# Education Reform
# and the Role of Administrators
# in Mediating Teacher Stress

## By Jason Margolis & Liza Nagel

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the center cannot holdÖ
ó William Butler Yeatsí ìThe Second Coming,î 1922

*Jason Margolis is an assistant professor of teacher education with the College of Education at Washington State University, Vancouver, Washington, and Liza Nagel is an associate professor in the College of Education at the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, New Mexico.*

## Introduction

School change is inevitable. As a human institution, schools are in a constant state of transformation (Hinde, 2003), and individual teachers adapt or provide the impetus for that transformation all the time (Richardson & Placier, 2001). The question, then, is not whether there will be change, but what change there will beó a question complicated by the fact that change means different things to different people (Evans, 1996).

For example, when it comes to school reforms, a policymaker may view a particular change as progressive and teachers refusing to change as recalcitrant. But to teachers in a particular school building, hundreds of miles from that policymaker, the proposed change may seem dictatorial or draconian and

in conflict with their long-held progressive student-centered ideals. This perceived conflict could arise because the reform is indeed incompatible with the reality of their teaching context, or it could be because they have not had the same amount of time as the reformer to integrate the proposed change into their philosophy: it just happened to them. When experienced, change comes with such social and psychological implications that it is sometimes hard to tell who is being innovative and who is being resistant (Marris, 1986). This tension arises partially because ìchange alone is not innovationî (Lubienski, 2003, p. 403), and educational policymakers, administrators, and teachers may view a particular initiative quite differently.

For teachers, specifically, negative perceptions of change manifest themselves in very real ways. Kyriacou (2001) reports the negative impact of change upon teacher stress and consequential resiliency. However, as Evans (1996) explains, the human feelings that teachers often experience during education reformsóloss, anxiety, ambivalence, and resistanceóhave historically either been ignored or belittled. And while administrators can serve as mediators of change-related stress (Lumsden, 1998; Calabrese, 1987; Pahnos, 1990; Brown & Nagel, 2004), a study of teachers in rural Washington reported that one of their most prevalent stress factors was lack of support by administrators, second only to time management issues (Keiper & Busselle, 1996). Recent studies of teachers in North Carolina and South Carolina by the Southeast Center for Teaching Quality (2005a, 2005b) found that teacher attrition was directly related to perceptions of lack of administrative support and to significant divides between how teachers and principals viewed working conditions in schools.

The tensions between innovation-status quo and teacher-administrator perceptions within a school-change effort form the basis for this study. Through phenomenological inquiry focused on teacher and administrator meaning-making, this study explored the inherent complications of change. Further, this study responded to the call for empirical research on the relationships between teacher learning and school restructuring (Ancess, 2000) and the interface between teacher and school change (Richardson & Placier, 2001). To better understand how teachers experience changing educational policies, the goal here was to document and interpret teachersí ìlived experienceî via phenomenological inquiryó*What is it like to teach amidst educational change?* This article examines educator perceptions of change, the way in which they integrated the prescribed changes, and the role of administrators in mediating the attendant stressors, thus impacting the efficacy of the proposed reform.

## Teachers' Resistance to Change

Historically, teachers have resisted the implementation of change in proportion to the amount of change required (Gusky, 1995). Some analysts of school reforms have claimed that reformers often ìunderestimate the impact of the

workplace and prior constraints upon teachers and overestimate the power of their innovation to alter teaching and learningî (Cuban, 1993). Indeed, recent literature notes increasing teacher resistance in schools seeking to adopt comprehensive reforms, citing insufficient time and relevant professional development to support model implementation, alignment with state assessments, and the creation of a common vision (Desimone, 2000; McChesney & Hertling, 2000).

Silin & Schwartz (2003) assert that teacher resistance to change can be read as a form of communicationóa voice articulating ìwhat is most salient for teachers, which dilemmas need to be addressed and if not resolved at least articulated and studiedî (p. 1598). They add that change agents within schools need to pay close attention to what teachers perceive as problematic, and must also stay close to the lived realities of teachersí work lives.

Whereas previous research has discussed the systemic problems related to teacher resistance to change, this study examines both the explicit and implicit communiquÈs by teachers regarding the lived and local impact of change, how teacher responses to change are connected to their lived experiences, and how understanding of these experiences by school administration can further or hinder a school reform effort.

## Foundations of the Study

The research design borrowed van Manenís (1990) framework for studying lived experiences within educational contexts, which itself draws from several German philosophers of human consciousness (Dilthy [in Makkreel & Frithjof, 1985]; Gadamer, 1975; Husserl [in Keller, 1999]). Van Manen explains that lived experiences have a certain ìessence Ö a non-reflective type of consciousness in our daily lifeî (p. 38)ófor example, a ìteaching consciousnessî that remains implicit. Over time, these lived experiences gather significance through memory as related experiences are compared. The essence of teaching, then, is in the experience of teaching and its ìsensationsî (Husserl [in Keller, 1999]); the significance of what it is like to teach gains meaning over time through reflection as ìremembered experienceî (Gadamer, 1975). What it is like to teach amidst educational change has immediate manifestations as well as accumulated meaning for individual teachers. A primary goal of this study is to come to a better understanding of these meanings as well as what teacher meaning-making suggests for educational change.

ìLived bodyî is one of the major components of lived experience, as van Manen points to ìthe phenomenological fact that we are always in the bodily worldî (p. 103). Inquiry into lived body examines both that which is revealed and that which is concealed by oneís physical presence. By inquiring into teacher lived bodily experiences, this study sought to describe the complex web of educational theories embedded in the lives of teachers, and the visceral experience of attempting to transform teaching and learning.

This study also drew from social psychology (Marris, 1986) to better understand the complicated and contradictory emotions of individuals (teachers) who live social changes (education reforms) that can often ìdrain vitalityî (p. 26). There is a growing acknowledgement by strategic theorists that there needs to be an emphasis on meaning over policy and plans (see also Barnes, 2002; Evans, 1996). Thus, a focus on teacher lived bodily experiences facilitated inquiry into teacher meaning-making and ìthe interplay of all the various factors that cause changeî (Hinde, 2003) rather than imposing any one theoretical lens or investigating the absence or inclusion of a single support structure.

Taken together, the phenomenological and social psychological frames guided inquiry into the parts (the immediate sensations of teachers amidst educational change) and the whole (how these lived experiences gain meaning and were represented in the body through the course of a school year).

## Context of Study and School Site

This study of school change and how teacher-administrator relations impact educational change efforts began when the school study site was just a concept. In the Winter of 2000, the primary investigator (PI) met John, the school founder and soon-to-be principal, in an interdisciplinary graduate course John created to help design College Prep Academy (CPA)óa new charter school in a Midwest urban area. When the course concluded, the PI recommended one of the teachers who later helped begin CPA and maintained contact with John and several of the teachers throughout the schoolís first year.

CPAís mission was to educate The Cityís children ìOne Student at a Time,î positing that all students could learn, given the right relationships with adults and the necessary learning space to pursue individual interests. The learning model was borrowed from Sizerís Coalition of Essential Schools (Levine, 2002), focusing on individualized and interest-based learning supported by internships in the community. Each student had an individual learning plan continually amended at learning team meetings, where a parent or guardianís presence was required. There were no grades; teachers wrote quarterly narratives describing student progress. Instead of studying discreet subjects and taking tests, students engaged in interdisciplinary, interest-based projects, and then exhibited their work and progress through public presentations before a panel. Class-size was no larger than 16 students. Some parents were drawn to enroll students at CPA for enrichment and challenge, others to give their children a second chance after being unsuccessful in the city public schools.

Teachers during CPAís first year stated they were attracted to the school with promises of being part of creating a fundamentally different type of school that was connected to the community, student-centered, and a place where they could grow and be key decision-makers. However, as the PI discovered during several site visits during CPAís first year, several teachers shared their concerns about whether the

schoolís high ideals were being actualized and whether it was personally a positive place to work. John, as well, told the PI that a greater emphasis on teacher development would be needed in order for CPA to be successful. It was during these conversations that John and the PI agreed that during the second year of the school the PI would facilitate an action research group (designed to help teachers own the school change effort) and simultaneously study the school and teachers (looking at the change process and teacher meaning making).

During the year of the study, CPA experienced several specific dilemmas that framed the context for overall teacher working conditions and teacher-administrative relations. These included conflicts over: (1) whether the schoolís diagnosed (and undiagnosed) special education population was being served correctly; (2) whether discipline and classroom management should be behavioral or constructivist; (3) what types of learning assessments should be created and implemented in lieu of state exams and grades; and (4) how salary increases, praise and recognition, and opportunities to advance were distributed by the school administration.

An additional important aspect of the broad context of this study is Johnís background. While he had briefly taught in the same city public school system 30 years earlier, he had spent most of his career in business and politics. John was open about his lack of experience with teachers, calling them ìpart of a sub-culture I didnít know much about.î He viewed his outsider status as an asset because he could critique the existing system and utilize leadership strategies he found effective in other contexts to facilitate a vision of change. Thus, John was a somewhat naÔve school administrator who did not have the educational background nor ways of speaking to conceal some of his early struggles working with his staff. For example, his early focus was on vision and bold public statements rather than listening to the concerns of his teachers. Because of this, exploring what administrators do (or do not do) to support teachers amidst change was, in this case, exacerbated, visible, and open for study.

## Research Site Demographics and Researcher Involvement

Located at a publicly funded county charter school of 6th and 7th graders in the urban Midwest, the duration of the study was a full year. CPAís student population of approximately 220 was predominantly African-American (99%) but the 18 teachers represented a more diverse population of 50% European-Americans (n=9), 33% African-Americans (n=6), two Latino-Americans (11%) and one Asian-Canadian (6%).

As CPA was in its second year when this study occurred, the absence of a physical plant and material resources that often become the focus of a first-year school were not primary concerns. Many of the more basic start-up issuesóhaving a building with a sufficient infrastructureóhad already been addressed by the end of the first year or the very beginning of the second. Studying CPA in year two allowed the PI to explore the development of a new school with a focus more on the

experience of the teachers and the managing of human resources than on facilities or the obtaining of books, desks, and computers. The original primary purpose of the PIís presence at the school was to create and facilitate an action research group; however, as the year progressed, the role was expanded to that of consultant in a variety of meetings and capacities.

### The Action Research Group

The specific professional development process that seven CPA teachers volunteered to participate in has been referred to as ìliterary action researchî (see Margolis, 2002), a blend of creative writing and systematic inquiry. Activities were designed to validate the teachersí prior beliefs and experiences, communally discuss the struggles of change, and help teachers take ownership of the schoolís development. Also, elements of the intervention were intentionally designed to model what teachers were to provide for their students. For example, teachers received narrative feedback on their writings, pursued an area of interest, and exhibited their findings publicly. This was done to explicitly connect the schoolís restructuring efforts to teacher learning (Ancess, 2000) as well as to have the teachers serve as models of inquiry for their students (Moll & Gonzales, 1994). Meetings of teacher-participants were to occur once every two-to-three weeks, with individual support in between meetings. Seven teachers joined the group in September; three remained when teachers presented their work in June.

## Study Participants across CPA

The 15 participants included 7 teachers who engaged in the professional development group facilitated by the PI, 5 teachers who did not, as well as 3 administrators. All participants consented to participate through a process approved by the universityís Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects. Of the 12 teachers who participated, 10 were female; 7 were Caucasian, 2 were African-American, 2 were Latino, and 1 was Asian-Canadian. Of the 3 administrators, 1 was a Caucasian male, 1 a Caucasian female, and 1 an African-American female.

Due to extenuating circumstances outside the researchersí control (i.e., employment dismissal, employment changes), data collection was not evenly carried out (see Table 1). For example, audiotaped interviews ranged from four with two participants to zero with three others, with the mean number of interviews being approximately two. Also, while seven participants stayed with the project for the full year, other participants were involved for only three to seven months.

## Methodology & Data Analyses

`Data sources focused on teacher lived experience included: (a) at least three formal interviews with group participants and two formal interviews with non-participating teachers/staff where possibleóall about 45 minutes in length, audio-taped and

**Table 1**: Participants' Status and Accompanying Data Collection

| Participant (pseudonyms) | Position | Full Year? | Audiotaped Interviews (#) | Informal, Semiformal Interviews | Observational Fieldnotes | Professional Development Work, Writing | Consent Form? |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Susan | Teacher | Yes | Yes (3) | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Laura | Teacher | Yes | Yes (4) | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Colleen | Teacher | Yes | Yes (4) | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Julie | Teacher, Consultant | Absence 9 months | Yes (3) | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| June | Teacher | Resigned 4 months | Yes (2) | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| LaKeisha | Teacher | Fired 3 months | Yes (1) | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Jacqulyn | Teacher | Left Study 3 months | Yes (1) | Yes | Yes | No | Yes, with-drew 10/31 |
| Rachel | ST + Teacher | Entered Jan. 7 months | Yes (3) | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Mary | CT + Teacher | Entered Feb. 6 months | No | Yes | Yes | No | Yes |
| Paul | Teacher | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | No | Yes |
| John | Principal, Founder | Yes | Yes (1) | Yes | Yes | No | Yes |
| Nancy | Teacher | Entered Feb. 6 months | Yes (1) | No | Yes | No | Yes |
| Lisa | Administrat-or, Teacher | Yes | Yes (2) | Yes | Yes | No | Yes |
| Karen | Admin-istrator | Yes | Yes (2) | Yes | Yes | No | Yes |
| Robert | Teacher | Entered Feb. 6 months | No | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |

transcribed; (b) descriptive field notes capturing information from regular informal and semi-formal interviews with participants as well as other school community members; (c) descriptive field notes from formal and informal observations of participantsí classrooms, and from the group meetings; and (d) teacher artifacts. Also, consistent with methods that seek to actively and systematically document oneís own subjectivity throughout the research process (Peshkin, 1988), the participant-observer kept a separate ìresearcherís journalî to trace her (his) own lived experience throughout the year.

Data sources supplying information on the backdrops to teacher lived experience, such as the school climate and norms, included: (a) school artifacts and documents; (b) descriptive field notes from observations of the school climate, interactions and school events; (c) artifacts and documents from the professional

development group, such as support materials and responses to their work; (d) a videotape recording of three action research participantsí final presentation of their work to peers; and (e) informal records of exchanges (such as e-mails) and the school environment (such as photographs). These secondary data sources complemented primary sources by providing information on the larger structures within the school that might impact individual teacher lived experiences.

Because investigation of teacher lived bodily experiences within school development took place in-depth at one site, the school was viewed as an ìinstrumental case studyî (Stake, 1995), one designed to provide insight into this issue more generally while at the same time describing naturalistically how it played out within this particular school. This case study borrowed methods from educational ethnography (Eisenhart, 2001; Erickson, 1986), as throughout the research process the PI served as a participant-observer; he was on-site two days a week for an entire school year and investigated the experiences of individual teachers and broader school climate, norms, and structures, as well as how they interrelated. Primary data sources included field notes from naturalistic observation throughout the school day.

Data analysis began with repeated readings of interview transcripts and field notes from conversations with teachers and administrators as well as their own writings. The purpose was to determine the ìessence of the phenomenonî and ìstructures of experienceî (van Manen, 1990, p. 77-79) of teacher and administrative meaning-making amidst a schoolís change-oriented development. Throughout, analysis was guided by van Manenís framework (1990), including an examination of the ways in which staff experienced lived priorities, proxemics, and relationships at the charter school.

It is important to note that van Manenís guiding framework did not limit coding; the phenomenological approach served to structure rather than limit analysis. In cases where, through inductive analysis, the framework did not shed light on the phenomenon of teacher lived experience of school development, adjustments were made. Within this framework, the PI analyzed the data drawing from grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) in order to develop emerging codes, and then to select, refine, and link core coding-categories.

## Findings

Several primary themes were uncovered from data analysis: *cumulative stress, the pace of change,* and *relationships and the administration.* First, stress increased as teachersí physical and mental exhaustion were coupled, negatively impacting job performance and satisfaction. Important here is that teachers not only felt worn down by stress, but felt that with no spaces to relieve stress constructively, this state was a permanent and chronic aspect of working at CPA. Second, physical exhaustion increased in relation to the scope and pace of change and the extent to which teachers perceived the changes to be imposed rather than communally owned.

Third, relationships were the most powerful mediator of teacher stress ñ teachers were most resilient when they felt valued and appreciated and trusted that school leadership had their long-term personal best interests in mind. Finally, this study reaffirms the power of the principal in shaping the environment and structures that either enhance or debilitate teacher work.

These findings were triangulated by seeking out multiple perspectives and collecting data to ascertain teacher and administrator views. Further, tentative findings were continually checked with participants both during the study and throughout data analysis and write-ups.

### 1. Cumulative Stress

While CPAís reforms were rooted in high ideals, it was not conflict over ideology that most impacted teacher stress levels during implementation. Teacher strain and resistance grew out of negative experiences that accumulated over time without acknowledgment or opportunities to re-formulate beliefs. This ultimately created negative teacher dispositions and, collectively, a staff morale which spiraled downward.

While John, CPA co-founder and principal, had claimed that the schoolís slogan (ìOne Student At A Timeî) needed to apply to teachers as well (ìOne Teacher At A Timeî), teachers consistently noted the absence of attention to their personal needs and circumstances. Most notable were a perceived: (a) lack of material resources (books, curricula, time); (b) lack of support (in conflicts with students or parents, in improving instruction); and (c) lack of opportunities to grow (personally and professionally). For example, Susan said she felt increasingly estranged and unin-spired as ìeveryone is always yelling at me ñ the kids, the parents, Janice and John. And there is no support. I need more support from the school to help these kidsî (field notes). Meetings, for the most part, exacerbated dissention, as explained by Lisa:

> A lot of times [what happens] at our monthly meetings for professional development is we talk business, business, business, and people donít have a lot of time to get out their frustrations and issues they may be dealing with at any given time …. (interview)

In the absence of a space to openly discuss frustrations, a vicious cycle developed. By October, teachers began to wear down and increasingly withdraw from each other, thus accelerating the lack of on-site resources like collegial support and collaborative problem solving. By Thanksgiving, the exhaustion was clearly both physical and mentalóand widespread. Colleen frequently missed work for ìemergency doctorís appointments,î Paul consistently complained of ìthe noiseî that was buffeting his body and keeping him from thinking, and Susan reported that several other teachers in the school were ìbeing testedî for significant health issues. Several teachers claimed they developed serious ailments they never had before, including rheumatoid arthritis and diabetes. Both are autoimmune diseases the NIH says is often caused by ìchronic stress.î Though still conceptually committed to

the school, many teachers physically and physiologically began to resist the day-to-day work associated with manifesting the vision of the CPA learning model.

Although the action research group was designed as a support for teachers, more often it was subsumed by the larger forces of the school. On one afternoon in early November, teachers were asked, ìAre you excited about moving from reflection to action?î After a period of silence, Colleen replied: ìI am too tired to move from anything to anythingî (field notes). As the year progressed, frequent absences turned into complete disappearances for several teachers. Susan called the staff attrition (see Table 2) ìa break down in school philosophy,î questioning how the school could make a difference for students with such high rates of teacher turnover and a constant ìre-learning of kids.î In this way, teacher stress directly impacted students and threatened the efficacy of the school enterprise.

Further, the downturn of teachersí morale became pervasive, as individual teachersí negativity gradually spread throughout the staff collectively. While lived experiences gained meaning for individual teachers (as cumulative stressful experiences turned into negative dispositions), a collective experience emerged for the staff (as negative individual dispositions turned into an overall low staff morale). In mid-February, Paul expressed how an over-emphasis by administrators on ìmodelî and a de-emphasis on ìwhat is really going onî had become deleterious to both his own work and the entire school:

> It is like they are off gazing at the stars, thinking that if they keep their eyes fixed in that direction, it will get everyone else there. Meanwhile, everything is falling apart around them, but they canít see it. (field notes)

Field notes and interview data suggest that the October through February deterioration of the mood and health of teachers at CPA was at least partly related to the fact that the administrative focus was still on implementing plans rather than ackowledging, reading, and building from teacher concerns. This lack of acknowl-

**Table 2**: CPA Staff Attrition

(Data from Year 1 reported in conversations; Years 2 and 3 from official school artifacts)

| Year 1 Staff* | Returned for Year 2 | Rate of Attrition*** |
|---|---|---|
| 7 | 3 | 57% |
| Year 2 Staff** | Returned for Year 3 | Rate of Attrition*** |
| 18 | 7 | 61% |

\* Includes only the 7 full time teachers that began the year
\*\* Includes only the 14 full time teachers that began the year, as well as 2 full time administrators who also took on teaching roles (Karen and Lisa), and 2 full time teachers of ìSpecialsî (Spanish and Gym)
\*\*\* With such a small sample, these percentages are more notable for their consistency than their statistical power

edgment of stress by the administration then appeared to have increased teacher stress levels expotentially.

### 2. The Pace of Change

What was so difficult about teaching at CPA that stirred such teacher resistance? While different teachers mentioned different aspects of the challenges of the workó ranging from difficulties with students, administration and the curriculum, to impact on personal relationshipsóthere was no single force causing disillusion-ment among the staff. Moreover, it was the pressure on the school and individual teachers to implement comprehensive and successful change that left little time for rest, recovery, or reflection related to any single challenge. It is this lack of time to process rapid-fire changes, Marris (1986) illustrates, which can stir grief and cause deteriorating health.

June, who quit just before Christmas, had commented in October that the quick changes in the school without enough structure made her feel,

> anxious . . . it makes it more difficult for me to feel like thereís a sense of calm in the structuring of the program because a lot of things just happen very quickly and I really have to change gears very fast in order to keep up. So I find that a little anxiety-provoking and somewhat tiring. (field notes)

Colleen, as well, was negatively impacted by the pace of change at CPA. To maintain her balance and employment, she explained how she turned to the ìinside reachî of spiritual inspiration (creative writing artifact):

> As I calm myself down, find my ìstill pointî, I am able to see more clearly. I am not as frenetic and I can sort out what I really value and want to pass on to my students. . . . In this state of calm, I am able to see the ìsmall picture.î

Being able to focus on small accomplishments was crucial for Colleen in maintain-ing faith in CPA. Because the pace of the school day was always ì*Running, faster, spinning, so little time"* (creative writing artifact), she worked outside school to create personal calm and perspective. Laura, also, tried to take things ìOne moment at a time. . . . You canít let moments interfere with other momentsî (field notes).

However, by mid-year, most teachers felt unsuccessful in keeping up with the changes and the momentsófor many, the sensations of teaching at CPA were more tiresome than fulfilling. Multitudes of meetings with students, parents, colleagues, administrators, and community members left little time to learn a new pedagogical approach, create curriculum and assessments, and adapt an ambitious model for student learning to particular groups of students.

In early March, John announced to the PI that he had decided to change approaches and ìgo for buy-in over speedî (field notes). This was part of a shift in administrative attention from sole focus on implementing the schoolís model of learning to one that included reading and learning from the teachersí responses to

school policies. One example of this shift occurred in mid-March when John asked his teachers to ìpilotî new assessments of students ìbased on what they were already doingî rather than imposing rubrics developed by an outside consultant (field notes). This turn-around in philosophy of reform implementation proved to be crucial in creating teacher resilience for the rest of the school year and did improve staff morale and motivationófor those who remained. For example, teachers more readily volunteered to experiment with the rubrics within their classroom as well as participate in meetings designed to revise and streamline the assessments.

Another important shift occurred when John, in response to continued criticism of the agenda-driven, monthly professional-development meetings, agreed to reorganize the meetingís structure. Much of the large-scale work the school was trying to accomplish at these meetings was shifted to two sub-committees that met on a different afternoon. With time and space now freed up, by March, the monthly meetings became more teacher-centered, including teacher-led role plays and creative activities that explored practical classroom issues and supported teacher problem-solving. At the final monthly meeting at the end of May, several teachers commented how the atmosphere had significantly improved (field notes).

### 3. Relationships and the Administration

Such acknowledgment of teacher perspectives and experiences by school administration proved to be the most powerful force in bolstering teacher resiliency throughout the year: improved lived relationships ‡ improved lived bodily experiences ‡ heightened sense of overall teacher satisfaction. Although CPAís model for learning was an initial draw for many teachers, perceived day-to-day validation and support from administration was the greatest determinant of whether they would decide to stay at CPA. For example, in May Rachel was thinking of teaching in another school, but by June she had decided to return for the following year. A single conversation with a school administrator, where they discussed a 5-year personal plan for Rachelís professional advancement and growth within CPAís overall growth plan, had changed her outlook. Laura, as well, decided to return for another year only when she felt she was finally ìcompensated for her giftsî and hard work. She added, ìI am qualified and worthy of advancement Ö this is very personal ñ itís my careerî (field notes). Susan, in contrast, never felt validated by John. Two weeks before leaving CPA after two full years, she said, ì[John] never took me seriouslyî (field notes).

As stated earlier, John, who had previously been successful in government and business, admitted he had difficulty reading and relating to teachers. He commented that teachers were ìpart of a sub-culture I didnít know much about. And therefore, they really didnít respond to leadership strategies that Iíve found successful in other contextsî (interview).

Johnís growing pains as a principal mirrored CPAís growing pains as a school. While in the beginning of the year he said his role was to ìwave the vision flagî (field notes), by the end of the year he said he would paint a more realistic picture of

working at CPA during the hiring process. Such recognition of the realities of the hard work of teaching, through praise and personalized opportunities to grow and advance, were also what the returning staff said would motivate them to continue with CPAís quest as a school.

## Discussion

As national initiatives continue to impose changes in how schools function, studies of impact upon teachers become increasingly critical. This study provides an insight into the impact of educational change and administrative support on teacher stress levels. However, caution must be exercised in interpreting these findings. First, because the researcher had become part of the school environment, any semblance of distance from the subject being studied was negatively impacted. Also, a focus on teacher lived experience meant that the concept of cultural dissonance was underexplored. As CPA was in a highly racially segregated area of the country, and 99% of the students (but less than half the staff) were African-American, it follows that race would be an important factor. However, because this study primarily interpreted lived experience as participants described it and because race is a difficult issue for many people to address explicitly (see Delpit, 1988), the official data corpus has few explicit references to race. For the most part, the issue was addressed indirectly or ìoff the record.î

Despite these limitations, three major findings emerged: (1) There is a *complex interactive relationship* between structures in schools designed to yield certain changes and the lived experiences of teachers within those structures; (2) *Teacher vitality* is an important dimension of teacher lived experience and the viability of school reforms; and (3) *Teacher role embodiment*ó the perceived compatibility between a teacherís sense of self and the roles they take on within a schooló impacts teacher satisfaction and feelings of self-worth and the viability of school reforms. These findings are rooted in teacher lived experience of change efforts, and indicate that individual teacher and collective staff remembered experiences become intertwined.

The cycle began as teachers experienced their work within school structures at the beginning of the school year. Over time, when compared longitudinally as remembered experience, lived experiences gathered personal significance and formed individual teacher dispositions. Negative dispositions were most prominent in teachers who rejected their embodied role and became physically and emotionally drained, as well as those who felt unsupported. When a critical mass of teachers took on negative dispositions, collective negative teacher morale emerged. These findings are similar to that of two recent studies of teachers in North Carolina and South Carolina (SCTQ Report 2005a, 2005b), which found that teacher perceptions of working conditions become collective, and ìare positively and significantly correlated with each other. . . . Consequently, schools have

faculties that are likely to be positive or negative overall about their working conditionsî (SCTQ Report, 2005a, p. 13). This study further indicates that conflicts in vision and relationships that emanate from negative staff morale can impede and sometimes reverse school change efforts.

However, this study also confirms recent literature that ìimproving one area could have a ëripple effectí on others and cause teachersí overall satisfaction with their school climate to increase and thereby improve student learningî (SCTQ Report, 2005a, p. 14). The area most in need of improving at CPAóand in many schools (see SCTQ Report, 2005a, 2005b)ówas teacher-administrator relations. Teachers at CPA could be reinvigorated by an acknowledgement of their lived experiences (the moment-by-moment realities of their work), thereby altering their remembered experience (their overall perception of their job). When, later in the year, John began acknowledging teacher physical and psychological resistance and praising the gifts of his staff, he was able to reverse some of the damage done throughout year. While for many CPA teachers it was too little too late, this finding holds out hope for principals who conceptualize their role as change agents, in that they can support change by staying close to the work of teachers (Silin & Schwartz, 2003) and to the teachers themselves. Most notable in this study were three administrative shifts John made which improved staff morale late in the year: (1) building from teacher experiences and expertise to create school-wide assessments; (2) moving away from agenda-driven administrator-led meetings to teacher-led interactive meetings; and (3) directly praising the daily work of teachers and acknowledging their larger professional goals.

It is also important to note that the PI, who was focused on improving professional development conditions at the school through the action research group, experienced his own sometimes-painful learnings which have implications for teacher educators concerned with sustaining practicing teachers. The original focus of the project and study was the impact of the action research group itself. However, it became clear early on that the support of the professional development group could not fill the void of perceived lack of administrative supports and that the group was just a small part of the teachersí overall professional lives. Further-more, within months, the group was subsumed by the larger organizational dilemmas of the school ólow morale, lack of communication structures, exhaus-tion, and attrition. Acknowledging the lived conditions of the school led the PI to shift and expand his role beyond the action research group, gain increased credibility with (and access to) the staff, and shift the focus of the study towards a more comprehensive exploration of school development, teacher lived experi-ences, and teacher-administrator relations. Becoming more intertwined with the reality of school life órather than focusing solely on the impact of the add-on action research groupóalso gave the PI more credibility with John, who was progressively seeking out more teacher-centered approaches in working with his staff.

## Implications

These findings have important implications for the professional development of teachers and administrators. Teachers need an acknowledgment of the difficulties of their work, now made more complex by the resultant demands of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 (see Kramer, 2004). This acknowledgement needs to occur in both day-to-day personal relationships and in systematic professional development efforts that build from teacher experiences. Education reforms can be bolstered with an awareness of how physical and psychological teacher responses to organizational stimuli impact teacher instruction, interactions with students, careers, and collective school endeavors. Preliminarily, this research indicates that high ideals without sufficient human resources and positive human relations may undermine intended school and educational reforms.

In addition, this study suggests that a promising approach to mediating the negative consequences associated with school change would be to provide administrators with efficacious strategies as part of a shift in the way school leaders are prepared. Similar recommendations have been made via other studies (SCTQ Report, 2005a, 2005b), including providing principals with ìmeaningful professional development that enhances their knowledge and skills as effective instructional leaders serving students and teachersî (SCTQ Report, 2005a, p. 24). The present study illustrates how not only the demands on teachers but also school administrators are greater, and thus, they need to be prepared not only as managers but as teacher educators. At CPA, the teachers would have benefited from a deeper administrative focus on teacher meaning-making, the complications of change at the individual and whole-school levels, teacher resistance, and planning for teacher stress and anxiety by creating support systems and spaces for honest critique related to the implementation of educational ideals.

## Conclusion

Investments made in professional development for teachers and administrators that is geared toward increasing awareness and acknowledgement of teacher lived experience will be cost-effective in the long-run. Even the most well-funded and well-researched reform effort will not succeed without teacher buy-in. Conversely, when teachers are vitalized and on-board with a school effort, they can breathe life into reforms in ways that transcend even the policymakersí dreams. Ultimately, it is the students, our children, who will benefit from this type of inspired and impassioned instruction.

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