will ask teachers about their perceptions of their paid and unpaid workloads, the health consequences of this workload, and their suggestions for how their workloads can be improved. I will also ask these thirty teachers to complete a task-diary to document the

different types of work that they do throughout the day, both in school and at home. Finally, I plan to interview others who are involved in the education system, including representatives of elementary principals, student assistants, the NLTA, the Department of Education, and the Provincial School Councils.

In the final stage of the research, I will meet again with the small groups of teachers from the first stage. I will present a draft version of the research report to them, describe what I learned in the main research stage, and ask for comments. I will then incorporate the teachers' feedback into the final report before it is made public.

Once complete, this research will provide insight into Newfoundland and Labrador primary and elementary teachers' understandings of their workloads, the ways that their work affects their health and well-being, and their suggestions for how their workloads could be improved. In addition, this research will examine the similarities and differences between primary and elementary teachers' workloads in rural and urban areas of the province.

**The proposal for this research has been approved by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR) at Memorial University. This proposal has also been approved by the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association (NLTA).**

**This research project is being funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Canadian Institutes for Health Research through funding to the RURAL Centre at Dalhousie University, and with support from Memorial University's School of Graduate Studies and SafetyNet: A Community Alliance on Health and Safety in Marine and Coastal Work.**

**APPENDIX X: LETTER TO THE FOUR ENGLISH-LANGUAGE SCHOOL  
BOARDS**

Julie Temple  
c/o SafetyNet, Memorial University  
95 Bonaventure Ave., Suite 300,  
St. John's, NL A1B 2X5

January 22, 2007

Dr. \_\_\_\_\_  
Director of Education  
\_\_\_\_\_ School District  
Address

Dear Dr. \_\_\_\_\_,

My name is Julie Temple, and I am a PhD student in Sociology at Memorial University. I am writing to you today to let you know about a research project that I am planning that you may be interested in. The topic is primary and elementary teachers' workloads in Newfoundland and Labrador, with a rural-urban comparison. I am planning to use a variety of methods, including focus groups, task-diaries, and individual interviews, to question primary and elementary teachers throughout the province on their perceptions of their paid and unpaid workloads, the health consequences of this work, and their suggestions for how their workloads can be improved. This research project is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Canadian Institutes for Health Research through funding to the RURAL Centre at Dalhousie University, and with support from Memorial University's School of Graduate Studies and SafetyNet: A Community Alliance on Health and Safety in Marine and Coastal Work. The proposal for this research is currently being reviewed for approval by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR) at Memorial University.

If you have any questions about this research, you may contact me by telephone at 777-8744 (my office at SafetyNet, Memorial University), by e-mail at [jtemple@mun.ca](mailto:jtemple@mun.ca), or by mail, at Julie Temple, SafetyNet, 95 Bonaventure Avenue, Suite 300, St. John's, NL, A1B 2X5.

Thank you very much for your time.

Sincerely,

**APPENDIX XI: RESPONSE FROM THE EASTERN SCHOOL DISTRICT**



*Office of the Assistant Director  
Rural Education and Corporate Services  
Ed Walsh*

*Telephone: 709-758-2341*

*Chairperson: Milton Peach  
C.E.O./Director of Education: Darin King, Ph.D*

January 31, 2007

Julie Temple  
c/o SafetyNet Memorial  
95 Bonaventure Avenue, Suite 300  
St. John's, NL A1B 2X5

Dear Ms. Temple:

**RE: Research Request**

Thank you for your correspondence of January 22, 2007 wherein you expressed an interest in doing a research project on teacher's workloads in Newfoundland and Labrador, with a rural-urban comparison.

Before your application can be considered by Eastern School District we have to be in receipt of the following:

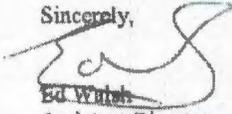
1. Completed Application for permission to conduct research with the Eastern School District, a copy of which is attached for your convenience;
2. A detailed research proposal;
3. A list of survey/test instruments to be used in conducting your research;
4. Copy of letter sent to the principal/teacher requesting permission to conduct research in the school;
5. Ethical approval from the research institution (e.g. MUN); and
6. Confirmation from you that upon completion of your study, a copy of the report of your results be sent to Eastern School District.

Once this has been complete please return same to our offices for processing.

For your information we are enclosing a copy of our policy on research studies and surveys.

Please feel free to contact this office should you have further questions.

Sincerely,



Ed Walsh  
Assistant Director  
Rural Education and Corporate Services

Suite 601, Atlantic Place, 215 Water Street  
Box 64-66, St. John's, NL A1C 6C9

Telephone: 709-758-2341  
Facsimile: 709-758-2387

**APPENDIX XII: LETTER OF APPROVAL FROM THE EASTERN SCHOOL  
DISTRICT**



Office of the Assistant Director  
Rural Education and Corporate Services  
Ed Walsh

Telephone: 709-758-2341

Chairperson: Milton Peach  
C.E.O./Director of Education: Darin King, Ph.D.

February 16, 2007

Ms. Julie Temple  
c/o SafetyNet, Memorial University of Newfoundland  
95 Bonaventure Avenue, Suite 300,  
St. John's, NL A1B 2X5

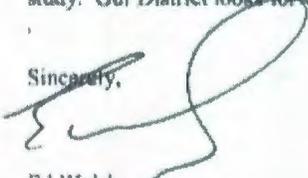
Dear Ms. Temple::

**RE: Research Request – Primary and Elementary teachers' workloads in rural and urban Newfoundland and Labrador**

Please be advised that permission has been granted to conduct a small scale research study within the Eastern School District.

Thank you for involving Eastern School District in what appears to be a very worthwhile study. Our District looks forward to receiving a copy of your results.

Sincerely,



Ed Walsh  
Assistant Director  
Rural Education and Corporate Services

Suite 601, Atlantic Place, 213 Water Street

Telephone: 709-758-2341

**APPENDIX XIII: LETTER TO THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

c/o SafetyNet, Memorial University  
95 Bonaventure Ave., Suite 300,  
St. John's, NL A1B 2X5

January 22, 2007

Honourable Joan Burke  
Minister of Education  
Government of Newfoundland and Labrador  
P.O. Box 8700  
St. John's, NL A1B 4J6

**Re: Letter of support requested for primary/elementary teacher workload study**

Dear Minister Burke,

My name is Julie Temple, and I am a PhD student in Sociology at Memorial University. I am writing to you today to let you know about a research project that I am planning that you may be interested in. The topic is primary and elementary teachers' workloads in Newfoundland and Labrador, with a rural-urban comparison. I am planning to use a variety of methods, including focus groups, task-diaries, and individual interviews, to question primary and elementary teachers throughout the province on their perceptions of their paid and unpaid workloads, the health consequences of this work, and their suggestions for how their workloads can be improved. This research project is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Canadian Institutes for Health Research through funding to the RURAL Centre at Dalhousie University, and with support from Memorial University's School of Graduate Studies and SafetyNet: A Community Alliance on Health and Safety in Marine and Coastal Work. The proposal for this research is currently being reviewed for approval by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR) at Memorial University.

I realize that the issue of teacher workload has created some tension in the province in recent years, and that there have been concerns raised about teachers' freedom to discuss problems with the working conditions. For this reason, I am concerned that many teachers may be hesitant to participate in my study, for fear of reprisal. I know that the Premier and your Department fully support teachers' right to speak out about any concerns they may have about their work. Would you be willing to write a letter to assure teachers that the Department of Education supports their right to participate in this study? I would include this letter with the invitation that I send out to a sample of teachers to ask them to participate in the research.

If you have more questions about this research, you may contact me by telephone at 777-8744 (my office at SafetyNet, Memorial University), by e-mail at [jtemple@mun.ca](mailto:jtemple@mun.ca), or by mail, at Julie Temple, SafetyNet, 95 Bonaventure Avenue, Suite 300, St. John's, NL, A1B 2X5.

Thank you very much for your time.

Sincerely,  
**Julie Temple**

**APPENDIX XIV: RESPONSE FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**



Government of Newfoundland and Labrador  
Department of Education  
Office of the Minister

February 7, 2006

Ms. Julie Temple  
c/o SafetyNet, Memorial University  
95 Bonaventure Ave., Suite 300  
St. John's, NL A1B 2X5

Dear Ms. Temple:

I am writing in reply to your January 22, 2007 request for an official letter from me, as Minister of Education, to encourage teachers to become involved in your research study on teacher workload.

While our government supports the right of all individuals to speak to issues which concern them, it would be inappropriate to provide the kind of letter you suggest. Beyond the inherent suggestion that the department/government is a partner in this study, it should be noted that teachers are employed by school districts. You may therefore wish to contact the employers to ascertain whether there are protocols/policies for their employees' involvement in external research studies of this nature.

Government continues to work with school districts and the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association (NLTA) on concerns identified by educators throughout the province. I note in particular the ongoing reviews of the teacher allocation model and the processes involved in the implementation of Individual Support Services Plans (ISSPs).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Joan Burke".

**JOAN BURKE, M.H.A.**  
St. George's - Stephenville East  
Minister

**APPENDIX XV: ETHICS APPROVAL**



# Memorial

University of Newfoundland

Office of Research

January 31, 2007

**ICEHR No. 2006/07-044-AR**

Ms. Julia Temple  
Department of Sociology  
Memorial University of Newfoundland

Dear Ms. Temple:

Thank you for your submission to the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR) entitled *Primary and elementary teachers' workloads in rural and urban Newfoundland and Labrador*. The ICEHR is appreciative of the efforts of researchers in attending to ethics in research.

The Committee has reviewed the proposal and would like to call your attention to one minor issue that needs to be addressed. Information and consent letters given to participants should include a statement that the proposal for this research has been approved by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and if they have ethical concerns about the research that are not dealt with by the researcher, they may contact the Chairperson of ICEHR at [icehr@mun.ca](mailto:icehr@mun.ca) or by telephone at 737-8368. These documents should also include the contact information of your supervisor.

Subject to the change noted above and in accordance with Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS), the project has been granted full approval for one year from the date of this letter.

If you intend to make changes during the course of the project which may give rise to ethical concerns, please forward a description of these changes to ICEHR for consideration.

If you have any questions concerning this review, you may contact Mrs. Eleanor Butler at [ebutler@mun.ca](mailto:ebutler@mun.ca). We wish you success with your research.

The TCPS requires that you submit an annual status report to ICEHR on your project, should the research carry on beyond January 2008. Also, to comply with the TCPS, please notify ICEHR when research on this project concludes.

Yours sincerely,

T. Seifert, Ph.D.  
Chair, Interdisciplinary Committee on  
Ethics in Human Research

TS/bl

cc. Supervisor – Dr. Barbara Neils, Department of Sociology

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St. John's, NL, Canada A1C 3S7 • Tel.: (709) 737-8251 • Fax: (709) 737-4612 • <http://www.mun.ca/research>





