

Full Length Research Paper

Factors leading to career frustration and exit: A case of a veteran physical educator

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The purpose of this study is to investigate the personal and organizational factors leading to career frustration and exit of a veteran physical educator. The Teacher Career Cycle Model provided the theoretical framework and guided the data analysis. Data sources included observations, field notes, and multiple interviews with the teacher, the school principal, a physical education colleague, and a fifth grade classroom teacher colleague. Data were analyzed inductively according to Huberman and Miles' four-stage process. Findings indicated that four factors contributed to the shift from the *enthusiastic and growing stage* to the *career frustration stage*: (a) difficult relationship with her principal, (b) preferential treatment of a non-teaching colleague, (c) messages of marginality, and (d) declining motivation. Findings support previous literature regarding the impact of the school administrator on teachers' working environments. Future research is needed for improved understanding of the physical education teacher/principal relationship.

Key words: Teacher career cycle, veteran teacher, qualitative research, case study.

INTRODUCTION

Understanding physical educators' career development is critical in the retention of high quality teachers, as mounting evidence suggests that teacher quality is the most significant factor affecting students' achievement (Goldhaber and Anthony, 2007). Researchers posit that studying teachers throughout their career stages, and especially their professional histories, offers valuable insight into the factors that motivate teachers as well as the reasons they change or burnout and leave the profession all together (Moreira et al., 2002; Singer and Willett, 1996). Mounting evidence suggests that at various points in their careers teachers have different occupational skills, knowledge, behaviors, dispositions, and these changes follow a regular developmental pattern (Fessler, 1992; Henninger, 2007; Super, 1994).

In total, the percentage of teachers leaving the profession in 2008-09 was higher among teachers with the most teaching experience (20 years or more) and teachers with the least teaching experience (3 years or fewer), than those with 10 to 19 years of experience (Keigher, 2010). Clearly, veteran teachers, or those with 25 years or more of teaching experience (Cohen, 2009), are a particularly important group of teachers to study (Ingersoll, 2003). Understanding the reasons experienced teachers leave the profession is important, as is gaining an understanding of veteran teachers who have stayed in the profession and feel successful (Tan et al., 2007). Attrition rates are also reported on the subject taught, with the highest attrition rates among math and science teachers. In most of this research, however, physical

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education is either not cited or is grouped with other subjects such as art and music; consequently, little is known about attrition among physical educators (Banville and Rikard, 2009).

Lawson (1989) conceptualized the Interactive Factors Influencing Workplace Conditions for the Physical Education Teacher. Lawson asserted that workplace conditions for physical educators include personal-social factors, situational factors, organizational factors, and political and economic factors. Although all factors ultimately influence interactions among all the players in the school setting, the organizational factors have a major bearing on this investigation as Lawson indicates that these factors are related to “teachers work and their longevity in teaching”. The organization factors include systems for: (1) supervision, control, and evaluations of teachers’ work performances, (2) prestige and reward associated with teaching in the setting, (3) allocation of resources, and (4) goals or orientation of the school.

Within the school environment physical education is considered a low-status subject in school. As a result, physical education teachers live their work lives “on the margin” as they teach a subject that is viewed as less valuable than subjects like reading and math. Physical educators have expressed feelings of isolation, limited access to resources, and a continued struggle to be perceived as a legitimate professional (Hendry, 1975; Macdonald, 1995; Templin, 1989). These perceptions influence not only how teachers feel about their jobs, but also their effectiveness, interactions with students, a predisposition to burnout, and compromised program quality. Over twenty years ago, Sparkes and Templin (1990) argued that physical education is viewed as practical in nature and not academic or intellectual. Its knowledge is viewed as “utilitarian and related to non-professional vocations that are deemed low status in society, and hence, the educational system”.

Some research, however, indicates that selected physical educators remain excited about their work throughout their careers (Henninger, 2007; Naess, 2001); other literature, though, points to careers in which teachers are more apathetic and biding time until retirement (Henninger, 2007; Sparkes et al., 1993; Thornburn, 2011). Naess (2001), for example, in a life history of a physical educator describes a teacher who continued to love her job that she approached with enthusiasm for 30 years. In his view, the teacher constructed an overwhelmingly positive narrative to keep her going, and chose to ignore negative views of her subject matter. Physical educators studied by Rovegno and Bandhauer (1997) and Lux and McCullick (2011) navigated marginality through the use of overt strategies. Woods and Lynn (2001) contend that the way in which teachers negotiate school sociopolitical conditions differentiates those who experience positive career progression and those who become discouraged and exit the profession

prematurely. An enhanced understanding of nuances specific to physical educators’ school sociopolitical environments, and potential navigation strategies incorporated by experienced teachers, could contribute to job satisfaction and the retention of effective teachers.

Relatedly, school climate has been shown to significantly affect attitudes and behaviors of both teachers and administrators (Hoy and Miskel, 2001). A healthy school climate is characterized by positive relationships between teachers, principals, and students. More specifically, in a healthy school climate, teachers like their colleagues, their school, and their jobs. Principal’s behavior is positive, friendly, supportive, and principals go out of their way to help teachers (Hoy et al., 2002). Likewise, Hoy et al. (2002) argued that in a healthy school climate, collegial leadership is characterized by leadership behaviors that attend to the goals of the school as well as social needs of faculty. As such, “Principals of schools with positive school climates treat teachers as colleagues, are open, egalitarian, friendly, and have high expectations for teacher performance” (Leithwood 1990).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Teacher Career Cycle Model (Fessler and Christensen, 1992) provided the theoretical framework for this case study. This model was used to help make meaning of the teacher’s shift from the *enthusiastic and growing stage* to *career frustration stage* and later to *career wind-down and exit stages*.

Among those who have identified stages of teachers’ development (Fessler and Christensen, 1992; Huberman, 1989; Steffy et al., 2000), Fessler and Christensen’s (1992) Teacher Career Cycle Model attempts to describe the teacher career cycle within the context of a dynamic and flexible social system (Figure 1). This model was selected because it takes into account the effects of multiple factors, both inside and outside of the school context, on teachers’ motivations, commitment, and enthusiasm at different stages in their careers. Through the lens of the Teacher Career Cycle Model teachers’ career cycles progresses through stages not in a lock step, linear fashion but rather in a dynamic manner reflecting responses to *personal* and *organizational environmental factors*. Therefore, teachers do not automatically experience every stage of the model. The teacher’s *personal* and *organizational environment* includes a number of interactive yet mutually identifiable facets.

The tenets of the Teacher Career Cycle Model suggest that teachers’ careers are cyclical, flowing from pre-service through career exit (Fessler and Christensen, 1992). The identified stages include: (a) *pre-service-teacher* becomes prepared for the professional role usually at a college or university; (b) *induction-teacher’s*

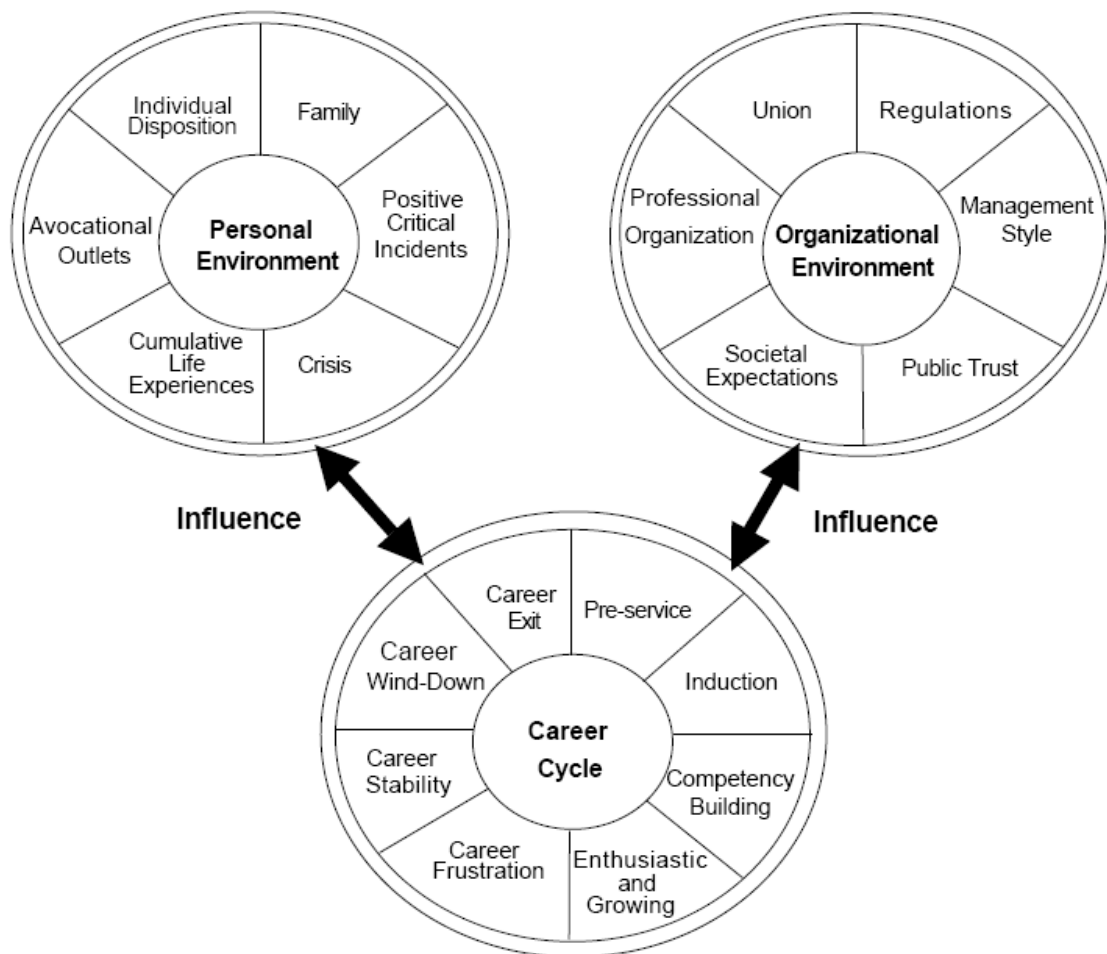


Figure 1. Teacher Career Cycle Model (Fessler and Christensen, 1992).

first few years of employment; (c) *competency building*-teacher is motivated to improve teaching skills and abilities and pursues new teaching methods, materials, and strategies; (d) *enthusiastic and growing*-teacher has reached a high level of competence and continues to advance professionally; (e) *career frustration*-teacher questions career choice and is discouraged; (f) *career stability*-teacher is doing what is expected of her/him, but little more; (g) *career wind down*-teacher is preparing to leave the profession; (h) *career exit*-teacher leaves the profession.

Teacher's *personal and organizational environments* comprise a number of interactive yet mutually identifiable facets. These facets influence movement between and placement within one's career cycle stage. Fessler and Christensen (1992) propose a career cycle model in which nurturing, supportive and reinforcing environments can assist teachers in pursuing rewarding and positive career progressions. Alternatively, negative environmental atmospheres can have adverse effects on teachers'

career paths. A number of elements are encompassed in teachers' *personal and organizational environments*. *Family, positive critical incidents and individual disposition* are examples of *personal environmental* conditions influencing career decisions, while *societal expectations, public trust, and management style* are examples of *organizational environmental* influences. Throughout the paper terms from this model are italicized to indicate their connection to the model.

Understanding why some teachers successfully negotiate hurdles in their *personal and organizational environments*, while others who experience similar contextual factors fail to navigate their career paths in a positive direction is clearly warranted (Stroot et al., 1994). The Teacher Career Cycle Model proposes that a supportive, nurturing, and reinforcing environment can assist teachers in pursuing a rewarding, positive career progression. Alternatively, environmental atmospheres that include negative pressures and conflicts can have an adverse effect on teachers' career paths.

Undoubtedly, social and political issues in the school environment significantly impact the work lives of physical educators. Existing as marginalized professional presents additional challenges that threaten the satisfaction, effectiveness, and burnout of these teachers. Further, retaining effective physical education teachers is essential to the profession and student learning in physical education. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate the *personal* and *organizational factors* leading to *career frustration* and *exit stages* of a veteran physical educator. Research questions guiding the study were (a) what *personal* and *organizational factors* led to the teacher's transition from *enthusiastic and growing stage* to *career frustration stage*? (b) What *personal* and *organizational factors* led the teacher's transition from *career frustration stage* to *career wind-down and exit stages*?

METHOD

In order to gain an in-depth understanding of the factors impacting a veteran physical educator, a qualitative, single-case study design was selected. Defined as an in-depth look at a single social phenomenon utilizing qualitative methods, Feagin et al. (2005) note that the case study approach allows for a multifaceted investigation, demands that it be executed with great detail and utilizes several data sources. It uses case study design provided for two specific advantages for thoroughly answering the research questions. First, it allowed the observations to be grounded in the dynamic context of the school where the primary participant taught. Second, case study provided the ability to access the larger social complexities of the school environment and how this influenced the interpretations expressed by the teacher.

Role of the researchers

One of the hallmark features of qualitative research is the admission of the subjective perceptions of both participants and researchers (LeCompte and Preissle, 1993). Researcher subjectivities provide specific advantages in that (a) affective reactions to observations can serve as clues to things that need deeper examination, (b) they are critical to establishing trust and relationship building with participants, and (c) subjective reactions can inform methodological decisions.

Because of the positive nature of the existing relationship between the teacher in this study and the first author, certain subjectivities existed. The first author had previous experience as an elementary physical educator, teaching a marginalized subject, and with the participant as a cooperating teacher to students who the first author taught in a teacher education program. These subjectivities were beneficial in providing an insider's perspective to the study and were essential in establishing the intimate relationship necessary to allow trust and confidence (LeCompte and Preissle, 1993). At the same time, it was critical for the first author to be mindful of how these subjectivities influenced the interpretations of what was observed. To do this, the first author documented her thoughts, feelings, and perceptions about the teacher and others in the school and included this in field notes. She remained consciously aware of her own subjectivities and documented instances when she perceived she was having an

emotional response. In addition to enhancing trustworthiness, these notes also prompted the first author to gain additional insight into the teacher and her emotions. The content of the field note journal was shared throughout the study with the second author who served as a peer debriefer to assist with the development of initial observations and ensured credibility of emerging themes.

Participant selection and setting

After acquiring Institution Review Board approval, the first author began data collection. Purposeful selection was used and one late-career physical education teacher was the primary participant in this study. The teacher, Lynn (pseudonym), had collaborated with the first author for two years prior to the official start of this study. This relationship involved Lynn serving as a clinical supervisor and cooperating teacher for regional institutions. During these years the first author spent several hours each week in Lynn's teaching space.

Throughout the first year and a half the first author worked with Lynn; she was consistently a positive professional. She frequently described her love for physical education, students, and her school. In the middle of the second year of the investigation, however, Lynn revealed severe frustration and negativity about her working environment that began the previous summer. These emotions were precipitated by feeling marginalized and devalued by her principal, Katherine, and were so strong that Lynn indicated that she had decided to leave the profession. This significant change led the researchers to determine that investigating this phenomenon could provide insight into experiences of marginality and career stage movement.

At the time of this study, Lynn was 61 years old and had 33 years of teaching experience. With certifications in both physical education and elementary education, Lynn had a combined 12 years of experience as a classroom teacher in grades 1, 3, and 5; and 21 years of experience teaching physical education. Lynn had been teaching physical education since 1991.

Haven Elementary School. Haven Elementary School (pseudonym) was located in a suburban community just outside of a Mid-Western metropolitan area with approximately 700 students and 100 staff. Students at Haven School received physical education twice each week.

Data collection techniques

Unstructured interviews. Frequent unstructured interviews (Kvale, 1996) were used to prompt the teacher to talk about the school environment, the place of physical education within school structure, and specific factors influencing her decision to leave the profession. These interviews were conducted at varying times before or after school, between classes, or at other unstructured times throughout the school day. Contents of these interviews along with the first author's thoughts and interpretations were recorded in the field notes.

Semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews with Lynn, the physical educator, served as the primary data source. In order to enrich the data set and to triangulate Lynn's expressions, interviews were also conducted with: (a) John (pseudonym), Lynn's colleague and part-time physical education teacher at Haven School, (b) Katherine (pseudonym), principal of Haven School, and (c) Jill (pseudonym), fifth grade classroom teacher. A total of 11 interviews were conducted throughout the course of the study.

These interviews were guided by a list of questions to investigate the structure of Haven School, the nature of the working

environment, and the interactions that contributed to Lynn's decision. Interview questions were written in advance in the form of an interview guide. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Six semi-structured interviews lasting approximately one to two hours each were conducted with Lynn throughout the study. The first interview focused on a critical incident that was the catalyst for consideration of career exit. The second and third interviews focused on her interactions with John, her PE colleague, and how those interactions influenced her decision toward career exit. The fourth interview focused on Lynn's relationship with Katherine and their relationship history and most recent interactions. The fifth interview focused on Lynn's perceptions of the dynamic relationship between the factors in her working environment and how these influenced her feelings of dissatisfaction. The sixth interview focused on Lynn's perceptions during the *career wind-down stage* as she approached the end of her career.

Three semi-structured interviews lasting approximately one hour each were conducted with John throughout the study. These interviews were focused on gaining John's philosophy and approach to teaching physical education, his perceptions of his working environment, and his perspectives of the working relationship with Lynn and Katherine.

It became clear early in data collection that the principal, Katherine, was a source of the majority of the messages of marginality Lynn received. Based on this, the decision was made to conduct a semi-structured interview with Katherine in order to enrich the data set and triangulate Lynn's perceptions. This interview focused on gaining an understanding of Katherine's philosophy regarding the role of a principal and her perceptions of the physical education program including the physical educators, Lynn and John.

One semi-structured interview was conducted with Jill, a fifth grade classroom teacher at Haven School to triangulate the observations and sentiments of Lynn, John, and Katherine. This interview focused on gaining an understanding of a classroom teacher's perspective of the working environment, the principal's leadership style, and Jill's observations of Lynn as an educator.

Participant observations and field notes

The first author functioned as a "privileged observer" (Schempp, 1993; Wolcott, 1988) as the researcher followed Lynn around the school, during classes, and observed everyday actions and events. Observations focused primarily on the nature of interactions between Lynn, John, and Katherine; but exchanges with others in the school environment were noted when relevant. Field notes were written by hand and kept in a notebook. The first author spent approximately 200 h conducting observational fieldwork that informed the purpose of the study and specific research questions.

Data analysis techniques

Data sources included 11 individual semi-structured interviews and a field note journal that included content from unstructured interviews. All data were analyzed inductively by hand to identify commonalities and themes across data sources (Patton, 2002). For the purposes of this study, the four stages proposed by Huberman and Miles (1994) guided the data analysis. Data were analyzed in relation to Teacher Career Cycle Model (Fessler and Christensen, 1992) in order to more fully explain the *personal* and *organizational factors* in Lynn's working environment that led to her frustration, movement between career stages, and contributed to her decision for professional exit.

In the first stage, data collection and initial analyses were

conducted. Analysis began with initial interactions with the teacher and principal as consent and approval were being gained. During interviews and observations, initial themes and commonalities were noted. In the second stage, data were coded and organized by theme. The researchers worked collaboratively to determine codes and themes. In the third stage, the data were organized into categories to most effectively arrange the data. Transcribed interview data and field note data were compiled collectively and were coded relative to the emerging themes combined with any thoughts about connections between these items. After this, codes and quotes were organized and aggregated according to theme. Finally, data were analyzed in reference to Teacher Career Cycle Model (Fessler and Christensen, 1992) to consider the dialectic relationship between the school environment and the actions of those involved, primarily the teacher, Lynn. Throughout the paper terms from this model are italicized to indicate their connection to the model.

Multiple techniques were used to enhance credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability of the data including: (a) an audit trail, specifying the steps involved in the methodological procedures followed in the study; (b) cross-checking multiple data sources for consistency to locate negative cases that could challenge emerging themes; for example, the researchers carefully examined and made comparisons between and among interviews; (c) researchers working as a team increasing the findings' credibility (Lincoln and Guba, 1985); and (d) member-checking, by asking the participant to corroborate researchers' findings (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Stake, 2005). All individuals who were interviewed were given the opportunity to provide feedback on content and accuracy of the final manuscript.

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the *personal* and *organizational factors* leading to *career frustration stage* and *career exit stage* of a veteran physical educator. Throughout her 33 years, Lynn's professional journey included transitions from one career stage to another in response to *personal* and *organizational environmental* factors. The current study focuses specifically on her shift from the *enthusiastic and growing stage* to the *career frustration stage* and later to *career wind down* and *career exit stages* (Table 1). The findings section will report the factors that prompted career stage transitions.

Enthusiastic and growing stage

For many years, Lynn existed in the *enthusiastic and growing stage*. She identified herself as an *enthusiastic and growing stage* teacher for 17 and half years in her role as a physical educator; the first three years were spent in the *induction* and *competency building stages*. Both field note data and interview data confirmed that Lynn had characteristics of an *enthusiastic and growing stage* teacher during this time. Lynn had an *individual disposition* that prompted her to excel in her profession and this was evidenced by her tireless work to improve her program and acquire resources. It seemed as though

Table 1. Environmental influences .

Career stage	Environmental domain influences	Key environmental influences
Enthusiastic and growing	Personal	Individual dispositions
	Personal	Positive critical incident
	Organizational	Societal expectations
Career frustration	Organizational	Management style
	Organizational	Public trust
	Organizational	School regulations
	Personal	Critical incident
	Personal	Individual disposition
Career wind-down	Personal	Individual disposition
Career exit	Organizational	Public trust

Lynn's dedication and quality teaching resulted in an elevated status and professional respect from other teachers in her building, which was related to *societal expectations* in her *organizational environment*. Lynn described feeling respected by other teachers when she said:

I feel like the people I work with respect me. I think they respect me because of the way I teach PE. I still feel like I'm a quality teacher. I feel like I have established myself and I feel confident in my skills as a teacher. (Lynn, informal interview)

Career frustration stage

In her twentieth year as a physical educator, Lynn shifted into the *career frustration stage*. Although she began to sense a loss of respect from her principal at the beginning of the school year, she was clearly frustrated by end of the first semester. Hurdles within her *organizational environment* influenced her attitude toward her work. Data revealed four issues that contributed to Lynn's transition into the *career frustration stage* and eventual decision to leave the profession: (a) a difficult relationship with her principal, Katherine; (b) the preferential treatment of a non-teaching physical education colleague; (c) messages of marginality and feeling devalued; and (d) declining motivation, enthusiasm, and teaching performance.

Difficult relationship with principal

History and dramatic change. A change in the *management style* of Katherine, her principal, had a substantial impact on Lynn's *organizational environment*.

Katherine had been the principal at Haven for 7 years, and during the initial years, Lynn described their relationship as positive. Lynn felt respected by Katherine, and believed that her principal valued her opinions. In their fourth year working together, the school expanded from a K-3 to a K-5 school. In response to this, Katherine adopted an authoritative leadership style. Katherine confided in Lynn during this transition, and Lynn described incidents when Katherine came to her office and cried due to frustration with the faculty, because she perceived that they did not find her credible.

John, an additional part-time physical educator, joined the school staff to accommodate the added students that caused a negative change in Lynn and Katherine's relationship. This loss of *public trust* within Lynn's *organizational environment* undoubtedly influenced the supportive atmosphere in which she had formally worked. After this, she described Katherine as the most significant source of marginality. The following quote illustrates the change in Katherine's leadership style and relationship with Lynn:

It used to be that when I said something, she would listen attentively. She would address it and respond in a timely manner. Now, it's like what I say is not important. At times, she gives me this look and I know I have said too much...there are times when she even rolls her eyes. So, I have just stopped speaking. (Lynn, structured interview)

Critical incident. A *critical incident* occurred at the start of the academic school year during Lynn's twentieth year as a physical educator that permanently changed Lynn and Katherine's relationship. Lynn made plans to paint agility ladders, hopscotch games, and foursquare courts on the playground for student use during recess. She had consulted with Katherine regarding this, had recruited parents to assist her, and had started painting

the week before the start of school. Despite being made aware of these plans, Katherine appeared surprised and angry when she saw Lynn and the parents painting on the playground blacktop. Lynn described that Katherine began chastising her for painting. Most upsetting was that this reprimand was in front of the numerous parent volunteers who were working alongside her. She described how this made her feel:

I was angry. I was belittled in front of the parents. When I told her I could clear it up if she was worried about the superintendent, she told me 'No, you will not call her. I am your superior and you will do what I tell you to do!' (Lynn, structured interview).

"I'm the boss". Katherine's leadership style could best be described as authoritative as she approached her role with a "my way or the highway" disposition. This *management style* was not well received by Lynn, and adversely influenced her *organizational environment*. Interview data from Lynn, John, and Jill (fifth grade classroom teacher) all described Katherine as an authoritative leader. Data from the structured interview with Katherine triangulated this. When asked to describe her leadership style, Katherine said:

I feel like with one hundred staff members, I can't mince words. It is just like I call it like I see it because you don't have time to pussy foot around with things. The teachers in this building aren't used to that because they used to have a lot of free reign to do a lot of different things (Katherine, structured interview).

Preferential treatment for a non-teaching physical education colleague

Katherine's preferential treatment of John, a part-time physical education colleague, was a negative aspect of Lynn's *organizational environment* in the area of *school regulations* specifically related to personal policies. Katherine's treatment of John was a significant factor that contributed to Lynn's shift into the *career frustration stage*. Despite demonstrating ineffective teaching within physical education, Katherine was overwhelmingly positive toward John and his place in Haven Elementary School while interactions with Lynn remained negative and disrespectful. Jill, a fifth grade teacher, also spoke of the professional difference between the two physical educators, and provided an explanation of why John might be viewed favorably:

I just know how much harder Lynn works. But, he's a man in elementary education, which that's usually a real good place to be. Usually men get glorified...I don't want to say a bunch of negative things. I just think Lynn runs

circles around him as a teacher. As a person he's fine, not a problem. I just don't see the enthusiasm from the subject from him that I see from her.

A non-teaching physical education teacher. John was an itinerant teacher; at Haven School he taught fifth grade classes in the morning and then traveled to a nearby elementary school to teach physical education in the afternoon. Both field note and interview data indicated that John did not demonstrate effective pedagogy. He could best be described as a non-teaching teacher. For example, a field note entry described a lesson with fifth graders that began with fifteen minutes of calisthenics and ended with running laps that was led by John and delivered in a "drill sergeant style." Interview data from structured interviews with John provided further evidence to his "busy, happy, good" philosophy of teaching physical education as his lack of skill-based teaching:

I believe PE should be about enjoyment. I am fortunate here because Lynn does all the skill teaching. So, it's not like I need to teach mechanics. (John, structured interview)

Lynn felt offended and unimportant because Katherine did not appreciate or recognize the deliberate effort Lynn put toward demonstrating highly effective pedagogy.

This caused Lynn to feel unmotivated and frustrated. Lynn believed that her disrespect for John contributed additional tension to her relationship with Katherine. This was evident in an interaction that occurred during her end of year evaluation the previous year. Lynn recounted the incident in a structured interview:

This year, when I had my teaching evaluation, Katherine asked me if I thought my program was being carried on when the students were in fourth and fifth grade. I told her no. She said, 'you mean he doesn't teach that at all?' I said, 'no' and that if she wanted to me to, I would help him. She said 'NO! You do not touch him. If there are any changes that need to be done, I will do it.' That's when I knew he is walking on water and I just need to leave it alone. (Lynn, structured interview)

Messages of marginality and feeling devalued

First ever low teaching evaluation. Lynn perceived a poor end of year evaluation by Katherine as a message of marginality. This impacted her *organizational environment*, specifically with regard to *management style*. According to Lynn, she had received the lowest teaching evaluation of her entire career after things became difficult between Lynn and Katherine. She believed that the severity of the evaluation was not credible as the

elements Katherine cited for her poor performance were directly linked to John. About this, she said:

This year, I got the worst evaluation of my entire teaching career. The things that were marked down were about sharing equipment, sharing ideas, and things like that. I just know it has to do with John (Lynn, informal interview).

Because high quality teaching was extremely important to Lynn, receiving a low evaluation was hurtful and upsetting. This was compounded by the fact that she viewed the low marks to be inaccurate as she and John shared an equipment room and he had full access to the equipment room with as much freedom as she did. Further, she had attempted to share ideas with John even remarking that she would “take him under her wing” (see previous quote) and Katherine firmly and angrily instructed her to leave John alone as she wanted to be the one to assist him. Lynn felt as if she could do nothing right commenting: “When it comes to John and Katherine, I can’t win.” (unstructured interview)

With declining motivation came a loss of enthusiasm for Lynn. The factors presented here all resulted in Lynn feeling unmotivated, lacking enthusiasm, which she perceived to have negatively impacted her teaching. Field note data indicated, however, Lynn continued to plan quality physical education and demonstrate highly effective lessons. This was the fourth and final factor leading Lynn to a decision of professional exit. Consider the following quote from a structured interview that demonstrates this:

I feel very unimportant and sad. I am trying to leave having a quality organized curriculum and program but I am losing my enthusiasm and I wanted to leave at the high standard I came in on. I have kept my enthusiasm all along until this year. Now my enthusiasm for teaching is really dragging. This is on my mind so much that it is affecting my teaching performance (Lynn, structured interview).

It is important to note that despite feeling unmotivated and devalued, Lynn expressed that she believed that had Katherine been supportive of her work, she would have continued to remain in the profession as an *enthusiastic and growing* teacher.

Career wind-down stage

Toward the middle of her final year, Lynn began to show signs of transitioning into the *career wind-down stage*, wherein she was preparing to leave the profession. Lynn expressed her sadness of leaving her students and her continued excitement for learning, “I love what I do. I still

feel the energy, the excitement of wanting to show these kids something new, something different, something exciting.” This factor can be connected to the *individual disposition* within her *personal environment* that is embodied in her life-long love of children and desire to foster learning.

At the end of Lynn’s 21st year of teaching (and near the end of data collection), John moved to a full-time position at his home school and left Haven School. An *induction stage* physical educator, Phillip, was hired as the new part-time physical education teacher working with Lynn. This caused an unanticipated positive change in Lynn’s relationship with Katherine. Lynn confided, “When I do have contact with her it’s a more relaxed contact, talking more on a more personal level.” Predominate during this career stage was her desire to “pass the torch” to the next generation of teachers. Lynn explained that it was important to her to share ideas and teaching strategies that were “positive experiences” for her students. Also prominent in this career stage was a change in emotional connections to her students, and placing more emphasis on affective outcomes, she said, “I know I’m coming to the end and my teaching portion is coming to a close, but that emotional side of me is opening up.” Relatedly, she explained, “Before I was more of an educator now I am an emotional educator.”

DISCUSSION

This study explored an exceptional veteran teacher’s professional journey and the *personal* and *organizational factors* that led to her transition into the *career exit stage*. Through the lens of the Career Cycle Model, (Fessler and Christensen, 1992) the current study focused specifically on Lynn’s shift from the *enthusiastic and growing stage* to the *career frustration stage* and later to *career wind down* and *career exit stages*. In her twentieth year as a physical educator, Lynn shifted into the *career frustration stage*. This shift was prompted by environmental conditions that negatively affected her career cycle. The *organizational environmental factors* that impacted her both singularly and in combination were the *management style, regulations, and public trust*, while the *personal environmental factors* were *critical incidents* and *individual disposition*.

Bayer and Brinkkjaer (2009) observed that, “The closer one studies the individual teacher’s career trajectory, the more it appears almost unique”. In several regards, Lynn’s career was unique. First, she spent the first 12 years of her career as a classroom teacher before gaining certification for physical education, and re-entering the *induction stage* as a physical educator. Although such a transition from teaching in the classroom to the gymnasium has been examined (Lynn and Woods, 2010), the occurrence of this type of career shift has not been reported frequently in the literature. Second, the

factors that led to Lynn's feelings of marginalization were certainly based on a complex network of shared historical and school-wide influences. Third, she continued to hold herself to high standards despite working with a physical education colleague who "rolled out the ball" yet was highly favored by the principal. Clearly, functioning within the social context of the school and related institutional factors influenced the Lynn's career progression. Especially noteworthy is the likelihood that Lynn expressed she would have remained in the profession for a number of years, functioning as *enthusiastic and growing teacher*, had her principal remained supportive of Lynn's work. She expressed no desire to exit the career until her relationship with Katherine became contentious. This highlights the critical role that the principal can play in teacher's lives and career development.

Related to her career stage movement, during most of her career as a physical educator, Lynn functioned as an *enthusiastic and growing teacher*. Reflective of a teacher in this career stage (Fessler and Christensen, 1992), Lynn enjoyed her job, and looked forward to going to work and her associations with her students. Signs of Lynn's competence were her being named Teacher of the Year for her school district and her enthusiasm was seen in her procurement of grants for her program. Rolls and Plauborg (2009) note, however, that a teacher's commitment to her/his profession can be either reinforced or undermined by the level of *public trust*, whether at national, local or school level. Unfortunately, Lynn's professional commitment was impacted by a loss of *public trust* at the school level. Although she perceived a gradual loss of *public trust* in the twentieth year, a specific example related to the removal of resources was the case in which Katherine reduced the physical education teaching space.

Lynn's *individual disposition* was likewise an important *personal environmental* factor in her career cycle. As Fessler and Christensen (1992) note, the goals, experiences, and beliefs of an individual teacher have a distinct influence on his or her career cycle. Over time, the individual's disposition can develop, resulting in changing priorities, altering degrees of commitment. In Lynn's case her individual disposition led her to excel as a teacher and to remain committed to the promotion of student learning throughout her career, even when she was frustrated with her principal and colleague. This parallels Rolls and Plauborg's (2009) summary of research on veteran teachers that posits that during the final years of their careers, teachers are typically confident in their teaching abilities. Conversely, Lynn's enduring devotion to her teaching contrasts Rolls and Plauborg's (2009) findings that veteran teachers often hold lower levels of motivation and commitment.

All four of the organizational systems outlined by Lawson (1989) were influential in Lynn's work life in relation to her perceptions of marginality. A key factor

related to the supervision, control, and evaluation system was a change in Katherine's *management style* during Lynn's tenure. Functioning with Katherine in a new imposing role was confusing for Lynn who had formerly viewed Katherine as a friend and confidant. Accompanying Katherine's shift to a more authoritative *management style* was a change in the teaching evaluations that she provided for Lynn. According to Lynn, she had received the lowest teaching evaluation of her entire career after things became difficult between Lynn and Katherine and this was directly related to John.

Lynn's relationship with John was challenging on many fronts. For example, she did not respect him as a professional and her disrespect for John contributed additional tension in her relationship with Katherine. The tenuous relationship between the veteran and novice teachers is highlighted by the obvious age gap between their career stages, and as Sikes, (1985) indicates veteran teachers are often "critical of what they perceive to be the low professional standards of the new generation of teachers." In another respect, Katherine, as principal, missed a valuable opportunity to encourage Lynn and John as veteran and new teachers to join forces and share responsibility for the success of their students (Kardos et al., 2001).

Along with alterations in the control, supervision, and evaluation systems, were changes in prestige and reward systems at play within Lynn's workplace (Lawson, 1989). Lynn experienced, for example, a loss of prestige when she was embarrassed in front of parents of her students. She also lost prestige with John, as Katherine gave preferential treatment to this inexperienced teacher. Likewise, it was John, the non-teaching teacher, who the principal held in high regard, while Lynn, who continued to teach for student learning was disregarded. A critical change in resource allocation systems, another of Lawson's (1989) Interactive Factors Influencing Workplace Conditions occurred wherein Katherine altered the physical education teaching area in which Lynn taught. In this case Lynn lost use of a gym space where she taught exclusively and was assigned to share a larger gym with her colleague. This resulted in challenges that are concomitant with coordinating the common use of space. And finally, goal systems were indirectly influential in the change in Lynn's work environment. In Lynn's case the goal of the school changed when the two grades, fourth and fifth, were added. The addition of the students and staff members triggered a change in Katherine's leadership style, which certainly changed Lynn's working environment. Clearly, the principal, Katherine, was a powerful influence on Lynn's workplace. This is not surprising as traditionally administrative and authority structure in schools is hierarchical, and principals exercise substantial power (Johns and Dimmock, 1999). The extent to which a principal can influence the work place environment of a physical educator, however, is

noteworthy. In essence, Katherine prompted a devoted, *enthusiastic and growing stage* teacher into one who chose early retirement. This clearly counters the retention of a quality teacher, which is unfortunate as teacher quality is the most significant factor affecting students' achievement (Goldhaber and Anthony, 2007).

IMPLICATIONS

Findings presented here provide additional evidence to the overwhelming significance of school administrators in the lives of physical education teachers. Consistent with our previous work, the principal (Katherine) was the primary source of messages of marginality and the strongest influencing factor in daily working conditions for Lynn. The teacher studied by Lux and McCullick (2011) learned to navigate the marginality in her working environment but clearly described her principal as the basis for the majority of her challenges. Additionally, physical education teachers with National Board for Professional Teaching Standards certification (Lux and Woods, 2010) described achieving elevated status following obtaining their certification and articulated this relative to the support they perceived from their administrators. These few studies provide us with an initial understanding of how physical education teachers' job satisfaction is impacted by the relationship with their school principal(s). Because relationship with a principal seems to have such a considerable impact on how physical education teachers feel about their work, future research is needed to more fully comprehend the nuances of these relationships and how they function. Further, scholars should investigate physical educators who have positive and productive relationships with administrators that act to nurture and support physical education. Such research might identify strategies that could assist teachers in cultivating professional relationships with their principals that ultimately results in improved job satisfaction or the elevated status of physical education and those who teach physical education.

A limitation of the current research is that Lynn was only studied during the last years of her teaching career. Longitudinal research focusing on the entire teaching career is warranted to better understand the personal and organizational factors influencing career cycle.

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