Chapter 5 Vignette:
The stress in teaching

In the survey responses, teachers stated the following as major stressors:

- feeling pressured by the demands of multiple tasks and limited time
- the complexity of the classroom, in terms of class size and class composition
- a lack of support for teachers in their efforts to meet students’ needs
- a lack of support to deal with problematic student behaviour
- relationships with a small number of parents were difficult and strained
- reporting caused a periodic increase in stress
- inadequate time for preparation and marking

Many suggested that it was a combination of several of the above factors that increased stress levels, and that stress increased at certain times of year:

When you try to break down the elements of stress in the profession of teaching it actually does a disservice to teachers. It’s not the individual items that cause stress, it’s the combination of things which actually causes stress. When we have our most stressful times, during report-card preparation, we also have all the other items to contend with at the same time. We can’t put the kids on automatic, and the meetings don’t stop; there’s still marking and planning; we still need to deal with behaviour issues and call parents, we still have the administration to deal with and the very real problems of kids not getting what they need at school and at home. This is when our stress levels are at their highest.

The causes and results of stress may be different depending on career stage, gender and age. Newer teachers find job insecurity stressful, and there is evidence that women 35–45 also report higher stress levels than teachers in other age groups or than men.

- Which of the above stress factors or findings resonate with your experience?
- How can stress issues be addressed by:
  a. The individual aiming for a positive work-life balance?
  b. Changes in teachers’ working conditions to make the job more manageable?
- Are you aware of work-life balance programs offered by the BCTF?
- Should the BCTF be addressing and aiming to improve those working conditions that cause stress?

The Worklife of BC teachers in 2009

The ‘vignettes’ are one-page snapshots of themes from different chapters in the BCTF Research study on teachers’ work in BC’s public schools. They may contain report text, charts, tables, or quotes from teachers who completed surveys.

Each vignette is intended to encourage reflection and discussion. Such discussions might take place at a local teacher union executive meeting, in a PSA, or at a professional development session, while a health and safety or bargaining committee might use them to focus on a current issue of concern.

The central idea is to make the research more accessible by offering a way to quickly access and share some of the major themes in the study. The vignettes can be read in minutes and might be used as a focus for a 10–30 minute discussion.

The Worklife of BC Teachers in 2009 study can be found on the BCTF website, and each chapter or the whole report can be read or downloaded. The worklife web page can be found online at:


It includes other Canadian and international worklife studies, sections on work/life balance, articles and videos on stress in modern society, as well as BCTF programs to address work/life balance and stress.

We welcome any feedback or suggestions on either these vignettes or any aspect of the study and can be reached at: researchteam@bctf.ca.

Charlie Naylor and Margaret White, BCTF Research