

WOMEN PRINCIPALS AND CONFLICT

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this study was to explore the ways in which women principals perceived and resolved conflicts. The second purpose was to produce research on women principals and conflict from a uniquely female Canadian perspective.

The data for this study was collected using two methods: a Critical Incident Technique questionnaire and follow-up semi-structured interviews. Both methods were analyzed by grouping data with similar ideas into themes and sub themes. Using both methods provided a means of testing and triangulation of the data. The key research questions guiding this study were (1) how do women principals perceive conflict? And (2) what strategies do women principals use to resolve conflict?

It was determined that women principals perceived conflict as an inevitable, constant and enduring part of the role of the principalship. The participants also held differing perceptions that conflict could be negative, positive, or behavioral. This dispelled the fictitious notion that women hate conflict and avoid it at all costs.

It was also determined that women principals used the same strategies as men to resolve and manage conflicts. Furthermore, five strategies emerged that went beyond the body of literature framework that was presented within this thesis, namely communication, apologizing when wrong, asking outside sources for help, reflection and being fair. These strategies corresponded with a softer administrative style that values integrity, fairness and the maintenance of personal relationships.

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Women Principals and Conflict

CHAPTER ONE

THE PROBLEM

Introduction

Sweeney and Carruthers (1996) asserted that conflict in educational organizations is inevitable. In fact, conflict is an essential element in the functioning and maintenance of relationships within the organization. Ripley (1997) concurred and projected that conflict would continue to be an important force affecting the principals' work in the future. Heaney (2001) maintained, "conflict within schools has many origins and arises from relationships with teachers, pupils, parents and external agencies...conflict is a fact of daily life and living...the potential for conflict is prevalent all around us" (p. 201).

In the past, research has been conducted on principals' perceptions and resolutions of conflict. However, Marshall and Anderson (1994) and Shakeshaft (1989) noted that these studies have been based primarily on the experiences of white male principals. Tabin and Coleman (1993) and Helgesen (1995) insisted that it is essential to also study women's approaches to school administration. Since an integral part of the principalship involves management of conflict, the ways in which women principals deal with conflict continues to be an important area of research in educational leadership.

The purpose of this study was to explore women principals' perceptions and resolutions of conflict within the context of their daily duties. The research was conducted using a Critical Incident Technique questionnaire and follow-up interviews.

The Purpose of the Study

A review of the literature indicated that conflict is an inevitable and enduring part of the principalship. Conflict in the principalship has been studied in the past, although the research has been primarily based on the experience of white males. This study was added to the literature to include the unique experiences of women principals. The main purpose of this study was to explore the ways in which women principals perceived and resolved conflict within their daily administrative duties. The second purpose of the study was to produce research on women principals and conflict from a uniquely Canadian perspective. This second objective was accomplished by sampling only women who were principals in elementary and secondary schools in the Province of Ontario, Canada. These two objectives were explored in two phases. In the first phase, a Critical Incidence Technique questionnaire was administered. In the second phase, each of the nine respondents to the questionnaire took part in a semi-structured interview. The following were key research questions that were used to guide this study:

1. How do women principals perceive conflict?
2. What strategies do women principals use to resolve conflict?

The Significance of the Study

Shakeshaft (1999) documented that the study of women administrators was developed in six stages: the absence of women in administration, investigating successful women administrators, the barriers women administrators face, using female perspectives to research female experiences, how gender affects the effectiveness of administrative behavior, and the experiences of men and women together. Shakeshaft (1999) proposed

that the stages of research were not complete and further studies were needed. She noted that studying how women principals dealt with conflict was the fifth stage of her research platform.

In the past, administrative theory was primarily based on the experiences of white males. Shakeshaft (1989) affirmed, "Studying male behavior, and more particularly white male behavior is not in and itself a problem. It becomes a problem when the results of studying male behavior are assumed appropriate for understanding all behavior"(p.325). Marshall and Anderson (1994) forcefully stressed this belief as they used the terms mainstream and 'malestream' interchangeably (p.171). Tabin and Coleman (1993) argued that incorporating the experiences of female principals into the literature is crucial as "understanding the situations of female principals from their perspective is necessary to help develop a greater understanding of the nature of the principalship" (p. 383). Burke and Nelson (2002) also asserted the need for more research that included the female perspective so that "professional women can understand why they are experiencing particular work situations" (p.13). Young (1994) extended this view into a Canadian perspective as she contended that Canadian research had taken a positive turn. She explained, "We have just begun to consider Canadian women's experiences and contributions as dimensions of our research and theorizing about Canadian educational administration and leadership" (p. 351).

The significance of this study was to advance the understanding of how women principals dealt with conflict. This study also produced research on conflict from a uniquely Canadian perspective.

Limitations

The following factors were limitations of this study:

1. There may be a difference between what the participants wrote and what they actually intended to communicate.
2. Not all of the potential candidates participated in the study as mail surveys have a low return rate.

Delimitations

The following were delimitations of this study:

1. The participants of this study were delimited to women principals.
2. The Critical Incidence Technique questionnaire was distributed to participants in only two school boards.
3. The study focused only on principals who were employed by Public and Catholic school boards.

Assumptions

The following is an assumption in this study:

1. The participants gave an accurate and complete rendition of the events that occurred.

Definition of Terms

Conflict - For the purpose of this study, conflict was defined as a disagreement or tension that existed between two or more individuals. This conflict could arise from the individuals having different desires, opinions, beliefs, values, goals or needs. A conflict could also manifest itself in the form of a personality clash or rivalry between individuals who may have felt the other was interfering with the achievement of their goals. Conflict could be intensified if the individual's goals were incompatible, or if the rewards they were seeking were limited or scarce (Deutsch 1973; Duryea 1992).

Conflict Resolution - For the purpose of this study, conflict resolution was defined as a process used by the parties in conflict to solve the problem. This could be accomplished in a variety of ways, and may have a variety of outcomes based on each individual case and set of circumstances (Sweeney & Carruthers 1996; Cooze 1990).

Overview of the Thesis

The first chapter of this thesis introduced the subject, the purposes and the significance of performing this study. Then the limitations, delimitations and assumptions of the study were explored. Finally, terms used within the thesis were defined. The second chapter includes a review of the related literature and discussion of the conceptual framework of the study. The third chapter examines the design of the research. This includes a description of the participants, ethical considerations, the methods used to collect the data, the process of data collection and data analysis. The fourth chapter presents the data collected from the Critical Incident Technique questionnaire, which was used to create the guiding questions for the follow-up semi-

structured interviews. The fifth chapter is a discussion of the major findings in the study. Conclusions are drawn using information from the literature review and data from this thesis. The research questions are answered and areas beyond the literature review are explored. The sixth chapter consists of a summary of the entire thesis.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Conflict

There are several ways the term conflict could be defined. Deutsch (1973) stated that conflict occurred “Whenever incompatible activities occur...(which) may reflect differences in interests, desires, or values...or a rivalry in which one person tries to outdo the other” (p.156). Duryea (1992) defined conflict as “an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce rewards or resources, and interference from the other party in achieving their goals” (p. 5). Freeman (1998) regarded conflict as “a state of discord, dilemma or disagreement between seemingly incompatible objectives or methods of pursuing a common objective, by either individuals or groups” (p. 27).

Is Conflict Positive or Negative?

Singleton, Davis and Henkin (1994) delineated three ways in which conflict might be viewed. The first is the traditional view that conflict is negative and should be avoided and eliminated at all costs (p.16). Kushner (1996) exemplified this traditional view as he explained:

For many people, conflict means confrontation, dealing with difficult people and situations, and negative, unwanted emotions. Understandably, they want to avoid conflict at all costs. Fear of conflict appears inherent in programs designed to

help people understand their emotions and negative feelings. Participants seek to deal with, resolve, mediate, avoid and ultimately, eliminate conflict. (p. 104)

Freeman (1998) believed that the socialization process could have a dramatic effect on how people perceived conflict. He maintained that even factors such as television could have an effect as he avowed, "Our folk heroes of the West rely heavily on violence...So by the time we mature, we frequently have attitudes toward conflict which are maladaptive for the situation of change and conflict which confronts us" (p. 28).

The second view of conflict is behavioral. Conflict is regarded as a natural and inevitable part of the daily functions of an organization. In this view, as in the first, it is essential that conflict be managed and resolved as quickly as possible. Grab (1996) believed, "today's educational leaders face a growing challenge. Conflict is in their daily diet and constant companion" (p. 34). He further affirmed, "unresolved negative tension can fester like a cancer within the organization" (p. 34).

The third view is an extension of the second view that conflict is positive and necessary. Conflict should be used to create, stimulate and encourage growth within the organization. This view also acknowledged that once the conflict has served its purpose, it should be resolved (Singleton, Davis & Henkin, 1994, p. 16). Kushner (1996) suggested that conflict could be seen as transformational as the parties are "actively seeking to enhance harmony, unity, and congruence. Looking at conflict in this new way means that conflict is to be encouraged, invited, and taken advantage of: not avoided, eliminated or merely managed" (p. 104).

The third view of conflict is very popular in dealing with conflict within an educational organization. Singelton, Davis and Henkin (1994) believed that conflict could have a unifying effect because “conflict when appropriately regulated, may serve as a strategic force for change. It may function as a managerial asset where the focus is on performance and goal achievement rather than harmony alone” (p. 22). Ripley (1997) furthered this assertion and determined, “Rather than viewing these tensions as negative, I believe good principals can use them to help make schools better” (p. 63).

Henkin, Cistone and Dee (2000) explained that although conflict can be used to improve the organization, it is important to realize that encouraging conflict within the organization can only be successful when conflict is “channeled in constructive directions [which] depends, in part, on how it is managed or regulated” (p. 142).

Kushner (1996) argued that conflict could have a positive role in the organization when it is based on a philosophy that encompasses the two following principles:

- 1) Consensual, no-conflict approach to decision making is impossible. No single goal or the process of attaining a single goal can exist in complex organizations and societies.
- 2) Conflict serves important transformational purposes. It plays a part in organizing motives; broadening, strengthening, and clarifying values; detecting and correcting incongruence between organizational goals and individual behavior. The intended outcome is greater congruence between goals and action, between belief and behavior, between what we say and what we do. (pp. 104-105)

Singleton, Davis and Henkin (1994) believed that how an educational leader viewed conflict is an important factor because it will have an effect on how he or /she will approach conflict. They maintained that there is a relationship between the leader's philosophy, attitudes and beliefs about conflict and how they chose to manage conflict (Singleton, Davis & Henkin, 1994).

Portraying Women As Conflict Avoiders

In the past, women have been depicted as conflict avoiders. Erickson (1985) declared that there are two main reasons why some women avoid conflict at all costs. The first is that girls have been raised and socialized to be nurturing and feminine. Young girls are taught that being assertive and aggressive are negative, masculine qualities. The second is that women have a role expectation as mothers and nurturers in society. Engaging in conflict can be seen as incompatible with this role (p. 288).

Girls are socialized very different from boys. The socialization process of children begins at infancy and Helgesen (1995) rationalized:

the kinds of games they [children] play help to form them into very different human beings. Male children learn to put winning ahead of personal relationships or growth; to feel comfortable with rules, boundaries, and procedures; and to submerge their individuality for the greater goal of the game. Females learn to value cooperation and relationships; to disdain complex rules and authoritarian structures; and to disregard abstract notions like the quest for victory if they threaten harmony in the group as a whole. (p. 38)

Wolf (1994) studied how school aged girls socialize each other. She believed that social structures exist between girls in a form of a pack mentality. The popular girls are at the head of this pack and stay at the helm by forming exclusive cliques. If any girl challenges the most popular girl in any way, she may be ostracized from the group. This leads to fear that she will not be accepted. Therefore, the less popular girls are kept in check, Wolf stated, "Since originality can be penalized by ostracism, girls learn that they must seek safety in consensus... Thus, women learn in girlhood to fear that people will not back them up simply because they are right; they will back them only if they are nice" (p. 279).

Wolf also affirmed that young girls also lack positive female role models for dealing with conflict. She reflected on her own experiences, "The only role models I had of younger women engaged in public behavior were entertainers – and people almost never got angry at them" (p. 238). Later in the book she maintained, "I wanted someone in a respected position to say, "It's okay to make people angry. Change causes friction, and that is good...I had few female cultural role models to whom I could relate and whose examples could confirm that the advice was sound" (p. 240).

School could also have a major socializing effect on young girls and how they learn to perceive and deal with conflict. Marshall (2000) avowed, "the hegemonic policy arenas are managed and controlled primarily by, and for white males, defines how women's needs and perspectives are marginalized..." (p. 128). She further posited, "Educational policy directs schools, as major socialization instruments, in curriculum, testing, governance – to reinforce the hegemonic view" (p. 129).

From infancy, girls are socialized to be nice and to avoid conflict. In most cases, this process begins at home and is perpetuated by schools, peers and social expectations. As a result, girls may have different perceptions of and experiences with conflict than boys. When the girls grow up, these differences could affect how they perceive and deal with conflict as adults.

How women are socialized and the roles to which they are expected to conform is a product of white male dominance; however, it is also supported by women's sub cultures. The socialization process starts from early childhood and continues throughout the entire life span. Wolf (1994) supported this argument as she explained:

Women's claim to power is not held in check only by men; standards set by other women create a strong force that can either inhibit female self-assertion or let it flourish. Women are deeply conditioned to fear visibility "rising above" other women, and their claiming of power is largely determined by how much latitude other women permit them. (p. 250)

However, all women have unique experiences based on their race, social class and environment. In the article, *The Gender Gap in Research in Educational Administration*, Shakeshaft (1989) delineated:

Gender is a cultural term. It describes the characteristics that we ascribe to people because of their sex and the ways we believe they behave based on our cultural expectations of what is male and what is female...one's gender identification has a tremendous influence on behavior, perceptions, and effectiveness. (p. 326)

When studying women principals it is essential to note that femaleness is constructed on many different levels. Each woman's experience is unique as she has her own set of factors that define her experience as a woman. Hooks (1990) elucidated, "sex, race, and class [are] factors which together determine the social construction of femaleness" (p. 89).

Marshall (2000) affirmed, "increasingly, feminist philosophies incorporate sophisticated understanding of how race, sexuality and class biases are intertwined in gender regimes. They further recognize the error of essentializing women, putting all women in a group" (p. 128). Therefore, all of these principles must be taken into account while studying the experiences of female principals.

While studying the experiences of women principals and conflict, the topic of power arises. The use of power has a definite impact on the resolution strategies used while dealing with conflict. It has been suggested that women deal with power differently than men. Brunner (2000) explained that many women shy away from power because of cultural norms and role expectations. She avowed, "Culturally, women were not supposed to be the power base. And their being powerful was not looked upon as a positive characteristic for a female" (p. 96). Wolf (1994) declared, "The female psyche still harbors great ambivalence about claiming power... Women must understand what leads them to view power, whether in their own hands or in those of other women, as a taboo, unfeminine substance" (p. 15).

Wolf (1994) outlined how difficult it is for women to claim power in North American culture. She reflected that in many other countries women have very few, if any rights and live in fear because there are no laws to protect them from speaking out.

As a result, women activists often paid with their lives and the lives of their families. She admitted that she does not face the same barriers that these women in other countries face because in North American society women are protected by laws and ironically, “The very worst torment I was facing [when claiming power] was in my head” (p. 241). Yet, the effects of socialization and the fear of social isolation and rejection are strong enough to discourage women from claiming power.

Wolf (1994) proclaimed that in order for women to be successful they must fight the monsters of femininity and niceness. Until these monsters are destroyed, women will have a difficult time becoming successful and rising to the top. She was adamant, “fears about using power stand in women’s way just as concretely as do external obstacles...” (p. 237).

The socialization of women has been so ingrained that it has shaped the perceptions and actions of women. This in turn, shaped their leadership styles and views of power. Naomi Wolf (1994) concluded:

there is a taboo that makes it virtually impossible in ‘women’s language’ to directly claim power or achievement. But women’s willingness – indeed, their eagerness – to do so when it seems “safe” suggests that this reluctance is not due to women’s aversion to asserting their strengths and successes; it is due to women’s sense that they are not allowed to assert themselves. (p. 250)

All of these factors may have an effect on how women perceive and resolve conflict.

How Women Approach Conflict

Females have been traditionally socialized to believe that getting angry is not considered attractive and feminine. Morris (1998) contended that anger is a natural

human emotion and stated, "Regardless of gender most people get angry at times" (p.15). The key is in the way the individual chooses to manage his or her anger and the resulting conflict. Their anger management reflects their personal philosophy of conflict. Fris (1992) affirmed, "the way principals manage conflict reflects their philosophies of administration" (p. 77). If a principal is autocratic and domineering, they may resort to yelling and displaying their anger in an aggressive manner. However, a more participatory style of manager may try to remain calm and use a softer communication style to address the situation.

Erickson (1985) suggested that female principals resolved conflicts in the following manner:

She works on "remaining calm" in conflict situations, on "listening carefully" when problems are presented to her, and on trying to "communicate well" with everyone involved. She knows that autocratic mandates will provoke opponents to work against her. She wants to "collaborate" or "compromise" with staff members in finding a solution. (p. 289)

Women principals attempt to use conflict in a constructive manner to help, not destroy, their opponent. Their strong emphasis on using conflict positively is related to the personal emphasis they place on being fair and being seen as fair. This is similar to Gilligan's (1982) finding about women's senses of integrity being linked to working positively with others to resolve issues and develop situations (Fennell, 1999, p. 46). Holtkamp (2002) believed that women principals valued personal relationships and went about "building relationships with others to achieve the goal and mission of the school..." (p. 15).

In North American society, women have been socialized to believe that engaging in conflict is not feminine and is to be discouraged. In an interview, one female principal said, "I had to learn that conflict was good. It's the only way we learn. But when you look at my growing up, which was in a very traditional, male-dominated society, conflict was bad. You didn't have conflict, fighting or arguing" (Fennell, 1999, p. 36).

Women have also been socialized to believe that having a successful career can conflict with the women's role in society as the nurturing wife and mother. Eckman (2004) asserted that for women, "role conflict occurs as individuals attempt to balance their family and home roles with their professional roles" (p. 368).

For a woman to be a successful and effective principal she must go against all of the socialization that has occurred throughout her entire lifespan. This is essential as conflict is present in all organizations.

Principals and Conflict

Sweeney and Carruthers (1996) declared, "In school environments, there will be conflict among and between staff, students and parents" (p. 329). Lyons (1990) supported this view as he asserted:

The organizational structure of school districts makes a certain amount of role conflict in the principalship inevitable. Principals serve as members of the superintendent's administrative team and are expected to accomplish direct goals and carry out policies and directives. Simultaneously, they serve as leader of the school instructional team and its staff. Frequently, the goals, policies, and

directives from the central office are in conflict with the goals, wishes, and expectations of staff members. (p. 44)

Ripley (1997) believed that conflict in educational administration would “continue to exist and exert pressure on principals for a long time to come” (p. 63). It is important that principals utilize these existing conflicts as Lyons (1990) suggested, “the overall effectiveness of the principal hinges on his or her ability to resolve these conflicts” (p. 45).

Conflict Resolution

Sweeney and Carruthers (1996) defined conflict resolution as “the process used by parties in conflict to reach a settlement. This process may include methods as diverse as warfare, dueling, flipping a coin, arbitration, and negotiation” (p. 328).

Theories of Conflict Resolution

A pioneer conflict resolution philosopher, Follet (1924), developed the following principles that encompassed the main aspects and theory of conflict resolution:

- 1) The whole situation of people in conflict is an evolving experience and not a static one,
- 2) Parties in conflict are co creators of the conflict and each has some responsibility for the solution,
- 3) Parties with differing interests need not oppose but simply confront each other,
- 4) Win-win solutions are possible in which all parties benefit from the conflict resolution process.

Sweeney and Carruthers (1996) delineated two assumptions regarding conflict resolution. The first embraced conflict and held that it was “natural, pervasive and inevitable” (p. 331). The second assumption was that conflict could be resolved in a number of different ways that could “take different forms and lead to different outcomes” (p. 331).

The body reacts physically to conflict when it is affected by conflict. It has a reaction referred to as ‘Fight vs. Flight.’ As the body prepares for the stress of conflict it releases the hormone adrenaline. The hormone enters the bloodstream causing the pulse to race and breathing becomes shallow and quickens. Overall, the body has a feeling of anxiety and tenseness. Instinctually, the body responds to this increase of adrenalin by either becoming aggressive and facing the opponent directly or by removing oneself from the conflict trying to avoid it physically and/or emotionally (Morris, 1998).

As well as physical, there are also behavioral reactions to conflict. Cooze (1990) created a model of five different types of behavior that could be displayed during a conflict:

- 1) Forcing – this approach reflects an unwillingness to deal with the other party, a desire to subdue it with the use of power in order to win at the other’s expense. This approach has a high level of assertiveness and a low level of accommodating the other party.
- 2) Compromise – this approach represents a desire to partially satisfy both parties, such that each gain as well as lose something. This approach is moderate on both assertiveness and accommodation.

3) Accommodating - this approach is based on a willingness to put the concerns of the other person or group ahead of one's own. This approach has a low level of assertiveness but is high in accommodation.

4) Collaborating – this approach represents a desire to fully satisfy the concerns of both parties. For this approach to work, the two parties involved must be open and respect each other. This approach has high levels of both assertiveness and accommodation.

5) Avoiding – this is a method (or orientation) whereby one refuses to deal with the conflict, thus showing indifference to the concerns of the other party. This approach has low levels of assertiveness and accommodation.

These strategies should be employed based on the uniqueness of each situation as not every strategy works in every situation. The administrator must utilize the strategy that will be most effective in dealing with the situation. A concept underlying this model is that communication is essential when employing any of these strategies except of course when employing the avoidance strategy (pp. 22- 24). Grab (1996) advised that when approaching conflict “the selection of a strategy to resolve a conflict should be a function of the particular problem and situation” (p. 36).

Conflict Management Strategies

Bolton (1979) outlined four strategies used to manage conflict: deny that conflict exists, avoid the conflict, give in to the opponent, and dominate the opponent with power. Weeks (1992) added the strategy of bargaining and referred to it as a band-aid approach.

Pulvino and Perrone (1998) built on and expanded the strategies of Bolton (1979) and Weeks (1992) to ten conflict management strategies. They divided the ten strategies into three groups; passive, assertive and facilitative, as follows:

a) Passive Strategies:

- 1) Do nothing - this approach takes a wait and see attitude and utilizes the idea that time will eventually fix the conflict on its own.
- 2) Withdrawing - this is accomplished by physically removing oneself from the conflictual situation in a purposeful manner.
- 3) Smoothing - the goal of this strategy is to maintain and enhance the personal relationship. This is accomplished by creating a warm and open atmosphere, maintaining a positive outlook and doing whatever is necessary to maintain a positive relationship.
- 4) Diversion - this can be done in a number of ways including changing the flow of the conversation, changing the subject or using humor to ease tensions.

b) Assertive Strategies:

- 5) Confronting the issue head on - this involves embracing the conflict and being straightforward by clarifying the issues. The purpose of this strategy is to work toward resolving the conflict.
- 6) Forcing - this involves the use of power to assert authority over the other person thereby controlling the situation as well as the outcome. In this situation, there is a clear winner and loser which often leads to a destruction of the interpersonal relationship between the parties to the conflict.

7) Standing firm - this strategy is employed in order to avoid escalating the conflictual situation. The goal is to respond to the other party in manner that will end the confrontation and restore harmony as tactfully as possible without giving in to their demands.

c) Facilitative Strategies:

8) Problem-solving techniques - together the parties define the problem, brainstorm for possible solutions, select solutions and project possible consequences. Once they have selected the plan they intend to execute, they decide who is responsible for what element of the plan. When all parties have agreed, the plan is implemented. After implementation, feedback is gained as the group evaluates how the solution worked. This strategy places an equal weight on reaching goals and the relationship between the conflicting parties.

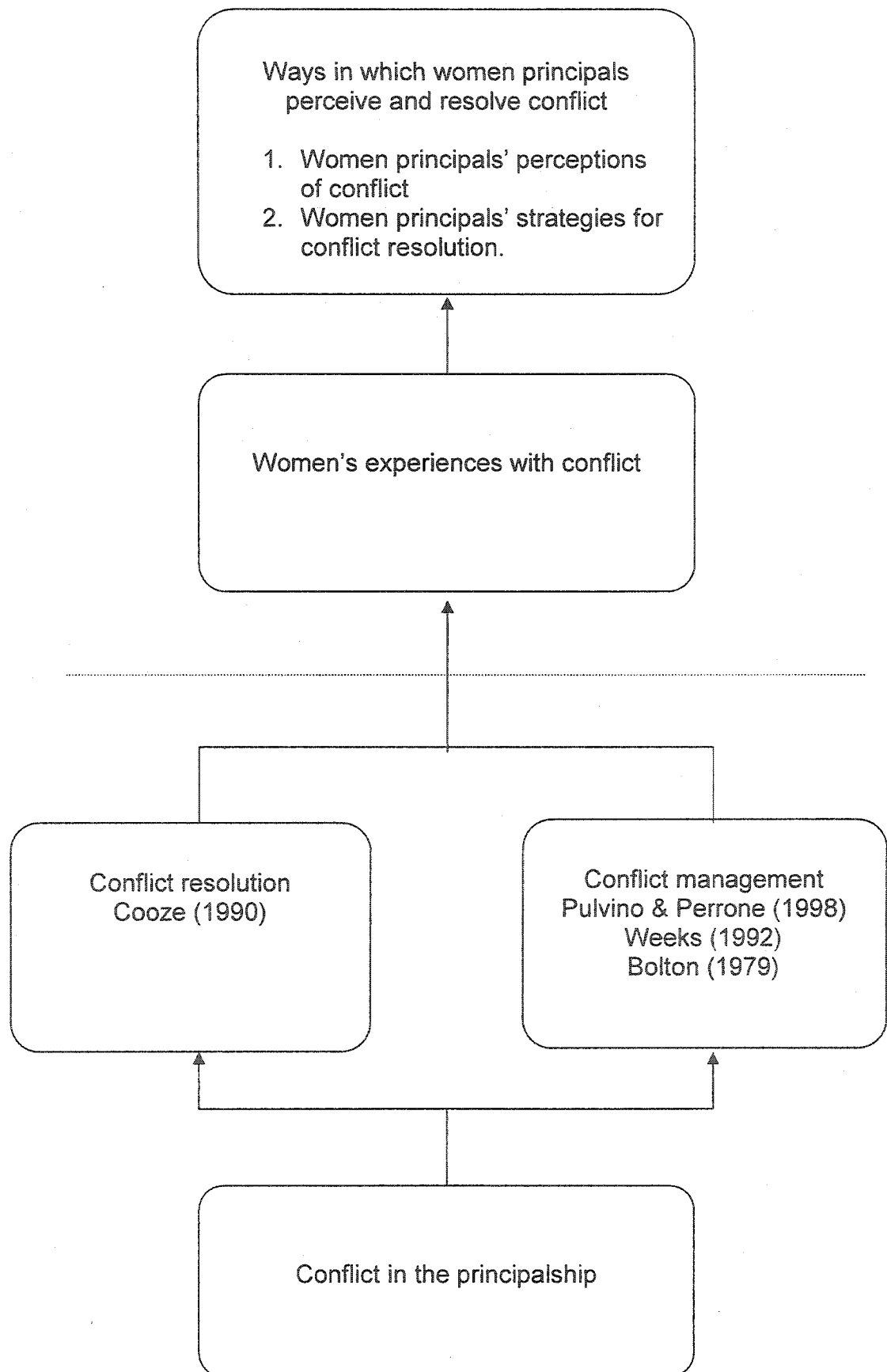
9) Negotiating - the purpose of this strategy is to find a middle ground where the most important goals of both parties are at least partially achieved. The participants must decide what they are willing to give up and what they are not. In the end, both parties must agree with the outcome.

10) Confluent response - each party recognizes the feelings of the other party, and expresses their own feelings and observations honestly. They acknowledge that there is a problem and that both parties have a desire to resolve the situation. The final step of the process is to employ problem-solving techniques (pp. 61-79).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1 – A Framework for Studying Women Principals and Conflict



The first concept located at the base of Figure 1 is conflict in the principalship. Studies by Ripley (1997) and Sweeney and Carruthers (1996) illustrated that conflict within the administrative duties of the principalship is inevitable. Conflict is an essential element in the functioning and maintenance of relationships within the educational organization. The principal's ability to manage and resolve these conflicts is an integral part of the principal's success. Engaging in conflict is the foundation of this figure because conflict occurs naturally within the principalship. It is imperative to study how principals approach conflict. Without the existence of conflict, this study could not proceed.

The next two concepts in the figure are conflict resolution and conflict management. There are two ways that principals could approach, either resolve or manage, the conflicts that occur in the principalship. Cooze (1990) used a model to outline the behaviors that could occur when resolving a conflictual situation. These included behaviors such as forcing, compromising, accommodating, collaborating and avoiding. With some conflicts, resolution is simply not possible. In these cases, the conflicts are managed. Pulvino and Perrone (1998) expanded on the studies of Bolton (1992) and Weeks (1979) and delineated ten strategies that may be used to manage conflicts without necessarily attempting to resolve them. These strategies are doing nothing, withdrawing, smoothing, diverting, confronting, forcing, standing firm, using problem-solving techniques, negotiating, and confluent responses.

Above the conflict resolution and management strategies, a dotted line appears. This line is used as a divider between the past and present. In the past, the majority of studies were performed to determine which strategies principals used to resolve and/or

manage conflicts. These studies, however, have primarily focused on white male principals as participants. This line signifies a changing direction in the research that focused on the experiences of women principals. In order to generate a more complete picture of the principalship, more studies are being performed to include women and other minorities.

The next concept above the dotted line is women's experiences with conflict. Studies by Brunner (2000), Marshall (2000) and Wolf (1994) included the female perspective in their studies. They insisted that the unique experiences of females are important and must be considered in order to fully understand the nature of the principalship. This need to include the experiences of women principals led to the writing of this thesis.

The final concept at the top of figure 1 is the ways in which women principals perceive and resolve conflict. The participants in this study were female elementary and secondary principals in Ontario English Public and Catholic school boards. The participants voluntarily participated in the study, which consisted of a Critical Incidence Technique questionnaire and a follow-up interview. The Critical Incidence Technique questionnaire consisted of the participant outlining one incidence in which they experienced conflict within their duties as a principal. Data collected from the Critical Incidence Technique questionnaire was used to create questions for the follow-up interviews. The follow-up interviews created a means of triangulation and testing. Follow-up interviews were also used in this study "to add "depth," "credibility," and "practicality"" (Mertens, 1998). This study added a female perspective to the literature on conflict and the principalship. This created a spiral effect as each layer produced new

knowledge that may be added to the literature base. The goal of the study was to construct a more accurate depiction and understanding of the experiences principals have with conflict.

In conclusion, the conceptual framework for this study illustrated the importance of studying female principals and how they approached conflict. The literature has shown that studies have been performed on the importance of conflict in the principalship and how principals attempt to resolve and manage conflict. The figure also illustrated the need for further study of how female principals deal with conflict. The purpose of this study was to add to the literature base by including the experiences of women principals with the Critical Incidence Technique questionnaire and the follow-up interviews. In Chapter Three the research methodology will be outlined. The data collection process and the data analysis will also be described.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In chapter three, the research methodology is explained. The description of the participants, ethical considerations, methods of data collection and data analysis are delineated. The purpose of the research was to study how women principals dealt with conflict during their daily administrative duties. The accounts of the participants were recorded in their own language using the Critical Incidence Technique questionnaire and follow-up interviews as outlined in this chapter.

Description of Participants

All nine of the participants in this study were female and employed as principals in the Province of Ontario at the time of the study. Five were principals of elementary schools and four were principals of secondary schools. Eight were employed by an English Public school board while one was employed by a Catholic school board.

Ethical Considerations

The participants in this study signed a consent form (refer to Appendix E) that outlined the following conditions. Participation in the study was voluntary and they were free to withdraw from the study at any time. The participants would have anonymity both during and after the research. The data collected would be kept strictly confidential and would be securely stored at Lakehead University for seven years. There were no known risks, either short or long-term, to the participants. Conversely, there were no known short-term or long-term benefits for the participants in the study. Participants

will, upon request, have access to the completed study. Since this study involved the participation of human subjects, ethical guidelines were considered in the design of the study.

Methods of Data Collection

Process for Obtaining Informed Consent

In the first phase of the study, the participants received a cover letter through the mail (refer to Appendix D), together with a consent form, a Critical Incidence Technique questionnaire, an interview card and a stamped return envelope to the researcher. Each participant's signature on the consent form (refer to Appendix E) indicated her consent. All participants volunteered to become candidates for the interview and filled out their names and contact information (refer to Appendix F). The interview cards were then returned to the researcher along with the Critical Incidence Technique questionnaires and consent forms.

Procedures for Ensuring Confidentiality

To ensure confidentiality, the respondents were assigned a pseudo name. Then the Critical Incidence Technique questionnaires and the consent forms were kept in separate files to ensure the anonymity of the participants. All collected data were kept strictly confidential and anonymous. Participants were coded and identified only by pseudonyms and their exact location was not used in the writing of this thesis.

Identification of Risk and/or Benefit

Since the participants simply responded to a questionnaire and participated in an interview, it is believed there were no apparent benefits or risks for the participants in the study.

Gaining Access

The sample size for the Critical Incidence Technique questionnaire was nine participants. They were selected through the process of cluster sampling. Merten (1998) described that, "Cluster sampling is used with naturally occurring groups of individuals" (p. 260). For the purposes of this study, the school districts were chosen because they had a naturally occurring population of female principals in which to study. The two school districts were also selected because they were within close proximity to the researcher. The researcher also used Criterion Sampling to select the school districts. Criterion Sampling is appropriate when "the researcher must set up a criterion and then identify cases that meet that criterion" (Merten, 1998, p. 263). In this study, the participants were selected because they fit the following criteria:

- 1) They were employed by a school board in Ontario, Canada
- 2) They were accessible to the researcher. Convenience Sampling was a factor in choosing to study participants in these particular school districts, as the participants were easily accessible to the researcher for interview purposes.

Mertens (1998) asserted, "accessibility to a sample or population is an important factor to consider when making decisions about sampling design" (p. 267).

The Directors of Education from both the Public and Catholic school boards were contacted. Their permission was requested from the researcher to perform the study in their school district. The directors were asked to mail the researcher a list of every female principal in their district along with their contact information (refer to Appendix A). Subsequently, every female principal within the two districts was mailed a Critical Incidence Technique questionnaire, consent form and interview card. All of the participants who completed the card also agreed to participate in the interview portion of the study. The researcher contacted the participants by telephone, e-mail and/or fax to set up a time for the interview. Five of the interviews took place at the principal's schools, two took place in the principal's homes and two were conducted in restaurants. The principals chose the date, time and location that were most convenient for them.

Data Collection Instruments

Two instruments were used to collect data for this thesis. The first was the Critical Incidence Technique questionnaire. The second was semi-structured follow-up interviews.

The Critical Incidence Technique (CIT) used in this thesis was an open-ended questionnaire (refer to Appendix B). The participants were asked to describe one specific event that involved conflict they had encountered during their principalship. They were requested to describe the context of the situation, who was involved, their own actions, what occurred, and if their view of conflict was altered in any way due to that particular event. Each participant was asked to respond in point form and to include all factors she believed were crucial and necessary. This data collection strategy was employed using

themes and sub themes to create the semi-structured questions that would be used in the follow-up interviews.

In the second phase of this study, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews. The interviews lasted approximately one hour each. The questions were created using the data from the Critical Incidence Technique questionnaire (refer to Appendix C for sample interview questions). Rothe (1993) explained, “semi-structured interviews incorporate a series of structured questions which are developed in advance. We study an event, situation, or group in advance and decide which areas to question. A series of concise, clear and focused questions is organized” (p. 97).

Since all nine participants in the interview portion of the study comprised the original sample, a means of testing and triangulation was created. The data from the interviews were used to address the research questions guiding this study. The researcher used the follow-up interviews in conjunction with the Critical Incident Technique questionnaire as Bogden and Biklen (1998) explained:

interviews may be used in two ways. They may be the dominant strategy for data collection, or they may be employed in conjunction with participant observation, document analysis, or other techniques. In all these situations the interview is used to gather descriptive data in the subjects' own words so the researcher can develop insights on how subjects interpret some piece of the world. (p. 94)

Bogden and Biklen (1998) asserted, “good interviews produce rich data filled with words that reveal the respondents' perspectives” (p. 95). They further asserted, “with semi-structured interviews you are confident of getting comparable data across

subjects” (p. 95). Therefore, using both the Critical Incident Techniques questionnaires with the follow-up interviews created a means of testing and triangulation.

Data Collection

The Critical Incidence Technique (CIT) questionnaires were distributed to the participants via the mail. The participants completed the consent form, survey and interview questionnaire and mailed them back to the researcher in a pre-addressed and stamped envelope provided.

The participants were contacted by phone, e-mail or fax and an interview time was set up. The participants were interviewed at their own schools, in their homes or at restaurants, wherever was most convenient for the participants. The interviews were audio taped and transcribed verbatim by the researcher.

Data Storage

Upon completion of the study, all data collected would be securely stored at Lakehead University for seven years and thereafter destroyed. Information regarding data storage was included in the cover letter that was distributed to the participants.

Process of Dissemination of Research Results to Participants

A summary of the findings of this research was made available to participants by the researcher. A copy of the completed thesis was also made available to the Lakehead University Library.

Data Analysis

All of the data collected from the Critical Incidence questionnaires were reviewed. The data was then separated into groups of data that contained similar ideas and commonalities. Each of these groups of data was given a heading that reflected the nature of the ideas in that group. This heading was called the theme. The data collected from each theme was broken down and arranged into sub themes. Each sub theme remained under the larger heading of the theme. Each subcategory was given a descriptive title and was categorized under the larger heading of the theme (Stano, 1983).

In the last stage, questions were formed from each subcategory for use in the interview portion of the study. The data from the interviews were analyzed by question. The responses to the questions were carefully reviewed. Similar responses were then grouped together. Each group of responses was given a descriptive heading.

Themes

A table entitled, Table 1 – Emergent Themes, follows below. This table was created as an overview for the reader, to show how the researcher structured the themes, sub themes, and the data collected from the Critical Incident Technique questionnaires.

Table 1. Emerging Themes

| Theme | Sub Theme | Question |
|-------------------------|--|---|
| Perceptions of Conflict | a. Principal's Perception b. Engaging in Conflict | Do you view conflict as positive, negative or neutral? Do you feel that engaging in conflict with others is an inevitable part of being a principal? |
| Conflict Resolution | a. Strategies | What strategies do you use to resolve conflict? |
| Conflict Management | a. Strategies | What strategies do you use to manage conflict? |
| Principal's Response | a. Emotions b. Physical | What emotions do you feel when you are engaged in a conflictual situation? How do you feel physically when you are engaged in a conflictual situation? |

Summary of the Chapter

This chapter examined the research design for this thesis. It described the participants of this study who were female principals in Ontario. The ethical considerations were also examined ensuring confidentiality, anonymity, safe storage, no harm or benefits to participants and that participation in the study was completely voluntary. Next, the two methods of collecting data, the CIT and follow-up interviews, were discussed. Finally, how the data from this study was analyzed was examined. The next chapter will present the data collected from this study.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

Introduction

A review of the literature indicated that conflict is an inevitable and enduring part of the principalship. Conflict in the principalship has been studied in the past, although the research has been primarily based on the experience of white males. Findings from this study will contribute to the literature by including the unique experiences of women principals. The main purpose of this study was to explore the ways in which women principals perceived and resolved conflict as part of their daily administrative duties. The second purpose was to produce research on women principals and conflict from a uniquely Canadian perspective. This second objective was accomplished by sampling only women who were principals of schools in the Province of Ontario, Canada.

These objectives were explored in two phases. In the first phase, a Critical Incidence Technique questionnaire was administered. In the second phase, all nine respondents to the questionnaire took part in a semi-structured interview.

The following were the key research questions that guided this study:

1. How do women principals perceive conflict?
2. What strategies do women principals use to resolve conflict?

The incidents from the Critical Incidence Technique surveys were summarized. (refer to Appendix G) The data was then analyzed and organized into themes. The themes were broken down into sub themes from which the questions were created to be used in the semi-structured follow-up interviews.

The data from these interviews were organized into sub themes that were formulated from the Critical Incidence Technique survey data. The sub themes were (a) perceptions of conflict, (b) engaging in conflict, (c) conflict resolution strategies, (d) managing conflict, (e) emotional reactions to conflict, (f) physical reactions to conflict, and (g) fairness.

Data Used to Create Questions

Perceptions of Conflict

Ingrid argued that conflict was positive because “The events caused me to review and reflect on my views which in turn actually reinforced my personal stand. I firmly believe that I was and am still correct” (p. F9).

Ellen suggested that conflict had negative ramifications as the “relationship with the V.P. (vice principal) has not returned to initial level of trust on either side. However, both of us are older and wiser and both realize administration is not an easy job” (p. F5).

Anne declared that the “conflict was very unpleasant” (p. F18).

Engaging in Conflict

Grace hypothesized that engaging in conflict is essential because “in real life, you can’t just run away from difficult situations, and that by facing up to these and problem solving with others everyone benefited” (p. F15).

Ingrid also believed it was necessary to engage in conflict. She was reluctant to initiate conflict but avowed, “I do not seek conflict with her, however, she is well aware that I would not think twice about banning her from the building” (p. F9).

Conflict Resolution Strategies

Ellen's initial strategy was to speak to all those involved in the conflictual situation "to find out all sides of the story" (p. F5). Helen also used this strategy. She explained:

I immediately went to the staff room, and asked to speak to the classroom teacher...then I asked the French teacher...I called Mom, but could not get a hold of her, so the emergency contact (aunt) was made...called another Principal to run by him. (p. F2)

Fran acted immediately and "called teacher to my office, confronted the problem" (p. F3). She later regretted that decision because she had acted hastily. Therefore, she "returned to discuss two days later, developed clearer understanding" (p. F3). Cindy declared, "I acknowledged their feelings and point of view and tried to incorporate it in the solution/resolution I proposed" (p. F17).

On two occasions, Helen sought assistance from outside the school using community resources. She contacted "special services... and testing that had already been requested was done, and medication from the medical doctor was also adjusted. Counseling services were also initiated at this time" (p. F2). She had another pupil "meet with the counselor...had some testing done. (p. F2)

Managing Conflict

Ingrid stressed the importance of communication. For example, "all of these changes were communicated via a school newsletter to the parents and I stood at the entrance when I could to enforce it" (p. F9). Anne attempted to keep the "communication lines open between home and school" (p. F18).

Grace listened to the problem although she would not intervene as the parents had hoped. She felt that the parents needed to deal with the issues themselves and discuss the matter with the teacher. She explained:

I listened and jotted down notes. When they were finished I told them that I could see they were concerned about “D” (their daughter), that it took courage to come and bring these to my attention; however they really needed to bring their concerns to “T’s” (teacher’s) attention. If indeed “T” was yelling, she needed to know how students and parents felt about it – otherwise no one would ever challenge “T” to change. My point was that they should address their concerns to “T” themselves, not just expect I would do it for them. I was finding diplomatic ways of pointing this out to them. (p. F12)

Although Grace was not willing to resolve the conflict for them, she listened and offered her support through brainstorming. “They (parents) thanked me for listening and brainstorming with them” (p. F15).

Ingrid used dedication and persistence to manage the conflict with a parent. She affirmed, “the majority of the parents applauded the changes and supported fully the need for tighter security in the school. I simply wore the others down” (p. F9).

Ingrid made a concise plan and carried it out. She clarified:

It was my intention to curtail her open and ready access to the classrooms and my teachers and stop the harassment campaign she was inflicting on them. I also wanted to limit her access to her own children during the day because she was embarrassing them and setting them up for teasing. (p. F8)

Emotional Reactions to Conflict

Brenda advised, “When dealing with an irate parent, remain calm” (p. F4).

Dawn acknowledged that due to the conflictual situation, “emotions were running high” (p. F6).

Physical Reactions to Conflict

Two principals shared situations when parents threatened them physically.

Brenda declared that a parent “threatened me and another teacher” (p. F4). Ingrid stated, “a parent...is in essence an adult bully...oversized woman who used her size as a means of intimidation” (p. F8). Brenda set and accomplished a specific goal to resolve the conflictual situation. She attempted “to remove the parent in as calm a fashion as possible” (p. F4). After the situation was diffused, she documented the incident and had the victims do the same. She said, “This seemed to have calmed all victims” (p. F4).

Grace maintained a balance of power between herself and the people involved in the conflict. She kept “a round table there (her office) for the purpose of meeting with parents or students” (p. F11).

Fairness

Dawn was very concerned with fairness as she asserted, “the principal chose not to look at the impact of decision on the one athlete, but the impact of not following Board and Athletic policy on the staff and pupils of a school that was under review for closure” (p. F6).

She further affirmed, “The Director suggested the principal break the rule and the principal countered with if it was okay to break this rule is it okay to break any rules. His response was no. The principal stated that would be inconsistent and the discussion ended” (p. F7).

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

PRESENTATION OF THE DATA

How Do Women Principals Perceive Conflict?

Engaging in Conflict

Engaging in conflict is a major part of the role of the principal. Anne estimated, "about 99 percent of your work deals with conflict" (p. G3). She also used the analogy: "You are walking a rope the whole time" (p. G3). Helen asserted that conflict is "Constant" (p. G61). Ellen also agreed, "A principal is dealing with conflict a lot of the time. The phone rings, somebody walks in the door, you have a conflict. You just live with that all the time" (p. G39). Brenda asserted, "Conflict is a daily thing..." (p. G10). Fran suggested, "you know that there's stuff you've got to get done but you may not get at it all because you're busy all day solving people's problems and resolving conflict" (p. G44). She added, "You never know where there'll be a conflict" (p. G45) and she declared:

Everything you do is conflict resolution... it's a tremendous part of my job...I got a little coaster from my sister at Christmas and it says, "Life is just one God dam thing after another," and that basically is the life of a principal. (p. G44)

Dawn described the potential number of possibilities for engaging in conflict:

It's a daily event...depending on the size of your school... You've got a principal. You might have an EA (Educational Assistant) or two... Each of those children has a minimum of two parents unless one of them has died. Some of them have more than two because of blended families. Some of them have grandparents who have taken on that role or have become part of that equation, or older brothers or sisters... Each of those on staff has families... There are also custodians and secretaries... We haven't talked about the police... media... Social Services... community people... All of those are things that happen to us every single day. (p. G21-22)

Cindy recalled the number of people she has dealt with in a day and that each contact has had the potential for developing into a conflict:

being a principal involves so much interplay of people that you have your custodians, EA's, teachers, parents, trustees, hierarchal people like the superintendent person ... it almost feels like pull taffy because you are being pulled into so many directions. (p. G15)

Helen also shared this belief:

I think anytime you're dealing with a number of people whether it's adults or children, conflict is just going to be part of the whole scene. So when you have 200 kids in the building and we have 14 teachers here, a couple of EA's, two custodians, a secretary, a French teacher, librarian tech. there's going to be conflict. (p. G60)

Brenda explained that principals have a number of contacts in a day and also work with a number of other agencies that all have their own objectives and goals.

She put forward:

you are working with a whole bunch of other ministries; you work with the Ministry of Public Safety and Security, Children's Aid, Ministry of Education, Child and Family Services; and I like working with other agencies and making things work. That's another aspect of my job and you can have conflict with any of these ministries and with corrections. (p. G12)

Anne declared, "You know there is conflict as an administrator...that goes without saying..." (p. G7). She also addressed the issue that some people simply do not get along because "Sometimes whether you like to admit it or not there is plain personality conflict" (p. G3).

Ingrid summed it up when she concluded that conflict is “an inevitable part of life and inevitable to this role...you just have to deal with it” (p. G69).

Perceptions of Conflict

Three principals in the study perceived conflict as positive. Cindy suggested that conflict within organizations could be positive as it helped those involved to reflect and improve upon their work:

Generally, I look at conflict positive because it requires you to think and reassess ... why you are doing something and what you believe in...I think that it can be a very positive...if you don't have conflict then you could tend towards being pretty myopic and maybe status quo... (p. G15)

Dawn also perceived conflict as positive because it helped her to grow as an individual. It also reinforced her belief system that:

conflict sometimes can be positive. Any time that I've been in a conflict I've grown as a person, I've become more confident, I've more strength, I've become more aware of my value system and my integrity and where it's at. I know if I've compromised it. I know if I've strengthened my belief system that when I come out at the other end, even if the other party is still not pleased with my decision, if I've followed all the rules, I've done everything I've done, I feel fine that I've done what I'm supposed to do. (p. G20)

Brenda viewed conflict as positive because it gave her an opportunity to help other people to understand the issues surrounding administration. She avowed, “you can't see conflict as something that is going to destroy you as an administrator. You have to see it as something that okay, that person does not understand so we are going to work together and that person will understand...” (p. G10).

Two principals in the study had a negative perception of conflict. Anne viewed conflict negatively and asserted, “I find conflict very unpleasant” (p. G3). Fran agreed that conflict could be negative and she attempted to avoid it if possible. She explained,

“I don’t like conflict. I would do anything I could to avoid conflict and if I wait long enough, sometimes it goes away. But it’s part of the job” (p. G44).

Three principals felt that conflict has both positive and negative attributes. Helen stated that she has sometimes viewed conflict in a positive light. Conflict could be an opportunity for people to brainstorm and work together to get issues resolved. She asserted, “There is a lot of positive conflict. If people just come with different viewpoints of how they want to handle a certain situation, that’s really helpful” (p. G60). Helen admitted, however, that “conflict is difficult” (p. G60) and can also have a lasting negative affect on personal relationships “because once you damage that relationship I don’t think it’s easy to heal” (p. G64).

Ellen explained that conflict might be unpleasant at the time of engagement. She also acknowledged that once the conflictual situation is over, positive outcomes often ensue from it. She surmised, “at the time you’re going through conflict you perceive it as negative. But often when you’re finished a conflict you can come out with a lot of positive results” (p. G39).

Grace agreed that conflict could be positive as it may stimulate growth within the individual and the organization. She also noted, however, that if conflict is not handled correctly, it could have a very negative outcome. She elucidated:

It’s certainly part of life. You can’t avoid it totally. I think it’s a learning situation so it can have positive aspects because it can bring about good change and learning. It can be negative if it’s approached in a certain way or if you get stuck in it or if it gets out of hand so that things are said or done that are not appropriate and hurt people. So I would say that it can be all of those. (p. G54)

Emotional Reactions to Conflict

Cindy described her emotional state while involved in a conflictual situation:

I work at trying to keep myself calm...I'm thinking about maintaining calm especially if they are very emotional. It is very difficult not to feed into that and it is so important if you want to be able to have a successful resolution of the conflict to be able to bring them down and get them into the rational level. So sometimes you end up being almost like a sponge for their aggression and their hostility and their anger and emotion. So you just try to absorb that in so it nullifies it and then when you finished the discussion it is very draining because it has been a really emotional tug of war. (p. G17)

Fran averred, "if I've had time to think about it and made a decision that this is how I'm going to solve it, then I'm very calm" (p. G48). Helen confessed, "I do get very emotional so I have to give myself time to calm down" (p. G64). Anne admitted, "it was all I could do to hold my temper..." (p. G7).

Emotional stress could also be a factor after the situation has been resolved. Brenda declared, "It's just like in any job for anyone, if you have an irate parent that goes into your classroom you are not going to feel all happy about it" (p. G13). Ellen noted, "Emotionally you are drained afterwards" (p. G41). Helen divulged, "I get very emotionally involved. I am getting better. I don't take things personally but for the first six months I sure did and that's really hard. I am very emotional and I have to watch that" (p. G64). Anne shared, "it is just constantly going through my mind and I am constantly thinking..." (p. G4). Often these conflicts were "very deep and serious; that's when I would withdrawal" (p. G4). Fran admitted, "if I feel I'm being criticized, that kind of gets me emotionally a little bit out of balance" (p. G48). Ingrid suggested:

you have to really go with the punches. If you can't, you don't sleep...get an ulcer...high blood pressure...you tend to cower and shrink as an individual. You lose a sense of who you are because people today aren't nice. (p. G69)

Ingrid furthered, "Conflict can consume you if you let it" (p. G75). Cindy agreed:

It is really, really abusive a lot of the time. When you've got really irrational, very aggressive hostile people. How much should you endure, what cost does it take on your humanity and your own dignity. It is a very complex and very difficult thing and something you are always struggling with...and trying to stay positive in the midst of it all. (p. G18)

Cindy suggested, "If you don't feel comfortable with conflict, I think that it could probably tear you apart...I think it could probably consume you" (p. G15).

Dawn shared her thoughts on the emotional effects of conflict:

Does it mean that it doesn't impact me sometimes when I think my staff doesn't like me? It does. Or the kids don't like me. It does. Because my personality or the type of person I am has this really strong need to be liked and to be respected and to be recognized. So when I'm in a place where I've made a decision or I'm trying to get something going and it doesn't happen and people are angry with me, the little girl in me remembers what it was like to be ostracized or remembers what it was like not to feel part of something and not be noticed. So yes, she hurts but she still has to move on and do whatever it is. (p. G35)

Brenda shared strategies she has utilized to be emotionally healthy. The first was how she has separated her career from the rest of her life. She explained:

You have to know how to divide; I never bring my problems home, ever. The minute I walk out of the school everything stays there... I will deal with that tomorrow when I go back and I leave it there and I go home. There is a life there and you have your family and you have to deal with those conflicts. (p. G13)

Dawn used the strategy of distancing herself emotionally from the conflict as she argued, “You may not like my decision ... if I start worrying about how everybody thought about my decisions, I couldn’t function” (p. G34-35). She felt that her personality type has hindered her in being an effective administrator. She explained:

I’m an introvert. I’m going to be dead by the end of the day, every day. Extroverts get their energy from other people. Introverts don’t. Most people go to work and they go, go, go, go. There’s not another profession on the face of this earth that has the potential every single day on the job of that many contacts. (p. G22)

Fran acknowledged that the support of her husband has had a positive effect on her emotional well-being. She affirmed, “he’s been very supportive. I think that’s been key to my success... But he also always supported me in my education and he knew I wanted to do this” (p. G52). Ellen shared this view as she stated that she “had a whole lot of support from my husband” (p. G42).

Physical Reactions to Conflict

Grace described her physical response as “you can feel your heart racing ... and your pulse is quickening. You’re anxious...so yeah, it’s definitely stressful” (p. G59). Ellen described a similar feeling as “Your adrenalin is going” (p. G41). Helen admitted, “I get hot and flushed but physically I get really tensed up sometimes” (p. G64). Ellen described her experience as “Okay, it’s that adrenalin thing that you are right keyed to very peak of your being...you’re ready for the race...you’re tired afterwards but the adrenalin keeps you going while you’re doing it” (p. G41).

Anne also reported suffering from “a headache... I don’t sleep...my stomach did churn” (p. G4). Cindy revealed that she could feel her “stomach churning...” (p. G17). Brenda divulged, “I feel very knotted up inside...I get the knots in my stomach until you

deal with it and then it is gone... You will feel something in your belly upset and uptight and it is human nature to feel that way..." (pp. G12-13).

Cindy related, "I can start to feel my ears burning...I am trying to make myself breathe...to control my voice...to control those almost automatic responses where your pulse would race and think about staying relaxed and staying rational..." (G17).

What Strategies Do Women Principals Use to Resolve Conflict?

Strategies to Resolve Conflict

All of the principals in this study affirmed that the best way to deal with conflict is through communication. Helen strongly asserted that when dealing with conflict resolution, communication is "Number one..." (pp. G61-62). She added, "as long as you keep the communication open problems can be resolved" (p. G60). She argued, "as soon as you yell at someone they shut right down. There's absolutely no communication there again. It's gone" (p. G63). Fran declared, "A lot of it is resolved just by listening" (p. G44). Grace noted, "A lot of listening, a lot of talking" (p. G54). Ingrid stated, "I try first off to listen. I just try to listen" (p. G70). Cindy shared an example of when she took a communicative approach: "Near the end of September I had invited them for coffee so we can just sit down and talk about what were the issues and what can we do to work together" (p. G16). Anne concurred that communication is key as she posited:

that's all I know how to do is to talk and to listen... What else do you do to handle a conflict situation, besides talk... communication is the main name of the game if you are going to get anywhere with conflict as far as I can see. (p. G8-9)

Dawn declared that communication is:

the most effective way that I help to deal with conflict. Just basically letting someone tell their story. Ask them what it was like for them. Then what does it

remind you of, and then ask if we go back to that time what would you really, really wish you could have said. Then I allow them to do some venting. (p. G24)

Dawn described her method of communication:

I'll talk to each side individually because I want them to feel comfortable and I want them to feel safe. So I'll say, okay tell me what happened...I just want you to tell me your story. Then they tell me their story. I'll say, "what was it like for you?" I want them to tell me what it was like, what did they feel. Then I'd say, "What does it remind you of? When was another time you felt that way?" I will go back. (p. G23)

Cindy affirmed that communication was key in understanding what people needed from you and the education system:

when you are trying to resolve conflict you have to be more communicative. And the more you are communicating, listening and speaking with other people, then you are having a better understanding of the services you need to be providing or how effectively you are doing it. (p. G15)

Ingrid noted that in her experience, people have often just wanted to vent their frustrations and that in itself could frequently resolve the conflict. She stated, "I learned very quickly that most of the time people just want to vent..." (p. G71).

Ellen agreed that people have often just wanted to tell their side of the story. Her goal has been to communicate to both parties that each person has a different perception of the events surrounding the conflict. She explained:

Listen first. Listen, listen, listen. Lots of times people just want to get it off their chest...They just want to have someone hear it and that makes them happy... you're trying to get the individuals to understand there are always two sides of the story...But I've often used the technique where one person talks to the other person. The other person is not allowed to say anything. You must just listen and you must feed back what you hear. (p. G39-40)

Cindy insisted that communication must run both ways:

They just seemed to want us to have all of the solutions, but I know full well that if we come with some sort of ready-made solution, without inviting their involvement, then we would just go in reverse. So we need to have their involvement and communication and that kind of cooperation... (p. G17)

Brenda agreed that it is important to work together with the other party to find an appropriate resolution. She believed this could be accomplished through communication.

She stated:

My personal experience when dealing with conflict is once you've addressed the issue for both you and the person in conflict is to aim for a win-win situation. Also for a more harmonious work environment once it's been dealt with...It is a humanitarian way to deal with conflicts that arise in the workplace. (p. G10)

Fran took a different form of communicative strategy moving from oral to written. She has often suggested, "Why don't you sit down and write out what your problems are here. Let's sign it and get it in for our purposes" (p. G45). There is also a non-verbal component to communication. Dawn noted that part of listening should include observing verbal cues "So it's listening to the voice, the tone of voice" (p. G25).

Dawn claimed that a lack of communication could create conflict:

Part of conflict for me comes from the fact that I think that people who are the bullies are cowards because they don't communicate with you. So if I've done something you don't appreciate or you feel that I'm out of line – which is quite possible because we're different people coming from different places...then sit down and let's have a dialogue. (p. G19)

Grace suggested, "It's very important to make the communications as quickly as possible because the longer you let things go they can fester and then people are upset with you" (p. G59).

Anne used mediation as a conflict resolution strategy. She explained, "you as principal try to act as a mediator between these two parties...because they needed to get a third person that is removed from the situation" (p. G8-9). She added, "at no time did I agree with the parent any more than the teacher. It was just that we were all looking at things from a different viewpoint" (p. G3). Ellen suggested, "you

are walking absolutely fascinating middle ground as a mediator. But you're more than a mediator because you're trying to leave everybody with their integrity intact" (p. G41).

Fran also involved pupils in the mediation process. She explained, "Among pupils we have a peer mediation committee going... We mediate with the vice principal who likes to do mediation between student to student and he acts as the mediator..." (p. G45).

Dawn said that in her experience, mediation alone had not always been sufficient. She argued, "Conflict resolution and mediation to me only deal with the surface level... We haven't gotten to the underlying reason why that occurred so it will happen again...until we get to the underlying reason..." (pp. G24-25).

Cindy used collaboration within the community to build trust and good will. She shared, "We are putting together a big pow-wow...collaborating and we are breaking down some of the barriers and doing some of the healing that needs to be happening too" (p. G17).

Another conflict resolution strategy would be to take an authoritarian approach.

Cindy stated:

this is the kind of role that I am least comfortable with...the authoritative dictator... and you hardly ever want to have to resort with something like that. I usually try to reason with people...you need to draw the line and say I understand what your opinion is but this is what the decision is...(p. G15)

Fran asserted that it was sometimes necessary to take an authoritarian approach.

She realized that:

People don't like to be told but...this is my school and it was this way is a necessary statement. But I don't like getting to that, but I also will not have my school and my teachers maligned by someone who doesn't know what they are talking about but are listening to their child who is lying. (p. G44-45)

Ingrid declared that at times it has been necessary for her to stand firm:

Everybody knows exactly where they stand with me...I seem to have this idea people want to know what I think and I tell them...the bottom line is, no matter what, I'm the boss here. The principal is the last line...However my door is always open. You're free to come back at me tomorrow if you think you have more arguments to sway me to what you want. I'll listen and if you can convince me...I'll listen to reason...But when all is said and done I'm the boss and make the decisions. That's what I get paid the big bucks for... (p. G78)

Brenda has also used an authoritarian approach with her staff. She avowed, "My people know that I am Principal of the school and that I am in control of the school" (p. G10). Fran noted that she has given the other party a chance to state their case but the bottom line is that the final decisions are made by her. She stated, "I will listen to them and sometimes I will change my mind, if what they are saying is legal and sensible. But other times I just have to say no" (p. G46).

When dealing with pupils, Grace has used an investigation technique: "We interviewed all the kids involved and couple of others who were mentioned as being there just to see what we could find out" (p. G56). She also described some of the policies that must be adhered to when dealing with conflictual situations with pupils: "you have your Safe School Policy and your Code of Behaviors and the whole suspension/expulsion things that the Ministry has for us" (p. G54).

Helen stated that was important that she modeled appropriate conflict resolution strategies. She reasoned:

As a principal I think our main thing is to be a role model and to solve problems. So what we're doing most of our day is demonstrating to people that there is a solution to the problem and how we're going to get there. (p. G60)

She added, "I really do believe that my most important thing is modeling how to resolve that. How to resolve those issues and do it in a reasonable manner so everybody remains calm and the production time with the kids can be at its fullest..." (p. G61).

Fran summed it up, "You know there's all kinds of ways to resolve conflict" (p. G45).

Managing Conflict

Some conflicts simply cannot be resolved. Nevertheless, these ongoing conflicts must be dealt with and managed. Brenda outlined the importance of documenting ongoing conflictual situations:

I write everything, everything down. I document everything and when I have conversations with people like that I also document everything that I am going to say and I also make sure that my expectations are clear. There are some conflicts that you can never solve...I make sure that that person knows what my expectations are. I document it and they know that I am documenting it. (p. G12)

Anne declared that being prepared for conflicts that arose is very important:

to keep the staff conflict at a minimum...let them know what is going on...as far ahead as possible...have workshops to let people know what is going on so that it does not come as a big surprise. (p. G8)

Grace avowed:

I try to be as prepared as I can be, which means I've done the background work. I don't like to get myself in the position of where I get surprises...have all my evidence there in front of me and so on and I just try to be as ready as possible. (p. G59)

Dawn reflected on her actions and decisions. If she felt she had made a mistake she apologized and made every attempt to correct the problem. She recognized:

I'm very human and I'm not perfect. When I screw up, and I've done it with my staff and with my students, I've called them in and said you know what, I'm

sorry. We need to work something out because I did not handle that situation well. (p. G22)

Fran acknowledged that she has made amends because “if I make a mistake I’ll admit it...I’ll say I’m sorry but we’ve got to make this right so we can move on, and that’s what we do” (p. G47).

Ellen asserted that it is very important to be in control. She explained:

You know you’re pumped up; you’re recognizing that your particular words can escalate a situation that’s already a very high fire level. So you have to be very careful of what you say. You have to be very careful of who you let speak when. You have to be in control without seeming to be in control. (p. G41)

Helen alleged:

I think it’s way better to wait until you are very careful with the words you use because once you damage that relationship I don’t think it’s easy to heal. Adults dealing with adults is always a little bit testy. Right? So you’ve got to be careful. (p. G64)

To manage conflicts, Brenda has used help from outside of the school. She said:

I will go for outside counsel. I’ll ask maybe the steward of the union to say that this person is causing conflict in my school that person is also creating a negative work environment... If it is a personality conflict then I will go and ask someone to talk to that person, but not someone from my staff because that would create cliques within the staff. I would go to someone in the union. (p. G11)

Grace has also used outside support:

Sometimes you just have to find support people who can do some extra monitoring outside at recess... We’ve had values, influences and peers with that class – VIP program. The student family counselor comes in and does presentations as well and we try to get the support worker. (p. G56)

Helen declared:

I called support. I called another principal... Human Resources Department... another colleague...and just hearing an outside voice and just saying okay here’s the situation, how would you deal with it...and then decide what I’m most comfortable with...I used to call my superintendent last year all the time too, all the time. I think I drove her crazy. But I just needed to know that I was on track...so I didn’t hesitate to call. (p. 62-63)

Helen stated that she has learned from the experiences of other principals
 “because everybody has their strengths and weaknesses and so working with different
 people you can pick out different things you would like to do like them (p. 66).

Brenda explained:

You have to really, really make sure that you have a networking group, a support
 group; it is very important whether you are a male or a female administrator. To
 have that support group and to be able to bounce ideas off of other people... To
 get yourself a mentor at school. (p. G13)

Fran said she received help from a variety of sources:

I’ve got a lot of people to help me. I’ve got an excellent superintendent and
 support system through the Board. I was also very involved with OSSTF ... I
 have great respect from the parents and I think it really helps for principals to
 know their community. (p. G46-47)

Ingrid utilized the support of her superiors and once encouraged an irate parent to
 speak to him. She explained:

I have on occasion referred them to my superior. I really like it when they try to
 bully me when they say, “Well you know I was calling the Board Office.” My
 answer to that is then you will specifically want to talk to my superior and that
 would be Mr. _____ and this is his number and his extension. I am not going
 to be bullied by anybody. Nobody is going to push me around and nobody is
 going to make me think that I’m not doing a good job for kids because I beat out a
 lot of people to get this job and I’m doing this job because I’m qualified. (p. G71)

Dawn confessed that she has used the tool of intimidation, but as a last resort:

can I be intimidating? Yes I can and I hadn’t learned to love the part of me that
 was intimidating and when I finally learned to love the fact I am intimidating and
 can intimidate, then it became a tool... because you can get good things out of
 intimidation. Let’s say I have a conflict in front of me and something’s going on
 and I have to stop it right away because there are some health and safety issues.
 So I will use my tool of intimidation to stop it. It will not be my motif operendi to
 stop things because first of all pupils will end up hating me and will sabotage me
 and I’m doomed and then I should be out of education. But I will use
 intimidation to start something immediately and then I will deal with the
 aftermath. So yes, I’m going to use a tool like intimidation but I’m using it as a

tool. It may get me what I want but it won't get me the end result because I've used it as a last resort. (p. G33)

When managing ongoing conflicts Dawn used every strategy she knew but, on occasion, none of them worked successfully. She explained:

Ongoing conflict... every semester.... I'd call that same person in for the same thing...If you named a strategy, I used it. His behavior did not change one iota. Was I handling that well? No. I just wanted that to end because I could not figure out for the life of me how to get this man to love teaching...So that was ongoing. Three and a half years. That's how long I had him. (p. G33-34)

Ellen has been in a similar situation. She stated, "There are some situations and there are some people for whom there is no resolving and you have to recognize that as well and say, You know what? We did our best" (p. G41).

Grace asserted, "There are times when you just have to give it up and say, oh well, you did your best with it, and just see if you can get some healing going and see what happens the next time if there is a next time" (p. G59).

Helen has used avoidance as a strategy when resolving conflicts. She claimed, "I'm going to give it a day or two and then I deal with it days after" (p. G64). Fran declared:

Now I have four sayings...One of them is, "You never start a war on Friday". One is, "Tomorrow is a new day". One is, "This, too, shall pass". ... "It's not my fault, it's not my fault." Whatever I'm dealing with, it's not my fault; I'm just doing a job. (p. G46-47)

Fran also affirmed:

My philosophy is that no resolution has to be immediate if people aren't in danger and that we need to learn from it. So rather than point the finger it's sometimes best to try to work through the whole problem if you have time. Sometimes you don't have time. Sometimes it resolves itself. (p. G44)

At times, Ingrid has chosen to withdraw from the conflict. She explained, "Some strategies work sometimes but not all the time so therefore you have to have a whole little

tool kit of strategies. Sometimes it is just walk away. That doesn't seem like a strategy but it is" (p. G69). Cindy shared an experience where the conflict was becoming counterproductive despite her best efforts:

an irate, irrational parent...started getting really personal about the teachers and so then I asked her to stay calm, it was getting difficult for us to even talk and that made her even more angry...finally I said I'm sorry but we are going to have to adjourn this meeting because this is counter-productive. (p. G18)

Fairness

Ellen believed that being fair involves the realization that different people have different perceptions. She declared:

The biggest sense of fairness is understanding that there are two sides of a story. I don't think I have ever, ever been in a situation where there hasn't been two sides of the story and both people are sure they are right...where my sense of fairness comes in is to try to make the other person see the other side of the story and if you can, you've won. (p. G41-42)

Brenda described being fair as acting in a humanitarian way. She disclosed:

I don't really talk with my male colleagues. I find that they run their schools like a business. And a school is not a business, and I don't care what anybody says, you can't treat it like a company...Teachers go through a lot but employees in a company don't...my school won't be a business, it won't be a company. It is going to be a school and teachers are important. (p. G13-14)

She described a situation in which a pupil told her: "you know Miss you are really, really tough but you are fair." She said, "I remembered that and about maybe twelve years later...a kid said the same thing...one attribute that you really have to concentrate on, is being fair" (p. G14). She also believed that the rules and expectations must be clearly set and are the same for everyone. She declared:

You can't have a set of rules...for a certain number of people on your staff and not for the others; it has to be the same for everyone...you have to be fair, you have to be consistent...all the time because people notice when you are not and that can really destroy you as an administrator...(p. G14)

Helen insisted that being fair means being consistent. She elucidated, "Make sure your rules are fair and consistent and the kids see you following through with what you said...If that's your rule, that's your rule. You've got to stick to it" (p. G61-62).

Grace explained that being fair means accommodating individuals needs. "A lot of times there's extenuating circumstances...things happening with the pupil's life...might be a special needs student so there's a certain degree they don't understand. You have to take all that into consideration" (p. G54).

She further suggested:

I don't think you can be fair in the fact that you treat every situation the same. You know there isn't a one size fits all consequence because there are so many different things that affect what a student does...be fair to that student according to that student's needs and use the least intrusive consequence...I think you have to look at each case individually...(p. G59)

Two principals in the study stated that fairness is a perspective. Dawn asserted:

Fairness comes into every decision that I make, from my perspective. You may not think I'm being fair because you may not like my decision...So when I make a decision, and some of them are made quickly, and I have to go back on them...But I would say most of the decisions I make, in my mind, are fair because I couldn't live with myself if they weren't... (p. G34-35)

The other principal, Cindy, affirmed, "part of the aggression is people sometimes don't feel that they can trust you, they do not think you are fair. So sometimes you have to build that relationship..." (p. G18). She also suggested that always being fair to others could create a situation where she is not being fair to herself. She stated:

I like to think that I am pretty fair. I really try to be fair even sometimes I think that in my effort to be fair, understanding and accommodating to the other person, that sometimes I am not really fair to myself...Actually it is easier for me to be stronger for the school than it is to be strong for myself. So I really spend a lot of time even afterwards reflecting on what happened, how I handled it, what I said, what I did, whether or not the decision really was a fair decision...I really think that we have a very serious responsibility as educators to be ethical...morally

upstanding, not to be judgmental...we always have to make sure that we are thinking about ourselves as being service providers...(p. G18)

Ingrid felt that although being fair is necessary, it could also have the downside of being very time-consuming. She proclaimed:

I have a higher set of values and ethics than most. Thanks to Mum and Dad...my level of personal integrity is high...and it is necessary for this job...it can also become a weakness. Because people know that you will go to every degree to be fair and perceived as fair and it can become all consuming. He gets his day in court, he gets his day in court, he gets his day in court whether it's ten o'clock at night...And I make sure everybody gets their say. So it can be a weakness and be consuming and take a lot of your time. I don't think I would change that about myself because it's who I am and who I want to be but another downside to it is it makes you judgmental. (p. G.76)

Summary of the Chapter

In this chapter, the data collected from the Critical Incidence surveys were analyzed and organized into five themes. The five themes are: perception of conflict, conflict resolution, conflict management, principals' reactions and consistency. These themes were then broken down into sub categories. The sub categories are: principals' perceptions, engaging in conflict, strategies to resolve conflict, strategies to manage conflict, emotional reactions to conflict, physical reactions to conflict and fairness. The semi-structured interview questions were created from each sub category. These questions were used in the semi-structured follow-up interviews. The data from the semi-structured follow-up interviews were organized into sub-themes that were created from the Critical Incidence Technique data. The next chapter will be a discussion of the data collected from this study and how it relates to the literature review.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

Introduction

In this chapter, the findings of the study are summarized and discussed. The key research questions guiding the study are also addressed. Conclusions are drawn using the data from the literature review and the semi-structured follow-up interviews. This chapter also addresses areas where the research from this study has gone beyond the literature review to generate data that represents Canadian women principals. Tabin and Coleman (1993) asserted that “understanding the situations of female principals from their perspective is necessary to help develop a greater understanding of the nature of the principalship” (p. 351). If the nature of the principalship is to be understood more, the experiences of women principals must be included in the literature base. The goal of this discussion is to produce a more complete picture of the principalship by including the perceptions and actions of women principals.

Key Research Questions Guiding This Study:

How do women principals perceive conflict?

What strategies do women principals use to resolve conflict?

Engaging in Conflict

Three important findings in the literature were (1) engaging in conflict is inevitable to the role of the principalship, (2) conflict is a constant part of the administrator’s daily events, and (3) conflict is an enduring and ongoing part of being a principal. Each of these findings are discussed below.

1) Conflict is inevitable to the role of the principalship

Lyons (1990) affirmed, "The organizational structure of school districts makes a certain amount of role conflict in the principalship inevitable" (p. 44). The data from this study were in harmony with the literature on this point. Ingrid explained that engaging in conflict is "an inevitable part of life. And inevitable to this role..." (p. G69). Helen confirmed, "You know there is conflict as an administrator...that goes without saying..." (p.G7). Both the literature and the participants in this study posited that conflict is unavoidable due to the nature of the profession.

2) Conflict is a constant part of the administrator's daily events

Grab (1996) asserted, "Conflict is in their daily diet and constant companion" (p. 34). Anne stressed, "about 99 percent of your work deals with conflict" (p. G3) and, "You are walking a rope the whole time" (p. G3). Helen described her engagement in conflict as "Constant" (p. G61). Ellen declared, "A principal is dealing with conflict a lot of the time... The phone rings, somebody walks in the door, you have a conflict. You just live with that all the time" (p. G39). Cindy outlined the numerous opportunities for conflict to arise as she described the number of people she has dealt with in a day and that each contact has had the potential for developing into a conflict. She explained, "being a principal involves so much interplay of people... custodians, EA's, teachers, parents, trustees...superintendent...it almost feels like pull taffy because you are being pulled into so many directions" (p. G15). Conflict, therefore, is inherent to the role of the principal due to the social nature of the position. The principal interacts with so many people on a continuous basis that conflict exists regardless of the principal's efforts.

3) Conflict is an enduring and ongoing part of being a principal

Ripley (1997) projected that conflict would “continue to exist and exert pressure on principals for a long time to come” (p.63). Catherine affirmed that engaging in conflict is ongoing in her role as an administrator:

Everything you do is conflict resolution... it's a tremendous part of my job...I got a little coaster from my sister at Christmas and it says, Life is just one God dam thing after another and that basically is the life of a principal. (p. G44)

Conflict will always be present in the daily job of a principal. It will be an ongoing factor due to the nature of the principalship. The data from this study has shown that the participants have perceived conflict as inevitable, constant and enduring to their administrative position. This was in accord with the literature review and addressed the research question: how do women principals perceive conflict? Since conflict continues to be a challenge, it is relevant to study how women principals perceive and ultimately deal with conflict as part of their duties.

Is Conflict Perceived as Negative, Behavioral or Positive?

Singleton, Davis and Henkin (1994) believed that the way in which an educational leader views conflict is an important factor because it will have an effect on how he/she approaches conflict. They identified a relationship between the leader's philosophy, attitudes and beliefs about conflict and how they manage it. The authors suggested three ways in which conflict may be viewed: negative, behavioral and positive. (p.16)

The first perception suggested by Singleton, Davis and Henkin (1994) was the traditional belief that conflict is negative and should be avoided and eliminated at all costs (p.16). Kushner (1996) exemplified this traditional view, "For many people, conflict means confrontation, dealing with difficult people and situations, and negative, unwanted emotions. Understandably, they want to avoid conflict at all costs" (p. 104).

Anne perceived conflict as negative. She admitted, "I find conflict very unpleasant" (p. G3). She described how conflict made her feel physically when she disclosed that she suffered from "a headache... I don't sleep...my stomach did churn" (p. G4). Brenda explained, "I don't like it. It is a fact of life and I have to deal with it" (p. G10). She further divulged, "you will feel something in your belly upset and uptight and it is human nature to feel that way..." (pp. G12-13).

Fran affirmed, "I don't like conflict. I would do anything I could to avoid conflict and if I wait long enough sometimes it goes away. But it's part of the job" (p. G44). She further admitted, "if I feel I'm being criticized that kind of gets me emotionally a little bit out of balance" (p. G48). Cindy argued that conflict can be negative because:

it is really, really abusive a lot of the time. When you've got really irrational, very aggressive hostile people. How much should you endure, what cost does it take on your humanity and your own dignity. It is a very complex and very difficult thing..." (p. G18)

Ingrid discussed the negative effects conflict may have on one's health as she complained, "you don't sleep...get an ulcer...high blood pressure...you tend to cower

and shrink as an individual. You lose a sense of who you are” (p. G69). She further asserted, “Conflict can consume you if you let it” (p. G75).

Hence, in this first view, four principals in the study had negative perceptions of conflict. It was viewed as unpleasant, difficult and capable of destroying one’s health.

In their second view of conflict, Singleton, Davis and Henkin (1994) held that conflict is behavioral. Conflict is to be regarded as a natural and inevitable part of the daily functions of an organization. In this view, it is essential, however, that conflict be managed and resolved as quickly as possible (p. 16). Grab (1996) deemed, “unresolved negative tension can fester like a cancer within the organization” (p. 34).

Helen viewed conflict in a positive light although she was well aware that conflict also has the potential for creating negativity. On one hand, conflict can present an opportunity for people to brainstorm and work together to resolves issues. She maintained, “There is a lot of positive conflict.... people just come with different viewpoints of how they want to handle a certain situation, that’s really helpful” (p. G60). On the other hand, however, she acknowledged, “conflict is difficult” (p. G60), and “I get really tensed up sometimes” (p. G64). Conflict could also have a lasting negative affect on personal relationships “because once you damage that relationship I don’t think it’s easy to heal” (p. G64).

Ellen stated that conflict is often perceived as negative at the time of engagement. She reflected, “Emotionally you are drained afterwards” (p. G41). She also recognized that conflict could result in positive outcomes by providing an opportunity for people to brainstorm and work together to resolves issues. She explained, “at the time you’re going

through conflict you perceive it as negative. But often when you're finished a conflict you can come out with a lot of positive" (p. G39).

Grace suggested that conflict could be negative as "You're anxious...it's definitely stressful" (p. G59). She also acknowledged that conflict is positive when it stimulates growth within the individual and the organization:

it's a learning situation...it can bring about good change and learning. It can be negative if it's approached in a certain way or if you get stuck in it or if it gets out of hand...things are said or done that...hurt people. (p. G54)

Thus, in this second view, three principals saw the need for conflict within the educational organization but also wanted to resolve it quickly and appropriately so that it did not have any long lasting negative effects on personal relationships and/or the organization.

The third view of Singleton, Davis and Henkin (1994) was an extension of the second, and was that conflict is positive and necessary. Conflict should be used to create, stimulate and encourage growth within the organization. This view also maintained that once the conflict has served its purpose, it should be resolved (Singleton, Davis & Henkin, 1994, p. 16). Kushner (1996) stated that conflict could be seen as transformational as the parties are "actively seeking to enhance harmony, unity, and congruence. Looking at conflict in this new way means that conflict is to be encouraged, invited, and taken advantage of, not avoided, eliminated or merely managed" (p. 104).

Cindy resolved that conflict has strengthened her ideals and beliefs. Conflict brings about positive change that prevents the organization from stagnating as "it requires you to think and reassess ... why you are doing something and what you believe in ...if

you don't have conflict then you could tend towards being pretty myopic and maybe status quo..." (p. G15).

Dawn also viewed engaging in conflict as an opportunity for personal growth. She perceived conflict as positive because "any time that I've been in a conflict I've grown as a person, I've become more confident, I've more strength, I've become more aware of my value system and my integrity and where it's at" (p. G20).

Therefore, in this third view, two principals perceived conflict as positive and considered it as a tool that should be encouraged and used to their benefit to stimulate growth within themselves and the organization.

The perceptions of the participants did fit into Singleton, Davis and Henkin's (1994) three categories: negative, behavioral and positive. These categories were useful in grouping the perceptions of the participants. Furthermore, the responses of the participants affirmed the authors' assertion that an administrator's view of conflict is an important factor because it will affect how they will manage and resolve conflicts that arise. (Singleton, Davis & Henkin, 1994, p. 16)

In this study, a range of perceptions were evident in the data, which was in harmony with the earlier findings that different administrators perceived conflict in different ways. The majority of the earlier findings, however, did not incorporate data to include the views of women principals, since women were not always represented in these studies. The fact that these women had varied opinions and views is an important finding because in the past women administrators have been consistently portrayed as perceiving conflict only as negative and therefore as conflict avoiders.

Portraying Women As Conflict Avoiders

Erickson (1985) and Helgesen (1995) alleged that women administrators avoided conflict because they perceive it as negative. Two principals in this study used avoidance, not as an escape mechanism as the authors supposed, but as a strategy for resolving certain conflicts. It was not their first or primary strategy but one of several strategies in a toolkit of strategies. A strategy they often used only as a last resort.

Helen used conflict avoidance as a strategy. She explained, "I'm going to give it a day or two and then I deal with it days after" (p. G64). Fran advised, "You never start a war on Friday..." (p. G46). She reasoned, "My philosophy is that no resolution has to be immediate if people aren't in danger...so rather than point the finger...try to work through the whole...sometimes it resolves itself" (p. G44).

Whereas some of the respondents occasionally used avoidance, albeit as a strategy to resolve conflict, the data also revealed that not all women principals perceived conflict as negative and therefore to be avoided. Cindy and Dawn, for example, viewed conflict as a positive opportunity they could use to generate growth within the organization and themselves. This is an important discovery because in the past women have been portrayed as conflict avoiders who perceived conflict exclusively as negative and undesirable. This finding, that not all women principals view conflict as negative, is contrary to Erickson (1985) and Helgesen (1995) who hypothesized that women principals tend to tuck tail and run from conflict.

Moving Beyond the North American Socialization Process

Erickson (1985) asserted that female administrators were not as capable as their male counterparts. He reasoned that girls are socialized to fear conflict. He explained

that girls “must seek safety in consensus...Thus, women learn in girlhood to fear that people will not back them up simply because they are right; they will back them only if they are nice” (p. 279). In North American society, women have thus been socialized to believe that engaging in conflict is not feminine and is to be discouraged. This socialization is so ingrained in North American women that it has shaped their perceptions and actions. This in turn, influences their leadership styles and views of power (p. 279).

For a woman to be a successful and effective principal, she must divorce herself from all of the socialization that has occurred throughout her entire life. This is essential because conflict is present in all organizations. Dawn addressed this issue as she acknowledged that conflict can have an emotional effect on her but she transcends that training in order to do her job:

Does it mean that it doesn't impact me sometimes when I think my staff doesn't like me? It does. Or the kids don't like me. It does...the type of person I am has this really strong need to be liked and to be respected and to be recognized. So when...people are angry with me, the little girl in me remembers what it was like to be ostracized or remembers what it was like not to feel part of something and not be noticed. So yes, she hurts but she still has to move on and do whatever it is. (p. G35)

Dawn moved beyond always trying to be nice as she explained, “You may not like my decision ... if I start worrying about how everybody thought about my decisions, I couldn't function” (pp. G34-35).

Dawn acknowledged the socialization she experienced as a child and the impact it had on her psyche. She has overcome her North American socialization process in order to do her job effectively and engage in the conflict that arises within her role as a principal.

Being Assertive and Aggressive

Erickson (1985) stated that some women avoided conflict at all costs because as young girls they were taught that being assertive and aggressive are negative, masculine qualities (p. 288). The data in this study indicated, however, that far be it from fleeing in the face of conflict, as that author suggested, some of the respondents not only embraced conflict, but stood their ground. Two principals shared experiences where they were quite assertive and aggressive and did not apologize for it! In one incident, Ingrid encouraged an irate parent to speak to her superior:

I really like it when they try to bully me when they say...I will be calling the Board Office. My answer to that is then you will specifically want to talk to my superior...this is his number and his extension. I am not going to be bullied by anybody. Nobody is going to push me around... (p. G71)

Dawn used assertive and aggressive strategies when dealing with certain conflicts. She declared that at times she used intimidation as a tool: "can I be intimidating? Yes... I finally learned to love the fact I am intimidating and can intimidate. Then it became a tool...you can get good things out of intimidation" (p. G33).

The act of intimidating another person during a conflict is quite the opposite of avoiding a conflict. Erickson (1985) believed that women were not socialized to display masculine behaviors like intimidation because it opposed the socialization process in

which they were reared (p. 288). Dawn has risen above the feminine stereotype and has embraced her ability to use intimidation, and acknowledged it as a part of her personality that she has learned to love.

The data from this study showed that two of the principals, rather than avoiding conflict or running from it, engaged it assertively and aggressively when they felt such an approach was necessary to maintain control.

Authoritarian Approach

Erickson (1985) surmised that women principals know “that autocratic mandates will provoke opponents to work against her” (p. 289). Helgesen (1995) deduced that women are taught to “disdain...authoritarian structures...”(p. 38). She believed that women couldn’t even perceive using an authoritarian approach because of their socialization.

In this study, four women principals used an autocratic, authoritarian approach when they felt it was necessary to resolve a conflict. Ingrid was adamant that she was in charge of her school. She declared, “the bottom line is, no matter what, I’m the boss here...and make the decisions. That’s what I get paid the big bucks for...” (p. G78). Brenda also took an assertive attitude. She avowed, “My people know that I am Principal of the school and that I am in control of the school” (p. G10). Fran incorporated an authoritarian attitude into her leadership style as she declared, “this is my school and it will be this way is a necessary statement...” (p. G44). Fran affirmed the bottom line is that she makes the final decisions. “I will listen to them and sometimes I will change my mind, if what they are saying is legal and sensible. But other times I just have to say no” (p. G46).

Cindy explained that although using an autocratic approach is not her first strategy, sometimes she has had to use it in order to do her job to the best of her ability. She acknowledged:

this is the kind of role that I am least comfortable with...to be the authoritative dictator. I am the boss...you need to draw the line and say I understand what your opinion is but this is what the decision is and... I give the reasons why so that they can understand it. (p. G15)

In these examples, four women principals used an autocratic management style, contrary to Erickson (1985) who believed that women would not use an autocratic management style because they are not capable of doing so to their advantage, and against the Helgesen (1995) theory that women disdain the authoritarian approach to conflict resolution.

Role Expectations

Erickson (1985) stated that women avoided conflict at all cost because they have a role expectation as wives and mothers who are the designated nurturers in society. Engaging in conflict may be seen as incompatible with this role (p. 288). Eckman (2004) suggested, "the societal expectations of wife and mother may influence the choices made by younger female educators so as to keep them from aspiring for leadership positions" (p.382).

Fran and Ellen, however, in dealing with the function of the wife in society, suggested there might be a trend toward a reversal in roles for men. The man now often supports and nurtures the woman's career. Fran received help with her role as a

principal from her husband. She explained that the emotional support of her husband had a positive effect on her emotional well-being. She acknowledged, "he's been very supportive. I think that's been key to my success...he also always supported me in my education and he knew I wanted to do this" (p. G52). Ellen shared this view as she affirmed that she was able to become a principal and be successful in her career because she "had a whole lot of support from my husband" (p. G42). This is a reversal of the stereotypical view that men are the sole providers and the woman's function is to support the man.

Brenda took a slightly different approach than Fran and Ellen. She explained that she separates her career from the rest of her life and is thus able to be an administrator by day and a nurturing wife and mother after the workday has ended. She explained:

You have to know how to divide; I never bring my problems home, ever. The minute I walk out of the school everything stays there... I will deal with that tomorrow...you have your family and you have to deal with those conflicts. (p. G13)

These three women were able to fulfill their nurturing roles without compromising their positions as principals. They separated their careers from their personal lives and enlisted the help and support of their spouses. Perhaps the role expectations of women, where their sole purpose is seen as that of mothers and nurturers, is slowly beginning to change. The definition of roles is apparently beginning to widen to include today's reality. Women are breaking down the "glass ceiling" and working in

administrative positions successfully. These women are also becoming role models for young girls so that they can learn how to be successful in administration.

Modeling Conflict Resolution Strategies

Wolf (1994) suggested that young girls lack positive female role models. She reflected on her own experiences, “The only role models I had of younger women engaged in public behavior were entertainers – and people almost never got angry at them” (p. 238). Later in the book she added, “I wanted someone in a respected position to say, it’s okay to make people angry. Change causes friction, and that is good...I had few female cultural role models to whom I could relate and whose examples could confirm that the advice was sound” (p. 240).

As the roles in society change, one participant felt that it was not only important to resolve conflict, it was also important to model appropriate conflict resolution strategies while she was doing it! She used modeling as a form of teaching and encouraging others. Helen explained, “As a principal I think our main thing to be a role model and to solve problems. So what we’re doing most of our day is demonstrating to people that there is a solution to the problem and how we’re going to get there” (p. G60). She added, “I really do believe that my most important thing is modeling how to resolve that. How to resolve those issues and do it in a reasonable manner so everybody remains calm...” (p. G61).

Helen, therefore, could be a very positive role model, especially for young girls who need strong women role models from whom they can learn how to deal with and

resolve conflict effectively. This will help to create a new breed of young girls who will feel confident to compete and succeed in administrative positions.

Strategies Women Principals Use to Resolve Conflict

This section of the study will answer the second research question: what strategies do women principals use to resolve conflict? These strategies are organized herein by the framework outlined by Cooze (1990) and Pulvino and Perrone (1998) in the literature review. The data from this part of the study shows clearly that the participants used a wide variety of strategies in dealing with conflict, contrary to the long held notion that portrayed female principals solely as passive conflict avoiders.

The participants also used strategies to resolve and manage conflict that did not fit into the literature framework. These strategies, which will be discussed later in this chapter, are: communication, apologizing, asking for advice, reflection, and being fair.

Adding these five strategies will strengthen the literature base to show that female principals not only utilize all of the previously identified strategies for dealing with conflict, but that they have added five additional strategies that they have employed successfully. Furthermore, the need to include female administrators in the literature base will be made even more obvious than heretofore, since these five strategies are apparently unique to women in their choice of methods to resolve conflict.

Behavioral Reactions

Cooze (1990) created a model of five different types of behavior that may be displayed during a conflict. In this study, the participants exhibited all five behaviors.

1) Forcing – this approach reflects an unwillingness to deal with the other party, a desire to subdue her/him with the use of power in order to win at the other’s expense. It has a high level of assertiveness and a low level of accommodating the other party.

Dawn stated, “can I be intimidating? Yes I can...I finally learned to love the fact I am intimidating... then it became a tool...you can get good things out of intimidation” (p. G33).

2) Compromise – this approach represents a desire to partially satisfy both parties, such that each gains as well as loses something. It is moderate on both assertiveness and accommodation. Brenda suggested, “aim for a win-win situation...a more harmonious work environment once it’s been dealt with...It is a humanitarian way to deal with conflicts that arise in the workplace” (p. G10).

3) Accommodating - this approach is based on a willingness to put the concerns of the other person or group ahead of one’s own. It has a low level of assertiveness but is high in accommodation. Cindy avowed, “I really try to be fair... I think that in my effort to be fair, understanding and accommodating to the other person, that sometimes I am not really fair to myself...”(p. G18).

4) Collaborating – this approach represents a desire to fully satisfy the concerns of both parties. For this approach to work, the two parties involved must be open and respect each other. This behavior has high levels of both assertiveness and accommodation. Cindy avowed:

I know full well that if we come with some sort of ready-made solution without inviting their involvement then we would just go in reverse. So we need to have their involvement and communication and that kind of cooperation... (p. G17)

5) Avoiding – this is a method (or orientation) whereby one refuses to deal with the conflict, thus showing indifference to the concerns of the other party. This approach has low levels of both assertiveness and accommodation. Ingrid suggested, “Some strategies work sometimes but not all the time so therefore you have to have a whole little tool kit of strategies. Sometimes it’s just walk away. That doesn’t seem like a strategy but it is” (p. G69).

Since there is no single recipe that works well in all circumstances, these strategies ought to be selectively employed according to the particular requirements of each situation. Grab (1996) suggested that when approaching conflict “the selection of a strategy to resolve a conflict should be a function of the particular problem and situation” (p. 36). Sweeney and Carruthers (1996) stated that there is an assumption that conflict can be resolved in a number of different ways that can “take different forms and lead to different outcomes”(p. 331). These authors affirmed there is no one formula that resolves conflict situations appropriately every time. Some tactics are better than others thus yielding better results (p. 331).

Fran summarized this view when she advised, “You know there’s all kinds of ways to resolve conflict. I think if you do it with the best interests of the kids in mind then your school will become a more positive environment for them” (p. G45). In this section, the participants used all five of these strategies. No one strategy appeared to be used most often. This is significant because in the past, female principals have been portrayed as using the avoidance strategy the most and of never using aggressive strategies. The participants in this study, however, used both the aggressive and passive strategies depending upon the nature of the situation.

Conflict Management Strategies

Bolton (1979) outlined four strategies used to manage conflict. These strategies were to: 1) deny that conflict exists, 2) avoid the conflict, 3) give in to the opponent, and 4) dominate the opponent with power. Weeks (1992) added 'bargaining' as another conflict management strategy. He referred to this strategy as a band-aid approach.

Pulvino and Perrone (1998) built on and expanded the strategies of Bolton (1979) and Weeks (1992) to ten conflict management strategies. They separated the ten strategies into three groups: passive, assertive and facilitative, as follows:

a) Passive Strategies:

1) Do nothing - this approach takes a wait and see attitude and utilizes the idea that time will eventually fix the conflict. Helen asserted, "I'm going to give it a day or two and then I deal with it days after" (p. G64). Fran shared two of her favorite sayings, "You never start a war on Friday... This, too, shall pass" (p. G46-47). She further explained, "no resolution has to be immediate if people aren't in danger... Sometimes it resolves itself" (p. G44).

2) Withdrawing - this is accomplished by physically removing oneself from the conflict in a purposeful manner. Ingrid suggested, "you have to have a whole little tool kit of strategies. Sometimes it's just walk away. That doesn't seem like a strategy but it is" (p. G69). Cindy shared an experience where the conflict was becoming counterproductive despite her best efforts:

an irate, irrational parent...started getting really personal about the teachers...I asked her to stay calm...that made her even more angry...I said I'm sorry but we...have to adjourn this meeting because this is counter-productive. (p. G18)

3) Smoothing - the goal of this strategy is to maintain and enhance the personal relationship. This is accomplished by creating a warm and open atmosphere, maintaining a positive outlook and doing whatever is necessary to promote a positive relationship. Helen warned to be “very careful with the words you use because once you damage that relationship I don’t think it’s easy to heal” (p. G64).

4) Diversion - this can be done in a number of ways including changing the flow of the conversation, changing the subject or using humor to ease tensions. Ellen explained:
 your particular words can escalate a situation that’s already a very high fire level.
 So you have to be very careful of what you say...who you let speak when. You have to be in control without seeming to be in control. (p. G41)

b) Assertive Strategies:

5) Confronting the issue head on - this involves embracing the conflict and being straightforward by clarifying the issues in order to resolve it. Cindy avowed:
 when you are trying to resolve conflict you have to be more communicative...
 because we are basically a service provider and if you’re engaging in that communication then you are having a better understanding of the services you need to be providing or how effectively you are doing it. (p. G15)

6) Forcing - which involves the use of power to assert authority over the other person, thereby controlling the situation as well as the outcome. In this circumstance, there is a clear winner and loser which often leads to the destruction of the interpersonal relationship between the parties.

Dawn used the tool of intimidation as a last resort measure. She affirmed, “I’m going to use a tool like intimidation ...It may get me what I want...” (p. G33).

7) Standing firm - this strategy is employed in order to avoid escalating the conflict. The goal is to respond to the other party in a manner that will end the confrontation and restore harmony as tactfully as possible without giving in to their demands. Ingrid encouraged an irate parent to speak to her superior. She explained:

I have on occasion referred them to my superior. I really like it when they try to bully me when they say, "Well you know I will be calling the Board Office." My answer to that is then you will specifically want to talk to my superior...this is his number and his extension. I am not going to be bullied by anybody. (p. G71)

c) Facilitative Strategies:

8) Problem-solving techniques - together the parties define the problem, brainstorm for possible solutions, select solutions and project possible outcomes. Once they have selected the plan they intend to execute, they decide who is responsible for each element of the plan. Upon agreement of all parties, the plan is implemented. After implementation, feedback is gained as the group evaluates how the solution worked. This strategy places an equal weight on reaching goals and the relationship between the conflicting parties.

Helen believed that conflict could be an opportunity for people to brainstorm and work together to resolve issues. She asserted, "There is a lot of positive conflict. If people just come with different viewpoints of how they want to handle a certain situation, that's really helpful" (p. G60).

Cindy, in emphasizing the importance of communication, shared, "Near the end of September I had invited them for coffee so we can just sit down and talk about what were the issues and what can we do to work together" (p. G16).

9) Negotiating - the purpose of this strategy is to find a middle ground where the most important goals of both parties are at least partially achieved. The participants must decide what they are willing to give up and what they are not. In the end, both parties must agree with the outcome.

Negotiation, although not stated explicitly by the respondents, was a prominent feature of most of the resolution strategies cited, particularly those emphasizing communication, listening, collaboration, mediation, working together and getting everyone to understand the other person's point of view.

Grace's strategy included "A lot of listening. A lot of talking" (p. G54).

Cindy declared:

when you are trying to resolve conflict you have to be more communicative. And the more you are communicating, listening and speaking, with other people, then you are having a better understanding of the services you need to be providing or how effectively you are doing it. (p. G15)

Anne posited, "that's all I know how to do is to talk and to listen... What else do you do to handle a conflict situation..." (p. G8-9).

Ellen argued:

Listen first. Listen, listen, listen... you're trying to get the individuals to understand there are always two sides of the story... So you always try to get the person to see the other person's point of view. (p. G39-40)

Brenda agreed that it is important to work together with the other party to find an appropriate resolution. She elucidated:

My personal experience when dealing with conflict is once you've addressed the issue for both you and the person in conflict, is to aim for a win-win situation...

Both people get what they want and understand my point of view, how we can do it together, and I want to understand where the person is coming from... (p. G10)

Anne and Ellen used mediation to assist the parties in their negotiation of a conflict. Anne explained, "you as principal try to act as a mediator between these two parties...because they needed to get a third person that is removed from the situation" (p. G8-9). Ellen suggested, "you are walking absolutely fascinating middle ground as a mediator. But you're more than a mediator because you're trying to leave everybody with their integrity intact" (p. G41).

10) Confluent response – each party recognizes the feelings of the other party, and then expresses his/her own feelings and observations honestly. They acknowledge that there is a problem and that both parties have a desire to resolve the situation. The final step of the process is to employ problem-solving techniques (pp. 61-79).

Dawn affirmed that she often encourages a confluent response, "I'll talk to each side individually because I want them to feel comfortable and I want them to feel safe. So I'll say, okay tell me what happened...I just want you to tell me your story" (p. G23).

Ellen also tried to facilitate a confluent response. She said that her goal is to communicate to both parties that each side has a different perception of the events surrounding the conflict. She explained, "I've often used the technique where one person

talks to the other person. The other person is not allowed to say anything. You must just listen and you must feed back what you hear” (p. G39-40).

Brenda also stressed the importance of working together:

My personal experience when dealing with conflict is once you've addressed the issue for both you and the person in conflict is to aim for a win-win situation.

Also for a more harmonious work environment once it's been dealt with. Both people get what they want and understand my point of view, how we can do it together, and I want to understand where the person is coming from. It is a humanitarian way to deal with conflicts that arise in the workplace. (p. G10)

Going Beyond The Literature

Conflict management and resolution can be quite unique for each individual based of his/her perceptions and management style. In this study, women principals, in addition to utilizing all of the strategies outlined by Cooze (1990) and Weeks (1992), also used other strategies to manage conflict that did not fit into their frameworks. These strategies are communication, apologizing when wrong, asking outside sources for help, reflection and being fair. Including these strategies in the literature base would form a clearer picture of how women administrators deal with conflict.

Communication

All of the participants in this study used communication to deal with conflict. Moreover, communication was the only strategy cited by all participants. This strategy was used, at least initially, to deal with every problem that arose. Communication was utilized in two ways. In the first, communication alone was used to resolve the conflict.

In the second, it was used as a primary strategy in conjunction with other strategies.

Anne explained the importance of using communication as a key element in resolving conflict:

all I know how to do is to talk and to listen...What else do you do to handle a conflict situation, besides talk...communication is the main name of the game if you are going to get anywhere with conflict as far as I can see. (p. G8-9)

Fran also used communication to resolve conflicts, "a lot of different talk... talking time, taking time..."(p. G46). Grace employed communication to resolve conflict as she noted, "A lot of listening. A lot of talking" (p. G54). Helen thought communication was key to interacting with everyone she dealt with. She stressed the importance of "making sure kids know they can talk to me, making sure staff can talk to me, making sure parents can talk to me, being open to that. It's really, really important" (p. G61-62). She also argued, "as soon as you yell at someone they shut right down. There's absolutely no communication there again. It's gone" (p. G63). She avowed that communication is the key to resolving conflicts and once communication is stopped, no progress can be made in finding a resolution. She rationalized, "when it comes to conflict, the biggest thing is communication...I think as long as you keep the communication open problems can be resolved" (p. G60).

A vital component of communication is listening. Listening is so important because it allows the administrator to hear the conflict from the respondent's perception that may be very different from her own. When dealing with two parties in conflict, listening allows the administrator to understand both parties so that resolution can take place. Ingrid explained, "I try first off to listen. I just try to listen" (p. G70). Ellen

suggested, "Listen first. Listen, listen, listen. Lots of times people just want to get it off their chest. That's all they want to do. They just want to have someone hear it and that makes them happy" (p. G39-40). Cindy stated that she must communicate with others because it is part of her role as a principal. She saw education as a service and she wanted to satisfy her customers. She felt it necessary to communicate with the people with whom she was providing services in order to improve those services. She explained, "we are basically a service provider and if you're engaging in that communication then you are having a better understanding of the services you need to be providing or how effectively you are doing it" (p. G15).

Dawn affirmed, "A lot of it is resolved just by listening" (p. G44). She used communication to resolve conflict and to facilitate healing within some of the people she was trying to help. She describes her method of communication:

I'll talk to each side individually because I want them to feel comfortable and I want them to feel safe...Then they tell me their story. I'll say, what was it like for you?...What does it remind you of? When was another time you felt that way?...That's probably the most effective way that I help to deal with conflict. Just basically letting someone tell their story...then I allow them to do some venting. (p. G23-24)

In this study communication was a very important factor for all the participants, as a diagnostic tool for getting to the root of the problem. Communication may appear to be a passive strategy yet they used it as a way to clearly define the conflict and then to resolve or manage it. Being approachable and having a nurturing attitude were important factors in being able to use the tool of communication effectively.

Apologizing

Two participants admitted they were not perfect and at times in their careers have made a bad decision or could have handled a situation more appropriately. When this has occurred, these two women principals admitted their errors and apologized to those involved. Dawn rationalized, "I'm very human and I'm not perfect. When I screw up...I've called them in and said you know what I'm sorry. We need to work something out because I did not handle that situation well" (p. G22). Her ultimate goal was to fix the mistake and move on. Her admission helped to preserve integrity and maintain personal relationships.

Fran also apologized when she made an error. She declared, "if I make a mistake I'll admit it...I'll say I'm sorry but we've got to make this right so we can move on and that's what we do" (p. G47). Fran does not dwell on her mistakes. She takes action by admitting her faults and taking steps to correct her errors immediately.

These two principals acknowledged their mistakes, learned from them and then moved on. Apologizing should not be seen as a weakness but as a tool. This ability to be straightforward and acknowledge their mistakes took courage and honesty. It also fostered an environment of acceptance, good will and integrity. Apologizing demonstrates a softer type of management style. An autocratic dictator would never admit her mistakes, at least not in public. Her decision comes straight from the top and is to be followed at any cost. This militant management style is a direct opposite of the more nurturing and inclusive style of these two participants.

Asking for advice from outside sources

To an autocratic manager, asking for help from outside sources would be quite

rare. Dictators often work alone and make most decisions themselves depending on their own skills and confidence to always make the correct decision. Three of the participants in this study contacted others in the profession for help and advice before making important decisions. This may reflect the changing times, as principals are no longer members of the powerful teachers' union that once protected them. They are now subject to the general public's opinions and it is not uncommon for a parent group to lobby against a principal if they disagree with the principal's decisions. Therefore, principals must be even more careful than before that their decisions are sound. Principals are often caught between several different groups including parents, teachers, the ministry and the school board. All of these groups have different expectations of today's principals, which generate a lot of stress and pressure upon them. Asking for advice helps the principals to ensure they have weighed all of the possibilities before making major decisions.

Helen used help from outside of the school. She would ask other principals for advice and guidance. She explained:

I called support. I called another principal and then... I called our Human Resources Department and asked them for guidance... I often called another colleague and would talk to them first...just saying okay here's the situation, how would you deal with it? Actually I have two colleagues; one is very regimented.... Then I have another one that is very loosey-goosey... So for big issues I'd always call both of them.... and then decide what I'm most comfortable with...I used to call my superintendent last year all the time too... I just needed to know that I was on track ...so I didn't hesitate to call. (pp. G62-63)

Helen stated that she learns from the experiences of other principals. She suggested, “because everybody has their strengths and weaknesses and so working with different people you can pick out different things you would like to do like them” (p.

G66). Fran affirmed that she received help from a variety of sources:

I’ve got a lot of people to help me. I’ve got an excellent superintendent and support system through the Board. I was also very involved with OSSTF so I understand the whole Federation and when to call on the Federation to help me... (pp. G46-47)

Brenda endorsed having a circle of colleagues for support. She advised:

You have to really, really make sure that you have a networking group, a support group; it is very important whether you are a male or a women administrator.... to be able to bounce ideas off of other people...a good group at work that I could go and sit with and talk too. (p. G13)

Asking for assistance and advice should not be seen as a weakness but as a tool that helps the administrator to be effective. There is a lot of value in taking advantage of the experience and knowledge of others, which aids the administrator to think and reflect on the important decisions they must make. These women principals worked as a network supporting each other in striving towards the common goal of strengthening the education system.

Reflection

Reflection is an essential tool in administration as principals make many decisions each day. Some of the decisions are very important and must be made under time constraints. Two of the participants in this study felt that reflection helped them

assess their decisions and learn from conflict. Cindy affirmed, “I really spend a lot of time even afterwards reflecting on what happened, how I handled it, what I said, what I did” (p. G18). She explained, “I look at conflict positive because it requires you to think and reassess ... why you are doing something and what you believe...” (p. G16). Dawn affirmed:

Any time that I've been in a conflict I've grown as a person, I've become more confident, I've more strength, I've become more aware of my value system and my integrity and where it's at. I know if I've compromised it. I know if I've strengthened my belief system that when I come out at the other end even if the other party is still not pleased with my decision ...I feel fine that I've done what I'm supposed to do. (p. G20)

Administrators are human and often make decisions they later reflect upon.

Reflection allows the principals to analyze their strengths, and weaknesses. This type of reflection strengthens the administrator's ability to be effective and learn from their experiences. Principals may also take action like apologizing and making amends if a poor decision was made. This strategy reflects a softer style of administration and ought to be incorporated into the list of available strategies.

Being Fair

The participants in this study endeavored to use conflict in a constructive manner to help and not destroy their opponents. Rooney (2003) believed, “every principal has the power to weave an environment in which people care for one another – and thereby foster excellent teaching and learning” (p. 76). The participants in this study wanted to resolve the conflict and maintain a positive relationship with the other party. Fennell

(1999) referred to Gilligan's (1982) finding that a woman's sense of integrity is linked to working positively with others to resolve issues and develop situations (Fennell, 1999, p. 46).

All of the participants felt it very important to be fair. Dawn explained, "Fairness comes into every decision that I make, from my perspective... because I couldn't live with myself if they weren't..." (pp.G34-35). Brenda stated, "I think that is one attribute that you really have to concentrate on is being fair... you have to be fair all the time because people notice when you are not and that can really destroy you as an administrator..." (p. G14). Ellen declared, "So that's where my sense of fairness comes in is to try to make the other person see the other side of the story and if you can, you've won" (pp. G41-42). Grace asserted, "What I try to do is be fair" (p. G59). Helen reasoned that fairness exists when you "Make sure your rules are fair and consistent... following through with what you said..." (pp. G61-62). Cindy avowed:

I really try to be fair... So I really spend a lot of time even afterwards reflecting on what happened, how I handled it, what I said, what I did, whether or not the decision really was a fair decision; a fair-minded decision. I really think that we have a very serious responsibility as educators to be ethical and to be morally upstanding...(p. G18)

Ingrid felt that fairness is necessary and a part of her values and morals. She declared, "According to most people who know me I have a higher set of values and ethics than most...my level of personal integrity is high... it is necessary for this job..." (p. G76).

Therefore, being perceived as fair was a goal for the principals in this study. It was linked to a sense of integrity and doing their job to the best of their ability. They wanted to be fair and to give everyone the benefit of the doubt. Their desire was that justice would prevail and that all parties would leave, perhaps not agreeing with the decisions made, but feeling that they had been heard and treated fairly. This builds and maintains positive relationships and reflects a more humanitarian management style by these participants.

Conclusion

In this chapter, conclusions were drawn using the data from the literature review, the Critical Incident Techniques survey and the semi-structured follow-up interviews. The conclusions were supported by the literature review and in some areas moved beyond current literature by including the unique perspectives of Canadian women principals. It was determined that the participants in this study had many different perceptions of conflict and used a wide variety of strategies to resolve and manage the conflicts in which they were engaged. This is an important finding because finally women are being represented in this area of study. This finding also discredited the stereotypical fiction that women cannot be effective administrators because they run from conflict as they have been socialized to find it uncomfortable. To the contrary, some women are overcoming their North American socialization process to become successful administrators. They are also using a wide variety of strategies to approach and resolve conflict. These strategies, while demonstrating a trend in shifting management styles away from autocratic mandates to a more inclusive style of management, also include assertive tactics as circumstances warrant.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

This chapter includes a summary of the entire study. First, the purpose, significance and methodology are reviewed. Then a précis of the main conclusions from the literature and data collected are completed. The conclusions and findings drawn from the study focused on the two key research questions that guided this study. The first question: how do female principals perceive conflict? The second question: what strategies do women principals use to resolve conflict? This chapter completes the thesis.

Purpose

The main purpose of this study was to explore the ways in which women principals perceived and resolved conflict within their daily administrative duties. The secondary purpose was to produce research on women principals and conflict from a uniquely Canadian perspective.

Significance

The significance of this study was to advance the understanding of how women principals deal with conflict. In the past, administrative theory has been primarily based on the experiences of white males. Shakeshaft (1989) asserted, "Studying male behavior, and more particularly white male behavior is not in and itself a problem. It becomes a problem when the results of studying male behavior are assumed appropriate for understanding all behavior" (p. 325). This study added a female perspective to the literature on conflict and the principalship. Tabin and Coleman (1993) argued that

incorporating the experiences of female principals into the literature is crucial because “understanding the situations of female principals from their perspective is necessary to help develop a greater understanding of the nature of the principalship” (p. 383).

This study also produced research on conflict that has a uniquely Canadian perspective. Young (1994) contended that Canadian research has taken a positive turn as “We have just begun to consider Canadian women’s experiences and contributions as dimensions of our research and theorizing about Canadian educational administration and leadership” (p. 351).

Adding the unique Canadian female perspective to the literature will create a spiral effect as each layer generates new knowledge that can be added to the literature base. The goal of this study was to construct a more accurate depiction and understanding of the experiences that principals have with conflict.

Methodology

A cover letter, consent form and survey were mailed to all participants. The cover letter and consent form assured the participants that the study was completely anonymous. There were no risks for the participants in the study nor were there any benefits. The participants were informed that all data collected from this study will be securely stored at Lakehead University for seven years and thereafter will be destroyed. A summary of the findings of this research was also made available to each participant by the researcher. A copy of the completed thesis will be made available to the Lakehead University library.

The participants in this study were selected through the process of cluster sampling. They were female principals in Ontario, employed by Public and Catholic

school boards in both elementary and secondary schools. The written data collected from the Critical Incidence mail surveys were organized by themes that became apparent from the data. The themes were categorized by grouping similar responses and ideas together and were given titles and coded by number. The data collected from each theme was broken down and arranged into subcategories. Each category and subcategory was given a descriptive title and fell under the larger heading of the theme. (Stano, 1983)

In the last stage, questions were formulated from each subcategory and used to prepare questions for the interview portion of the study. The data from the interview portion of the study was audio taped and transcribed verbatim by the researcher. The data was then analyzed by question and categorized by themes. The themes contained data that shared commonalities and like responses.

How Do Female Principals Perceive Conflict?

Sweeney and Carruthers (1996) asserted that engaging in conflict was an inevitable, constant and enduring part of being a principal. The participants in this study affirmed these three findings. The literature and the data were therefore in agreement that conflict will continue to be a challenge and is relevant to the role of the principalship.

The ways in which the participants viewed conflict were then examined. Their perceptions were in accord with the three categories delineated by Singleton, Davis and Henkin (1994): conflict may be perceived as positive, negative or behavioral. The female principals' perceptions were divided quite evenly among these categories and no single category appeared to be more popular than the others. This conclusion challenged the notion that female principals tend to cling to a negative perception of conflict and thus are passive conflict avoiders.

The data collected also illustrated that the participants did not avoid conflict and often tackled it with authoritarian strategies. However, these strategies were most often employed as a last resort measure.

Erickson (1985) suggested that women have always avoided conflict because it is incompatible with their roles in society as nurturers. This study demonstrates clearly, however, that women are embracing many roles like wife, mother, and principal. They are also balancing all of them most satisfactorily. Meanwhile, the roles of men have also been evolving which was illustrated when participants in this study explained how their husbands have supported them in their careers.

The roles of women and men in our North American society have been significantly changing and the younger generation has been looking to the more experienced for positive role models. The participants in the study modeled how it is possible to attain to high levels of management and also to fulfill all of their many roles in society successfully.

How Do Female Principals Resolve Conflicts?

Studying the principals' perceptions of conflict is critically important because it shapes and influences their management styles. When resolving conflicts, the participants in this study concurred with Grab (1996) and tended to use a variety of conflict resolution strategies based on the nature of the conflict and the personalities of those involved. The participants used all of the strategies laid out in the categories delineated by Cooze (1990): forcing, compromise, accommodating, collaborating, and avoiding.

When managing conflicts, the female principals also used all of the strategies outlined by Pulvino and Perrone (1998) who had built on the earlier ideas of Bolton (1979) and Weeks (1992). Their ten strategies were: (1) doing nothing, (2) withdrawing, (3) smoothing, (4) diverting, (5) confronting, (6) forcing, (7) standing firm, (8) employing problem solving techniques, (9) negotiating, and (10) effecting a confluent response.

Strategies That Reached Beyond the Literature Framework

In addition to utilizing all ten of the conflict resolution categories outlined by Pulvino and Perrone (1998), the participants repeatedly pointed to five other strategies that did not fit and therefore could not be incorporated into the authors' categories. These strategies were: (1) communication, (2) apologizing, (3) asking for outside advice, (4) reflection, and (5) being fair.

The first strategy, communication, has been consistently associated in the literature base with passivity. However, all of the participants in this study employed it as a tool to diagnose the conflict. Once the conflict was diagnosed, it could be managed or resolved.

The second strategy, apologizing, was utilized when the outcome of a hasty decision was considered undesirable. In an autocratic management style, an administrator would never admit he/she was wrong much less openly apologizing. Nevertheless, participants in this study utilized apologizing as a tactic to maintain personal integrity and relationships.

The third strategy was asking for advice from outside sources. Taking advantage of the experiences of others helped the administrators to reflect on the difficult and

important decisions they were required to make on a daily basis. Furthermore, a network of support was taken advantage of in the pursuit of the common goal of strengthening the educational system.

The fourth strategy, reflection, allowed the principals to analyze their strengths and weaknesses and strengthened their ability to learn from their experiences and to be more effective.

The fifth strategy was being fair, which linked directly to the participants' sense of justice and personal integrity. Fairness was used to build and maintain positive relationships and to cultivate a more humanitarian management style.

The participants utilized these five strategies to resolve and manage conflicts within their daily administrative duties. These strategies were congruent with a softer style of administration that valued integrity, fairness and personal relationships.

Recommendations for Further Research

Shakeshaft (1999) delineated her research platform that women administrators have been studied in six stages. She proposed that these stages are not yet complete and further studies must be done to create a truer understanding of administration. Further research should be conducted in the fifth and sixth stages to complete the literature base.

Further research is needed on the importance of communication and how women administrators use it as a primary and secondary strategy in conflict resolution. Personal integrity kept emerging in the data from this study as an important quality in an administrator. Further studies focusing on how integrity is linked to effective communication practices would be a worthwhile avenue to explore.

It would also be valuable to further investigate how administrators are implementing fairness and win-win situations in an effort to foster and maintain personal relationships. To study in-depth how some administrators use a softer management style as they engage in conflict and how they resolve and manage conflicts with the intent of fostering communication and fairness without attempting to destroy their opponents.

The consequences for the physical and psychological well being of principals as a result of stress inherent in conflict situations were briefly dealt with herein. More knowledge is needed in this area about both the short and long-term effects of such stress. The effect on personal and professional relationships should be included as well.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the study was summarized. Its purpose, significance, and methodology were also reviewed. The key questions from the study were then addressed through the literature review and data collection. The hackneyed notion that female administrators were conflict avoiders was dispelled. Whereas the participants used a wide variety of strategies to resolve conflicts based on the situation and the personalities of those involved, they did not attempt to destroy their opponents but rather sought a positive resolution. Further research recommendations were then explored.

This thesis studied the unique Canadian female approach to the role of the principalship. It constitutes an important study because now the perspectives of female principals and how they deal with conflict have been included in the literature base.

Appendix A

Letter to Directors of Education

Dear Director of Education:

My name is Gloria McMillan and I am a Masters of Education student at Lakehead University. Under the supervision of Dr. Hope Arlene Fennell, I am working on my thesis entitled, "Female Principals and Conflict". The purpose of this study will be to examine how female principals perceive and resolve conflict within their daily administrative duties. In the past, the majority of studies of this matter have been based primarily on the experience of white male administrators. The goal of this study will be to examine the unique experiences and unique perspectives of female principals.

With your permission, I would like to conduct my study in your school district. The study will consist of two phases. In the first phase of the study, an introductory letter, Critical Incident Technique Questionnaire, consent form and interview card will be mailed to every female principal in your School District. Responding to the Critical Incident Technique Questionnaire will take approximately twenty to thirty minutes of their time. In point form, the female principals will be asked to describe one incident in their career as a principal that involved conflict. The participants will be asked to return the questionnaire, signed consent form and interview card indicating whether or not they are willing to participate in a follow-up interview.

The data from the surveys will be collected, coded and analyzed. The data will also be used to create questions for follow-up interviews. Approximately, ten to twelve female principals volunteers will then participate in a follow-up interview. The interview will take approximately one hour each.

All data collected will be voluntary and the participant is free to withdrawal from the study at any time. All data will be anonymous and kept strictly confidential. The consent form, questionnaire and interview card will all be kept in separate files to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. The data will be securely stored at Lakehead University for seven years. There are no direct benefits or hazards for participating in this study.

The findings of this thesis will be made available to you upon request after the completion of the thesis. You can contact me through Lakehead University.

I would appreciate it if you would mail me a list of all the Female Principals in your School District along with their contact information. Thank you in advance for your assistance with this project.

Sincerely,

Gloria McMillan

Appendix B

Critical Incidence of Conflict Experienced by Women Principals

All responses are voluntary and all information will be kept strictly confidential.

Consider a situation related to your own experience as a principal that involved conflict. Describe the incident in as much detail as you can in point form. If you have some additional thoughts as you go along, just include them.

The following outline may help you capture the details of the event, but use it only as a guide. There is no need to adhere to a category if it is not useful.

- a) Describe the context of the conflict situation.
- b) What were your intentions?
- c) Who was involved?
- d) What did you do?
- e) What happened as a result?
- f) How did the events make you rethink your views on conflict?
- g) Further Comments (e.g., future expectations, predictions, what you learned...)

Appendix C

Sample Interview Questions

1. What is your view of conflict? (Positive, negative, neutral, why?)
2. What part does conflict play in your work as a principal?
3. What strategies do you use to resolve conflict?
4. What strategies do you use to manage conflict?
5. Can you describe a conflictual situation that you have encountered as a principal?
6. How did you feel emotionally when you were engaged in the conflictual situation?
7. How did you feel physically when you were engaged in the conflictual situation?
8. How does your sense of fairness affect your actions when dealing with a conflictual situation?

Appendix D

Cover Letter

Dear Participant:

My name is Gloria McMillan and I am a Masters of Education student at Lakehead University. Under the supervision of Dr. Hope Arlene Fennell I am working on my thesis entitled, "Female Principals and Conflict". The purpose of this study will be to examine how female principals perceive and resolve conflict within their daily administrative duties. In the past, the majority of studies have been based primarily on the experience of white male administrators. The goal of this study will be to examine the unique experiences of female principals.

I would appreciate it if you could fill out the enclosed questionnaire. It will take approximately twenty to thirty minutes of your time. In point form, you will be asked to describe one incident in your career as a principal that involved conflict. All answers are completely acceptable. There are no direct benefits or hazards for participating in this study. An envelope with return postage paid is included so that you can return the consent form and survey to the researcher.

The data from the surveys will be collected, coded and analyzed. The data will also be used to create questions for follow-up interviews. If you are also interested in participating in a follow-up interview, please fill out the enclosed interview card. The interview will take approximately one hour of your time.

All data collected will be voluntary and the participant is free to withdrawal from the study at any time. All data will be anonymous and kept strictly confidential. The consent form, questionnaire and interview card will all be kept in separate files to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. The data will be securely stored at Lakehead University for seven years.

The findings of this thesis will be made available to you upon request after the completion of the thesis. You can contact Dr. Fennell or myself through Lakehead University.

Thank you in advance for your co-operation.

Sincerely,

Gloria McMillan

Appendix E
Consent Form

My signature on this form indicates that I agree to participate in the study entitled Female Principals and Conflict. This study is conducted by Gloria McMillan under the supervision of Dr. Hope Arlene Fennell, Lakehead University. The purpose of the study is to examine how female principals perceive and handle conflict within their daily administrative duties.

I understand that:

1. I am a volunteer and can withdrawal from the study for any reason at any time.
2. There is no apparent risk of physical or psychological harm. Nor are there any apparent physical or psychological benefits for participating in this study.
3. The data I provide will be anonymous and confidential.
4. Upon request I will receive a summary of the completed thesis.

I understand the conditions of my involvement in this study as stated in the cover letter.

Signature of Participant

Date

Appendix F
Interview Card

Please fill out the following information:

No, I am not interested in participating in an interview.

Or

Yes, I am interested in participating in an hour-long interview regarding my experiences as a female principal with conflict.

Please contact me at the following address:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: () _____ - _____

E-mail: _____

Appendix G

Incident Summaries

Introduction

In the first phase of this study, the participants responded to a Critical Incidence Technique questionnaire. They were asked to describe one situation they had encountered as a principal that involved conflict. The following section of this thesis summarizes the situations the participants shared in this portion of the study. Pseudo names are used to identify the participants. Helen was the only participant who shared two separate conflictual situations when she responded to the questionnaire.

Incident One – Page F1 (Helen)

A pupil was being very rude to a noon hour assistant. The principal was patrolling the hallways and came upon the situation. She intervened and told the pupil to bring his lunch to the table outside the office. He “stormed into the classroom, packs up his lunch; books from inside his desk, his indoor shoes and outdoor shoes and says he is never coming back to this school...” (p. F1) and left the building. Helen “thought for sure there had been a problem and this was just the icing on the cake” so she went at once to the staff room to enquire of the pupil’s classroom teacher whether there had been any difficulty earlier that morning (p. F1). The teacher said they had “a great morning” (p. F1). Helen then asked the French teacher who also felt the same way.

The situation was very serious because the pupil had left school property. Helen tried to contact the pupil’s mother by telephone but she was not home. She then called the pupil’s emergency contact person, the pupil’s aunt.

She conferred with another principal who suggested notifying the police. Before calling the police, she and a staff member went in search of the pupil. They drove to the pupil's home and explored the neighborhood but did not find him. Upon returning to the school they discovered that the boy had come back on his own and that his aunt had also arrived and was with him. The boy had gone home and found no one there so he had returned to the school. At 3:30 p.m. the parents at last contacted the office and came to the school for a meeting. They said they had noticed that their child had been depressed of late. The pupil went to counseling the next day to seek the help he obviously needed.

Incident Two - Page F2 (Helen)

A mother of a grade three pupil called to inform the office that she wanted her son to come home for lunch because he had a medical appointment at 1:30 pm. The pupil's teacher informed him of his appointment and told him to go home for lunch. He protested, "he doesn't want to go" (p. F2) and ate his lunch at school. When the teacher again reminded him of his appointment he refused to leave the classroom. He pushed items off other pupils' desks and turned the desks over.

The 'teacher in charge' called the principal, who was at home due to illness, to inform her of this episode. The principal asked another principal to go to the school until she could get there herself. The mother was called and "came to the school where she restrained her son until he calmed down" (p. F2). The pupil's doctor was contacted. He recommended calling an ambulance if the pupil did not calm down in ten minutes or if he was hurting himself or others.

After this incident, the pupil stayed home for two days and returned for a half-day before full re-entry to the school. The special services department was contacted, testing was done, medication from the doctor was adjusted and counseling services were initiated.

Incident Three – Page F3 (Fran)

A teacher left the classroom to convene a badminton tournament and left a pupil in charge. During the teacher's absence, a pupil jumped out of the window. The teacher did not inform the office of this incident.

The principal called the teacher to her office and confronted him about the affair. Fran's intentions were "to determine why the teacher was not there" (p. F3). The teacher was "very angry and felt bases were covered" (p. F3). Two days later Fran discussed the matter with the teacher again. Afterward, Fran believed that she had a clearer understanding of all the facts. In retrospect, she felt that she should not have "reacted so negatively to the situation until facts heard" (p. F3). Fran concluded that she had "developed a clearer understanding on both sides of job stress" (p. F3).

Incident Four – Page F4 (Brenda)

An irate parent came to the school and threatened the principal and a teacher. The principal's strategy was "to remove the parent in as calm a fashion as possible" (p. F4). Brenda remained composed, insisted that the parent leave the school and notified the police who laid charges against the parent. All of the people involved, including all witnesses in the office, completed a detailed account of the incident. Brenda affirmed,

“this seemed to have calmed all victims” (p. F4). Her advice was “when dealing with an irate parent, remain calm” (p. F4).

Incident Five – Page F5 (Ellen)

The vice principal had suspended a pupil for an incident that had occurred in a downtown mall on the weekend. The parent of the pupil called the school board office questioning the relevance and severity of the suspension. The principal’s objective was to “find out all sides of the story” (p. F5). Ellen did not agree that the suspension was appropriate because the affair had taken place off school property. Nevertheless, she supported the vice principal and upheld the suspension. Subsequently it came to her attention that the vice principal had, without her knowledge, called an experienced male principal to get his opinion on the issue. Ellen apprised the superintendent who informed the director and a letter of reprimand was placed on the vice principal’s file.

In retrospect, Ellen wished she had not reported the vice principal’s indiscretion to the superintendent. She said the “relationship with the vice principal has not returned to initial level of trust – on either side. However, both of us are older and wiser and both realize that administration is not an easy job!” (p. F5).

Incident Six – Pages F6-F7 (Dawn)

A grade ten pupil transferred to another school mid-year. According to the OFSAA transfer rule, the pupil was “not eligible to participate in track and field during the spring season” (p. F6). The pupil and her parents were informed of this consequence

before transferring. The receiving school misinformed the parents by assuring them that the matter would be taken care of by their program leader of sports.

The father became enraged when the transfer for athletics was denied. He “engaged the media in a one-sided debate. He made threatening calls to the Director and the Superintendent. He vowed to the principal that he would have her job” (p. F6).

In the past, the OFSAA guidelines had been accepted by the school board but not enforced on every occasion. Dawn based her decision on the impact of an exception in this instance on the staff and pupils of a school that was under review for closure. Furthermore, she pointed out that the school board must conform to OFSAA policy or the school may be prevented from participating in OFSAA events.

The superintendent and director suggested Dawn was being unreasonable. The director suggested the principal break the OFFSA rule. Dawn argued that would be inconsistent and the discussion ended.

She told the senior administrators she would not object to their signing the athletic transfer themselves. The issue was discussed with the board’s athletic director and the trustees, who all agreed to support the principal’s decision.

Dawn refused interviews with the media and referred the reporters to the athletic director since the issue was centered primarily on an OFSAA rule. The OFSAA committee upheld the decision through every appeal.

Dawn concluded that policies should be enforced consistently. She believed that “The Director and Superintendent should have supported the principal who was administering Board policy” (p. F7). She suggested that if the board does not agree with its own policies it should change them.

Incident Seven – Pages F8-F9 (Ingrid)

This incident occurred during Ingrid's first two months as principal of an open-concept school. A parent with two children in the school is at heart an "adult bully" (p. F8). Ingrid described her as "an oversized woman who used her size as a means of intimidation: she would enter the school at will before, after or during school" (p. F8). The mother would demand to see the teacher, stand outside the classroom, stand over her children at lunch to ensure they ate it in the correct order, inspect their desks, and looked through the teacher's desk when she was not there. She would also raise her voice and be sarcastic to the teacher in front of the students at the school. Ingrid's goal was:

to curtail her open and ready access to the classrooms and my teachers and stop the harassment campaign she was inflicting on them. I also wanted to limit her access to her own children during the day because she was embarrassing them and setting them up for teasing. (p. F8)

Ingrid locked all of the doors to the school except the front door. Anyone could get out of any door but could only enter the school through the front door. The classroom areas could be entered only after the parent had signed the visitors' book and provided a valid reason for interrupting the class. All of these changes were communicated via the school newsletter. Ingrid also stood at the front door to enforce the policy. She explained:

Carol and some of her parent followers, who had spent their idle hours standing in key positions watching classes at work and teachers teaching, started a game trying to sneak past the office. One would try to distract me or the secretary so others could slip past. It became a silly game for a while. However the majority of parents applauded the changes and supported fully the need for tighter security in the school. I simply wore the others down. (p. F9)

Incident Eight – Pages F10-F16 (Grace)

During the first two weeks of school, the parents of a female pupil called to make an appointment with Grace concerning their child's teacher. They were concerned that the teacher was yelling at her pupils. Grace confided:

I did not share this information with the teacher involved. Instead, I reflected on her performance as observed last year. To me, she had always impressed me as a kind and gentle teacher. Just the day before I had complemented her on her way of speaking to her pupils...her voice was loud, but she did not yell. Her voice was firm but not critical. (p. F10)

At the meeting with the parents, they insisted that the teacher was yelling at the class. Although their daughter had never been yelled at, she complained of headaches and did not want to go to school. They also claimed that other parents had similar concerns. The teacher was nearing retirement and they were fearful that she had run out of patience and was most likely not using current teaching techniques. They were considering transferring their daughter to another school.

Grace stated that she:

told them that I could see that they were concerned about "D" (daughter), that it took courage to come and bring these to my attention; however they really needed to bring their concerns to "T's" (teacher's) attention. If the teacher was in fact yelling, she needed to know how the pupils and parents felt about it and challenge her to change. (p. F12)

Grace also explained that transferring their daughter to another school could be very difficult for her. She would have to adjust to a new school setting, teacher, classmates and routines. This could have a negative effect on her grades. It would also teach her to run away from her problems instead of facing them. The parents agreed not to transfer their daughter.

Grace said that she:

thanked them for bringing their concerns to my attention, then stated that hopefully by working together we could come to a solution that would be in D's best interest. I recommended that the parents make an appointment to talk to the teacher about her discipline and teaching strategies. (p. F13)

Two weeks later, Grace approached the teacher to ask if a meeting had taken place. It had not. At curriculum night the principal spoke to the parents who felt their fears had not been justified. The parents were glad they hadn't approached the teacher or continued the matter any further. By the third week their daughter was coming home happy saying, "the teacher was her favorite teacher" (p. F16).

Grace went to the teacher and told her she valued and appreciated her skills with grade one pupils. The teacher was somewhat distressed but now felt better since the issue was resolved.

Incident Nine – Page F17 (Cindy)

The First Nations chiefs had a meeting with the principal concerning the large number of suspensions during the school year. The chiefs threatened to withdraw all of their pupils from the school.

Cindy listened to the chiefs and explained the reasons for the suspensions. She outlined several steps the school had taken to help the pupils before they were suspended. She also explained that her goal as an administrator was "to enable children to be the best they can be by communicating consistent boundaries and expectations" (p. F17).

Cindy "acknowledged their feelings and point of view and tried to incorporate it in the solution/resolution..." (p. F17). In the end they did "part amicably" (p. F17).

Incident Ten - F18 (Anne)

A teacher called a pupil's parents because she was concerned about their child's behavior. The parents did not believe the child was misbehaving and a "teacher/parent conflict" (p. F18) ensued. Communications between the teacher and parents were curtailed. Anne began by "mediating parent/teacher meetings" (p. F18). They prepared a crisis management plan for the pupil. This involved the use of a communication book. The purpose of the book was to keep "communication lines open between home and school" (p. F18).

The parents asked for the communication book because they wanted to show it to their lawyer. The teacher refused. Anne told the teacher to give the book to the parents but initially the teacher would not. In the end, however, the teacher gave the communication book to the parents. Anne declared that the "conflict was very unpleasant" (p. F18).

The table presented below is entitled, Table 2 - Emergent Sub Themes. This table orchestrates how the quotations found in the data were organized into the sub themes. The quotations and sub themes found in this chart are discussed further in the thesis.

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| <p>requested to be sure we have this child appropriately placed where his needs can be best served.”</p> <p>P. F2 “special services was contacted and testing that had already been requested was done, and medication from the medical doctor was also adjusted. Counseling services were also initiated at this time.”</p> <p>P. F4 “to remove the parent in as calm a fashion as possible.”</p> <p>P. F4 “all involved completed a detailed account of the incident. This seemed to have calmed all victims.”</p> | <p>Set A Goal And Accomplish That Set Task</p> <p>Document/Culminating Task</p> |
| <p>P. F11 “I keep a round table there (her office) for the purpose of meeting with parents or students.”</p> <p>P. F8 “It was my intention to curtail her open and ready access to the classrooms and my teachers and stop the harassment campaign she was inflicting on them. I also wanted to limit her access to her own children during the day because she was embarrassing them and setting them up for teasing”</p> <p>P. F9 “all of these changes were communicated via a school newsletter to the parents and I stood at the entrance when I could to enforce it”</p> <p>P. F17 “I acknowledged their feelings and point of view and tried to incorporate it in the solution/resolution I proposed.”</p> <p>P. F18 “communication lines open between home and school.”</p> <p>P. F17 “listened, explained how we try to help students help themselves...”</p> <p>P. F12 “I listened and jotted down noted when they were finished I told them that I</p> | <p>Conflict Management Strategies</p> <p>Balance Power</p> <p>Communication</p> <p>Listening</p> |

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| <p>could see they were concerned about “D” (their daughter) that it took courage to come and bring these to my attention, however they really needed to bring their concerns to T’s (teacher’s) attention. If indeed T was yelling, she needed to know how students and parents felt about it – otherwise, no one would ever challenge T to change. My point was that they should address their concerns to T themselves not just expect I would do it for them. I was finding diplomatic ways of pointing this out to them.</p> <p>P. F15 “They (parents) thanked me for listening and brainstorming with them.”</p> <p>P. F9 “the majority of the parents applauded the changes and supported fully the need for tighter security in the school. I simply wore the others down.”</p> | <p>Diplomacy</p> <p>Brainstorming</p> <p>Dedication and persistence</p> |
| <p>P. F4 “”When dealing with an irate parent, remain calm”</p> <p>P. F6 “Emotions were running high”</p> <p>P.F4 “threatened me and another teacher”</p> <p>P. F8 “a parent...is in essence an adult bully...oversized woman who used her size as a means of intimidation”</p> | <p>Emotions</p> <p>Physical</p> |
| <p>P. F6 “The principal chose not to look at the impact of decision on the one athlete, but the impact of not following Board and Athletic policy on the staff and students of a school that was under review for closure.”</p> <p>P.F7 “The Director suggested the principal break the rule and the principal countered with if it was okay to break this rule is it okay to break any rules. His response was no. The principal stated that would be inconsistent and the discussion ended.”</p> <p>P. F5 “to find out all sides of the story”</p> | <p>Fairness</p> |

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