

February 2019

Exploring Teachers' Experiences of Parental Leave Policies in One School Board in Ontario

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Graduate Program in Education

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Master of Education

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Abstract

In this study, I sought to examine the experiences of secondary school teachers with parental leave in one school board in Ontario. The purpose of the research was to understand the policies that govern parental leave and teachers' perceptions about the power dynamics in how these policies are enacted. This qualitative study was conducted with semi-structured interviews with six teachers who had taken parental leave in the last five years. The research explored the supports and challenges for teachers and the ways in which teachers' experiences with parental leave policies contributed towards gendered organization of schools. The experiences of the participants in this study suggest that the ways parental leave policies are enacted brought challenges for women teachers, particularly related to work-family life balance and career implications. This research contributes to the body of knowledge about parental leave policies, gendered nature of organizations and work-life balance of working parents.

Keywords: parental leave, maternity leave, secondary teachers, gendered policies, work-life balance, Collective Agreement

Acknowledgements

There are many people that I would like to acknowledge with the completion of this thesis. Many key individuals helped to support me academically and make this thesis possible.

I would like to thank my thesis supervisor and professor, Dr. Melody Viczko, who demonstrated how to think critically about policy. You guided me through the research process and provided much insight.

I would like to thank my husband, Andrew, who was always encouraging and supportive. You offered many suggestions for writing and researching due to your own experience as a teacher researcher that were invaluable. Your accomplishments have been an inspiration to me.

I would like to thank my daughters: Caroline, Christina and Amelia. My interest in gender and policy is inspired by you, my three daughters. You are my inspiration for ensuring that the world is a more fair, equitable and kind place in which to thrive.

Lastly, I would like to thank my parents, Rod and Myra for their on-going support. Dad, you offered sage advice and guidance as I pursued my Masters' degree and went through the research process. Mom, your kindness, and encouragement through the years, has been an inspiration for me as a mother and helped me persevere in the completion of this work.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Parental leave policies straddle the divide between the public and private spheres. The public and private domains are governed by value systems, power dynamics in the workplace, and gender role expectations.¹ Research on women who take parental leave in the corporate world have focused on the discourse around individual negotiations of parental leave (Meisenbach, 2008), as well as on the impact of parental leave absences on career advancement (Young, 1994). However, as Lyness et al. (1999) remarked, although “women make up about 46% of the US workforce and over 80% of working women are expected to become pregnant at some point in their working lives” (p. 487), there has been little research done on the topic. While parental leave policies are created on a “needs based” allocation of resources (Grover, 1991), they are articulated and applied to varying degrees around the world (Martin, 2012).

Teachers’ experiences of parental leave policies in Ontario have not been studied, and doing so may offer a rich area to examine the ways that policy affects both the private and public lives of women, men, their families and colleagues in the workplace. In the 1970s, with the increased participation of women in the workplace, legislation that protected women from pregnancy discrimination came into existence in many countries around the world. In Canada, that legislation takes the form of the Ontario Human Rights Codes (OHRC), Ontario’s

¹ For the purposes of this thesis, I will be using the term ‘parental leave,’ but note that these policies are also referred to as ‘pregnancy leave’ or ‘maternity leave’ policies. Parental Leave is the period of time that directly follows the maternity leave.

Employment Standards Act (ESA) and the various employer policies that have governed workplace conditions for both men and women.

With changes to the *Employment Standards Act, 2000*, in 2017, new parent employees are now able to take up to 63 weeks of parental leave, for a total of 18 months leave. The federal legislation around pregnancy and parental leave is stipulated in Section 53 (1) in the *Employment Standards Act, 2000*, which maintains that “the employer of an employee who has taken pregnancy leave... shall reinstate the employee when the leave ends to the position the employee most recently held with the employer, if it still exists, or to a comparable position if it does not” (p. 65). This federal legislation sets out the employment law that is *intended to protect* (my emphasis) employees from pregnancy discrimination. Pregnancy discrimination is considered a form of “sex discrimination” according to the Canadian Human Rights Act. However, in recent years there has been an alarming trend towards increasing cases of pregnancy discrimination before the courts in Canada (Hall, 2011; Stechyson & Bouzane, 2012) and abroad (Dixit & Kleiner, 2005; Schulze, 2008). The parental leave policies that exist in various forms are important institutional structures that regulate how we value and understand the role of men and women as parents and as workers in society.

Parental leave policies are critical to the health and well-being of parents and their children (Tanaka, 2005; Phillips & Adams, 2001; Piscicella, 2008). They are also critical to achieving gender equity in the workplace (Calder, 2003; Martin 2012). Stockdell-Giesler and Ingalls (2007) underlined the importance of parental leave policies: “Workplaces that honour family life and respect a diversity of schedules, family structures, and personal commitments

outside work can go far to reduce gender inequities” (p. 38). While there are gaps in the studies of parental leave policies as they are experienced by teachers, the topic has been addressed in other workplaces as a new field of research over the last decade.

Riehl and Lee (1996) note that the gendered nature of teaching means that there are more female teachers taking up parental leave. However, to date, the literature does not include any focus on elementary or secondary teachers’ parental leave policies, though there is some literature that focuses on the parental leave policies for post-secondary educators (Armenti, 2004; Demerling, 2009; Prentice & Prankratz, 2003; Stockdell-Giesler & Ingalls, 2007). There is also literature that relates to other sectors and their parental leave policies, such as health (Pisciella, 2008). From a broad perspective, parental leave policies have been examined in greater detail in studies from Scandinavian countries (Almqvist et al., 2011; Gwennaële, 1999), which are among the countries with the most generous and inclusive policies in the world and are often touted as models for other countries to follow.

Closer to home, North American studies on parental leave in education examine university faculty and their experiences of parental leave. These studies reveal some of the difficulties that faculty members have in establishing careers and maintaining work and family life balance. A recent study of surgeons who took parental leave uncovers the difficulties of work-life balance for women who are both a doctor and a parent, and explores the gender implications of being a female surgeon with parenting responsibilities (Brown et al., 2013)). These studies together reveal a common theme of work-life balance difficulties.

Despite these existing studies on parental leave policies, there has been a void in the academic study of how teachers experience these policies in Ontario. In the present case study, I sought to examine the perceptions of teachers in one school board in Ontario about how their own lives, and those of their colleagues and families, are affected by parental leave policies. This study about parental leave policies focuses on the narratives of secondary school teachers in one school board in Ontario. This study will help fill the gap in our knowledge about teachers' experiences of parental leave policies in Ontario and the resulting effects on their personal and work life, in order to influence both policies and practices in this province and throughout Canada.

Significance of Study for Particular Audiences

This study will provide valuable information for those who both develop and experience parental leave policies in education in Ontario. There has been an increasing number of women in the teaching profession (Cortina & San Roman, 2006; Riehl & Lee, 1996), especially over the last 15 years. Because women teachers are often defined by their roles as “mothers” and “guardians of the nation” (Dillabough, 1999, p. 708), they are often equated with the private sphere, playing out the role expectations of “mothering,” even in the public sphere of teaching. However, despite the many women taking parental leave, there has been an increase in the number of human rights complaints concerning parental leave that have been received across Canada in the past decade (Dixit & Kleiner, 2005; Hall, 2011; Stechysane & Bouzane, 2012), specifically in fields such as policing (Seymour, 2007) and teaching (Siminovic, 2005).

As mentioned earlier, maternity leave policies in education exist textually in the Ontario government's *Employment Standards Act, 2000*, *The Ontario Human Rights Commission* and the collective bargaining of the provincial teaching federations. This study is significant for policymakers in the Ministry of Labour that creates the Employment Standards Act, the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF), the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO), the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA) and Ontario School Boards that create policies governing teachers in their contractual agreements, and the courts, that decide on cases of parental leave discrimination. This study will offer teachers and policy makers valuable insights into teachers' experiences at work, negotiating workplace conditions, and experiences with work-life balance.

Objectives of the Study

In this study, I seek to understand the realities faced by teachers in one school board in Ontario as they engage parental leave policies. In particular, I examine the relationships of teachers with the school administration and their colleagues. In a final analysis, I place the research in the legal framework, examining the collective bargaining language in the Collective Agreements around parental leave, and how this intersects with the reality of teachers' experience at the workplace. The goal of this study is to illuminate teachers' experiences of parental leave policies, with the aim of increasing awareness of tensions, work-family balance and career implications. In the recommendations of the study, I propose a change to the Collective Agreements for secondary teachers to include more specific language to give secondary teachers more clearly defined timetables, and provide more professional learning opportunities and ways of connecting with the teaching community for teachers on leave.

Positionality of the Researcher

My personal experiences teaching in the secondary school system for 20 years and my concurrent experiences as a mother provide a certain proximity to the subject. The ways which these intersect in my understandings of parental leave, and the treatment and attitudes towards teacher parents who take leave have given me a particular understanding of some of the challenges and privileges that these experiences offer both teachers and parents. My objective is to allow participants to share their experiences openly without biasing their responses. I encouraged the trust of the participants by sharing the fact that I was a teacher, myself, and had taken parental leaves, as well. However, I did not share with the participants my own experiences of parental leave policies before or during the interviews so as not to bias their responses.

Background and Context

The practice whereby a teacher is supposed to be placed in the same position following a parental leave, as stated in Collective Agreement of the school board in this study, is negotiated at a school site-by-site basis and seems to be different in the experiences of elementary teachers than secondary teachers. Furthermore, with the amendment of Bill C-32 in 2000 to the Employment Insurance Act total parental/ maternity leave time increased from six months to one year in 2000, and the opportunity to stay at home with one's child was extended. This increased the total overall months of parental leave that women took in Canada from six months on average to 10 months (Marshall, 2003). However, this increase in time away from the workplace, created a potential change to the teacher's experiences in returning to work. This can have negative repercussions for teachers who may feel that their careers are "on hold" for many years because of parental leave.

As a teacher who has taken parental leave three times, I have experienced the ambiguity of parental leave policies both in text and in practice. In my experience as a secondary school teacher, and what I sought to examine in my thesis, is that there are many other costs to taking parental leave that are not accounted for in parental leave policies. The economic and social impact of parental leave can be seen at the level of the teacher's public and private life, with the potential to lose "working capital" that a teacher has built in her career. These include: loss of time building networks with colleagues, loss of promotional opportunities and professional development, "costs associated with signalling a lack of commitment to employers, reinforcement of traditional roles and responsibilities [...] the father takes over the role of sole 'breadwinner'" (Galtry & Callister, 2005, p. 221) and potentially loss of "seniority" in terms of course and classroom allocation. Armenti (2004) has documented this loss of working capital for women to a greater extent than men in higher education who took time off for parental leave. Examining the effects of parental leave policies and the ways that they are enacted in school boards in Ontario is integral to understanding issues of equity, gendered roles in society and the lives of teachers in general.

Overarching Research Questions

In examining the questions of parental leave policies in practice, I will examine three distinct time periods in the parental leave process for secondary school teachers: before going on leave, during parental leave, and returning from leave. The main questions can be divided into the two following overarching questions:

- 1) What policies (i.e., federal, provincial, board, federation) govern parental leave in the district under study?
- 2) What power dynamics do teachers perceive, both personally and professionally, in the enactment of parental leave policy?
 - i) What are the supports and challenges teachers navigate in negotiating the parental leave policy?
 - ii) Do teachers experience tensions in what they perceive in policy text and practice?
 - iii) In what ways do teachers' experiences with parental leave policies contribute to the gendered organization of schools, if at all?

Definitions of Key Terms

District Level – This is a reference to the school district as a governing body in the province. Teachers' federations as well as schools operate within the jurisdiction of a school district.

Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario (ETFO) - The Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario is an organization that represents the Public Elementary Teachers, Occasional Teachers and educational professionals of Ontario.

Gender – It is important to recognize that gender is performative and can be understood as a pattern of behaviours (Blackmore & Sachs, 2007; Connell, 2009; West & Zimmerman, 1997). There is a cis-gender bias in the literature and in my research. I use the terms women and men to refer to cis-gender subjects.

Hegemony – This refers to power asserted by a dominant group over the minoritized ‘other’. Hegemonic groups can assert dominance in institutions and organizations through the interpretation of policy and influence on workplace culture (Connell, 2006, 2009; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012).

Long Term Occasional Teacher (LTO) – Long Term Occasional Teacher is a reference to a teacher who is on the supply teaching list in Ontario school boards who attains a position to teach for at least 10 days consecutively in one school year.

Maternity Leave – *The Employment Standards Act 2000*, provides employees with the right to take a maternity leave for 15 weeks. This must be taken directly following pregnancy leave, and can be taken 10 weeks before birth/ adoption and up to 15 weeks after birth.

Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation (OSSTF) – The Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation is a union representing Ontario Secondary School Teachers and other educational members. Part of their mandate is also to protect public education from privatization, and they work to ensure that all students receive an education free of bias and discrimination.

Parental Leave – This leave refers to the period of time directly after maternity leave. Under the new provisions in the *Employment Standards Act, 2000*, a new parent can take up to 63 weeks of unpaid parental leave after maternity leave in Canada. *The Employment Insurance Act*, which is federal legislation, provides up to 63 weeks of paid parental leave.

Patriarchy – This is a concept of a relational system of power in which men are dominant, and assert power over women. In patriarchal households men are the heads of the household and hold power over the women in the household (Connell, 2009). Organizations can also be patriarchal in the way that they position men to be in dominant positions of power, such as in managerial positions, creating and interpreting policies that are imposed on women (Connell, 2006).

Teaching Lines – The number of classes a secondary school teacher is assigned. A full-time teaching contract in Ontario secondary schools would consist of 6 teaching lines assigned in one school year. Usually these are organized into three teaching lines each semester.

Summary

In summary, I sought to explore teachers' experiences of parental leave policies, and the effects of parental leave policies on work-family balance and career implications. This study fills a gap in research on men and women's experiences of parental leave policies in Canada. There has been some research done on parental leave in the corporate world, and in post-secondary institutions. However, teachers' experiences of parental leave policies in Canada have not been explored.

Despite the fact that legislation protecting women from pregnancy discrimination has been in existence since the 1970's, there has been an increase of reporting pregnancy discrimination in the last decade. The ways that parental leave policies are enacted have an impact on the work experience and the work-life balance of teachers and their families. The implications for work-life balance will be explored further in the Literature Review.

The focus on parental leave in education comes from my experiences as a secondary school educator. My own experiences and observations about the loss of working capital that teachers experience when taking parental leave provides proximity and a particular perspective of the impact of parental leave policies on teachers.

In the following chapter, I will outline the theoretical framework for this study and present the literature review that will guide the analysis in the conclusion. In the theoretical framework I will examine critical feminist understandings of policies as gendered. I will examine how gender is a construct (West and Zimmerman, 1997), and can be understood as a pattern of relations. I will explore the ways that policies can be viewed as gendered (Acker, 1992; Connell, 2009) and how state control of women's bodies (Connell, 2009) affects our understanding of gender. Connell's (2006) study of gendered organizations provide a theoretical framework for understanding power dynamics of gender in organizations. I will also examine five fundamental concerns in critical policy analysis research (Diem et al., 2011).

In the literature review, I will review parental leave policies for postsecondary educators which is very relevant to understanding the experiences of the teachers in my study. I will also examine parental leave policies in Ontario, in particular the OHRC, and the Collective Agreements. I will look at the work-life conflict relating to parental leave in different employment sectors including the corporate sector, for post-secondary faculty, and in the field of medicine (Brown, Fluit, Lent & Herbert, 2013). Finally, I will review cases of pregnancy discrimination in Ontario human rights cases (Hall, 2011; McPhail, 2009; Stechyson & Bouzane, 2012) to understand the implications of parental leave policies on equity.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

My research is informed by a framework that draws on literature in the areas of critical policy studies and feminist theory. In doing so, I am interested in examining the power dynamics in policy. Ball (1993) situates policy text and discourse within the context of power and inequality: “Policy is not exterior to inequalities, although it may change them; it is also affected, inflected and deflected by them” (p. 56). There is an assumed existing tension between policy in text and policy in practice that is fundamental to my study and underlies critical policy analysis. I examine inequalities in policy and the ways that policy can be gendered through a critical feminist lens.

Critical Feminist Understanding of Policies as Gendered

Feminist theorists believe that gender is a social construct that impacts social relations (Acker, 1992; Hawkesworth, 1997; West and Zimmerman, 1997). Butler (1990) argues that gender is constructed as a performative construct and that, in everyday choices (whether conscious or unconscious), behaviours, and social relations, we are “doing gender”. West and Zimmerman (1997) differentiate between sex which is biological and gender which is culturally, psychologically and socially constructed. They propose that gender is performative and “constituted through interaction” (p. 129). The ways of relating and interacting and the discourse that we use all contribute to our understanding of and performance of gender. Consequently, gender is more than just a sexual attribute but rather a pattern of behaviours, a process that constrains one’s realm of possibility (Connell, 2009). This concept that gender is a pattern of interactions and social relations in which “the positions of women and men are defined, the

cultural meanings of being a man and a woman are negotiated, and their trajectories through life are mapped out” (p. 839) is integral in understanding that gender can be understood as an organizing principle. Patterns of gender relations are negotiated and understood through power dynamics in the relationships between men and women within organizations.

Policies themselves can be viewed as gendered (Acker, 1992; Connell, 2009). Feminist theories of the state are founded on the notion that the state is patriarchal, and the policies that are created by the state are made by men, and for men (Connell, 2009; Dryzek & Dunleavy, 2009). The parental leave policies which exist through different legislative bodies are important institutional structures which regulate how we value and understand the role of men and women as parents and as workers in today’s society.

The association between state control over women’s bodies is a key example of gendered politics. Connell (2009) points out that women’s bodies have been a site of control for state policy and this is “difficult to change” (p. 124). Connell maintains that there is a strong disposition in postmodern writing and discourse to “downplay or erase such issues as that of the patriarchal state power, social class divisions, institutional structures and hegemonic cultural capital” (p. 25). However, Galman and Mallozzi (2012) argue that post-feminism discourses “which claim that the work of a reified uni-focused feminism is done and that gender parity has been achieved are particularly troubling” (p. 286). They argue that this is troubling because this suggests that there is no need to focus on gender equality in the work force if parity has been reached. There is a need to examine the patriarchal and gendered nature of policies that still exist in the ways policies are interpreted.

In a study about women educational leaders in Australia during the increasing reforms brought to public education through New Public Managerialism, Blackmore and Sachs (2007) brought attention to the gendered nature of organizations. Citing Ashcraft and Mumby (2004), they summarize this position:

Gender is constitutive of organization; it is an omnipresent, defining feature of collective human activity, regardless of whether the activity appears to be about gender...the gendering of organization involves a struggle over meaning, identity and difference...[and] such struggles reproduce social realities that privilege certain interests (p. xv).

Here, we see that the gender as a construct is embedded in organizations because of its inherent connection to human activity. That is, in the work of enacting policies in educational organizations, gender becomes a defining feature of the subjectivity of individuals there, regardless if policy activity is directed related to gender. This concept is interesting when considering the attempts of parental leave policies to apply regardless of gender, suggesting gender neutrality in practice. Yet, as Blackmore and Sachs (2007) suggest organizations involve “an array of fluid social practices and interactions, cultural representations and meaning making that are gendered” (p. 17). In essence, the gendered nature of organizations is one that cannot be done away with by stating neutrality in policy or practice.

Connell’s (2006) study of 10 public sector organizations in Australia provides further theoretical framework for how the organizations and policies themselves can be gendered. According to Connell (2006) there are four dimensions of gender regimes that create power

dynamics. First, the gender division of Labour, focuses on the production and consumption of labour. This category examines how occupations have been gendered in the way the policies are applied. It also refers to the division between paid work and domestic labour. This gendered regime is particularly applicable for this study as it pertains to how the policies can be viewed as gendered in the ways parental leave policies are applied and negotiated in the workplace.

Second, Connell (2006) describes how gender relations of power examines how force and authority is exercised along gender lines. Who holds power in organizations and the ways their authority is viewed can create inequality and reinforce the status quo. Even within organizations that seem progressive, there remains “cultural connections between power and masculinity” (p. 845). This gendered nature of power in organizations will be examined in relation to my study in the final analysis.

Third, emotion and human relations are gendered, according to Connell (2006). The attachments and antagonisms that are formed amongst people in an organization follow gender expectations and prejudice which influence how people interact. Connell notes that there are many emotions related to gender transition in organizations. On the one side there may be “resentment and distrust” towards a shift towards women in positions of power in organizations and on the other side, there may be “exasperation and anger” (p. 843) held by women towards an organization that is slow to change.

Fourth, Connell (2006) claims that culture and symbolism are also gendered in the ways that gender identities are interpreted and the beliefs and attitudes about gender in organizations. In their study, organizations that are largely masculinized, the symbols of “male” culture are

represented by pornography, swearing, and rough housing, whereas, in workplaces that are “depolarized”, there is a businesslike atmosphere and a feeling of “mutual respect among staff” (Connell, 2006, p. 843). Female employees can feel devalued and powerless in a largely masculinized workplace. One of the interesting findings in the study was that the labour process and policies tended to recreate the gender patterns and the way that policies were applied followed along expectations for what constituted male and female work and patterns of communicating.

Liberal views of society recognize that most women in Western societies have political agency (through voting powers, a degree of political representation and increased participation in government bureaucracies), and the ability to be self-supporting through jobs and careers. However, the ways policies act as sources of power to regulate women’s participation in the public sphere and ways these policies are practiced can be challenged through a critical feminist lens. Traditional gendered role expectations underlie state policy and they create a script of women’s work allotted to the private sphere (Blackmore, 1995).

Blackmore’s (1989) work places importance on child-rearing and the work done in the “private” sphere during and after a person is on maternity or paternity leave. She values the intersections of experiences of child-rearing and working in schools as having influence over a person’s administrative leadership experience. Indeed, parental leave policies and the ways they are enacted and interpreted reflect society’s views of women and men’s roles at the intersection where the private (mothering/ fathering) meets the public (paid labour). This home/work conflict

for women is accentuated by women seeking to be a part of the public sector and having to negotiate the demands between work and home (Weedon, 1987).

As Dryzek and Dunleavy (2009) explain, this traditional view of women's roles, whereby women are considered to act in the private realm, is particularly detrimental to women's participation in the paid workforce when a woman is faced with child-rearing responsibilities because it makes her "disadvantaged in the competition for positions of power and influence in politics, business and elsewhere" (p. 230). Although feminists differ on how the state should operate, and to what degree it should be involved in policy making that regulates the private sphere, there is agreement on the need to create public policies that ensure space for women and children in society (Dryzek & Dunleavy, 2009).

Drudy (2008) notes that teaching around the world is predominantly female. The majority of teachers, and indeed, workers in other sectors, who take parental leave are women (Bernard, 2013). There are an increasing number of men taking parental leave in Canada and around the world, and to differing degrees. For example, Quebec and Sweden's significant increase in men taking parental leave is interesting when one examines their parental leave policies (Demerling, 2009; Almqvist et al., 2011). It is interesting that in places where there are stronger paternity leave policies, such as in Nordic countries, there is also "more gender equitable roles in parenting" (Warin, 2014, p. 99).

One could use a liberal feminist perspective of parental leave and propose that by having equal numbers of males and females taking up parental leave there would be more equality in the ways that these parental leave are experienced and applied. Indeed, there are more fathers taking

up parental leave in certain parts of the world (Almqvist et al., 2011; Demerling, 2009). However, the reality is that women are still the majority of parents who are taking parental leave. After the extension of the paid parental leave benefits in Canada in 2000, that went from 15 weeks to 35 weeks, the number of fathers taking parental leave to care for infants went up significantly from 3 percent to 20 percent in 2006, though the number of fathers who take up paid parental leave is still less than the 60% of mothers who took it in 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2008).

Olesen (2011) conceptualizes developments, issues and future implications for feminist qualitative research. Feminist research poses essential questions of power and knowledge, questions such as: “Whose knowledge? Where and how obtained, by whom, from whom, and for what purpose?” (Olesen, 2011, p. 129). This is important to my research as I attempt to understand the many perspectives and experiences of teachers’ parental leave.

In this study, I seek to understand the concept of policies as gendered (Acker, 2008; Connell, 2006) by examining how parental leave and workplace treatment may continue to reinforce inequities between men and women (Noor & Zainuddin, 2011, Young, 1994). Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) acknowledge the importance of critical research that “must be a process of conscientization, not research solely by experts for experts, but to empower oppressed participants” (p. 41). Feminist theories can provide a framework for understanding how societal roles and expectations can influence parental leave experiences (Acker, 1992, Blackmore, 1989; Sallee, 2008). As Blackmore (1989) states, there is not one feminist theory but rather a “body of

theories which take on different political hues ranging from liberal feminism to radical separatism” (p. 96).

Sensoy and Di Angelo (2012) claim that oppression is institutionalized, as men dominate all major institutions of society, such as education, and ideological, “embedded within individual consciousness through socialization and rationalized as normal once people are socialized into their place in the hierarchy” (p. 45). Therefore, it is important to go beyond a liberal feminist view of parental leave to understand the ways that oppression operates to uphold the dominant group’s hegemonic power (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012; Connell, 2009).

By examining parental leave policies through the experiences of secondary teachers, I seek to understand how parental leave policies are gendered and have social implications for the work-home division of labour, work-flow stability, and opportunities for advancement that may create inequities and disempower teacher parents. By examining the discourse and narratives of teachers on parental leave, I aim to understand the impact of parental leave policies on teachers’ lives and to create an increased awareness around these issues. The simple acknowledgement that this is a worthy research topic and one that affects many people’s lives gives voice to the disempowered who may remain silent for fear of further alienation of their coworkers or administration.

Critical Policy Analysis

My approach to policy analysis is based on the assumption that all policy actors bring their own feelings, values and beliefs into the acts of making, and experiencing policy (Yanow, 1999). These various actors bring many interpretations to the policies themselves based on their

education, experiences and many factors in their background (Yanow, 1999). It is the interplay between policy as text and policy actors that creates a variety of interpretations that suggest it is the way that policy is enacted that matters. Critical policy analysis examines the narratives of policy actors to understand the ways in which they interpret policy and the ways in which policy is enacted in various settings such as schools.

In a study about the ways in which policies were taken up in four secondary schools in England, Ball, Maguire and Braun (2011) suggest that the enactment of policies should be the focus of policy studies. In their study, they suggest that policy enactment research involves exploring “the ways in which different types of policy become interpreted and translated and reconstructed and remade” (p. 6). Such an approach challenges the notion that policies are apolitical in how they are implemented into schools, rather, as they suggest, “policies, once enacted, restructure subsequent political processes...they empower some and displace others” (p. 8).

Similarly, Diem et al. (2011) conceptualized that there are five fundamental concerns that are shared across the landscape of critical policy research and approaches. First, there is an assumed difference between policy rhetoric and practiced reality. Second, critical policy scholars are interested in the changing of policy over time and how such change reinforces dominant culture and the ways in which policies are institutionalized or internalized. Third, there is a concern for understanding the distribution of power, whether that is the “policy system itself, the site of implementation or who gets what when and how” (p. 1072). Fourth is a concern for how

policy contributes towards societal stratification. Fifth, there is an interest in processes of domination and oppression in policy.

Understanding the social structure of policy is important towards an understanding of the “material conditions with which such texts are produced and to examine critically the institutional practices which they are used to defend” (Olssen & Codd, 2004, p. 72). By examining textual policy of pregnancy and parental leave, we can find meaning in the ways that specific words can act as “floating signifiers”(Graham, 2011), words that are variable and mean different things to different people, and can be ambiguous and create “antagonisms” (Graham, 2011). Parental leave policies are written in federal, provincial and collective bargaining documents, crossing over the boundaries of jurisdiction, and therefore are apt to have more differences in interpretation because of the many articulations of the policy.

Olssen and Codd (2004) brought attention to Foucauldian thought that power and knowledge are dependent on one another. Through discourse, they argue, “knowledge and power are always inextricably related and that there are always sociological implications to the production of knowledge” (p. 21). Foucault defines discourse as the historically specified relations between bodies of knowledge about teaching and teachers and disciplinary practices or technologies which regulate and control teachers. The concept of discourse can be understood then as a system of statements whose organization is regular and systematic, consisting of all that can be said and thought about a particular topic, as well as who has permission to speak and with what authority. Discourses, according to Foucault, “systematically form the objects of which they speak...they do not identify objects, they constitute them and in the practice of doing so

conceal their own invention”(Foucault, 1972, p. 49). Knowledge and knowledge production are closely linked to power (Olssen & Codd, 2004).

Relating to the area of parental leave policy, there is concern for how underlying power dynamics are at play in educational settings related to how teachers experience parental leave. The various stakeholders, the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour, Ontario school boards, principals, and teachers may all interpret policies in different ways, and there is a power differential that may be reflected in these relationships. From this understanding, the parental leave policy is not applied to the teacher through the hierarchy of policymakers and enforcers, but is enacted in these relations. We need to consider: Who is creating the policy? For what purpose? For whose benefit?

Teachers are not passive in how policies are enacted and there is communication and negotiating that occurs as teachers interpret the policy themselves. Indeed, teachers have “some degree of political agency” (Dillabough, 1999, p. 713). In this study, I seek to examine teachers’ experiences with parental leave policy, and the resulting power dynamics, gender role expectations, and issues of work-family balance that are communicated through teachers’ narratives and interpretations of these policies in their lives. Adopting a critical policy lens, I am working from the assumption that the teachers in my study have agency in relation to parental leave policies.

A critical understanding of policies as gendered suggests it is possible to understand and explore the many experiences of people to understand gender. It allows for the use of coding discourse which “illuminates important phenomena and seeing them in constructive

perspectives” (Alvesson & Billing, 2009, p. 43). I will also examine the research with intersectionality in mind (such as the categories of age, race, and class) to consider the ways that social divisions exist in an interplay of identities that “contribute to the oppression of women” (Olesen, 2011, p. 134). It will be important in this study to examine and understand the various social identities of the participants that contribute to their own personal narrative and recollection of experiences. Blackmore (1985) states that it is important to “support programs oriented toward women, and value women's ways of knowing, acting, and talking” (p. 2). This framework offers a guide to understanding gender differences in the realm of education for the purposes of this study.

Literature Review

The literature on parental leave policies is growing but to date does not include any focus on elementary teachers or secondary teachers’ experiences or the impact of policies on them. There seems to be a gap in the literature with respect to this topic. There is some literature that focuses on the parental leave policies for post-secondary educators (Armenti, 2004; Comer, 2009; O’Meara & Campbell, 2011; Stockdell-Giesler & Ingalls, 2007). This research would be most relevant to the proposed research, as it is still within the field of education. The key words that I used to research on-line databases and Western University’s catalogue were “parental leave policy”, “maternity leave policy”, “gender equity in teaching”, “parental leave and education”, “parental leave and discrimination”, “administration, teaching and gender roles”, “teacher federations and gender equity”. There is also literature that relates to other industry sectors and their parental leave policies.

This literature review is grouped into three topics: 1) Parental leave policies at Canadian federal, provincial and local district levels (*Employment Standards Act, 2000, The Ontario Human Rights Commission*); 2) Work-family conflict for teachers; and 3) Existing research on parental leave policies. The latter group of literature was found when broadening my search to include pregnancy discrimination (Dixit & Kleiner, 2005; Gardner, 1994). There was a surprising dearth of literature in this field. These studies found that there is a growing problem of pregnancy discrimination in the workplace (Stechyson & Bouzane, 2012). Pregnancy discrimination can exist in areas of hiring (Masser, 2007), pregnancy (and parental) leave, and return to work (Dixit & Kleiner, 2005).

Parental Leave Policies in Ontario

Parental leave policies are written in federal, provincial and collective bargaining documents and therefore are apt to have more antagonisms in interpretation because of the many redefinitions of the policy. This federal legislation sets out the employment law that is *intended to protect* (my emphasis) employees from pregnancy discrimination. Pregnancy discrimination is considered a form of “sex discrimination” according to the Canadian Human Rights Act. According to the act: “It is illegal to refuse to hire or to promote a woman, to terminate her employment or to harass her in relation to a pregnancy” (Stechysane & Bouzane 2012).

The *Ontario Human Rights Code* (OHRC) adds protection against discrimination during parental leave by stating that the employee should be returned to the same position, OHRC,

7.1.1.1 :

At the end of the leave, the employee must be reinstated to the position he or she most recently held with the employer, or, if that no longer exists, a comparable position, unless the person's employment has been terminated for reasons unrelated to the leave. An employer cannot refuse to give the employee her job back because it prefers the person who was hired to replace her during the leave.

The OHRC articulates specific scenarios to understand the application of the law. These federal and provincial policies are then further redefined with the policies in the local teachers' federations bargaining units. According to a section in one Collective Agreement between Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF) and one school board in Ontario, teachers on parental leave should be returned to the "same position" that they previously held. However, the term "same position" is vague and leaves room for interpretation and different labour practices. The school board and some arbitrators have argued that the "same position" means returning the teacher to teaching duties in the same school (Siminovic, 2005).

There may also be a difference in practice of these policies between secondary and elementary panels. It is generally agreed that teachers in elementary schools are returned to the same grade from which they earlier taught. There are many different ways of analyzing parental leave, to understand how they are applied in practice, and to examine the social implications of who is left out or not protected because of parental leave policies, and what the overall effects are of these policies.

Work-Family Conflict relating to Parental Leave

The challenges of balancing work and home responsibilities are still a struggle for parents today. Yet, Burke and Karambayya (2004) note that women in the workplace still “have to contend with the limitations imposed by traditional gender roles, the challenges of a second shift work, and the absence of viable role models” (p. 165). Negotiating the demands of work-life balance and nuances of parental leave policies are not unique to education. There have been numerous studies that deal with this topic in other employment sectors. I will review some of them in the next section.

Liu and Buzzanell (2004) conducted research with 15 participants and their experiences with parental leave uptake and return to work. They consider maternity leave to be a socially constructed phenomenon that is influenced by stakeholders’ expectations and their discourse around maternity leave. They recommend that human resources departments should be communicating with administrators to ensure reasonable accommodation of the individual women’s needs are met as this links to the health of the women and their babies. Liu & Buzzanell’s (2004) study focuses on discourses, as well as the health and legal repercussions when maternity leave policies are ignored.

Negotiating Parental Leave Policies in the Corporate Sector

In the corporate sector, Meisenbach et al. (2008) conducted qualitative research, interviewing 21 women about their experiences negotiating maternity leave. They found that the process of negotiating maternity leave was not “open” in terms of transparency as they previously thought and that there were limitations in terms of how the participants thought of

themselves as agents of the maternity leave or as subordinates. One of the essential questions they sought to understand was the “opportunities for empowerment and transformation” that were revealed in their discourse (Meisenbach et al., 2008). They used Burkean (1945/1969) pentadic discourse analysis to understand the motivation and attitudes of participants in discourse analysis. This examines the relationship between five elements: an act, an agent, a scene, agency, a purpose. This analysis draws upon a dramaturgical informed analysis of discourse. They explain that Burkean pentadic discourse is applied to the women’s discourse as they talk of their maternity leave (the agent) being set up (the act) by the policy (the agency) through bureaucratic organizations (the scene) “in order to control and regulate the leave” (the purpose) (Meisenbach et al., 2008, p.8).

They found that by examining the employee-employer relationships, feminist scholarship could identify prominent relationships and themes. Meisenbach et al. (2008) concluded that “in general, maternity leave fosters gender conflict, uncertainty about workflow stability” and implications for future career advancement (p.4). This study offers an interesting model for analyzing the elements in relationships and provides valuable findings as to possible outcomes for people that take parental leave. This relates to my research as I seek to understand the teachers’ own role in negotiating their parental leave and the transition back to work after their leave.

Parental Leave Policies for Post-Secondary Faculty

Parental leave policies in education are the subject of academic research in Canada and the United States as they pertain to post-secondary institutions, most notably, the policies which

govern teaching faculty (Armenti, 2004; Comer, 2009; O'Meara & Campbell, 2011; Stockdell-Giesler & Ingalls, 2007). It is an important topic in academia because although there are a growing number of women who are teaching faculty at universities, few of them are tenured, and still fewer of these are mothers (Stockdell-Giesler & Ingalls, 2007). In Armenti's (2004) research on parental leave policies in universities in the United States, she asserts that there needs to be questions asked about how our policies and ways of communication are gendered.

The research suggests that the tight deadlines for publishing, the pervasive idea of the "ideal worker", and the lack of supportive parental leave all contribute to this lacklustre record for women's equality. Stockdell-Giesler and Ingalls (2007) point out that female faculty "routinely have difficulty with the 'up-or-out' tenure clock. Because the childbearing years coincide with the pre-tenure years, many women find that they must choose between producing children and earning tenure" (p. 38). According to this study, parental leave policies in American universities do not seem to offer family-work balance that is necessary to recruit and retain female faculty members.

The research suggests that there are a wide variety of parental leave policies, depending on the university by which one is employed. Prentice and Pankratz (2003) review the policies at Canadian universities and find wide spread differences in the policies in place. Research on parental leave, needs to take into account the differences between gender as well as providing family leave rights for each. Prentice and Pankratz (2003) maintain that "'family-friendly' policies require accommodating reasonable sex-differences between women and men as well as

the equitable treatment of all parents, whether male or female, biological or adoptive, same-sex or heterosexual” (20).

Prentice and Pankratz’s (2003) analysis of parental leave and the recommendations for improving working conditions and leave policy for men and women in Canada and the United States, offer a model for educators in the public system and post-secondary. For example, whereas 18 of the universities top-up the maternity leave to 100% for the duration of the parental leave, in all of the school boards in Ontario, there is only 8 weeks top up to 100% in the provincial collective bargaining agreement for public school educators, in secondary school system in Ontario. The reality is that the discrimination faced by women faculty is both overt and covert and the nuanced gender expectations that come with mothering often clash with the expectations of relentless application of oneself to one’s career as a professor. Discrimination around parental leave is not limited to the realm of education though.

Maternity Leave Experiences in the Field of Medicine

A recent study from Western University by Brown, Fluit, Lent, and Herbert (2013) explored how the shift in gender balance in surgery reflected a shift in generational beliefs. A group of 24 recently hired assistant professors (12 men and 12 women) in the Department of Surgery in the Faculty of Medicine at Western University were invited to participate in the study. Of these, 17 (nine women and eight men) agreed to take part in the study. Not all of the 17 participants had children. Of the six women who had children, four had husbands who worked outside of the home. All six of the men who had children had wives who assumed the majority of childcare. The study found that the participants who fell into the Generation X demographic

exhibited beliefs often deemed congruent to this demographic group, such as the belief that one needs to work hard but not at the expense of family, friends and personal development, and the need for autonomy and flexibility.

By conducting a qualitative study with a phenomenological approach, Brown et al., (2013) used immersion and crystallization, a suspension of reading and analyzing data in order to identify themes and patterns, in participant responses for synthesis and interpretation of the research. They found that although the male surgeons supported the inclusion of more female surgeons in the department, and even though the female surgeons believed that gender was not an issue when considering their work, the women participants “appeared to struggle more when obligations at work conflicted with childcare responsibilities” (Brown et al., 2013, p. 155). They found that the struggle to attain work-life balance was very difficult for female surgeons who needed to negotiate maternity leave and manage and prioritize their time to include responsibilities at home with young children. Some of these challenges related to arranging parental leave.

Although parental leave policies allow women to take up to one year of paid leave in Canada, the average leave for surgeons was much shorter (Brown et al., 2013). They cite three months as the average maternity leave for surgeons in their study. Most of the reasons given for the truncated parental leave reflected issues of a shortage of specialists available for patient care and financial considerations. Brown et al., (2013) noted that prior research found that “physicians who practice part-time reported less burnout, higher satisfaction and greater control over their work in comparison to full time physicians” (p. 157). Interestingly Brown et al. (2013)

also noted that physicians had less stress if their goals were aligned with those of leadership. They stated that one of the limitations of their study was the need to interview senior colleagues in the department of surgery to study their beliefs and perspectives of gender in the field of surgery.

Brown et al. (2013) concluded that gender did impact the work and struggle for balance for these surgeons and that maternity policies, although in place to allow one year of leave, need more structural support such as more human resources to support the surgeons with patient care. They noted that a new finding in their study which had not been found in previous studies of surgeons, was the positive views held by the male colleagues in the department towards the uptake of maternity leave. A gap in the study is the absence of information about whether or not the men took paternity leave, whether they considered doing so, and what factors might have affected those decisions. This study offers a guide for methodology, approach, and the formulation of questions to use in my study.

Human Rights Cases relating to Parental Leave in Canada

In recent years, there has been an increase in reporting of pregnancy discrimination in Canada. According to the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission, “one in 10 complaints filed with the commission come from women saying they were denied employment because they were pregnant, had their employment terminated when they applied for maternity leave or were not allowed to return to work after a maternity leave” (Hall, 2011, A5). There has been increased reporting of pregnancy discrimination in British Columbia, as well. According to the B.C.

Human Rights Coalition, the number of pregnancy discrimination cases increased by 50% in 2010-2011 (Stechyson & Bouzane, 2012, D11).

Similarly, in Ontario, McPhail (2009) reported that the Ontario Human Rights Commission has seen an “alarming” surge of reports of pregnancy discrimination. McPhail (2009) scripted this article in the Ontario teachers’ federation newsletter in response to the Ontario Human Rights Commission’s report, in which he indicates the Ontario provincial opposition leader Andrea Horwath has called on the government to enforce employment standards protection and the Ontario Human Rights Code. McPhail argued,

It is unconscionable that in Ontario today, women are getting pink slips for having children with the economic crisis being used as an excuse. The NDP argues the need for proactive steps such as hiring more Employment Standards Officers to conduct audits, look for patterns and follow through on complaints as well as reaching out aggressively to employers to ensure they know their obligations. (p. 3).

It would appear that pregnancy discrimination is on the rise and a pressing and relevant topic for the educational community, given its presence in the professional journal. The sheer number of articles and reports, both scholarly and journalistic, which have cited the increase in pregnancy discrimination in the past decade (Hall, 2011, A5; McPhail, 2009; Stechyson & Bouzane, 2012) reinforces the need to study this phenomenon and research the experiences of workers, and particularly for my study, secondary teachers in Ontario, to understand the realities and the challenges that parents who take parental leave face.

Summary

In summary, I began this chapter with an overview of the critical policy theories and feminist theory that underlies this research. Two important concepts to this research were that gender is an organizing principle within organizations (Connell, 2009) and that policies themselves can be viewed as gendered (Acker, 1992; Connell, 2009). It is important to consider how traditional gendered role expectations can underlie state policy (Blackmore, 1989). Furthermore, organizations themselves can be gendered in their policies and practices (Blackmore & Sachs, 2007). Teachers are not passive in the ways that policy is enacted. They have a role in negotiating policy (Dillabough, 1999). By adopting a critical policy lens, I examine how teachers have agency in parental leave policies.

In the Literature Review, I presented three areas of research: a) parental leave policies at Canadian federal, provincial and local district levels, b) work-family conflict for teachers and c) existing research on parental leave policies. I examined the rights and responsibilities of employees taking parental leave as outlined in the Canadian Human Rights Act, The Ontario Human Rights Code and the Collective Agreement of one school board in Ontario. These provide specific policies that guide parental leave in Ontario. I offered an overview of the research on work-family conflict for parents taking parental leave. Liu and Buzzanell (2004) examined the struggle for parents to balance work and home responsibilities. They recommended that human resource departments should be communicating with administration to ensure that the needs of an individual who is taking parental leave are accommodated.

In the existing research on parental leave policies I examined three sectors of parental leave policies: the corporate sector, post-secondary faculty, and the field of medicine. In the corporate sector, Meisenbach et al. (2008) found that maternity leave created gender conflict and apprehension about return to work. However, they suggested that there were opportunities for empowerment and transformation for employees taking parental leave. In the field of post-secondary education, Prentice and Pankratz (2003) reported that there was existing conflict for university faculty who were faced with demands of earning tenure and having children within the same time period. They found that the discrimination against women faculty who took parental leaves was both overt and covert. They called for more equitable treatment of parents through parental leave policies. In the field of medicine, Brown et al. (2013) studied the uptake of parental leave amongst surgeons. They concluded that female surgeons bore more responsibility for childcare and therefore had more difficulty balancing the work-family responsibilities. However, overall there was an increased positive perception of the uptake of parental leaves in the field of medicine.

Finally, I examined the human rights cases in Canada to explore how the growing number of human rights cases have impacted parental leave policies. Although research on parental leave policies have grown recently, in many sectors, there is a gap in the literature that relates to parental leave policies as they are experienced by teachers. In particular, there is a lack of literature around secondary school teachers' experiences of parental leave policies. This study aims to fill the void in the research to examine how secondary teachers experience parental leave policies.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

In this study, I adopted a qualitative approach, with the goal of collecting the experiences of male and female teachers who have taken parental leave. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2011) state that the strength of qualitative research lies in its ability to offer “thick descriptions” (p.17) and offer a more nuanced understanding of topics from a participant’s point of view. Interviews allowed me to delve into topics in a more comprehensive way and offer a subjective perspective. Because of the flexible nature of semi-structured interviews, the interviewer can ask follow-up questions of the participants as they relate to the topic, providing significant data.

My epistemological stance is closely aligned with the post-positivists’ views of knowledge that it is “personal, subjective and unique” (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011, p.6). This view adheres to my approach of gender as a basic organizing principle. My basic assumption is that “women have different understandings of reality” (Alvesson & Billing, 2009, p. 30) and that there are many different experiences of parental leave policies. There is an important intersection between the private realm (mothering) and the public (teaching) and that the ways in which the notion of parental leave is positioned within the institution of education influence teachers’ experiences. Understanding the ways that policy can affect parental leave experience helps to uncover the basic assumptions about gender and gendered roles. The reflective nature of this study lends itself to interviews.

For centuries, research was conducted following positivists’ strict guidelines for collecting quantifiable data. In the last century, a more recently established tradition of qualitative research became accepted as valid research methodology in social science research.

Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2011) define social science as a “subjective” form of understanding and draw on Beck (1979) to advocate for qualitative research focused on “explaining, demystifying social reality through the eyes of different participants: the participants themselves define the social reality” (p.15).

Methods

I conducted interviews to research teachers’ experiences of parental leave policies. With this qualitative research method, I aimed to research gender within institutions with an understanding of the unique experiences of each research subject. The human nature of interviews acknowledges the “centrality of human interaction for knowledge production, and emphasizes the social situatedness of research data” (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011, p. 409). Interviews allowed for detailed story-telling and meaning-making by the interviewees and the interviewer alike.

I planned to conduct interviews with participants over two to three months. I did not anticipate difficulty in finding participants, as I planned to use a networking approach which would allow me to find participants through contacts. However, obtaining enough participants proved to be more difficult than anticipated. The inclusion criteria were that participants had to have a position as a secondary school teacher and have returned from parental leave within the last five years so that their experiences were still “fresh” in their minds. This was difficult because it took more time to recruit participants with this specific criteria in mind. As well, during the first six months of this study, the teachers in the school boards across Ontario went on work to rule action, in response to a breakdown in negotiations of Collective Agreements

between OSSTF and the school boards in Ontario. This affected the time it took to recruit participants because researchers were directed by the school board not to continue interviewing teachers until the work to rule action was over.

I used semi-structured interviews (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011, p. 412) to gather information. This interview structure offered the participants an opportunity to respond in a detailed, descriptive manner. As well, this interview method offered open-ended questions to gain unique perspectives and allow for a rich study of teachers' experiences of parental leave policies.

Sampling

I aimed to interview secondary school teachers, both male and female who had taken a parental leave in the past two years. I used convenience sampling to recruit participants. In the end, I had six participants: five female teachers, and one male teacher. All of the participants had been teaching between eight to 24 years. The participants had varied number of parental leaves, ranging from one to four periods of leave from work. With the exception of one participant, all of the participants had been back to work after taking one or more parental leaves at the time of the interviews. Participants took between six months and one and half years with each parental leave. The time restrictions and privacy issues of trying to identify everyone who had been pregnant or taken parental leave in the past five years in this school board was a challenge and so many of the participants were contacted through snowball sampling. With snowball sampling, research participants suggest future research participants from their acquaintances for the study.

For example, for confidentiality it was not possible to request a list of teachers who had taken parental leave from the board. So, snowballing became a preferred way of attaining participants.

Table 1

Participant Information

Participant	Gender	No. of Children	No. of Parental Leaves
Participant 1	F	1	1
Participant 2	F	3	3
Participant 3	F	4	4
Participant 4	F	2	2
Participant 5	M	4	2
Participant 6	F	3	3

Interview Method

At the beginning of the interview, I explained how interviews would be conducted “what happens, how, and the structure and organization of the interview[s]” (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011, p. 421). Although I planned for the interviews to be about 45 minutes to one-hour in length, they ranged from half an hour to one hour and a half, depending on the participant’s engagement. They were organized outside of the school, and in a “neutral” place, in an office on-campus, to provide assurances of privacy, anonymity, and less disruption. The

interview started as general questions about length of time teaching, subjects and departments taught in, and year graduated from the Faculty of Education.

The second part of the interview addressed three distinct time periods in the parental leave process: experiences preparing for parental leave (e.g., while pregnant for women, attitudes of co-workers, administration; opportunities for training, promotion), during parental leave (e.g., communication with administration, colleagues; opportunities for further training, promotion; financial stability/hardship due to parental leave policy), and finally the teachers' experiences after returning to teaching (e.g., work-life balance, assignment schedule, relationships with other colleagues). The last part of the interview included some open-ended questions that allowed participants to discuss other issues that they felt were related to their parental leave experiences.

I ended the interviews by debriefing the participants on the parental leave policy the school board, contact information from OSSTF, and provided literature about the Employment Standards Act and the Human Rights Code as they pertain to parental leaves and pregnancy discrimination. By doing the latter, I intended to leave participants feeling that they are empowered and not confused or demoralized upon reflecting on their experiences.

Data Analysis

Since data analysis in qualitative research is often considered interpretive, I wanted to find meaning through the use of coding. I used content analysis for identifying themes and patterns in these themes (Merriam, 1998). Ways of meaning making included: identifying themes, clustering and especially, "building a logical chain of evidence- noting causality and making inferences" (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011, p. 428). The latter shed light on the

understanding of parental leaves and teachers' experiences of policy. Drawing on the notion of policies as gendered, I sought to understand how power structures and gender roles are institutionalized through policy. Data analysis occurred concurrently with data collection, as well as at the end of data collection, so that the emerging themes could be identified and help focus subsequent interview questions (Merriam, 1998).

Trustworthiness

Although it is never possible to capture an “objective ‘truth’ or ‘reality’” there are ways of increasing the credibility of a study (Merriam, 2009). To increase trustworthiness there must be internal validity (Merriam 2009). Credibility or validity of the research findings can be achieved through triangulation, checking with the participants about interpretations, being on-site for a time, or asking for feedback from peers about the findings (Merriam 2009). Triangulation is a common method to achieve credibility in research. This method can use “multiple sources of data means comparing and cross-checking data collected through observations at different times or in different places, or interview data collected from people with different perspectives or from follow-up interviews with the same people” (Merriam 2009).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) developed the benchmarks of transferability, dependability and confirmability as a means to prove trustworthiness in qualitative research. However, as Morse et al. (2002) argue, these should not be used to prove rigor and validity. They state that audit trails “do little to identify the quality of those decisions, the rationale behind those decisions, or the responsiveness and sensitivity of the investigator to data” (p.16). Furthermore, Morse (1998) and Sandelowski (1993) argue that the problem with member checks is that “study results have been

synthesized, decontextualized, and abstracted from (and across) individual participants, so there is no reason for individuals to be able to recognize themselves or their particular experiences” (Morse et al., 2002, p.16).

Sandelowski (1993) makes the apropos analogy that for the participants “the effect of seeing in print what they once said or listening to themselves on tape may be similar to the effect of seeing oneself on video giving birth: somewhat bizarre and not wholly comfortable” (p. 6). Participants asked to listen to transcripts from a time ago, may have forgotten what they had said, or might attempt to change their responses to present a more favourable representation of themselves. Sandelowski (1993) states that qualitative researchers often try to find validity in the “notion of reality as external, consensual, corroboratory, and repeatable” (p. 3). However, she argues that this should not be the goal of qualitative research and that for qualitative research validity should not depend on reliability. Qualitative interviews are interpreted, analyzed, synthesized and constructed to create an informed conclusion of a topic at a particular point in time.

Ethical Considerations

One ethical concern is the impact of the study on the careers of the teachers who were participating. I was committed to conducting a study that would avoid negative feedback or ramifications for these participants. Assurances of steps taken to provide anonymity were important, however, as Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2011) point out, “a subject agreeing to a face-to-face interview, on the other hand, can in no way expect anonymity” (p. 91). However, there were ways to protect the identity of the participants such as changing names and removing

other possible identifying information collected about the participants in order to ensure confidentiality, which I did with the transcript data. This step is especially important in areas where researchers are examining issues of inequity in education, and they need to be careful about how they conduct themselves as the “instrument” of research. Also, within the framework of feminist theory, it was important to be aware of my own positionality and power as a researcher, and avoid making the participants feel that they are less empowered than the researcher.

In order to increase participant privacy, anonymity and confidentiality, I used the ethical guidelines stated by the university and the secondary school board. The data was not linked to any particular secondary school or study site. The participants were referred to by a number rather than a name. All transcripts were securely stored in a locked cabinet in my office. All digital files were stored with only the participants’ numbers and stored on a password protected computer.

Conclusion

With the growing number of reports and cases of pregnancy discrimination in both the private and public sector across the western hemisphere and beyond, the topic of the experiences of men and women who take parental leave is pressing. The growing number of women who return to work after taking a parental leave, the increasing number of fathers who are taking parental leave, and the economic climate that may press employers to overlook policies and legislation that protect the parent worker all contribute to the need for this research. With increasing numbers of teachers who are retiring, replaced by younger teachers (often as

occasional teachers without job security), there is the potential for younger teachers to face more discrimination or disadvantage in the workplace. In this study, I aimed to reveal the experiences of secondary teachers, in order to revisit the board of educations' policies and the federation Collective Agreements that govern teacher parents.

Chapter 4: Analysis

This study, related to Ontario secondary school teachers' experiences of parental leave policies, is based on interviews with six participants. These interviews took place over the course of five months. The following chapter is divided into seven sections in which I present the data using the coded themes. In the first section, “‘We’re’ Pregnant! Now What?”, I tell the story of the excitement, concerns and general response of the participants to telling their administration that they were pregnant. This section also includes the responses from the administrators to finding out that the participants were pregnant. A theme of support from administrators is discussed in this section. In the second section, Applying for Parental Leave, I identify the challenges, and the themes of confusion, and insecurity that teachers experience in this process is introduced.

The third section, Awareness of Parental Leave Policies, outlines the policies related to financial remuneration (EI, SEB), as well as return to work policies found in the Employment Standards Act (ESA) and Collective Agreement. The fourth section, “Man It’s Hard to Go Back”: Balancing Pressures from Home and School, outlines the impact of returning to work on their lives and the creative ways that the participants negotiated this balancing act. This section includes four themes: 1) arranging child-care, 2) pressure to lead extracurricular, 3) extending parental leave, 4) returning to work part-time 5) sharing parental leave time with a spouse.

In section five, I explore the feelings that that participants had when returning to work, as well as the challenges that they faced. The differences in policy text versus policy in practice are examined in Section 6, as it pertained to return to work policies in the Collective Agreement. The

final section offers suggested changes to parental leave policies. These suggestions include: 1) clarification around ambiguous wording in the Collective Agreement, 2) information booklets/ and websites to clarify parental leave policies, 3) need for general awareness of parental leave policies amongst all staff, 4) mentorship to address missed professional development and instructional initiatives, and lastly, 5) workshops to inform teachers about parental leave policies.

In each of these seven sections, I explore the experiences and policies that govern the parental leave process for teachers in one school board in Ontario. The impact of these policies is far reaching, affecting more than teachers themselves, but also their families, their colleagues and students, and the education system as a whole.

“We’re” Pregnant! Now What?

When telling their administrators that they were pregnant, participants had mixed experiences, from feeling supported by their administrators to feeling insecure. The theme of feeling supported or unsupported by their administrators and colleagues became a central issue in this section of the interviews. All of the participants reported they felt the principals at the school were “supportive” for the participants’ first pregnancy or parental leave. They reported that their administrators were excited for them and congratulatory. However, participants also expressed feeling insecure when telling their administrators that they planned to take parental leave. One participant described having a very supportive principal who said, “This is the best thing you will do in life, to become a parent” (Participant 4). This comment was impressive for this participant, and the first parental leave was a positive experience overall.

However, even though they felt there was support from the principal, some participants recounted feeling anxious and uncertain when telling their administrator that they were pregnant. Participant 1 was a bit apprehensive about telling her principal about being pregnant. She stated:

I just sort of went into my principal's office and said, "Hey can I talk to you for a second," and sat down; and it is a very weird experience to tell your administration, especially because I had only been working with that particular principal for one year and didn't know that principal that well, per se, but we certainly got along well. But it is, it is weird even though it is exciting news for you. It's also [about] how are they going to react. Like, I'm sure my principal is happy but is also maybe, um, not so pleased that they have to find a new person to fill your spot. Maybe, right?

She had only been teaching at the school for a short period of time and felt that she did not know her principal well. This sense of being a "new" teacher, in addition to the uncertainty of telling one's administrator about being pregnant, creates an added sense of insecurity at this time.

Half of the participants stated that their administration had a "family first" policy. In one interview, Participant 5 talked about each of the three times he had taken parental leave and the similar experiences he had across these instances. Participant 5 stated that he felt he had a different perspective of child-rearing because he had children later in life. He noted that taking parental leave was a decision that he made with his partner and they decided that it would ease the stress of work-home conflicts. He stated:

When we were dating, since we are both teachers, we basically said at least one of us should be with them until the kids are in school. And then after that point, at least one of us could go part-time. We see a lot of people trying to balance before and after school. Someone gets sick and it throws the whole thing off. And you see the stress levels that people being you know ...trying to get the kids out the door for a time to get to work.

In talking about the first instance of taking leave, this participant told me how the administrator had indicated a recognition of the importance of family in the lives of the teaching staff. When the participant told the administrator that he intended to apply for parental leave, it went smoothly. He said, "Our administration has always said, you know, family comes first. So, it's always been... it's never really been a problem." He shared that this was a similar experience across all three times he applied for leave, as he "told [the] principal about it for all three. They were all very supportive for each one."

Participant 4 indicated that there was a similar sentiment in the response she received when she told the administrator of her leave. However, she suggested that the attitudes of administrators around the "family first" policy was more reflective of how close the administrator was to retirement, concluding that the closer he/she was to retirement, the more the actions and words aligned with this unwritten policy of putting family before teaching. She explained that the principal at one school put her work before her family, although the principal told staff that it was important to put priority on family obligations. For Participant 4, she felt this young principal was not demonstrating that family should come first in the decisions she

made and so, consequently, as a teacher, Participant 4 felt there were contradictions between what was said and what was expected.

I noticed, principals who are close to or could have retired, they don't have to toe the party line quite as hard. So, whereas [one] school now has a young principal. Now she said, family first, but if you look at her own life and how she handles her family, family is not first. So she still... even though she says family first, she would expect you to put your job first.

This participant felt that she was supposed to put her job before her family when making decisions, even though her principal said otherwise. It was clear for Participant 4, from this example, that, for the principal, actions convey more than words.

Other participants indicated that there were other determining factors in the response from administrators. One participant suggested the number of parental leaves taken seemed to influence the response of the administrators. There seemed to be an inverse relationship between the positive response from the administrator and increasing number of parental leaves taken. Participant 2 reported that the response from the principal was very different for her third pregnancy than her first two: "The first one, again, with administration was good. Second. Third one, there was no reaction. It was like [sigh]. It was almost exhausting. I've exhausted them now." This participant also noted that there was a very dramatic decline in enthusiasm from her department head with each successive pregnancy. She stated,

I told my head first, and she congratulated me on my first pregnancy. Can I go into my second pregnancy? The second pregnancy she congratulated me. The third pregnancy I was like, 'Why are you doing that?' It was so negative.

She recounted that her department colleagues as a whole were not as supportive either of her third pregnancy/ parental leave. A few participants expressed feeling anxious about reporting their pregnancies and ensuing parental leave to their administrator, suggesting that it would cause more work for the principal to find someone to fill their spot. One participant said that:

But it is, it is weird even though it is exciting news for you. It's also, how are they going to react? Like, I'm sure my principal is happy but is also maybe um not so pleased that they have to find a new person to fill your spot. Maybe, right? All the extra-curriculars I was a part of and team meetings and stuff that I was not going to be there for, committees I was on and stuff like that. (Participant 1).

Participant 3 reported feeling "insecurity" and "apprehension" for her first two pregnancies because she was an LTO (long term occasional teacher) who did not have a permanent contract position. She also suggested that timing when to report the pregnancy to the administrator was an important consideration as a supply teacher. The participant explained this apprehension as follows:

Supplying I think I felt a little bit of apprehension with regards to how to approach any administration or what my perspective career would look like going into something permanent. So at that point, it was how I should approach it, and when and that was a lot of concern for me with my first pregnancy wondering the best timing. A lot of questions

like that because I wasn't permanent and not knowing policies enough for supply teachers or for occasional teachers. (Participant 3)

Participant 3 raised the point that timing the communication with administration was important in terms of hiring and getting teaching assignments for the following year.

Protocol for Applying for a Leave

The theme of confusion came out in this section of the interviews as participants discussed how to apply for parental leave. Half of the participants felt that the process of applying for parental leave was not very transparent, or "readily accessible". For some participants, navigating the application process itself was rife with caution. Participant 1 felt unsure about who to report to, and wary about what to say:

I always kind of feel that, maybe it's the union reps I talk to that [said], be careful when you call HR to ask questions or be careful when you call the union to ask questions because even if it is a hypothetical situation or question that you have, someone could take your name and say, "Hm, that's funny that you are asking about that." Not that I'm asking about anything illegal but, it's like, I felt I had to be careful about the questions that I asked and who I asked them to. Even with regards to telling my principal when I was going off or when I was going back. I think it was my union rep who said, "Just be careful". And I don't fully understand why, but I get that possibly you could say that wrong thing to someone who could misinterpret what you say or whatever. So, maybe that was why I definitely had some questions, like I mentioned, like if I [should] come back in September instead of April. I never got the answers [to those questions] and, no, I

didn't call the union but I think that was why. I was unsure of who do I speak to and [if it is] okay to ask that.

Participant 1 was worried about asking questions, and that her questions to the board staff would be misconstrued. This led her to avoid asking questions, even of the union, with regard to her parental leave.

The theme of feeling alone and uncertain in the process of applying was reiterated several times throughout the interviews. Participant 1 stated that it was not very clear where to look for information when applying for leave:

I, for the life of me, could not find a link on a website. There wasn't a package that you could pick up. There wasn't, I certainly didn't find there was someone I could just call to get all of that information. A protocol? I don't know what that would look like. There are steps that you could take if you are lucky enough to find what those are. It was ridiculous.

Participant 2 reinforced that sense of being alone in the process when she stated that there was no one to help her navigate the parental leave application process, "No one helped me. Absolutely no one helps there. I think I found them all myself. They were pretty... not too difficult." Participant 3 also stated that she learned about the protocol through on-line reading, and talking to her midwife in navigating the options for parental leave: "I remember reading a lot about this myself, through sources on-line and I also had some support with the midwife." Participant 3 also stated that she was unsure of how to apply, and reiterated the concerns of Participant 1, that she had to be wary about of what and to whom she asked questions:

I felt that there wasn't any support at the school level on how to do that, and it was more about me having to contact the school board about who dealt with that; and I felt, you know, that there was basic information given, and if, I believe that if I look back I think it was D.M. if I'm correct, I'm not sure at the school board. It seemed that forms were just given, and we were to basically go over those forms [ourselves] and apply based on that direction. I think in my experience looking back it would be beneficial to have, maybe someone from the board, to sit down and go over those forms with you and not to feel like you couldn't ask questions or that you shouldn't ask questions.

The other half of the participants felt that the process was "easy". Participant 4 stated that "I think it was easy. At that time, we had electronic forms." The majority of these participants (5 out of 6) reported that they asked their colleagues for help finding forms when applying for parental leave. Participant 3 also noted that although there was not much direction from the school as to how to apply for leave, she used the Collective Agreement to understand the policies around parental leave. Participant 5 stated that his principal was flexible and helpful. He said that even when he applied for the leave past the deadline, the principal was accommodating: "I was even past the deadline, and my principal was like, 'It doesn't matter. We've got plenty of people to teach.'" He found the process of applying for the parental leave to be easy in general.

Participants' Awareness of Parental Leave Policies

The theme of anxiety around financial burden occurred in this part of the interviews as participants discussed their lack of awareness of Employment Insurance (EI) when first applying for leave. Under federal policies, Employment Insurance is provided for all employees in

Canada that have been working for at least 600 hours of “insurable employment” prior to going on parental leave. Both parents can apply for parental leave, so long as the total time on leave does not exceed 52 weeks. The rate of pay is 55% of one’s salary up to a maximum of \$543/week. Many employers in Canada offer additional pay to “top up” EI to the employee’s regular salary. The length of top-up available to employees ranges widely in Canada, depending on one’s employer. All of the participants were aware of the employer supplemental salary parental leave, but some were unsure of how long that lasted, even though it was stipulated in the OSSTF Collective Agreement.

The most recent contract agreement for teachers in this board stipulates that teachers will be remunerated for “8 weeks of 100% salary immediately following the birth of her child but with no deduction from sick leave” (Collective Agreement of One School Board in Ontario). This is the Supplementary Enumeration Benefit (SEB) that pays the difference between “the gross amount that the teacher receives from EI and their regular gross pay” (Collective Agreement of One School Board in Ontario). The SEB historically had a wide variance in length from board to board across the province. However, with the most recent contract agreements (2017) across the province this has been applied to all Collective Agreements in English public secondary school boards in Ontario.

The policy around parental leave SEB was introduced in 2004, for up to 8 weeks of supplemental salary (100% of salary). As one participant noted, this change in 2004 in the policy around EI during parental leave created confusion:

So I didn't get any top up for (daughter #1), but did for (daughter #2). So I was kind of fuzzy on how long that was going to be topped up, for how much that was going to be topped up. There wasn't a lot of help in terms of applying for EI or things like that. Then we had to kind of figure that out on your own. (Participant 4).

Half of the participants expressed some anxiety about the reduced pay during the uptake of parental leave. Participants indicated that some confusion came for them because of the differences in how EI was applied across different sectors. Participant 1 pointed out that a friend who is a nurse received a salary supplement for longer, and that "even" her massage therapist told her that, "[she] topped up for almost the majority of a year." She expressed frustration with the financial difficulty she faced while on EI with no top-up. She explained,

So yeah, that top-up is short-lived. I was surprised to hear that. I was under the impression that working for the school board is great. And that the benefits are great and they are in many ways. But I guess that that is an area that, compared to other people, is not. And lots of other people had a very easy time on parental leave versus my experience. (Participant 1).

One participant made the comparison between people going on sick leave, or disability to parental leave, and the difference in pay from the board. Participant 2 stated:

I was aware of, I think, now, it's 8 weeks you can top up to now, or something like that in terms of parental. So you get 8 weeks of full time pay and then after that it goes down to 55%. That was tough. That wasn't fair, I felt, because I know people that are on sick

leave now, or anxiety leave, and some of them are getting their full pay and I was struggling with parental leave.

For Participant 2, the financial hardship of only getting EI for the majority of her parental leave was difficult and left her feeling that the treatment of people on parental leave was “unfair”.

Sharing Parental Leave Time

Four of the six participants spoke about sharing their parental leave with their partners. Two of the participants did this by sharing the one year leave with their spouse and returning to work early so that their spouse could have time at home with the baby as well. Participant 3 returned to work halfway through her one-year parental leave with one of her children and discussed how her husband was able to participate and communicate her baby’s progress while she was back to work. She stated, “It’s an amazing experience and I remember my husband taking more [parental leave] time this time. And recording videos for me because I would have liked to have taken more time and provided more than what was given.”

Two of the other respondents said that they or their spouses took an extended parental leave for a year more. Three of the respondents thought that this shared parental leave was valuable time spent with the children. Participants felt that parental leave was an important time to bond with their children. One of the participants was visibly annoyed that her partner took the time off to go hunting while on leave. The ways that people use their parental leave differed. However, overall, they felt that this was a time that should be protected in policy.

The Uncertainty of Returning to Work

With regard to placing teachers back into the “same position” as stipulated in the Employment Standards Act, and the Collective Agreements, all of the participants were aware that they could return to the same school, but unclear about what “same position” meant. In the Collective Agreement policy, it states that “A teacher returning from a Parental Leave shall return to the position most recently held unless the teacher would otherwise have been declared surplus or redundant to the system in which case the provisions of Articles L30, L31, and L32 – Surplus, Redundant Teachers and Recall – shall apply.”

The participants noted that there was a problem of ambiguity in language around “position most recently held.” Does it mean returning to the same departments? Does it mean returning to the same courses taught prior to going on parental leave? Does it merely mean returning to the position of teacher in a broad sense? As some of the participants pointed out, teaching in secondary school requires teachers to be specialists in certain teaching areas, called one’s “teachables”. However, participants were unclear if a principal could schedule a teacher in an area outside of their teachable subject when the parent teacher was returning to the classroom. As four of the six participants attested, they, in fact, returned to different departments than those they were assigned prior to going on leave. One was returned to a department without the qualifications to teach in that subject area.

Half of the participants reported feeling anxiety or concern about which department they would return to and what their schedule would be when returning from parental leave.

Participant 3 felt insecure about which department she would return to and this created some anxiety for her. Participant 3 stated,

I think that was my concern too that I had been in that department for a few years and was I going to be returning to the same both departments, or even same subject areas, or grade or level. So it wasn't clear and it definitely was a concern for me.

Participant 3 also noted that although there was not much direction from the school as to how to apply for leave, she used the Collective Agreement to understand the policies around parental leave. She was referring to the policy in the Collective Agreement that states that teachers will be returned to the same position when returning from a parental leave of one year or less. Participant 3 suggested that she felt pressure to come back early from her parental leave and eventually did cut her parental leave short:

I think, in my mind just with different experiences and having four different parental leaves, just what people think about if you wanted to take more time. I've always felt, I think even more so with my last pregnancy, I felt the push to come back earlier.

Participant 3 noted that there was more pressure to come back earlier after each parental leave. She took four parental leaves, and for the last one she decided to come back after six months, rather than taking a full year parental leave. Part of this pressure was related to her sense that she would lose her newer position in a non-teaching department if she took more time. She did return to her non-teaching department after this last leave and felt that this was because she took a shorter parental leave. The pressure and awareness of how the length of parental leave may affect the teachers' teaching schedule on return to work was extensive for most.

“Man, It’s Hard to Go Back to Work”: Balancing Pressures from Home and School

When returning to work after going on parental leave with their babies, teachers found the pressures from home and school to be overwhelming at times. The themes of arranging child-care schedules and negotiating extra-curricular involvement at work came out in discussion as teachers discussed returning to work. However, teachers found creative ways to navigate these turbulent times by extending parental leave, returning to work part-time and sharing parental leave with their partners. The teachers’ perspectives on these issues are discussed in the next section.

Arranging child care schedules around teaching. The theme of arranging child care was discussed as participants relayed the challenges they faced returning to work. After returning to work from parental leave, a challenge imposed through the scheduling of an early start time at secondary schools is finding daycare that can accommodate early mornings. Most secondary schools in this school board require teachers to be in their schools by 8:00 am. However, finding childcare for early morning drop-offs can be difficult especially when one lives far from work. One participant explained that she was able to alleviate the problem of finding childcare by juggling it with her husband, who was teaching later in the day because he was part-time. However, she noted that when the upcoming fall term would start, she was unsure how they were going to manage the early morning drop-off.

So even finding daycare for our son that opens early enough in the morning, I have to leave my house by 7 am. My school starts at 8:15 and it’s an hour away. Like, I can’t leave later than 7 am. Finding a daycare that opens earlier than 7:30 we haven’t been able

to, not one with spots. So luckily my husband starts a little bit later, and he doesn't start teaching until period 2 so he has some flexibility. However, come September 2016, what if we are both driving far and we are both teaching period 1? That's scary. There's a lot of ifs there. (Participant 1)

She notes that there is anxiety and fear around the possibility that they may not be able to arrange these early morning drop offs for childcare. So, for a family with two teachers, with rigid schedules, the flexibility to manage childcare and the policies around start times are an additional stress.

Arranging child-care can also be difficult when arranging a part-time return to leave. One participant explained that going part-time allowed her to spend more time with her baby at home, and juggle the responsibilities of being a teacher and parent. However, this also created difficulties in scheduling which impacted child-care arrangements. She explained that when she asked to teach mornings, despite the leave application being accepted by the board, her department head would not accommodate her request to teach mornings and consistently scheduled her in the middle of the day, or afternoon. This created timetable difficulties, as daycare facilities have more rigid timelines set out for part-time hours. If a child is in daycare for longer, the parents must pay full-time fees. This was an additional financial burden on the participant that she said she could not afford because she was receiving less pay, working 2/3 fulltime equivalent (FTE), and could not afford to pay for full-time day care.

Oh yeah, it's hard because they have specific timing. You know, a morning child is from 9-12, and afternoon is from 12-5, or whatever it is. So if you are in the middle, picking

up, they are going to charge me a full day. And so I always had to work that out with the people and they always made accommodations. The childcare people would make accommodations really well and if they didn't. There was one department head X? Department head Y? No...anyways, one didn't accommodate me. (Participant 2)

Consequently, to make her assigned teaching schedule work, it became necessary for her to switch her son out of daycare into homecare. There was an impact on the child's adjustment as well. She stated,

It was very difficult because he was young, right? There were two of them [of her own children] at the time. They were used to kids and they were used to people and it was an awful scenario for the child. The child has a hard time adjusting to new situations anyways. There was no continuity. (Participant 2).

When asked if she had discussed with her department head the problems that the schedule had created with her child's daycare arrangements, she said that her department head would not make changes to the schedule. This participant declared that this made her feel like she was working in a place where her immediate supervisor did not care about her. She stated, "Yes, she didn't care. It didn't matter. She actually gave me the name of some homecare people that she used" (Participant 2). This participant did not see this as problem solving but rather the department head's refusal to arrange her teaching periods in a consecutive manner. She was unaware of the policy in the Collective Agreement that that requires teachers with part-time schedules to be scheduled consecutively whenever feasible.

Two of the respondents indicated that they did not feel that there were challenges posed with parental leave policies themselves, but rather that issues with childcare were personal. Participant 6 responded, “None. Any limitations were my own.” Participant 5 felt that the process was “a foregone conclusion” and thought that the process for applying for parental leave was easy. He juxtaposed his own experience with that of his wife. He noted that there were significant challenges for his wife when she returned to teaching because she taught in elementary school and when she returned from her leave, she did not return to the same grade. This created additional stress for her in the extra time planning that was needed.

Pressure to lead extracurricular activities at school. The issue of coaching and extra-curricular activities impacted the teachers’ perception of work-life balance. Half of the participants noted that they felt pressure to coach and do extra-curricular activities, and that this conflicted with their time at home with their babies. They stated that they were not able to give time to activities at school outside of classroom time when their children were young and that, subsequently, they worried about their career advancement and promotional opportunities.

One participant said that because she did not coach she was not placed back into the department where she had previously been before going on parental leave. In fact, she said that it was not until she agreed to coach that she was reassigned to that department. She went to the branch OSSTF representative to ask for clarification on the unwritten policy that a teacher must coach in order to be a part of the department, and was told that it was “a grey area.” When she said that she was “under the understanding that it was volunteer,” the OSSTF branch president said, “No if you are in [that] department, they will literally move you out if you don’t coach.”

This was therefore a significant concern for the participant, who decided after a few years to coach again. Coaching, as she explained, was a large undertaking, consisting of 4 practices a week, for three to five months, as well as two to three weekend tournaments. One of the ways that she was able to cope when she decided to coach again was to split the coaching with another teacher. She explained that in this way she was able to attend every other practice, and that this made it easier to juggle her responsibilities at home.

Participant 4 also noted that as a new mom she had to be “strategic” about committing to being an advisor for extra-curricular clubs because of the time constraints involved with being a new parent. She also suggested that in comparison to coaching, being an advisor for a club was less time consuming:

You know having said that, having kids, I would just kind of pick one thing I'd do extracurricular wise. I was the ... youth advisor. Didn't take too much of my time. I could kind of contribute to the school life, without having to commit to something really big, like coaching.

Another participant was concerned that by not coaching she would actually negatively impact her chances at promotion. She explained that practically, since her husband was coaching and still trying to get a full time contract position, she really needed to stay at home and take care of their child. It was a juggling act as they decided whose career would benefit most from doing extra-curricular activities and who would take care of their child. Teachers felt pressured to coach, especially if they were on long-term occasional contracts. She explained,

I can't coach anything this year. I'm just going to be teaching. Which, [my spouse] should be able to, I really think [he] should. It's not part of my job description to coach three sports and drive all over the city and other cities, and not see your kid grow up.

She lamented the fact that coaching is “not part of my job description,” highlighting the differences between written and unwritten policies. Although it is not a part of a teacher's job requirements, she emphasized that in order to get a job, her husband must coach. She stated that her husband “can't just say, ‘Sorry I've got a baby. I can't coach anything this year. I'm just going to be teaching.’ Having a baby at home, doesn't matter.” She underscored the pressure to contribute in extracurricular activities even when their family had extra responsibilities at home with the baby. She also stated that there was a concern that if he did not coach, it would affect his contract. “But he still feels like if he doesn't do that, potentially he won't receive contract lines, or he will be a less desirable candidate or some other administration may not be as accommodating or understanding for that.” The ongoing pressure to coach, combined with the increased responsibility of caring for a baby and all of the scheduling conflicts that this can create, has a significant impact on the lives of both parents.

Participant 1 explained that after having a baby she would need to lessen her commitment to leading extracurricular activities. She suggested that not being able to put the extra time into being an advisor or coach would impact her promotional opportunities, and prevent her from being promoted to department head:

Ultimately if you asked me a year or two ago, about where do I see myself going, I'd love to be a [department head] at a big school.... That has been my dream for a long time.

However, with being a department head, there is an expectation that you are going to be growing your department and doing wonderful things for your department and in [that school] that looks like an annual or biannual school play. And depending on what school you are at, you may or may not have assistance with the school plays; and so for me, I'm thinking, I love teaching drama. I love putting on school plays. But I'm thinking my son goes to bed at 6:30 pm. And if I have rehearsal four to five days a week for four to five months, I won't see my son grow up. It's extreme but, so then I have to think about, 'Am I going to be able to be a [department head] in the near future?' Probably not. (Participant 1)

This participant considered the time needed to be involved in school plays, and decided that it was not possible both to do that and be available to take care of her son. She felt that although she was a full-time contract teacher, her decision to not be involved in extra-curricular activities while her child was young would adversely affect her chances of being department head.

Extending parental leave to cope with demands. Extending parental leave to longer than one year was one coping strategy that five of the six teachers reported using to deal with scheduling challenges when returning from a parental leave in the middle of a semester. With regard to extending parental leave, Participant 2 said that she was aware that she was "not guaranteed the same position" when returning from an extended leave and she said that she was told by the board, "Yeah, but we can't guarantee your position at the school. You can still have your job, but not at your school or the courses you teach."

This is consistent with the wording in the Collective Agreement which applies to teachers who take one year or less of leave: “Teachers returning from a leave of one school year or less shall be placed at the school from which they took the leave, subject to seniority and qualifications.” When teachers take an extended leave of more than one year, the Collective Agreement applies: “Teachers returning from a leave greater than one (1) school year will be returned to the staff list of their previous school for the purposes of tracking staff during the staffing process. If there is no vacancy for which the teacher is qualified, the teacher will be declared surplus to the school, regardless of seniority.”

However, the interpretation of this policy also can vary widely. While one principal told Participant 2 before her first parental leave, “Don’t worry about it... You’re okay.” She said by the second pregnancy another principal told her more non-committedly, “Well, we’ll see”, for the second leave and then for the third parental leave stated, “Probably, we’ll probably find you a position at the school but the courses will be determined by me at the time.” However, none of the participants reported being placed at a different school after returning from extended leave. One participant also noted that colleagues talked poorly about teachers who took extended leave and discriminated against those who took more than one year off (Participant 3). This was a consideration for her when deliberating about taking an extended parental leave with her last baby and she chose not to take an extension. In fact, this participant reduced her one-year parental leave to 6 months. This suggests that department heads’ attitudes towards parental leave adversely affected this teacher’s decision about parental leave.

Returning to Work Part-Time

Five of the six participants (both male and female) had applied for part-time leave on the return to work, to reduce their teaching load from full-time to part-time for one more year. This allowed the participants to juggle the demands of teaching with the demands of being a parent to a young child. One participant explained how going part-time allowed them to balance the demands of parenthood:

When we were dating, since we are both teachers, we basically said at least one of us should be with them until the kids are in school. And then after that point, at least one of us could go part-time. We see a lot of people trying to balance before and after school. Someone gets sick and it throws the whole thing off. And you see the stress levels that people being you know, trying to get the kids out the door for a time to get to work.

(Participant 5)

The protocol in place to apply for part-time leave was to complete a leave of absence form, have the principal sign it and then send it to the board to have the Superintendent of Human Resources sign it. One participant explained how she took a 33 percent leave, to go two-thirds. “.67 that I went down to for the next year as well. So I took part-time in between so I had to fill out that paperwork. There was a protocol in place. Yes.” (Participant 2). One participant noted that his principal was very supportive and helpful in the process of applying for part-time leave. He also felt very confident that he would be returned back to the same department the following year after his leave. He stated: “I’m pretty confident. I’ve talked to my department head who’s said, we’ll make it work. We won’t know staffing until June, early June. I feel

confident that the problem will be resolved. And I talked with my new principal about taking it and he was like, ‘Yeah. Print it off and send it. I’ll even send it in for you.’” His principal even offered to send it to the board of education.

The process of negotiating the part-time teaching schedules was not as easy, however. Teaching .67 equates to teaching four out of six courses in the year. Participant 2 was first scheduled in three out of four courses in an area that was out of her teaching qualification. In order to try to balance her preparation time on new courses, she contacted the department head of another department in which she was qualified and had him talk to the principal for her to teach another class in his department. This adjusted her teaching schedule so that she was now teaching only two courses that were not her “teachables”. This participant also had difficulty arranging to teach two consecutive courses in the morning while she was applying for part-time leave.

For the first few years I went down to part-time. I went two-thirds. That was the best thing I could do. But every year I had a hard time getting two-thirds together. [The department head] wouldn’t give them to me. She wanted me to teach [periods] one and three, four and five. I wanted to do the morning and she wanted me to do the afternoon. So every year it was an argument. Every year I was in tears, just trying to get two lines [two classes] together. And the only way I got two lines together is if I taught other subjects. They wouldn’t work it out. (Participant 2)

Many of the participants were not aware of the policy in the Collective Agreement that stipulates, “The assigned duties of a Teacher on a part-time assignment shall be scheduled,

whenever feasible, consecutively during the part of the working day which the Teacher has requested to teach.” This policy states that part-time teachers’ scheduling preferences should be accommodated whenever possible when they request to be scheduled for consecutive teaching periods.

One of the participants pointed out that in going part-time, one of the problems was that she would miss important elements in the teaching day, such as announcements, and that it could leave one feeling that they were not as connected with the school. She explained that for her husband who went on a part-time leave to stay home with one of their children, “He didn’t like it because when he came in at noon he felt very out of touch with his school, cause he’d missed announcements, he’d missed... so he kind of felt like he was just wandering in doing his job and leaving.” (Participant 4). This highlights the sense of being “out of touch” that can occur for teachers who choose to work part-time. Participant 4 noticed that teachers were not accommodated if they just came in and did their jobs “heads down” without interacting much with their department heads and department.

One participant said that she wanted to apply for a part-time leave but was told by the principal that she could not do that and still be a department head. She pointed out that she was not scheduled full time in the department even though she was a department head. She stated, “So I thought that was really interesting from the board’s perspective, you can be a head and have to teach in other departments, but you can’t be a head and take time [with your children].” There seemed to be an inconsistency in unwritten policy around being a department head and

being required to teach full time, even when as a department head she would not be teaching full time in her department in any case.

One of the benefits of going part-time according to Participant 4 was that it allowed her to schedule medical and other appointments for herself and her children during her leave time, rather than requesting time off to get to appointments. In the following excerpt, an “on-call” refers to the written policy that mandates secondary teachers to perform supply teaching on the second day of another teacher’s absence. All teachers must do up to a predetermined number of on-calls in a semester, in addition to their teaching duties and other supervision duties. For example, in 2016/2017, the number of on-calls that could be assigned to a teacher was 16 in a semester.

Like that was awesome when I had a leave time and prep. And the advantage to that too, from a board policy point of view, is that by putting your leave, if you are doing part-time, by putting your part-time hours and your prep together, it meant that I rarely ever had to ever have an on-call during my teaching time. Because I could schedule things like doctor’s appointments with the kids, or a specialist appointment, I would request, ‘Could I have that in the morning?’ So I really work hard to make sure that I don’t take away from my teaching time for any personal appointments. And if they scheduled you well you could really do that. (Participant 4)

Two of the participants pointed out that the board actually saved money by allowing teachers to go part-time because they hired LTO teachers, who are generally paid less, in their place. Participant 2 stated, “Benefits you pay them less. Benefits for the board.”

Although reducing one's timetable to part-time gave teachers more time to spend with their babies at home, and to juggle family responsibilities, participants noted that there were many extra costs to this. Some of the teachers reported being given workplace, or college level courses that required more planning in terms of dealing with classroom behaviours. In addition, there was the extra paperwork that could be a frustrating experience in general. Participant 2 emphasized that ultimately the burden fell on the teachers who went on part-time leave because "it's more paperwork. It's more juggling. Anyways... it was a frustrating experience." As well, the difficulties of working out a part-time teaching schedule that was in line with the operating hours of a daycare became an added problem for two of the participants. This is explained in more detail later in this chapter. Lastly, there was also the financial burden of reducing one's salary.

To summarize the previous section, juggling the responsibilities of being a parent and of being a teacher returning to work was a "rich" topic of discussion for the participants. As noted in the previous sections, some of the participants reported anxiety around (1) negotiating the position they would be returning to; (2) the subsequent challenges of teaching new courses while a new parent; (3) pressure to coach and be involved in extra –curricular activities with a baby at home; and (4) scheduling conflicts, including organizing child-care.

Feeling Like a New Teacher Again

The theme of "feeling like a new teacher again" was a common one that participants expressed as they returned to work. Participants were often scheduled to teach new courses when returning from parental leave. For most of the participants, it created added stress

and anxiety because of the preparation time involved in getting a new course ready. Participant 1 stated that she was returning to three new courses after her parental leave, and was considering taking an extended leave in order to avoid the prep work in the middle of the semester. She was also returning to primarily workplace level courses.

Maybe somebody thought you know X coming back and teaching all workplace level courses maybe the marking wouldn't be so much. Right? Maybe that would be great for her. But the emotional toll that that takes on you, but the emotional toll that takes for you. There's still a lot of prep because how you teach is very important and how you run your classroom is very important. And coming home from the end of that day, but I have a lot of de-stressing that I have to do if that's who I'm teaching for three periods a day, and then prepping on top of it. (Participant 1)

She said that she felt like she was getting "dumped on" by getting so many new courses. Another participant explained that returning from leave to a new course can create stress, "I came back to teach a brand new course, a grade 12 X, which I'd never taught, which I was a little stressed about" (Participant 5). One participant also echoed this sentiment that a new course creates added stress as she had to try to understand and plan what they'd teach in conjunction with new department heads who were not necessarily helpful. She did not feel that she was respected or supported by her new department head. She tried to order a teacher guide for the new course and was questioned and eventually the department head refused to buy it for her from department funds.

On returning to work, one of the additional challenges noted by two of the participants was professional development and new curriculum that they missed during their leave. They noted that it was difficult getting caught up when coming back, and that they felt like “a new teacher all over again”. They reported feeling embarrassed when student teachers were able to explain the new ministry documents that they had missed reading about while on leave.

Participant 4 explained that policies and initiatives are missed during parental leave: “You’ve got ministry policies that come down the pipe when you are gone, you’ve got board policies, or board initiatives that come down the pipe. You’ve missed all the PD [professional development] related to that, and nobody is getting you caught up”. They noted that new initiatives created more work for them as they adjusted to new evaluation schemas. Teachers regularly need to adapt to new pedagogies, teach new curriculum and implement new teaching strategies. There currently is no systematic method of preparing and giving professional development to teachers returning from leave.

Differences between Policy in Text and Policy in Practice

Many of the participants felt that there was a difference between the way parental leave policies were worded and how they were practiced or interpreted. Some participants felt that there was ambiguity and uncertainty around the ways that the parental leave policies were interpreted. They experienced parental leave policies as being something that was applied to them when it came to returning to the position they most recently held that aligned with the “top down” view of policy that Ball (2013) criticizes as being too managerial. However, they also experienced a certain amount of agency (Dillabough, 1999) in negotiating this policy.

Negotiating a Return to Teaching

As noted earlier, four of the six teachers were placed in different departments from the ones they had been in prior to going on leave. All of the teachers were assigned at least one new course that they had not taught prior to going on leave. The teaching schedule is ultimately determined by the principal, but this is done after consultation with the teacher. There is no written policy that requires the principal to consult with teachers. However, there is a policy that a request form is sent to all secondary teachers and they are asked to complete it in the spring to indicate their teaching preferences for the following year. The scheduling is done with the input of the department head who schedules teachers into particular courses in their department. Therefore, the process of asking for and negotiating the schedule returned to, and determining what that position would be, involved the teacher, the department head, the vice-principal (who usually does the timetabling of the schedule) and ultimately the principal (who makes the final decision for each teacher). This was a stressful process for half of the participants. Three of the six teachers said that they were not asked or consulted about what they would prefer to teach when returning from leave, because they were not teaching at the school when the request forms were distributed.

On being consulted about teaching preferences one participant said:

And typically, I'm sure, it's maybe the same at your school, at the end of the year you get a little form that you fill out. What have you taught in the past, what are you allowed to teach, what would you preferably like to teach. Which I guess not being there in May or

June disqualified me from filling that out. Certainly nobody bothered to ask me and I wasn't thinking about it. I was thinking about taking care of my baby. (Participant 1).

Some participants were not happy that they were not consulted about the timetable they would be assigned after returning from parental leave. Participant 1 said, "I think I would have liked to be consulted about what my position would look like." She was "not happy" that she was not returned to the same department that she had before going on parental leave. Participant 1 stated that it was "emotionally stressful" being scheduled new classes to teach because of the amount of prep work involved, and this at a time when she was still caring for a baby. Participant 2 noted that she was angry and incredulous that she was not returned to the same department and stated that she was taking a parental leave for her child: "Why wouldn't anybody say something? I am doing this for the benefit of my child so I could be home with them and I thought it would be better." Most of the participants experienced a lack of communication with regards to their timetable.

Half of the respondents felt that the administration was "accommodating" and "good" about scheduling their courses when returning from leave. These same participants reported less stress levels around their parental leave in general. Participant 5 suggested that scheduling could "depend on the school size, principal and specialized teaching area" taught by the teacher. Participant 4 suggested that teacher collaboration and socializing with the department head and department may contribute to a teacher's requests being accommodated. Teachers who had a positive relationship with their department head and took the time to visit their school regularly reported more positive outcomes with regard to their teaching schedules on their return to work.

It seems that developing the relationships with department heads and colleagues may have a direct correlation to overall positive feelings that the teacher has about returning to work.

“Is It Going to be Something Completely Different?”

Many of the participants felt that there was a difference between the way parental leave policies were worded and how they were practiced or interpreted. The majority of the concerns around focused on the wording of the ESA (Employment Standards Act), and Collective Agreement policy “A Teacher returning from a Pregnancy Leave shall return to the position most recently held.” Participant 3 pointed out that the wording is ambiguous around this policy.

I think there are differences and mainly it's because the wording is ambiguous. It's not you know, read between the lines to what we can infer from it. It's almost like it's left, you can interpret to whatever you think it means, not necessarily what was intended. So when a parent is going on parental leave or considering it, I think that's probably not the first thing on your mind. But then it tends to be when you are thinking of, 'okay how am I going to approach this?' And then when you are thinking of coming back, and you know, what are you going to do when you come back? How are things going to look like? What am I going to be teaching? Is it going to be something completely different? (Participant 3)

Participant 3 suggests that one needs to “read between the lines” when interpreting the policy and that it leaves questions for the teacher returning from a leave, when they are unsure of what they will be teaching. She suggests that there are questions as to how to broach the question of what they are teaching initially as well. She anticipates that what she would be returning to

could be different from what she originally taught prior to going on leave. All of these ambiguities about the process and the text create added anxiety.

Participant 2 suggested that the interpretation of the wording and the policy itself are “completely different”. She suggested that the principal “uses” the language in the policy to his advantage. “Yes they are using language, a principal is using language to do what he wants, to do what he wants to those parents that are coming back.” (Participant 2). She also suggested that women may not argue or negotiate their teaching schedules to the same extent that men would. She notes several times in the interview that she felt alone, and without support throughout the parental leave process.

Whether you are female or male it doesn't matter. But in a lot of cases it is young females. Like, let's be honest here, if young females trying to get [a] contract, just getting [a] contract [and] having children. We're not in the right, like, we do not feel like we are safe in our position in order to argue. We are coming back, nobody's in our corner. We are all by ourselves. Nobody, even the people that stayed behind, our heads, don't even seem to want to support us on this. Like I don't know about you but I didn't understand... when you made that decision. So these are the consequences of it and now you have to deal with the consequences of it. And I was so shocked and angry that I was out of X department for a little while. (Participant 2)

Participant 2 states that the decision to go on parental leave has consequences and insinuates that the consequences are punitive in nature. This is evident when she states “you made that decision so these are the consequences and now you have to deal with the

consequences of it". This suggests that the ambiguity of the parental leave policy around returning to the same position can create negative outcomes for parents returning from parental leave.

Participant 4 also reiterated that there was ambiguity in the wording of the text around returning to the same position and that this created room for different interpretations of the policy.

Well I guess it's not the policy in text, it's maybe how we interpret the policy. Right? So if you for example say, you are going to go back to your same position, I think people understand that to mean the same department, teaching the same courses. So, but if you look at the policy strictly literally it doesn't necessarily mean that. I think certainly the way people interpret the policy, there is a discrepancy maybe between what the policy actually says and how people interpret it. I knew, for example, on our self-funded leave that we were guaranteed a position back in the board, but not at our same school.

(Participant 4)

She suggests that in looking at the policy "strictly" it does not mean that teachers should be returned to the "same department, teaching the same courses". She goes on to say that there is a common understanding, however, that it means returning to the same department, "But with parental leave, I think most people's common understanding is you go back to the same school, you go back to the department." There seem to be differences in interpretation with this parental leave policy.

Participant 6 also considered discrepancies in the way parental leave policy was written and practiced. She stated, “Is our position just a high school teacher? We all get our same position back.” The question suggests that there is some ambiguity as to what “position” means. However, she felt that teachers do get their same position back if interpreted as “just a high school teacher”.

One participant stated that, in comparison with the parental leave prior to 2001 when people were only given six months paid leave, the parental leave of one year is much better for the parent-child bond. She explained: “It’s only six months, or it’s seventeen weeks. Some people split it with their spouses, so they weren’t at home for even that long. I think for family life, a year is great, that bonding time with your baby.” She also noted that in comparison to the parental leave in the United States where people receive only 12 weeks paid leave, our one year leave in Canada is much better for families.

And then I think of the States where they only get six weeks, maybe maximum. And I thought I can’t imagine leaving my baby after only six weeks. And my sister was doing some work in Georgia, as a contract person from Ontario and met up with some military women. They only had six weeks maternity, and then they would be deployed to Iraq.

It was clear that she felt favourably about the length of parental leave in Canada. Participant 3 suggested that the “when and how long” the parental leave could be taken should be changed. Participant 3 agreed that it would be preferable if the model for parental leave was more similar to the ones in Scandinavian countries, with longer leaves that approximate two

years and include specific time set aside for fathers or spouses to take time from work with their child.

Suggested Changes to Parental Leave Policies

Participants' suggestions for changes to parental leave policies fell under five categories: (1) a need for clarification around parental leave policies, particularly more specific wording related to the position teachers return to; (2) information booklets and on-line information; (3) a need for general awareness of parental leave policies amongst all staff to create a more accepting environment; (4) mentorship to address missed professional development and instructional initiatives; and (5) workshops to inform teachers about parental leave policies.

Clarification of ambiguous wording in parental leave policies. Five of the six participants suggested that the parental leave policies needed to be clarified, in particular around the wording of teachers returning to the same position. Four of the six participants felt that there needs to be more clarification around parental leave policies. Participant 3 stated that there was anxiety and questions around each stage of parental leave and these could be alleviated with policies that were clearer to everyone. She stated, "Again, I think the clarification of what the expectations are leaving and coming back. I think there is some anxiety there when you don't know what to expect." Participant 1 felt that there needed to be more information on the steps needed for parental leave, "There was no clear information." She also noted that the lack of information around parental leave policies and procedures left her feeling confused and hesitant to ask questions.

I think the information for parental leave must be much more readily accessible and detailed. And if you have questions it's like, here's the person you can contact. I'd like to talk to somebody. "Who?" No one knows. That makes it difficult. Call someone and bombard them with all these questions. Should I have been able to find this easier? According to people they all said, "no, it's all ridiculous." But I felt like I was burdening other people by asking questions. Right? It's not a great way to feel. Looking back on it, I don't feel like I should have felt that way but I did. (Participant 1)

This participant also made metaphorical connections to the process of trying to find information relating to the financial policies when on parental leave as "detective work":

Like I'm a pretty organized and clear-headed individual. This was my understanding. I thought, oh, okay. If I had never looked into this or been aware of what was happening with my bank account I would have assumed I had paid off my pension while being off. That's scary. And then finding out down the road, and then you realize, I never paid it back. Now I have to pay it back with interest or have to work another year later. Supports? Unless from my own detective work, truly. Nobody offered me any supports at any point. (Participant 1)

She concludes by stating that there is a problem of lack of support when seeking answers to questions about pension payments and policies around parental leave. She felt alone in the process and attributed the fact that she was able to understand the policy to being an organized person. This highlights the need for clearer information and more transparent procedures, which will be addressed later in this chapter.

Participant 2 was even more specific about how and why the wording of the policy needed to be changed. She pointed out that secondary teachers are required to have specialties, subject areas, in which they are qualified to teach. She suggested that this difference in teaching requirements between elementary and secondary teachers should be reflected in the “returning to work” policies for parental leave:

Wording it needs to be corrected. I'd like to see the wording not “position”. I'd say “courses taught” maybe, because we are different than in elementary as well. Because we have specialties. In elementary we could say, “You are teaching a grade”, and allow them the choice of grades. You get to choose, do you want to come back to 2 or can you do a 3? For us we should be allowed the choice of teaching in our subject area. So it would not be only subject area but courses taught. Subject area, courses taught would be nice to have that specified in there. The fact that it's not, I think they've taken that and just made it work for them and not for the parent. (Participant 2)

She suggests that specifying that teachers be returned to the “subject area and courses taught” is important in secondary school, because secondary school teachers have “specialties” based on their qualifications. She proposed that teachers be given the “choice” to return to the subject area in which they are qualified. Also, she made the comparison to elementary school teachers and suggests that they, too, should be allowed to return to the same grade, but that this should be a choice given to them.

Participant 3 also concurred that the wording around returning to the “position most recently held” needed to be clarified. She stated, “I think being that with the secondary school

teaching, I think because a teacher can be in different departments and in different grade levels, I think there should be every accommodation made to return back to the exact department, and teaching position, not just teaching in general.” The wording around what the secondary teacher returns to was a concern for most of the participants. Without specific language in the policy around what department teachers would return to, there was more ambiguity and more room for interpretation by the administration.

Most of the participants felt that there should be some assurance of what timetable the teacher would return to after parental leave. Participant 5, who generally felt good about parental leave policies and how they were applied in his experience, said that there should be a guarantee to what one comes back to. “I mean my wife went back to a one-two, so that was hard on her. So you have to have an absolute guarantee to what you come back to” (Participant 5). He also makes the point that knowing or not knowing one’s principal (because one is away on leave when a new principal arrives at the school) adds to difficulties in staffing. For his wife, who did not know her principal well, he felt that this impacted the teaching timetable that she was assigned. She ended up coming back to a split grade one/ grade two class and he suggested that this may have been because she did not know her principal well.

Information booklets/ websites to clarify parental leave policy. There needs to be more clarification around the procedures and parental leave policies and that these needed to be “more readily accessible” (Participant 1). Participant 1 added that an information package that went into detail about parental leave policies and procedures would be helpful.

So I think that changes to avoid somebody feeling stressed out about parental leave.

“Here’s all the information.” Or to be able to go to your administration when you do tell them. They can say, “Great here’s a package to help you out.” Like, “here are all the steps that you can take.” And even if that administration hasn’t gone on parental leave themselves, it’s all outlined in this package. Because you do have to tell administration regardless. That’s the perfect time for them to say “here’s everything you need to know.”

(Participant 1)

She suggested that principals give the package to the teacher when they tell the principal that they are applying for parental leave. On the outset this seems like a good idea. It is interesting to note that there is already a booklet about the procedures and process about parental leave that was made by OSSTF which is supposed to be available in every school. However, none of the participants mentioned its existence and none of the participants mentioned going on the OSSTF website to find information regarding parental leave. Participant 4 stated that she was not aware that the OSSTF pamphlet existed and had not seen it at her school.

Need for general awareness of parental leave policies amongst all staff. Another participant felt that there should be more general awareness of parental leave policies for everyone so that there was a more receptive attitude towards family-work balance.

I think there definitely could be some positive changes made. Policies clarifying for the purpose of, you know, for people knowing that it’s okay to go on maternity and parental leave. And that it’s okay to balance family and careers. That there’s not a question or concern that when you come back that it’s going to be something completely different

that you are not prepared for, and not being judged or feel like any type of anxiety, or over whether or not you should be coming back or when. (Participant 2)

This also underscores the feeling of being “judged” by her colleagues for going on parental leave and that there needs to be a sort of acknowledgement that it is “okay” to go on leave. She insinuated the basic idea of parental leave is still questioned by administration.

Mentorship to address missed opportunities. Several participants mentioned concerns about missing out on opportunities such as professional development and instructional initiatives. One participant suggested that there should be a mentor assigned to a teacher on parental leave who will help them “catch up” on the curriculum changes that they have missed while on leave. She suggested that this could be included as a Learning Forward initiative, to further the curriculum development and planning, “I think it would be helpful, and I don’t know if this is a policy issue, but some sort of mentorship for people who have taken parental leave or an extended parental leave especially. I think if they’ve been gone for more than a single year, I think that is important.”

Participant 5 also noted that the missed professional development could be addressed by someone who was in charge of emailing teachers about new initiatives. However, he did not feel that the job of getting teachers caught up should be the job of department heads.

I think, I think once you are on parental leave you are kind of in no man’s land.

Department heads get paid a nominal amount of money to do a whole lot of work. So I can’t see adding this, like I wouldn’t expect that from him. This would be more like, if there was someone at the board office firing off emails about those opportunities.

He suggested that the responsibility to provide professional development for teachers returning from leave should be available by the board. This is an initiative that could be offered by learning coordinators who often organize professional development for certain subject areas.

Workshops to inform teachers about parental leave policies. One participant noted that there was a lack of planning workshops available about the topic of parental leave. She suggested that OSSTF could organize one: “Well I was going to say, they have all those retirement workshops, but I’ve never seen one for parental leave. I think that I’d be interested, from men, who take part in the parental leave, whether there is anything explained to them.” She wonders if men are given information about taking parental leave, too.

One participant did not think that there should be any changes, and felt that financially it was not possible. Participant 6 stated, “I don’t think so. Fiscally I don’t know if they can.” This participant connected change with financial implications and thought that changes to parental leave policies could be a financial burden for the board of education.

Summary

It is clear in this analysis that there are many different policies that govern and affect parental leave in general. Policies around teacher assignments when returning to leave, around part-time leave, length of leave taken, and the unwritten policies around coaching and extra-curricular involvement all have an impact on the teachers’ general feelings of well-being, work-life balance, and the well-being of their families. Most participants agreed that the process of applying for parental leave in general was not straight-forward and that this needed clarification. Coping strategies to the demands of juggling teaching and parenting responsibilities included

returning to work on a part-time basis and extending one's leave to return to work at the beginning of a semester rather than in the middle of a semester. However, these coping strategies also came with added stress and difficulties. The financial burden of taking parental leave, given that the top-up of EI for this particular board was only eight weeks was also noted.

The challenges that these participants faced were many. They fell under the categories of negotiating the position they would be returning to; and the challenges of teaching new courses while a new parent; pressure to coach and be involved in extra-curricular activities with a baby at home; and scheduling conflicts, including organizing child-care. The majority of the challenges revolved around scheduling conflicts for the teachers returning from parental leave. What they would be teaching, as well as when they would be assigned the duties were the focus of discussion with administration and department heads and points of negotiation. Although the administrators were supportive of the teachers going on leave, there seemed to be some negative consequences of returning from a leave for some of the participants, which consisted of not being scheduled into the same departments and having to prepare for new courses assigned.

The added pressure to coach and do extra-curricular activities was an unexpected challenge that appeared several times in the interviews. The difficulties in negotiating one's timetable did not just extend to the interactions of the teachers with the principals, but also with their department heads. Participants reported negative ideas around taking or extending parental leave in departments held by department heads and colleagues that affected teachers' decisions to return to work from a leave. It was interesting that the role of the board in the process of applying for parental leave was minimal. The role of the OSSTF was that of supporter for many

of the participants. Half of the participants asked questions of clarification around parental leave policies of the OSSTF. However, there seemed to be more clarification of the policies needed in general.

There were many suggestions for ways to improve teachers' knowledge of the options available to them. The format for clarification could be as information booklets, websites and workshops. The suggestion to have teaching mentors (which could be department heads) as part of the already implemented "Learning Forward" professional development provided a good solution to the problem of missed professional development and curriculum changes while teachers are on parental leave.

Overall, the results of this study highlighted the benefits, and challenges of parental leave and the ways that parental leave policies are interpreted. It provided suggestions for many areas for clarification and improvements to parental leave policies.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

Summary of Findings

This study has focused on the experiences of six secondary teachers, five female and one male, in a school board in Ontario. The purpose of this study was to understand the policies that govern parental leave and the ways in which secondary teachers interpret, negotiate, and experience these policies. This study helped to illuminate the tensions, issues of work-family balance, and career implications for teachers who take parental leave. This research was important due to the historical significance of the fight to gain parental leave rights (Dixit & Kleiner, 2005; Hall, 2011; Stechysane & Bouzane, 2012), the need to hear the voices of those taking parental leave, and the absence of this topic in previous studies in public education in Ontario. The vast majority of teachers taking parental leave are women; however, there is an increasing number of men taking parental leave in Canada and around the world (Demerling, 2009; Almqvist, 2011). I thought important to include male participants in this research because we need to understand power imbalances and inequalities in the ways that men's and women's roles are defined by society (Connell, 2009).

Policies that govern parental leave are continually evolving in federal and provincial legislations and teacher federation Collective Agreements. Looking at the research from a perspective of gendered policies allows us to understand and critique the research findings. It is important to understand how gender impacts the role of being both a teacher and parent. The study has implications for the way men and women experience parental leave, how they perceive the way their leave have influenced their relationships with colleagues and their positions in the

school, and the decisions they make for themselves both in terms of their careers and their families.

There were two overarching research questions that guided the study. The first question was: “What policies govern parental leave policies in a certain district in Ontario?” This study revealed a number of policies both anticipated and unanticipated in the process of the research. These ways that these policies are practiced leads to the second overarching question. The second question was: “What power dynamics do teachers perceive, both personally and professionally, in the enactment of parental leave policy?” The supports and challenges for teachers, the differences between “policy in practice” and “policy in text” and the ways in which their experiences with parental leave policies contributed towards gendered organizations were explored within the context of this second larger research question. This conclusion will address the findings to these research questions in this study.

The first section of this chapter will address the policies that govern parental leave texts as well as the challenges of parental leave in practice. The section entitled Challenges to Parental Leave in Practice will address the findings from the childcare policies, negotiating teaching timetables, additional demands on time when returning from leave, and lastly responding to challenges through extended leave and part-time work. In the section Implications for Research, the challenges and responses to parental leave uptake will be discussed. In the section A Call for Further Action, there are five areas of recommendation of change to address the existing challenges of parental leave. In the section entitled The Recommendation for Further Study, I outline areas for further research. This includes further research on parental leave in the

elementary panel. My personal perspective and narrative on the topic of parental leave experiences and challenges is provided in the section entitled The Commentary on Personal Stance of the Author. A discussion of the areas that limit the scope of the study ensues in the section The Limitations of Study. In the section entitled The Conclusions from a Specific Qualitative Design, I outline the theoretical framework that has been used to understand and analyze the findings from the study. Lastly, in the section, Unique Contribution of the Study, I discuss the ways that this study brings new research and findings to the area of critical policy studies.

Policies that Govern Parental Leave Policies as Text

There are several parental leave policies that govern parental leave for teachers. Some of these policies, because of ambiguous wording, created perceived inequalities in the application of the policy into practice. In the Collective Agreement between secondary teachers and one school board, one section, as mentioned in the introduction, applies to teachers returning from parental leave. It stipulates that teachers be returned to the “same position”. Participants were aware that they would be returned to the same school under the Collective Agreement, if they returned within a year, but they were unsure what “same position” meant. The ambiguity and differing ways that “same position” of the wording of the Collective Agreement left considerable room for interpretation by the administrators. Teachers also interpreted this wording in different ways. This affected their agency in negotiating their return to work, as well as their understanding of themselves as gendered subjects. Some participants thought that it meant “teaching” in general, others interpreted it as teaching in the same department and still others

thought it should mean teaching the same courses as they were teaching prior to going on parental leave.

The way that the parental leave policy was experienced varied between participants, as well. Most of the female participants were assigned a teaching schedule that included teaching courses in different departments. This was perceived by these participants as being unfair and as a punishment for having taken parental leave. The male participant was returned to the same department. Some teachers suggested that perhaps the male teachers taking parental leave might not face the same “penalties” as the female teachers who take parental leave. The different ways that the female versus the male participants experienced the parental leave policies is reflective of the gendered nature of the policies. By not being returned to the same position, teachers often lost “working capital” that they had built before going on leave. They had developed certain knowledge and skills and gained teaching positions in departments that were coveted (eg. drama, student success, librarian). By placing participants to other departments to which they did not wish to return, the participants’ knowledge base and “working capital” were devalued and they were “set back” in their career track which is a common occurrence for women administrators, as well (Kachur-Reico et al., 2012). It could be argued that there is a patriarchal, hegemonic structure in the way the policy is interpreted and applied (Connell, 2009). Examining this from a gendered policy lens, the ambiguity of the wording around return to work allows for hegemonic power structures to impose teaching assignments on teachers that may limit their career advancements.

Challenges Due to the Gendered Nature of Parental Leave Policies

Feeling powerless to determine one's teaching timetable. Another challenge that participants had was in negotiating their teaching timetable so that their classes could be scheduled consecutively, rather than for example, Period One in the morning, and Period Five in the afternoon. Some participants said that with each subsequent baby, they felt increased resistance from their colleagues, department heads and principals around flexibility with their timetables. The male participant did not feel powerless. He indicated that he felt that he had agency in negotiating his teaching timetable. Participants felt increased pressure to teach full time, as well. Young (1994) also noted that female educators expressed guilt about work-life conflicts. There was increased pressure to “do it all”. In my study, teachers felt the pressure to spend quality time with their young children at home as well as pressure from colleagues to increase their teaching timetables to full time. This is supported by Dillabough's (1999) research who asserts that female teachers are equated with the private sphere and are defined as “‘mothers’ and ‘guardians’ of the nation” (p.708). There is a gendered expectation of caregiving by female teachers that extends from the private sphere into the public sphere. These teachers noted that it was difficult to fit everything into the day.

Teachers in the study perceived part-time teaching as a way to mitigate the demands of marking and other extracurricular activities and have more time to spend with their young children. Noor and Zainuddin (2011) suggest that there is a need to “recognize emotions and emotional work demands as sources of stress that might influence the well-being of female teachers with family responsibilities” (p. 291). Their study suggests that the demands of mothering and emotional labor of teaching create burnout for female teachers, in particular. They

maintain that there needs to be “greater awareness on the importance of sharing responsibilities between partners” so that partners can “play a more equal role at home to reduce the burden of their wives’ work-family conflict” (Noor & Zainuddin, 2011, p. 291).

Organizational power over teaching duties and teacher status. An additional challenge that participants faced were that when they returned from parental leave, they were scheduled to teach new courses, often outside of the departments in which they were qualified to teach. This increased the demand on their time as they needed to do extra preparation to teach these new courses. This also increased the stress that the participants felt going back to teaching.

As well, most of the participants felt pressure from their department heads and principals to lead extracurricular activities or to coach. They reported that they did not get the teaching timetable that they wanted until they agreed to coach, or supervise extra-curricular activities. They also felt that if they did not coach or act as an advisor to a club they would not get contract lines. Furthermore, teachers articulated that if they did not act as club advisor or coach it would affect their promotional opportunities, such as placement as department heads.

Loss of status in the workplace as experienced by those taking parental leave. In response to these challenges, most of the participants extended their parental leave. However, this, also, posed some problems for participants. They encountered differing interpretations of the parental leave policy when extending their leave. Some administrators reportedly told them they could expect to go back to the same departments, while others suggested that they would not necessarily be returned to the same school. Teachers that extended their parental leave also faced adverse comments from colleagues who talked poorly about those who chose to take more

time at home. The perception of teachers who took parental leave by other colleagues was an important factor in the decisions that teachers made about when and how long they would take parental leave for. The feeling of insecurity around being returned to the same school or position not only added stress to the teachers' experiences of parental leave but also, reinforced teachers' feelings of being powerless.

Struggle with control of timetable when negotiating childcare policies. one of the areas that came up that was unanticipated in the study was the negotiation of childcare. Participants reported two main challenges to balancing the pressures between home and school with the addition of a baby to their families. The first challenge was arranging childcare schedules around the rigid schedule of teaching. The early start time created issues around childcare that affected whether or not childcare through a community-based organization or homecare could be accessed. Homecare providers tended to be more flexible in working around the participants' schedules than community daycare agencies. This was important because it highlights the difficulties in finding childcare providers who offer flexible schedules. Women often still struggle with the majority of the housework and childcare arrangements, even when they are engaged in work in the public sphere (Brown et al., 2014), thus also drawing upon the "patriarchal dividend" of other women's "underpaid and unpaid labor" (Blackmore, 2009, p. 142).

The participants acknowledged difficulties in finding work-life balance. One of the ways the participants dealt with the challenges was by reducing their teaching schedules to teach part-time. This reduction in work schedule from full time to part-time was evidenced in Young's

(1994) study as well. She noted that women's careers characteristically included part-time work, and had a "delayed or slower hierarchical progression" (p. 359). To be clear, it is a "choice" that the participants made to ameliorate the demands on their work-life responsibilities. However, these teachers face many challenges when they return from leave. Teachers who return from leave may be placed in a new teaching position, with increased demands to prepare for new courses, face negative attitudes from colleagues, and have increased responsibilities for both arranging childcare and providing childcare at home. In addition to these constraints, part-time work often leads to stagnancy in one's career advancement (as aforementioned).

From a critical feminist standpoint, the delay in career advancements that teachers face as a result of taking up part-time teaching assignments reinforces the ways that the power structures work to disempower women in the workplace, and create oppression. All of these constraints faced by female teachers returning from work, lead to a system of oppression. Sensoy & Di Angelo's (2012) claim that "no individual member of the dominant group has to do anything specific to oppress a member of the minoritized group; the prejudice and discrimination is built into the society as a whole and becomes normalized and taken for granted" (p. 39). Even when these female teachers were trying to negotiate their return to work, and were accepting a reduction of pay in order to find work-life balance, they still experienced the parental leave policies in an oppressive way, which left them feeling powerless in the way that these policies were enacted.

The challenges that the participants experienced was in part due to the gendered nature of the policies. Most of the women in my study still were responsible for the majority of the

child care responsibilities at home. Wall & Arnold (2007) found that although Canadian fathers are “spending more time with their children than they did 30 years ago, their involvement in caregiving, especially with young children, is still a fraction of that undertaken by mothers” (p. 509). They posit that some of the reasons for this gender bias towards mothers being responsible for most of the care of the young children is due to “policy shortcomings, workplace culture and the wages gap between men and women” (p. 509). Similarly, in my study, I found that the ways that the policies were enacted and the lack of specificity of the language, as well as the workplace culture that disempowered women that took parental leave all contributed to more mothers working part-time, and finding other ways to mitigate the gendered parental leave policies on their return from leave. According to Schmitz (2016), there is a preponderance of research that “has established that men’s masculine roles as breadwinners in caring for children supersede those associated with nurturing, bonding, and love for their offspring within the realm of public policy and its associated literature” (p. 20).

There are still gendered assumptions underlying these policies that suggest that women are best able to care for infants and young children. The hybrid masculinities that posit that fathers can be both providers and companions or providers and nurturers has not resulted in significantly more time spent caring for young children (Randles, 2014; Wall & Arnold, 2007). In fact, Randles (2014) found in her research of 64 fathers in a US study of a government funded “Responsible Fatherhood Program” that this “‘new fatherhood’ has not translated into gender equality, as women still provide most of the day-to-day care for families” (p. 4). This study also reinforces the shortcomings in parental leave policy language and enactment, as well as the challenges that teachers face in the workplace around perception when they take parental leave.

To further understand the power dynamics that are at play, we can examine Connell's (2006) work on gender regimes and apply the concepts of gendered policies to the ways in which teachers experienced parental leave policies in this study. Connell (2006) noted that the gender division of labor in organizations is such that work that required less preparation and limited hours was seen as more suitable to those who had "major childcare responsibilities" (p. 841) which meant that those positions that did not require as much responsibility outside of work hours was predominantly filled by women. Likewise, in my study, the teachers who took parental leave sought part-time teaching positions in order to ameliorate the time spent preparing for classes and to find work-life balance. Female teachers experienced tensions in the ways that the parental leave policies were applied and reported feeling powerless when they tried to negotiate their return to work conditions. These working conditions not only affected what they taught, and when they taught but also, their work-life balance when juggling family responsibilities.

Connell (2006) noted in their study that gender based changes in the workplace were as a result of decisions that managers made and that "gender balance may occur without the intention to produce gender effects" (p. 841). Similarly, Blackmore and Sachs (2007) suggested that the gendered nature of organizations is created through the gendered nature of human activity in organizations, even when gender is not a focus of the work. Therefore, the decisions made by administration may not be intentionally related to gender. However, there remains a gender imbalance in the workplace as a result of the decisions made in organizations around parental leave policies.

Inequality can be created by the structure of authority in organizations. The views of what constitutes women's work as well as the views of women managers can also create systems of inequality (Connell, 2006). This regime of the Gender Relations of Power examines who holds power in organizations, who is controlled and how that power is delegated. Women themselves are pulled into parental leave policies as gendered subjects because it is these women who bear babies, and who generally take parental leave, and thus the policies are generally applied to women. These policies are intended to create equality but the gaps in policy, and the ambiguity of language in the existing policies, actually exacerbate the power dynamics for teachers returning from parental leave, leaving them in positions of inequality.

Implications of Research

Understanding how parental leave policies are gendered. The framework that underlies my research is the critical policy approach, with an understanding that actors bring with them their own feelings, values and beliefs into making sense of policies and how they intersect with their experiences (Yanow, 1999). The teachers who were the participants in my study brought with them a variety of feelings and beliefs about parental leave policies and how they experienced them. It was clear that there were more than teachers involved in interpreting the parental leave policies. Some of the other actors were the administration, department heads, board personnel, and OSSTF. In analyzing the research and making meaning of the participants' experiences, I applied a critical policy approach to understanding how power dynamics influenced the participants. This involved an understanding that the application of policies, even those involving parental leave, involved power imbalances. The teachers' experiences (primarily female teachers), involved negotiating parental leave policies with their principals (who were

often male). Understanding the ways that gender politics influenced the interpretation of parental leave policies is important to understanding the ways that the teachers experienced these policies as participants.

Research as a source of empowerment for participants. My hope is that the process of researching parental leave policies and giving the participants a voice to explore and communicate their experiences empowered the participants in reflecting on the importance of their own agency and the larger issues around parental leave. Participants reported feeling informed and more empowered through the interview process. Participant 1 said, “Your questions really got me thinking. Yeah! Things I had briefly considered, but I... the more I thought about how it all went down and talked to other people not in the school boards and things like that too.” She felt that she had more time to consider her experiences and was happy to give her reflections and suggestions for improvements to policies. Through the research teachers began to reflect on the ways that parental leave policies and the ways that they are interpreted can create challenges in their lives. These challenges, as outlined above, are confusion around how to access parental leave information, differences in interpretation of the text in practice, and negotiating back to work timetables and demands, and notably, trying to find work-life balance.

Challenges and Responses to Parental Leave Uptake

It is important to note that teachers were not passive in dealing with the parental leave process but found ways to gather the necessary information and policy knowledge in order to negotiate their timetables and expectation around coaching with principals and their department

heads. As Dillabough (1999) asserts, teachers have “some degree of political agency” and are not just passive objects in an instrument of “neo-liberal forces”. Teachers used the experiences of others who had been on parental leave, the knowledge they gleaned from collective bargaining contracts, as well as discussion with system staff, to help to inform their decision making.

Meisenbach et al. (2008) conducted qualitative research, interviewing 21 women about their experiences negotiating maternity leave. They found that the process of negotiating parental leave was not “open” in terms of transparency, as was previously thought, and that there were limitations in terms of how the participants thought of themselves as agents of the parental leave or as subordinates.

Like the participants in the study by Meisenbach et al. (2008), the participants in my study found the process of negotiating parental leave and the return to work was not “open” in terms of transparency. Participants found it difficult finding information relating to parental leave applications and policies related to their return to work. The policies themselves were open to interpretation and it was clear that most of the participants felt that the ways that these policies were applied left them at a disadvantage and that they were left with “unfair” timetables that put them in different departments from which they were previously working. They felt penalized and under more stress because of new courses that they had to prepare (“preps”). The one male participant in the study did not feel that taking parental leave left him disadvantaged. On the contrary, he felt very supported by both his department head and his various principals through his parental leave. He reported that the overall process of applying for leave was easy. He felt that his principals helped him through the process of applying for leave and that his position

returning back to the same department was secure. He felt that the workplace culture was collegial and he made connections with his colleagues by visiting the school regularly when he was on leave.

McColl-Kennedy and Anderson (2002) assert that “supportive work superiors have been shown to influence the emotional experiences of their employees” (p. 549). In contrast to this very favourable experience of being on parental leave, some of the female participants reported feeling unsupported, and coming back to a hostile workplace. Participant 2 described feeling “alone” and that there was nobody “on [her] side”. Participant 3 also felt that there was little support and that there was a gendered way of enacting policy that was oppressive to young females, saying, “Unfortunately, I don’t think our board, and our policies and our principals are really... I think they pick on young females a little bit.” She felt that the administrators were using the policy language “against” the female teachers taking leave for their own hidden agenda. The male participant felt empowered by the experience of being on parental leave because of his perceived feelings of being supported by administration and colleagues. Female participants, overall, did not feel as supported and felt discriminated against by the ways that the parental leave policies were enacted and because of the negative attitudes of their colleagues towards them. This is evidence of the gendered nature of policy enactment.

Like Meisenbach et al’s (2008) study, my research pointed towards the ways that the uptake of parental leave contributed to “workflow stability” concerns and anxieties around career advancement. Some teachers even felt pressured to come back earlier than they would have

liked, before their one-year maternity leave, due to colleagues' negative attitudes towards teachers that take extended parental leave.

Armenti (2004) noted that faculty mothers who took parental leave faced work-life balance challenges, felt that they missed professional development opportunities, felt colleagues had negative perceptions of those that took parental leave, and felt that the uptake of parental leave might adversely affect their career advancement. All of these experiences and concerns around the uptake of parental leave were similarly expressed by the participants in my study. Stockdell-Giesler and Ingalls (2007) also noted that faculty struggled with the "up-or-out" tenure clock that affected their career advancement. So the uptake of parental leave could directly affect their promotional opportunities. In particular, the pressures that teachers faced also seemed to be influenced by the "ideal worker" who kept up with the curriculum, learned new assessment strategies, and acted as coach/ advisor after school hours. This expectation to be the perfect teacher created additional work-life balance struggles.

The struggle to attain work-life balance was also reported by female surgeons in Brown et al.'s (2013) study of maternity leave experiences in medicine. In order to ameliorate the effects of work-life pressure, some of the female surgeons went part-time. However, in going part-time they experienced shorter burn out times. Similarly, most of the participants in my study, also, returned to work part-time in order to stabilize their work-life balance, and create more time to spend with their children. However, the process of negotiating part-time return teaching timetables was arduous for most of the teachers, involving many discussions with principals and department heads to try to get a teaching timetable that was manageable. It is clear from the

research that the issue of childcare and how to organize and negotiate one's teaching timetable was a significant challenge to the participants.

An important part of "equity work" is in identifying the inequality and making issues "visible" (Connell, 2006, p. 847) that otherwise would be obscured. Using a critical policy approach, it is evident that the interpretation and experiences of parental leave policies are influenced by power imbalances. These power imbalances lead to a gendered division of labour for teachers taking parental leave. The importance of parental leave policies in the workplace is articulated by Betty Frieden (1997) who notes that the increase of women in the workforce has blurred the lines between work and home. However, this study, and others such as Meisenbach et al's (2008), emphasize that the mere existence of parental leave policy in Collective Agreements does not ensure the equal application or treatment of men and women who take parental leave. These policies, under a critical policy approach, should be considered in the context of how organizational structure and power impact the way that the policies are interpreted. Policies are interpreted and experienced by many actors which allows for gendered structures in educational organizations to influence the way that they are interpreted.

Haase (2008) argued the importance of recognizing the privilege that is set out through gender relations, stating "patriarchy [is] a broad, overarching, although not completely pervasive, system of gender relations that privilege men" (Haase, 2008, p. 598). Female teachers who took parental leave generally felt disempowered by the process of negotiating their parental leave. Most of the principals with whom the teachers negotiated the parental leave were male. The ways they experienced parental leave when dealing with these principals is reflected in the

leadership bias that is noted in Collard's (2003) study in which he interviewed 24 principals about their gendered perceptions of the profession and their roles in education, the students, the curriculum, and work/family balance. In this study, female principals were more likely to see teachers as continuing learners, adapting policy to realities, and as questioning individuals; whereas, male principals saw teachers as obedient, as implementers of policy, and of their relationship as hierarchical (Collard, 2003). This difference in the ways of perceiving the agency of teachers might also influence the ways and differences that male and female principals might interpret parental leave policies.

Blackmore (1989) describes how leadership, bureaucracies and schools have been traditionally constructed in hierarchical, male dominated ways. Male principals might not assume as much room for negotiating with teachers around parental leave policies and view teachers who question the policies as "disobedient". From a feminist framework, Blackmore (1989) suggests that leadership should empower others, not be about having power over others. Many of the participants in this study found that they had limited agency in negotiating their return to work after taking parental leave. It was the department heads who interpreted the policies, and were responsible for creating the teachers' timetables. The female participants felt that they did not have much agency in negotiating their return to work timetables with their department heads or principals. The participants experienced the schools as being hierarchical in the ways that the parental leave policies were interpreted. They felt disempowered through the process of negotiating parental leaves and when they questioned the ways that the policies were interpreted they were viewed as trouble makers. As we turn from a traditionally masculine concept of leadership to one that includes feminine experiences and ways of interacting, we need

to re-evaluate “what counts as administrative and leadership experience” to include “community activities, teaching, curriculum development and child rearing” (p. 124). It is important that the responsibility and experiences of child rearing be considered a part of the leadership framework, rather than a separate sphere of responsibility that detracts from a teachers’ career.

The ambiguity of the wording of the contract, the lack of support by administrators and department heads, and the sense of uncertainty when returning from work created conditions where the participants felt that they lacked power. The participants’ experiences reflect the gendered relations that exist in the nature of parental leave in the workplace. The participants turned to various actors, administrators, department heads, human resource staff, and OSSTF, as well as the Collective Agreement to negotiate the parental leave policies. The gendered nature of parental leave policies reinforced participants’ feelings of powerlessness. Overall, the impact of these policies on the teachers’ personal and professional lives and the experiences of the participants in this study suggest that parental leave policies are gendered and are part of a hegemonic system of oppression. There is a gap between parental leave policies in text and enacted policies to support teachers in their return to work.

Recommendations for Policy

Based on the results of this study, four recommended areas for further clarification of policy and policy implementation can be noted.

Clarification of parental leave policies. The first is clarification around parental leave policies, particularly more specific wording related to the position to which teachers return. As stated earlier, a section in the Collective Agreement, stipulates that teachers should be “returned”

to the position they held before going on leave. The wording could be amended to avoid ambiguous interpretation to state, “A Teacher returning from a Pregnancy Leave shall return to the same department(s), with the same number of teaching lines in each department.”

Parental leave workshops and information booklets. The second recommendation is for OSSTF, possibly with the collaboration of the board of education, to develop workshops to inform teachers about parental leave policies. These parental leave workshops could be similar in format to the ones offered through ETFO or the retirement workshops now offered through OSSTF in conjunction with the board of education. They would aim to raise awareness around policies, workers’ rights on leave, collective bargaining language, supports they can access while on leave, information around the impact of parental leave on their pensions, and financial planning while on leave.

Along with the workshops, OSSTF and a Board of Education should develop information booklets and online information that would help teachers going on parental leave to understand the policies that impact them. These information booklets would include references to the Employment Standards Act, and the Collective Agreement and how to apply for Employment Insurance. It would also include some helpful advice to transition between teaching and going on parental leave such as asking a department head and principal for a letter of reference, and having a discussion about how long the teacher anticipates going on leave and a desire to keep informed about ongoing professional development through emails while on leave. When transitioning back to teaching from the leave, there would be a recommendation to complete the Teaching Preference form that is sent out to teachers in the schools, but is not generally sent to

teachers on leave. Teachers need to be proactive about informing their department heads and the principal about what they would like to teach on their return.

Increased awareness of policies among all staff. The third recommendation is for increased awareness of parental leave policies amongst all staff to create a more accepting environment. The aim is to improve understanding of parental leave policies, as well as make people aware of the ways that supportive work environments can create healthier lives for parents and children. This would be an important step in improving the climate for teachers returning from leave, and reducing stress for these teachers. One way to improve this would be to refer to the OSSTF booklet on parental leave and make teachers aware of the contents of it, and implications at a staff meeting. I recommend this could be done by an OSSTF branch president.

Mentorship program. The fourth recommendation is for the board of education to develop mentorship to address missed professional development and instructional initiatives. Ideally, this mentor would be the department head who would keep the teacher on leave apprised of changes to department policies, new programs and initiatives in the classroom and professional development opportunities. These four recommendations would help to ameliorate the power dynamics when teachers are scheduled into teaching lines and reduce ambiguity about the teacher's schedule when returning from leave, help to improve school climate for teacher-parents, provide teachers going on parental leave with the knowledge and support around parental leave policies, and provide opportunities for questions and answers for teachers taking parental leave.

Recommendations for Further Study

This study on secondary school teachers' experiences of parental leave policies leave open some further areas of study. One of these areas is to understand the ways that elementary teachers experience the Collective Agreement language and parental leave policies. How do elementary teachers' experiences of parental leave policies compare and contrast with those of secondary teachers? Since there are already parental leave workshops offered regularly through the ETFO, it would be helpful to understand the ways that these impact the parental leave experiences and understanding, and interpretation of policy for elementary teachers.

Secondly, it would be interesting to explore how parental leave policies are interpreted by administration. How do administrators apply parental leave policies? What supports do administrators offer and access in order to support teachers on parental leave? The third area of study that would be interesting and offer a rich comparative study would be focussing on Long Term Occasional Teachers (LTOs) to see how pregnancy affected their advancement to contract positions. What supports did they access? How does their employment status affect the ways that they apply for, communicate and negotiate parental leave? All of these recommendations would be interesting to explore within a feminist framework to further understand the basic assumptions about gender and gendered roles.

Commentary on Personal Stance of the Author

As a secondary school teacher who has taken three parental leaves over the course of my career, I have experienced parental leave policies in differing ways. The responses from administrators and department heads ranged from positive to unsupportive. Similarly, to many of

the participants, I have perceived a more generous attitude towards my parental leave and found it easier negotiating back to work teaching schedules after my first parental leave, compared to my last parental leave. There were a variety of interpretations by administrators and department heads as to what “same position” meant when returning from a parental leave. When I was not returned to the same department after returning from my last parental leave, it was upsetting to me to hear a female co-worker remark to me, “That is the price you pay.”

Looking at this from a neoliberal concept of choice, the implication seemed to be that taking parental leave was a choice and that a theoretical commercial exchange had been made (eg. “You exchanged your baby for your job.”) Neoliberalism “argues that free markets, unfettered by government regulation, will solve social, economic, and political problems” (Drudy, 2008, p.316). However, policies informed by neoliberalism fail to understand or recognize the systems of oppression that are in place, largely because of the dominant groups’ policies. Furthermore, it “engages with differences in tokenized, limited and commoditized forms for the purpose of profit (Osei-Kofi, 2012, p. 237).

Examining this through a feminist framework, there was a “deficit model of women that leads to a blame the victim approach” (Acker, 1992, p. 467). This example reinforces the ways that we internalize, and take part in the hegemonic oppression even as being one of the minoritized (women). My colleague’s statement demonstrates the ways that we participate in the hegemonic oppression, sometimes in unknowing ways.

In Grover’s (1991) study, she asserts that “being of child bearing age, having children and holding positive attitudes toward women were positively related to perceptions of parental

leave policy fairness” (p. 247). This would situate my own experience and proximity to the subject matter as having “egocentric bias”. However, I think it is important that the researcher is able to situate their own experiences within the field of study. Grover (1991) also states that “policies that may benefit “worker-parents” are “flexible work schedules, part-time provisions, family related leave of absence” (p. 247). Some important questions remain for me after this study: Does the collective bargaining language mean returning to one’s same school as a teacher? Or could the policy be interpreted as returning to the same department(s) within the school? More clarity around the wording of this policy would be beneficial for administrators, department heads, and teachers who take parental leave as it would lessen anxiety and “grey” areas of understanding.

Limitations of the Study

It was difficult to find an equal number of male and female participants for my study, and so the limited number of male teachers affected the extent that conclusions could be made about the role of gender in this study. As well, including only teachers in the study, and excluding other policy actors such as principals and department heads, considers only one professional role’s perspective. This focus on teachers’ experiences, although it provides valuable information from the teachers’ perspective, also leaves out bigger picture issues such as the staffing needs of the schools that management has to consider when creating teachers’ teaching timetables. Therefore, further studies would benefit from a wider array of participants involved, including a variety of policy actors.

The findings in this study are not generalizable to other contexts. However, the research findings offer there are still great benefits in conducting qualitative case study research. The research produced thick data and deep analysis which offer insight into the experiences of teachers who take parental leave. It also provides a perspective on the challenges that teachers face and offers some solutions and ways to address these challenges.

Conclusions from a Specific Qualitative Design

Using qualitative research allowed participants to offer stories and anecdotes that illustrated their experiences with parental leave policies. These created rich data to sift through and understand the many challenges that teachers found with parental leave policies. Two main questions formed the framework for the research: 1) What policies govern parental leave in the district? and 2) What power dynamics do teachers perceive, both personally and professionally, in the enactment of parental leave policy? These gave rise to further questions around the ways that teachers experienced parental leave. For example, the discussion of parental leave policies invoked questions about the nature and impact of other policies on the participants such as part-time work, childcare policies, and unwritten expectations around extracurricular involvement. This research methodology allowed me to elicit responses that were “personal, subjective and unique” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p.6). This methodology allowed me to explore the power relations evident in the relationships that the teachers had with administrators, colleagues and their families through the interviews.

Unique Contribution of the Study

This research offers a unique contribution to the field of education. By exploring the stories of teachers' experiences of parental leave policies, we uncovered many challenges and power dynamics that exist in the interpretation of these policies. The interviews offered a unique perspective into an otherwise little researched area of teachers' experiences of parental leave. The experiences of participants in my study reinforced the need for flexibility and accommodations when applying parental leave policies in secondary schools. The health and welfare of parents and children are affected by the ways these parental leaves are applied (Liu & Buzzanell, 2004). The participants in my study reported feeling stress and anxiety around the ways that parental leave policies were interpreted in secondary schools. This research reinforced the need for participants to find work-life balance after having a baby and the creative ways that they sought this through part-time work, extension of parental leave and reducing extracurricular involvement. Compared to faculty mothers who took parental leave (Armenti, 2004; Stockdell-Giesler & Ingalls, 2007), secondary teachers do not face the same pressures to produce research during their child-bearing years. However, some participants, in my study, reported that opportunities for promotion were adversely affected by the uptake of parental leave. The participants, similarly to faculty, felt pressure to come back early from parental leave in order to reduce the penalizing effects of taking parental leave.

Brown et al. (2014) concluded that gender did impact the work and struggle for balance for these surgeons and that maternity policies, although in place to allow one year of leave, need more structural supports. Similarly, the participants, in my study, reported struggling with the impact of work after returning from parental leave. My study offers some ways that parents can

negotiate parental leave policy and create work-life balance. The female surgeons in Brown et al.'s (2014) study reported feeling responsible for childcare duties whereas the experiences of the participants in my study delved deeper into how the childcare arrangements were affected by the application of return to work policies.

My study offers a unique view of the obstacles around childcare arrangements and explores creative solutions to address these. The power dynamics exist due, partly, to the hierarchical nature of education, as administrators interpret parental leave policies as they apply to teachers. There is also the gendered power dynamics of parental leave policies (Meisenbach et al., 2008) that was evident as the majority of teachers who participate in parental leave are female. Similar to Meisenbach et al.'s study (2008), which was situated in the corporate sector, gender conflict and uncertainty around the transition back to work from parental leave was evident in my study. The experiences of secondary teachers provided a unique opportunity to examine these power dynamics in negotiating parental leave policies in the field of teaching.

The effects of parental leave policies are numerous and extensive due, in part, to the fact that the interpretation of parental leave policies affects both people's professional and personal lives. The study also provides for numerous areas of action that are needed in order to improve the interpretation and implementation of parental leave policies. This study addresses the challenges and offers some recommendations for implementing parental leave policies in secondary schools in Ontario.

The issues, challenges, and experiences of these particular participants in this study, although specific to one profession, may be a reflection of a larger hegemonic system (Connell,

2009). There are inherent gendered power dynamics that affect the ways that parental leave are interpreted in the public and private sectors (Armenti, 2004; Brown et al., 2013; Comer, 2009; Meisenbach et al, 2008; O'Meara & Campbell, 2011; Stockdell-Giesler & Ingalls, 2007). This study brings awareness to the challenges of parental leave implementation in teaching and offers possibilities for ways that people can be active participants in negotiating parental leave policies.

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Appendix A: Letter of Information

Project Title: Exploring Teachers' Experiences of Parental Leaves in One School Board
in Ontario

Principal Investigator: **Melody Viczko**, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Education,
Western University; **Rachelle Martin**, Graduate Student, Faculty of Education, Western
University

Letter of Information

1. Invitation to Participate

You are being invited to participate in this research study that seeks to explore secondary teachers' experiences of parental leave policies. You are being invited to participate because you returned to teaching at the secondary school panel after having taken a parental leave.

2. Purpose of the Letter

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with information required for you to make an informed decision regarding participation in this research.

3. Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this study is to understand the realities faced by teachers as they engage in parental leave policies. In particular, we hope to examine the relationships of teachers with the school administration, and their colleagues and the ways that policy text is put into practice. The goal of this study is to illuminate teachers' experiences of parental leave policies, with the aim of

increasing awareness of tensions, work-family balance, career implications, and examining collective agreements for secondary teachers.

4. Inclusion & Exclusion Criteria

Individuals who have are secondary school teachers and have taken parental leave in the past five years and have returned to teaching are eligible to participate in this study. Individuals who are not secondary school teachers and who have not taken parental leave in the last five years are not eligible.

5. Study Procedures

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to participate in one interview. It is anticipated that the entire task will take 90 minutes. The interview will be conducted at a café, library or mutually acceptable place outside of a school location. There will be a total of up to 12 participants all-together.

6. Possible Risks, Harms and Benefits

There are no known or anticipated risks associated with this study. The possible benefits to participants may be a greater awareness of parental leave policies. You may not directly benefit from participating in this study but information gathered may provide benefits to society as a whole which include offering opportunities for studying parental leave policies and the ways that they are practiced in the school board. This could provide insight into policy areas that could change within school boards, and collective agreements in Ontario. This study could lead to the

development of more support programs that would ease the transition back to work for people who take parental leave.

7. Compensation

You will not be compensated for your participation in this research.

8. Voluntary Participation

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time with no effect on your future career.

9. Confidentiality

All data collected will remain confidential and accessible only to the investigators of this study. If the results are published, your name will not be used. Data is encrypted on the student investigators' computer until after the thesis is completed and submitted. After that point the data will be erased from the computer and kept in a locked cabinet in the office of the principal investigator, Melody Viczko, at Western University. Rachelle Martin, and Melody Viczko will have access to this data. If you choose to withdraw from this study, your data will be removed and destroyed from our database. While we will do our best to protect your information there is no guarantee that we will be able to do so. The inclusion of your initials may allow someone to link the data and identify you. Representatives of The University of Western Ontario Non-Medical Research Ethics Board may contact you or require access to your study-related records to monitor the conduct of the research.

10. Contacts for Further Information

If you require any further information regarding this research project or your participation in the study you may contact Melody Viczko, Principal Investigator,, or Rachelle Martin, student researcher. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or the conduct of this study, you may contact The Office of Research Ethics.

11. Publication

The study will be used as part of a Masters of Education thesis. It could be used for future journal publications. If the results of the study are published, your name will not be used. If you would like to receive a copy of any potential study results, please contact Melody Viczko.

12. Consent

Participants will be asked to sign a Consent Form if they would like to participate in the study.

This letter is yours to keep for future reference.

Appendix B: Consent Form

Project Title: Exploring Teachers' Experiences of Parental Leaves in One School Board
in Ontario

Principal Investigator: Melody Viczko, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Education,
Western University; **Rachelle Martin**, Graduate Student, Faculty of Education, Western
University

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

Participant's Name (please print): _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Person Obtaining Informed Consent (please print): _____

Signature: _____

Date:

Appendix C: Ethics Approval Letter



Western
Research

Date: 29 June 2018

To: Dr. Melody Viczko

Project ID: 106885

Study Title: Exploring Teachers' Experiences of Parental Leaves in One School Board in Ontario

Application Type: Continuing Ethics Review (CER) Form

Review Type: Delegated

Meeting Date: 17/Jul/2018

Date Approval Issued: 29/Jun/2018

REB Approval Expiry Date: 22/Jul/2019

Dear Dr. Melody Viczko,

The Western University Research Ethics Board has reviewed the application. This study, including all currently approved documents, has been re-approved until the expiry date noted above.

REB members involved in the research project do not participate in the review, discussion or decision.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario. Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB. The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 0000941.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Daniel Wyzynski, Research Ethics Coordinator, on behalf of Prof. Randal Graham, NMREB Chair

Note: This correspondence includes an electronic signature (validation and approval via an online system that is compliant with all regulations).

Appendix D: Interview Questions

1. What is your name?
2. How many children do you have?
3. How many parental leaves did you take?
4. How did you first come into teaching? What experiences did you have earlier in life that led you into teaching?
5. How long have you been teaching?
6. What is your teaching assignment now? What subjects, and departments do you teach in?
7. On a day-to-day basis, what is your experience teaching like?
8. When you found out that you were going to be a parent, how did you tell the administration and the board office about it and how did they respond?
9. How did you apply for parental leave and what sort of protocols were in place?
10. What kinds of policies were you aware of in terms of our Collective Agreement, in terms of federal or provincial laws?
11. After returning from parental leave, what policies were in place to help you transition back to teaching?
12. How have you juggled the responsibilities of being a parent and a teacher?

13. What supports have you had to help you negotiate parental leave policies?
14. What challenges did you experience with parental leave policies?
15. How do you feel about how parental leaves were structured or put into place. at the board or at your school?
16. Are there differences between how parental leave policies are in text and how they are practiced?
17. Do you think there should be any changes to parental leave policies and if so what would they be?

Appendix E: Curriculum Vitae

Name: Rachelle L. Martin

Post-Secondary Education: Western University
& Degrees: London, Ontario, Canada
1992-1996 honours B.A.

Western University
London, Ontario, Canada
1997-1998 B.Ed.

Honours and Awards: WGRS Scholarship
2010

Related Work Experience: Secondary School Teacher & Guidance Counsellor
Thames Valley District School Board
1998-2019