From the Editor

Raymond Chodzinski

This issue is devoted to exploring ideas and information about stress experienced in school communities and specifically how education professionals cope. While there are plenty of resources available to individuals suffering stress there is always a new avenue to explore and a different perspective to consider. Simply put, what one individual finds stressful and may inhibit performance, for another, it may in fact be the motivating factor that drives one to achieve great things. Stress is defined by Hans Selye as "essentially the wear and tear caused by life." Based on that assumption, it would seem that stress is almost unavoidable; yet it seems we do much in our lives to bring about that which we try desperately to avoid.

An important question to ask is "What types of stress do students and classroom professionals experience in their daily lives that might interfere with the teaching /learning process?" Research suggests that student stress is caused by factors such as parental and family discord, peer pressure such as bullying, harassment, exclusion and lack of acceptance by peers and teachers. Health and welfare conditions create stress as do learning challenges and physical incapacities.

Education professionals report that stress is linked not only to personal health, welfare and life management issues but to work

overload, fatigue, time management difficulties, ineffective leadership, sense of a lack of control, constant disruptive student behaviour, a perceived increase in school violence and vandalism, and pressure from parents and society to be more accountable for student learning and performance.

In the larger picture, global issues such as wars, genocide, famine, poverty, impending doom, world health concerns and economic and social issues impact highly. On a more local and personal level, life management, health and welfare issues, constraints and demands on personal time and a host of other life challenges to numerous to mention here contribute greatly to increased levels of individual and community stress.

School communities are reflections of society in general and more importantly reflect various micro social systems and community living networks. Therefore, it is expected that a teacher in a classroom may encounter a variety of stressors not only in their own lives but in the lives of their students. While educators are expected to deliver effective programs and provide instruction to all students they are also expected to provide empathy, understanding, care and support for those experiencing stressful lives and to incorporate these care giver qualities within the context of routines, structures and expectations related to the business at hand. Perhaps often overlooked is that while front line professionals, such as educators, are expected to do this for students/clients they are also expected to manage their own set of stressors, whatever they maybe, and to do so in a

manner that provides for effective and seamless delivery of services, skills and decision making. While education institutions teach the fundamentals of curriculum and behavioural management quite well, I suspect that very little time is devoted to effective mastery of support skills for students and parents in stress. Less are support skills for professionals in stress.

During my career as a teacher and professor I encountered students who experienced family upheaval, death of a parent or sibling, abuse of every imaginable kind, depression emotional upheaval, debilitating health concerns and a plethora of learning challenges that could fill a book. Most of these students looked to the school community for assistance and most often they were rewarded with kind and accepting teachers who tried to help. They struggled to accommodate in the best way they knew how and with the personal traits and skills that we associate with what being a good teacher is all about. There were times however when I encountered teachers and principals who believed that childrens' problems were best kept out of the school and acted accordingly. In similar fashion they, too, were unreceptive to teacher stress and its resultant outcomes. It is my belief that administrators and teachers must take an active role in helping students, parents and colleagues find ways to handle the various challenges that are encountered through the journey of life. This is what I call the second curriculum and perhaps in some ways the most important. I truly hope that the articles and information contained in this issue will be helpful.

The contributions by authors included in this issue may help readers establish a basis on which to begin dialogue and provide a platform for school professionals to begin to deliberate on how they might challenge administrators and faculties of education to provide training and education in these areas.

Julian Kitchen, assistant professor at Brock University reveals how his research and intervention strategy helped save a stressed out teacher's career. Catherine Kiteley, Clinical Nurse Specialist, Supportive Care at Credit Valley Hospital in Mississauga, Ontario, provides insights about handling workplace stress that are applicable to all professionals who provide care and support services to groups of patients, clients and students. Darlene Ciuffetelli Parker shares with readers her internship/mentorship experiences and the stress she experienced as a new professor at the Faculty of Education, Brock University. Music therapist, Adrienne Pringle introduces readers to the skills of a music therapist and how those skills can be applied in therapeutic settings. Mary Brownell of Florida State University provides educators with tips on reducing stress in the special education environment. Concluding this issue is an excerpt from a paper prepared by the National Education Association titled *Violence in Communities and Schools: A Stress Reduction Guide for Teachers and other School Staff*. Each of these articles provides readers with insights, strategies and tips for dealing with stress.

Overcoming the Stress Cycle through Relational Teacher Development

Julian Kitchen

There is little doubt that teachers in Ontario, like their peers throughout the industrial world, have experienced considerable stress during an era of wholesale educational restructuring. When systemic change is compounded by school and personal factors, stress can become overwhelming for some teachers. Troman and Woods (2001), who conducted a qualitative study of twenty teachers who felt they were suffering from anxiety, depression or stress-related illness, reported the "drip, drip" effect of change and criticism meant that

"The teachers felt humiliated, tormented, disparaged and overloaded" (p.63).

This was partly attributable to principals who wanted "constant improvement", causing teachers to feel under "constant surveillance" as if

"Hidden cameras [were] watching them all the time" (p.67).

Many of Troman and Woods' participant felt "fear and humiliation" more than "care and collaboration" (p.70) in the face of the "powerful emotional relationship" between teachers and principals (p.63).

Hargreaves, who has studied changes to the nature of teachers' work, writes

"Teachers' emotions are rooted in and affect their selves, identities and relationships with others" (1998, p. 323).

As their emotions and identities are tied to their performance in the classroom, challenges to their professional competence may cause them to question their identities as caring persons committed to serving young people. This may contribute to a "stress cycle" in which exhaustion and frustration lead to worsening performance that, in turn, lead to diminished efficacy and energy (Troman & Woods, 2001).

On the other hand,

"Teachers with rich opportunities to grow and learn are enthusiastic about their work and are motivated to find ways to do even better" (McLaughlin & Yee, 1988, p. 28).

We need to foster, maintain and renew this positive attitude among teachers in a time of change. The level of exhaustion and burnout in the teaching profession (Beatty, 1999) has caused many experts to stress the need for constructive feedback (Rosenholtz, 1989), recognition (Troman & Woods, 2001) and collegial support (Beatty, 1999) in order help teachers overcome stress and rise to the challenges of teaching in a "post-modern age" (Hargreaves, 1994).

In this paper, I recount the story of one elementary teacher, Bob Fitzgerald, who seemed locked in

"A stress cycle where exhaustion contributed to worsening teacher/pupil relationships which in turn induced further exhaustion and impacted on teacher efficacy" (Troman & Woods, 2001).