

Good Bye Burnout, Hello Me:  
Individual strategies of self-care among  
Saskatchewan teachers

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## ABSTRACT

Teachers with less than five years teaching experience have a high attrition rate. This high rate has financial, organizational and instructional consequences, such as school divisions that must recruit and train replacements, and students who lose the value of being taught by teachers who have gained experience in the profession. Self-care is a factor that curbs attrition, however, little is known about the personal and professional strategies of self-care for teachers. The Delphi method was used to identify and understand the self-care strategies used by Saskatchewan schoolteachers. Fourteen participants with five or more years of teaching experience and from nine different school divisions in Saskatchewan contributed to the study. Each participant responded through two rounds of online questionnaires about his or her self-care practices. Self-care is associated with well-being and it is the individual teacher that can take steps to cultivate and maintain personal health. Data were analyzed using SurveyMonkey and NVivo 9 qualitative analysis software programs, and Skovholt's theoretical model of self; strategies and themes were identified. A visual representation of participant's responses was developed. The most common self-care strategies identified were talking with friends and family, healthy eating, discussing events from the classroom with support system at school, drinking water, and volunteering. The findings are described alongside implications for teachers and other helping professionals as well as future research.

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## DEDICATION

Krista. Our work was laid out before us day after day. Missing daylight, relationship, and laughter we preserved. In every intolerable winter lies an invincible summer and I look forward to playing amongst the sunbeams with you once again.

To Boyd and Alice, thank you for your unconditional love and support. Your modeling of hard work and dedication influenced me greatly to set goals and exceed them in life, and thus, I am the person I am today because of both of you.

Lastly, this is dedicated to the teachers. The 70 hour a week, putting their students ahead of themselves, for minimal pay and ever-eroding respect. I am honoured to be surrounded by such professionals.

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## CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

Teaching has traditionally been characterized as an occupation with high levels of teacher turnover and attrition (Ingersoll, 2003). Some critics even view teaching as an occupation that “cannibalizes its young” and suggest the initiation of new teachers is akin to a “sink or swim,” “trial by fire”, or “boot camp” experience (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004, p. 682). All occupations experience some loss of new and experienced employees; newcomers decide not to remain, a number decide they are unsuitable, and others who have worked diligently for many years retire. Researchers hold that teaching has had high rates of attrition for decades. Some reports estimate that 50% of beginning teachers in the United States who have entered the profession, leave within the first five years (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004; Ingersoll, 2003). Nearly one-third of new teachers leave the field within the first three years (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003), 16 % leave after completing their first year (Kirby, Berends, & Haftalet, 1999), and 10% do not even complete their first year of teaching. This evidence makes universities, school divisions, school administrators and teachers wonder how to curb educational turnover and attrition.

Several studies have found a significant correlation between teachers' likelihood of retention, and their stress and burnout levels (Kyriacou, 2001; Wilhelm, Dewhurst-Savellis, & Parker, 2000). Much of this literature links teacher stress with the tension, frustration, anxiety, anger, and depression associated with teaching. Demands are made for teachers to contribute to the academic, social and emotional wellbeing of pupils (Day & Qing, 2009). With continuing challenging behaviors from students, government expectations of results driven performance, broadened physical work environments, and inclusive expectations (Hakanen, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2006), teacher wellbeing is negatively affected. These

challenges affect teachers in all countries. The work of teachers is intensive and has become more demanding (e.g., aggressively changing curriculum, government expectations, challenging students, and inclusive work environments) (Day & Qing, 2009). The consequence of these changes has made teaching in the twenty-first century one of the most stressful professions (Kyriacou, 2000), which, in turn, contributes to the negative wellbeing of educators and affects attrition rates.

Stress and burnout are increasingly prevalent in teachers and have been linked to a number of social, psychological, and physiological problems (Kyriacou, 2001). These problems may include the following: unpleasant and negative emotions such as anger, anxiety, tension, frustration or depression; detachment from relationships; use of substances; exhaustion; obesity or poor appetite; poor psychological and physiological wellbeing, and premature death (Kyriacou, 2001). Research on teacher stress and burnout has become a provocative area in international research. Studies have examined physical and mental pressure (Pithers & Soden, 2002), anxiety (Wilhelm et al., 2000), teacher turnover (Ingersol, 2001), and attrition (Brown & Wynn, 2009).

It is important that governments, teacher educators, school divisions, and principals attend to teachers' wellbeing, but individual teachers can make a difference too. One way to stop stress and burnout is to focus on the role of positive emotions that are associated with self-care. By focusing on the effect of positive emotions, one builds emotional resources, (Day & Qing, 2009), which ideally curbs teacher turnover and attrition (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). Teacher wellbeing is a necessary ingredient for teacher effectiveness and job retention (Day & Qing, 2009). Positive wellbeing sustains teachers' positive qualities and strengths, sustains concern for students, sustains motivation, commitment, and the

ability to continue to give their best in the profession, despite challenges and setbacks. Self-care is associated with wellbeing; with self-care strategies that involve relationships, relaxation, physical exercise, spirituality, and humor, teachers are better able to continue to be passionate about their vocation and lead generations of students with compassionate and altruistic motives.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to investigate self-care strategies used by Saskatchewan teachers. Specific attention was given to:

- organizing an expert panel of teachers;
- identifying self-care strategies used in teacher's daily and weekly lives;
- understanding how self-care affects teachers in their personal and professional lives.

Potentially, these self-care strategies will improve teacher retention and open the door for further research. By understanding teacher self-care, we can demystify what individuals can do to reduce stress and burnout in their lives. These practices can help inform and shape both an individual's wellbeing, and direct universities and school divisions in combatting stress and burnout in the workplace.

### **Context of Study**

Therapists have long advocated the essential need for self-care in our daily lives; they maintain that we lack the ability to help others if we do not first, help ourselves (Canadian Psychological Association, CPA, 2001). Research on teacher self-care in education has been ongoing for some time but it has not been until recently that the topic of emotional labor (i.e., effort, planning, and control teachers need to produce organizationally appropriate emotions) in teaching has been considered (Schutz &

Zembylas, 2009). Studying teachers from their personal point of view has become increasingly important, not only because of the growing number of teachers leaving the profession, but also because of unpleasant classroom emotions, uncomfortable school climates, and the quality of education in general (Hargreaves, 1995). Research has been done, and continues to be done, about the steps universities, school divisions, and individual schools can take to better equip teachers (Chapman & Green, 1986; Passow, 1988). However, little has been written about what teachers can do personally and I was unable to identify studies that focused on specific teacher self-care strategies.

Individual self-care is associated with wellbeing (Hansson, Hilleras, & Forsell, 2005a; Bowling & Farquhar, 1996; Hilleras, Auguero-Torres, & Winblad, 2001). An excellent way to combat feelings of stress and burnout is to engage in self-care activities. Hansson et al. (2005a) suggested that future research in coping strategies and self-care should be completed. Teachers need to begin to help themselves. Through engaging in conscious self-care practices, perhaps we can begin to fix some of the problems that plague the profession of education.

### **Significance of Study**

The present study offers an original contribution to theory and research in the following ways:

1. A great deal has been written about stress and attrition in the context of teachers teaching. However, much of what has been written is from outside of Canada and from the perspective of schools and school divisions. This study contributed to the wider body of literature on stress and attrition, but more specifically to an emerging focus on the teacher as a target of stress and an agent of change.

2. This study offered schoolteachers an opportunity to voice their experiences. “One must listen to the voice of the teacher, to the person it expresses and the purposes it articulates” (Hargreaves, 1992, p. 11). Failure to understand the teacher’s voice is a failure to understand their responses to stress and attrition.

### **Definition of Terms**

For the purpose of clarity, the following terms are presented and defined as they are used in the thesis.

**Self-care.** The word self-care suggests the helping of the individual. Skovholt (2001) described it as “finding ways to replenish the self. The result is more important than the method. The point here is to find ways to produce constant self-renewal” (p. 147). As Bickley (1998) elaborated, there are steps taken to preserve and maintain personal health; self-care is a deliberate response to stress. Individuals who engage in self-care are able to provide compassionate and effective care to others without being overwhelmed. Self-care is associated with wellbeing and includes, but is not limited to, having significant relationships, a balance of work and play, exercise, sufficient sleep and rest, sound intellectual emotional and spiritual experiences, and healthy eating habits.

**Stress.** Stress can be described as a state of emotional or mental strain or tension resulting from very demanding circumstances. Greenberg (1984) defined stress as follows: “physical, mental, or emotional reaction resulting from an individual’s response to environmental tensions, conflicts, pressures, and other stimuli” (p. 2). In the context of the proposed study, stress is a result of increasing teacher workplace demands.

**Burnout.** Burnout, that is, “excessive and repeated exposure to stress, without effective self-care” (Bickley, 1998, p. 115), is an evolution of the original definition by

founder Freudenberger (1974), who defined it as follows: “to fail, wear out or become exhausted by making excessive demands on energy, strength, or resources” (p. 159). In regard to teachers, burnout is the beginning of a psychological problem occurring as a result of chronic work stress.

**Attrition.** Attrition refers to the phenomenon of teachers leaving the teaching profession (Ingersoll, 2001). Leaving the occupation of teaching can be voluntary or involuntary.

**Well-being.** Well-being is both a psychological and social construct defined by Day and Qing (2009) as a “dynamic state, in which the individual is able to develop their potential, work productively and creatively, build strong and positive relationships with others, and contribute to their community” (p. 15).

**Emotional labor.** The emotional nature of the teaching profession. Schutz and Zembylas (2009) defined emotional labor as, “the effort, planning, and control teachers need to express organizationally desired emotions during interpersonal transactions” (pg. 3).

### **Organization of Thesis**

The current qualitative study has been organized into five chapters. Chapter One introduced the study and briefly summarized the research question. Chapter Two presents the main points of past research within a literature review. Chapter Three outlines the Delphi methodology and its use within the study. Chapter Four shows the results from the study. Finally, the discussion, Chapter Five, concludes with a comparison of results from the study and past findings.



## **CHAPTER TWO: Literature Review**

This chapter reviews the literature on stress and burnout in the profession of teaching, self-care, and the association of wellbeing with self-care. The first section presents literature on stress and burnout in teachers. Topics covered include the history of educational research and current ideas and problems with teacher stress and burnout. The second section addresses self-care from the perspective of Skovholt (2001), who argued that the self is composed of twelve parts and briefly explores self-care from a historical First Nations perspective. The third section provides a general review of self-care and its association with wellbeing. Statistics are used to argue the importance of exploring self-care, in order to reduce stress and burnout.

### **Stress and Burnout in Teachers**

Since the 1960's when a series of autobiographical accounts of stressed-out teachers first sparked public interest in education and the problems of teachers, stress and burnout has been a part of the culture of education (Farber, 1991). Even as far back as 1954 with Arendt's "Crisis in Education" we get glimpses of problems with our education system and the struggles of teachers that work within these systems. Arendt (1954) argued that the system itself is responsible for too much and it is inevitable that children, teachers, and the world as a whole will suffer without more support.

In the early 1970's authors knew that teacher stress and burnout were not a new phenomena. By 1974, journal articles on the topic of stress and education were very common (Greenberg, 1984). Dr. Hans Sale, president of the International Institute of Stress, and one of the leaders in stress research, has conducted experiments and written about stress for almost 40 years prior.

The 1980's welcomed a plethora of research about teacher stress and burnout. Sarson (1982) said, "to be an effective, let alone outstanding, teacher...has become more problematic than ever before" (p. 213). Sarson (1982) observed, "The phenomena that are so troublesome about schools today were not created yesterday, or last year, or a decade ago, but rather are the latest eruptions and disruptions that have long characterized schools in our social history" (p. 209). In a study completed by Dworkin (1980) in which he surveyed 3,549 active teachers in the United States, an astounding 61.1 % were thinking about quitting teaching; he argued the factors that make the career of teaching unrewarding include culture shock – when a teacher's background does not match that of his/her students, low pay, excessive duties and responsibilities, and difficulties with administrators. Other researchers in the 1980's indicated other contributions to teacher stress, such as larger school systems, increased paper work, layers of bureaucracy and students' rights (Sarson, 1982; Sakharov, 1983; Forman, 1982).

In the 1990's Farber (1991) suggested that students no longer respect teachers like they did in the 1950's. According to Farber (1991) this was just one of the reasons teachers burn out at an alarming rate. In 1993, Gold and Roth alluded to the prevalence of stress, decline in morale of teachers, and teachers leaving or intending to leave the profession due to the problems with the profession. They argued that teaching is one of the most stressful occupations, ranked above air traffic controller, medical intern and firefighter. Gold and Roth (1993) even pointed to research done by Bloch (1978), who said that many teachers are being treated for the same symptoms soldiers in combat are likely to experience. According to Gold and Roth (1993) teachers face a barrage of daily dangerous threats to their physical, emotional, and intellectual welfare, which leads to inevitably high rates of

burnout and stress. Teaching involves “intensive personal interactions, often in crowded conditions, with large numbers of pupils who are frequently energetic, spontaneous, immature and preoccupied with their own interests” (Nias 1996: p. 296). In an attrition study conducted with 2,327 American elementary teachers in 1996, Adams, King, and King found that 25 percent of teachers would leave teaching before they reach retirement. This alarming statistic showed how volatile the profession of teaching was in the 1990’s with one-quarter of the study’s respondents leaving teaching. Kirby, Berend, and Naftel’s (1999) research mirrored that of Adams, King and King (1996) who reported that approximately 16% of those who entered teaching left the public school system within their first year, and 26% left within two years; teacher stress and burnout were the focal point of such high attrition. A great deal of work in the area of stress and burnout had been done by researchers in the 1990’s, and by this point the general public had now become very aware of the problems with not only education in general, but also with teacher stress.

Despite all the knowledge and information presented and gained over the last five to six decades, the issues plaguing teachers and education are still unresolved. Ingersoll (2003) estimated that nearly 50% of American teachers entering the profession leave within the first five years, a figure that was corroborated by the Alliance for Excellent Education (2004). Nearly one-third of new teachers leave the field within the first three years according to Darling-Hammond & Sykes (2003) and one-half depart after five years. The authors found that the highest turnover rates seen for teachers occurred in their first years of teaching and after many years of teaching when they were near retirement, thus producing a U-shaped pattern of attrition with respect to age and experience. Similarly, Hanushek, Klain, and Rivkin (2004) analyzed data from more than 300,000 teachers and

found that those who left public schools were generally very young teachers in their first two years of teaching or very experienced teachers nearing retirement eligibility. Ingersoll (2001) had similar finds using data on 6000 teachers in school and staffing surveys. He found that most of the teachers leaving the profession were generally either very young teachers in their first two years of teaching or very experienced teachers nearing retirement eligibility. New teachers are leaving the profession at a brisk rate (Brown & Wynn, 2009) and almost 10% of teachers do not even complete their first year of teaching (Black, 2001); after the first year, 14% have left the profession (Ingersoll, 2002b). Other researchers in the past have reported that 16% of those who entered teaching left the public school system within their first year and 26% left within two years (Kirby et al., 1999). Likewise, in 1996, Adams et al. analyzed data on 2,327 elementary teachers and found that approximately 25% of teachers left within two years. What we are seeing in the twenty-first century is that educators are weighing the costs and benefits of teaching, and are quickly deciding to abandon the profession. Ingersoll (2002a) said it best when discussing the attrition of teachers. He said attrition is epidemic in education, creating a “revolving door occupation with relatively high flows in, through, and out of schools” (p. 3).

In 2009, a study funded by the Saskatchewan Health and Research Foundation (SHRF) found some alarming statistics. Martin (2009) through 745 responses, found the following:

- 61% of teachers in Saskatchewan had reported becoming ill due to work-related stress.
- 40% of those surveyed had to take time off work because of stress.
- 51% of the teachers in this sample stated that, if they found a viable

career alternative, they would leave teaching (personal communication, March 21, 2010).

Martin also claimed that many teachers polled mentioned the increasing number of roles they are expected to play, roles that see them dealing with complex legal, ethical and social issues. The Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation (STF) stated in a recent health bulletin "stress, anxiety, depression and other psychological conditions are the leading causes of workplace absences." The STF also stated that the largest cost to the Saskatchewan teachers' drug benefit plan were medications for depression and blood pressure (personal communication, Saskatchewan Teachers Federation, 2009).

The Saskatchewan Teachers Federation (STF) and the College of Education at the University of Saskatchewan conducted joint research of Saskatchewan teachers' early career path and their commitment to the profession. Through Hellsten, Prytula, Ebanks, and Lai's (2009) longitudinal mixed-methods research program, beginning teachers who graduated from the University of Saskatchewan during the Fall of 2005 or the Spring of 2006 were surveyed. Findings from the study suggested that Saskatchewan beginning teachers were overwhelmed and experienced the challenge of transitioning from university to full-time teaching. Participants of this study put a high priority on supports, indicating to researchers that beginning teachers were "crying for support" from any and all directions. The researchers also suggested that Saskatchewan beginning teachers felt overcome by the obstacles they faced, specifically the ability to prepare for their classes on a daily, weekly, and long-term basis (Hellsten et al., 2009). This joint research was similar to other findings that proposed beginning teachers needed support, and further research needed to be conducted.

In the new millennium researchers were also finding that the climates of schools were changing and the wellbeing of teachers was being affected. Currently, many teachers work in schools that are unfavorable to their wellbeing (Brown & Wynn, 2009). Schools contain children and young people who are more likely now than at any time previously to live uncertain emotional lives. They may live in homes in which parents are less able to be present at times of real and unanticipated need (Layard & Dunn, 2009). Compacting the problem are challenges that come from results driven performance agendas of governments (Day & Qing, 2009). The authors argued that teachers' abilities to improve student attainment are being scrutinized and judged to a greater extent than in previous decades. This is a cocktail of challenges that is affecting teachers in all countries; it means that, "there is more bureaucratic accountability, that the work of teachers is more intensive and that, in general, their work has become more demanding" (p. 16).

Problems seem to have followed education, and specifically teachers into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We have a very good understanding that there is a problem, but fixing the problem is going to be even more difficult than identifying it.

### **The Problem with Attrition**

The exit of educators from the profession of education and the movement of teachers to better schools is a costly phenomenon. This affects the students, who lose the value of being taught by an experienced teacher, and the schools and divisions, which must recruit and train their replacements. Each year, thousands of new teachers enter the profession, only to leave a few years later. Though some teachers stay until retirement, others leave earlier for many reasons, including the teaching environment and personal reasons (Ingersoll, 2001). Even though a certain amount of turnover in any field is

important, the high turnover of teachers has financial, organizational and instructional consequences.

**Financial costs.** There are financial costs that accompany teacher turnover. For example, in the state of Texas the yearly turnover rate of 15.5%, including a 40% attrition rate for teachers in their first three years, costs the state \$329 million annually for recruitment and training (Brown & Wynn, 2009). This school district of 32,000 students spent \$3,307,500 on replacement costs in 2004, hiring 315 new teachers; that equates to a lot of money per educator that leaves. Brown and Wynn (2009) noted that when school divisions lose a new teacher, the division loses the chance to recoup their investment in recruitment and professional development. The higher the rate of turnover, the lower the return will be on hiring, induction, and professional development expenditures. A second analysis, provided by the Alliance for Excellent Education (2004), estimates a total figure of \$2.6 billion lost annually on turnover. The United States Department of Labor estimated turnover costs to employers at 30% of the departing employee's salary. According to this method, the per teacher cost of turnover, based on the average U.S. teacher's salary, was estimated at \$12,546. With a current focus on professional development, more money is being spent on the continuing education of our teachers; high turnover costs not only the school divisions but also the taxpayers millions of dollars. However, professional development may be associated with increased retention, the divisions that invest in such supports may well retain more novices. Perhaps now that professional development is a mandate, total costs will drop, since fewer teachers eventually leave. Nonetheless, teacher turnover costs are high for divisions at a time when budgets are tight. Money spent as a result of turnover could better be spent to improve instruction and student learning.

**Organizational costs.** Teacher attrition encompasses more than mounting costs to school divisions. Difficulties with sustaining learning communities and the deterioration of teaching quality (Brown & Wynn, 2009) were just a couple of reasons teacher turnover is an important topic of continued discussion. When a school loses a good teacher, the school also loses that, “teacher’s familiarity with the school practices; experience with the school’s curriculum; and involvement with students, parents, and colleagues” (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003, p. 21). High turnover diminishes the sense of community that is a hallmark of strong schools; this affects all students, whether they would have been taught directly by a departing teacher, or whether the departing teacher may have influenced them indirectly, by contributing to staff cohesion and school memory.

Teachers and administrators also pay a considerable cost when they are left to reinvest in establishing professional relationships and re-establish routines for shared work. Similarly, sustaining new reform is especially difficult with one-third of new teachers leaving the field within the first three years, and one-half departing after five years (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003). With a teaching field fluctuating at such a rate, organizational conditions become fluid and unpredictable; this puts more stress on the remaining teachers. Motivation and commitment becomes questioned and further turnover is inevitable (Ingersoll, 2001).

**Instructional costs.** The price of high teacher turnover affects the education of students. Schools tend to lose inexperienced teachers, particularly those with fewer than five years of experience (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). Thus, schools that lose new teachers and replace them with novice teachers ensure that instruction, on average, will be persistently weak, since there is general consensus that teaching effectiveness increases within at least



the first few years of a teacher's career (Hanushek et al., 2004). If teachers quit the profession or repeatedly leave a school before becoming competent in their practice, students will be taught by a string of teachers who are, on average, less effective than more experienced teachers. Good teachers positively influence student achievement, but high turnover has been linked to a decline in student achievement (Brown & Wynn, 2009). The focal point of schools needs to be our students, and high teacher attrition cheats students of an effective education.

### ***So what can be done?***

#### **Self-care**

Self-care is necessary to function effectively in personal and professional roles (Skovholt, 2001). Lately there has been a blossoming of empirical self-care research that is beginning to span a variety of occupations. Self-care courses are beginning to be developed across a wide range of academic disciplines (Schure, Christopher, & Christopher, 2008), codes of ethics are being updated to include a responsibility to self (CPA, 2001), and individuals are beginning to understand the benefit of taking care of oneself. The confluence of these trends provides an opportunity for individuals to personally and professionally begin to understand self-care and apply it to their lives.

Though the term self-care is a modern construct, the basis of caring for oneself is not new. Historically, self-care in North America originated with First Nations people. The Aboriginal Medicine Wheel teachings claim that achieving balance in life is the most important way "to live a good way in life" (Chapman, Newhouse, & McCaskill, 1991, p. 338). Aboriginal groups throughout history have had differing versions of the Medicine Wheel. A common aspect between them is a requirement of balance in each of the four dimensions;

the four dimensions included emotional, physical, mental and spiritual realms (Chapman et al., 1991; Lavalley, 2007; Sundlie, 2009). Large stone structures are scattered throughout North America, which are believed to be medicine wheels of ancient times. These massive stone behemoths sit on sacred ground, but most individuals would not view the medicine wheels, nor their symbolism, as important.

A decade ago, self-care was most commonly linked to the medical profession (Weiner, Swain, Wolf, & Gottlieb, 2001). Patients within hospitals and upon release required care, whether it be post surgery or for ongoing conditions. Conditions like asthma, diabetes, and cancer treatment required daily monitoring and often administration of medications; this was referred to as self-care. Research in medical self-care had been available prior to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, it has only been in the last few decades with an aging population, and specifically in Canada with a history of a strained publicly funded health system, that patient self-care within and outside the walls of hospitals, had become an important area of research.

Currently, a review of self-care research still yields a plethora of medical model information, but self-care research is quickly evolving and expanding its focus into many occupations. For example, helping professionals over the past decade have begun to embrace self-care in their lives (Skovholt, 2001). Teachers, nurses, counselors, childcare workers and physicians are examples of helping professions where current research can be found. These individuals are argued to have occupations that incur emotional labor, meaning helping professionals need to share themselves to do their job properly (Schutz & Zembylas, 2009). A growing body of self-care research shows that society is beginning to find merit in self-care.

When narrowing the scope of self-care to teachers, Thomas Skovholt's theoretical model of self-care can be applied. In this challenging new era of teachers work, Thomas Skovholt (2001) is an American educational psychology researcher interested in the helping, teaching and healing professions. He believes that the key to helping teachers through this era is to care for and balance the twelve elements that he proposes comprise a human being: the emotional self, the humorous self, the loving self, the nutritious self, the financial self, the physical self, the playful self, the priority-setting self, the recreational self, the relaxation stress reduction self, the solitary self, and the spiritual or religious self. Each one of these elements of the self can be nurtured and ideally receive ongoing sustenance. In essence, this is a modern North American version of the Traditional Medicine wheel from ancient First Nations culture. Both perspectives believe the self is composed of parts, which need attention; theorists define these parts differently. Every piece in Skovholt's theoretical model of self works together and maintains some semblance of balance in the lives of individuals. Skovholt argues that we need to acknowledge each one of the twelve pieces that make up a human being, and nurture each one together and separately. Skovholt believes that through recognizing and addressing problems or imbalance in each of the twelve areas of self, teachers, and other helping professionals, can alleviate and repair problems in their personal and professional lives.

### **Caring for the 12 Elements of Self**

**The emotional self.** The emotional self is defined by Skovholt (2001) as embodied by intense, positive feelings. Individuals in helping professions often use the emotional self as an instrument in their work. Taking care of the emotional self is one way to achieve better wellbeing and be a better helper. One strategy that Skovholt (2001) recommended

to nurture the emotional self is to attend therapy; the major focus of therapy should be on reducing painful emotions such as anxiety or depression. Positive changes in awareness, understanding, esteem, and confidence result from attending to self-care in the realm of the emotional self.

**The humorous self.** The Humorous Self is the ability to be serious and have fun (Skovholt, 2001). According to Kramen-Kahn and Hansen (1998), maintaining a sense of humour is the number one career maintaining behavior. Humour as a coping strategy is defined as, “the ability to appreciate or express that which is funny or amusing” (Burkhead, Ebener, & Marini, 1996, p. 51). Laughter sustains teachers and other helping professionals. Being, “playful, telling jokes, and being humorous are very positive activities for individuals whose work environment is often filled with serious human problem” (Skovholt, 2001, p. 151). Seeing the humour in everyday life is a very important self-care technique, and learning when to laugh through difficulties is an important skill for all individuals (Kramen-Kahn & Hansen, 1998; Skovholt, 2001). Laughter, born from humour, releases endorphins and enkephalins which produce positive psychological effects (Bickley, 1998). Humour allows an individual to reframe a situation or experience so that something that causes overwhelming and unmanageable distress may become something less threatening (Smedema et al., 2010). A positive correlation has been found among individuals with disabilities between humour, self- concept, and vitality (Leftcourt & Martin, 1986). The teaching profession, and helping professions in general, can be stressful at times, and humour is an effective way to manage burnout and increase zest for life.

**The loving self.** The Loving Self is defined as the ability to love and be loved by another, or others (Skovholt, 2001). Often self-care of the loving self means a strong

primary relationship with one other person who cares for the individual who is nurturing, loving, affectionate and fun to be with; families can be a very rich source of personal self-care (Lynch, 1999; Skovholt, 2001). Self-care in the area of the loving self is regarded by Skovholt (2001) as the most powerful source of professional and personal vitality.

Teachers, and other helping professionals, often have long personal and professional histories of nurturing others (Skovholt, 2001). Caring and being cared for in one's personal life can be very sustaining, and is associated with a reduction of stress and burnout (Lynch, 1999; Skovholt, 2001).

**The nutritious self.** The Nutritious Self is any step taken to increase an individual's nutrient health (Skovholt, 2010). Sustaining the personal and professional self requires good nutrition (Callaghan, 2003; Skovholt, 2001; Bickley, 1998). In order to take care of the nutritious self, Hays (1999, as cited in Skovholt, 2001) recommended keeping one's blood glucose up, routinely eating, not skipping breakfast, eating plants, drinking lots of water, enjoying food, learning how to identify true hunger signals from other body or emotional signals, realizing when one's body is hungry and thirsty, and developing a long-term outlook with regard to eating habits. Within these nine nutritional self-care techniques, it is recommended that every person find at least one nutritious-self practice to try.

**The financial self.** The Financial Self is the capacity to select financial goals that lead to prosperity (Skovholt, 2001). It is often reported that financial difficulties are the number one reason marriages end up in divorce (Kalmijn & Poortman, 2006), so perhaps financial difficulties impact careers in the same way? A major stress factor, according to Skovholt (2001) comes from an individual being poorly paid, yet living in a consumption-saturated culture. In many situations, teachers are paid poorly. Perhaps this is one of the

reasons why 51% of Saskatchewan teachers stated that they would leave teaching if they found a viable career alternative, as reported in a very new study (Dr. R. R. Martin, 2010, personal communication, March 21). Receiving more money is not always the best answer. Planning a financial future helps alleviate stress despite current income (Hewitt, Howie, & Feldman, 2010). The authors argue viewing and updating financial records and plans allows for greater financial clarity. With an understanding and an appreciation for personal finance, a positive relationship with money can be achieved.

**The physical self.** The Physical Self is defined as any type of exercise in which an individual partakes in (Skovholt, 2001). The benefits of exercise on the body and mind are multiple and improve well-being in many different ways (Hansson, Hilleras & Forsell (2005a). Research has proven, according to the authors, that there is powerful link between physical activity and mental acuity; similarly, cognition and problem-solving skills are some of the benefits of taking care of our physical selves (Hassmen, Koivula, & Uutela, 2000; Kramer & Erickson, 2007). There is also strong evidence that exercise is helpful in reducing the stress from anxiety and depression (De Moor, Beem, Stubbe, Boomsma & De Geus, 2006). This is important research because the term *burnout* originated in people professions, like teaching. By knowing that physical exercise can be highly effective at combating stress, individuals have another strategy available to help them combat work-related stress and burnout (Skovholt, 2001).

**The playful self.** An individual is accessing their Playful Self when they engage in an act for enjoyment and not for serious, practical purpose (Skovholt, 2001). Teachers continue to work under constantly changing and challenging circumstances (Gu & Day, 2006). In a profession where it is necessary to perform good work under stressful

conditions, being playful can be difficult to fathom. However, it is important (Skovholt, 2001). Ackerman (1999), a past professor at Columbia and Cornell Universities and who has been published in many distinguished journals, said it best:

The world of play favors exuberance, license, abandon. Shenanigans are allowed, strategies can be tried, selves can be revisited. In the self-enclosed world of play, there is no hunger. It is its own goal which it reaches in a richly satisfying way. (p. 6)

Examples of ways that teachers might nurture their playful selves, could include organizing specific times to interact playfully with their primary age students, or participate in noon hour sports with older students. Generally, when individuals interact with others that are substantially younger, a person's mood may increase (Ginsburg, 2007). For teachers who work with younger students on a daily bases, opportunities for play abound. Skovholt (2001) said it best, "The world of play helps make the world of work possible" (p. 156).

**The priority-setting self.** The Priority-Setting Self is one's ability to determine the personal or professional importance of specific tasks (Skovholt, 2001). Making boundaries around work and personal lives is an important way to set self-priorities (Pope & Vasquez, 2005; Skovholt, 2001). Part of self-care in this area is being realistic about the workload that individuals can handle, and creating a schedule that accommodates one's capacities (Pope & Vasquez, 2005). The focus must remain on the amount of work a person can do well, and then balancing our professional priorities with our personal priorities (Pope & Vasquez, 2005). It takes time and self-awareness to develop prioritizing skills. Every person will have a different need and capacity in this area. Creating boundaries with regard to priorities can help individuals begin to sustain this area of self.

**The recreational self.** The Recreational Self is the involvement in a task for enjoyment when a person is not working (Skovholt, 2001). Hobbies are just one example of self-care that can provide wellbeing. Hobbies provide an outlet for stress reduction and can increase the ability to cope during stressful situations (Bickley, 1998). There are many leisure activities and hobbies that are relaxing and entertaining. Being a collector is one such example that elicits many positive emotions because it is concrete (Skovholt, 2001). By becoming immersed in recreation, stress reduction is the result as it allows individual to feel refreshed and gain renewed energy (Iwasaki & Schneider, 2003). It is important to investigate options, including ones that have not been previously considered. Perhaps a person likes to be nurtured through a slower paced hobby; bird-watching, and photography offer a variety of activities which include interacting with people who have similar interests (Bickley, 1998). Reading and information gathering is another great recreational activity that can be relaxing. If fast-paced recreation is more absorbing, golf, fishing, hockey, or swimming can provide excellent recreation. Whatever the recreation is, the possibilities are endless, if a person is determined to increase the quality of their life (Bickley, 1998).

**The relaxation-stress reduction self.** The Relaxation-Stress Reduction Self is techniques that reduce physical body response and arousal (Skovholt, 2001). Stress management methods such as relaxation training, biofeedback, and self-hypnosis are examples of self-care (Skovholt, 2001). One of the most well-researched stress management programs is mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), which asked individuals to practice yoga, meditation, and *Qigong* over a period of time, typically 8 weeks (Schure, Christopher, & Christopher, 2008). It has been found that self-care based in MSBR had a positive influence in an individual's personal and professional lives (Bruce, Young,



Turner, Vander Wal, & Linden, 2002; Shapiro, Schwartz, & Bonner, 1998; Schure et al., 2008).

**The solitary self.** The Solitary Self is nutriment through being alone (Skovholt, 2001). It seems in the modern world there is little room left for being solitary and silent. The television is on, earphones in ears, and the phone is always ringing. Helping professionals like teachers should use solitude as an antidote to the intensity of the professional life (Skovholt, 2001). The solitary self lends itself well to the other areas of self, such as relaxation and spirituality.

**The spiritual self.** The Spiritual Self is defined as the belief in a higher power or a proper way of living (Skovholt, 2001). Spiritual health is defined as:

“the ability to develop one’s spiritual nature to its fullest potential, including the ability to discover and articulate one’s basic purpose in life, to learn how to experience love, joy, peace, and fulfillment, and how to help us and others achieve their fullest potential” (Pender, 1996, p. 129-130).

Pender (1996) also suggested that assessing one’s spiritual health goes beyond a church affiliation. Spiritual health means thinking about one’s beliefs and feelings about the meaning of life, love, hope, forgiveness, life after death, and considering the connectedness with self, others, and a larger purpose in life. Having a spiritual self acknowledges reality, and helps people search for meaning and understanding in painful human experiences (Skovholt, 2001).

A large part of spirituality reflects the idea of hope. Hope is a cognitive-emotional process resulting in better adjustment (Smedema, Catalano, & Ebener, 2010). Hope is defined as “a positive motivational state that is based on an interactively derived sense of

successful (a) agency (goal-directed energy), and (b) pathways (planning to meet goals)” (Snyder, Irving, & Anderson, 1991, p. 287). It is related to psychosocial factors, meaning individuals with higher levels of hope have lower levels of depression and psychosocial impairment (Elliott, Witty, Herrick, & Hoffman, 1991). These individuals also have less mental health problems, better wellbeing, and have a more positive life with positive thoughts (Irving et al., 2004). Self-care of the spiritual side is an important factor in a person’s overall wellbeing because spirituality cultivates hope.

Taking care of oneself is a sacred responsibility (Skovholt, 2001). The traditional medical approach solves problems through diagnosis. Self-care helps prevent and increase wellbeing, and is especially important in fields like education, in which emotional labor is involved (Schutz & Zembylas, 2009). Emotional labor has been associated with job dissatisfaction, health symptoms and emotional exhaustion, which are key components of burnout (Maslach, 1982). Self-care is a way to combat the emotional labor that is associated with stress and burnout, and developing strategies to implement Skovholt’s (2001) twelve aspects of self is an important concept for teachers to recognize.

### **The Caring Cycle**

One of the reasons teaching can lead to stress and burnout, thus requiring self-care, is partially because of the Caring Cycle. The Caring Cycle is a theoretical model that creates awareness for the need and inherent dangers that accompany caring. The model was based on a study in which individuals were asked to recall past teachers in their own lives and describe teacher competence at the highest level (Skovholt & D’Rozario, 2000).

Overwhelmingly, the most popular word used to describe the best teachers was caring. The authors also found within the main theme of caring, words such as “understanding, kind,

patient, concerned, helpful and loving” (p. 11). This study highlighted the importance and value of keeping teachers’ wellbeing strong, so that they can continue to be the best teachers they can be. This is especially important according to Wentzel (1997) who found that teacher caring was critical to the success of students and concluded that “perceptions of supportive and caring relationships with teachers are important” (p. 417). Skovholt (2001) concurred saying caring is: “the essential quality that must be maintained in the high touch careers and that inability to care is the most dangerous signal of burnout, ineffectiveness, and incompetence. The inability to care, therefore, must be strongly guarded against during one’s career” (Skovholt, 2001, p. 12). This was Skovholt’s (2001) premise for creating the Caring Cycle.

**The Caring Cycle and teachers.** Teachers often choose their work because they perceive it to be of great value. It is a passion for many of them and they intend to give their best to contribute to the learning and growth of their students (Day & Qing, 2009). For many individuals, “becoming a teacher is a proactive and positive response to an inner emotional call” (p. 25). Going to school is a common experience for everyone in Canada and teachers sometimes join the profession to recreate that experience. The experience is a feeling of caring, whether it is in the academic, physical, emotional or social realm, and people want to recreate it and share it with others. Teaching is work that benefits others and can provide not only meaning, but also purpose. For some, this passion and purpose erodes with the passage of time, and they lose their sense of wellbeing. Teaching continues to be a part of the helping profession that reports high or extreme levels of stress and strain (Pithers & Soden, 2002). These caring professions can be referred to as “high touch” (Naisbitt, 1982, p. 39), and include teachers, counselors, professors, therapists, social

workers, nurses, doctors, physical therapists, and other health professions. Helping professionals must share themselves to do their job properly and each caring professional is a part of the valuable, yet exhausting, Caring Cycle.

The Caring Cycle is specialized work that describes the continual series of professional attachments and separations, which are prevalent in helping professions, such as teaching (Skovholt, 2005). Teachers work on a daily basis to meet the needs of their students and engage in a cycle of caring. Making positive connections is a part of the job and making positive separations with others is at the core of the profession. Skovholt (2005) argued there are three phases to the Caring Cycle: empathic attachment, active involvement, and felt separation. The model, as well as the phases, came from work on the relational process of helping, counselling outcomes, applied attachment theory, normative counselor development and resilience (Skovholt, 2005). Each phase is distinct and can be discussed separately; not every “high touch” (Naisbitt, 1982, p. 39) professional is evenly skilled at each phase of the cycle (Skovholt, 2005). For example, a high school mathematics teacher may be good at involvement due to his focus on specialized content, but less skilled at attachment or separation. The emotional dimension of involvement is an equally important element in the Caring Cycle.

**Empathic attachment.** Attachment is the first step of any caring relationship. Connecting and bonding are key terms that describe the connections that build relationships (Skovholt, 2001). The very act of attachment requires the teacher to give a piece of self in order to create that attachment. According to Skovholt (2001), the helping professional is required to create a positive human connection so that teaching can occur. To do the job well, the teacher must absorb something from the other person. The very act

of caring extracts a cost under most circumstances (Figley, 2002). In Figley's view, the effort in caring, compassion, and empathy means the individual that is creating this positive attachment is bearing suffering. Compassion fatigue, like any other kind of fatigue, is the result; it reduces the capacity and interest in bearing the suffering of others (Figley, 2002). Novice professionals are especially vulnerable. It is estimated that nearly 50 % of teachers entering the profession of teaching leave within the first five years (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004, Ingersoll, 2003). Problems in understanding boundaries and optimal levels of attachment require experience, and for novices this can be particularly taxing; fatigue can be the result if self-care is put aside (Figley, 2002; Skovholt, 2001).

**Active involvement.** The second step in the Caring Cycle is active involvement. There is a fundamental risk, according to Lamendola (1996), in caring through involvement. He believes that burnout is inevitable when a person is involved, and experiences a period of prolonged stress. However, he took it a step further by stating that caring individuals, "only have so much energy to give, so when you exhaust your supply, you burnout" (Lamendola, 1996, p. 16). Being involved is a necessary and expected aspect of teaching. A teacher can easily become over-involved and exhaust their resources and then burnout. With class sizes growing, student needs increasing, and poor parental support (Blatchford & Martin, 1998) the role of the teacher has expanded and it is easier to become emotionally involved (Day & Qing, 2009). Schutz and Zembylas (2009) suggested teachers are leaving the profession early in their career because of over involvement and the increasing emotional nature of the profession. The authors argued involvement requires emotional labor, which takes effort, planning, and control in order to express socially correct emotions in interpersonal transactions. Active involvement demands emotion in the helping fields,

and these emotions are associated with job dissatisfaction, health symptoms and exhaustion, which are precursors to burnout (Maslach, 1982). This is the work phase of the caring cycle which demands continuous attachment of the teacher to the student (Skovholt, 2001).

**Felt separation.** It can be theorized that the ability to separate may be a key attribute for the relationship building elements of long-term professional vitality (Skovholt, 2001). The question of how professionals separate from students is not a simple process. Teachers regularly hint at their attachment to students by referring to them as, “my kids”. Elements of loss and grief can be common, but positively being able to separate enables the helping professional to attach again successfully. An elementary teacher is responsible for thirty students, on average, which therefore means that thirty individuals will enter into the Caring Cycle of the teacher.

This means thirty individual persons are counting on one person to begin the attachment, be involved through the entire year, and then separate in a positive manner. Entering into this cycle with so many people with no prior experience besides a few personal relationships can be detrimental to one’s wellbeing. Skovholt (2001) argued the ability to “anticipate grief and honor the loss” (p. 22) comes with experience and can help well-meaning helping professions become resilient. To Skovholt, anticipating the grief means preparing oneself internally for a change in life; honoring the loss means building in time and energy for a positive separation. For example:

An experienced elementary teacher may devote the last days of the school year to honoring the loss of her students and of the class as a living, breathing group that will never reappear in the same way. She may engage in a series of goodbye and

transition activities to help the children and herself (p. 23)

Separating positively is a delicate process that requires energy, experience and appropriate rituals. Closing the Caring Cycle requires just as much internal processing as does the other two steps of the process.

### **Emotional Labor**

The Caring Cycle involves attachment, involvement, and separation of multiple relationships; substantial emotional labor from the individual is required during each step of the process. Exploring emotional labor and other aspects of teachers' emotions in teaching is, therefore, becoming increasingly important (Schutz & Zembylas, 2009). Schutz and Zembylas (2009) stated that progress had been made and researchers were beginning to highlight how emotions were linked to teachers' work, development and identity and how those emotions impacted teachers' lives. Hargreaves (2005) found effective schooling of all types required emotional bonds; these bonds arose from the distance or closeness in the interactions or relationships of persons. Through interviewing fifty elementary and secondary teachers, the author found educators that began their career painfully, taught children in conditions of violence, poverty, few resources and little adult support. These were the teachers that became exhausted and prone to burnout due to emotional demands and were more likely to leave the profession within the first three years. If teachers do not end up leaving, experience breeds emotional distance in education, and this distance comes at the expense of the students. In order to teach children, a sense of wellbeing is a necessary condition (Day & Qing, 2009). With wellbeing, educators are able to draw upon personal resources in order to manage the individual backgrounds of each one of their

pupils. Furthermore, they are able to support the primary and emotional landscape in which they teach and in which their students learn.

### ***So how is it done?***

#### **Self-care and Its Association with Well-being**

Schools and classrooms have become a microcosm of society's problems. Teachers are required to expand their professional role in order to simply survive. "Teachers' work is becoming increasingly intensified, with teachers expected to respond to greater pressures and comply with multiplying innovations under conditions that are at best stable and at worst deteriorating" (Hargreaves, 1995, p. 84; also 2000, 2003). Teachers seem to be taken advantage of and are treated like, "classroom furniture rather than as thinking, possibly disputatious human beings" (Ravitch, 1985, p. 19). With these problems continuing to perpetuate, solutions are starting to be generated, but most solutions come from within the profession (Chapman & Green, 1986). Rarely is research formulated about what a teacher can do personally to combat job stress and burnout. At a time when teaching in the twenty-first century is rated as one of the most stressful professions (Kyriacou 2000; PWC 2001), there is a particular need to focus more on the role of positive emotions in sustaining teachers (Day & Qing, 2009). Researchers are beginning to understand that if negative emotions persist, they result in the loss of a sense of wellbeing by teachers (Day & Qing, 2009). Despite challenges and setbacks within the field of education, wellbeing can be enhanced through self-care.

The key, according to Hansson et al., (2005a) is self-care (Bowling & Farquhar, 1996; Hilleras et al., 2001). The authors reported that individual self-care could take many different shapes and forms and had a direct relationship with better wellbeing. In 2005,



Hansson et al. explored the positive results of self-care and found support from friends was significantly associated with wellbeing. Day and Quinn (2009) took self-care research a step further, agreeing that personal friendships helped wellbeing, but also added “positive relationships with colleagues and pupils functioned as an emotional resource which enabled educators to manage external change initiatives” (p. 27). Bondy and McKenzie (1999) acknowledged that having a close relationship is paramount if teachers were to care for others as well as themselves. Falloon, Shannahan, and Laporta (1992) argued similar sentiments when they said that one close, supportive relationship could possibly reverse depression. They continued by saying family and marital status aided in stopping or altering depressive symptoms (Falloon et al., 1992). This supported numerous other studies that showed social support as an important self-care technique, as well as integral in improving quality of life (Cassel, 1976; Cobb, 1976; Geckova, Van Dijk, Steward, Groothoff, & Post, 2003; Headey, Holmstrom, & Wearing 1984; Freudenberger, 1974).

Bobek (2002) agreed that significant relationships were important, and the author added that having a sense of humour in all relationships was vital in combating a teaching profession that generated conflict and stress. If conflict and stress were not dealt with, physical health and psychological wellbeing could be affected (Freudenberger, 1974). Humour was an important theme in individual wellbeing, as Martin, Puhlik-Doris, Larsen, Gray and Weir (2003) agreed, but they specifically named affiliative humour and self-enhancing humour as being positively correlated to wellbeing. Affiliative humor was witty banter used to amuse others, to facilitate relationships, and to reduce interpersonal tensions; self-enhancing humour involved a humorous outlook on life, a tendency to be amused by the incongruities of life, and maintained a humorous perspective even in the

face of stress or adversity (Martin et al., 2003). These forms of humour enhanced wellbeing through emotion regulation, and they were linked predominantly to positive moods and emotions (Martin et al., 2003). A positive correlation has been found among individuals with disabilities, linking humor, self-concept, and vitality (Leftcourt & Martin, 1986). Even as far back as 1928, when Freud described humour as a positive, life-affirming approach to the world and oneself, humour had intrigued us with its healing affects. Self-care was beginning to be understood as a mechanism to promote wellbeing in individuals under stressful conditions; humour was a way to reverse the negative effects of burnout.

Self-care strategies are associated with better wellbeing; increased physical exercise and physical health are examples of self-care, which contribute to a better life (Hansson et al., 2005). The author of the term *burnout*, Herbert Freudenberger (1974) advocated for self-care in the form of exercise, such as yoga. In a study conducted by Hassmen, Koivula, and Uutela (2000), investigating physical exercise and a large number psychological factors, the strongest and most consistent finding was that active individuals experienced less depression, less suppressed anger, less cynical distrust and less perceived stress in comparison to those who exercised less frequently. In addition, frequent exercisers exhibited a stronger sense of coherence and a stronger feeling of community than their inactive counterparts (Hassmen, Koivula, & Uutela, 2000). This indicated that physical exercise had antidepressant and mood-enhancing effects when applied to individuals in high-stress occupations. Similar results were achieved when 82 adults were placed in a 12-week aerobic fitness program; exercise participants experienced a positive fitness change and psychological improvement compared to a control group (DiLorenzo et al., 1999). Moreover, the authors found beneficial long-term outcomes, as the participants at a 1-year

follow-up had physiological and psychological benefits that remained significantly improved from the baseline (DiLorenzo et al., 1999). Exercise in many forms helps individuals deal with stress and burnout (Hansson et al., 2005a) and research is beginning to provide data to support exercise as a helpful self-care technique.

Meditation and relaxation are self-care techniques that are often used by individuals under stress and who show symptoms of burnout. This type of self-care can be broken into two categories: meditation and relaxation that are physiologically oriented, aiming at the achievement of deep muscle relaxation through contracting and relaxing major muscle groups, and, on the other hand, the cognitive-oriented methods which achieve relaxation through imagery and meditation (Bruce, et al., 2002). In a small study of 137 subjects, cognitive-oriented methods were implemented through the use of at-work cognitive behavioral relaxation (Tsai & Crockett, 1993). The authors proposed that there was significant difference between the experimental and control group after just five weeks, with the experimental group reporting lower work stress (Tsai & Crockett, 1993). In a similar study conducted by Murphy and Sorenson (1988), the researchers measured absenteeism, performance, and work accidents while being led through a relaxation program. In this physiologically orientated study, the authors found that workers who received relaxation training had significantly lower absenteeism and higher attendance ratings in the year immediately following training when compared to non-volunteers (Murphy & Sorenson, 1988). With such a low participation of 37 in the relaxation group and 80 in the non-volunteer workers group, no conclusions could be made, in regard to Murphy and Sorenson's (1988) study. However, overall relaxation training did show promise of being an effective treatment for symptoms of stress and burnout. In a survey of

stress management experts, conducted by Bellarosa and Chen (1997), the strongest finding was that relaxation-style self-care was rated the most practical intervention. They said, compared to other self-care techniques, relaxation and meditation were the least expensive and the easiest to implement for the individual (Bellarosa & Chen, 1997). The authors concluded that relaxation was the most effective intervention to positively alter physiological stress and burnout, which mirrors both studies by Murphy and Sorenson (1988) and Tsai and Crocket (1993). Relaxation and meditation are self-care techniques that are often used by individuals under stress and are positively related to wellbeing (Freudenberger, 1974; Hansson et al., 2004).

Spirituality and the idea of hope together are very old self-care techniques that are starting to be further researched. Callaghan (2003) found that the self-care strategy of spirituality was associated with wellbeing and was effective in reducing stress and burnout in individuals and professionals. The author said that working with spirituality, could be enormously effective when used as part of a self-care program. Part of spirituality as self-care, incorporated the idea of hope and the positive emotions that precipitate from hope. Elliott, Witty, Herrick, and Hoffman (1991) discovered that individuals with higher levels of hope had lower depression and psychosocial impairment. These individuals had less mental health problems, better wellbeing, and had a more positive life and thoughts (Irving et al., 2004; Snyder et al., 1996). Through spirituality, hope could lift attitudes and remove stress that otherwise perpetuates itself. The emotional-focused coping strategy of spirituality and hope had a drastic affect on health and wellbeing according to Kohn, Hay, & Legere (1994). This positive attitude is an integral part of spirituality and one that is important when teachers care for students (Bondy & McKenzie, 1999). Teachers who

partake in spirituality or self-care in general become healthy and optimistic. They care for themselves and are likely to look for their students' strengths rather than focusing on student deficits (Bondy & McKenzie, 1999). Spirituality and hope in regard to self-care are associated with better wellbeing and teachers can benefit from these positive feelings.

Self-care elicits positive emotions. These positive emotions have an effect on health and mental wellbeing of individuals under stress. Smedema, Catalano, and Ebener (2010) argued that self-care appeared to influence wellbeing in a positive direction, by first increasing feelings of positive self-worth. Fredrickson's (2004) recent development of a "broaden-and-build" theory of positive emotions suggested positive emotions such as joy, interest, contentment and love served to build individuals' personal resources, which in turn, contributed to their sense of wellbeing. Ranging from physical and intellectual to social and psychological resources, they "function as reserves that can be drawn on later to improve the odds of successful coping and survival" (Fredrickson, 2004, p. 1367). More importantly, by focusing and building upon positive emotions, individuals may "transform themselves, becoming more creative, knowledgeable, resilient, socially integrated and healthy individuals" (p. 1369). In the field of education, Day and Qing (2009) stated that there were consequences if teachers do not take care of their stress and burnout levels. They argued that there was an urgent need for teachers to attend to their emotional as well as cognitive health as factors which were of equal importance in their effectiveness. Self-care was the vehicle that aids in burnout recovery and helps build resiliency for the inevitable stress of the job.

Self-care such as relationships, humour, physical exercise, relaxation, and spirituality are associated with wellbeing. Teaching in the twenty-first century can be a

stressful occupation (Kyriacou, 2000), but individual self-care can counteract the physical and mental pressures of the job. With self-care being strongly associated with wellbeing, it is important to consciously survey our lives in regard to marriage, friends, participation in leisure activities, type of personality, and subjective health; each are strongly related to well-being (Hilleras et al., 2001). When teachers begin to help themselves through self-care, teachers positively affect not only their own health, but that of their important charges, their students.

### **Summary and Concluding Comments**

The purpose of this chapter was to provide a review of the literature in the areas of self-care, teacher stress and burnout, and self-care's association with wellbeing. The specific problem identified in this chapter was the lack of research conducted on self-care practices of teachers. In recent years, research concerning self-care of helping professionals had emerged, but none specifically on self-care strategies of teachers. Additionally, there had not been a study in the province of Saskatchewan, which probed Saskatchewan teachers about individual ways to combat stress and burnout. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the self-care strategies Saskatchewan teachers used to keep themselves well balanced personally and professionally.

## **CHAPTER THREE: Research Design and Methodology**

This chapter presents a detailed overview of this study including the Delphi method, research design, participants, instruments, data collection procedures, data analysis, evaluation criteria, and ethical considerations. The purpose of this study was to (a) determine self-care strategies used by a group of Saskatchewan teachers, nominated by their peers as successfully managing the demands of work life and (b) understanding how self-care affects teachers in their personal and professional lives. Currently, research exists on teacher stress and burnout as well as resulting early-career teacher attrition; however, there is a gap in the literature about teachers who successfully combat these symptoms of stress and avoid burnout. The present study aimed to contribute further knowledge on this topic.

The questions at the core of this research were (a) What self-care strategies do Saskatchewan teachers use to build both career and personal wellbeing? (b) How do teachers believe self-care strategies help them persist through difficult times? These questions were answered through an expert panel of teachers that was established for this study. A consensus of the responses from the panel shaped descriptive conclusions.

### **Research Design**

The study consisted of two rounds of inquiry to gain understanding of self-care strategies in helping individual and teacher wellbeing. In this Delphi study, a qualitative method was implemented. The qualitative design consisted of closed and open-ended questions that generated feedback from participants regarding their lived experiences.

### **The Delphi Methodology**

The Delphi method was developed by Norman Dalkey of the RAND Corporation for a United States military project in the 1950's (Linstone & Turoff, 1975). According to Dalkey, the aim of the project was "to apply expert opinion to the selection, from the viewpoint of a Soviet Strategic planner, of an optimal U.S. industrial target system and to the estimation of the number of A-bombs required to reduce the munitions output by a prescribed amount" (Dalkey & Helmer, 1963, p. 458). In order to complete this work, experts needed to be repeatedly questioned, without sparking any sort of confrontation in doing so. At the end of the project, it was recognized that the method was highly conducive in generating information about certain subjects.

By 1969 the number of Delphi studies done could be counted in the hundreds, and by 1974 the number counted was in the thousands (Stewart, 1987; Linstone, & Turoff, 1975). The technique and its application evolved with each subsequent study, and by 1975 according to Turoff and Linstone (1975) the Delphi method was characterized as:

a method for structuring a group communication process so that the process is effective in allowing a group of individuals, as a whole, to deal with a complex problem. ...To accomplish this "structured communication" there is provided: some feedback of individual contributions of information and knowledge; some assessment of the group judgment or view; some opportunity for individuals to revise views; and some degree of anonymity for the individual responses. (p. 3)

In essence, all versions of the Delphi Method assume that group judgments are more valid than individual judgments. The entire method was based on a "structured process for collecting and distilling knowledge" from a collection of experts by means of a series of questions or surveys blended with directed opinion feedback (Adler & Ziglio, 1996).



According to DeSanctis and Gallupe (1987), this method was used to improve the process of group decision making by discarding common communication barriers, providing means for structuring decision analysis, and methodically guiding the pattern, timing, or content of discussion. Clayton (1997) described the Delphi Method as a systematic, rigorous and an effective methodology designed to draw out effective and valid practical answers to questions using group judgments. Stewart (1987) surmised that the Delphi method was developed, and survives to this day because important decisions depend on judgments, and that these resolutions can create important forecasts of the future.

The Delphi method recognizes human experience and judgment as authentic and effective input in generating ideas and solutions (Murphy, 2008). Individual experts have biases (Gatewood & Gatewood, 1983). Face-to-face group meetings or focus groups often experience group think processes or are predisposed to “follow the leader” (p. 4) where participants are reluctant to disregard previously stated opinions. Predictions and forecasts are often acquired through examination by expert judgment (Murphy, 2008). Dalkey and Helmer (1963) created the Delphi method for the accumulation of judgment for such studies. This method makes it possible to explore new ideas from an expert group without the cost and worry of location or poor group communication (Adler & Ziglio, 1996), while still accumulating rich data.

### **Classical Delphi Methodology**

There are many different Delphi techniques, but the method used in the present study most resembled the classical Delphi technique. Rowe and Wright (1999) characterized the classical Delphi method by four key features:

1. Anonymity of Delphi participants: allows the participants to freely express their

opinions without undue social pressure to conform to others in the group.

Decisions are evaluated on their merit, rather than resting on the reputation of those who have proposed the idea.

2. Iteration: allows the participants to refine their views in light of the progress of the group's work from round to round.
3. Controlled feedback: informs the participants of the other participants' perspectives, and provides the opportunity for Delphi participants to clarify or change their views.
4. Thematic and statistical gathering of group responses: allows for qualitative and quantitative analysis and interpretation of data (p. 354).

Panel members were a group of nominated teachers employed full-time at schools in Saskatchewan. All participants responded to two rounds of questionnaires. Panel members were not mentioned by name and instead were assigned pseudonyms. Although panel members were known to each other in this study, the members did know that they were perceived by a peer as successfully managing the demands of work. The group responses from the first Delphi round were made available for all members once the data were analyzed. Original responses were categorized and listed in order to help the researcher reach group consensus.

### **Delphi Research Justification**

The Delphi method was deemed the most appropriate technique for the present study because it was an effective process for exploring a complex problem with a group and gaining consensus (Linstone & Turoff, 1975). A review of the literature revealed a large and growing body of research on teacher stress and burnout; however, there appear to be fewer studies that have focused on personal strategies to combat stress and burnout in teachers (Brunetti, 2006). The Delphi method was selected for this study due to its

investigative nature and its ability to develop a process of group communication in order that a panel of experts can provide information and feedback on the problem (Linstone & Turoff, 1975). Alexander and Serfass (1999) noted that “the intent of the process is to bring together people who have expert knowledge about a subject, for they are the people most likely to know, or at least be in a position to know the answer” (p. 59).

The Delphi method was also chosen because a group of expert teachers can be compiled, without the need for a large time commitment from participants or added expenses for the student researcher. The profession of teaching is a very demanding occupation with many time constraints placed on teachers (Day & Qing, 2009). In order to increase the likelihood of sufficient participation, the present study incorporated online data generation with an easily accessed procedure that allowed participants to contribute as much or as little as they wanted to. It was also a cost effective way to conduct research in the very large province of Saskatchewan. This study represented many different school divisions from around the province and it would have been expensive to visit each participant or even send paper copies of questions in order to collect data. As a student researcher, I had limited funds and this was a preliminary study, therefore, the Delphi method of organizing group communication online was chosen. A brief and unstructured discussion before the current study began, with current teachers about the proposed online Delphi study, was endorsed unanimously.

### **Participants**

The most fundamental issue when using the Delphi method concerns the participants (Delbecq, Van de Ven, & Gustafson; Adler & Ziglio, 1996). Several authors have suggested that all participants need to understand the Delphi exercise (Delbecq, Van de Ven,

& Gustafson; Adler & Ziglio, 1996). If not, the participants may answer inappropriately or become frustrated and lose interest (Murphy, 2008, p. 54). Hanson and Ramani (1988) recommended that respondents should be well informed about the topic (Hanson & Ramani, 1988), but the other literature suggests that a high degree of expertise is not necessary (Armstrong, 1978). The sample size of participants also varies in Delphi studies (Dillon-Marable & Valentine, 2006). Some studies recommended between 12 and 15 participants (Ludwig, 1997), while others recommended between seven and 50 (Linstone & Turoff, 1975).

For this study 16 participants were recruited based on recommendations from 24 nominators; two participants withdrew from the study due to ongoing teacher labour negotiations in the province of Saskatchewan before the data collection began. This loss of participants brought the Delphi expert group to 14 members for Round-One. Each selected participant met sample criteria (see Appendix B). Nominators intentionally selected individuals with knowledge about the phenomenon under study (Patton, 1990), that is, those who successfully use self-care strategies to manage demands of their work life. “Criterion-based sampling requires that one establish the criteria, bases, or standards necessary for units to be included in the investigation; one then finds a sample that matches these criteria” (Merriam, 1991, p. 48). Accordingly, a combined strategy that synthesizes criterion-based, purposeful sampling and snowballing strategy was selected, which was applied at the outset of the study.

Using this combined strategy required participants to possess certain characteristics. For example, teacher’s attrition rates are significantly lower for teachers with five or more years experience; teachers with this amount of experience have made it past the first five

years and continue to teach. Goetz and LeCompte (1984) recommended developing a profile of attributes. For this study, the “recipe of attributes” (p. 71), was as follows (Appendix B): (1) fully certified teacher in the province of Saskatchewan; (2) engaged in full-time classroom practice in a school; (3) have been a full time teacher for at least five years; (4) perceived as demonstrating a high degree of self-care with good work-life balance in their professional and personal life; (5) self-assured, secure and positive in life; (6) focused in their perspective, having a clear vision of their professional and personal life; and (7) remain healthy.

In snowball sampling, the researcher “identifies cases of interest from people who know people who know what cases are ‘information-rich’ (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 28). For the present study, 24 acquaintances of the student researcher, who are typical teachers from a variety of schools, were contacted and asked to nominate participants (see Appendix A). Contact was made through e-mail and social media such as Face Book. The teachers were presumed to be knowledgeable about their profession and able to identify teachers who match the criteria, and who demonstrated high levels of self-care in regards to work-life balance.

The 24 acquaintances of the student researcher collectively nominated 16 participants. The 16 participants were contacted via e-mail and sent a thank-you/invitation e-mail on June 2, 2011(Appendix D). The e-mail included a brief description of the Delphi study and its purpose, restatement of the expectations of experts participating in the study, and the estimated timeline for the study. The participants represented nine different school divisions from the province of Saskatchewan; however, there was not an even number of distributed participants from each area of the province. Seeking

participants from around the province yielded diversity across work settings. Of the 16 participants who were sent the thank-you/invitation e-mail, only 14 completed the Round-One survey. Thirteen participants completed Round-Two.

Table 3.1 Delphi Study Timeline

Activity	Date
Send thank-you/invitation email	June 2, 2011
Collect Round-One data	June 9, 2011
Collect Round-Two data	June 16, 2011

### **The Delphi Method Study Rounds**

#### **Round-One**

The purpose of Round-One was to gather data on the best practices that participants used to reduce stress and burnout in their lives. In Round-One of the Delphi study, the survey instrument was the foundational questionnaire (Appendix E). Closed and open-ended questions were used to identify the self-care strategies that the nominated teachers used at work and at home; self-care strategies were grouped based on Skovholt's (2001) model of the twelve elements of self. Round-One data were analyzed to identify emerging themes and provide more information about how self-care is utilized in participant's lives.

#### **Round-Two**

In Round-Two, a list of self-care strategies identified in Round-One was presented to participants. The questions posed related to the relative agreement on the best self-care strategies and themes in reducing stress and burnout and building wellbeing personally and professionally. Most participants agreed that the list of self-care strategies and themes

named in Round-One, represented teacher self-care in their life. Additionally, an open-ended question was provided for participants to give self-care advice to new teachers in the profession. During Round-Two of data collection, all fourteen surveys were sent out to participants, however only thirteen were completed. The unreturned online survey was resent via SurveyMonkey for a second time but was not completed by the recipient. It was assumed that the high return rate of questionnaires was partly due to participants knowing the nominators.

### **Data Collection Techniques**

Qualitative data collecting techniques were employed within this study. According to Denzin and Lincoln (1998), "Qualitative research is multi method in its focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter" (p. 2). The current research had teacher participants explore professional and personal self-care strategies while interpreting the benefit self-care had in their lives. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), "qualitative research is a source of well-grounded, rich descriptions and explanations of processes in identifiable local contexts" (p. 1). What, therefore, emerges from qualitative methods are thick descriptions which convey "very much the web of interrelated contextual factors...associated with the situation under study" (Owens, 1991, p. 295). This study gave participants a chance to describe the role self-care had in their lives. Ideas and statements surrounding the stressful situations that teachers addressed through self-care strategies was the result.

The qualitative approach was selected because it presents the perspective of teachers in a genuine fashion. Participants in this study were honest and sometimes frank about the profession of teaching and qualitative research gave participants a genuine voice.

This research was focused on the individual and how he/she manages his/her personal wellbeing in the hectic profession of teaching. With qualitative research a more experienced based description of self-care, that would otherwise not be accomplishable, is available. In this holistic method, the researcher was able to interact with participants on their terms; the online survey was accessed by participants when they wanted and where they wanted giving them flexibility to respond. This gave the research an authentic outcome because there was no person-to person expectations. Using this approach, a more insightful description of self-care anchored in the lived experience of participants was accomplished. Quantitative research has been the approach most widely used in researching self-care in different professions. Consequently, Hansson et al., (2005), recommended future research be more naturalistic and interpretive when investigating self-care (Hansson et al., 2005). The current research satisfied the qualitative research goal the authors were recommending.

### **Data Analysis: Delphi Rounds**

For the two rounds of this Delphi study, the participants' responses provided qualitative data for analysis. The qualitative responses from the first round yielded lines of text that were analyzed in order to identify themes. The qualitative data were analyzed using SurveyMonkey and NVIVO 9 qualitative analysis software programs. Qualitative data were obtained from SurveyMonkey and transferred into NVIVO 9 for coding of text responses. The qualitative data were analyzed and interpreted using coding methods that helped to identify patterns, trends, and themes (Creswell, 2002). Applying software to data analysis helped with the organization aspect of the survey. For example, written responses were easily coded by highlighting and moving text to one or more thematic areas. Without



the use of NVIVO software data analysis would have been time consuming. Though the software was a great organizer of data, a lot of contemplation and time was taken to understand and interpret what participants, individually and collectively, were disclosing.

The Round-One emerging themes in a qualitative format were included in the Round-Two questionnaire. During Round-Two, consensus among the expert group when organizing self-care strategy responses occurred. A consensus indicated the importance assigned to each particular self-care technique.

### **SurveyMonkey Survey Tool**

A survey tool called SurveyMonkey was used to create the online questionnaire. Similarly, it was used to develop the qualitative principles of the survey, and to administer the questionnaire to the panel of participants. This tool was used throughout the study for the participants to access the survey and respond to the questionnaire in the two rounds of the Delphi study. Participants were notified through e-mail that a Web address or URL link would provide access to the survey. Also, instructions were provided for Round-One of the Delphi study to help participants understand their role, the purpose of the round, and other related information. The first Delphi round showed respondents the definition of self-care, as well-being (see Appendix E).

After formal definitions rooted in research were presented for each of the terms, Round-One questions were asked (Appendix E). Participants submitted their answers confidentially within SurveyMonkey and the data was analyzed for themes, key words and phrases. In the second round of the Delphi study, the participants were shown anonymous responses from Round-One. The participants commented on self-care strategies suggested from the group. The expectation was that by showing the group responses from Round-

One, the members would discover new self-care strategies they participate in, but did not consider. Finally, Round-Two respondents submitted their data through SurveyMonkey for analysis.

### **Evaluation Criteria**

Establishing trustworthiness for the current Delphi Method study required a number of elements. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), traditional evaluation criterion for qualitative inquiry involves auditability and credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Both concepts were incorporated in the present study.

#### **Auditability**

In the current study all background literature, electronic data, and any additional information was adequately explained in order for a traceable and logical methodology. Lincoln and Guba, (1985) argue a researcher must construct a decision trail that can be logical and traceable. Specifically, when a researcher leaves a clear decision trail concerning the study from its inception to its conclusions, auditability is achieved. This included explaining the purposes of the present study, how data was collected and how data was analyzed for understanding.

#### **Credibility**

In order to enhance the credibility of the current findings and data, Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend several techniques be implemented throughout the research process. The authors state, a study should make use of participant's language and demonstrate, research authenticity and triangulation. All three concepts were incorporated into the current research.

Precise use of participants' language within this thesis allowed for clear representation of the data and findings. In allowing participants voice through unedited presentation of data, credibility was established, even if a few spelling errors and grammatical difficulties were present; the label 'sic' has been placed behind incorrect spelt words and brackets are occasionally used in order to show reference. A difficulty when working with this online questionnaire was the absence of a spell check program for participants. Despite the occasional error, participants' language is direct and their words and thoughts are used accordingly.

Authenticity of the research was similarity achieved in this study through fairness, educative authenticity, and catalytic authenticity, with prolonged engagement working alongside each concept (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). Firstly, being that the researcher holds a Bachelor of Education and has spent time as a classroom teacher, the researcher has taken into account his own ways of thinking, allowing for fairness in the study. Furthermore, previous to this research a sufficient amount of time was invested in understanding self-care from a teacher's perspective. Fairness through prolonged engagement was satisfied because the researcher had a history of teaching experience coupled with an understanding of self-care.

Secondly, educational authenticity occurs when both the researcher and participants take into account evolving interpretations of self-care and whether a better understanding is reached through the research. The Delphi methodology endorsed the idea of educational authenticity through its multi-staged approach. The approach allows for the exploration and explication of concepts and interpretations through sharing, evaluating, and

reevaluating (Dillon-Marable, 2006). Both participants and researcher through educational authenticity better understood the ideas surrounding self-care.

Lastly, in catalytic authenticity as a result of the study it is expected participants might be moved to some new or different understanding, and potentially act differently based on the input of the Delphi expert group. Though catalytic authenticity was not a purpose of the present research, it was noted that a couple of participants did move to potentially different understandings. For example, Joy was surprised when she saw the results from the Round-One analyzed data and exclaimed that she had no idea what other Saskatchewan teachers were doing regarding self-care. She continued by sharing she wanted to try some new self-care strategies as a result. Catalytic authenticity was present once data was analyzed by the researcher and authenticity of the research was accomplished through consideration and implementation of Guba and Lincoln's (1985) research criteria.

Triangulation is a data collection and analysis tool that enables the researcher to get at a deeper, approximate reality (Creswell, 2005). Stated another way, it is a way of improving the probability that the findings will be found credible (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this research multiple sources were used to get a better sense of the findings. Triangulation occurred when the researcher contacted nominators about teachers who display good self-care; current research regarding self-care was utilized to ground the selection process, and participants, through the simple act of participating, completed the triangulation process. All these procedures led to assure of triangulation in this thesis.

Triangulation was also used during data analysis. Through using SurveyMonkey's text analysis function, NVioV 9 qualitative software, Skovholt's theoretical model of self,

and personal interpretation, a combination of two or more perspectives was realized. All these procedures lead to assurances of triangulation in this thesis.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The current study received ethical approval from the University of Saskatchewan Advisory Committee on Ethics in Behavioural Science and Research (See Appendix G). Through the informed consent process, participants were made aware confidentiality issues. Participation in the present study was voluntary. In addition, participants were aware that they had a right to withdraw at any time during the study. All data were stored on a secure computer which only I had access to. Survey confidentiality was maintained by changing the configuration settings of the SurveyMonkey survey link to disregard the saving of e-mail addresses. Once the data collection process was complete, data stored on SurveyMonkey were backed up to a secure computer. The data on SurveyMonkey were subsequently deleted and the subscription was cancelled. The SurveyMonkey software tool was selected because of the confidentiality maintained through its secure database and the flexibility for a two-round study. Data will be securely stored for the required five years in the office of my supervisor in the Department of Educational Psychology and Special Education in accordance with the University of Saskatchewan regulations. Following five years, all data records will be appropriately destroyed beyond recovery.

### **Summary**

This chapter justifies how the Delphi methodology was used in this research and describes how data collection took place. The purpose of this Delphi study was to explore self-care techniques of teachers in Saskatchewan. This study was significant because it had

the potential to help young teachers as well as experienced ones by increasing their wellbeing in regard to their personal and professional lives.

The Delphi method provided an approach to identify as many self-care strategies as possible from selected knowledgeable experts in the field of education in Saskatchewan. The self-care practices of teachers influence their personal wellbeing while also potentially helping other friends, family and students; it is difficult to help others if a person has not taken care of himself/herself. It may conceivably provide descriptive data for future research, while making a contribution to teacher education in general. The Delphi study allowed experts to review and examine proposed self-care best practices, comment on their use, and make recommendations about additional best practices in self-care of themselves and others. The Delphi methodology enabled the researcher to explore subjective opinions of expert teachers, while using qualitative methods for gaining consensus on the specific topic of self-care.

## CHAPTER FOUR: Results

This chapter presents the results of research from a two-round online Delphi survey that was conducted with 14 participants who represented nine different school divisions around the province of Saskatchewan. The focus of this chapter was on the qualitative outcomes from the Delphi survey, which included questions exploring teachers' intentional engagement of self-care practices in their lives. Through two rounds of data collection, teachers explored individual self-care strategies they used to keep them healthy personally and professionally. Participants' quotations were cited verbatim in order to optimize meaning, authenticity and context. Errors in spelling were not corrected. To denote a direct quote from the participants rather than a spelling error by the researcher the label 'sic' has been placed behind incorrect spelt words and brackets are occasionally used in order to show reference. The chapter begins with a brief description of the participants, and shows the results from the two rounds of questions distributed amongst the Delphi expert group participants; Round-One and Round-Two results have been placed under their respective headings. A brief summary concludes the chapter.

### Participants

Table 4.1 shows the demographic characteristics of round one participants. The majority of participants were female, married and educated towards obtaining their B. Ed. in the last 5-10 years.

Table 4.1 Demographic characteristics of Delphi survey participants

Demographic Characteristics	Delphi Round 1 and 2 (n=14)
<u>Gender</u>	
Male	4
Female	10

<u>Age (years)</u>	
27-32	7
32-38	5
>38	2
<u>Relationship Status</u>	
Single	4
Common Law	1
Married	9
<u>Graduated with B.ED.</u>	
2001-2006	9
>2001	5
<u>Years as a teacher</u>	
5-10	8
11-15	6

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Participants were also asked about the school divisions they currently worked for. Between the 14 participants, nine school divisions from around the province were represented.

Pseudonyms were used to identify and track participants throughout the chapter. Fictitious names were used over a numerical 'participant' because this made the writing more personal and allowed the reader to track and connect with participants' experience. While every effort was made to ensure specific pseudonyms were continued from Round-One to Round-Two, the online semi-anonymous survey format did not allow for precise identification of comments; e-mail addresses from participants were monitored based on date and time they submitted answers. Though I am fairly confident participants comments are linked, this is not absolute, nevertheless, this ought not impact the readability of the chapter.

### **Round-One Results**



Round-One of the study consisted of five questions (see Appendix E). Firstly, participants were asked to list self-care strategies they currently used to improve or maintain their well-being. Self-care was defined as steps taken to preserve and maintain personal health (Bickley, 1998) and well-being was defined as a person's evaluative reactions to his or her life-either in terms of life satisfaction or affect (ongoing emotional reactions) (Diener, E., & Diener, M., 1995). Secondly, participants were asked how these strategies helped. Thirdly, they were asked how consistently self-care occurred in their life. Fourthly, participants were asked to describe a current incident when they utilized self-care strategies. The last question gave participants an opportunity to discuss anything regarding teacher self-care. The following five subheadings summarize participants' responses to each question.

### **Saskatchewan Teacher's Self-Care Strategies**

Categorizing and analyzing participants' self-care strategies were accomplished by applying Skovholt's theoretical model. Most responses conformed to Skovholt's elements of personal self, but on occasion there was some overlapping of strategies. For instance, the relaxation-stress reduction self and the recreational self had strategies that intersected. Some relaxation and recreational strategies were similar. Placing responses from individuals took time because the definitions of each element of self needed to be revisited. The spiritual and solitary self similarly had overlapping strategies. Spirituality for one participant did not look the same for another, therefore, strategies like taking Sunday off and listening to music required judgment of where a particular strategy should be placed. Tracking a participant's comments through both rounds helped place a self-care strategy into the appropriate category.

Strategies listed by participants as improving or maintaining their wellbeing were compiled and categorized according to Skovholt's (2001) model. If more than one participant endorsed a strategy a number was placed behind the strategy, otherwise only one participant identified the self-care strategy.

Table 4.2 Participant self-care strategies

The emotional self	Keep a journal
	Discussing problems/successes with other friends within the profession (5)
The humorous self	Laugh with Colleagues
The loving self	Spending time and talking with family and friend (5)
	Talk with spouse (2)
	Family
	Friends (4)
	Talking with my wife
The nutritious self	Drink lots of water (5)
	Healthy eating (5)
The financial self	None
The physical self	Walk (4)
	Skiing (2)
	Bike Ride
	Yoga (2)
	Exercise (6)
	Running (2)
	Weight training (2)
	Hockey
	Community rec sports
	Run
Massage	
The playful self	Playing with my children (2)
The priority-Setting Self	Plan relaxing activities to look forward too
	Keeping interested in things outside of work (learning to play instruments, etc.)
	Volunteer (5)
	Taking my children to various activities (soccer, museum, park etc.)
The recreational Self	Golfing (2)
	Snowmobiling

	Baseball
	Sports
	Garden
	Shopping (4)
	Coaching
	Motorcycling
	Fishing
	Boating
	Cooking (3)
	Baking
	Spending time outdoors
	Travel
The relaxation-stress reduction self	Video Games
	Go for a drive over lunch break
	Reading (2)
	Meditation
	Hot bath
	Drink wine
	Drink Coffee
	Deep Breathing
	Getting enough sleep (2)
	Plenty of rest
	Watching television (2)
	Dinners out
	Holidays
	Talking on the telephone
The solitary self	Time spent alone
	Listen to music
	Fixing things and working in my garage
The spiritual self	Bible study
	Taking Sunday as a true day off

### How Self-Care Helps

Participants' responses to the second question about how self-care strategies helped to support participants in their lives, comprised to the development of themes. Four themes emerged from the fourteen participants' responses: 1) self-care alleviating stress, anger and frustration; 2) self-care focusing life priorities; 3) self-care providing better overall health; and 4) self-care helping participants become better teachers.

**Theme one - Alleviate stress, anger, and frustration.** Many of the participants identified the positive impact of self-care in reducing stress, anger and frustration. Kristen said:

*The self-care strategy of visiting or venting to other teachers helps by getting others professional opinions, or at the very least having someone really understand and be able to relate to what you are discussing. This definitely reduces my stress levels.*

All but one participant mentioned the stress reducing effects of self-care. According to the participants, self-care helped with stress, reassured them, helped them feel confident again, dispelled anger and frustration, and cleared their mind. Participants also cited the calming effect of self-care because it allowed for clearer thinking, relieved tension, aided in relaxation, and reset the mind in order to ease problems. Sarah summarized self-care in her life when she said, “Generally, the strategies help in terms of relaxing your mind so that it has a chance to catch up”. Jace thought, “visiting/venting to other teacher friends helps by getting other professional opinions, or at least having someone really understand and be able to relate to what you are discussing”. Each participant expressed their own explanation for how self-care alleviated anger, and frustration, with the majority of participants believing self-care greatly reduced stress.

**Theme two - Focus on life priorities.** Focusing on life’s priorities was a central theme among participants. Participants saw self-care as helping to maintain relationships with those they love and reminded them of the importance of family and friends. Many participants thought self-care reminded them that they were doing good work and at the heart of this stressful job was the satisfaction that they were helping other people. Priorities named by participants were spouse, children, religion, health and wellness, and the betterment of all society through vocation. Juliette wrote:

*Having a life outside of school is very important because teaching could literally be a never-ending job and you have to make a decision to draw a line in the sand and be able to stop work at the end of the day. Self-care helps me remember I am more than a teacher.*

Participants also found merit in allowing their minds to focus on something else besides work. Teaching had its obvious obligations but participants found they were more able to meet those obligations effectively when they mentally had something to work for such as family or community. Jace said self-care, *“allows me to leave work related thoughts on the back burner and remember why I work so hard...to make the world a better place.”* Another participant felt that self-care allowed her to step away from work and remember the bigger picture. In doing so, the participant felt a renewed sense of purpose, not only personally, but also professionally. Self-care, *“reminds me how lucky I am.”* said Abbie.

**Theme three - Better overall health.** All participants linked self-care with better health. Whether it was exercising, drinking water, or simply playing with children, participants were unanimous in their belief that self-care increases and maintains health.

Krista said:

*Self-care through exercise makes me feel better because it releases all the pent up energy that has built up all day. When I release it through exercise I know that I am not only keeping my body healthy but also my mind.*

Joy agreed:

*(Self-care) helps me physically, as our occupation ‘sic’ can be quite demanding with the time we are on our feet. By nourishing my body with natural foods and getting adequate sleep I am contributing to my overall health.*

Other participants like Sarah said when she *“eats healthy” she “feels better”*. Two participants also thought regular self-care, no matter the strategy, *“helps me fight off illness”*, said Daniel, and *“keeps me from getting sick”*, said Gus.

**Theme four - Being a better teacher.** Six out of the fourteen participants discussed self-care and its positive affect on their current job as teachers. Maintaining stamina, keeping positive, and having the internal emotional resources to continue to develop better relationships with students, were benefits of using self-care strategies. Juliette listed after school and evening coaching as a self-care strategy:

*Self-care, in particular coaching, allows me to interact with the students in a setting very different from the classroom. Coaching makes me feel not only better about myself and my career, but it fosters better classroom management for my students and me.*

Participants also discussed events from the classroom with trusted colleagues at work.

Sam said:

*My support system at school helps to solve problems. I take care of myself and my job by through bouncing ideas off of other teachers for classroom discipline, curricular outcomes/planning, and just to feel better because dumping on someone renews me to continue forward.*

Debriefing with colleagues, family or friends was the number one mentioned self-care strategy that contributed to being a better teacher. The renewal of self in order to continue to give was a key strategy shared by the six teachers that named it

### **Self-Care Consistency**

All participants in the study were purposely selected based on others' judgments that the participants exemplified good self-care. Specific criteria that were used to identify nominees included having a secure and positive view on life, having clear vision on what they want to achieve, and being physically and emotionally healthy. Nonetheless, nominees varied in terms of the consistency with which they implemented self-care. Data indicated self-care was used by some participants on a regular basis, others as needed, or yet others depending. Personal circumstances, time commitments, changes of seasons, and

professional responsibilities were the reasons participants used self-care on a depending basis.

**Self-care on a regular basis.** Slightly more than half the participants reported using self-care on a regular basis in their lives. They saw it as an important and useful part of their work/life and, therefore, made it a priority. Lacy said, *“I use them on a regular basis in order to maintain a routine in my life. A stable home life establishes a stable work life”*.

Another participant, Abbie, stated:

*I use self-care on a regular basis. I incorporate a combination of my self-care strategies into my weekly routine to avoid burnout. I specifically use them to increase my health and well being, as well as ease my stress.*

Of the eight participants who used self-care regularly, six noted the importance of setting up a routine so that self-care could be carried out on a regular basis. Daniel said:

*I try to do all on a weekly basis, no matter what. I don't want to get to the point where I'm burned out before I use them so I make a routine and set time aside specifically each week to do them.*

The remaining participants used self-care on a regular basis, but the strategy itself changed because of the accessibility or season they were in.

*I use them on a regular basis and it depends on the day of the week, season, availability, and time commitment I choose a strategy that fits. I use the strategy to de-stress. I use the strategy to build up my self-confidence. I use the strategies to maintain my mental and physical wellbeing but it depends on the weather etc. -Juliette*

Self-care on a regular basis looked different to each participant. The connecting factor was that self-care occurred as part of a routine for eight of the fourteen participants.

**Self-care as needed.** One participant used self-care on an as need basis. Rick said:

*Quite honestly, rarely do I get a chance to truly engage in any strategies. I will get a few moments each day to focus solely on my children to play, and I try very hard to make a point of doing this. As far as sitting down and just relaxing, I would have to say as needed, in terms of a desperate manner. At times you just have to sit down and turn everything off; this may take place once a week or so.*

Though Rick said he used self-care as needed, he did specifically state that each day he had the intention of playing with his children. This participant viewed self-care as sitting down in order to relax, and when raising children, this may be when self-care occurred. Nevertheless, Rick was nominated due to someone perceiving him as having a high degree of self-care. Though Rick stated that he seldom used self-care, he did say that he practiced self-care when needed.

**Depends.** Self-care on a depending basis meant participants used self-care sometimes as needed, and other times on a regular basis. Five participants thought it really depended on personal circumstances, time commitments, season changes, and professional responsibilities for how they used self-care. Of the five, most stated that some strategies they do regularly, while other self-care activities are done as needed:

*Debriefing with fellow teachers after the school day often gives me a good laugh and reminds me that I am not alone. I use this strategy almost every day. Many of the family related self-care strategies happen regularly because spending time with my kids is what makes me happiest. Strategies such as taking a walk alone, reading, and shopping by myself are used when I NEED some time to myself. Unfortunately my needs not always trump the needs of my kids and I am not always able to get the alone time I long for. -Jace*

Krista stated:

*Most of the time it is regular but, sometimes it depends on if I have a really bad day then I need to institute additional self-care strategies. Working out is as regular as can be allowed depending on schedule from work. I drink wine as needed/depends. I also discuss events from the classroom with support system on a regular basis. With shopping it really depends, most of the time as needed.*

In this group of five, there is a belief that some self-care strategies were perfect for routines like exercise or talking with colleagues. Other strategies were used as needed or when a particularly bad day occurred. A participant said:



*I use them on a regular basis, but if I have a really bad day I do more than just one. Once I finish my bad day I immediately decide what I'm going to do. Depending on what I have after school, extra-curricular, I usually go for a run. If its been one of those crazy stressful days and I have time I will workout and talk to a friend or family member. -Sarah*

Self-care can take many shapes and forms and according to almost half of the participants, self-care depended on a variety of factors. Participants spoke of work and family obligations that sometimes dictated when self-care could take place. Yet, these participants still used a number of different self-care techniques but practiced them sometimes regularly and other times as needed.

### **Self-Care Strategies in Participant's Lives**

Participants were asked how self-care helped in their lives and to describe a recent occurrence when a self-care strategy was used. The nominees' descriptions of specific incidents illustrated many of the points previously discussed. The most prominent themes in the anecdotes mirrored findings from previous questions such as the impact of self-care strategies in lessening stress, anger and frustration, focusing life priorities, facilitating better overall health, and becoming a better teacher.

*When I receive phone calls or messages from demanding/difficult parents, I immediately seek the opinions of my closest colleagues. Having someone corroborate my feelings and reactions immediately makes me feel justified and gives me confidence that I am doing what is best, whether it be a good situation or a difficult one. For example: I am in charge of planning a trip for a group of French students. I had a few phone calls from parents concerned about the destination, and some parents were rather hostile in their means of communication. After speaking with several close colleagues, I felt good about my decision to send a letter home, and had them edit my letter to make it professional, firm, and respectful. I had great response and was able to satisfy the parents, the students and myself. It was a very stressful situation for me, and having the encouragement and support of my friends/colleagues really helped me through. -Juliette*

Juliette said she immediately felt confident following the use of a self-care strategy. She was feeling stressed but found encouragement and support from colleagues. Juliette was

helped through this difficult situation and as a result she felt justified in her actions, which made her confidence grow.

Self-care for this next participant, Ty, also took the form of speaking to colleagues. Ty exercised and spent time with his family to cope with work place stress. Difficulty with their students' parents was mentioned throughout the data as an ongoing challenge, and no more than from this one participant where interactions with a difficult parent prompted the use of self-care strategies. Ty said:

*Just yesterday I came to work a little tired and immediately I answered the phone and began talking to an irate parent. The parent was very upset about her son not being able to come on a June field trip due to his behavior. The parent felt I was purposely picking on her child and I had no reason to not allow him on a school trip. After reassuring the parent in a very polite manner and the parent hanging-up on me, I stepped outside my classroom to see one student punch another student directly in the face. This was just the start of my day. I still had an entire day of teaching, supervision, lunch and afterschool extracurricular coaching and an assessment and day to plan for tomorrow. I spent some of the day talking to colleagues, which always helps me feel better. Immediately when I got home I gave my wife and children a big hug and we went for a long family walk. Before I used the self-care strategies I was upset, angry and frustrated but when I talked to coworkers, hugged my family and went for a walk I forgot what I was frustrated about. Self-care makes the rigor of the job not seem as daunting.*

Anger and frustration was felt when Ty went through a difficult situation, but this same anger and frustration was curbed when self-care strategies attending to the emotional self, the physical self, and the loving self were implemented. Ty said he felt better and self-care helped him forget about the frustration and made teaching not seem as intimidating.

Self-care for the physical self and loving self was similarly evident with this participant who shared:

*Teaching is difficult and last week I had a particularly bad day when I really needed to de-stress myself. My students were off the wall and not listening what so ever. At one point I told the students if they were not going to listen then they would be taking their work home for homework. One student looked me right and the eye and ripped the assignment in half. I was upset and when I finished the teaching day I immediately*

*went and ran on my treadmill at home. Running made me feel a lot better, just to sweat. However, I still felt like I did not want to go to work the next day so I called a family member, who was also a teacher and talked about my day. By the time evening came I felt a lot better and even though I wished I did not have to go to work, I felt relaxed enough to head back into the classroom. -Sarah*

Running for exercise and calling a family member who was also a teacher helped Sarah deal with stress during her day. Combined, both strategies resulted in a feeling of relaxation for Sarah, which made going into work the next day possible.

Themes of focusing life's priorities and self-care aiding in better health were apparent in both these next participant's comments. For Jace, who had a hard day, spending time with her children and going for a walk helped her to leave her day behind and rejuvenate:

*Just recently, I had a particularly long day, so I left work fairly early, came home, put on my walking clothes and took my kids to the park and to see the baby ducks. It allowed me to leave my work day behind for awhile and feel good about myself as a mom. My girls enjoyed our time together and I did to! I was able to rejuvenate 'sic' after such a long day...it felt wonderful.*

For Rick, going outside and playing with his children was especially important. The self-care strategies implemented helped him truly appreciate what was important in his life.

*Just last week I had a very exhausting day at school. Many things went wrong, and the entire experience was very frustrating. I responded by coming home as early as possible to take my children outside to play. We played whatever they wanted and that is all I focused on. This gave me the time I needed to let my mind realign and to remember to appreciate what is truly important in my life. As well, I enjoyed a couple of beers while playing. These activities ended with me feeling much more relaxed and calm, which is I guess the goal.*

In both these examples, the loving self was apparent: spending time with children helped focus life priorities. Other participants in the study concurred, explaining that time spent with friends, family, spouses and neighbours helped individuals to de-stress and enjoy things such as laughter, friendship and community.

## Combination of Strategies

The most frequent self-care strategy named by participants was not one strategy at all, but instead a combination of a few strategies. For instance, a couple of participants discussed meditation, yoga and walking, but this was usually in combination with relaxation and recreational strategies, or like in this example, giving attention to the spiritual self, nutritious self, and loving self:

*During the recent teacher strikes and withdrawal/re-implementation 'sic' of voluntary services, I was stressed and completely on-edge. Instead of hiding in my house and feeling sorry for myself, I went to the gym, continued my healthy eating, and made sure I attended bible study and spent time with friends and family. It helped me to see the big picture and to get through that time without being a complete emotional wreck. - Kristen*

Kristen said she was stressed and used exercise, healthy eating, and time with loved ones as self-care, which resulted in seeing the big picture and not ending up an “emotional wreck.”

The majority of participants who provided an example of self-care described more than one self-care strategy being used. For example Ty said:

*About 2 weeks ago when I got home I needed to do something because the day had left me angry and upset. After school I went to Cal Fit with friends as I usually do. Sometimes that is enough but it wasn't so I listened to a little music in my driveway before I went into my house. This relaxed me just being alone and somewhere quiet, as a school usually has a decibal 'sic' level of 1000. After spending a little time making a good supper and talking to the wife, I opened my bible that I seem to never get a chance to do and read the first thing I saw. By the time I went to bed I was no longer mad and remembered the real point of everything.*

In this example Ty listed several self-care strategies used to alleviate feelings of anger. The result of implementing the physical, loving, relaxation-stress reducing, and spiritual selves is being no longer mad and instead understanding life's priorities.

## Participant Open Forum

At the end of Round-One participants were given the opportunity to comment about anything regarding self-care and the current study they were contributing to. While some participants skipped the question entirely, others shared broad insights into their experiences with self-care. Gus said:

*I live in a fairly small community, so I truly feel like a teacher 24/7. It is very difficult to be anonymous within the community and it feels like you constantly have to be a role model. It is very easy to feel judged by the public for your personal choices. This adds to the everyday stress of work life and causes you to constantly rethink actions outside of work, making it difficult to turn your work brain off! Teaching is a stressful job, and there needs to be more done to eradicate teacher burnout!*

In this comment Gus recognized the importance of curbing teacher burnout and named stress as a leading cause of it. Other participants such as Lacy offered something entirely different:

*I think the make-up and structure of my school makes my job easier and helps my wellbeing. We are all very supportive of one another and always lend a helping hand when another teacher is going through difficulties. I have been at other schools where this is not the case and I have to do more activities at home and with friends and family to make my job workable and not burnout.*

Like Gus, Lacy referred to burnout as well, but added the idea of the school itself being an environment of caring and revitalization. Though the school environment itself was not a specific self-care strategy, a teacher purposely seeking out a supportive school was a different way of helping oneself.

When Krista answered this question, she discussed three aspects of her life that contributed to her well-being.

*Professional - Having time (which rarely happens) to visit the staff room. Personal – carpooling with a trust worthy colleague ‘sic’ /friend. Organization – time spent on weekends/after school planning, correcting and attending to my extra curricular priorities (this makes me feel more prepared to take on a week of teaching).*

Krista could identify a professional, personal, and organizational self-care strategy that contributed to her well-being. For Krista, spending time with colleagues in either a staff-room setting or as part of a carpool were important. Similar to Lacy and Gus, Krista conveyed a sense of effort that was a requirement of the job.

### **Summary of Round-One**

Self-care is performed many different ways for many different people but findings from Round-One suggested that it reduced stress, focused life's priorities, contributed to better health and made the participants better teachers. These four themes were identified when participants explored how self-care helped; sharing a recent example when they used self-care in their lives also contributed. Participants also disclosed that self-care can be done on a regular, as needed, or depending basis; depending on personal circumstances, time commitments, season changes, and professional responsibilities. Most participants used self-care regularly, some used self-care depending, and only one used self-care as needed. Finally, during an open-forum, participants recognized the importance of participating in this research. Participants named stress and burnout as a constant in the profession of teaching, but also recognized the possibility that a school itself could be an environment of caring and revitalization. Round-One resulted in a list of self-care strategies, four themes about self-care benefits, and detailed personal experiences of self-cares role in the participants' lives.

### **Round-Two Results**

In Round-Two of the Delphi study, participants were challenged to reach a consensus on common/frequent self-care strategies utilized by Participants and also asked to agree on common themes regarding how self-care helps in their lives. Furthermore,

participants were asked to name self-care strategies they were not doing but wanted to and also give advice to individuals just entering the profession of teaching about the perils of stress and burnout and how to overcome with self-care. Finally, similar to Round-One, participants were given a final opportunity to discuss anything regarding teacher self-care for the research team to consider. Through posing these questions a relative agreement on the best self-care practices in reducing stress and burnout and building wellbeing personally and professionally was achieved as well as constructive advice for future teachers.

### **Self-care Strategy Consensus**

At the beginning of Round-Two, participants were given a list of the most common self-care strategies named by the expert group in Round-One. The strategies included exercise, talking with friends and family, healthy eating, discussing events from the classroom with school support system, drinking water, and volunteering. Participants were asked to comment on how well these practices fit their individual lives and through agreeing or disagreeing, explaining their feelings on both. Though it was not expected that every participant were involved in the most frequent self-care strategies, it was assumed through the Delphi expert group nomination process that their opinion on the practices be given substantial weight. The majority of participants agreed that the self-care practices of exercise, talking with friends and family, healthy eating, discussing events from the classroom with school support system, drinking water, and volunteering, were an important part of how they practiced self-care in their lives, and how they saw the well-being of teachers being taken care of. Ty commented:

*I agree. This list speaks to myself and the school group/community that I am apart of. If I polled the teachers in my school, my best guess I would say that these would be the most frequently used practices to reduce stress etc.*

Almost half of the participants simply agreed and said they were involved in all six of the most popular self-care strategies, while other participants agreed but offered up strategies they forgot to mention in Round-One. For example Sarah said:

*I agree; I do all these but I am reminded that I also pray, watch movies, and laugh often.*

With all participants acknowledging the more common self-care strategies and adding a few others, a small snapshot had been captured of what these participants do to maintain themselves personally and professionally.

### **Consensus of Benefits**

The second question asked of participants was to agree on common themes regarding how self-care helps in their lives. Working from this research, participants were asked to reach consensus on the helpfulness of self-care from their personal experience with the construct. In Round-One, four themes were discovered that best described the intrinsic benefits of self-care. Self-care helped to increase or maintain well-being by:

1. Alleviating stress, anger, and frustration
2. Focusing life priorities
3. Aiding in better health
4. Helping individuals become better teachers

All thirteen participants affirmed that self-care does benefit them in each of the four ways. When explaining how, participants reiterated specific strategies fundamental to their lives that aided them on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis. Participants named exercise, eating



healthily and spending time with loved ones as strategies that acknowledged each of the four benefits of self-care. Joy explained:

*Agree; I see myself doing self-care for all those reasons. It does help stress and really does help me focus on what is important in my life, such as my family. Also, when I do eat healthy and live an active lifestyle I feel much better and have more energy contributing to better health. Being a better teacher is constantly on my mind and the general public does not understand that our Christmas and summer breaks are so important because this is where many of us teachers recharge our batteries so we continue to be effective teachers. Without proper breaks, not only do the students lose focus but teachers quickly burnout out. Having 35 fourteen year olds is enough to make anyone stressed. Things like golf and listening to music help me relax when holidays are not close.*

Other participants were in agreement with the four benefits but pointed out one in particular that stood out, “*Agree...number 2 (Focusing life’s priorities) is of particular importance to me. Playing with my children reminds me of my true priorities in life.*”-Jace.

Some participants liked the idea of life having priorities other than their jobs and self-care aided them in achieving this balance. Gus articulated this quite well saying:

*I agree with the other participants, I use self-care for all those reasons. Focusing priorities in life is very important to me and my family. Teaching can be all encompassing and take over your life if you do not monitor it correctly and school systems are set up with the expectation that you have to work weeknights and weekends for no pay. To me self-care helps balance my job and family responsibilities ‘sic’ and when you do that as a teacher life can become rewarding. So yes, self-care helps in all those four ways.*

There was also an idea brought forward by participants that when teachers take care of themselves, and are healthy and happy, productivity and sensitivity to the ever changing needs of students increased. Stated another way, participants believed that when you take care of yourself through self-care, you then have the resources to take better care of the students you teach. Participants found the link between the personal and the professional and identified how each has an important role in the other similar to the brain and body connections with human beings. Krista said, “*Agree. I feel if I take care of myself properly, I*

*am a much more dedicated and focused teacher*". Stated many different ways but echoed by these participants, you need to take care of your self first; only then can you have the ability to take care of others. Self-care can help that occur.

### **New Teachers and Self-Care**

A purpose of this study was to enrich understanding of, and perspective on, the individual teacher's response to stress in the context of personal and professional life. The participants in this study finished the two round Delphi study by passing along advice to new professionals in the field of education. Advice ranged from the clichéd, 'don't work so hard' comments to the more insightful ideas about balancing priorities and finding one passion to relax with at the end of a long day, week, or month. The theme of balance was apparent as well as increasing self-awareness regarding life's priorities. Daniel said, *"Life is about balance, try hard to always achieve this. Remember that your life is not in the classroom, that is a job."* Balance professionally and personally was important to most participants especially when the stress of the job became a reality. Participants gave a reality check about the pitfalls and work ethic required in the field of teaching. Several participants commented about the stress of being a teacher and warned that self-care needs be a part of a teacher's life or burnout will inevitably strike. One participant, Jace, stated:

*(self-care) Extremely important, If you are not at your best, physically, emotionally, intellectually it is very difficult to deal with the demanding challenges of the teaching profession.*

Abbie mirrored those comments saying:

*They (self-care techniques) are so important! Many teachers burnout in the first five years. This is a very demanding profession in which you get little respect and monetary reward for what you do. Balancing your personal and professional life will allow you to enjoy your job and life in general for a long time. Being satisfied with your life allows you to be a better teacher in the classroom and a good role model for your students.*

Other participants saw the job as very demanding but essentially witnessed the good in the profession. Lacy wrote:

*Teaching can be the hardest job you will ever have, but at the same time it can be the most satisfying. For me the key to being a good teacher is always reminding myself that I am doing good work and contributing to the good of society. Also if you have a strong stable home life the difficulties of teaching can be minimized by having people around you to count on. A support system of family or friends is important and not forgetting to spend time with that support system is key. Teaching can be all encompassing but taking time to step back should be a priority.*

Teaching is a helping profession, and though participants mentioned the stress, low pay, and society's move to less support for children and education, the participants in this study felt a strong sense of vocation. Participants remarked that their jobs were meaningful and the children they taught were the reason they worked so hard and cared so much. Though participants mentioned they did not have the best of material possessions, their advice was to know you are doing good work, and through self-care, new teachers can have the emotional resources to build the next generation of educated adults.

### **Participant Open-Forum**

Similar to the culmination of Round-One, participants were given another opportunity to comment about anything to help me better understand aspects of their personal, professional, or organizational lives, that positively influenced their wellbeing. Some comments echoed those of Daniel's saying:

*"It is so important that there is a balance in my life. It is not healthy for someone to work at their job 24/7. You need to have a life outside of work as well.*

One other participant recognized the importance of the current research that she partook in. Joy said:

*Self-care is a very important area of research that does not get enough attention. I had no idea what was going on for many of my colleagues in Saskatchewan. I can't wait to try a few of these self-care strategies for myself."*

Joy said she cannot wait to try some self-care strategies that some of her Saskatchewan colleagues were doing. Capturing excitement about self-care from a participant was a rare emotion coming from this research, but one important to note.

**Round-Two's impact on participants.** Besides the Delphi methodology working to enlighten the researchers, participants also benefited from indirectly interacting with other participants. In Round-Two participants explored self-care strategies they felt were important either personally or professionally and ones they would like to start doing more often. As expected, participants named the most frequent strategies previously discussed by the group. For example, almost half of the participants hoped to exercise more often while a few participants hoped to eat even more healthily. Both these strategies were named by the participant group in Round-One. Other self-care strategies participants named were going to church more often, doing yoga, and having regular medical checkups. Gus stated, "*Calling in sick more often cause I never do because it takes too much work to plan.*" as a self-care strategy he wanted to do more of. For Gus, taking sick days, mental health or otherwise, was a strategy he would like to do more of. He stated, planning for a substitute teacher took a lot of work, therefore, he does not do it very often. Overall, the participants brought no new strategies forward, but furthered solidified previously named self-care strategies.

### **Summary of Round-Two**

The purpose of Round-Two of the study using the Delphi method was to gain participant consensus while drawing conclusions, not only for the study, but also for

informing and educating participants about group findings. For this study the participants communicated their knowledge through online questions and consensus was reached when participants responded by agreeing or disagreeing. All thirteen participants agreed that the self-care practices of exercise, talking with friends and family, healthy eating, discussing events from the classroom with school support system, drinking water, and volunteering, were an important part of how they constructed self-care in their lives. Similarly, all thirteen participants acknowledged that self-care does benefit them in each of the four ways; the four ways being alleviating stress, anger, and frustration, focusing life priorities, aiding in better health, and helping individuals become better teachers.

Round-Two also added depth to teachers' self-care techniques and further solidified how self-care aided in a teacher's personal sense of well-being while contributing a new theme. Participants discussed the theme of professional and personal balance when they were to give advice to new teachers in the profession. Moreover, although the purpose of this research was not to offer ideas to participants about self-care strategies, growth of participants was evident. Participants commented on self-care strategies they wanted to do more of, and also explicitly stated that some techniques shared by other participants are future strategies they want to try. Overall Round-Two succeeded in garnering consensus of participants, as well as contributing a new theme and further strengthening Round-One findings.

### **Overall Summary**

Participants' responses highlighted self-care strategies and their role in these Saskatchewan teachers' lives. From Round-One responses, and consensus in Round-Two, the self-care techniques of exercising, talking with friends and family, eating healthy,

discussing events from the classroom with support system at school, drinking water, and volunteering were recognized as the most often utilized self-care techniques by the participants. Each participant expressed personal experiences of self-care, but when the group was presented in Round-Two with coming to a consensus, participants showed shared meaning by agreeing to a list of participant self-care strategies.

In addition to self-care strategies, I identified four themes. The participants described how self-care nourished them in their personal and professional lives and four themes developed from the participants' stories. Participants felt self-care alleviated stress, frustration and anger, focused life's priorities, allowed for better overall health, and helped participants become better teachers. Within these themes participants commented on how self-care was used whether it be on regular basis, as needed, or depending. A variety of ideas about self-care were discovered, however, participants felt mostly self-care was done on a regular basis and sometimes it depended when self-care can and would take place. Either way, self-care was viewed as curbing the difficulties associated with teaching and helping to restore emotional resources to continue to do good work.

Lastly, participants provided advice for future teachers who will be entering a profession with high attrition rates. Most participants commented on the obstacles young teachers faced in the profession and cautioned of the need to find balance and prioritize needs because teaching can involve an overwhelming workload. From these harsh realities encouragement came by referring young teachers to the concepts of balance and prioritization. The themes brought forward by the experts in Round-One captured the advice given to future teachers. The themes and advice were: Watch out for stress; keep an eye on priorities; eat healthy; and taking care of yourself will make you a better teacher.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: Discussion**

This qualitative study was conducted to understand more about self-care practices of teachers in Saskatchewan and the strategies they use to maintain or increase their well-being. This chapter reviews and summarizes the main findings of the study, and extends the results to existing literature. Findings are discussed in relation to the literature on personal and professional self-care strategies, and as those findings relate to teacher well-being, and third to new teacher attrition. Practice implications for teachers and other helping professionals, alongside both strengths and limitations of the present study, and areas for future research are described.

### **Summary of Findings**

The purpose of this study was to investigate self-care strategies used by Saskatchewan teachers. Specific attention was given to (a) the organization of an expert panel of teachers (b) the identification of self-care strategies used by teachers (c) further understanding of how self-care affected teachers in their personal and professional lives.

To answer the questions posed by this research, participants were selected based on the following criteria (a) fully certified to teach in the Province of Saskatchewan (b) currently engaged in full-time classroom practice in a school (c) have been a full-time teacher for at least 5 years (d) self-assured, secure and positive in the view that life is complex and also filled with opportunity (e) focused in their perspective, having a clear vision of what they want to achieve (f) physically and emotionally healthy. Twenty-four nominators from around the province of Saskatchewan consulted and selected participants for this study. Fourteen participants were recruited and completed two rounds of an online survey.

Even though participants were selected based on specific criteria, participants work/life were very different. Participants represented nine school divisions from around the province of Saskatchewan. Almost three-quarters of the participants were female and half were between the ages of twenty-seven and thirty-two. Nine of the fourteen were married and received their Bachelor of Education between 2001 and 2006. Lastly, teaching experience placed eight teachers in the five to ten years of experience, while six teachers had been teaching between eleven to fifteen years.

The Delphi method was chosen to collect data because of the method's ability to structure group communication and collect and distill knowledge from a collection of experts (Adler & Ziglio, 1996). A Delphi study recognizes human experience and judgment as authentic and effective input in generating ideas and solutions (Murphy, 2008). With stress and burnout becoming increasingly prevalent in teachers (Kyriacou, 2001), and a 2009 study showing 61% of teachers in Saskatchewan had reported becoming ill due to work-related stress (Martin, personal communication, March 21, 2010), ideas and solutions investigating self-care in teachers was important.

Through two rounds of surveys, participants were guided through open and closed questions supplying professional and personal knowledge on the subject of self-care. In the first round, information was collected, analyzed, and then synthesized for round-two. In round-two participants could choose to revise their round-one answers and come to a participant consensus based on information disclosed in round-one. Once both rounds were completed, all data was analyzed.

Figure 5.1 shows a visual representation of synthesized data from participants. Modeled after the traditional Aboriginal Medicine Wheel, this figure highlights central ideas



in this research. The visual representation of the wheel was created to illustrate participants' responses in an accessible and understandable format; it was depicted as a circle because traditional teachings in self-care focus on the relationship of many parts to make a whole. Self-care is central to this wheel, and is circled by the further findings of the study.



Figure 5.1 A visual representation of the role self-care plays in the lives of Saskatchewan teacher participants.

Central to Figure 5.1 is the concept of self-care. The self-care strategies that the participants shared revealed that self-care is an important part of their lives. Self-care was defined for the participants as, “Steps taken to preserve and maintain personal health” (Bickley, 1998); participants then shared the strategies that made them effective in their professional and personal lives. There was no distinction between strategies at the workplace or at home. Participants grouped all self-care together as strategies that aided in well-being. They were presented with the following definition of well-being, “A person’s evaluative reactions to his or her life-either in terms of life satisfaction or affect (Day & Qing, 2009). In Round-One of the Delphi survey participants listed exercising, talking with friends and family, eating healthily, discussing events from the classroom with support system at school, drinking water, and volunteering as the most common self-care strategies. Other notable strategies included laughing, walking, cooking, and reading. In Round-Two participants came to a consensus that these were the most common self-care strategies witnessed from personal and professional experience. Skovholt’s (2001) model of the 12 elements of self was used to organize self-care strategies identified in the surveys. Through two rounds of online surveys, I came to believe that all of the participants’ self-care strategies that were reported, fit into Skovholt’s (2001) model. Skovholt’s (2001) model of the 12 elements of self aided in determining best practices regarding self-care.

Extending out from the central concept of self-care within the visual representation, is idea of self-care consistency. Self-care can take many different shapes and forms and according to this study’s participants, can occur on a regular, as needed, or dependent basis. More than half of the participants felt self-care in their lives needed to be done on a regular schedule. Consistency gave participants the increased well-being necessary to be effective

in both their professional and personal lives. The strategies of regular basis self-care looked no different than self-care as needed or depending, but differed on the consistency. Self-care on a regular basis often took the form of a routine and did not lend itself to any specific strategies. Participants described self-care, such as cooking, exercise, talking to friends and family, whether they used self-care strategies consistently or not. The only distinguishable finding was participants' use of self-care being dependent on the season. Activities such as golf, bike riding, baseball, skiing, snowmobiling, and sometimes hockey are done at different consistencies depending on the season. Saskatchewan has four distinct seasons and some self-care activities can only be done in one or two particular seasons. For participants who used self-care, this limitation of seasons made self-care dependent on external factors. Moreover, martial and familiar responsibilities required some participants to prioritize self-care strategies. These individuals used less consistency, but used self-care on their schedule either as needed or depending.

The third circle in the visual representation signifies a consensus surrounding the positive role self-care plays in the participants' lives. Themes that related to this circle encompass self-care's ability to lessen stress, anger and frustration, focus life priorities, give better overall health, and become a better teacher. Through practicing self-care, participants were able to maintain their personal well-being and sometimes thrive in a profession with high levels of stress and burnout. Participants in this study openly shared their feelings and opinions regarding self-care in their personal and professional lives. In gaining understanding about the role of self-care in the lives of participants, it became evident that participants shared common experiences and was characterized by similar responses and themes. This shared common experience made consensus among

participants quite easy, as all 13 participants agreed on how self-care helped in their lives. Common self-care strategies and themes were ascertained as a result of the very specific criteria used to select participants and the possible common experiences of teachers. Participants often mentioned the use of colleagues at work to share ideas, thoughts, and to seek advice. The idiom of walking a mile in my shoes, spoke to teachers who often felt misunderstood and under-appreciated. Self-care allowed them to keep going and increased their personal resiliency to the negativity in and surrounding their job.

Depicting responses through a visual helps to frame self-care's role in participants' lives. The visual also organizes the role of self-care for the participants and highlights themes and generalizations from the study. This study chose the medicine wheel as a framework for discussion because the medicine wheel has a history of promoting balance and advocating for personal self. From this study the idea of balance was an important concept that participants wanted to share with new teachers entering the profession. The understanding that one must help themselves before they can begin to help others resonated with participants of this study. The concept that the medicine wheel first promoted many centuries ago still has a place today with participants who are building the next generation of adults.

In summary, self-care strategies were central to all participants' lives despite the difference in individual consistency. Exercising, talking with friends and family, eating healthily, discussing events from the classroom with support system at school, drinking water, and volunteering were the most common self-care strategies named by the participants. Self-care strategies helped lessen stress, alleviate anger and frustration, focus life priorities, give better overall health, and helped to establish better teachers.

## **Integration of Findings with Existing Literature**

### **Self-Care Strategies**

Existing research on self-care has been done with the intent of developing self-preservation tactics of helping professionals such as counselors, nurses, and teachers. Individuals in helping professions are argued to have occupations that incur emotional labour (Schutz & Zembylas, 2009). Caring for others requires withdrawing from self, as helping professionals must share themselves to do their job effectively. Each one is a part of the valuable, yet exhausting, caring cycle which involves attachment, involvement and separation on a continual basis (Skovholt, 2001). The author argues that in order to thrive as a helping professional, one must maintain vitality and avoid depleted caring that can occur as a result of the caring cycle. Often individuals in high touch career fields (Naisbitt, 1982) have limited emotional resources that they expend on a daily basis. Self-care is believed to renew and revitalize personal resources so that the individual can continue to care for others in an effective manner (Skovholt, 2001).

Effective helping professionals take care of themselves through self-care whether they consciously recognize it or not (Pope & Vasquez, 2005). In the current study, Rick was an example of not consciously recognizing self-care, yet demonstrating it through the eyes of others. He was a participant because a colleague nominated him, but responded to an online question saying he rarely gets a chance to practice self-care. Yet he does mention playing with his children and simply sitting down to relax. Though Rick did not consciously recognize himself as participating in self-care, he did utilize self-care strategies to combat the emotional demands of teaching. Other helping professionals such as counsellors and psychologists have an ethical obligation to engage in self-care (CPA, 2001). For example,

research by Newsome, Chambers, Dahlen, and Christopher (2006) addressed the need for self-care by creating a self-care course that taught specific strategies for student counsellors and evaluating the course's effectiveness to reduce stress and burnout. Four years of qualitative and quantitative data resulted in participants having positive physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, and interpersonal changes and substantially increasing their counselling skills and therapeutic relationships. Whether a helping professional engaged in an intentional act of self-care or not, the benefits are seen or felt by the individual as a positive and necessary aspect of their professional and personal lives.

Despite emerging research, teacher self-care strategy research was limited. From the research that has been completed regarding self-care strategies, the following strategies were linked with better well-being: (a) friendship (Day & Quinn, 2009; Falloon et al., 1992); (b) relationships with colleagues and pupils (Day & Quinn, 2009); (c) family and marriage (Falloon et al., 1992); (d) participation in leisure activities (Hilleras et al., 2001); (e) humour (Bobek, 2002); (f) physical exercise and physical health (Hansson et al., 2005); (g) relaxation (Bellarosa & Chen, 1997; Murphy & Sorenson, 1988); (h) and spirituality (Callaghan, 2003; Bondy & McKenzie, 1999).

In the present study I found similar results as participants identified self-care strategies that they accredited with better well-being. All fourteen participants in the first round said they used self-care in their lives. Participants cited exercising, talking with friends and family, eating healthily, discussing events from the classroom with support system at school, drinking water, and volunteering as the most common self-care strategies used to increase well-being. Other research-based strategies were also mentioned such as spirituality, relaxation, leisure and humour. Participants of the study understood that self-

care contributed to better well-being and the strategies they used were very individual to themselves. The fact that each participant identified at least a few strategies, and then reached a group consensus about strategies they saw as being beneficial, shows emerging research about self-care will have an audience.

**Skovholt's model of self-care.** Skovholt (2001) argued that the self is made up of twelve elements and we must care for each individual element through self-care. The twelve pieces of self are the emotional self, the humorous self, the loving self, the nutritious self, the financial self, the physical self, the playful self, the priority-setting self, the recreational self, the relaxation stress reduction self, the solitary self, and the spiritual or religious self. Each one of these elements requires nurturing through self-care and every piece of self works together and maintains some semblance of balance in the lives of individuals. Skovholt (2001) believes we need to acknowledge each one of the twelve pieces that make up a human being, and cultivate each one together and separately. The findings from the current study can be applied to the Skovholt's personal self-care theoretical model.

When participants spoke of self-care, most responses could be understood within the umbrella of Skovholt's (2001) theoretical model. Findings from the present study suggested that if teachers were dealing with stress, or wanting to maintain their vitality, tapping into the emotional self, the loving self, the nutritious self, and the physical self proved beneficial. Skovholt (2001) argued the elements of self need to be continually sustained, especially when a person is withdrawing from self. Professions such as teaching require engaging with others and engagement demands personal resources to be shared. Self-care has the ability to restore a person's capacity to give and when an individual

focuses on a specific area of self to restore, positive results occur. For instance, Kristen said her occupation was very demanding but eating healthily nourished her body. Through healthy eating Kristen gained a renewed sense of energy, which was needed for her challenging teaching job. Similarly, Juliette discussed the idea of the emotional self (Skovholt, 2001) and how speaking to colleagues was an important self-care strategy in her life. Using one of the most common self-care strategies discussed by the group, talking with colleagues, Juliette said she immediately felt confident following use of a self-care strategy. Skovholt's (2001) model is a simple way to organize and categorize self-care strategies and participant's comments in the current study aligned well with his theoretical model.

There were a few participants' self-care strategies that did not fit into Skovholt's (2001) theoretical model and perhaps counteracted what Skovholt proposes. For example, two participants mentioned the use of alcohol at the end of the day or after an especially stressful day in order to take care of themselves. Rick stated that he drinks a few beers at the end of a hard day, and another participant, Krista, says a glass of wine makes her feel a lot better. While there are authors that link moderate alcohol intake and the subsequent health benefits (Morrow, Cullen, Liu, Cahill & Redmond, 2010), there are many more who dismiss the use of alcohol as a healthy strategy (Chikritzhs, Fillmore & Stockwell, 2009; Gupta & Warner, 2008; Szabo, 2007; Young, Sweeting & West, 2008). Research into self-care and alcohol does not exist, but these two participants used alcohol for its relaxation benefits.

Alcohol has traditionally been used for communal socialization, recreation, and religious celebration (Peele & Grant, 1999), but with alcohol use doubling since the 1960s (Gupta & Warner, 2008) in some countries, attitudes towards alcohol and its use have



undergone significant changes. In Canada with its size and diversity, there are differences in alcohol amounts and patterns (Canadian Centre for Substance Abuse, CCSA, 2005). There are also findings that support commonalities between Canadian provinces and territories. One of the commonalities revealed that a considerable portion of Canadians consumed alcohol on a daily basis. For the two participants in the current study that disclosed alcohol consumption, Rick stated he drank after a hard day, and Krista said she had wine to feel better about a tough day at work. Neither participants mentioned drinking alcohol on a daily basis, but were a part of the 82% of Canadians who drink alcohol. More locally in Saskatchewan, alcohol is the most abused substance costing Saskatchewan more than \$500 million in annual lost productivity, absenteeism and disability (CCSA, 2005). In the current study it was not explicitly stated whether alcohol was used for its traditional function or any negative consequences.

Alcohol consumption is a highly complex issue with many negative consequences, but for participants, only positive results were stated. For Krista and Rick, alcohol was effective in helping them relax. Both participants experienced the protective effect of alcohol in relaxation, but longitudinally alcohol use can have detrimental effects to a person's health. Loss of brain tissue (Gupta & Warner, 2008), poor cardiovascular health (Chikritzhs et al., 2009), anti-social behavior (Young et al., 2008), and liver disease (Szabo, 2007) are just a few of the effects of excessive alcohol use among individuals. Though most self-care strategies from participants in this study fit into Skovholt's (2001) model, the consumption of alcohol did not.

While all participants did claim to use self-care, there were definite differences between the type, length and purpose of the self-care. According to research though, self-

care benefits are the same, as self-care can take many different shapes and forms while still providing the same benefits (Bowling & Farquhar, 1996; Hilleras et al., 2001). This was found to be true of participants in the present study as many felt similar benefits despite differences in strategies. There was also an expectation that self-care is most useful in moderation, and any strategy in excess could potentially be problematic.

**Wheel of Wellness model of self-care.** Other models of self-care exist and can be applied to the findings of this study. A popular theoretical model used in a variety of helping professions is the Wheel of Wellness (Myers, Thomas, Sweeney & Witmer, 2000). First described by Sweeney and Witmer (1991) and since undergone a few versions, the Wheel of Wellness is a holistic model with a multidisciplinary focus (Myers et al., 2000). The model proposes five life tasks, designed as a wheel with spokes that are interconnected and interrelated. These tasks are spirituality, self-direction, work and leisure, friendship, and love, which are defined and used applied to the current study's finding below.

Firstly, the life task of spirituality was demonstrated by participants when they spoke about an awareness of a being or force that transcends the material aspects of life (Myers et al., 2000). Kristen and Ty each named spiritual self-care strategies that contribute to their health and well-being. Kristen said she attended bible study and Ty said he read his bible. Another participant, Sarah, mentioned that she prays. These self-care strategies may suggest that spirituality is important to some participants, and a sense of wellness is felt when these spiritual strategies are employed.

Secondly, participants' responses can be applied to the self-direction task in the Wheel of Wellness. Self-direction, "refers to a sense of mindfulness and intentionality in meeting the major tasks of life" (Myers et al., 2000, p. 253). It denotes an individual's sense

of worth, sense of control, realistic beliefs, emotional awareness and coping, problem solving and creativity, sense of humor, nutrition, exercise, stress management, gender identity, and cultural identity. The current research names many of the areas within the life task of self-direction. For instance, Jace referred to sense of worth when she connected her occupation with helping the world. Lacy showed a similar sense of sense of worth when she said, "For me the key to being a good teacher is always reminding myself that I am doing good work and contributing to the good of society." Jace and Sarah also talked about the life task of humor when they mentioned laughing with colleagues and laughing often. The life task of exercise and nutrition was demonstrated by participants on numerous occasions. Six participants mentioned exercise as a self-care strategy and ten named nutrition. Krista said self-care through exercise made her feel better as exercise helped her release pent up energy. Moreover, drinking water and eating healthily were nutritious self-care strategies participants named that positively affected their health.

Thirdly, the work and leisure life task focuses on the economic, psychological and social benefits of work and the physical, social, intellectual, volunteer and creative aspects of leisure (Myers et al., 2000). The work component in the Wheel of Wellness matched with some participants' comments in the current study. When participants mentioned positive relationships with coworkers and affirmed that their work was contributing to a greater good, the life task of work and leisure were being referred to. For example, when Ty and Sam said they spent time during the day talking to colleagues they accessed the life task of work. Other participants like Juliette stated the social benefits of coworkers who help to corroborate her feelings. When participants mentioned self-care strategies linked to leisure activities, life satisfaction was being increased for participants. Activities such as

community rec sports, cooking, fishing, and gardening are leisure activities that satisfy the Wheel of Wellness's leisure component. Work and Leisure activities were a part of participants' daily and weekly lives, as many participants stated self-care strategies that fit in to the work and leisure life task.

Fourthly, the friendship life task includes one's social relationships and incorporates feelings of empathy, cooperation, and altruistic endeavors. The current study acknowledged this life task through participants like Juliette, who enjoyed the relationships she created through coaching, or Jace, who believed her job contributed to the world in a positive manner. Other participants, who mentioned playing baseball or attending bible study, where a group of friends congregate, were naming the friendship life task. Four participants listed friends as a specific self-care strategy suggesting some participants understand the positive feelings and important social relationships friends have on personal and professional well-being.

Lastly, the feeling of being loved and valued by others acknowledges the life task of love (Myers et al., 2000). Participants in the current study mentioned loved ones regularly, especially children, spouses, and family. The authors state characteristics of healthy love such as trust, intimacy and caring encompass this life task. Focusing solely on his children is how Rick provided self-care to himself. Jace similarly mentioned her children saying, "spending time with my kids is what makes me happiest". Ty discussed talking to his spouse. Calling a trusted family member is how Sarah dealt with difficult days of teaching. The loving life task was mentioned often by participants in the current study.

The results of the current study can be applied to the Wheel of Wellness theoretical model through participant's comments satisfying many aspects of each of the models life

tasks. The Wheel of Wellness continues to be researched and used across multiple disciplines (Myers et al., 2000). The holistic nature of the model allows for teachers as well as other helping professionals to look at themselves both professionally and personally. It is also applicable to the students or clients that helping professionals work with on a daily basis.

**Self-care in other helping professions.** Every helping professional's job description is different, but each one is a high touch career field (Naisbitt, 1982). School teachers, physicians, nurses, social workers, professors, therapists and counselors are examples of helping professionals. On a daily basis helping professionals are required to care for others whether they are listening, teaching, or healing (Skovholt, 2001). Many studies provided proof that stress and burnout were present in specific helping professions, but many less provided research based strategies to counteract stress and burnout. Outcomes from the current study supported findings reported in the current research literature.

Childcare is considered to be a helping profession that is at risk for burnout amongst its work force (Eastwood & Ecklund, 2008). In a study of 57 residential childcare workers (RCW) at a residential treatment facility, five of the most common self-care strategies were identified. Spending time with family, eating nutritious meals and exercising, socializing with friends, getting sufficient sleep, and taking short breaks at work were the most frequent strategies named by childcare workers. These findings from Eastwood and Ecklund's (2008) research have much in common with the current study's findings. Both studies recognized the importance of relationships with family and friends. Kristen, Sam, and Lacy were just a few of the participants from the current study that mentioned social

support as a self-care strategy. Having a strong social support network can be an important self-care strategy for helping professionals like childcare workers and teachers. Similarly, both studies suggested caring for oneself physically can result in self-care benefits; exercising and eating healthily were named in each study. Eastwood and Ecklund (2008) added the self-care strategy of adequate sleep, and the current study mentioned drinking lots of water as additional strategies. Self-care strategies between teachers in the current study and childcare workers can be compared as similarities exist between both groups of helping professionals.

Physicians are responsible for patient care which requires compassion, understanding and empathy (Weiner, Swain, Wolf, & Gottlieb, 2001). Utilizing self-care strategies increased physicians' capacity to support the medical needs of patients. In a study measuring self-care strategies physicians used to promote their own well-being, five main strategies were identified. Qualitative content analysis identified being in relationships, being positive, having a religious belief system, receiving positive feedback and pursuing and achieving their goals as strategies most often used by physicians to improve their psychological well-being. The current study on teacher self-care had similar findings, especially in the areas of relationship and spirituality. Relationships with friends, family, and co-workers were very important to participants in the current study as well as with physicians (Weiner et al., 2001). One of the physicians in the study stated time spent with his family was very important, which mirrored comments made by participants like Rick and Jace who said both their families promoted wellness. Religion and spirituality such as Bible reading, attending church services and involvement in church activities named by physicians were similar to comments by participants Kristen, Sarah and Ty.

Spirituality as a self-care strategy contributed to wellness for both teachers in the current study and physicians. Physicians and teachers are both helping professions that use self-care strategies to increase their well-being.

Helping professions are a group of occupations that aid in the caring of other individuals (Skovholt, 2001). Despite the different work of each profession, some self-care strategies used in one profession may also be used in another. Childcare workers, physicians, and teachers share some of the same self-care strategies. Teachers in the current study identified many of the same self-care strategies used by both childcare workers and physicians. These findings may suggest that there is a link between the self-care strategies of teachers and other helping professions.

### **Teacher Well-Being**

A teacher's work in all countries is becoming more intense and difficult each year with environments that are hostile to well-being (Day & Qing, 2009). A teacher's daily routine is continuing to evolve and change and expectations on teachers are different than they once were. Starting as far back as the 1960s the profession of teaching has been scrutinized for invoking stress (Farber, 1991). Over time, teacher stress has grown with authors noting many societal and organizational problems that plague education and its teachers. Problematic work environments, students' emotions, technology, and government agendas contribute to the steady erosion of teacher well-being (Layard & Dunn, 2009).

Teachers' well-being is related to the students they teach and the parents or guardians who care for the students. Brown and Wynn (2009) argued that schools are becoming harmful to teachers partly due to a new generation of children who live uncertain

emotional lives and parents who are raising these children. Now more than any other time in history students live in homes or situations where their needs are sometimes not being met (Layard & Dunn, 2009). In this study participants shared similar sentiments disclosing difficulty with families and parents who devalued teachers and their role in education and students who exhibit a lack of respect. Juliette and Ty each shared stories about parents who diminished their well-being. Self-care was needed in order for both participants to begin to feel better. Students also had a role, such as in Ty's and Sarah's cases with discipline and correction. Student discipline requires emotional labour; teachers have to first control their own reactions and then think in a calm and rational way. Not allowing oneself to react comes at an emotional cost (Skovholt, 2001), requiring self-care to renew the individual. Discipline of students is often a daily occurrence that happens several times during the day, requiring a withdrawal from the teacher's well-being. Furthermore, interacting with parents on a more regular basis is heavily promoted and expected.

The modern day student has the ability to access information and technology in a way no other generation has before. Day and Qing (2009) noted that this familiarity with technology and communication has made the modern day student aware of the limitations of school and classroom learning. The argument that a teacher's well-being is affected by the advent of a student's knowledge of technology was not mentioned by participants in this study.

Day and Qing (2009) also argued that government performance agendas have detrimental effects on teacher's well-being. The authors argued that teachers are now expected to improve every student's educational attainment and are scrutinized and judged based on bureaucratic accountability. In this study, no participants mentioned anxiety



surrounding the learning outcomes of students even though there is research focused on governments increasing expectations, especially in the United States.

Day and Qing (2009) argued there are primary emotions that most teachers experience on the job: fear, anxiety, disgust, surprise, sadness and happiness. The persistence of negative emotions results in loss of well-being and teachers feeling like they cannot succeed (Day & Qing, 2009). Skovholt (2001) similarly argued that negative emotions can negatively impact many helping professionals. The constant caring cycle that exists for helping professionals makes it difficult to continually give. If an individual does not replenish the self, anger, sadness and depression can become the result (Skovholt, 2001). In this study participants named a variety of emotions when discussing their lives as educators in Saskatchewan. Kristen, Sarah, Sam, Joy and Juliette mentioned on the job stress, and Krista discussed having pent-up energy that builds up throughout the day. Other participants such as Daniel and Abbie mentioned burnout, specifically equating teaching with the symptoms of burnout. Ty spoke about the emotions of anger and frustration in his teaching day. Similarly, Rick spoke about the stress of teaching and also adds the idea of exhaustion. The persistence of negative emotions surrounding teaching was prevalent in participants' comments, making the need for self-care to counteract the negativity imperative.

Educating students in these intense and difficult times requires teachers to enter into a circle of caring (Skovholt, 2001). Many factors push teachers in the direction of negative emotions such as fear, anxiety, disgust, surprise, and sadness. These emotions need to be addressed and self-care implemented in order to increase well-being among the individual teacher. In the study Lacy said it best when she comments that teaching can be

the hardest job a person will ever have, but to remember despite it all, that good work is being done. Teacher well-being is at the heart of that.

### **New Teachers and Attrition**

New teacher attrition has become a circumstance of a modern day educational system. Ingersoll (2003) estimated that nearly 50% of American teachers entering the profession leave within the first five years; nearly one-third of new teachers leave the field within the first three years according to Darling-Hammond & Sykes (2003). Even more alarming 10% of teachers do not even finish their first year (Black, 2001), while 14%-16% leave after their first year of teaching (Kirby et al., 1999; Ingersoll, 2002b). Some research says that attrition is epidemic in education, creating a “revolving door occupation with relatively high flows in, through, and out of schools” (Ingersoll, 2002a, p. 3). Participants echoed the difficulties found by researches explaining the perils and pitfalls of teaching, and offering advice for weathering the early career storm. From a research perspective, attrition affects education and its teachers financially, organizationally, and institutionally. Participants had ideas about new teachers to the profession as well.

No participants linked attrition with financial detriment but instead gave a fresh perspective on the role teaching has in their life. Daniel mentioned that teaching was a job to him and recommended to new teachers that they find balance between home and work. Abbie commented that in teaching one gets very little monetary reward despite the difficulty and demands of the job. Most research linking attrition with finances come from the perspective of the school division or government costs, and researchers have calculated totals based on per teacher cost of attrition (Brown & Wynn, 2009). But Daniel and Abbie saw finances and attrition connected in a more personal way.

When teachers leave positions, professional development is lost, connections with students and families disappear, and school communities weaken, affecting the organizational structure of a school (Ingersoll, 2001; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003). Many participants spoke about the strength they received from their school communities. Organizationally, participants sought strength and resilience from trusted colleagues such as Ty who shared that spending time talking to colleagues within his school community always makes him feel better. Juliette said when difficult or demanding parents speak to her, she always seeks the opinions of colleagues. Jace finds solace with colleagues at the end of the school day, with which she shares a laugh and remind her that she is not alone. Similarly, Sam says she takes care of herself and her job by bouncing ideas off colleagues. Other participants also talked about the altruistic value of being a teacher and remained teaching because it is a selfless profession. Lacy comments that she reminds herself that she is doing good work and contributing to the good of society. I noticed that the many connections within the school community gave participants strength. Organizationally, participants communicated that they relied on other teachers quite heavily; Joy even went as far as saying the general public just doesn't understand. Participants demonstrated the strength of trusted staff members surrounding them, which agrees with research stating communities weaken when attrition occurs.

Instructionally, participants commented more about job expectations and the demanding nature of the profession than any specific instructional demands. Gus said that teaching could be all encompassing and take over your life. He said that school systems are set-up with the expectation that teachers have to work weeknights and weekends for no pay. Hanushek (2004) argued saying it is difficult with current work expectations for a new

teacher's to get their footing, especially at a point in a new teachers career when their teaching effectiveness increases within the first few years. Jace saw teaching as very demanding. She mentioned that teachers need to be at their best physically, emotionally, and intellectually because it is very difficult to deal with the demanding challenges of the teaching profession. Perhaps these expectations and challenges are why Abbie said many teachers burnout in the first five years and argued teaching is a very demanding profession, or why Sarah said teaching is very difficult, and Lacy said teaching can be the hardest job you will ever have. High turnover has been linked to a decline in student achievement (Brown & Wynn, 2009), and with teacher job requirements being elevated for new teachers, the resulting attrition affects students directly. New teachers get their instructional footing within the first few years, but many young teachers never reach that point, which limits a student's education.

New teacher attrition is abnormally high and participants of this study gave some reasons, advice, and guidance to new and future teacher professionals. Attrition of new teachers affects the profession financially, organizationally, and institutionally. But at the root of a 50% attrition rate (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004; Ingersoll, 2003), the attrition effect on students and colleagues is significant. Participants commented that the school community was very integral to them and placed importance on colleagues and the idea of balance in both their professional and personal lives. Teaching was difficult, said participants, but through relationship and steadiness it can be very rewarding.

### **Implications for Teachers and Other Helping Professionals**

In recent years research concerning self-care of helping professionals has emerged, but little specifically on self-care strategies of teachers. Self-care is a necessary function of

effective helping professionals (Skovholt, 2001), therefore, research into this area is important. In the current study three domains of self-care were raised: a) self-care strategies b) consistency of self-care, and c) positive role of self-care in participants' lives.

First, the present research highlighted self-care strategies of participants. These participants were selected based on strict sample criteria and organized as experts through the Delphi methodology. There has never been a study like this in the province of Saskatchewan that asked teachers what they specifically do to take care of themselves. I believe this current study was distinct because it listed strategies named by expert participants. These strategies are easily read and understood by readers and transferred to this demographic. Information about self-care strategies were listed and agreed upon by participants showing a sampling of what Saskatchewan teachers do to increase their well-being. The findings from this research are practical for educators and helping professionals. Demystifying proactive reactions to stress and burnout were a result of this research.

Second, the current study provided information on the regularity of self-care. Previous to this study, limited research had been conducted looking at how often self-care is used by helping professionals, like teachers. There were specific strategies that were associated with well-being but no study had been done asking individuals about self-care consistency. In this study, we got a small glimpse of how often self-care take place with teachers. This research also pointed to the uniqueness of each participant's life, dictating how often self-care occurs. A few participants indicated how they would like to include more self-care in their lives but no participants felt self-care was unimportant.

Lastly, this research delved deeper into the benefits of self-care. No other self-care research had investigated the intrinsic benefits teachers felt when self-care is utilized.

When looking at a 50% attrition rate of American teachers with one to five years' experience (Ingersoll, 2003), then research looking at solutions to this attrition problem is valuable. Potentially, these self-care findings could improve teacher retention and open the door for further research. By understanding teacher self-care, self-care becomes clarified and the strategies individuals use to reduce stress and burnout in their lives is no longer a secret. These practices can help inform and shape both an individual's well-being, and what universities and school divisions could do to combat stress and burnout in the workplace.

### **Strengths of the Current Study**

Three strengths of the current study exist. First, research in the area of self-care, especially with teachers and helping professionals, remains understudied. To date, few studies exist that examine self-care practices of helping professionals and no studies consider self-care strategies of teachers. This research stretched across the province of Saskatchewan with nine school divisions represented within participants. Though this study was small it did have broad, far-reaching participation and was not centralized to one district in the province. Thus, the present study added to a small, but growing, body of research in this area, and began research regarding teachers and self-care strategies.

Second, by presenting self-care strategies and starting a discussion about self-care in teachers' lives, I hope that it presented interest in additional research. For example, a smaller scale, more in-depth qualitative study could interview teachers to explore the uniqueness of self-care in their individual lives. Additional research could assist in understanding the lived experience and meaning of self-care for different teachers.

A final strength of the current study concerned the growth opportunity of participants. The Delphi method is an organized approach where expert participants can generate information about certain subjects (Dalkey & Helmer, 1963). In the present study, participants shared self-care strategies amongst themselves in Round-Two of the questionnaire, learning from each other what teachers from around Saskatchewan do for self-care. Although the purpose of this research was not to offer ideas to participants about self-care strategies, reciprocity was evident through the researcher sharing findings from the round one questionnaire. For example, Joy shared, “self-care is a very important area of research that does not get enough attention, I had no idea what was going on for many of my colleagues in Saskatchewan. I can’t wait to try a few of these self-care strategies for myself.” For Joy, working with the Delphi group opened up new ideas about self-care, making this study a growth opportunity for her.

### **Limitations of Present Study**

The present study sought to understand self-care strategies of 14 Saskatchewan teachers. 14 participants responded to the Round-One survey, but only 13 were able to respond in Round-Two. Therefore, the continuity between the participants was partially disrupted due to the absence of one participant. With this lack of a 14th member in Round-Two, it was more difficult to track participants’ comments and get a clear picture of each distinct member of the group. Though losing one participant between rounds was not ideal, the Delphi methodology allows for much flexibility within its expert group.

Within the fourteen participants there was a lack of equal gender representation. Both male and female teachers were approached during the nomination process with ten female and four male agreeing to be participants. While this lack of diversity may have an

effect on participant responses, the ratio does mirror the present profession with more females than males teaching.

Participants of this study all lived in Saskatchewan but rural or urban distinction was not clarified. Saskatchewan is a diverse province with many urban and rural schoolteachers. Both urban and rural teachers have unique circumstances and opportunities based on where they live and teach. For example, visiting a gym for a rural teacher might be an unrealistic self-care strategy simply because of location; this is the same for an urban teacher who is unable to walk home from work. This was not noted within this study and was a limitation.

Teaching is a very demanding profession. With ongoing teacher contract negotiations occurring during data collection, many Saskatchewan teachers felt additional stress. One participant in the study, Kristen, commented that during the recent teacher strikes and withdrawal/re-implementation of voluntary services she was stressed and on-edge. Two participants who agreed to be participants left the study before it even began. Therefore, a limitation of this research was the timing of the study; the added stress of the Saskatchewan teachers' contract negotiations may have affected the responses of participants. Some participants' responses were very short, and I believe this was partly due to the demanding nature of the profession and the added stress of a long-lasting contract dispute.

### **Implications for Future Research**

The findings from the current study offer a foundation for future research. As mentioned previously, it would be interesting to explore a smaller group of experienced teachers who are viewed by their coworkers as having excellent self-care. In-depth



interviews could build upon the foundation of self-care strategies explored in this research, but with more detail and a comprehensive element. In the current study we explored the self-care strategies of Saskatchewan teachers, but a qualitative case study of teachers that display exceptional self-care would be engaging research, as it would build upon the broadness of this study.

It would also be interesting to explore rural versus urban self-care strategies, as well as complete this study in another region in Canada. Saskatchewan is a Western province with a large urban and rural split. A larger scale quantitative study that measured the self-care strategies of Saskatchewan teachers, featuring rural and urban similarities and differences would be a stimulating project. If other areas of Canada completed similar studies, valuable information about self-care and its many uses would be realized. Self-care can be a proactive approach to increasing well-being and the more individuals begin to learn the vocabulary and understand the concept, the more it will become an acceptable practice in occupations of high stress and burnout.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this Delphi method qualitative study highlighted the self-care strategies of Saskatchewan teachers. An analysis of the participants' lived experiences, understandings, and opinions revealed the ways in which self-care individually played a role in their lives. From interaction and analysis of each participant's contributions, six self-care strategies were found to be most popular. I also identified four themes of self-care's ability to lessen stress, anger and frustration, focus life priorities, give better overall health, and encourage becoming a better teacher. The present study extended the

literature in the area of self-care and illuminated positive solutions to stress and burnout, not only for teachers, but also for helping professionals.

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APPENDIX A  
**Introduction Letter to Nominators**

Good Bye Burnout, Hello Me:  
Individual strategies of self-care among Saskatchewan teachers

Date, year

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

Thank-you for agreeing to participate in the initial phase of this study by helping identify a sample of teachers perceived as successfully managing their work lives. Unquestionably, work stress and burnout in the field of education has been a topic of much concern over the years. Being in the profession, as you have been, makes you very aware of the demands and resources required to be a successful teacher, let alone be a good friend, spouse, parent, coach, etc. This study seeks to unravel the mystery around stress and burnout, but by taking a different approach. The purpose of this study is not to continue research on the levels of stress and burnout among teachers, nor is it to determine the causes. The intention of this study is to investigate what nominated teachers, identified as having good work-life balance, do at work, or more importantly what they do once they finish work in order to take care of themselves.

Participants in this study will have the opportunity, provided through a web-based questionnaire, to reflect on their lifestyle and career in the context of self-care. As well, they will have the opportunity to contribute to the knowledge on the changes occurring in education.

In this research, I will take special care and attention to ensure ethical safeguards are built into all aspects of the study. Careful attention will be paid to honoring the voluntary nature of participation, and by displaying sensitivity to every participant (Confidentiality will be protected but anonymity cannot).

To begin this investigation, I ask your cooperation in nominating teachers who, in your view, meet the criteria and characteristics listed on the next page. For your convenience, I have enclosed three response forms. Once you get verbal agreement from the nominated person(s) and fill out the nomination consent /response form with them, response forms can be e-mailed to me; if you do prefer regular mail, I have enclosed a self-addressed envelope for their return to me.

Sincerely,

Matthew McCaw

mtm472@mail.usask.ca  
Department of Educational Psychology and Special Education  
University of Saskatchewan

Dr. Audrey Kinzel  
[audrey.kinzel@usask.ca](mailto:audrey.kinzel@usask.ca)  
Educational Psychology and Special Education  
College of Education, University of Saskatchewan  
28 Campus Dr., Saskatoon, SK.  
S7N 0X1



APPENDIX B  
**Nomination Criteria**

Good Bye Burnout, Hello Me:  
Individual strategies of self-care among Saskatchewan teachers

Please Identify **school teachers** who meet the following criteria:

- Fully certified to teach in the Province of Saskatchewan.
- Are currently engaged in full-time classroom practice in a school.
- Have been a full-time teacher for at least 5 years
- Perceived as demonstrating a high degree of self-care and resilience with good work-life balance in their teaching context.

AND

from your perspective, are an example of a teacher who successfully manages their work life and best exemplifies the following set of characteristics:

- Self-assured, secure and positive in life.
- Focused in their perspective, having a clear vision of their professional and personal life.
- Remain healthy.

APPENDIX C  
**Nomination Consent/Response Forms**

Good Bye Burnout, Hello Me:  
Individual strategies of self-care among Saskatchewan teachers

**Please fill out this form IN THREE STEPS!**

**STEP 1** (Fill out privately. Then share with nominee)

Describe how you perceive this teacher to have great work-life balance and uses/employs self-care techniques in their lives as indicated. Please use specific examples (e.g., interactions and observations you've had) (You may use the back of this form, as well, if necessary.)

**STEP 2** (Review with nominee)

You are invited to participate in a research project entitled Good Bye Burnout, Hello Me: Individual strategies of self-care among Saskatchewan Teachers. Please listen carefully, and feel free to ask questions you might have. Please give your verbal consent to the nominator once information has been reviewed if you wish to participate.

Investigators:       Matthew T. McCaw (MEd Student)  
                          [mtm472@mail.usask.ca](mailto:mtm472@mail.usask.ca)  
                          1(306)960-1722  
                          Department of Educational Psychology and Special Education  
                          University of Saskatchewan

Dr. Audrey Kinzel (Research Supervisor)  
[audrey.kinzel@usask.ca](mailto:audrey.kinzel@usask.ca)  
1(306)966-8861  
Educational Psychology and Special Education  
College of Education, University of Saskatchewan  
28 Campus Dr., Saskatoon, SK.  
S7N 0X1

Objective:       This study is intended to investigate how selected Saskatchewan Teachers, successfully managing their work lives.

Rationale:       A great deal has been written about teacher stress and burnout. However, much of this writing has focused on what universities, school divisions and individual schools can do to help. The proposed study will seek to define self-

care and explore strategies used by Saskatchewan Teachers to allow them a healthy balance in their lives.

**Procedures:** An expert group of 12-15 teachers will be consulted. Two rounds of online surveys will be conducted within a five-week time frame.

**Benefits:** By partaking in this study, participants will, through reflection, have an opportunity to better understand their own responses to self-care, while making a contribution to knowledge in the area of education. In addition, they will have the opportunity for feedback with respect to the findings of this study.

**Risks:** There are no risks apparent in this study. Voluntary participants will be notified of the full intent of the study, and safeguards will be implemented to ensure confidentiality in the analysis of data and conclusions. Though all data gathered through the proposed study will be treated with confidentiality, anonymity cannot be assured. Direct quotations from the questionnaires will be reported.

**Survey** Survey Monkey, a web-survey company that is located in the USA, is the host of this on-line research. This company is subject to U.S. laws; in particular, the US Patriot Act that allows authorities access to the records of internet service providers. Survey Monkey's servers record incoming IP addresses – including that of the computer that you use to access the survey. However, no connection is made between your data and your computer's IP address. If you choose to participate in the survey, you understand that your responses to the survey questions will be stored and accessed in the USA.

**Confidentiality:** Your privacy will be respected. Your name will not be attached to any information, nor mentioned in any study report, nor be made available to anyone except the research team. It is the intention of the research team to publish results of this research in a thesis and scientific journals and to present the findings at related conferences and workshops, but your identity will not be revealed. Pseudonyms will be used and potential school divisions named with be listed nominally.

**Storage of data:** All contributions made by participants will be kept confidential during data analysis and not shared with others outside the research team. The student researcher (Matthew McCaw) will store the raw data in a password-protected file on a secure personal computer in order for data analysis.

Once thesis is successfully defended, raw electronic data will be printed and stored by faculty supervisor Dr. Audrey Kinzel for five years upon completion of the study; after five years paper data will be shredded. Data will be stored in a filing cabinet in her office; all other necessary paperwork will be stored with Dr. Kinzel once thesis is successfully defended as well. Once electronic

data is printed and stored, raw electronic data will be destroyed via a secure trash function on the student researchers laptop.

**Right to withdraw:** Your participation is voluntary, and you can answer only those questions that you are comfortable with. There is no guarantee that you will personally benefit from your involvement. The information that is shared will be held in strict confidence and only discussed in the research team. You may withdraw from the research project for any reason and without penalty of any sort. Your right to withdraw data from the study will apply until April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011 (results have been disseminated, data has been pooled, etc.). After this it is possible that some form of research dissemination will have already occurred and it may not be possible to withdraw your data.

**Other:** This research is for a graduate student's master's thesis.

**Questions:** If you have any questions concerning the research project, please feel free to ask at any point; you are also free to contact the researchers at the numbers provided if you have other questions. This research project has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board on (insert date). Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Ethics Office (966-2084). Out of town participants may call collect.

**Follow-Up:** A thank-you email will be sent to conclude the study.

### **STEP 3** (Fill out with the help of the nominee)

On the basis of the nomination criteria listed on the preceding page, please provide the following information as fully as possible. (Nominate one teacher per form, please.)

Name of Teacher Nominee (pseudonym if preferred): \_\_\_\_\_

School Division (pseudonym if preferred): \_\_\_\_\_

Years of Teaching Experience: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's e-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_

Current Teaching Assignment (grades/subjects): \_\_\_\_\_

I read and explained this consent form to the participant before receiving the participant's consent, and the participant had knowledge of its content and appeared to understand it.

---

(Signature of Nominator)

---

(Date)

APPENDIX D  
**E-mail to Nominated Participants/Nominees**

Good Bye Burnout, Hello Me:  
Individual strategies of self-care among Saskatchewan teachers

Date, year

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

**Thank-you for agreeing to participate in this study.** Unquestionably, work stress and burnout in the field of education has been a topic of much concern over the years. Being in the profession, as you have been, makes you very aware of the demands and resources required to be a successful teacher, let alone be a good friend, spouse, parent, coach, etc. This study seeks to unravel the mystery around stress and burnout, but by taking a different approach. The purpose of this study is not to continue research on the levels of stress and burnout among teachers, nor is it to determine the causes. The intention of this study is to investigate what selected teachers (5 years or more of experience, and hold a Saskatchewan Teacher's certificate), identified as having good work-life balance, do at work, or more importantly what they do once they finish work in order to take care of themselves.

Participants in this study will have the opportunity, provided through a web-based questionnaire, to reflect on their lifestyle and career in the context of self-care. As well, they will have the opportunity to contribute to the knowledge on the changes occurring in education.

In this research, I will take special care and attention to ensure ethical safeguards are built into all aspects of the study. Careful attention will be paid to honoring the voluntary nature of participation, protecting confidentiality, and displaying sensitivity to every participant. This is a secure website-based study meaning participant's names, details, and commenting will remain confidential (anonymity cannot be assured). Furthermore, if at anytime a participant decides they wish to not continue, they can remove themselves from the study reassured that all information provided will be destroyed. Please be aware that direct quotations may be used as part of the study, the deadline to withdraw your data from the study is June 16<sup>th</sup>, 2011, and no personal names, locations or school division disclosures will be reported.

To begin this investigation, please refer to the timeline expectations below:

Table 1. Study Timeline

Activity	Duration
June 2, 2011 Thank-you/invitation e-mail that the study will begin in one week	
June 9, 2011 SurveyMonkey Link sent to participants via e-mail survey	1-week to complete
June 16th, 2011 2 <sup>nd</sup> SurveyMonkey Link sent to participants via e-mail survey	1-week to complete

**In one week, from the date of this e-mail, you will receive the link to your first survey to complete.**

Thank-you very much for your time and cooperation in this very important area of educational research. Please to refer to attachment which includes information about the studies objective, rational, procedure, benefits, risks and contact information which was explained to you during the nomination process.

Sincerely,

Matthew McCaw  
[mtm472@mail.usask.ca](mailto:mtm472@mail.usask.ca)  
1(306)763-4263  
Department of Educational Psychology and Special Education  
University of Saskatchewan

APPENDIX E  
**Round 1 and 2 Questions**

**Round 1: Delphi Expert Group**

- (1) Demographic Information
  - (a) Age?
  - (b) Relationship status?
  - (c) What year did you graduate with your Bachelor of Education?
  - (d) How many years have you been in the profession of teaching?
- (2) Definitions to consider
  - (e) *Self-Care* - They are steps taken to preserve and maintain personal health (Bickley, 1998).
  - (f) *Well-being* - A persons evaluative reactions to his or her life-either in terms of life satisfaction or affect (ongoing emotional reactions) (Diener, E., & Diener, M., 1995).
- (3) Self-Care
  - (g) What self-care strategies do you use to improve or maintain your wellbeing? Please list as many as you can think of.
  - (h) How do the self-care strategies help?
  - (i) How do you use these self-care strategies? (e.g., on a regular basis, as needed, depends?). Please explain.
  - (j) Please think of a recent time of when you used one of these self-care strategies and then describe it in as much detail as you can: e.g., what was happening in your life at this particular time; what you did and how you responded; what you felt/thought/experienced before, during and afterwards; other people who were involved; etc.
- (4) General
  - (k) Are there other comments you would like to add to help me better understand those aspects of your life – personal, professional, or organizational, that positively influence your wellbeing?



## Round 2: Delphi Expert Group

- (1) The most common/frequent self-care strategies suggested by teachers were:  
EXERCISING  
TALKING WITH FRIENDS AND FAMILY  
EATING HEALTHY  
DISCUSSING EVENTS FROM THE CLASSROOM WITH SUPPORT SYSTEM AT SCHOOL  
DRINKING WATER  
VOLUNTEERING  
Are there any strategies not presented on this list that you have used and would like to add (please do not add strategies that were included in your answers from the first survey).
- (2) Are there self-care strategies you would like to begin doing? Please list as many as possible.
- (3) Common themes that resulted from how self-care strategies help were:  
1. ALLEVIATE STRESS, ANGER, AND FRUSTRATION  
2. FOCUS LIFE PRIORITIES  
3. BETTER OVERALL HEALTH  
4. HELPS ME BE A BETTER TEACHER  
Do these common themes reflect your personal well-being when self care strategies are utilized? Agree or disagree? Please explain.
- (4) What advice would you give future teachers who are just entering the profession on the importance of using self-care strategies?
- (5) Any other general comments you want to make regarding teacher self-care?

APPENDIX F  
E-mail Attachment  
**Delphi Expert Group**

University of Saskatchewan

Title of Study: Good Bye Burnout, Hello Me: Individual strategies of self-care among Saskatchewan Teachers.

Investigators: Matthew T. McCaw (MEd Student); Dr. Audrey Kinzel (Research Supervisor)

Objective: This study is intended to investigate how selected Saskatchewan Teachers, successfully managing their work lives.

Rationale: A great deal has been written about teacher stress and burnout. However, much of this writing has focused on what universities, school divisions and individual schools can do to help. The proposed study will seek to define self-care and explore strategies used by Saskatchewan Teachers to allow them a healthy balance in their lives.

Procedures: An expert group of 12-15 teachers will be consulted. Two rounds of online surveys will be conducted within a five-week time frame.

Benefits: By partaking in this study, participants will, through reflection, have an opportunity to better understand their own responses to self-care, while making a contribution to knowledge in the area of education. In addition, they will have the opportunity for feedback with respect to the findings of this study.

Risks: There are no risks apparent in this study. Voluntary participants will be notified of the full intent of the study, and safeguards will be implemented to ensure confidentiality in the analysis of data and conclusions. Though all data gathered through the proposed study will be treated with confidentiality, anonymity cannot be assured. Direct quotations from the questionnaires will be reported, and that if, at some later point, they have any second thoughts about their responses, they should contact the researcher, who will remove them from the database. Your right to withdraw data from the study will apply until April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011 (results have been disseminated, data has been pooled, etc.). After this it is possible that some form of research dissemination will have already occurred and it may not be possible to withdraw your data.

Survey Survey Monkey, a web-survey company that is located in the USA, is the host of this on-line research. This company is subject to U.S. laws; in particular,

the US Patriot Act that allows authorities access to the records of internet service providers. Survey Monkey's servers record incoming IP addresses – including that of the computer that you use to access the survey. However, no connection is made between your data and your computer's IP address. If you choose to participate in the survey, you understand that your responses to the survey questions will be stored and accessed in the USA.

Other: If you have any questions concerning the research project, please feel free to ask at any point; you are also free to contact the researchers at the numbers provided if you have other questions. This research project has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board on (insert date). Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Ethics Office (966-2084). Out of town participants may call collect.

Matthew McCaw  
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Supervisor  
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## APPENDIX G: Ethics Application

### **Behavioural Research Ethics Board (Beh-REB) Application for Approval of Research**

1. **Researchers:**

**Faculty Supervisor:** Dr. Audrey Kinzel

**Student Researcher:** Matthew McCaw (M.Ed. program of study)

**College:** Department of Educational Psychology and Special Education

**Anticipated Start Date:** January 15, 2011

**Anticipated End Date:** September 1, 2011

2. **Title of Study:** Good Bye Burnout, Hello Me: Individual strategies of self-care among Saskatchewan Teachers

3. **Abstract:**

Teaching has traditionally been characterized as an occupation with high levels of teacher turnover and attrition (Ingersoll, 2003). Some reports estimate that nearly 50% of teachers who have entered the profession leave within the first 5 years (Ingersoll, 2003). Nearly one-third of new teachers leave the field within the first three years (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003), 16 % leave after completing their first year (Kirby, Berends, & Haftalet, 1999), and 10% do not even complete their first year of teaching. In recent years, research concerning self-care of helping professionals has emerged, but none specifically on self-care techniques of teachers. The purpose of this study is to investigate Saskatchewan teachers' self-care strategies. The Delphi method will be used to identify, compare and contrast self-care strategies of teachers with specific attention given to: organizing an expert panel of teachers perceived as successfully managing the demands of their work life; defining self-care according to these teachers; listing self-care strategies used in their daily and weekly lives; and understanding how self-care affects them in their

personal and professional lives. Potentially, these self-care practices will improve teacher attrition and open the door for further research.

4. **Funding:** No funding provided
5. **Expertise:** Below minimum risk
6. **Conflict of Interest:** There is no anticipated conflict of interest.
7. **Participants** (Panel of Experts)

Selection: The student researcher will contact current and past coworkers; these coworkers are the nominators. Nominators will receive a letter (Appendix A) requesting their help. They will be asked to identify participants, by way of a nomination form (Appendix B), teachers who, in their opinion, best meet the criteria described. These potential participants will be asked verbally to participate by nominators, and then if they accept, agree to fill out a nomination consent/response form with the nominator (Appendix C). Once the student researcher receives the nomination consent/response forms back from the nominators, the student researcher will send an introductory e-mail to the participants (Appendix D). This e-mail will include an attachment with the studies objective, procedures, benefits, and risks which was already reviewed with them (Appendix F). These participants are the panel of experts.

8. **Consent:**

Oral consent will be asked of participants. Nominators will be required to sign and date Consent/Response Form (Appendix C) once explained to participants. Signatures of participants are not required. Coercion to participate will be minimized through a statement about the voluntary nature of the research, right to withdraw and research conducted through a web-based questionnaire.

### *Nominators*

The student researcher will contact all nominators through online video chat, or by phone. The nomination process will be explained to them verbally and if they are agreeable, they will be sent a letter explaining the study (Appendix A), a list of nomination criteria (Appendix B), and a nomination consent/response form (Appendix C). Nominators will be given one week to nominate participants and send completed response forms through standard mail or e-mail. It will be explained to nominators that:

- 1) Nominators do not need to nominate participants for the study if they do not feel comfortable.
- 2) Any information given will remain confidential. No actual names will be used and school divisions, if potentially named, will be changed to pseudonyms as well.
- 3) Nominators and their nominated participants may withdraw at anytime, for any reason, and no penalty will result, or hurt feelings. Participants by April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011.
- 4) Verbal consent from participants will be required, as well as nominator signed and dated consent/nomination response form (Appendix C).
- 5) Nominators will share with potential participants that this study is for a graduate student's master's thesis.

### *Participants (Panel of Experts)*

All participants who verbally agree to be a part of the study when asked by the nominator, will complete the nomination consent/response form (Appendix C).

Nominators will mail the form back to the student researcher in a self-addressed postage paid envelope or via e-mail. Potential participants can use pseudonym names. Once identified, participants will be sent an e-mail which outlines the study in detail (Appendix

D). Attached to the invitation e-mail will be a word document that explains the objective, rational, procedure, benefit and risks (Appendix F). This is repeated information that was already explained to participants during verbal consent (Appendix C).

## 9. **Methods/Procedures:**

### The Delphi Method Study Rounds

Round 1: The purpose of Round 1 is to gather data on the best practices that nominated teachers state they are using to reduce stress and burnout in their lives. In Round 1 of the Delphi study, the survey instrument will be the foundational questionnaire. The questions ask:

1. What self-care strategies do you use to improve or maintain your wellbeing?  
Please list as many as you can think of.
2. How do these self-care strategies help?
3. How do you use these self-care strategies? (e.g., on a regular basis, as needed, depends?). Please explain.
4. Please think of a recent time of when you used one of these self-care strategies and then describe it in as much detail as you can: e.g., what was happening in your life at this particular time; what you did and how you responded; what you felt/thought/experienced before, during and afterwards; other people who were involved; etc.
5. Are there other comments you would like to add to help me better understand those aspects of your life – personal, professional or organizational – that positively influence your wellbeing?

These open-ended questions will be used to begin to identify and increase

understanding about the best self-care practices that teachers use at work and at home.

The Round 1 results will identify emerging themes through the potential consensus of the panel (Appendix E)

Round 2: In Round 2 a list of self-care practices used by expert panel members from round one will be presented to the group. The questions posed will relate to the relative agreement on the best self-care practices in reducing stress and burnout and building wellbeing personally and professionally. Additional open-ended questions will be provided to increase understanding.

#### 10. **Storage of Data:**

The participants will access SurveyMonkey, an online confidential survey-creation software tool. Confidentiality will be maintained by changing the configuration settings of the SurveyMonkey survey link to disregard the saving of e-mail addresses. Once the data collection process is complete, data stored on SurveyMonkey will be backed up to a secure computer in order for data analysis to begin. The data on SurveyMonkey will subsequently be deleted and the subscription will be cancelled. The SurveyMonkey software tool has been selected because of the confidentiality maintained through its secure database and the flexibility for a two-round study.

All contributions made by participants within both Delphi rounds will not be shared with others outside the research team. The student researcher (Matthew McCaw) will store the raw data participants in a password-protected file on a secure personal computer in order for data analysis.

Once thesis is successfully defended, raw electronic data will be printed and stored by faculty supervisor Dr. Audrey Kinzel for five years upon completion of the study. Data



will be stored in a filing cabinet in her office; all other necessary paperwork (Appendix C) will be stored with Dr. Kinzel once thesis is successfully defended as well. Once electronic data is printed and stored, raw electronic data will be destroyed via a secure trash function on the student researchers laptop.

11. **Dissemination of Results:**

The data collected will be used to write a Masters thesis to fulfill requirements for M.Ed. Furthermore, upon completion findings may be used in conference presentations, article publications, or personal in-services.

12. **Risk, Benefits, and Deception:**

There will be no risk or deception in this study. General benefits are anticipated for contributing to the research literature. Possible personal benefits may occur as a result of participants being acknowledged by their peers as exemplars, as well as by participants taking time to reflect on their self-care strategies.

13. **Confidentiality:**

The following steps will be taken to maximize confidentiality. Firstly, all participants will be contacted through e-mail; no specific identifying information will be known. Furthermore, participants may choose to use pseudonym names, therefore allowing for confidentiality.

Data will be reported through direct quotations and paraphrasing. Though the researcher is gathering data from teachers from different areas of the province and from a variety of school divisions, school division names will not be used. Instead the researcher will label teachers specific school divisions as numbers one to five.

Secondly, participants will not know the other participants because they will all log

into a secure website named SurveyMonkey. The researcher will upload an e-mail message and questions to SurveyMonkey, which will send the survey on the researchers behalf.

Thirdly, after the first round of the Delphi Method, respondents will get to view a collection of direct quotes and paraphrased information. They will then continue to explore the subject of self-care and make any alterations or new discoveries about the subject material. Because participants will have no visual and informational connection to other participants due to the online nature of the research, confidentiality will continue to be established. Anonymity cannot be assured.

14. **Data/Transcript Release:**

Participant's information will be kept confidential. Participants are clearly told in the consent form that direct quotations from the interview will be reported, and that if, at some later point, they have any second thoughts about their responses, they should contact the researcher, who will remove them from the data base. Deadline is April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011 for information to be removed from the database.

15. **Debriefing and feedback:**

Once data collection is complete and the two Delphi rounds are done, participants will be sent a thank-you e-mail. They will be asked to e-mail the student researcher with any questions or concerns over the next 3 months while data analysis is being conducted. Within the thank-you e-mail participants will be allowed to request an electronic copy of the completed masters thesis once it is defended.

16. **Required Signatures:**

Matthew McCaw (Student):\_\_\_\_\_

Audrey Kinzel (Supervisor):\_\_\_\_\_

David Mykota (Department Head): \_\_\_\_\_

**17. Required Contact Information**

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