Connecting Calgary Teachers With Resources to Improve and Alleviate Burnout

by

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We accept the thesis as conforming
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Abstract

Between fostering relationships with parents, students, and colleagues and navigating a never-ending list of tasks to complete in a given day, it is no question that teachers are experiencing high levels of stress. As a result, more and more teachers are opting to leave the education field, not because they lack the passion for their job, but because they feel that they are no longer able to cope with the stress. Research has demonstrated that, although teachers are attempting to cope with an increased workload with minimal resources, they are struggling with ways to ensure that they are taking care of their own well-being. The research suggested that more supports need to be in place to support teachers’ well-being while they are experiencing burnout. In this vein, I designed a website with the aim of supporting teachers while they are experiencing burnout and educate them on the resources available to them within the Calgary area through both the CBE and community resources. Finally, this website offers a resource collection of videos, articles, books, and Web resources that teachers can access to support and motivate them to stay in the profession. I hope that #TeacherWellnessYYC will be an information guide for all teachers.
Acknowledgements

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Thank you!
Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my mom and dad.

Thank you for your unconditional love and support and reminding me to be remarkable in all that I do. You both inspire me every day, and

I am so proud to be your daughter.
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#TeacherWellnessYYC

Connecting teachers with resources to improve wellness and alleviate burnout.

## Articles

In this section, you will find a variety of articles ranging from how to build strong relationships with students, parents and colleagues to tips on how to avoid burnout.

### 10 Burnout Proof Tips For Teachers

By: Emily Liscom

Website: [http://educationtothecore.com/2017/01/10-burnout-proof-tips-for-teachers/](http://educationtothecore.com/2017/01/10-burnout-proof-tips-for-teachers/)

About This Article:

These 10 tips on how to avoid burnout provide teachers with small changes that can make now that will help them avoid burnout in the future. Favorite tips include: Taking time for you, leaving work at work and the importance of sleep and nutrition.
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Chapter 1: Background/Context/Problem To Be Investigated

In my first few years of teaching I was overtired, overstretched, and overwhelmed; I was trying to keep my head above water. Between navigating the curriculum, dealing with students, and collaborating with parents and colleagues, the complexity of teaching can be overwhelming for even the most seasoned veteran teachers. Teaching can be one of the most uplifting and fulfilling professions; however, it can also be frustrating, embarrassing, irritating, and gut wrenching. The following are examples of events that I have experienced in my short career, and I am sure that I will have many more.

In my first year of teaching the principal took me aside to tell me that a traumatic incident had occurred that involved one of my student’s parents. In addition to the empathy that I felt for this poor child who had lost a parent, I had no idea how I could support either this student or myself. This traumatic event intensified the already overwhelming experience, and I was unclear about what I should do—or to whom I could talk.

Another event occurred in my third year when I had one of ‘those’ classes—the type of class that made me wonder why I had entered the teaching profession. What was I thinking? Not wanting to seem incompetent (or as though I were struggling), I continued teaching as if everything was normal. At the end of each day I would go home from this intense class feeling hopeless, lost, and exhausted. After months of feeling this way, an administrator approached me after an evaluation and asked me why I had not told her that it was as serious as it was. I asserted that I was good at my job, that I could handle it. But was I handling it? Not really. I was too embarrassed and ashamed to ask for help. Not only was this not fair to myself, but it was also not fair to the students in this class because I was in no state of mind to give them my best, every day.
The next two stories center on stress that involved parents and colleagues. The first one occurred in September of my third year. I learned that a parent of a student in my class was attending the interviews only to ‘check me out’ because, obviously, I could not be a competent teacher at the age of 23. After a plethora of questions, I believed that we had sorted everything out and resolved the issue. When the grade team decided to walk the students to the swimming pool for lessons, this parent questioned the safety of crossing the street and expressed surprise that I was allowed to do that; finally, she stated her desire to come along to ensure that it was actually safe. The feeling that a parent would consider that I had anything but his or her child’s interests at heart was heartbreaking. I was insulted that she could imagine that I would do anything to harm these children. A parent’s accusation that I was incompetent at my job was crushing.

Colleagues who do not get along and do not communicate create a different type of stress, which I experienced when two teachers on a grade team decided on a literacy program for the entire grade without consulting the rest of the team. This isolated incident had a snowball effect, which turned into a battle and resulted in a communication block in which no one talked to each other except through passive aggressive e-mails. The atmosphere in the hallway was cold, and the event culminated in teachers’ threats to quit. With the stress of being caught in the middle of the chaos, I became isolated from everyone as a self-preservation technique.

This collection of anecdotes demonstrates the different aspects of stress that are beyond the expertise of a teacher, especially a new teacher, to resolve. Yet it seems that teachers are expected to know what to do in these situations and to know where to access the supports necessary to survive and thrive. These experiences made me wonder whether I might have been less overwhelmed if I had had access to resources and support. Perhaps I might have felt that I
could support myself through these situations. Finally, they made me reflect on what resources are already available for teachers and how they can access them.

Background

Teacher burnout is becoming a more prominent issue in our society. Over time, the complexity and intensity of teachers’ workload have increased the incidence of stress leave and teacher burnout (Alberta Teachers’ Association [ATA], 2012). Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter (2001) stated that job burnout “refers to feelings of being overextended and depleted of one’s emotional and physical resources” (p. 399). Much of the literature on job burnout referred to Maslach et al., who can therefore be considered key researchers in the field. They were also the first to describe job burnout as “a psychological syndrome in response to chronic interpersonal stressors on the job” (p. 399).

The responses to these stressors can be described as the three dimensions of burnout: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced sense of accomplishment. Emotional exhaustion is described as a stress dimension of burnout and refers to feelings of being emotionally extended as well as the depletion of a teacher’s mental and physical energy resources (Evers, Tomic, & Brouwers, 2004; Fernet, Guay, Senécal, & Austin, 2012; Kim, Shin, & Swanger, 2009). Depersonalization refers to teachers’ attitudes when they feel detached from the job itself and the people associated with it (Fernet et al., 2012). The final dimension of burnout is a reduced sense of personal accomplishment, which results in feelings of incompetence and a lack of achievement at work (Fernet et al., 2012; Maslach et al., 2001). I will further explore these dimensions in the literature review.

In a case study of the work life of Calgary Public Teachers, researchers found that “teachers and administrators are increasingly struggling to find the time and the mental energy to
address all the demands made of them” (ATA, 2012, p. 12). These demands, or stressors, refer to events or conditions that negatively affect a person either physically or mentally. In a study on why new teachers are leaving the profession, Karsenti and Collin (2013) explained that “it is increasingly evident that some teachers are coping with more and more challenges and problems until the only option is to abandon the profession” (pp. 141-142). The ATA’s Calgary study also revealed that teachers were feeling guilty, overwhelmed, and exhausted because they believed that they “were unable to do any one facet of their work to the best of their ability” (p. 12).

Martin, Dolmage, and Sharpe (2012) echoed this sentiment when teachers expressed the feeling of being overextended and overwhelmed by the various aspects of their professional responsibilities and that these teachers struggled to manage the variety of stakeholders’ expectations. Decreasing this sense of exhaustion and guilt by supporting teachers is key to alleviating job burnout.

**My Context**

With four years of teaching experience, my current assignment is in a Grade 1 classroom with the Calgary Board of Education (CBE) at a French immersion school. My school is located in Calgary’s south and has a population of approximately 515 students from kindergarten to Grade 4. Because I am near the start of my career, I know how demanding and overwhelming teaching can be, especially early in the career.

It is understandable that many teachers (especially early in their career) are so overwhelmed that they decide to leave, either by taking a stress leave or by leaving the profession altogether. Begnall (2013) reported that nearly 40% of new teachers in Alberta leave the profession within the first five years. In a survey of Saskatchewan teachers, Martin et al. (2012) found that although they were clearly passionate about their work, the challenging
realities of the job (such as the negative impact of work-related stress on their personal lives, the difficulty of managing stakeholders’ various expectations, and the perception of excessive workload) were causing a large majority of the teachers to reconsider whether they wanted to stay in the profession. My experience is similar to these findings: I was excited and enthusiastic to start teaching and simultaneously crushed by the overload that came with the job. I felt incompetent and did not know what to do or where to turn for assistance. This is not an uncommon feeling amongst new and veteran teachers alike.

Having grown up in a household that was very involved in the non-profit sector in Calgary, I am aware that our education system is not utilizing the expertise in our community. I believe that this untapped resource can be the key to supporting teachers through the complexities of teaching and provide the support that might be beyond their expertise. Teachers cannot be all things to all people, and it is imperative that they not only redefine the role and functions of teachers, but also consider what supports they need to ensure their continued participation in the profession (Martin et al., 2012).

**Research Question**

These experiences led me to my research question: What resources can we create to alleviate the three dimensions of teacher burnout and therefore increase teacher wellness? The supporting questions include the following: (a) In what ways can we utilize community resources to diminish teachers’ emotional exhaustion? (b) What resources are currently available to teachers who are experiencing burnout? and (c) Could better understanding the dimensions of burnout and identifying potential stressors help teachers to cope and develop strategies to improve their wellness?
I will answer these questions by referring to a website designed to support teachers who are experiencing burnout. The website has five key sections: (a) information on job burnout, including what it is, the common stressors specific to teachers, the three dimensions of burnout, and a discussion on the stigma associated with burnout; (b) a review of the literature on the subject of burnout; (c) a collection of resources such as books, articles, videos, and websites that teachers can utilize; (d) a brief description of services currently available to teachers through the CBE; and (e) a collection of organizations in Calgary with which to connect teachers to alleviate burnout.

This project is essential because, for teachers to be able to teach and support their students to their full potential, they first need to be able to support themselves. When teachers have as much control as possible, they can mediate the stressors, independently develop coping strategies, and even eliminate the stressors while they are still minimal. They have an opportunity to regain control of the situation. I liken this to an experience of a speeding car hitting gravel. The car begins to skid. If the driver has the proper support and training, he or she will know how to drive into the skid and eventually regain control. If the driver does not have the proper support or training, he or she will make the situation worse by slamming on the brakes and creating an even bigger accident. Teachers need support to drive through the skid.

In the following chapters I discuss the literature, including a further discussion of the three dimensions of burnout, the stressors that contribute to burnout, the consequences and implications of burnout, and the solution to teachers’ burnout. Then I explore the website that I created and justify my design and resource choices. Finally, I briefly summarize the project and discuss areas for further research and an action plan for implementing my design.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Job burnout does not discriminate. It can happen to anyone, in any profession, at any age, regardless of gender, and in any region. The consequences of job burnout include decreased productivity, deteriorating mental and physical health, and an adverse effect on relationships both inside and outside the workplace (Martin et al., 2012). Any human-services profession—specifically teaching—is especially vulnerable to burnout because of the relational aspects of the jobs. In this section I (a) define job burnout, (b) identify who is most susceptible to this syndrome, (c) describe the three dimensions of burnout, (d) identify key stressors that cause burnout, and (e) reveal the implications for teachers’ physical and mental health and their efficacy in teaching. This section concludes with a discussion of possible solutions to alleviate teacher burnout.

Job Burnout

First, it is important to understand job burnout. Job burnout, according to Maslach et al. (2001), “refers to feelings of being overextended and depleted of one’s emotional and physical resources” (p. 399). This feeling is not uncommon for most teachers at one point or another in their career. It is an ongoing process that occurs over time and is generally caused by a prolonged exposure to work-related stressors (Chang, 2009; Fernet et al., 2012; Pyhalto, Pietarinen, & Salmela-Aro, 2011). Initially, researchers explored job burnout primarily as it related to human-services professions such as teaching, nursing, and social work; however, it has recently expanded to include all other professions (Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma, & Bakker, 2002). Unlike depression, which infiltrates every aspect of one’s life, burnout occurs with stressors specific to the work context; however, burnout is related to anxiety and depression, and people who are prone to depression are more vulnerable to develop job burnout (Maslach
et al., 2001). Martin et al. (2012) surveyed the work life and health of teachers in Regina and Saskatoon. They found that, although almost all of their participants were passionate about teaching, the harsh realities of the job and the impact of work-related stress on their personal lives could have been forcing the vast majority to reconsider whether they wished to continue teaching. It is therefore necessary to consider teachers’ stressors. Although they might have a passion for the job, they might be unable to cope with the various stressors that occur at the same time. Swider and Zimmerman (2010) suggested that job burnout can be used as a set of “mental encodings” (p.489) that one might have with regard to reactions and responses to ongoing stress at work.

In Chang’s (2009) review of articles on teacher burnout written over the past 30 years, it was evident that the experience of burnout is unique to the individual, with regard to whether the teacher experiences burnout on a regular basis or during the length of his or her career and the dimensions of burnout that he or she might experience (Chang, 2009). Chang added that “the psychological property of burnout seems to be a temporary state on a continuum rather than just an end-product” (p. 197). On the milder end of the continuum, a teacher might have feelings of being burnt out that result in fatigue and exhaustion; however, the teacher might still feel satisfied with his or her work. On the more severe end of the continuum, a teacher might continually feel emotionally exhausted and detached from teaching as well as unsatisfied with and inefficacious in the job.

My review of the literature revealed no consistent evidence that gender, age, marital status, and race are factors in a susceptibility to burnout (Chang, 2009; Maslach et al., 2001; Okeke & Dlamini, 2013; Purvanova & Muros, 2010). The way that people experience burnout—or how burnout manifests—can differ. No perfect combination of demographic traits
makes individuals more susceptible to job burnout. One slightly more consistent factor
susceptibility to burnout is personality traits.

Kim et al. (2009) and Swider and Zimmerman (2010) used the Big Five Personality
Model to characterize the personality characteristics that can make a person more susceptible to
job burnout. The traits are neuroticism, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and
openness to experience. These researchers, along with Maslach et al. (2001), found that
neuroticism is highly linked to burnout. A neurotic individual is emotionally unstable and is
prone to psychological distress, and “individuals who are ‘feeling-types’ rather than ‘thinking-
types’ are more prone to burnout” (p. 411). Swider and Zimmerman agreed and suggested that
“individuals high in neuroticism are likely to be anxious and fearful at, and away from work”
(p. 489).

In Swider and Zimmerman’s (2010) exploration of the relationship between the Big Five
Personality Traits and job burnout, they found that, should a person have a high level of
neuroticism and low levels of extraversion, conscientiousness, and agreeableness, he or she
would be more vulnerable to job burnout. Kim et al. (2009) concurred and found that individuals
who are high in conscientiousness have strong organizations skills and a strong sense of
responsibility, which would make them more likely to put more energy into their work, complete
tasks, and therefore have a high sense of accomplishment. Agreeableness is a buffer against
burnout because it results in more success in interpersonal relationships and therefore lower
detachment from the job (Swider & Zimmerman, 2010). Finally, Maslach et al. (2001) found
that individuals who are more extroverted tend to enjoy working with people and therefore
would be less likely to distance themselves from their clients or co-workers.
**Teacher susceptibility.** This raises the question of why teachers are so susceptible to burnout. Teaching is comprised of a wide variety of tasks, including creating and presenting lessons, responding to students’ diverse needs and learning styles, assessing and reporting on student progress, and collaborating with parents, students, colleagues, and administrators—all while managing a classroom. Näring, Briët, & Brouwers (2006) described teaching as a profession in which teachers constantly interact with students. Teachers must be engaging to catch and maintain their students’ attention, are required to react with extreme exuberance when students progress in their learning, and must maintain a calm composure when they are confronted by misbehaving students. This wide variety of tasks and interactions with a wide variety of people inevitably creates stress. If teachers are not able to cope with or alleviate this stress, they will become vulnerable to burnout.

Martin et al.’s (2012) survey of teachers in Saskatchewan and Karsenti and Collin’s (2013) survey of teachers across Canada showed that teachers left the profession, not because of a lack of passion, but as a result of the stress that emanated from a wide variety of sources that caused the teachers to decide that the positive aspects did not outweigh the negative. According to Chang (2009), “Kindergarten to grade 12 teaching is a profession characterized by high levels of burnout and emotional exhaustion” (p. 193). Overall, the discussion in the literature on whether teachers’ skills make them more susceptible to burnout was limited.

**Job satisfaction.** Schaufeli et al. (2002) described burnout as “the erosion of one’s engagement with the job” (p. 71); the opposite of job burnout is job engagement or satisfaction. The literature described many sources of job satisfaction for teachers, including working with students, feeling that they are making a difference in society, having variety in the work day, having a sense of teamwork and collegiality, taking pride in their work, and having autonomy in
their job (ATA, 2012; Brunetti, 2001; Martin et al., 2012; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014). Schaufeli et al. defined engagement as “a positive, fulfilling work-related state of mind” (p. 74) and explained that when teachers feel energetic and dedicated to their work, they are better able to cope with the demands of the work. Maslach et al. (2001) concurred that “engagement is characterized by energy, involvement, and efficacy, the direct three opposites of the three burnout dimensions” and that burnout occurs when “energy turns into exhaustion, involvement turns into cynicism and efficacy turns into ineffectiveness” (p. 416).

**Dimensions of Job Burnout**

Job burnout is a response to stress and has three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization/cynicism, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment. These dimensions are not necessarily sequential or cyclical, and how they manifest depends on the individual.

**Emotional exhaustion.** Emotional exhaustion is the most prominent and easiest dimension of job burnout to identify. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2014) stated that because the development of burnout often begins with a feeling of emotional exhaustion, it is therefore regarded as the key aspect of burnout. Maslach et al. (2001) suggested that emotional exhaustion “reflects the stress dimension of burnout” and is the most obvious symptom of burnout as well as the “most widely reported and most thoroughly analyzed” (p. 403) of the three dimensions.

Researchers concurred: Emotional exhaustion refers to feelings of being emotionally overextended as well as the depletion of teachers’ mental and physical energy resources as a result of excessive psychological demands (Evers et al., 2004; Fernet et al., 2012; Kim et al., 2009).

Wrobel (2013) made the connection that the relational nature of teaching affects teachers’ empathy towards their students because their “interactions with pupils are often-long term,
repeated and intense” (p. 582). Maslach et al. (2001) echoed this and added that emotionally demanding work can eventually drain teachers’ capacity to be involved and respond to the needs of students. Responsiveness to students’ emotions can trigger teachers’ emotional exhaustion and lead to burnout (Wrobel, 2013). The emotional labor of teaching creates a vulnerability to burnout. As I previously stated, emotional exhaustion reflects the stress aspect of burnout; however, it does not represent the relationship between people and their work; therefore, researchers must identify more criteria for burnout because emotional exhaustion is not sufficient on its own (Maslach et al., 2001).

**Depersonalization/cynicism.** Depersonalization/cynicism refers to teachers’ attitudes where they demonstrate detachment from the job itself and the people associated with it (Fernet et al., 2012). This dimension represents the interpersonal aspects of burnout that include negative, cynical attitudes and detached feelings about students or colleagues (Maslach et al., 2001; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009). Much of the research described depersonalization as an immediate reaction to emotional exhaustion and teachers’ attempt to protect themselves, thereby alleviating their emotional exhaustion by distanciing themselves from their students, colleagues, and parents (Chang, 2009; Maslach et al., 2001).

Kim et al. (2009) characterized depersonalization as “the treatment of others as objects rather than people through cynical, callous and uncaring attitudes and behaviors” (p. 97). It is therefore understandable that exhaustion “prompts the actions to distance oneself emotionally and cognitively from one’s work, presumably as a way to cope with the workload” (Maslach et al., 2001, p. 403). Chang (2009) agreed and suggested that depersonalization can be a psychological coping mechanism when people feel overwhelmed and exhausted. By moderating their compassion, teachers might protect themselves from intense emotional interference with
their ability to function effectively on the job (Maslach et al., 2001). In other words, by emotionally distanci

Reduced sense of personal accomplishment. Distancing leads to the third and final dimension of burnout, a reduced sense of personal accomplishment. It is not surprising that if teachers are emotionally and physically exhausted and feel detached from their students, they feel less motivated and not as effective at work. Chang (2009) stated that “when a person feels exhausted or indifferent towards serving or helping people, it is difficult to gain a sense of accomplishment” (p. 197). Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2009) referred to this as the tendency for teachers to judge themselves negatively and develop feelings that the work they are doing is no longer meaningful or important. Fernet et al. (2012) and Maslach et al. (2001) concurred and described a reduced sense of personal accomplishment as a decreased feeling of competence and lack of achievement at work.

Skaalvik and Skaalvik’s (2014) survey of teachers in Norway asked them about their feelings of accomplishment in their classroom. The teachers described the feeling of a loss of control in their ability to manage their classrooms and their heavy workload and explained that this “loss of control led them to a lack of inspiration” (p. 186). Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001) and Ross, Romer, and Horner (2012) defined teacher self-efficacy as how teachers self-judge their capacity to engage students and motivate them in their learning, even when students are difficult or disengaged. Kim et al. (2009) added that “diminished personal accomplishment denotes a tendency to evaluate oneself negatively due to the failure to produce result” (p. 97). A lack of inspiration is a strong reason to leave the profession; if teachers no
longer care about the work that they are doing, then they will not want to navigate the workload and emotional labor of the profession.

Burnout occurs when high levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization are accompanied by low levels of personal accomplishment (Swider & Zimmerman, 2010). Although the connection between emotional exhaustion and depersonalization is linear, the further link to reduced personal accomplishment is less clear (Maslach et al, 2001). Maslach et al. described the link among the three dimensions. When a work situation is characterized by continuous, overwhelming stress, it will likely lead to employees’ increased emotional exhaustion and withdrawal from the people around them at work (i.e., depersonalization). Increased exhaustion and withdrawal from individuals at work likely erodes the sense of personal accomplishment. Maslach et al. stated that “the lack [of personal accomplishment] seems to arise more clearly from a lack of relevant resources whereas exhaustion and cynicism emerge from the presence of work overload and occasional conflict” (p. 403).

Alarcon (2011) matched this description and suggested that emotional exhaustion begins with depersonalization soon after emotional exhaustion as a maladaptive coping mechanism to deal with excessive demands; this coping mechanism then reduces the sense of personal accomplishment.

**Stressors**

Stress is “the combination of physiological and psychological reactions that negatively affect individuals as a result of conditions in their environment” (Okeke & Dlamini, 2013, p. 1). Martin et al. (2012) and Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli (2001) complemented this definition by describing negative work-related stressors or job demands as physical, social, and organizational aspects of an occupation that create a consistent physical and mental strain on
teachers that can eventually have mental and physical consequences. Demerouti et al. identified a direct relationship between the increased effort needed to deal with these stressors and increased physical consequences for the individual and explained that long-term exposure to such stress can drain energy and result in breakdown or exhaustion. Although a multitude of stressors affect teachers, the literature grouped them consistently. Overall, they can be categorized into two overarching themes: relationship stressors and task-related stressors. Within each of these categories, I will further divide and explore the stressors.

**Relationship stressors.** Teaching is a unique profession in that teachers constantly interact with students, parents, and colleagues. Because of the highly relational nature of teaching, emotional drainage occurs. It is therefore not surprising that these social interactions are major stressors that make teachers highly vulnerable to job burnout (Fernet et al., 2012; Kim, et al., 2009). Burnout is the most evident issue in social relationships on the job (Browers & Tomic, 2000). School communities rely on many contributors to function properly. According to Maslach et al. (2001), “The most destructive of communities is chronic, unresolved conflict with others on the job” (p. 415). It is human nature to connect with others, and when these connections involve conflict, emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment begin to filter in. Martin et al. (2012) found that the most salient negative work-related stressor is the multiple roles that teachers are expected to assume; they deal with students with problematic behaviour and struggle to meet various stakeholders’ (such as government, administrators, parents, colleagues, students, and community) increasing expectations and responsibilities. They further stressed that “teachers cannot be all things to all people” and that “we need to regularly re-examine and re-define the critical role and functions of teachers in order to identify not only what is possible in terms of society in an ideal sense but what is reasonable”
Redefining these roles and expectations helps to determine how best to support teachers with the resources necessary to make them feel satisfied with their work.

**Relationships with students.** “Teaching and interacting with students is arguably the most important task teachers engage in during the course of their professional lives” (Keller, Chang, Becker, Goetz, & Frenzel, 2014, p. 2). Teachers are expected to create lessons and devote extra time to meet a wide variety of individual students’ needs and abilities with a lack of support and resources for this diverse student population (ATA, 2012; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014; Wrobel, 2013). In their survey of Calgary teachers, the ATA found that “teachers and administrators are increasingly struggling to find the time and mental energy to address all the demands made of them” (p. 12). This can lead to a deterioration in teachers’ sense of accomplishment and belief that they have the competence to support their students (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014).

No matter how well prepared teachers are, students are the determining factor in their teaching day, and student misbehaviour can have a profound effect on teaching. Student misbehaviour is cited as a major source of stress for teachers because it makes teaching and maintaining discipline in the classroom difficult and can be extremely energy intensive to correct and maintain (Chang, 2009; Karsenti & Collin, 2013; Martin et al., 2012; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014).

When Martin et al. (2012) asked teachers about their worst teaching experiences, those who identified situations that involved students described incidents of violence, verbal abuse, or threats and general behaviour problems. Although the teachers in Wrobel’s (2013) study faced severe behaviour problems similar to those of teachers in Saskatchewan, Wrobel found that mild types of misbehaviour such as lack of attention, disruptions, and cheating “occurred frequently
enough to have a negative effect on a teacher’s functioning” (p. 582). However, researchers agreed that when teachers’ perception of confidence to deal with student misbehaviour and conflict is high, it increases their sense of efficacy and competence in the classroom and decreases the sense of depersonalization and emotional exhaustion (Browers & Tomic, 2000; Collie, Shapka, & Perry, 2012; Evers et al., 2004; Fernet et al., 2012; Pyhalto et al., 2011).

Browers and Tomic investigated the link between teachers’ burnout and their perceived self-efficacy in classroom management and reported that “teachers who have no confidence in their classroom management abilities are confronted by their incompetence every day, while at the same time understanding how important that competence is if they are to perform well and achieve the educational goals” (p. 242). Chang (2009) echoed the finding that if teachers perceive their relationships with students or lessons as important, they are less likely to develop a sense of incompetence.

**Relationships with parents.** Teacher-parent relationships are imperative to support students. Teachers rely on parents to motivate students’ attitudes towards learning as well as towards their behaviour in school. Therefore, if this important relationship is conflicted, it can cause a severe strain on teachers (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009). Pyhalto et al. (2011) found similar results in their study in which they studied the kinds of episodes that challenge Finnish teachers’ well-being and burnout. They found that unresolved conflict between parents and teachers and insufficient support from administrators can lead to factors that cause teacher burnout. Such conflicts might include verbal abuse from parents, unfair criticism and threats, ongoing harassment, and lack of support (Martin et al., 2012). Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2009) agree in saying that teachers are dependent on a positive and cooperative relationship with parents and therefore when teachers experience a fracture within this relationship, whether it be
not being trusted, being criticized or attempting to work with a non-cooperative parent, that may cause a serious strain on the teachers by having a negative impact on their sense of self-efficacy and burnout. It is no surprise that teachers’ relationships with parents have a strong impact on their ability to plan, carry out activities, and attain goals, which erodes their sense of accomplishment and leads to an attitude of detachment from their work (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009).

**Relationships with colleagues.** Working on a team can have both a positive and a negative effect on teachers’ level of burnout. Collie et al. (2012) found that collaboration with colleagues can be either positive or negative depending on the climate of collaboration in the school. Therefore, teachers’ perception of a high level of collaboration has a direct, positive effect on their sense of personal accomplishment; conversely, if teachers perceive a low level of collaboration, their sense of personal accomplishment is low as well. In their study on why new teachers leave the profession, Karsenti and Collin (2013) concluded that, although their participants most often cited experienced colleagues as preferred contact persons for new teachers who experience burnout, “some respondents found that a lack of team spirit and time were obstacles to collegial support” (p. 146). Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2014) determined that one category of stress that improves Norwegian teachers’ job satisfaction is teamwork: “When teachers work in teams, they have to sacrifice part of their individual autonomy” (p. 189), which thereby leads to disagreements and frustration among teachers who feel that they cannot reach an agreement on their educational values or goals and are forced to work with teammates whom they have not chosen (p. 189).

Another conflict that can arise is the result of peer pressure from colleagues. The ATA’s (2012) case study on the work lives of Calgary teachers revealed that “teachers who do not
volunteer risk ‘losing face’ or being perceived as unwilling to do their part for the team” (p. 15). Peer pressure to take on extra work causes teachers to resent their high-performing colleagues (ATA, 2012). On a more positive note, Martin et al. (2012) found that a majority of their sample of Saskatchewan teachers believed that they received adequate support from their colleagues. However, “the perception of a lack of support from administrators is a significant problem as it has been linked to job dissatisfaction and turnover among teachers” (p. 17).

**Relationships with administrators.** The efficacy of a teaching staff and their ability to work together depend most on the functioning of the school leadership (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009). A lack of support and lack of trust—particularly with the principal—can cause teachers to feel that their concerns are not taken seriously and result in feelings of helplessness and vulnerability (Karsenti & Collin, 2013; Martin et al., 2012). Pyhalto et al.’s (2011) findings were similar and suggest that a poor work atmosphere with destructive friction and a lack of leadership can lead to exhaustion. When Karsenti and Collin asked new teachers why they hesitated to go to the administrators for support with problems, they cited the fear of appearing incompetent to their supervisors. Pyhalto et al.’s work supports this finding; they stated that “episodes that were experienced as burdening by the teachers typically included negotiations with pedagogically complex social events that have no clear-cut solution” (p. 1105). Similarly, Maslach et al. (2001) found that “a lack of support is linked to burnout. Lack of support from supervisors is especially important, even more so than support from coworkers” and that “a lack of feedback is consistently related to all three dimensions of burnout” (p. 407).

All of these relationships can have a significant impact on teachers’ stress and therefore increase their likelihood of burning out. The teachers in Pyhalto et al.’s (2011) study identified prolonged unresolved conflict with parents, students, colleagues, and the greater community as
the main causes of burnout. They suggested that these interactions create an environment that challenges their well-being. Alarcon (2011) agreed that the demands from the school environment play a prominent role in emotional exhaustion. To cope with multiple relationships, teachers might distance themselves from all relationships (depersonalization) except those required for student-teacher interactions to continue teaching (Chang, 2009).

However difficult these relationships might be, they can also be a source of support for teachers who experience burnout. Pyhalto et al. (2011) stated that “relationships were the sources of both emotional strains and rewards and sometimes they functioned as a resource for coping with stress” (p. 400). Emotional exchanges and support that make people feel that they are part of a team and positive relationships can moderate stress and burnout (Maslach et al., 2001). Maslach et al. suggested that, ultimately, “people thrive when they share praise, comfort, happiness, and humor with people they like and respect” and that “it is there that we begin to diminish burnout” (p. 415).

**Task-related stressors.** The second category of stressors is task related: the stressors that are specific to the task of teaching. I further explore the stressors in this category, which include workload, time pressure, teacher autonomy, and reward, in this section.

**Workload and time pressure.** The ATA (2012) found that teachers are increasingly being asked to do more with less and that “teachers are facing the toxic combination of an increase in responsibilities and a reduction in the supports and resource they need to meet those responsibilities” (p. 15). Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2014) concurred with these results and explained that workload and time pressure are exceedingly stressful for teachers and that teachers are asked to do too many tasks in a short amount of time. In addition to preparing and teaching lessons, the teachers in this study referred to many other tasks that they need to
accomplish in their day, such as attending staff and team meetings; photocopying; communicating with parents via e-mail, telephone, or in person; and communicating with special education services (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014). Droogenbroeck and Spruyt (2015) found that that “the scope of educational tasks with the larger society continues to broaden” (p. 98) and that the expectation is that not only does education educate students, but it has also become the solution to many social problems such as drug-abuse prevention, civic education, and health education. Martin et al. (2012) also found that teachers struggle to manage the increasing expectations of stakeholders.

In Skaalvik and Skaalvik’s (2009) study on teacher self-efficacy, they found a strong relationship between emotional exhaustion and time pressure on teachers. They described time pressure as “teachers’ feeling of having a heavy workload, having to prepare for teaching in the evenings and weekends, and having a hectic school day with little time for rest and recovery” (p. 1066). Maslach et al. (2001) also found that workload and time pressure are strongly correlated with burnout, particularly the emotional-exhaustion dimension. In their surveys of Canadian teachers, Martin et al. (2012) and Karsenti and Collin (2013) both reported that one of the main difficulties that teachers identified is the issue of increasing workloads and work-related stress, which therefore requires that they take their work home to complete. Martin et al. and the ATA (2012) both discovered that teachers are increasingly working well beyond the average 35-40–hour work week and are more realistically working an average of 50-55 hours per week. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2014) offered more evidence of the effect on workload and time pressure and reported that when teachers do not have increased support for students’ increased disruptive behaviour, conflict with colleagues, or their work with diverse classes, their workload and the pressure of time to complete it will likely increase. Lo (2014) further identified “a lack of
support, being unprepared and overwhelmed by job responsibilities and the sense of disempowered” (p. 1) as sources of stress in their study of the stress and burnout levels of special-needs teachers in Hong Kong.

**Teacher autonomy.** Maslach et al. (2001) stated that a lack of control or of job autonomy has a direct effect on people’s sense of accomplishment in their job. Any “mismatches in control most often indicate that individuals have insufficient control over the resources needed to do their work or have insufficient authority to pursue the work in what they believe is the most effective manner” (p. 414). They also found that being overwhelmed by responsibilities can lead to a crisis of control and workload. Fernet et al. (2012) found that “teachers who gradually find themselves as less autonomously motivated and efficacious in accomplishing their classroom tasks, even as they perceive greater pressure to do so, are more likely to be more exhausted at the end of the year” (p. 522). On the other hand, even though 87% of Martin et al.’s (2012) respondents believed that they had control over the decisions in their classrooms and 71% reported that they had control over decisions in their school, less than half (41%) felt that they had flexible jobs. Skaalvik and Skaalvik’s (2014) findings also demonstrate that teachers need flexibility in deciding when and where to prepare for teaching.

**Reward and recognition.** Everyone wants to be recognized for doing a good job, either with a monetary reward or social acknowledgement. Therefore, a discrepancy between the demands of a job and the reward or recognition for completing the job can understandably lead to stress and therefore increase the potential for burnout. Examples of inadequate reward and recognition are insufficient financial rewards such as salary and benefits or the lack of social rewards such as appreciation from administrators, parents, students, or colleagues (Maslach et al., 2001). Droogenbroeck et al.’s (2015) conclusion supported this finding; they reported that
“the high expectation of clients and their emotionally demanding work requires a lot of effort and might be perceived to be disproportionate to the available financial rewards, public esteem and career opportunities” (p. 89); Maslach et al. (2001) also recognized that a “lack of recognition devalues both the work and the workers” (p. 414).

Martin et al. (2012) surveyed 745 teachers and noted that 75% of their sample reported that they received adequate recognition from friends, family, colleagues, administrators, and students; however, 1 in 4 of the teachers did not believe that the administrators and students recognized them adequately for their contributions. The “teachers believe that key stakeholders are failing to value their professional contributions” (p. 17). Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2014) found similar results in that the teachers in their study believed that the parents in their school perceived them as having low status. For this reason, meetings with the parents became stressful events. The teachers also pointed to the “critical and negative references to teachers and schools in the media” (p. 186) as sources of stress.

Considering the link between task-related stressors and the dimensions of burnout, Demerouti et al. (2001) also found a link between emotional exhaustion and the task-related stressors of workload and time pressure; alternatively, they found that cynicism and depersonalization are more commonly linked with a lack of feedback, autonomy, support, and control in decision making.

Consequences and Implications

The consequences of burnout are as unique as the people who experience them. The literature provided a broad overview of the experience of burnout. However, as I previously stated, each individual’s experience differs. Martin et al. (2012) and Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2014) described the general categories as negative consequences of job burnout. They include
teachers’ health, job performance, and job satisfaction and the effect on teachers’ personal lives. The following is a brief description of some of the immediate consequences for teachers themselves; I then explore the implications of teacher burnout for students, the school, and society in general.

Mental health. A number of researchers who explored teachers’ job burnout described its effect on their mental health. The World Health Organization (2014) defined mental health as “a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community” (para. 1). Poor mental health makes a person less able to cope with these normal stresses, and he or she is no longer productive. It is widely known that teaching is an emotionally and physically exhausting profession. It is therefore not surprising that teachers can be more susceptible to eroding mental health. Maslach et al. (2001) explained that it is a common assumption that burnout can lead to poor mental health; however, they found that burnout can actually perpetuate the negative effects of burnout in terms of mental health, such as anxiety, depression, and lowered self-esteem, which suggests that “people who are mentally healthy are better able to cope with chronic stressors and thus are less likely to experience burnout” (p. 406). The ATA (2012) and Martin et al. (2012) gathered data that revealed a similar finding that teachers leave work feeling exhausted and overwhelmed, which begins to interfere with their daily work activities as well as their normal social activities. The ATA reported that the teachers in the study felt “guilty because they were unable to do any one facet of their work to the best of their ability” and that they felt “particularly troubled when the competing demands left them feeling that they had shortchanged their students” (p. 12).
Teachers believe that they can never do enough for their students, even when they suffer physically and mentally.

**Emotional regulation.** Much of the literature described the emotional labor in teaching as well as the necessity of regulating emotions in the classroom. Emotional work such as teaching requires that teachers display emotions that might be inconsistent with their feelings (Maslach et al., 2001). Chang (2009) stated that “teachers’ emotions change day by day, class by class, sometimes even moment by moment” (p. 203), because of the complexity of student-teacher relationships in addition to the necessity of regulating their emotions; teaching is not just about caring for students. The more that teachers care, the more angry and frustrated they might feel (Chang, 2009; Keller et al., 2014). When feelings of inadequacy, frustration, and anger as well as a sense of guilt accompany student misbehaviour, the stress can have a detrimental effect on teachers’ feeling adequate to perform their job (Collie et al., 2012; Keller et al., 2014; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014). Chang explained that “teachers also often feel burned out because of the extensive emotional labor they are engaged in to maintain student-teacher relationships” (p. 204) and that “teachers need to have a realistic understanding of how emotions are embedded in teaching and should abandon the view that unpleasant emotions are irrational or wrong in the classroom” (p. 212). Finally, Change emphasized that understanding the emotional aspects of teaching can improve the understanding of why teachers are emotionally exhausted. Keller et al. (2014) investigated the relevance and occurrence of teachers’ emotional experiences (enjoyment, anger, and frustration) and emotional labor in classroom situations and found that “teacher burnout is related to teachers’ emotional experiences, as well as the frequency with which teachers regulate their emotions” (p. 2). They discovered that the more emotionally exhausted teachers are, the less they enjoy their job. Pishghadam, Adamson, Sadaﬁan, and Kan (2014) also
reported that teachers who feel emotionally exhausted also feel the loss of a sense of accomplishment, which can also affect their teaching performance and satisfaction.

**Physical health.** In the literature I found limited exploration of the physical health consequences of burnout, possibly because it can be difficult to attribute physical health problems to burnout because of the multiple factors that can cause physical ailments. However, Martin et al. (2012), in their study of teachers in Saskatchewan, explored this more thoroughly through a survey. They found that more than 50% of their participants reported prevalent physical health complaints that included cold and flu, sleep problems, headache, sore throat, and back pain. Other common illnesses that the survey revealed were diseases of the digestive system, diseases of the nervous system, mental and behavioural disorders, and diseases of the musculoskeletal system and connective tissue. Once again, it is important to note that physical health complaints cannot be attributed solely to burnout, and further investigation is necessary to confirm their relationships.

Burnout can have a negative effect and tends to spill over into teachers’ home lives (Maslach et al., 2001). Martin et al. (2012) commented that

> the majority of our participants indicated that the demands of their work as teachers had a negative impact on their ability to pursue personal interests (78%), their family lives (69%), their relationship with their spouse or partner (64%) and friends (55%). (p. 20)

This further proves the propensity for burnout and its ability to affect other aspects of life.

**Implications for students, schools, and society.** One can assume that the largest effect of teacher burnout is its impact on students. Hoglund, Klingen, and Hosan (2015) explored teacher burnout and classroom quality in high-needs schools and how the interactions predict children’s social and academic adjustment. They determined that
when teachers feel overwhelmed by their work, they may unintentionally treat children with less importance; ... [therefore,] these teachers may be too emotionally depleted to form close bonds with children and fail to model for children how to form high quality friendships. (p. 340)

Hoglund et al. also proposed that “in classrooms where teachers are generally burned-out, children may also be uninterested in learning or unmotivated to participate in class activities because their teachers do not have the energy or passion to inspire their learning” (p. 340). Evers et al. (2004) analyzed students’ and teachers’ perceptions of teacher burnout in relation to experiences of student disruptions and the teacher’s ability to cope with interruptions and concluded that the students “perceived their teachers to be closer to burnout than the teachers themselves did” (p. 144). Therefore, one can assume that burnout has an effect on students’ relationships with their teachers. Brower and Tomic (2000) found that when teachers have no confidence in class management and do not react adequately to students’ misbehaviour, instructional time is lost for all students, and the teacher is likely to give up easily.

Shen et al. (2015) investigated the relationship between teachers’ burnout and students’ motivation in high school physical education. After interviewing 1,452 Grades 9 and 10 students and 33 physical education teachers, they found that the teachers’ lack of feeling and impersonal responses to their students damaged the students’ motivation to develop in physical education. They concluded that “as teacher burnout increases, both the thoroughness of classroom preparation and the involvement in classroom activities decline while student criticism increases” (p. 520). Therefore, it is understandable that Shen et al. found that students’ perceptions of their teacher, their reactions to the teacher, and their behaviour in the classroom changed. Overall, they determined that “teacher burnout reduces students’ intrinsic motivation, which may diminish learning and engagement” (p. 520). Further investigation of the
implications for student achievement might lead to improvement in teachers’ working conditions.

The effect of teacher burnout is not only limited to students in the classroom, but also has an effect on the educational system and society itself (Pishghadam et al., 2014). “Burnout can be contagious,” according to Maslach et al. (2001); “people who are experiencing burnout can have a negative effect on their colleagues, both by causing greater personal conflict and by disrupting job tasks” (p. 406). Olivier and Venter (2003) continued that, should teachers remain teaching even whilst they experience burnout, they can inadvertently harm their students and the school. This could have a snowball effect in which one person’s stress affects someone else’s stress, and the problem continues until everyone is affected. As I previously mentioned, students can be very perceptive of whether their teachers are mentally engaged in their job.

Teacher burnout has several effects on society. Burnout is associated with several forms of job withdrawal, including absenteeism, intention to leave, and turnover (Maslach et al., 2001). The more emotionally exhausted teachers are, the poorer their job performance and sense of accomplishment will be. Therefore, once teachers believe that the frustration and tension will not subside, they often choose to leave the job altogether (Swider & Zimmerman, 2010). According to Karsenti and Collin’s (2013) study of why new teachers leave the profession—because novice teachers who quit did not yet have an experienced skill level—they will then be required to hire more novice teachers, who then once again need to build their expertise, which will impact the quality of teaching that students receive. This puts the onus on the system to increase resources to enhance the expertise of new teachers. Chang (2009) noted that this constant turnover continues to harm the workforce because it negatively affects teacher attrition and can therefore create a shortage of teachers.
Coping strategies. In Skaalvik and Skaalvik’s (2014) analysis of teacher stress and coping strategies, they concluded that teachers’ coping strategies depend on the age of the teacher. They found that younger teachers (age 27-34) worked overtime to try to manage everything that was required of them, avoided sick leave, and sacrificed their social lives. This strategy did not work in the long run and reached a point at which young teachers’ ambition decreased, and they would do the bare minimum of work to survive. The second group was middle-aged teachers (35-50) who had high ambitions and worked overtime to prepare what they needed to teach. The difference between this group and the younger teachers is that the middle-aged teachers began to use sick leave as a self-protection strategy because they were no longer able to recover during weekends and vacations. This increased their motivation to leave the profession. The final group, senior teachers aged 51-63, actively used short-term sick leave as a means of escaping stress and the workload. They chose to reduce the number of hours that they worked; and, like their younger counterparts, their ambition decreased to meet the amount of time that they used to prepare for teaching.

These are all examples of maladaptive coping strategies that teachers use to alleviate work stress temporarily. Maslach et al. (2001) stated that “those who are burned-out cope with stressful events in a rather passive, defensive way, whereas active and confrontive coping is associated with less burnout” (p. 410). The difference between adaptive and maladaptive coping is that adaptive coping means actively confronting a problem or stress over time, whereas maladaptive coping is a passive, defensive way to alleviate the problem or stress temporarily. An example of a maladaptive coping strategy is multitasking.

Multitasking has become the norm in our society. According to the ATA (2012), multitasking is a widely used but ineffective maladaptive coping mechanism that teachers use to
cope with an increased workload. Technology has also exacerbated multitasking in that it has enabled teachers to be connected constantly and has therefore intensified their work as well as blurred the boundaries between work and home (ATA, 2012). Although multitasking has enabled teachers to do more with less time, it can actually be harmful to the learning, lesson planning, reflection, and metacognition needed to improve teachers’ effectiveness (ATA, 2012).

A second example of a maladaptive coping strategy is taking time away from work or taking sick leave. Martin et al. (2012) found that over 70% of their participants took anywhere from zero to five days a year off because of illness. Although the majority of the teachers surveyed reported having become ill because of work stress, less than 50% took time off to recover, and most felt that they did not have time to be ill and therefore continued to work even when they were sick. In other words, teachers need to take time off work to recover; however, it might mean more work for them and put a larger strain on their colleagues than to continue to work when they are sick and only ‘go through the motions.’ This can escalate to the point that teachers require extended sick leave to recover.

These maladaptive coping strategies point to a looming problem. Teachers do not have enough time to prepare everything that they want for their students, which might reduce the quality of their teaching. This brings up the question, “What can be done to support teachers to alleviate burnout?”

The Solution

The literature supported the need for more resources for teachers who experience burnout, but there was little agreement on a tested and tried, best intervention for teachers. There is also little research on what supports and interventions have been implemented to alleviate
teacher burnout, possibly because of the complexity of teacher burnout and its uniqueness to individual teachers.

People can learn new ways to cope with burnout, yet most times it can be a challenge to apply this new learning to their work environment (Maslach et al., 2001). According to Maslach et al., the most effective interventions are those that combine a change in teachers’ management of stress and the creation of new learning opportunities to further their development. They suggested that “one advantage of a combined managerial and educational approach to intervention is that it tends to emphasize building engagement at work” (p. 419) rather than reducing burnout (p. 419). However, Maslach et al. cautioned that, although developing individual coping skills can alleviate the emotional-exhaustion dimension of burnout, it does not alleviate the other two dimensions, depersonalization and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment.

Pyhalto et al.’s (2011) results suggest that teacher burnout is constructed in a complementary and contradictory work environment and that it is therefore important to help teachers and the teaching community to understand the importance of learning to identify the progression of burnout, the various stressors that impact teachers, and the type of work environment that fosters burnout. Okeke and Dlamini (2013) agreed and asserted that the ideal approach to alleviating teacher burnout is to better equip teachers with stress-coping strategies. Pyhalto et al. also commented that “the strategies designed to promote the teachers’ occupational well-being should take into account the dynamic, complex and nested nature of schools as a working environment” (p. 1108).

Chang (2009) shared a belief with the previous researchers that positive social supports for teachers will help them to learn positive coping strategies and give them opportunities to
interpret their emotions to react more appropriately to unpleasant emotions, create an adaptive response to work stress, and therefore alleviate burnout. Teachers can then be more proactive and adaptive to stressors and more engaged in teaching and a variety of relationships.

Skill development is imperative to cope with burnout. Giving teachers opportunities and time to develop their craft as teachers enables them to be more proactive to deal with situations that can increase the likelihood of burnout (Covell, McNeil, & Howe, 2009; Fernet et al., 2012; Hoglund, Klinge, & Hosan, 2015; Karsenti & Collin, 2013; Kim et al., 2009; Martin et al., 2012). Class management is a key example of a skill that can alleviate burnout. Developing skills in classroom management and enhancing their knowledge of the struggles that children face (such as disabilities, learning difficulties, behavioural issues, etc.) can help teachers to create better strategies to help their students if issues arise and consequently alleviate their own potential for stress (Martin et al., 2012).

Lo (2014) and Browers and Tomic (2000) both stressed that burnout interventions should help teachers to improve their resilience and sense of personal accomplishment in their work, because greater mastery in all domains of teaching (not only class management) better equips them to deal with all three dimensions of burnout, not just emotional exhaustion. Lo discussed other options for help than class management. She recommended that teachers be taught positive-thinking and adaptive-coping skills and how to build a positive and supportive school culture; that they be allowed to participate in key decisions on teaching; and, finally, that open lines of communication be created with all key stakeholders.

**Emotional support.** Personality traits are the determining factors for job burnout (Kim et al., 2009; Maslach et al., 2001; Swider & Zimmerman, 2010). Emotional support from mental
health professionals, colleagues, friends, spouses, family members, and school administrators is therefore a key intervention.

Ju et al. (2015) explored personal and environmental resources as possible mechanisms to manage burnout for teachers in mainland China. They confirmed a link between emotional intelligence, the potential for burnout, and the implementation of workplace social supports. Ju et al. illustrated the relational nature of teaching and concluded that teachers with higher emotional intelligence have more positive, supportive interactions with colleagues and administrators and therefore experience lower levels of burnout.

Lo’s (2014) results were similar, in that the mental health of teachers with a support system that includes psychological resources such as effective support and direct help is better than that of teachers with less social support.

Hoglund et al. (2015) explained that

ongoing collaborative work with mental health professionals (such as a school counselors) may also help to coach teachers in identifying and managing feelings of job-related burnout, identifying and supporting young children’s mental health needs and in supporting positive collaborative work between teachers and parents. (p. 353)

Collaboration among teachers, parents, students, and mental health professionals nurtures home-school collaboration with diverse families, which thus makes teachers more resilient when they are confronted by conflict. Martin et al. (2012) found similar results with regard to the benefits to teachers of support from mental health services to enhance their mental health and wellness. They, along with Karsenti and Collin (2013) and William (2012), emphasized the need for teachers to reduce their isolation from their colleagues by communicating more, receive more time to collaborate, and have opportunities for feedback.

**Support from administrators.** A common theme in the literature was support from the principal and administrators. “Principals can help teachers accomplish their work in different
ways” (Fernet et al., 2012, p. 517). Okeke and Dlamini (2013) affirmed the importance of administrators doing more to improve teachers’ workplace wellness by reducing their stress. The participants in the ATA’s (2012) study appreciated administrators who understand, are sensitive to teachers’ well-being, and act as buffers when unreasonable demands are made. “Strong support from the administrators has a supportive effect on the teachers” (Lo, 2014, p. 1).

Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2009) believed that, to minimize teacher-parent conflict, administrators should create a set of norms for parental involvement and clarify both teachers’ and parents’ responsibilities and expectations. They further noted that it is important that administrators decrease the time pressures on teachers, which is linked to the emotional-exhaustion dimension of burnout (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009).

Fernet et al. (2012) suggested that “principals who adopt autonomy-supportive behaviours can make themselves available to provide information, clarify ambiguities related to their role or tasks, respond to questions and offer assistance or guidance as needed” (p. 523). Furthermore, administrators “can foster a positive perception of resources by creating an autonomy-conducive environment, sharing information and acknowledging teachers’ contributions” (p. 523). The need to acknowledge teachers’ contributions was a key finding in Martin et al.’s (2012) survey of Saskatchewan teachers: “When teachers feel recognized and respected for their professional contributions, they are likely to feel more committed to their work, which may, in turn be linked with other positive outcome” (p. 17).

The creation of an online website for teachers and administrators to alleviate burnout will offer teachers the resources and support necessary to minimize their stress and give them an opportunity to connect with others who can support them in their time of stress. It will also give teachers knowledge to determine whether they are experiencing burnout; offer resources to
develop relationships with students, colleagues, and parents; develop their skills to manage their various teaching tasks; and, finally, connect them with community resources to support them as they work through their stress.
Chapter 3: Design Discussion

Teachers play such a valuable role in helping our children grow up that any opportunity to promote their physical and mental health should be seized. (Evers et al., 2004, p. 132)

Inspiration

During my upbringing in Calgary, it was not uncommon for my family to volunteer at local organizations. It was an important family value to give back to the community. It also developed my love for the charitable sector and all of the remarkable people who help local Calgarians. Therefore, when I started working in Calgary as a teacher, I was shocked at how little my fellow teachers knew about these wonderful organizations. It also made me wonder whether, if so few students are able to access the resources of the CBE specialist, it would make more sense to connect them with local organizations that could support them. This helped me to decide on the topic of my project: to connect Calgary teachers with local organizations. However, the more that I researched organizations, the more that I realized how difficult it would be to narrow down my research because of the hundreds of organizations. If my project was too broad, it would not be feasible to include all of these organizations and create a useful resource. This forced me to narrow it down to organizations that deal with student learning and special needs. As I contemplated this decision, I thought of my own class. I teach in a French immersion program in an upper-middle-class neighbourhood in Calgary, and it occurred to me that, although it would benefit schools with higher populations of special-needs students, it would not be as useful for all teachers in Calgary. Once again I narrowed down the list to organizations that teachers could access to support their teaching. I wondered what resources would be useful to all teachers in Calgary regardless of grade, subject, or neighbourhood that would enable teachers to engage with local organizations. Then it came to me.
As I mentioned in chapter 1, my class last year was ‘one of those classes’—the type that makes you question why you would want to continue to teach. After months of leaving the school in tears, during an evaluation in March my administrator noticed my struggles and informed me that I had done everything that I could and that it was time to ask for help. I realized that had I not had the evaluation and received the support I needed, I might not be a teacher today. It also made me realize how little I knew about what do when I experienced burnout and that other teachers are facing the same thing. After discussions with my fellow masters students last summer, I realized that this project could connect my two passions, teaching and the not-for-profit sector.

**Design Process**

The main objective of this design project was to create a website that would help teachers in the Calgary area to connect with local organizations and additional resources that could help them to understand burnout, identify the potential stressors that teachers face on a day-to-day basis, and learn how to take care of themselves to alleviate the stress and eliminate their potential for burnout. I believe that teachers have a passion for teaching and that they would choose to continue to teach if they knew that support would be available should stress arise. I then began to wonder whether, if teachers could find all of the resources available to them through work or in their local community at a single location, they would be able to cope more proactively with their stress and therefore alleviate the potential for burnout. Would it be possible for such a website to help teachers enough and encourage them to seek help when they needed it?

Beginning my literature review was overwhelming. With thousands of articles that all dealt with job burnout, I quickly realized that I would have to narrow down my search parameters and focus. I decided to look at articles that dealt specifically with teachers and job
burnout. As I read the articles, I found that the same researchers kept appearing: Christina Maslach, Wilmar B. Schaufeli, and Michael P. Leiter. Most of the articles that I read referred to their work on burnout and their article “Job Burnout,” which became the basis for my literature review. Maslach et al. (2001) seemed to be the only researchers who condensed and organized all of the previous 25 years of research. They are also the creators of the Maslach Burnout Inventory, which is a key tool to identify burnout.

Overall, the literature that I found in my review strongly suggested that teacher are increasingly being asked to do more with fewer resources and less support. I know personally that the expectations of the curriculum, administrators, parents, and students can be exhausting. In addition to planning and preparing for a day of teaching, teachers answer e-mails, return telephone calls, dealing with students’ and parents’, plan field trips and school activities, and attend meetings.

My research also strongly affirmed the importance of supporting teachers who are experiencing burnout. This is especially true with regard to support from the administrators of the school. Fernet et al. (2012), Okeke and Dlamini (2013), and the ATA (2012) all agreed on the importance of support from administrators as a key buffer to reduce workplace stress. When I experienced burnout, my principal and assistant principal supported me and gave me the time, resources, and general support that I needed to move successfully back into my classroom.

Ultimately, the literature pointed to the same conclusion: that to keep teachers from experiencing burnout, it is necessary to support them emotionally, teach them to manage their stress proactively, and offer them opportunities to further their development as educators. Pyhalto et al. (2011) stressed the importance of ensuring that the strategies that are being
designed to promote teacher wellness also take into account the complexity of the school environment.

**Design Approach**

My approach to designing this website involved creating a user-friendly website that would take into account all of the dimensions of burnout. Knowing that the first dimension and most obvious symptom of burnout is emotional exhaustion, I wanted to ensure that I condensed all of the information and explained it in a simple manner so that someone who is exhausted would be able and motivated to explore the resources. I also wanted to ensure that teachers would be able to identify the overall theme of each resource before they decided to further explore or reach out to an organization. In the second dimension, depersonalization and cynicism, teachers isolate themselves from others as a form of self-preservation. Assisting them with connecting with local organizations to either help themselves or support their work will make them feel less isolated and therefore better able to tackle their stressor head-on. The final dimension of burnout is a reduced sense of personal accomplishment. Many people, when they are able to make small changes to tackle their stress and regain control of their lives, will begin to feel a sense of accomplishment again and motivated again.

**Website Creation**

This brought me to my journey of creating this website. I began by looking for information on the CBE *Staff Insite* on resources available to teachers who are experiencing burnout. After hours of searching, I found nothing. I then accessed the ATA website, where once again I found limited information on supports available to teachers. I began to wonder, When teachers experience burnout and cannot find support, what do they do?
After more discussions and exploration, I discovered the Employee Health Resource Center, which is offered through the CBE. This resource center offers resources such as counselling, wellness seminars, and referral services. I then asked at my school, but no one had heard of this resource center and the resources it offered. I wondered, if no one knows about it, what help is it? I also thought, if teachers experience burnout, would they be willing to seek support from their employer, or would they worry that their administrator would find out and deem them incompetent? This reminded me of the vulnerability of teachers who need support and the fact that few teachers would feel comfortable in taking a resource guide from the resource library. Realizing the complexity of burnout and the vulnerability of its sufferers, I wanted to ensure that I created a resource that teachers could assess anonymously and that would connect them with resources available through the CBE as well as in the community and online.

A website seemed to be the most appropriate platform for this resource because it is easy to keep up to date, and it is accessible to teachers from anywhere. A website also seemed the most appropriate choice because it could connect teachers to Web resources as well. I chose to create my website using WIX, which is user friendly and has the templates of sites already created.

In building my site, I knew that it was important that the website be user friendly, simple, and concise. I also wanted to promote hope and wellness and not overwhelm teachers with the ‘doom and gloom’ of burnout. However, it is important that teachers be able to identify what they are experiencing and that they know that they are not alone in this experience.

#TeacherWellnessYYC (2017) connects teachers with local organizations in Calgary that can offer support, as well as a curated library of articles, books, websites, apps, and videos to alleviate burnout. It is important that teachers realize that this website is not intended to replace
medical care or counseling; nor is it a definitive resource to diagnose burnout. It is meant to educate teachers on the resources available to them.

**Content Overview**

#TeacherWellnessYYC (2017) mission appears below the title of the website:

“Connecting teachers with resources to improve wellness and alleviate burnout.” The navigation bar at the top of the page has the following tabs: Home, What Is Burnout? Review of the Literature, and Resource Collection.

The Home page informs users on what they will find on the site and the importance of supporting teachers who are experiencing burnout and offers a collection of my personal experiences to demonstrate that burnout is a universal experience.

When I created this website, I had two potential users in mind: (a) teachers who are experiencing burnout and (b) the academic community who would examine this project that I developed to fulfill the requirements of my Master of Educational Leadership degree. It was therefore important that the website be simple and concise and have the academic background and substance necessary to satisfy both types of users. For this reason, I created the two different tabs, What Is Burnout? and Review of the Literature. The What Is Burnout? tab offers teachers background information on burnout, the common stressors specific to teachers, a description of the dimensions of burnout, and a discussion of the stigma associated with burnout.

The Review of the Literature offers a more academic perspective on teacher burnout and draws on the literature and research in the field of burnout.

The heart of this site, however, is the resources. The final tab, Resource Collection, links users to three subpages called Services Offered by the CBE, Community Resources, and Full Collection. The Services Offered by the CBE tab is an overview of the resources available to
teachers who work for the CBE, as well as where on the *Staff Insite* they can find more information. The Community Resources tab is a curated collection of not-for-profit organizations in Calgary that can be resources for teachers who experience burnout. Users will find each organization’s contact information, including website, telephone number, and e-mail address; a brief discussion of what the organization does; and an icon to indicate the best way to utilize the resource. Once again, I tried to make it as easy as possible to best utilize these organizations. I also wanted to ensure that I gave users as much information as possible to search the organizations if the Web links change.

The final section within the Resources Collection is the Full Collection tab. This section informs users on an icon system of general themes in the resource. Of the four icons in this section, two are linked to the two major areas of stress, relationships and task-related stress; and the other two are related to general mental health resources, as well as inspiration. I believed that it was important to include a section of resources on inspiration because burnout diminishes the sense of accomplishment. Therefore, it re-inspires teachers; demonstrates that, in the long run, they will be successful; reminds them of the reason that they became teachers; and encourages them to continue teaching. Some of the types of resources found in this section are videos, articles, websites, apps, and books. I purposefully limited the length and types of resources to videos under 20 minutes, articles that can be read in under 30 minutes, and books under 200 pages.

I designed #TeacherWellnessYYC (2017) to support the well-being of teachers who are experiencing burnout. Because teachers face many expectations that become more and more demanding, their stress increases as well. Evers et al. (2004) stated it best: “Students need mentally and physically fit adults who can guide them as they find their way in the world”
(p. 132). This statement rings true in that, for teachers to teach to the best of their ability, they need to be mentally and physically fit. I therefore hope that this website will offer teachers the resources necessary for them to regain control and reignite their passion for teaching.
Chapter 4: Design: Website

Refer to #TeacherWellnessYYC (2017) for the completed website. The following screen shots (Figures 1-11) illustrate the content of the website. Chapter 3 contains further descriptions of each page, its contents, and the considerations that I took in creating the website. Figure 1 is the Home page.

Figure 1. Page 1 of the #TeacherWellnessYYC website.
The What is Burnout? page (Figure 2) describes burnout, the common stressors that affect teachers, and the dimensions of burnout and includes a brief discussion of the stigma associated with burnout.

Figure 2. Page 2 of the #TeacherWellnessYYC website.
The Review of Literature page (Figure 3) presents an analysis and synthesis of the literature on burnout.

**Figure 3.** Page 3 of the #TeacherWellnessYYC website.
The Resource Collection page (Figure 4) is an overview of the three types of resources available on #TeacherWellnessYYC.

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*Figure 4. Page 4 of the #TeacherWellnessYYC website.*
The Services Offered by the CBE page (Figure 5) is an overview of the resources available to teachers who work for the CBE.

![#TeacherWellnessYYC](image)

*Figure 5. Page 5 of the #TeacherWellnessYYC website.*
The Community Resources page (Figure 6) is a collection of 30 organizations in Calgary that can help teachers.

Figure 6. Page 6 of the #TeacherWellnessYYC website.
The Full Collection page (Figure 7) is an introduction to the online resource collection available at #TeacherWellnessYYC. It includes videos, articles, websites and apps as well as books. This page also describes the icons next to each resource to give users an idea of the general themes in the resource.

![Figure 7. Page 7 of the #TeacherWellnessYYC website.](image)
The Video page (Figure 8) is a collection of over 20 videos ranging from inspirational Ted Talks to meditation videos.

*Figure 8. Page 8 of the #TeacherWellnessYYC website.*
The Articles page (Figure 9) is a collection of articles on a range of topics from relationship building to tips to alleviate burnout.

**10 Burnout Proof Tips For Teachers**

By: Emily Liscom

Website: [http://educationtothecore.com/2017/01/10-burnout-proof-tips-for-teachers/](http://educationtothecore.com/2017/01/10-burnout-proof-tips-for-teachers/)

**About This Article:**
These 10 tips on how to avoid burnout provide teachers with small changes that can make now that will help them avoid burnout in the future. Favorite tips include: Taking time for you, leaving work at work and the importance of sleep and nutrition.
The Websites and Apps page (Figure 10) connects teachers to other Web resources that they might find useful.

![Image of #TeacherWellnessYYC website](Image)

**Figure 10.** Page 10 of the #TeacherWellnessYYC website.
The Books page (Figure 11) lists three titles of books under 200 pages that teachers might find helpful on their journey to wellness.

**The Gift of Imperfection**

By: Brene Brown

Available at Chapters or Amazon

**About This Book:**

New York Times best-selling author and professor Brene Brown offers a powerful and inspiring book that explores how to cultivate the courage, compassion, and connection to embrace your imperfections and to recognize that you are enough.

Each day we face a barrage of images and messages from society and the media telling us who, what, and how we should be. We are led to believe that if we could only look perfect and lead perfect lives, we’d no longer feel inadequate. So most of us perform, please, and perfect, all the while thinking, What if I can’t keep all of these balls in the air? Why isn’t everyone else working harder and living up to my expectations? What will people think if I fail or give up? When can I stop proving myself? In The Gifts of Imperfection, Brené Brown, PhD, a leading expert on shame, authenticity and belonging, shares what she’s learned from a decade of research on the power of Wholehearted Living—a way of engaging with the world from a place of worthiness. In her ten guideposts, Brown engages our minds, hearts, and spirits as she explores how we can cultivate the courage, compassion, and connection to wake up in the morning and think, No matter what gets done and how much is left undone, I am enough, and to go to bed at night thinking, Yes, I am sometimes afraid, but I am also brave. And, yes, I am imperfect and vulnerable, but that doesn’t change the truth that I am worthy of love and belonging.

**The Power of Teacher**

By: Adam Saenz

Available on Amazon

**About this Book:**

Remember? You went into education to make a difference! Whether you are searching for a reason to believe or you just need a hope-filled reminder, the bottom line is that you do...
Chapter 5: Summary and Conclusion

Summary

It is not uncommon today to see headlines in the newspaper on the increasing number of teachers who are leaving teaching because of burnout. However, as Martin et al.’s (2012) survey of teachers in Saskatchewan and Karsenti and Collin’s (2013) survey of teachers across Canada show, teachers left the profession, not because of a lack of passion, but as a result of the stress from a wide variety of sources that caused them to decide that the positive aspects of teaching do not outweigh the negative. It is important to keep teachers in the classroom because the longer they teach, the higher the quality of their teaching. The more experience that they have with different students and the more professional development opportunities that they receive, the more that they develop their pedagogy, which in turn has a positive effect on student achievement. Teachers who burn out are less engaged with their classes, are less motivated to develop their skills as educators, and take more time off from their classrooms, which negatively affects student engagement and achievement.

As someone who has experienced burnout, I have an understanding of the feeling of being emotionally exhausted, slowly pushing the students, parents and colleagues away and ending the day feeling as though nothing was accomplished. However, it was apparent that what saved me was the support I received from my principal and assistant principal. It was also through my research for this thesis, that helped me to understand what I was going through and helped me realize that it was not that I was incompetent at teaching, it was the fact the stress had escalated to the point where I was unable to recover.

The #TeacherWellnessYYC (2017) website supports Calgary teachers who experience burnout by giving them information on it and connecting them with a full resource collection,
including a list of resources available to teachers through the CBE, a directory of 25
organizations in Calgary for teachers, and a resource library that offers access to articles, videos,
books, and websites curated to support teachers who experience burnout. This support will help
to improve the wellness of not only teachers who are facing burnout, but also teachers who are
on the verge of burnout.

**Suggestions for Further Development**

Burnout affects veteran and novice teachers alike. It is not uncommon in staff rooms, on
teachers’ blogs, in Facebook groups, and in other form of media to see conversations about the
stressors and difficulties that teachers face daily. #TeacherWellnessYYC (2017) shifts the
conversation from negativity and complaining towards a more positive, open conversation about
the realities of burnout and resources that can help to change this experience. I hope that, at the
very least, this project will serve as an information hub for Calgary teachers to educate
themselves on burnout and learn where they can find support.

My goal is for the Education Health Resource Center at the CBE to connect teachers with
this website as a resource made by a teacher for teachers. Every school in Calgary will post
information on my website in their staff rooms, and the link on the Staff Insite will ensure that
teachers do not have to search for this information as they do now. Furthermore, I hope to create
workshops for teachers to give them information on burnout and how to access
#TeacherWellnessYYC, but they will also be able to connect with each other, talk openly about
their stress, and create a support network. The creation of open dialogue on burnout in education
will make teachers more willing to seek help before their stress becomes overwhelming, and it
will remove the stigma associated with burnout.
Limitations

The primary goal of this design project is to connect teachers with resources to alleviate burnout. In my opinion, the most significant challenge that teachers face is understanding that they are experiencing burnout and knowing where to access help to alleviate the stress and diminish their potential for burnout. Identifying burnout can be difficult because it manifests in a variety of ways unique to each individual. Because one of the key dimensions of burnout is depersonalization, individuals become isolated from others, and it is therefore more difficult for their colleagues or school administrators to identify their experience of burnout.

Finally, I believe that the biggest challenge with regard to burnout is the stigma attached to it. As with any mental illness, the less open the discussion on burnout, the more stigma that is attached to it. If teachers know that they can discuss their struggle with their administrators or colleagues and admit that they need support without fear of retribution or being labelled as incompetent, then perhaps they will come forward and take the necessary time to recover earlier rather than at their breaking point.

A challenge with my project itself is that the community and school board resources are specific to teachers who work for the CBE and therefore might not be as useful to teachers outside the Calgary area.

Final Thoughts

As a teacher researcher, I have become more aware of the implications of burnout and the resources available to teachers. I hope to expand my research and explore what deters teachers from accessing resources to alleviate burnout, what administrators of schools or districts can do to assist teachers who experience burnout, and what can be done to limit teachers’ stress.
As an aspiring leader in education, I have learned the importance of teacher wellness and ensuring that teachers feel supported and trust their leaders. This is important, because when teachers know that they can discuss a situation before their stress reaches a breaking point, they can take proactive measures to alleviate and manage the stress appropriately. In doing so, teachers will be able to spend more time in their classrooms, develop their skills as educators, and manage their stress in a proactive and healthy way. In the long run students will receive better-quality education from teachers who are devoted to their work, who are masters of teaching, and who are there because of their passion for their work. Happy and healthy teachers result in happy and healthy students.

“Teaching offers opportunities to feel closeness and intimacy in student and colleague relationships, which in turn offers opportunities for many pleasant emotional experiences such as passion, excitement, joy pride and hope” (Chang, 2009, p. 203). In times of stress teachers need to be reminded of the reason that they chose to teach in the first place. When I graduated with my Bachelor of Education degree, a friend bought me a book called Things My Kids Say in which I can write memorable quotations or stories that children have told me. When I feel down or wonder What am I doing? I open my book and read the stories and memories that remind me why I chose to become a teacher. Some of the memories include a student who sounded out a word for the first time. I saw the pure joy on his face as he said, “Look, Madame Anna, I’m reading!” Another example is a student who told me that the fastest animal in Africa is the cantaloupe. In addition, a parent sent an e-mail to my principal to tell her that I had made a great impact on her daughter’s life and that she appreciated the work that I had done for her child. These moments remind me why I chose teaching as a profession.
I believe that the hardest decision for teachers with regard to burnout is admitting that they need help and taking a leap of faith to seek it. When I completed my summer session at VIU for my Master of Educational Leadership degree, my cohort camped on Hornby Island and participated in a high-ropes course. For an obstacle called the Leap of Faith, we climbed a telephone pole (wearing a safety harness), regained our balance at the top, and jumped into the air to grab a trapeze a few feet away. This reminded me that wellness is much like the Leap of Faith: having the courage and support to climb a rickety telephone pole in the rain and trusting that, regardless of whether or not we grabbed the trapeze, we would not crash to the ground.

With burnout, teachers sometimes need to take a leap of faith rather than quitting and seeking a new profession. They need to identify their stressors and have the resources or tools at hand to help them to do what they need to do, supporters to cheer them on, the courage to keep going even when they do not think that they can succeed, and the confidence to trust that they will not fall. This is wellness: It is taking back control and making a plan to move forward.

As a teacher still at the beginning of my career, I know that I will have a long and fulfilling career in education because I have learned the importance of taking care of myself first to take better care of my students. I know where to access support and understand that it is acceptable to struggle at times. I also understand the importance of strong relationships with my colleagues and administrator, who can be significant sources of support in times of need. Finally, I know that when I become a principal, I will ensure that the teachers feel supported and not ashamed to take a ‘mental health day’ if they need it, because in the long run it will be in their own and their students’ best interests.
# References


