IMPACTS OF THE 2011/2012 BRITISH COLUMBIA TEACHER JOB ACTION ON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL-BASED ADMINISTRATORS

by

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Abstract

British Columbia has experienced a pattern of teacher strikes in the last three decades. During the 2011/2012 school year, the province of British Columbia experienced teacher job action that lasted almost the entire year. The teachers engaged in varying degrees of service withdrawal. Approximately two-thirds of the year took the form of work-to-rule.

The purpose of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences of four Lower Mainland elementary school-based administrators during the 2011/2012 British Columbia teachers’ job action and in the following year. I sought to identify what, if any, challenges and opportunities the administrators faced and how their professional practices were affected.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with four elementary school-based administrators from the same Lower Mainland school district were interviewed. The interviews were transcribed and the data was analyzed using thematic content analysis.

This study found that the 2011/2012 teacher job action did affect the professional practice of the four participants in this study during the year of the job action but did not significantly affect them in the year afterwards. The participants found that the job action presented a number of positive opportunities and benefits, some of which carried on into the next school year. The participants experienced significant disruption to their workload, decreases in certain kinds of administrative work and increases in other tasks such as the amount of student supervision and coordinating extracurricular activities. They experienced challenges in their ability to communicate but developed creative ways to maintain communication with teaching staff. They were able to maintain positive relationships with their teaching staff and avoid potential conflicts. The ability of the participants to collaborate and meet normally with teaching staff was restricted. Their ability to engage in various school programs and initiatives was also affected in different ways. Several factors, such as the cooperation of teachers, the role of the vice principal, the administrators’ relationships with the union staff representative, and other circumstances influenced the degree to which the school functioned effectively. All of the participants found that the operation of the school and interactions with staff – and their abilities to manage and lead – returned to normal the year after the job action. A number of recommendations are offered in the conclusion of this paper.
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Introduction

My interest in this study was heavily influenced by my experiences as an elementary teacher and as a student teacher, particularly my teaching experiences during the 2011/2012 and student teaching experiences during the 2005/2006 school years. Both years were collective bargaining years between the British Columbia Teachers’ Federation (BCTF) and the provincial government that saw teachers engaged in various forms of job action. As an elementary educator who had been contemplating becoming a school-based administrator (SBA), I became curious as to how SBAs were affected by teacher job action and how their practices were informed by these experiences, particularly those of elementary school principals and vice-principals.

I focused on elementary school-based administrators (ESBAs) because of personal interest in pursuing elementary administration. This study would serve to inform me about how ESBAs approach the challenges of job action and strikes. The role of ESBAs – principals and vice-principals – can differ from their secondary counterparts due to the unique characteristics of an elementary school, such as the smaller student and staff populations. Additionally, at the elementary school level, vice-principals have the added role of teaching in their jobs. ESBAs are often required to work collaboratively with teaching staff in the delivery of various school programs and educational services.¹

Teacher job action that has so often accompanied collective bargaining years in British Columbia, since 2002, can present potential challenges to this partnership between SBAs and teachers as SBAs are agents of their school boards and potentially can become targets of teacher job action. As it will be discussed in a later section, job action can potentially impact the management and leadership practices of SBAs.

I witnessed these challenges first hand in 2005/2006 and 2011/2012. The school-based advisor (SA)² I had been paired with during my 2005/2006 elementary student-teacher practicum was also the vice-principal of the elementary school. He split his time as a classroom teacher and administrator and his role required him to work very closely with the other teaching staff in coordinating programs and delivering educational services. I was present during a number of these meetings between my SA and

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¹ I do not mean to say that secondary SBAs do not work on collaborative programs with their staffs. I merely argue that the role of ESBAs – especially vice-principals – requires regular direct involvement with many roles that would be filled by a larger high school staff (such as serving food to students during lunch) and that the demands of an elementary school are different from those of a secondary school.

² A SA is a classroom teacher with whom a student-teacher is paired and in whose classroom the student-teacher will often perform their practicum teaching duties. The SA will participate in assessment of the student-teacher and help inform his/her practice.
other teaching staff throughout the year. From my point of view he was just as much an educator as the teachers. There seemed to be no obvious divide or difference in his interactions with the teachers; he appeared to be a teacher with administrative duties added to his teaching load. My SA was well liked and had a great rapport with the teachers. However, during the weeks of the 2005 strike, an obvious divide was placed between the teachers and my SA. When my student-teacher colleagues and I visited the school staff on the picket lines, all my colleagues’ SAs were on the line except for mine. He was inside the school with the principal, on the “other side”. Though things appeared to be unaffected in the school after the strike ended, I often wondered what challenges my SA faced during the 2005 teacher strike and how they may have affected his managerial and leadership practices.

The teacher job action of 2011/2012, which will be discussed in detail in a later section, lasted nearly two-thirds of the school year. At this time I was in a full-time teaching position in a Lower Mainland school and observed a number of challenges the job action presented on the ability of SBAs to perform their roles effectively. During the 2011/2012 job action, my SBAs could not hold staff meetings, they were forced to hand out notices to students themselves, and they had to take on many other duties that teachers normally filled such as having to perform morning and afternoon supervision on the school grounds. As well, my SBAs were prevented from participating in many collaborative programs within the school or were forced to take on the work of various committees themselves (such as the school finance committee).

A number of occurrences that I observed during the 2011/2012 school year caused me to wonder about the specific challenges and impacts the job action presented my administrators. I remember a number of times during the year either my principal or vice-principal coming to my classroom with notices that needed to go home with students. My administrators would explain that they could handout the notices to the students themselves or leave them by the door for students to take at the end of the day. As my school had nineteen classrooms, I could see that this extra task was taking a significant amount of my administrators’ time and may have been awkward for them as they had to interrupt classes near the end of the day.

I also noticed that I had significantly fewer interactions with my administrators during the job action compared to a normal school year. Not only did we not have regular staff meetings, casual exchanges of pleasantries appeared to be less frequent. Due to the job action, teachers appeared to minimize their interactions with administrators. At the same time, I wondered whether administrators were reducing their interactions with staff.
My observations during the 2011/2012 school year also made me ponder whether the challenges presented by the job action continued to affect the practices of SBAs into the school year following the end of the job action.

Background: The 2011/2012 BC Teacher Job Action and Effects on School-based Administrators

This section summarizes the events leading up to the 2011/2012 British Columbia job action, the details of the job action, and some of the reported effects the job action had on the school-based administrators.

In 2002, the BC Liberal government made changes to the Labour Relations Code that classified public education as an essential service therefore limiting the strike action that teachers could engage in during collective bargaining. Under the changes, the BCTF would have to apply to the BC Labour Relations Board (LRB) to engage in job action. The LRB would then determine what job action was permissible under the essential service legislation.

On June 30, 2004, the existing collective agreement between the BCTF and the employers’ association, the British Columbia Public Sector Employers’ Association (BCPSEA), expired and collective bargaining ensued. In September of 2005, The BCTF engaged in limited job action by withdrawing services the Labour Relations Board declared non-essential (such as extra-curricular supervision) in order to put pressure on the collective bargaining process. When the provincial government legislated an extension of the previous collective agreement, the BCTF reacted by conducting an illegal walkout that lasted from October 7 to 24, 2005. The BC Supreme Court imposed a $500,000.00 fine on the BCTF for contempt of court.

Despite the illegality of the strike and the court-imposed fines, the teachers enjoyed widespread public support (Gunster, 2008). The government appointed mediator Vince Ready to bring a resolution to the dispute. Ready issued a recommended settlement that was accepted by both parties October 23, thus ending the strike the next day. In June of 2006, a collective agreement was reached between the two parties.

The collective agreement struck in 2006 expired on June 30, 2011. BCPSEA and the BCTF began collective bargaining in March 2011. Citing a lack of progress at the bargaining table, the BCTF held a strike vote between June 24 and 28, 2011 (BCTF, 2011). It was announced on June 29 that ninety

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3 Unless cited, information in this section is summarized from the BCPSEA Chronology – Key events in collective bargaining between BCPSEA and BCTF (2011).
percent of voting members had voted in favour of strike action (BCTF, 2011). A strike notice was given to BCPSEA on August 31, 2011 and teachers commenced Phase 1 of job action on the first day of school, September 6.

The job action occurred in phases. The struck work of Phase 1 job action – which will be described in detail in the following section - was approved by the LRB in August 2011 (BCPSEA v BCTF, 2011). Phase 1 lasted until March of 2012 when the BC government introduced back-to-work legislation to end any form of job action (Education improvement act, 2012). The legislation instituted a “cooling off period” during which teachers were prohibited from engaging in any form of job action. It also implemented fines not only on the BCTF, but on individual teachers if they engaged in any form of job action. In response to the announcement of the legislation, but before it passed in the legislature, the teachers staged a full three-day legal strike from March 5 until 7 (CBC, 2012). As the new legislation prohibited teachers from engaging in any form of job action, the BCTF members voted to withdraw extracurricular activities such as coaching when they returned to schools after spring break in April 2012 (BCTF, 2012). The withdrawal of extracurricular activities would last until a temporary mediated agreement was struck and approved by the parties on June 29, 2012, after a year without a contract (BCTF, 2012).

**Phase 1 of the 2011/2012 Job Action.** Under Phase 1 of the BCTF job action, teachers still attended work and performed their teaching duties. They withdrew from tasks that were declared non-essential services by the LRB. These included:

- participating in meetings with parents or guardians or participating in “meet the teacher” activities outside of instructional time
- preparing report cards
- submitting assessment data to administration or school offices though teachers were expected to provide grade 12 students marks that were required for graduation, post-secondary applications and scholarship
- attending staff meetings or other meetings called by administrator/management with the exception of the organizational meetings at the beginning of the school year
- attending school-based team meetings held by principals unless the meeting related to emergencies
- participating on school committees

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4 Of the eligible BCTF members, seventy percent participated in the strike vote.
accepting any written, printed or electronic communication from administrators (other than emergency communications)

- participating or organizing school assemblies outside of instructional time or without classroom coverage
- participating in professional development that was not teacher directed
- administering or marking the BC Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA) tests\(^5\)
- participating in a variety of clerical or organizational tasks such as: collecting money for field trips or fundraising, ordering school supplies, conducting inventory
- distributing school communications to the home, such as notices and newsletters, unless related to student health or emergencies
- providing coverage for an absent teacher (BCPSEA v BCTF 2011)

Most of the descriptions of struck duties were clear and specific; others were less detailed and lent themselves to interpretation. Some of the confusion about how to implement the policy resulted in inconsistency amongst schools. For example, extracurricular volunteer activities, such as coaching, were not explicitly included amongst the struck work in the Phase 1 job action and teachers were only barred from participating in assemblies if the organization of them required extracurricular planning. In my school district, the Phase 1 policy was interpreted differently by staffs at each school. This resulted in differing applications of Phase 1 at each school; some teaching staffs continued to coach sports teams and hold assemblies without administrators while others refrained from all extracurricular activities and school assemblies.

Another confused area of Phase 1 was whether or not teachers would include principals in school-based team (SBT) meetings. Initially SBAs were excluded by teachers from SBT, but SBTs were an important educational service for students that often required the participation of SBAs. Because of the confusion about whether or not SBT meetings fell under the Phase 1 job action, BCPSEA asked the LRB to clarify how the job action affected SBA activities related to SBTs. A ruling in October 2011 clarified that the SBTs were “multi-disciplinary meetings to address issues and challenges posed with special needs and other complex students” (BCPSEA v BCTF, 2011) and that SBAs did indeed have the privilege to attend SBTs at their discretion. The ruling also stated that teachers in SBTs had to communicate with SBAs via traditional means in regards to SBTs, such as providing SBAs with SBT agendas and minutes.

\(^5\) The FSAs are BC government mandated tests in reading, writing and arithmetic that are annually administered during the months of January and February to Grades 4 and 7 students.
ruling stated that SBAs could, at their discretion, attend any portion of a SBT meeting at which one or more of the following matters would be discussed: a) custody; b) confidential and/or sensitive matters such as those relating to Family and Children’s Services issues; c) police; and d) legitimate safety issues.

**Effects on the Role of SBAs.** The BCTF claimed that the purpose of the job action was “to increase pressure on the employer while minimizing the impact on students” (BCTF, 2011). It was reported in various media that the job action increased the managerial workload of SBAs; inhibited the ability of SBAs to communicate, collaborate and build relationships with staff; and may have put SBAs under a higher level of stress than during non-strike years.

During the teacher job action, SBA administrators had to perform a number of duties that normally were performed by teachers. In accordance with the Phase 1 job action (BCPSEA v BCTF, 2011), teachers’ struck duties included extracurricular supervision, administering and marking the FSAs, and collecting money for field trips. Other tasks that traditionally were done collaboratively with SBAs such as inventories and supply orders were struck. It was reported that SBAs often attempted to complete the struck duties themselves (McGerrigle, 2012; Mortimer, 2011).

Due to both the added workload and restrictions of the job action, SBAs were unable to participate in collaborative initiatives and educational services with staff. Tim Davie, president of the Nanaimo School Administrators' Association commented, “certain district-level leadership initiatives that principals would spend some of their time on, which also require teacher collaboration, [were] on hold” (McGerrigle, 2012). In a lecture at the University of British Columbia (UBC), a Lower Mainland vice-principal commented that because of the inability to meet with staff as a whole or communicate through traditional means during the job action, he found it more difficult to forge trusting relationships with teaching staff (Ratzlaff, 2012). Even after the LRB ruling permitting their participation, SBAs still had their leadership role in SBTs restricted as there were certain conditions under which they could attend and participate in school meetings.

It was reported that the challenges of the job action may have also had an impact on the stress and health of administrators (Abshire, 2012). According to the then president of the British Columbia Principal & Vice-Principal Association (BCPVP), Jameel Aziz, “administrators [were] working an hour and a half more every day and overtime can affect health”. He also stated that SBAs were facing both increased physical ailments and mental strain resulting in more absenteeism and leaves (Abshire, 2012).
These media reports suggested that the job action did have a direct effect on the ability of SBAs to perform their job. However, it was unclear whether the effects of the job action continued to affect the practice of SBAs into the following school year.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to examine in what ways, if any, challenges ESBAs experienced as a result of a teachers’ strike affected their practices during and after the job action in 2011-12. In this study, four ESBAs from a particular Lower Mainland school district were interviewed to investigate 1) what challenges the 2011/2012 job action presented ESBAs; 2) what effects these challenges may have had on the leadership practices of ESBAS during and after the job action; and 3) how ESBAs perceived their experiences as presenting challenges and/or opportunities. This study inquired into the effects on ESBA workloads, their communications with and working relationships with staff, and their abilities to participate in educational services and school initiatives.

The central question posed in this study was: “What, if any, challenges did four ESBAs in a Lower Mainland school district face, and how was their professional practice affected, by the 2011/2012 teacher job action both during the job action and in the year afterwards?” The subquestions guiding my study were:

1. How was the workload of the four ESBAs affected by the job action?
2. How were their communications with, and relationships with, school staff affected?
3. How were the abilities of the four ESBAs to participate in various school programs and initiatives affected?
4. In the case of the ESBAs who had teaching roles, how were their roles as teachers affected?
5. What, if any, other aspects of the ESBAs’ roles were affected and in what ways?
6. Did ESBAs perceive any opportunities arising from their experiences during the job action?

As discussed in the previous section, according to reports, the 2011/2012 British Columbia teachers’ province-wide work-to-rule campaign presented challenges and had effects on the management and leadership practices of school administrators during the time of the job action. Administrators saw their managerial workload increased, restrictions placed on their ability to fulfill their leadership role, working relationships strained, and many collaborative school initiatives and programs were put on hold. However, these reports were generally from media sources. This study can
serve as primary documentation of the challenges SBAs faced during the job action, told through their own experiences and voices.

Much of the literature on educational leadership stresses that SBAs must be able to balance their managerial and leadership roles and work collaboratively with staff. To be a successful leader, a SBA must be able to lead in collaboration with teachers in developing and delivering educational services and running school programs. Research indicates “leadership is second to classroom instruction among all school related factors that contribute to what students learn at school” (Leithwood et al, 2008). SBAs play an important role in their schools but there is relatively little literature documenting the effects teacher strikes and job actions have on the role of SBAs.

We do know that job action is designed to put pressure on management; however, we do not know whether the effects of the job action on SBAs lingers after the job action has ended. In addition to addressing my own curiosity, this study could be used to inform new SBAs of the effects job action may have on their practice, not only during the job action but in the time following. It is important to understand whether these effects are perceived as challenges, opportunities, or both so that administrators can better prepare themselves to address teacher job action. It is also important to understand how challenges related to teacher job action influence the learning of SBAs, and the development of their administrative and leadership practice. Finally, we need to better understand how administrative and leadership challenges affect the teaching practices of those SBAs whose job responsibilities include both teaching and administration/leadership.
Literature Review

The province of British Columbia has undergone a number of teacher strikes during its history of collective bargaining. School-based administrators in British Columbia are not part of the teachers’ union and are legally framed as agents of their school boards. According to Wallace (2001, p. 1) “the separation of bargaining units for administrators and teachers has exacerbated work divisions and made it more difficult for administrators to provide instructional leadership.” During job action, SBAs must continue balancing their managerial and educational leadership roles alongside their striking colleagues. Most vice principals in BC, with the exception of some who work in large schools, have dual roles; while they are classified as administrators, the majority of their workload is teaching.

School administrators can play a significant role in the success of their schools. Their role is second only to classroom teachers in influencing student learning (Leithwood, 2008). The influence of SBAs is most effective when they work collaboratively with their staffs. However, job action, such as work-to-rule and strikes, significantly affect teacher-administrator collaboration. Literature documenting the effects of school strikes on the work of school administrators is limited. As discussed in the introduction, it was reported in the media that principals in BC were being affected by the teacher job action of 2011/1012 but no studies have been undertaken to formally document the experiences of SBAs in British Columbia during the 2011/2012 job action.

This chapter is organized into three sections. The first section discusses literature that suggests that SBAs are most effective when they adopt a model of distributive leadership that is collaborative and team oriented. The second section discusses some of the literature that identifies some impacts collective bargaining and strikes have had on the role of SBAs that may inhibit SBAs from being effective leaders. The last section discusses the British Columbian context and suggests ways that the recent history of collective bargaining and strikes may impact SBAs’ role.

School-based Administrator as a Distributive Leader

The role of the SBA is a complex one that requires principals and vice-principals to balance a variety of managerial and educational leadership tasks. Hallinger (2005), citing Cuban (1988), identifies political, managerial, and instructional roles as fundamental to the principalship and says “principal effectiveness is attained by finding the correct balance among these roles for a given school context” (p. 2). However, in the current organization of school environments, SBAs cannot manage and lead with a traditional top-down approach (Hallinger, 2005). Rather, leadership is more effective when it is done
collaboratively and distributed widely amongst school staff (Leithwood et al., 2008). SBAs must exercise a model of distributive leadership in order to effectively perform their managerial and leadership roles.

**Distributive leadership is collaborative and team oriented.** Hallinger (2005) suggests that in order for SBAs to fulfil their role as instructional leaders, they have to reconceptualise their strategies from a top-down approach to a collaborative one. “Leadership must be conceptualized as a mutual influence process, rather than as a one-way process in which leaders influence others. Effective leaders respond to the changing needs of their context” (p. 15). Successful SBAs must attempt to create a shared sense of purpose in their schools. They must participate with staff in cyclical school development planning as well as aid in organizing and monitoring a range of activities aimed at the continuous development of their staff (Hallinger, 2005). Timperely (2005) states that the idea of “leadership as distributed across multiple people and situations has proven to be a more useful framework for understanding the realities of schools and how they might be improved” (p. 395). Timperely (2005) recommends thinking of leadership in terms of activities and interactions that are distributed amongst a school staff and in various situations. She suggests that distributive leadership must utilize activities to assist teachers to provide more effective instructions; its focus is “on how school leaders promote and sustain conditions for successful schooling in interaction with others, rather than on what structures and programmes are necessary for success” (p. 396).

A study conducted by Hallinger and Heck (2010) did find that leadership that was team-oriented or collaborative, and that was school-wide and exercised by both administration and staff had a significant positive impact on the success of schools. A review of a large range of educational leadership literature conducted by Leithwood et al., (2008) suggested that school leadership has a greater influence on school students when it is widely distributed within a school. Additionally, school leaders made improvements to teaching and learning indirectly and most powerfully through their influence on staff motivation, commitment and working conditions.

**Sites within schools where distributive leadership can occur.** Wasonga and Murphy (2010) conducted a study to identify the mechanisms where distributive leadership occurs in schools, or places where staffs collectively create “leadership moments”. Wasonga and Murphy (2010) identified a number of mechanisms within schools that provide sites for distributive leadership. Some of these included the presence of school leadership teams, partnerships between school staff and the school community, positive union relations and strong organisational efficacy (staffs having a strong sense of
collectivism and a belief that the group could have a positive impact on students and school practices). Wasonga and Murphy (2010) found that the leadership capacity within schools increased because of collaboration, because of continuous conversations and activities within and outside of these mechanisms.

The prescriptions of the 2011/2012 BC teacher job action instructed teachers to not attend staff meetings, participate in administration directed professional development sessions, accept electronic or written communications with SBAs and to not participate on school committees. If SBAs are most effective by exercising a form of distributive leadership which includes ongoing collaboration, staff and committee meetings and communication with staff, it would be reasonable to assume that actions that affected or prohibited an SBA’s ability to interact with staff would inhibit her/his ability to properly fulfil their management and leadership roles. Therefore, it is important to understand how teacher job action may impact SBAs. However, as I discovered, there exists relatively little literature about the effects of strikes on SBAs.

Impacts of Collective Bargaining and Job action on School-base Administrators

When I began my search of literature on the effects of strikes on SBAs, I emailed a contact at the BC Principals and Vice-Principals Association (BCPVPA) to inquire whether the association could connect me with any relevant material. He responded that “there is little information related to the impacts of job actions upon principals and vice-principals or systemically for that matter. There will be even less info on the aftermath scenarios” (Krische, 2012). As I browsed databases for relevant material, I soon discovered he was correct. I found it difficult to locate relevant literature on the subject of strikes or teacher job action and their effects on SBAs. Much of the material I did find was more than twenty years old. However, the material did allow me to make some generalizations as to some of the challenges SBAs may face during teacher job action. The literature suggests that collective bargaining has played a role in changing the role of SBAs and that this role is strained during times of teacher job action. In particular, the literature suggests that teacher job actions may pose challenges for SBAs in maintaining relationships and communication with teaching staff and in proceeding with school goals. These impacts could potentially inhibit SBAs from performing a distributive leadership role.

Mitchell, Kerchner, Erck, and Pryor (1981) conducted an in-depth study of the effects the emergence of collective bargaining had on school management in the United States. Mitchell et al., (1981) discovered that collective bargaining has had a significant effect on the operation of schools and the role of management. Specifically, collective bargaining has created more formalized environments
and relationships within schools where the roles and responsibilities of teachers and administrators have become more defined and processes (such as teacher evaluations and grievance procedures) have become more streamlined by providing more prescriptions and standardizing procedures in collective agreements. They describe collective bargaining as making positive contributions in the form of contract settlements but also having potentially disruptive impacts during the times of dispute and negotiation.

Mitchell et al (1981) stated that collective bargaining has resulted in a “modification in the authority available to school principals and other middle managers” (p. 155) and has affected the working relationship between SBAs and teachers. SBAs became more consistent in their administrative behaviour but less attuned to the feelings of staff. Mitchell et al (1981) did state that SBAs did not necessarily lose their authority or power but that processes and procedures prevented them from adopting a “free-wheeling personality-based style”.

Mitchell et al (1981) also suggest some ways SBAs can be affected during contract negotiations and strikes particularly in their relationships with teachers and their ability to pursue school and district goals. During periods of negotiations or when relations between school districts and teachers is poor, collective bargaining can create a climate that encourages “minimal work effort on the part of teachers” (p. 155). Mitchell et al suggest that this is used as a means to bring pressure on management during these periods. Additionally, it is suggested that there could be increased tensions between SBAs and teachers. They comment that teachers may refuse to cooperate with management goals and SBAs may feel that they cannot afford to provide teachers with support during times of contract disputes (p. 159).

Mitchel et al (1981) found that principals believed that the loyalty and cooperation from teachers was essential in creating good school programs but that “the existence of teacher organizations -especially during contract negotiations - helps to further undermine this loyalty and to make it harder for even the best principals to ‘count on’ the cooperation of teachers in pursuing district program goals” (p. 164). Though strikes generally are over in a period of days, Mitchel et al (1981) describe a period of discontent that can surround a strike and can last much longer, for months in some cases. They observed that communications between SBA and staff is disrupted and program planning typically stops during these periods (p. 159).

Teacher strikes can be stressful to administrators and have the potential to affect the relationships between SBAs and teachers. Roff et al (1981) conducted a national survey of American SBAs and found that four of the five highest ranked administrative tasks, interactions with employees or events associated with administration by principals were concerned with conflicts with teachers; two of these events were preparing for a strike and refusal of teachers to follow policies (p. 1). Cooper (1982),
in a dissertation which studied the 1979 strike in Arizona, found that principals reported feeling the most stress during the strike rather than in the time leading up to it or in the period afterwards. Cooper (1981) also found that before the strike, their relationships with teachers was a major concern for principals. Despite most principals feeling that their effectiveness as an administrator was not reduced, the participants did feel that during these periods the strike did not help to improve relationships and that it was costly in terms of relationships for many.

Zigarmi & Sinclair (1979) also concluded that strikes could potentially damage relationships within schools if negative changes in behaviour are made during a strike. In their study of teacher-perceived school climate in a middle school in the aftermath of a strike in an Ohio school district, Zigarmi & Sinclair (1979) found that the principal’s behavior after the strike affected the relationship with the teachers. They concluded, “if interpersonal communication among peers, between the principal and teachers and the central office, and teachers and the school board declines, misunderstanding and conflict will tend to increase” (p. 276).

Strikes can present challenges to SBAs in regards to their relationships with staff and their ability to manage and lead; however they can play a role in minimizing the impact of strikes on their ability to perform their roles (Heller, 1978; Hahn, 1981; Eustice & Cone, 1990). Hahn stresses the point that SBAs must maintain a neutral position during a teacher strike. He suggests that during a strike SBAs are challenged by having to walk “four tightropes” controlled by parents, students, teachers and their school boards (p. 58, 1981). He comments that SBAs must adequately plan for the challenges they may face during a strike and take efforts to maintain positive relationships with teachers which can become strained during a strike. Hahn also comments that SBAs may face additional tasks during a strike such as having to take on coaching athletic teams (p. 59, 1981). However, Hahn suggests, “the hardest task is not managing the building during the strike but putting the school back together afterward” (p. 58). He states that SBAs may face some problems in the periods after a strike has settled and may experience both mental and physical exhaustion in the days or weeks afterwards. Additionally, he suggests that SBAs may face the task of repairing interpersonal and communication wounds between staff members after a strike (p. 61).

Both Eustice & Cone (1990) and Heller (1978) also suggest that SBAs may face challenges in the wake of a strike. Eustice & Cone comment: “the crucial job of returning to ‘business as usual’ is not an easy task to be faced by administration. This exceptionally difficult task most often falls to the building principal” (p. 29). They state that SBAs are often the first administrator teachers will meet after a strike and that creating positive initial interaction is important (p. 28). In their study of an Ohio school district
after a two week strike, Eustice & Cone (1990) found that there were lingering tensions amongst staffs when their schools reopened. They recommend that SBAs must conduct themselves professionally and humanely when they must carry out board directives and need to make themselves fully familiarized with the collective agreement after a strike. Additionally, they recommend that establishing and maintaining honest and open communication with teachers and community leaders will contribute to returning to positive relationships and normal school operations.

Heller (1978) suggests that a SBA becomes a key factor during a strike and that successfully dealing with the challenges presented by a strike depends much on the abilities and behavior of the SBA (p. 101). Heller also stresses the importance of pre-planning for a strike (p. 100) in order to minimize the challenges of a strike. He states that during a strike that SBAs’ ability to communicate will be affected and they may experience conflict between themselves and staff members and conflict amongst staff members. SBAs can face challenges in maintaining and supervising educational programs and need to enlist the support of other school staff and those teachers who are “on-board” (p. 103). Like Eustice & Cone (1990), Heller suggests that the period after a strike can be “the most difficult in terms of relationships between the organization’s members” (p. 103). Heller comments that SBAs are key to bringing their staffs back together and in providing strong and creative leadership. Heller also stresses the importance of principals having a full understanding of the new collective agreement, following it carefully, and dealing will all issues in an ‘above-board fashion’ (p. 104). Like Eustice & Cone (1990), Heller suggests that SBAs need to maintain and perhaps even change their communication system when teachers return to school and ensure that they are available to staff (p. 103, 1979).

Though the literature about the impact teacher of strikes on SBAs is limited and dated, it does suggest ways in which SBAs may be affected. The literature suggests that SBAs may have difficulties communicating with staff and experience strain on their working relationships. Additionally, SBAs may find their ability to manage and lead school operations inhibited. It is suggested that their ability to proceed with school or district goals can be inhibited. The literature also suggests the SBAs can reduce the impact of a strike on school operations and relationships through creating plans before a strike begins that anticipate these challenges and by conducting themselves in a collaborative and open way in the time afterwards.

The studies discussed above draw from experiences of SBAs in the United States. It should be noted that there are some significant differences in the nature of teacher strikes in the United States and BC. One differences is that, in some cases, students in some American districts may still attend school during times of teacher walkouts. In some American districts it is not unusual for teachers to
cross picket lines while in BC this is rare and is usually only individual teachers in a school district. In BC, teachers are expected to abide by the BCTF prescriptions; those that choose to cross picket lines may face sanctions or fines from the union if they do so and risk alienating their fellow teachers. I should note that in the last three decades, the nature of teacher strikes has changed in all jurisdictions and differs from one jurisdiction to another. It is important that the recent history of BC and the context of SBAs within the province is discussed.

**Principals and Vice-principals in British Columbia**

Like their American counterparts, SBAs in British Columbia must perform both managerial and educational leadership roles, and most vice principals also perform teaching roles. SBAs in BC have also been affected by the history of collective bargaining between the teachers and the employers. The province of British Columbia (BC) has seen a series of strikes during the rounds of collective bargaining over the last thirty years, since teachers won the right to full collective bargaining in 1987/88. It is important to identify where SBAs are positioned in this context and how they have been affected by collective bargaining and teacher job action.

Slinn (2011, pp. 31-32) states that collective bargaining between the BCTF and BC government from 1987 until present has not produced constructive or successful outcomes or negotiations. Slinn describes the last three decades of collective bargaining as “difficult and conflict-ridden, marred by legal and illegal work stoppages, litigation, imposed collective agreements, and other legislative and government intervention in bargaining” (p. 31). In fact, from 1994 until 2006, there has only been one voluntarily negotiated settlement in five rounds of collective bargaining (p 32).

Previous to 1987, BC administrators were part of the BCTF bargaining unit. They participated in collective bargaining alongside their teaching colleagues and could serve as buffers between the employers and teachers. In 1987, the SBAs left the BCTF after they were removed from the bargaining unit by provincial legislation (BCTF, 2001). Before the legislation the SBAs had been in a conflict with the teachers over representation in the federation; the administrators believed that their interests were not being well-served by a teacher dominated organization and the federation did not want to confer special status on administrators (Wallace, 2001, p. 4). Additionally, administrators also found that there were conflicting demands in their role described in the *Education Act* and in the policies of the BCTF (p. 4).

In addition to removing the administrators from the bargaining unit, Wallace (2001) states that the legislation of 1987 differentiated the role of principals and vice-principals from teachers and
cemented it as one of an “administrative officer” (p. 5). Removal from the bargaining unit made membership in the BCTF “pointless” (BCTF, 2001) and the BCTF subsequently ejected administrators from membership in the teachers union. This led to a legal suit filed by school administrators in which they won a sizable settlement from the BCTF.

Wallace (2001) suggests that this division has created difficulties for SBAs in fully carrying out their leadership role. Administrators in Wallace’s study (which interviewed administrators from both BC and Ontario), described their work as “intimately connected with teaching” but that their managerial role separated them from teachers in both “explicit and implicit ways” (p. 6). Wallace’s study found that administrators were pushing away from instructional leadership towards management and were experiencing role anxiety (p. 6).

BC participants in Wallace (2001, p. 11) identified working with teacher unions as an outsider to the union as a problematic issue. Wallace states that when teacher organizations come into conflict with government, the conflict can result in increased formalized relations at the school level. Administrators claim that that removal from the teachers’ federation exacerbated this formalization of relationships (p. 11).

Administrators did report that the formalization of relations at school had both potential drawbacks and benefits. More prescriptive conditions have increased administrators’ concern of grievances and affected their capacity to carry out job tasks such as staff meetings, leading staff professional development, and conducting teacher evaluations (Wallace, 2001, p. 10-11). However, administrators also saw opportunities to provide leadership and collaborate within a formalized environment in arenas such as various staff committees and through mandated school goal setting days (p. 11-12).

Collective bargaining appears to have had effects on SBAs in BC similar to those experienced by their American counterparts in the last three decades. Since being separated from the BCTF, SBAs have seen increased formalization in their role and in their relationships with teachers. Additionally, it has confirmed their management role as an administrative officer. Wallace (2001) suggests, similar to what is suggested in Mitchell et al (1981), that during times of conflict, that SBAs can possibly see an increase in formalization. However, more research needs to be undertaken to understand how SBAs in BC are affected by strikes.

The role of SBAs requires a balancing of managerial and educational leadership. Administrators who can cultivate positive relationships and collaborate with their staffs are more effective at exercising various forms of educational leadership. While collective bargaining has contributed to a formalization
of the role of administrators, it is hard to determine what impacts strikes may have on SBAs. It is suggested in the American literature that SBAs may see strains in their communications and relationships with teachers and resistance to pursuing school and district goals. Therefore, SBAs may see their ability to perform their managerial and leadership roles inhibited. BC has experienced frequent job action by the BCTF during rounds of collective bargaining since 2000. It is unclear in what ways, if any, strikes affect the role of administrators particularly their capacity to balance their managerial and educational leadership roles.

The 2011/2012 teacher job action was unique as it mostly took the form of work-to-rule and lasted approximately two-thirds of the school year during which SBAs and teachers continued to work alongside each other. As job action will most likely occur again in future collective bargaining rounds, it is important that we study how such job action can affect administrators’ work.
Methodology

This study took the form of multiple semi-structured one-on-one interviews in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences of four ESBAs during and after the 2011/2012 job action. I engaged in one-on-one personal interviews with four ESBAs from the same Lower Mainland school district. Subjects were asked a series of prearranged questions and were asked follow-up or probing questions when answers required expansion or clarification. Interview data was transcribed and analyzed using thematic content analysis.

As I wished to understand the experiences of four ESBAs within a single school district, I determined that an interview study was an appropriate approach to my research question. Having interviews as the sole data collection method was appropriate in the study as the purpose was to “uncover and describe the participants’ perspectives on the events” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 146). Semi-structured interviews, or the interview guide or topical approach, are the most typically used type of interview in qualitative studies (p. 144). As the time to complete this study was limited, interviews were deemed appropriate as interview studies can yield a quantity of data quickly (p. 145).

One-on-one interviews were selected for data collection as depth of meaning was central to this study and my research aims required insight and a depth of understanding (Gillham, 2000, p. 11). The accessibility and small number of required participants also facilitated the use of one-on-one interviews. One-on-one interviews were also necessary as the questions I posed were open and required extended responses with prompts and probes (Gillham, 2000, p. 11). Marshall and Rossman (2011, p. 145) argue that the richness of an interview is heavily dependent on the follow-up questions or “probes”. One-on-one interviews would allow me to engage each participant more directly and pose more follow-up questions.

Participants

The four participants in this study were all ESBAs in the Lower Mainland school district in which I am employed as an elementary school teacher. I chose this district because of its accessibility and my familiarity with it. I thought it would also help in the building of rapport with participants and aid in understanding the perspectives of the participants. The school district is a large urban, multicultural district. It is also diverse in terms of the socioeconomic status of its population; communities range from very affluent to impoverished inner-city neighbourhoods. There are approximately one hundred elementary schools and school annexes in the district.
Selection of participants began with emailing a letter to all ESBAs in the school district detailing information about the study and inviting participants. Only six ESBAs responded to the invitation to participate in this study; five were female and one was male. Of the ESBAs who responded, four participants were selected using purposeful sampling. Specifically, maximum variation and criterion based sampling procedures were used. Maximum variation is a popular approach used in qualitative studies (Creswell, 2007, p. 126) and “documents diverse variations and identifies important common patterns” (p. 127).

Each participant had to meet specific criteria; each ESBA had to have been assigned at the same school during both the 2011/2012 school year and in the following year. Efforts were made to select both school principals and vice-principals with varying amounts of administrative experience. Additionally, efforts were made to select participants from schools of varying size, demographics and locations within the district. Both genders were represented and efforts were made to have participants represent different cultural and ethnic backgrounds; however, due to a low number of respondents, all selected participants were white Canadians. Only four participants were selected because of time restrictions in completing this study. One of the volunteers was not selected because she did not fully meet the criteria of the study. The other volunteer was not selected because her school was in a similar neighbourhood as another volunteer. In this case, the selected participant worked in a French immersion school and this gave the study more variation since the other three participants worked in English schools.

The Interview Questions

The interviews took the form of a semi-standardized interview, which involved a number of predetermined questions and special topics (Appendix A). These questions were asked of each interviewee in a systematic and consistent order (Berg, 2007, p. 95). However, the format allowed me freedom to digress and to ask probing questions.

The set of questions looked to inquire about how the job action affected both the administrative, leadership, and teaching (where applicable) roles of the participants. A number of essential questions were posed. Initially, the participants were asked to give their overall assessment of the effects of the job action and whether or not they believed their roles were still affected by the job action. The other questions specifically inquired into a) the administrative workload, b) relationships and communications with staff, c) the relationship and communication with the teachers’ union staff-rep, and d) participation in school initiatives, programs and educational services. Participants who had
teaching duties were also asked about the effects the job action may have had on their teaching role. In regards to educational services, I asked the participants to specifically comment on how their role in SBT was affected as I thought this is a very important educational service that is common to all schools in this district.

Data analysis

I conducted one-on-one interviews with each of the participants. Audio recordings were made of each of the interviews and were supplemented with notes taken during the conversations. Transcripts were then made of each interview.

Interview data were analyzed using content analysis. Berg (2007, p. 134) states that content analysis is the “obvious way to analyze interview data.” Gillham (2000) also suggests the use of content analysis for analyzing interview data. I followed Gillham’s method of content analysis in this study (p. 59-79). He describes content analysis as organizing the substantive content of interviews through the identification of key substantive points and then placing them into categories (p. 59), called thematic categorization.

Interview transcripts were read through a number of times and substantive statements were identified within each of the themes identified in the interview guide and in the research questions. In the next step, I derived a set of categories and constructed a list of these categories in two analysis grids constructed using spreadsheets. The substantive statements were then matched to categories and marked in one of the grids. The statements were then copied-and-pasted onto the other spreadsheet under the assigned category. Once this step was completed, data could be compared and I was able to establish patterns.

The large thematic categories identified were 1) administrator workload, 2) communication and relationships with teaching staff 3) relationships with other school staff and administrators, 4) school-based teams, 4) various school programs and initiatives, and 5) experiences in the year after the job action. Substantive statements were organized into smaller sub-categories under each of these main categories.

Ethical Considerations

A number of ethical concerns needed to be taken into consideration during this study. Confidentiality of participants was paramount as they may have revealed personal information about themselves, their staff and possibly student cases. This information was confidential and potentially
damaging, disclosure of which may have had professional consequences to the participants or those people discussed in interviews. The names of the school district, schools, participants, staff members or students were either replaced with pseudonyms or not referred to in the study.

All recorded, transcribed and analyzed data was stored on a USB flash drive and backed-up on an external hard drive. Both the electronic data and any written notes were stored at the University of British Columbia in a locked cabinet when not in use.

**Trustworthiness**

Shenton (2004) provides methods for achieving trustworthiness using the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability as measures. A number of methods presented by Shenton were used in this study.

Credibility was achieved in several ways. Though interviewing was the only method of data collection in this study, triangulation can also involve the use of a range of informants (Shenton, 2004, p. 66). In this study, efforts were made to select a diverse range of participants. The adoption of well-established research methods was also one way of achieving credibility (p. 64). This study employed semi-standard interviews as the means of data collection, which are the most commonly used form of interviews in qualitative studies (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 144), and content analysis was used to analyze the data. Thirdly, developing an early familiarity with the culture of the participating organization was another means of achieving credibility (Shenton, 2004, p. 65). As the study was conducted in the district in which I work, I had already established a familiarity with the culture within the district. Additionally, member checks, which could be considered the most important provision for achieving credibility (p. 68), were employed during the course of the study. Participants were given the opportunity to review interview transcripts and provide input during the analysis stage if they so wished.

Transferability was not a major consideration. The focus of this study was to gain a rich understanding of the experiences of four ESBAs in their individual settings. However, as one of the goals of this study was to inform me as to the experiences an ESBA may face during teacher job action, some efforts were made to generalize the findings by selecting participants with different backgrounds and from a variety of different settings within the district. Additionally, a detailed description of the teacher job action was provided in the introduction; a detailed description of the phenomenon in question allows for comparisons to be made in other cases (Shenton, 2004, p. 70).

Dependability and confirmability were maximized by including a detailed description of both the data collection and analysis methodology. Additionally, admissions of a researchers beliefs and
assumptions is also one way of maintaining trustworthiness (Shenton, 2004, p. 73). I have included discussion about my positionality and steps I have taken to maintain a reflexive stance throughout the study. Shenton (2004) includes the admission of shortcomings in methodology as another way of achieving confirmability (p.73). Only one method of data collection, interviews, were used in this study and the study was conducted amongst only four participants allowing for only a limited number of perspectives on the issue.

**Positionality and Reflexivity**

Reflexivity, or thoughtful, conscious self-awareness, is one tool for evaluating how intersubjective elements influence data collection and analysis and helps to increase the trustworthiness of research (Findlay, 2002). Reflexivity involves researchers engaging in an explicit, self-aware meta-analysis of the research process in the attempt to be aware of their role in the construction of knowledge. Findlay (2002) states that reflexive analysis occurs throughout the research process: during the pre-research stage and during both data collection and analysis.

Findlay (2002, p. 536) states that a researcher should reflect on their own relationship to the topic of study. Shenton (2004, p. 73) offers the admission of a researchers beliefs and assumptions as one way of maintaining trustworthiness. My position and experiences as an elementary school teacher in the Lower Mainland have contributed to strong opinions and assumptions about the teacher job action of 2011/2012 that risk influencing this study. Previous to this study, I developed a negative opinion towards the job action. Additionally, I also developed the assumption that the challenges faced by ESBAs during the job action had negative effects on their practice.

I became critical of the teacher job action during my own experiences during the 2011/2012 school year. I found that the job action was disruptive to my own practice as a teacher. The job action affected my ability to communicate with my ESBAs and disrupted a number of programs in the school. Additionally, as staff meetings could not be held during the job action, my school staff had to find alternate ways of disseminating information amongst ourselves. The bulk of the job action lasted the entire first two terms of the school year; the length of the job action and the fact that no new collective agreement was formed caused me to question its effectiveness as a strategy during the collective bargaining process.

As I believed the job action negatively affected my practice as a teacher, I made the assumption that the challenges ESBAs faced also negatively affected them. As discussed in the introduction chapter, I observed my own ESBAs facing various challenges during the job action; some of these challenges
appeared to negatively impact the practices of my ESBAs. Though I did not personally experience any conflict or strain in my relationships with my ESBAs, a number of my colleagues from other schools shared anecdotes of strain or conflict between staff members and ESBAs at their schools during the job action. Additionally, my opinion was also shaped by reports from the media on the effects of the job action on ESBAs.

My opinions could influence the results of my study if I am not attentive. By maintaining a reflex stance throughout this study I can minimize the influence of my beliefs on the research.

I have taken a number of steps to maintain my reflexivity during the data collection and analysis processes. During data collection, I used an interview guide made of questions that were open and not leading (Appendix A). The interview guide was developed in consultation with my research supervisor. During interviews, I consciously made efforts to ask prompts or probing questions that were not leading but were intended to allow participants to expand on their responses. Additionally, Findlay (2002) states that reflection (reflexive analysis) may be required in order to understand participant responses; this was supported by taking time after each interview to record my own reactions, and emotions in my field notes.

This process of reflexive analysis was also conducted during the data analysis as I remained conscious of my own reactions and emotions. I took these into consideration in order to limit how my own opinions and emotions influenced the analysis of the data. I have made efforts to include my own reactions and thoughts during the interviews when presenting interview data in the findings section.
Findings

This chapter is organized into two sections. It begins by providing an overview of the four participants and their schools. The second section presents the findings of the interview study. The findings section is divided into nine themes arising from the research questions and additional themes emerging from the interviews: workload, communication and relationships with teaching staff, relationships with other school and district staff, contact with the administrators’ association, school-based team, participation in other school programs and initiatives, conflict and potential conflict, opportunities arising from job action, and the year after.

Participants

Each of the participants in this study worked in a unique school and had different administrative roles to perform. Participant #1 was a white female principal with twenty years of administrative experience and had been assigned as the principal of her school five years prior to the 2011/2012 job action. The school is located within the main city centre and the students had a diversity of incomes and ethnicities. The school has a population of approximately 500 students representing over thirty languages and forty countries. The school has a high number of vulnerable families and is assigned a settlement worker to aid new immigrant families in the neighbourhood. Approximately 60% of students at the school participate in a subsidized hot lunch program. The principal stated that the school had one of the highest incidents of student mental health and referrals to the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) in the district. The school participates in the International Baccalaureate (IB) Middle Years Program (MYP). The school has a vice-principal assigned to it.

Participant #2 was a white female in her first year as a vice-principal during the 2011/2012 job action and was also assigned to a new school. The school is located in an ethnically diverse neighbourhood of both working class and middle class families. The school has a population of approximately 400 students. Approximately half of the students are learning English as a second language; over half come from families where English is a second language. Over 40% of students are of Asian origin including Filipino, Chinese and Vietnamese. The school has identified students entering kindergarten as having a “high vulnerability rate” in social, emotional, physical, language and communication domains. Participant #2 stated that during her assignment there, the school also provided a district program for gifted students.
Participant #3 is a white female who had been an administrator of her school for five years prior to the job action year, four as a principal and one as a vice-principal. The school is a single-track French immersion school with over 400 students. It is located in an affluent, upper-middle class neighbourhood. The school is very homogeneous as it is not ethnically diverse; most of the families are white and are native English speaking. Participant #3 commented that the parent community has high academic expectations of students and sees high parent volunteerism in classroom and extracurricular activities. She reported that nearly one out of five students in the school had noticeable indicators of anxiety. The participant also included that the school teaching staff had a high proportion of new, young teachers and saw high turnover rates of staff each year. She commented that this was common for French immersion schools. The school also has a lot of teachers from different areas of the country and other French speaking nations. The vice-principal of this school was new to the staff in the job action year and had recently arrived from Quebec.

Participant #4 was a white male who began the job action year as a vice-principal at a school of over 400 students in a middle to upper-middle class neighbourhood. This first school is ethnically diverse with approximately 70% of students with English as a second language representing nearly thirty different languages. The community has high academic expectations and the students perform well over district and provincial averages on Ministry of Education standardized tests.

Participant #4 was promoted to principal of a new school in the January 2012 in the middle of the job action year. He was assigned to a small school of under 200 students that did not have a vice-principal. This second school is also ethnically diverse; it is located in a mixed working class and middle class residential neighbourhood. The students speak nearly twenty different languages. The school has three dominant cultural groups: Chinese, Punjabi and Vietnamese. It also has a diversity of special needs students.

Findings

From the interview data, I found that the job action did present challenges to all four participants and affected their workload and ability to perform their leadership role but did not negatively affect their relationships with their staff. There did not appear to be any negative effects on workload, relationships or ability to lead for the four participants in the year following the job action. All participants commented that the job actions presented some positive opportunities. I perceived during the course of the interviews that all four participants appeared to have a genuine desire to share their stories; two of the administrators commented that their overall experience was generally positive.
However, all participants did note their experiences were their own individual experiences and were not shared by all other administrators in the district. Two of the participants provided examples where their colleagues had had negative experiences.

**Workload.** All four participants stated that their administrative workload was noticeably affected by the job action, particularly the time before and after school. All participants commented in some way that there were some aspects of their workload that was lightened during the job action; however, they all noted that any freed-up time was often filled by other tasks.

**Supervision of students.** Supervision of students before and after school was a task that all participants stated added significantly to their workload. In normal years, supervision was generally shared amongst the teaching staff but was included in struck work during the 2011/2012 job action year. All four administrators in this study stated that they had to cover the teachers’ supervision duty every day. Despite the extra strain of having to perform daily supervision, three of the participants commented that the obligation allowed them more direct contact with parents and students and therefore helped build relationships with them:

Participant #1: I was on supervision all day, every day, morning, recess, lunch, afterschool. [Laugh]…I forgot about that. That was a lot. Supervision, supervision, supervision. Yah, but that was okay because I was out interacting with the kids, which I really love.

Participant #2: Supervision was hugely up. I mean every day, which I mean was kind of neat too because I had just started at the school so all the kids knew me by the second week or so. I was out there every day before and after school…and… I , you know, I’d also be out there at recess and you know at lunch once and awhile what have you…but definitely…yah that was a big factor.

Participant #3 commented that the extra contact with parents during supervision allowed her the opportunity to communicate with parents who were anxious about the job action:

Participant #3: We did supervision, every day. And you know what? It was great. It was great because, I was outside with those parents. I got to know those parents really well. I went out
there and we used it as an opportunity for making connections, smoothing ruffled feathers. Parents were upset because of the teachers. And just to keep that public face....we are continuing on.

Participant #4: That was probably...that was a big one because I was outside every day. Every day afterschool and every day in the morning I was outside. And, it was the rainiest year ever when I got to that school in January... As a single administrator, it’s way more challenging. You have nobody else really to rely on right away....

Participant #4 stated that he found the additional supervision more challenging at his new school because he did not have a vice-principal with whom he could share the supervision load. Additionally, when he arrived at his new school, the student support workers (SSWs) had not been put into the supervision rotation and were already occupied with other tasks so he could not enlist their help:

Participant #4: Support staff was never really put into a rotation for supervision. I couldn’t come in in January and “hey, guess what? I’m putting you in the rotation now” because they’ve eaten up their supervision already or they’re not...I can’t just put them in all of a sudden... I was allowed to put them in but they had already been put into a system or schedule prior.

One of the participants noted that because administrators in the district were responsible for conducting before and after school supervision, the district had to reschedule a number of administrator meetings. Rather than the SBAs meeting monthly at the board office monthly during the school day, meetings were held after school time. This added even more to the load of SBAs.

I did find it particularly interesting that despite stating that the extra supervision was a major additional task for them, all the participants did not comment on supervision until they were asked about specifically about it. In her response, Participant #1 even laughed that she had almost forgotten about the extra supervision. It appeared to me that for the participants the extra supervision did add significantly to their workload and time but was not a significant source of stress or strain.

Three of the participants commented that they also took on coordinating or supervising extra-curricular activities such as sports. Participant #2 stated that extracurricular sports were not conducted at her school during the job action year. Participant #4 commented that that he normally coached a
number of teams so taking on extracurricular sports during job action did not add any new tasks to his workload. The three administrators who participated with extracurricular sports did say they were able to share the load with parent and other community volunteers:

Participant #1: You know, things like extracurricular activities just didn’t exist. From their [the teachers’] point of view; however, I was able to continue a lot of extra-curricular [activities by] working with our youth and family worker who typically was looking at- was coordinating I guess the sports right?

In the case of Participant #3, despite having parent volunteers available to coach teams, either her or her vice-principal were still required to attend games in order to provide supervision and serve as an official school board sponsor of the team.

Participant #3: What happened during job action, though, was that teachers wouldn’t go to provide supervision. So that meant that both the vice-principal and I had to be at every single game.

Communication with parents. All of the participants commented that the restrictions on communications imposed by the strike did affect their workload in some way. All participants commented that their ability to disseminate information to parents was affected as teachers were no longer handing out notices to students unless they were regarding health and safety issues. All participants had to distribute materials to students themselves or come up with creative methods of having students receive notices:

Participant #2: I would take them to the classes, yah. I would take them to the classes and I would either hand them out or if teachers were comfortable that I would put them in a box in their room and the kids would pick them upon the way out. So it just depended on what the teacher wanted me to do.

Participant #4: [T]hese letters I would go around at the end of the day and hand out. I would give it to child and say, “Would you please hand this out to the rest of the students before you go home?” So those kind of things, that’s all I did. I’d go in and, you know, and hand it to a
student. You know, “So, Johnny, would you hand this out to the rest of the class.” Sure, or, the older kids I would just say, “Hey, everybody, make sure you take one of these on your way out.”

Participant #4 commented that delivering the notices to each class was not as much of a challenge in his smaller school but Participants #1 and #3 commented that this took up significant amounts of time in their large schools:

Participant #1: We tried to come up with a few options for that [handing out notices] and one was to put them outside the door and tell parents to pick them up. Parents were just not getting the notices. But also there were some critical notices that may have come up. And at some point, the vice-principal and I were actually going into classes and directing children to hand them out and watch that they were handed out. In some cases, we actually went into the classes and handed them out ourselves. And when you’re looking at 21 divisions, that’s taking up many hours of your afternoon or whatever but there were things that we needed to get out.

Participant #3: What it meant for me was [a] huge amount of running around, delivering papers. Teachers would not want to take out those kind of papers... out of their boxes or they didn’t want to distribute anything...so that, the actual leg work. When you’re at a big school, right?

Collection of fees. The participants indicated that there were other tasks that the job action added to their workload. Participant #4 stated that at both of his schools, the collection of funds from students was a challenge that required the office staff to come up with creative ways of receiving and tracking; he did state that it was more of a challenge at his previous school as it was larger:

Participant #4: The money collection was a bit of a challenge. But we worked that out at the previous school in a way that was very streamlined and I think they still do that now because it made it even easier for teachers. So I continued that with my new school in the following September. But a lot of teachers [at my new school]... they still did it [collected funds themselves]. But a lot of teachers still wanted to know who brought in the money so they were doing their own little checklists on the side. So we did streamline things at the previous school...In my new school, we tried the same thing, for the most part it worked out but we’re a small school so it wasn’t very necessary [in the year after].
Testing. Participant #4 also commented that the provincial Foundation Skills Assessments (FSAs) were solely his responsibility since the teachers were not assisting in conducting the tests with students. He found it challenging to schedule times for students to complete the assessments. He did comment that parts of the assessment were not fully completed by students that year:

Participant #4: FSA was fully my responsibility...I couldn’t schedule them... It was a bit more of a challenge in getting kids tested at the time. And, I didn’t really mess around with other teachers challenges or other teachers schedules, so I just sort of ... you know if I didn’t get things done, I didn’t get things done.

I did not specifically ask participants about the collection of funds or the FSAs but was surprised that only one participant discussed these issues without being prompted because I perceived these two issues to be challenges for administrators and office staff at my own school, particularly the scheduling of the FSAs. They were also issues that were discussed in media reports. It is possible that participant #4 had to address these issues more personally because he did not have an additional administrator while the challenges of these tasks were not felt as strongly by the other participants who worked with another SBA.

Teaching load of the vice-principals. Neither participant #2 nor #4 believed that their teaching roles as vice-principals was negatively affected by the job action. Participant #2 commented that the reduced administrative load during the job action allowed her to focus more on her role as a resource teacher and even provided her with somewhat of a transition in the role of a vice-principal into the next year:

Participant #2: So I was really able to focus on my [resource teacher] role, which was nice. After the strike, I kind of figured out...you know...this was more... this is what you do as an admin. So, in a way it was an interesting introduction to going into the role because I had that almost kind of like transition year of ...from being a teacher.

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6 The FSAs are annual standardized provincial assessments in reading, writing and mathematics that are completed by students in grades 4 and 7 in all elementary schools in BC. The multiple choice portions of the assessments are usually completed electronically by students and the written response and math problem solving sections are completed in booklets.
Participant #4 described his teaching experience as a teacher-librarian from September until December as “just a typical year”. Overall, he commented that other than that “everything was the same.”

**Moving school community to a new site.** Participant #3 had a unique task added to her workload at the beginning of the 2011/2012 school year that was made more difficult by the job action. For two years previous to the job action year, the school of participant #3 had been undergoing seismic upgrade renovations and the school community had been housed at an alternative site. The school community was scheduled to return to their normal site at the beginning of the 2011/2012 school year. Participant #3 commented that the job action made coordinating the move very difficult: “It was incredibly difficult because you’re coming back from seismic, and you have to make decisions about furniture and all of this and you can’t meet together.”

**Decrease in some administrative tasks.** Three of the participants commented that during the job action, they found that some of their workload was lightened and that they had some time during the school day freed-up. However, all the participants commented that any freed time was subsequently filled with other tasks:

Participant #2: [T]he workload was lighter in terms of paper work.

Participant #1: I did have a lot more freedom to do other things. But like I said, that would be filled.

Participant #4: I found myself spending more time being an educational leader actually.

Participant #4 commented that during the job action, he made efforts to collaborate with teachers who were willing. One example was collaborating with primary teachers at his school:

Participant #4: But as far as in-school stuff, I pitched ideas, and for example, the primary staff were into it, we played around with... I took the primary kids once a month while the primary
team had a chance to meet, so… You know that was in school stuff, in school things and they were willing.

He also made efforts to lead in-school seminars on the use of technology which will be discussed later in this chapter.

The three participants that experienced a decrease in some of their administrative tasks commented that much of the freed time was created because they were not conducting regular staff and committee meetings and were experiencing significantly fewer one-on-one conversations with teachers.

Participant #1: I think because there was less things happening, you know? The other thing was in [the school] it was a lot of people coming, you know teachers coming daily to get my advice on things, if there’s an issue with a kid [during a regular year], to…to… you know a child… to discuss it, problem solve… you know… we have a lot of that being inner-city and that wasn’t happening so much [during the job action]. And, that would consume… that would, I’m thinking, that was 40% of my day was that alone…you know?

Some of the participants suggested that some of the teachers at their schools were acting more autonomously; teachers chose to deal with issues and solve problems on their own or sought advice from other teachers. They did not suggest that these regular daily issues were being ignored or not being addressed by teachers.

Participant #3 did not comment about experiencing significant time being freed-up due to the job action, nor did she experience a significant decrease in conversations with teaching staff. She attributed this to the fact that a large number of her staff were new and still sought the advice of administrators. She believed that the new teachers needed to draw on her experience in dealing with educational issues that they did not feel experienced enough to address alone.

**Time during the walk-out.** During the three-day full strike, there were no students or teaching staff at the schools. Both participants #2 and #4 commented that they were able to use the time during the three days of full strike to address tasks that needed to be caught-up with or could not be done during normal days:
Participant #2: The days during the strike, if you will, those days were spent, you know, just getting caught up on admin things.

Participant #4: I was busy working, cleaning.... I was cleaning. I purged like fifteen computers and just cleaned up stuff. You know, I did some stuff around the school. So there was a bunch of stuff being done.

Communication and relationship with teaching staff

All the participants indicated that the job action significantly affected their ability to communicate and collaborate with teachers, which affected their ability to perform their leadership roles. However, the participants all believed the job action did not have a negative impact on their relationships with their teaching staffs during the job action or into the year after. Three of the participants commented that having good relationships with staff members previous to the job action helped significantly in maintaining positive relationships with staff during the job action. All the participants stated that by maintaining a formalized working relationship and following the job action prescriptions during 2011/2012 helped in maintaining positive relationships with staff. Additionally, all the participants said that the level of perceived union militancy of staff affected their ability to communicate and collaborate.

Communication with teaching staff. All the participants commented that their ability to communicate and collaborate with staff was significantly affected mostly by their inability to hold staff or various committee meetings. Two of the participants also saw a significant decrease in teachers approaching them to have casual discussions about educational issues:

Participant #1: People didn’t come in the office like they may have done previously to. Like we see here in this office, we ‘kibitz’, and we laugh, we enjoy other’s company. There really wasn’t much of that. People were really “work-to-rule” so they arrived at school at about five-to-nine in the morning and they left at three or soon after.
Participant #2: And I definitely...more, door was a lot more closed if you will ... and I don’t know whether that was because I was new or because of the job action. I would say, from what happened the second year, I would say it was based more on the job action.

Participant #3 did not experience a change in casual visits with teaching staff, which she attributed to the fact that many staff members were new teachers and still needed to consult the administrators about issues:

Participant #3: You know, I’d have to say in the communication, people just came by. You know, I’m always there early and I’m there late because that’s a thing you have to do when you have new teachers, right? You have to be able to be there, they’ll come in with their problems.

During the job action, teachers were instructed not to accept electronic or written communications from administrators and not to attend meetings. The participants in this study discussed using a number of strategies for maintaining communication with teaching staff. All participants continued to send email messages to staff and some stated that they knew staff were still reading the communications. The participants did need to filter or reduce the amount of information they sent to teachers. They still continued to send third party information – information not from themselves or the board – to teaching staff:

Participant #1: I continued even though I was told that they were not to read email from administration. I sent emails regularly, I sent regular things regularly, and daily and I know they read them. I know they read it, so I didn’t say anything...I knew darn well that they were reading my emails and any other memos...or any information that I forwarded.

Participant #2: Only if I needed to and they [emails] were very formal. Yah, there wasn’t really any [regular emails]...so, you know in terms of “we’re doing an inventory” or “we have a resource meeting” or things like that.

Participant #3: I still used email and one of the things I did was, and I’ve done it for years, is I write a weekly email to my staff...I’d write telling them something that I notice in education or whatever and I’d tell them three things I’m grateful for and I tell them all the things that are
going on in the school, what’s happening in a sense of different people. Whatever was going on. And then I would give them my schedule. And so I continued to do that. And it was one of the ways people said they kept more contact with what was going on.

Participant #4: I did try and email things out as much as possible too. So that was fine, nobody likes meetings anyways. So in a way, it kind of worked out and it’s kind of carried on from now... But the emails I sent out were more information items, like “free trips at Science World” or things like that. But I wasn’t sending information to them like there’s something important about the school or those I saved for a meeting, which I was allowed to call... And another thing was just sending out things to look and after that “I don’t care.” It they want to delete it, if they don’t want the free trips, that’s up to them. But a lot of that was just information items that came from somewhere else. It wasn’t coming from the board and it wasn’t coming from me directly. Technically it was coming from a third party.

Despite still sending emails, the participants could not confidently ensure that all teaching staff were receiving information. Because of the restrictions on meetings and the ability to disseminate information by email or in writing, SBAs had to deliver important messages to teachers in person. Additionally, SBAs had to contact teachers directly to discuss educational issues. However, three of participants commented that they did not find this particularly disruptive and considered it just a normal part of their job:

Participant #1: [T]hat was just part of my job.

Participant #2: I mean as a VP your time is...is...it’s a long day. So yah, most of the time, your day is spent with people, you know? On relations etcetera...and any time before or after school is paper work ...the most important part is working with the teachers and students.

Participant #4: I think there was no real issues in that and I didn’t find any hesitation from people saying, “I can’t talk to you. Go through whatever.” There wasn’t any of that as an issue. And...communication was still, relatively, for the most part, smooth. And, people got the information they needed I think.
However, Participant #3 commented that she thought a large amount of time was consumed by disseminating information directly to all teachers, particularly when it involved trying to poll staff opinions about decisions:

\[\text{Participant #3: You spent a lot more time on like redundant tasks. So that...that was a challenge so you spent a lot more time on individual conversations, running around to try and get consensus on something. You can just imagine. Of course it’s much more time consuming.}\]

\textit{Using the vice-principal as a go-between.} Three of the participants in the study commented that having a vice-principal whose teaching role was as a resource teacher allowed them to maintain lines of communication with teaching staff:

\[\text{Participant #3: I was kind of the go between, I guess, between both...because I was...my percentage was more structured in the teaching... in the teaching position. I was more the go-between between admin and teachers...so... If something needed to be explained, I kind of put on my resource hat and talked about things.}\]

\[\text{Participant #3 commented that teachers often would accept her as resource teacher so they could use her as a way of communicating to administration and to ask questions. She stated that sometimes she could feel awkward trying to straddle the line between administration and teaching but would attempt to help teachers as much as she could:}\]

\[\text{Participant #3: teachers would try to say “well you know, your resources right now, so I’m gonna ask you this questions or can you do this?” So I said, “You’re putting me in a tough position and I’ll do my best.” You know, especially around report cards etcetera...I mean questions...so there would be a lot of venting kind of on me when...during resource meetings etcetera. But, they completely understood, you know? And would say, “Ok, I’m talking to you know as a one of us” kind of.}\]

\[\text{Participants #1 and #3 commented that, as resource teachers, the vice-principals were able to attend meetings such as school-based teams and resource team meetings. This allowed them to remain}\]
up-to-date on education issues within the school. The issues of school-based teams and other collaborative programs will be discussed in following sections.

**Relationships with teaching staff.** All the participants believed that their relationships with teaching staff were not negatively affected by the job action. The participants attributed a number of factors that helped in maintaining positive relationships with staff and avoiding potential conflicts. These included having good relationships with staff previous to the job action, following job action prescriptions, keeping interactions more formalized, and maintaining good relationships with the teachers’ union representative. Additionally, how the participants perceived the union militancy of their staff affected how they interacted with their staff as a whole or with individuals. Three of the participants commented that having good relationships previous to the job action year helped them maintain positive relationships:

Participant #1: I think that, I was fortunate in some ways having been at the school... already at the school for five years at that point. So I had relationships and some friendships and so for some teachers it was a real struggle but I never felt left out. I never felt... like I know some of my colleagues [other administrators]... teachers literally would turn their back on them and would not sit in the same room as them. They were really mistreated. But I never felt mistreated.

Participant #3: For me on a day-to-day basis, because I had been at the school for a long time, well a long time ...I was there for four years before hand. And they really knew me as a teacher.

Participant: #4: And at the previous school, as the VP, I had already built such a good rapport prior that you know... and everybody else saw both of us as a team, both myself [as the VP] and the other [principal], ... you know, they weren’t going to look at us any differently in that. So I really think the relationship piece was pretty good at both sites.

**Starting a new assignment during job action.** Two of the participants did not have previous relationships with their staff because they were new to their schools. This presented an additional challenge to their role during the job action. Both participants #2 and #4 commented that being at a new school with a new staff created challenges in building working relationships with staff and getting fully integrated into their school cultures:
Participant #2: It was my first year. It was a difficult year because I was kind of placed on that tight rope a little bit. So, there were no meetings, so I could not really get a sense of how the staff worked collaboratively as a group. As a large group… so staff meetings and SAC meetings weren’t happening at that time... So, I didn’t really get a sense what the school could accomplish as a whole until job action was over, which was difficult, because I’m trying to continue my job and I’m not too sure if the staff is going to buy into any of these ideas that I’m...you know what will be the buy-in for anything.

Participant #4: I was a new principal at the school at the same time so, you know, you kind of...trying to, you know, get to know the staff and show them what I’m about and also to learn about them and see what they’re about. But, it was a bit more challenging relationship wise to kind of build those fences sort of thing.

Participant #4 had previous relationships with some of the staff at the new school, which helped him with communicating with the staff: “I happened to know a couple of staff members at the school and they knew me. And I think they were willing to communicate things to me if I did on the fly.”

**More formalized interactions with teaching staff.** The participants in the study all commented that maintaining more formalized relationships with their staffs and following the job action prescriptions helped in maintaining positive relationships and avoiding potential conflicts. The participants commented that trying to follow and respect the job action prescriptions, maintaining a formal tone and reducing casual conversations during meetings, and depersonalizing staff actions as ways of maintaining positive relationships with their staff. Additionally, Participants #1 and #3 reported that it was important to have a shared, clear understanding with her staff about how administration and staff would proceed during the job action and follow the prescriptions:

Participant #1: We talked about it, before hand and during, that this was not them reacting this way. This was a directive.

Participant #2: It was much more formalized. So I kind of....but.... so with the kids it was very...there was no difference. But when I had resource meetings or had discussions with
teachers it was much more formalized while trying to bridge...while trying to keep relations at an optimal.

Participant #3: We had an understanding. Right up...I just made it very, very clear, “Well, these are the terms of engagement.” “It’s nothing personal.” “It’s not going to be anything personal.”

Participant #4: You kind of take it slow, I just kind of did the things that I was supposed to do, you know, FSAs, those kind of things. I just filled in the pieces but I continued doing what I wanted to do for my own personal... I wasn’t stopping what I wanted to do as a principal...you know, coaching, those kind of things. I continued doing that kind of thing on my own.

**Empathy and depersonalizing job action.** Three participants also attributed their ability to empathize with their teaching staff and depersonalizing job action helped them to maintain good relationships with their staffs:

Participant #1: [M]y attitude was that I didn’t take anything personally. Absolutely, even when I felt that I, you know, should take it personally, I didn’t. I really made a point of not doing that. I think that’s important... [It] had not been the first time I had been through strike action... I saw the other side of it too as a teacher too, as a teacher. So I know, I understood what the principal or the administration would be going through... but, yah, so just not to take it personally.

Participant #4: And some things, I couldn’t care less about stuff. I won’t tow my party line to the full extreme and I think they were the same way. We kind of just did what we were supposed to do. We kind of just went from there.

During the three days when the teachers staged a full-strike, participants #3 and #4 tried to provide support to the teachers who spent the days outside of the school. They acknowledged that the period of the walkout was harder on teachers than it was on themselves.

Participant #3: when they did go on strike for I think it was a week, you know I was out there bringing them tea and coffee and biscuits and making sure they had everything they need to check in on them. Just to provide that kind of support.
Participant #4: I was out there every morning, every time they were outside and... it was bitter cold. So I was bringing them stuff you know, all kinds of things to at least make their day go by a little [less] longer.

**Relationship with the teacher staff rep.** All the participants commented that the job action did not negatively affect their relationships with their teachers’ union representative (staff rep). All participants stated that they maintained formalized contact with the staff rep throughout the job action. In fact, the participants suggested that the staff reps helped in maintaining smooth operations in the school and in maintaining positive relationships between the teaching staff and administration. The staff rep served as a means of communication between administration and teachers and as a buffer in avoiding potential conflicts.

Participant #1: [Our relationship] wasn’t affected at all in fact. [T]here was two [staff rep] people that I worked with and they were both just fantastic. They... they... I understood what they needed to do and they understood what I needed to do. And we talked about that. We were pretty open and... and I know how they felt. I just...they... we were able to communicate.

Participant #2: [S]he didn’t come to talk to us basically...I mean she would if ...in terms... of “you need to give us paper.” You know? It was very directed. It was interesting at that school because you wouldn’t even know that there was a [teacher union] meeting going on. It’s a big school. So they would meet on a different floor. And I heard after, that those meetings got quite heated but you would have never known that, I would have never known that or the office would never have known that unless someone had come up. So during that year from what I understand there were some very heated discussions that never trickled down to the office. Never trickled down to me anyway, yah.

Participant #3: It was the same way we always had dealt... it [the job action] didn’t affect it [our relationship] at all, you know? She was coming to me and she you know... They had lots of meetings, of course. And...of which we are not privy to. And...but there was never any animosity or...at all...we could always sort of... if there was an issue. I had a discipline issue [with a teacher] during that year. So, she helped me sit on the committee...There wasn’t any animosity at all. You
know, everybody just respects each other. We just respect what they have to do and really I’d have to say, people were really quite cooperative.

Participant #4: if I had an issue, then I’d easily bring it up with the [staff] rep and then they can go ahead and push that on to the staff; they can communicate to them. You know, relationship wise, I think you know, it got stronger as the time went on. And again, they saw what I was willing to do.

Participant #4 also commented that he had known his school’s staff rep prior to coming to his new school and that aided in communicating to the rep and to the staff.

Participant #4: Not really much, I knew this person prior to coming to the school and I think he was just... I mean he knew me when we went to school together at [University] and just coming back again, you know, how many years after, I think he just wanted to see what I was about. And, we communicated. We chatted a lot about things. I told him where I was from and he told me what he was about and the union so to speak.

**Impact of perceived militancy of teaching staff.** All the participants commented that the perceived level of union militancy of teachers affected their ability to collaborate or participate in various programs and activities. Similarly to what I observed in schools during the job action, each staff interpreted the job action prescriptions differently. Some teaching staffs were more flexible in their interpretations while some staffs were more rigid and less likely to cooperate with administration or participate in activities. Participant #1 commented that though her teaching staff was somewhat flexible with including her in some meetings, she did not attend the IB program meetings held between the staffs of the high school and other elementary schools because she perceived the staff from some of those schools would not participate if she attended:

Participant #1: And unfortunately, those collaborative sessions which I always attended the previous five years, always, I was not able to attend that because if I had shown up they would have walked out. And the problem, not so much [was my school], but because it was the other two schools staffs, who were maybe a little more militant, they were quite firm that an administrator or principal was not... if they...if the principal showed up they would leave.
Participant #4 noticed a difference in how his two schools interpreted the job action prescriptions. He commented that his first school was more flexible and was willing to cooperate more with administration and participate in various activities. He noted that at his previous school “people just carried on, and that was a staff decision.” When he moved to his new school the staff was more rigid in their interpretation of the job action:

Participant #4: There was some changes because different staff and their feeling on the job action was that they basically weren’t going to do anything. You know, just nothing. So there was...that left me to do, you know, to pick up the pieces.

He did note that interpretation of the job action differed among individual teachers. He stated that at his first school there were some meetings that administrators did attend and that he “had some staff not show up. I had some people... in the VP one...in my previous school.” Likewise, Participant #2 commented that one teacher in particular was more rigid than others on staff about the job action. She noticed that she had even less contact with that teacher during that year:

Participant #2: I mean [the teacher] is strong union so I did not have much of a relationship with her the first year so I was able to be fully introduced to her the second year which was nice.

Participant #3 commented that at her school the “staff is not a radical staff.” Participant #3 attributed the flexibility of staff members to the fact that most of the staff were new teachers. A number of the staff only minimally followed the job action prescriptions when they found them disruptive to their own practices:

Participant #3: “It was so ridiculous that teachers would just kind of doing it on the side...and just hand it in. Right? You know? Those kind of...and you know people started off with silly semantics of not signing permission forms or all of those kind of things. And our staff, they kind of just said, “oh what the heck.” Right?

She believed that some of the new teachers from out of province had difficulty with the job action as they were not used to long periods of job action or had had no experience with teacher strikes:
Participant #3: I think it was also harder for new teachers who are coming from away, not understanding... You know, you’re coming from another country. “What the hell is this?” Right? So that was kind of an interesting thing.

As discussed above, Participant #3 commented that due to the number of new teachers on staff, she was still included in many meetings, discussions, and consultations that administrators at other schools were prevented from attending. She suggested that the new teachers, particularly the ones from out of province, did not have the appropriate experience to deal with various issues autonomously.

In regards to extracurricular sports, administrators’ abilities to participate with sports differed based on the perceived flexibility of staff. Participants #1, #3 and #4 were able to continue sports at their schools by coordinating with parents and community volunteers. At my own school teachers continued to sponsor sports teams as we believed it was volunteer work, not struck work. Participant #2 commented that there were no extracurricular sports teams at her school during the 2011/2012 job action but unlike the other participants, the administration did not get involved with student sports because they “didn’t want to muddy the waters” by possibly offending the teachers who normally performed coaching duties.

For the participants, the level at which their staffs adopted the job action prescriptions affected their ability to participate in and perform leadership roles related to various staff committees and programs. School-based team was a committee that all participants believed was affected by the job action. This is the topic of discussion in a following section.

**Relationships with other school and district staff**

All the participants stated that the job action did not negatively affect their relationships with other staff within their schools, such as office staff, supervision aids and students support workers. The participants all commented that the presence of another administrator in their school helped with meeting the challenges presented by the job action. Additionally, three of the participants, particularly the two new administrators, reported that contact with other administrators in the district was helpful.

All the participants became closer to their office staff during the job action. They all relied on their office staff in meeting some of the challenges presented by the job action. One participant even commented that the job action seemed to isolate the administration and office staff from the teaching staff:
Participant #2: In that office it was kind of a tight community of the secretary, myself and the [other] administrator. We were kind of seen as the “office”. [Teachers] would not go in there unless [they] needed to, the first year.

Participant #3 expressed a similar feeling of working closely with her support workers, office staff and other administrator:

Participant #3: You just end up getting tighter with the person [the vice-principal] because this is like… you know, “it us against the world” kind of thing sometimes. So in that way you have to be able to be there and support each other. And that’s true. You form a little band of like supervision aids, the office staff, are a really, really tight kind of community.

Both participants #2 and #4 relied on their office staff to get adjusted to the new school and help them learn about the school culture:

Participant #2: [W]ith the office staff it was different, just because being new to the job there were a couple of things they needed [to explain to me]. You know, and she was very accommodating in that way... I definitely was very close to the office staff.

Participant #4 did not have a vice-principal he often would discuss ideas and plans with his office staff:

Participant #4: So the person I’m working with, she’s been there for the longest time. So I really relied on her because she’s been there obviously a lot longer than I had and knew the school inside out... I think with being a small school and the fact that she was extremely experienced in the school was pretty easy to work some things out. I threw ideas by her, “Well, what do you think about doing something like that?” or about collecting money; or, “How do you want to do things about collecting notices?” and that kind of stuff. So, you know I kind of just bounced ideas off of her and it wasn’t like, “This is what I’m going to do. You’re doing it.” It was sort of, “What do you think? What’s going to work here?” I relied on her because I needed to know, what’s the feel in the community? What’s going to maybe work and not work? And, those are the kind of things that I relied on her. So, no...Our relationship’s... I still treat her as if she’s really my boss.
According to participants #1, #2 and #3, having another administrator in their school helped tremendously in coping with the challenges of the job action. They noted that the other administrator was often a source of support and a person that they could communicate and share ideas with:

Participant #1: The nice thing about [the school] is that there was a vice-principal so you could talk to another...to a colleague and support each other.

Participant #2: I also did have a principal that was there as well. So, any questions were promptly answered.

Participant #2 noted that she even found that the job action gave her the opportunity to get to know her principal better and collaborate on projects together they may not have been able to do in a non-job action year:

Participant #2: you know my principal and I got along really well, very well. And, we would have a lot of communications together. I can’t say enough good things about him. I just find him incredible... He taught me a ton about things and we had some time to go over stuff, which we weren’t able to do in the second year. So I feel really fortunate that that happened...And with my principal and I think it was only from the fact that it was busier the second year than it was with the first.

Three of the administrators believed that having relationships and communicating with other administrators in the district was important during the job action. Participants #2 and #4 commented that contact with other administrators was particularly important because they were in new assignments and participant #4 did not have a vice-principal at his school. Participant #4 had more contact with administrators in other schools during the year of job action:

Participant #4: [R]elationships with other admin, for sure, probably was even picked up, maybe even more. Because you really are relying on them to answer some of the questions you might have. Every site is different due to relationships and due to just the staff. You know, everybody’s different. So, and me being a new [principal], I relied a lot, all the time, [on] people because as
much as the board would give me information I still had scenarios at my school where they couldn't really answer and I had to ask my colleagues.

Participant #2 had a mentor administrator because she was in her first assignment as a vice-principal. She commented that she found her mentor very helpful in dealing with the job action:

Participant #2: I had a mentor... I have a mentor. And he was incredibly supportive. And, was able to, in a more informal way, kind of guide me through if you will, how...from his experiences how to kind of navigate that [challenges from the job action] successfully.

Participant #3 commented that the regular board meetings with other administrators gave her and other administrators the opportunity to share their experiences and receive support, particularly for the administrators she perceived as having more difficult experiences at their schools. She stated that “every meeting you got to, you know? ... ‘Oh how’s it going?’”

Contact with the administrators’ association

Both participants #2 and #4 commented that contact and communication with their administrators’ association was also very helpful in addressing the challenges of the job action:

Participant #2: During that year the association that I’m part of...was incredibly supportive, super supportive. And, you know if I could go on to that for a second, the association has always been, for me, it has been incredibly supportive. And if anything needed to happen, they were right there. So there was...I never felt like I was put out on a ...you know? Whatever...limb...So, having such a strong association was key.

Participant #4: They [the association] would try to take the information that the board gave us and might try to put it into some easier language for us to understand. And, or, give us scenarios and what we...give us situations that we might expect also give things that we should probably say. You know, to make sure that... because we are still agents of the board and making sure that we’re saying the right thing and not going off on a tangent or saying something that’s our own personal belief. So, that was really important. To make sure that we...yah...because some people can go off on how we really feel but that’s probably not the thing to say.
In contrast to the other three participants, participant #1 said she had “definitely less opportunities to talk to colleagues and...unless you go on the phone.” She perceived that she and other administrators were “tied to their schools” because of tasks such as supervision. She also attributed the cancellation of meetings with administrators and professional development opportunities for administrators to this fact. However, she did not believe this had a negative impact on her.

**School-Based Team**

School-Based Team (SBT) was the main area in which three of the participants were significantly affected by the job action. Participants #1, #2, and #4 all believed that their ability to participate on this committee and perform their leadership role was significantly affected by the job action. All of the participants approached the challenge of participating and keeping abreast of issues in SBTs differently.

Each participant developed different approaches to the issue of SBT so they could participate or stay up-to-date with what was discussed at the meetings. For two of the participants, administration was able to take advantage of having a vice-principal attend in the role of a resource teacher. For the most part, participant #1 stated “I wasn’t allowed to attend unless there was a direct link to a child, and then I could. Generally, I was excluded.” She commented that in the early part of the job action she attended some of the SBT meetings until her staff made the decision to not include her for most meetings. However, the vice-principal, who was a resource teacher, still served as the chair of SBT and participated in the meetings. Participant #1 was able to remain up-to-date with the student cases discussed in SBT meetings:

Participant #1: I think that year the VP, if I can recall, was the chairperson of the school-based team. So basically, her and I would meet later and discussed what was discussed at school-based team... she was the chair, that was part of her job, her teaching part.

Similarly, participant #2 commented that though the principal was excluded from SBT meetings, as a resource teacher, she still continued to attend the majority of SBT meetings:

Participant #2: During the job action I did attend all school-based teams but I was more there in... if it was a student I was working with then I would be there as a resource teacher. If I was there ...if it wasn’t a child I was working with, I sometimes did not go.
Interestingly, participants #1, #2 and #3 commented that many times their presence was requested or welcomed by teaching staff. They suggested that teachers would put students first. Often, teaching staff would overlook job action prescriptions in the interest of students so they could make use of the expertise or service administrators could provide. These three participants all suggested that the teaching staff were flexible when it came to the best interests of students:

Participant #2: And with that school it really was to do…it wasn’t so much “what can we do to take her off” as much as it was “we to work for the kids here.”

Participant #1: The teachers wanted that. There was a couple of times where I wasn’t supposed to be there but a teacher came and said “I want you there, I need you there.” And you know what? We put the kids first. So it’s as simple as that.

Participant #1 had an understanding with teachers that they would overlook the job action prescriptions at times to better serve students:

Participant #1: You know, not that the teachers were doing anything wrong, there were some cases where they really needed me there. And I just simply ...I was there. And it was kind of a joke because it was like we don’t see [SBA name] here...[laugh]...You know and I’d be there but they...but it was kind of like you know? We’re not gonna say anything and I didn’t want to get them in trouble. So, even when my colleagues were talking about different things, I would not...I never said to anyone “Oh, I’m going to some of the school-based teams that maybe I should [not] be going to.” I just kind of kept it quiet. And it just had to do with the kids, with the children.

I found myself relating to these scenarios as the staff at my school found operating our SBT difficult without our SBAs and eventually requested that they attend in the second half of the job action year.

Participant #3 was the one participant who commented that she did not feel her role in SBT was affected by the job action: “It didn’t affect me at all about school-based team.” She attributed this to the fact that many of the teachers and her vice-principal at her school were new and had made the decision to include her:
Participant #3: I’m the one that has all the knowledge. Right? I am the one...when you are an administrator with new staff, I’m the one that’s got the experience. And so, people found out pretty quickly that with all of these new people you needed to have somebody who knew what the heck they were doing. Because, the vice-principal was from Quebec, we had new people in resource. Nobody could function...well I guess they could do it but they made a decision...and you know I just started every school-based team meeting saying “is this a problem for you that I’m here? Happy to leave.” And, nobody ever asked me to leave.

Participant #4 had different experiences at his two schools regarding SBT meetings. At his first school, he attend with the principal because the principal had mandated that administration would attend all SBT meetings but some teachers did not attend meetings and some student cases were not addressed:

Participant #4: My [principal] was very strong in saying “school-based team will not happen without an administrator.” So, school-based team carried on. If a teacher felt they... if they were on school-based team and didn’t want to be there because the [principal] was there, then they didn’t show up. And we either didn’t talk about the kid. But the administrator, both of us were in the meeting, in school-based team, as per usual...

Interviewer: Did you have many problems with staff?

Participant #4: Yep, I had some staff not show up ...in the VP one...in my previous school.

At his second school, where he was the principal, participant #4 did not attend any SBT meetings because the staff had already elected to exclude the principal since September 2011. He chose to respect that policy in order to maintain positive relationships with his new staff:

Participant #4: In the new school, it was already prior. It was already set up that the [principal] wasn’t attending. So, I wasn’t going to come in and say “well, I’m going to be there now.” So, I just kind of let it go. Because again, that’s part of the relationship building and kind of that piece
that I’m like look, I’m kind of true to my word and I support you and I’m kind of going to let things go this year.

Participant #4 did express that his absence presented a significant challenge for him and prevented him from providing leadership on the student issues discussed at SBT meetings.

Participant #4: Well school-based teams was a bit of a challenge because I really wasn’t allowed to attend. So I stuck with that and I trusted my… the people that...I trusted the school-based team chair that it was kind of going to go as business as usual and take....Go through the proper processes and protocols and so on...It was unfortunate that my experience on school-based team and what I know about certain programs out there and ideas wasn’t a part of that school-based team. And I think that they also felt that that was a too bad situation.

The ability of SBAs to participate in SBT meetings was a major aspect of their roles that was affected by the job action. As previously stated in the introduction, the LRB had been requested to clarify to what degree administrators could participate in SBT meetings. However, despite the ruling in October 2011, the four participants each experienced their roles in SBT meetings differently. They each adopted different policies to address the challenges the job action posed to their ability to participate and perform a leadership role. Their participation was also influenced by how teaching staff interpreted the job action prescriptions and by the level of experience of teaching staff.

In addition to SBT meetings, the participants commented that their ability to collaborate and lead in other school programs was affected by the job action.

**Participation in other school programs and initiatives**

All the participants commented that their ability to collaborate, lead or participate in various school programs or initiatives was affected by the job action. These programs and initiatives included resource team meetings, fundraising, professional development, staff collaboration and school planning, and programs specific to certain schools, such as the IB program.

**Involvement in school growth planning, and professional development for teachers.** All participants commented that their ability to engage in staff collaboration, to lead professional development and to move forward on their school growth plans was significantly affected by the job
action. They were able to discuss the school plan only once during the annual mandated professional development day in the spring of 2012:

Participant #4: I don’t know if I really participated in the planning of the [professional development] so I didn’t really plan any of it. The only one I could plan was the last one, or the second last one, on the school growth plan. So that was really the only one I participated in.

Participant #3 described the job action year as a “dead year” regarding the school growth plan because they could not proceed together as a staff. She also commented that her ability to be an educational leader during professional development sessions was restricted; she also perceived that it was difficult on her newer teachers:

Participant #3: We couldn’t come together for professional development and people spent a lot of time doing self-directed. So in a sense, as an educational leader, for those kind of teachers to do things, it was really challenging it was really challenging to do that. So that…it was like a hole. There was something that was missing.

Previous to the job action year, Participant #1 had established collaborative groups of teachers from similar grades that would meet monthly to work on the school growth plan. Participant #1 was unable to attend these meetings during the job action but stated that the staff still made efforts to collaborate in these groups during the job action year:

Participant #1: The collaboration that we are starting at this school…I had started to set-up and scheduling strong collaborative groups going many years, they continued it which was great, but I wasn’t invited to attend.

Participant #4 also commented that he still attempted to perform an educational leadership role during school time with staff members who were willing to collaborate with him. He discussed leading seminars on technology use, such as tablets:

Participant #4: It was more for me to just feel out to see what they were interested in and...you know? Those kind of things... I really didn’t stop what I was going to do when I got there. I just
said, “I’m going to go forward with some ideas, so you’re either in or you’re not.” And I would do in-class workshops with them because I was getting some of those new iPads and toys and technology stuff. So, and they were willing.

**Involvement with other educational programs.** As noted previously, participant #1’s school offered the IB MYP to its grade 6 and 7 students. The job action significantly affected her ability to participate in the MYP meetings. She did not attend weekly meetings amongst the staffs of the other neighbouring schools that offered the MYP and the high school staff. Participant #1 reported that the restrictions placed on her presented challenges as the following year was a review year:

Participant #1: I was respectful of that, and so I wasn’t involved with that for a year. And that, that was tough for me. Because, you know, because...I...it was really important that...I felt it was important I was part of the process and part of the group. But, it was what it was. It went right back to normal the moment it was over...

Interviewer: Oh Yah? I have not worked at an IB school before. But, I’m not sure how much leadership would you normally do...be putting into-

Participant #1: A lot, because as head of the schools...we were working towards our review year, it’s like an accreditation. So, you know, principals were very much involved. So, it was what it was. We got through it.

**Impact on school events and fundraising.** Participant #3 was unable to collaborate in some annual events that relied on teacher volunteers. She stated that during the job action, the teachers planned some events themselves such as the student’s sports day without help from the administration. Other annual events such as meet-the-teacher night were cancelled because teachers did not attend. Other events, such as the annual parent volunteer appreciation tea, she had to organize by herself:

Participant #3: They planned their sports day by themselves without me. It was great, to not feel that I had to push to get something done. It was harder to plan those [other types] of community events like the winter festival concert before Christmas break. Or the welcome...the meet-the-teacher-night, those kind of things that you like to do to have everybody come
together with your community right? Those kind of things are missing because teachers wouldn’t go and...If there were opportunities for teachers to go to a parent meeting or....But I have to say, some did come but they didn’t go to PAC meetings, they didn’t go to those kind of things. So in a sense, of course it affects the community relationships.

Participant #4 had to organize and promote various school fundraisers with minimum or no support from teachers during the job action year. At his first school a book fair fundraiser was normally part of his role as teacher-librarian but was something he took on as an administrator at his new school:

Participant#4: Well I had to run the book fair myself, which I had to do at the new school too. Because the teacher-librarian wasn’t going to do it. So I could have easily said no I’m not going to do it but I did because I knew it was money for [the school]. So I had to run the book fair in the school... [As a [principal], I did take on the Scholastic book fair when I got to the new school because the librarian wasn’t willing to do it. So instead I took that on and continue to take it on but will probably slowly ... If someone wants to do it then do it but if not I’m not doing it anymore.

Regarding educational programs and initiatives in their schools, all the participants expressed different experiences related to their ability to participate, collaborate and lead during the job action. They all perceived that it was very difficult to move forward with their school goal plans and professional development with their staffs during the job action year. Similar to SBT meetings, their ability to participate in other programs appeared to be influenced by how their staff as a whole and how teachers individually interpreted and followed the job action prescriptions.

**Conflict and potential conflict**

None of the participants reported having any significant conflicts with staff during the job action. The participants did identify some potential sources of conflict that they were able to avoid. As discussed previously, the participants were able to minimize conflict and maintain positive relationships with teaching staff by following the job action prescriptions and keeping interactions with staff members more formal than in non-job action years. Additionally, they were able to use their staff reps as a buffer between teachers and administration. There were two potential sources of conflict that the participants identified but were able to avoid.
Two participants identified extracurricular sports as a potential source of conflict. As already discussed, during the job action teachers in some schools did not participate in coaching; at some schools, coaching continued because it was not interpreted as struck work by teachers. All the participants in this study reported that their teaching staff were not participating in extracurricular sports during the job action. Three of the participants collaborated with parents and other community members to maintain extracurricular sports during that year. However, participants #1 and #2 expressed some concern that this could be a source of conflict with teachers if administrators were perceived as doing struck work. Participant #1 did not experience any resistance or conflict from her teaching staff as administration had participated in sponsoring extracurricular sports prior to the job action. However, participant #1 was aware of teaching staffs at other schools who submitted grievances against administrators who attempted to maintain sports without teachers:

Participant #1: [We] were able to continue that, parents helping out and so-on-and-so-forth. And thankfully, the teachers didn’t block that...You know... at other schools, they grieved it, because you know they felt it was inappropriate that somebody else was doing what they felt they were doing - which wasn’t always the case because we shared in that whether it was the administration, or parents, or youth and family worker, or counsellor. We all kind of shared in those extracurricular activities.

Participant #2 reported that rather than “muddy the waters,” the administration at her school refrained from taking on extracurricular sports; her school did not maintain extracurricular sports during the job action year. Participant #3 commented that in normal years, teachers participating in coaching was relatively low and was generally conducted by parent volunteers and she perceived no potential conflict because of administration taking on extra sponsorship duties. Participant #4 normally coached at his school and did not perceive any potential source of conflict with teachers during the year.

Another potential source of conflict involved the posting of union posters and the wearing of pins or T-shirts that displayed political messages or union slogans. As an example, during 2011/2012 teachers were provided T-shirts from the union that had the slogan “STANDING UP for BC Students” printed across them. Participant #2 reported that the school board had directed administrators to enforce board policy restricting teachers from wearing political messages. She found it potentially straining on her relationships with staff members to enforce the board policy. She stated that she was
able to minimize tension and avoid conflict by not making it a personal issue and clearly stating that the directive was from the board office and not from the school administration:

Participant #2: It was tricky because you’d have…there were different days posters would go up or clothes would be worn and at the board they were asking us to make mention of it. So, that kind of put us in a tricky spot in terms of relations. You know? “You need to put that button somewhere else” or “that poster doesn’t…shouldn’t be up in the school.” You know, that was kind of directed from the school board so...only kind of conflict would be more with posters or something like that. And... and, it wasn’t really mentioned, it was more...you know?

Interviewer: You were able to make it not personal by saying “the board wants”? 

Participant #2: Yah...the third party...

Participant #4 commented that he adopted a relaxed policy of allowing staff to wear their buttons or T-shirts in the school but that he had some concerns about distribution of literature to parents on school grounds. Though BC teachers have the right to communicate to parents about issues pertaining to education (BCTF, 2014), there are protocols that must be followed if literature is delivered to parents through students or on school grounds. The contents of documents must be approved by BCPSEA for accuracy of content and delivered in sealed envelopes. He felt that his staff was aware of what action was appropriate:

Participant #4: If they wanted to wear their shirt...and that’s fine... I didn’t really care, I really didn’t care. As long as they weren’t standing outside and handing out pamphlets, and you know, the understanding that they had to be off the property. Those kind of things. But they knew that and they understood that... I would see something as not really threatening and that.

A third potential source of conflict was the presence of administrators at SBT or resource meetings. All administrators commented that they were aware that their presence at SBT or resource team meetings might be an issue for some teachers. Participants #1, #2, and #3 did not experience any conflict with staff. As discussed previously, all three commented that many times their presence was
requested at meetings and sometimes teachers would bypass job action prescriptions in order to have an administrator present at meetings.

Participant #4 did not attend SBT meetings at his new school but did experience some minor issues at his previous school in the fall of 2011. As discussed earlier, the principal at the school he was assigned to from September until December 2011 had mandated that an administrator was to be present at all SBT meetings. Participant #4 said that a number of teachers did not attend SBT meetings when administrators were present. Participant #4 did not indicate that these protestations had any effect on relations between those teachers and administrator but did perceive that the SBT was unable to properly address the student issues that the teachers were supposed to bring forward.

Opportunities arising from job action

All the participants in the study discovered a number of opportunities during the job action. These included chances to interact more with students and parents, the opportunity to show their leadership in unique situations provided by the job action and opportunities for staff to become more involved with aspects of the school without the need of an administrator.

All participants commented that they were able to interact more with students and parents during the job action. Participant #2 commented that it helped her get to know the students faster at her new school:

Participant #2: yah...supervision was hugely up. I mean every day, which I mean was kind of neat too because I had just started at the school so all the kids knew me by the second week or so.

Being on supervision daily allowed participant #3 to connect with parents. This provided her an opportunity to communicate information to parents about the strike:

Participant #3: We did supervision. Every day. And you know what? It was great. It was great because, I was outside with those parents. I got to know those parents really well. We went out there and we used it as an opportunity for making connections, smoothing ruffled feathers. Parents were upset because of the teachers. And just to keep that public face....we are continuing on.
Participant #2 stated that the experience with parents and students during the extra supervision encouraged her to go out on supervision more often after the job action concluded: “Once the job action was over it was kind of interesting because I’d still go out there more than I normally would.”

Participant #1 also noted that because some teachers elected not to go to an overnight camp event, she attended the trip instead. The experience with the students was extremely positive and she continued to attend the camp with the students in the following year: “It turned out to be so positive, I had to go to camp …And after that year, I went the following year I just loved it so much. So that was a huge positive.”

Participant #4 commented that he was able to forge new relationships with parents and other volunteers in his school community at his new school during the strike. He was able to find coaches and volunteers for school sports who continue to volunteer with extracurricular activities today:

Participant #4: The one thing that it did bring about was because teachers weren’t willing to coach, I was able to get parent volunteers to coach so, you know, I think that was a big bonus for our school for sure. You know, it gave parents opportunities to come in and help out where they could, and so that was a big deal. And I did look around for other opportunities for the coaches outside the school board to come in and that continues now actually. So I think that was a big bonus for sure.

According to Participant #4, the job action provided opportunities to demonstrate to his new staffs his capacity to work and lead. He commented that this was one way he was able to develop trust with the teaching staff at his new school:

Participant #4: The only opportunities that it provided was everyone was seeing how much work I was willing to do as an administrator. So, and again, that was no different from what I would do if it was a non-job action year or whatever. I’m always out there doing stuff anyways. You know I coach or I try and fundraise. That stuff didn’t change.

Participant #3 also commented, “I think people began to see how hard the principal worked.” She also found that the job action aided in her distributive leadership. During the job action, because she was unable to participate on a number of committees, the teachers were forced to become more
engaged in staff collaboration, school committees, professional development activities and advocating for students in resource and SBT meetings:

Participant #3: What happened, what it did for us, and you have to understand that French immersion and our school culture you don’t have a collaborative sense as you would in an English school. We just don’t have it especially when you always have new staff... So we’re basically known like silos in the prairies, very much individual teaching. But the thing that did happen because of job action, especially in the area of professional development, was that they had to get it together because I couldn’t get it together anymore. So, it provided some leadership opportunities not only for like professional development but our resource team... They came together and they... and it was really positive. In things like, as I had mentioned, as our resource team. Because we had to. People in the resource team and what happened was that they became...They took on that kind of advocacy for student learning where we [administration] couldn’t in some cases, just because of the nature of things. And, so that was really positive.

Despite the challenges the job action presented, the participants were able to discover some opportunities and to observe positive changes to school operations. They all commented that they took opportunities to better get to know members of their school communities and to display individual initiative. Additionally, their removal from school communities and initiatives may have helped to foster collaboration and involvement of teaching staff.

The year after

All SBAs stated that the job action did not have a negative effect on the following year. For the most part, the participants commented that things seemed to return to normal relatively quickly. They all thought that the job action did not impact their relationships with teaching staff into the next year. The participants reported that SBTs and other initiatives returned to normal operations and some even commented that there were some positive changes in staff engagement in the year following the job action.

From the perspective of participants #1 and #4 school operations, staff relationships and workload appeared to return to normal relatively quickly. Participant #1 noted some adjustment in returning to normal in early September 2012 and some initial strain at the beginning of the year:
Participant #1: In September...we came back. They were willing to do some stuff, you know some work at the school, but it was still really strained. You know it was still difficult... for everyone involved. But they were less rigid for sure... By later in the fall, it was back to normal... it didn’t take too long.

Participant #4 did not indicate any strain at the beginning of September 2012 and commented “everything else just kind of continued on without any changes. It really was a typical year.”

Both participants stated that their administrative workload seemed to return to normal and was not affected in the year after the job action. Participant #4 did not find much of a difference between the two years in terms of his workload:

Participant #1: it went back to normal, pretty much the way it was before, which was that it was just an extremely busy and challenging school. Its...you’re going all day, every day with teacher concerns, parent concerns, student concerns. So Yah, it pretty much went back quickly, I found.

Participant #4: You know, I don’t find my workload... other than those small little things, really that much of a difference. I’m not feeling like “Wow, thank goodness for job action being over.”

Participant #2 did see an increase in her administrative workload in the year after the job action such as reviewing report cards, and attending regular meetings. As discussed previously, participant #2 commented that during the job action she was able to focus more on her role as a resource-teacher because during the school day some of her administrative workload was lightened; but in the following year, she found that it was more challenging to balance her administrative and resource teacher roles.

All participants found that their relationships with teaching staff in the following year were not negatively affected by the job action. They described communications with staff returning to a more informal tone. The two administrators who were new to their schools found that they could better get to know teaching staff and properly begin to develop their relationships.

Both participants #1 and #2 explicitly described a change to a more relaxed and informal tone when communicating with teachers the year after the job action; participant #1 described a sense of relief between her and the staff. Both indicated that they experienced a return to a normal frequency of casual interactions with teachers:
Participant #1: Like I said, prior to the job action we had a very strong relationship with most...with everyone. And it was more relief. I remember people coming up to me going “I’m just so relieved. I can come in your office now. “You know I can be myself, relax, talk.” You know? So it was more relief than anything.

Participant #2: [T]here just seemed to be a lighter, a more informal approach to things. People came in more often. It was very interesting because seeing how people interacted with other teachers at meetings was the first time I had seen that. So, some people would be saying that “oh, this person does this, this person does that” or what have you...and... I had no experience with that. So, it was. That was kind of interesting. And just the way people were very free to kind of come talk to me and so I would be happy to do things. And they felt more comfortable asking me to do things.

Participants #2 and #4 explained that because of the job action, they were not able to properly get to know their staff. They thought that in the year after, they could fully develop the relationships at their new schools. Participant #4 also commented that he could better collaborate and perform his educational leadership role better in the following year:

Participant #4: I think [the relationships] just continued to grow. And [I] got back to just to... you know... I’m supportive of them, “whatever you need” kind of thing. I look...I’m a tech person... “So let’s work together...I’ll teach your class about stuff and show you at the same time.” So, there was a lot of that going on and continues to go on now. So that just continued to grow. So the relationship [with staff] just continues to go stronger.

All of the participants found that SBT meetings returned to their normal operations after the job action was complete. They did not experience any back-up in student cases and they did not have to spend extra time after the job action to get updated with cases. Participant #1 commented that other programs and meetings quickly returned to normal such as the IB MYP meetings: “It [MYP meetings] went right back to normal the moment it was over.” She also commented that they were able to return to collaboratively working on the school growth plan: “[T]he formal collaboration sessions that were scheduled every week, those went back to normal.”
As discussed previously, participant #3 commented that the job action had positive effects on her ability to be a distributive leader as more teaching staff were willing to collaborate and perform leadership tasks in the year afterwards. She believed that her exclusion from a number of committees and meetings had a positive effect on her school:

Participant #3: I think it was positive sort of afterwards where I saw teachers really come into the forefront and looking at this as a leadership [opportunity]. And that I would have to say was really great. And it started this whole momentum amongst staff. Which was really positive for our school. It [the job action] had a positive effect.

For the participants in this study it appeared that the job action had no negative effects in the year after the job action. The participants perceived that the communications and operations of their schools quickly returned to normal in fall 2012. Some of the participants even perceived positive changes to their ability to collaborate with teaching staff in the year after the job action.
Discussion

The participants in this study had different experiences in different administrative roles and within different school contexts. However, there were a number of similarities that emerged from the interview data. The participants did experience a number of challenges presented by the job action, but they also were presented with a number of positive opportunities and experiences. All of the participants experienced changes and challenges to their workload during the job action. All of the participants experienced challenges associated with their ability to communicate with teaching staff and their ability to perform their leadership roles in various school committees and initiatives, particularly those related to the school growth plan and the school-based team. However, all participants adopted different policies and strategies to either participate in or remain updated about SBT meetings and student issues.

Supervisory work took up a significant amount of the participants’ time before and after school. Some of the participants faced the additional tasks of coordinating and supervising extracurricular activities such as sports teams. Many of the additional tasks that the administrators faced during the school day were attributed to the disruption to normal means of communication and the need to complete tasks that teachers were no longer performing.

For the participants, the increased supervision and participation in extracurricular activities actually provided a number of positive opportunities that carried into the next year. The participants commented that the increased contact with students allowed them to get to know their students better. Additionally, the extra supervision and extracurricular activities provided a means for the participants to communicate with parents and foster relationships with parents and community volunteers. This highlights that even in non-job action years, participating in morning and afterschool supervision can help administrators get to know the members of their school community. One of the participants even commented that they continued to make efforts to participate with supervision in the year after the job action.

The data reveal that for some of the participants, the job action freed up time during the school day for participants to perform other duties. The participants found that the reduction in meetings, in particular, provided time for other tasks to be completed. One of the participants attempted to use the extra time to provide more educational leadership to the staff members who were willing to collaborate, such as providing workshops on technology resources and collaborating with his primary staff. All the participants did indicate that most of the freed up time was quickly filled with other tasks.
Less one-on-one contact with individual teachers also provided time for other tasks. Teachers were not bringing as many educational issues about students to them. This may indicate an increase in collaboration amongst teaching staff and in teacher autonomy during the job action. One participant commented that the job action had a positive effect on the collaboration and participation of her teachers in meetings and committees. She found that this improved her ability to be a distributive leader in the year following the job action.

The participants stated that the three days of full strike action in which students and teachers were not in the building freed up significant time to perform other tasks, such as clearing away clutter and organizing. This suggests that periods of full strikes can offer administrators an opportunity to perform tasks that they may not be able to accomplish during regular school operations.

It appears that the most significant area of the participants’ jobs that was affected by the job action was their ability to coordinate and communicate with their staff. The inability to attend meetings and collaborate with their staff significantly impacted their ability to move ahead on the school growth plan and participate in teacher professional development sessions. However, it should be noted that teachers on some of the staffs were still willing to collaborate with their administrators in some meetings; most significantly, teachers appeared to be flexible and willing to meet with administrators when it served the best interest of students in meetings such as school-based team.

The job action forced the participants to develop creative ways to communicate with staff. One of the significant ways the participants maintained communication with SBT and resource meetings was through vice-principals who also performed the role of resource teacher. This highlighted the important role the vice-principal can serve during job action. Being both an administrator and a resource teacher, vice-principals can serve as a liaison between administration and staff. This illustrates that the structure of the vice-principal’s role, as it is structured in most BC schools, may be advantageous during times of job action.

The participants did not feel that the job action negatively affected their relationships with teaching staff. From the data it was clear that having positive relationships with staff before the job action really helped in maintaining positive relationships during the job action. The data suggest that administrators who are new to schools may face additional challenges during a job action. The participants in this study who were new to their schools were able to partially cope with these challenges by fostering positive relationships with office and support staff. All four participants were able to avoid significant conflict with teaching staff.
One observation that should be highlighted was the important role that the staff rep can play during job action in communicating between staff and administration. The data also indicated that the staff rep could help in solving problems between staff members that arise during the job action. The participants had fostered positive relationships with their staff reps and maintained communication with them during job action. Staff reps were helpful in dealing with some of the challenges presented by the job action.

The data suggested that maintaining relationships with other administrators appeared to be another important way of coping with challenges, particularly for newer SBAs and SBAs who did not have another administrator at their school. Contact with other administrators such as mentors and information provided by the administrators’ professional association all were found to be sources of support and advice during the job action.

What I found most surprising from the interview data was the degree of positive experiences and opportunities reported by the participants. The participants did not indicate that they had experienced many of the negative effects reported by the media during the job action. They did not comment that they were experiencing significant stress or conflict. They all appeared to accept the challenges the job action presented.

It appears that the participants in this study were able to adapt to the challenges presented by the job action. They even were able to find positive opportunities in their situations, a case of ‘making lemonade out of lemons.’ This reflects the positive character of the participants and their ability to draw upon the resources available to them such as their vice-principals, staff reps, and support staff. The participants maintained positive relationships with their staffs by not taking teachers’ actions personally and remaining calm and non-confrontational. They used formality to ensure that mutual respect and professional behaviour were maintained during the job action. It also appears that picking their battles carefully, such as not engaging teachers about issues such as union T-shirts and pins, or not adopting authoritarian policies about things such as SBT, played a role in maintaining positive relationships.

The behaviour of teaching staffs was a factor in the experiences of the participants. The militancy of the participants’ teaching staffs did not appear to be particularly high, in fact, the participants commented that overall their staffs appeared quite flexible, particularly when it came to the best interest of students. It also appeared that the staffs of the participants continued to collaborate amongst themselves and maintained a number of school programs without their administrators. The experiences expressed in this study cannot be generalized to other SBAs in the school district. In fact, two of the participants pointed out that colleagues in other schools were negatively impacted by
the job action. For example, participant #3 believed her experiences were exceptional to that of SBAs in the school district:

Participant #3: Everybody was struggling. You know what, you came in [to an administration or board meeting]... And we were all struggling. It was a lot. It was hard. You know, it was... And I have to say for my... I was at an easier school. Like it wasn’t... There were people who had really awful experiences and staff who...because the rhetoric affects everybody. You know, it was really quite confrontational. And it was silly and counterproductive. It was counterproductive. So in that regard, you could just tell, it was a yearlong warzone.

Participant #1 commented that a number of SBAs she knew did not have the same relationships with teaching staffs and some staffs were not as cooperative with their administrators, who felt more isolated than she did: “I know some of my colleagues ... teachers literally would turn their back on them and would not sit in the same room as them. They were really mistreated.” As previously discussed, participant #1 commented that at some schools the teaching staff filed grievances against administrators who took on extracurricular duties: “[A]t other schools, they grieved it, because you know they felt it was inappropriate that somebody else was doing what they felt they were doing.”

Since the sample is small and not randomly selected, the findings should not be considered representational of the experiences of all SBAs, or even all ESBAs, in the school district. The third-party observations shared by the participants point out that not all administrators had positive experiences during the job action. However, the findings highlight the importance of fostering good relationships with teachers and adapting and coping with the challenges presented by job action. Relationships established prior to job action may influence how a school staff engages with job action prescriptions and interactions with SBAs, which, in turn, play important roles in shaping the experiences of an SBA during a strike.
Conclusion and Recommendations for Practice and Further research

This study has enabled me to gain a certain depth of understanding of the experiences of four SBAs during the 2011/2012 BC teacher job action. Based on the findings, I can conclude that the 2011/2012 teacher job action did affect the professional practice of, and present challenges to, the four participants in this study during the year of the job action, but did not significantly affect them in the year afterwards. The job action did not just present challenges but also provided positive opportunities for the participants and in some cases influenced positive changes in the operation of the schools.

To cope with the challenges presented by the job action, all the participants altered their practices. They had to change their normal means of communicating with both staff and parents and find alternative means to stay abreast of issues in SBT meetings they could not attend. The participants adapted to additional supervision duties before and after school time and coordination of extracurricular activities. They filled time freed up during school time with additional tasks.

Though this study was limited to four participants, there are a number of recommendations that can be made from the findings:

- It is important for SBAs to foster positive working relationships with their teaching staffs before job action as the participants all discussed that previous relationships with their staffs contributed to their ability to maintain relationships and communication during the job action.

- SBAs should take the opportunity to increase their interactions with parents and other members of the community who may be willing to help with some of the school programs; this may benefit the school during and after the job action.

- If SBAs intend to maintain programs that teachers have withdrawn from during job action, they should remain aware of how teaching staff may react to administrators or volunteers coordinating these programs.

- SBAs arriving in a new school appear to be at a disadvantage but should make efforts to find other members of the staff, such as other SBAs and office staff, with whom they can consult and seek support.

- New SBAs should be encouraged to foster relationships with other administrators in their district and to make use of their professional associations. Both groups can be potential sources of support and advice during job action.
• It may be prudent for school districts to avoid transferring SBAs to new schools if job action is foreseen in an upcoming school year, as new SBAs may face additional challenges in a new school with a new staff.

• Additionally, moving a school community to a new location during a job action appears to be very difficult for SBAs to coordinate due to the disruptions to communication. School districts should consider delaying certain projects that require significant coordination between school staff and administration, such as moving into a newly constructed school or one that has been seismically upgraded.

• SBAs should be encouraged to develop positive relationships with their teachers’ union staff rep. Maintaining open communication with the teacher staff rep may help if normal lines of communication are disrupted.

• Teachers need to understand the importance of their staff rep during job action and should take care in selection of the staff reps at their schools.

• Staff reps should understand their importance to the operation of their school during job action. They need to clearly understand the prescriptions of a job action and the role they serve during job action.

• SBAs also need to make themselves familiar with the prescriptions of a job action so they are fully aware of what they can and cannot expect from teachers and how they must change their practice.

• Individual teachers and staffs as a whole may interpret the prescriptions differently; some may be more flexible than others in how they apply the prescription to their work. SBAs need to understand how the staff as a whole, and how individuals on the staff, interpret the prescriptions so that they can attempt to maintain collaboration among teachers and school programs such as SBTs.

• In regards to SBTs, it is important that SBAs and teachers make every attempt to address student needs within the prescriptions of job action and reduce negative impacts to students.

• It is important for the union to clearly communicate job action prescriptions to its members to avoid inconsistent implementation or contention about interpretation. Though I understand that the 2011/2012 prescriptions were designed to allow flexible interpretation about volunteer work, such as extracurricular activities, at each school, it would be helpful if
the union would provide more guidance about how school staffs might proceed with
decision making around such issues.

I recognize the limitations of this study. This study focused only on the experiences of four
ESBAs in one school district. Two volunteers were excluded, as explained in the methodology section
and it is possible they may have described different experiences. Additionally, volunteerism may have
been a factor in the limited number of potential participants; it is possible that SBAs who had negative
experiences chose not to participate. This might explain why the experiences shared by the participants
tended to be positive ones. Only one method of data collection, semi-structured interviews, was used in
this study and future research might include other approaches, such as questionnaires.

A broader study including more SBAs should be conducted to document the experiences of
administrators during the job action. This study only investigated the experiences of elementary school-
based administrators within one school district. Future studies might examine the experiences of SBAs in
other districts and high school SBAs. The participants of this study were all white Canadians, three were
female and one was male, further research could examine issues relating to race and gender as well.
Further research is required into the impacts teacher job action has on SBAs in BC as SBAs play a crucial
role in their schools.

No new collective agreement was negotiated after the teacher job action of 2011/2012 and the
BCTF is still engaged in collective bargaining with the BC government. Based on the history of collective
bargaining and teacher job action in BC, it is probable that the province will again experience some form
of teacher job action in the future. It is important that we fully understand the impact strikes have on
SBAs. This study has suggested that job action can present challenges to SBAs but that these challenges
can be weathered if SBAs are able to adapt and cope with them. However, it also suggests that SBAs can
find potential opportunities and have positive experiences if they navigate the challenges effectively.
References


Appendix A

Interview Guide

1. Overall Experience:
   a) Describe what your work was like as a SBA during the 2011-12 teachers’ job action.
   b) In what ways, if any, was your work different than it was before the job action?
   c) Based on your experience, can you describe in what ways, if any, your role as a SBA was affected by the job action?
   d) In what ways, if any, was your role as a SBA affected by the job action in the year after it occurred or later?
   e) In what respects did these changes pose challenges and/or opportunities for you as a school-based administrator?

2. Workload:
   a) In what ways, if any, did the job action affect your workload during the 2011/2012 workload?
   b) In what ways, if any, has your workload been affected by the job action in the year after it occurred or later?

3. Relationships and communication with teaching staff:
   a) In what ways, if any, was your ability to communicate with teaching staff affected by the job action?
   b) In what ways, if any, were communications with staff affected by the job action in the year after it occurred or later?
   c) In what ways, if any, did the job action affect your relationships with teaching staff?
   d) In what ways, if any, were your relationships with teaching staff affected by the job action in the year after it occurred or later?
4. Relationships with other school staff:
   a) In what ways, if any, did the job action affect your relationships with other school staff?
   b) In what ways, if any, were your relationships with other school staff affected by the job action in the year following the job action or later?

5. Relationship with teacher staff-representative:
   a) In what ways, if any, was your relationship with your teachers’ association staff rep affected during the job action?
   b) In what ways, if any, has your relationship with your teachers’ association staff rep been affected by the job action in the year after it occurred or later?

6. School programs and initiatives:
   In what ways, if any, was your ability to participate and collaborate in various school initiatives, programs and educational services (including school-based teams) affected during the job action?
   a) Specifically, in what ways, if any, was your ability to participate and be involved with SBTs affected by the job action?
   b) In what ways, if any, was your ability to participate with SBTs still affected in the year following the job action or later?
   c) Did the job action affect your ability to participate in any other school programs, initiatives or educational services? If so, which ones, and how was your participation affected?
   d) In what ways, if any, was your ability to participate in school programs still affected in the year following the job action or later?

7. Teaching role (if applicable):
   a) Do you also perform teaching duties in your job? Can you give a brief description of your teaching role?
   b) In what ways, if any, did the job action affect your role as a teacher during the 2011-12 school year?
   c) In what ways, if any, was your teaching role still affected by the job action in the year after it occurred or later?