

# Introduction

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In June 2000, I applied to the McDowell Foundation for a research grant to conduct an analysis of job sharing. My reasons for delving into this topic were two-fold – necessity and personal interest.

As chairperson of our Local Implementation and Negotiating Committee (LINC), I needed to converse with teachers who were job sharing and I wanted to learn about the climates of the schools where they were employed. By gathering information from people who have participated in job sharing or who have experienced it as a parent, colleague or administrator, I believed I would find the answers to the questions I encounter at the bargaining table. The knowledge these people could offer would be invaluable to our LIN Committee and the board in designing contract and policies.

Personally, I find that job sharing is an attractive option for educators who, for reasons of their own, want to be in the classroom on a part-time schedule. I wanted to gain insight into the results, or the consequences perhaps, of such an arrangement.

## Research Methodology

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My research took a slightly different path than I originally proposed. My intent was to gather data from a sampling of every party involved in the job sharing scenarios under study – teachers, administrators, students and parents. When I began making contacts with directors of education in my part of the province, I discovered that there were fewer people who were able to inform me about job sharing than I had anticipated. Some schools did not have true job sharing arrangements, and some teachers were not comfortable discussing the subject with me when results of my research were to be published. It was also highly difficult to make interview appointments with people, since everyone's professional schedule was already overloaded. In the end, I was able to interview 13 teachers, 8 sets of parents and 6 in-school administrators.

My initial proposal included classroom observations of the job share partners. I found that this activity, although it was interesting, did not contribute valuable information to my study. Also, my presence appeared to increase teacher anxiety and disrupt student performance.

After encountering these obstacles, I eliminated the classroom visits and instead pulled teachers out of their rooms for a one-on-one interview, in which I jotted down their responses to 12 open-ended questions. Information from principals was acquired in the same way. Parents tended to prefer telephone interviews or to fill in the questionnaires on their own time at home. The student perspective was omitted from this research, partly because of time restrictions and partly in response to recommendations from both teachers and parents.

After reviewing the limited amount of current research literature that I was able to acquire on job sharing, I analyzed the data that I had collected and compiled this resource. My hope is that this document will serve anyone with an interest in effective education, and will answer the many questions pertaining to job sharing.

# A Personal Definition of Job Sharing

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It became apparent to me when I contacted directors of education that there are various definitions of job sharing. Most of these are more restrictive than my own idea of the term. For the purpose of this document, I have developed the following understanding: job sharing exists when two teachers share the responsibilities and the joys of educating one group of students as a partnership. My focus is on elementary classrooms where the student group and the setting are constant, but the teacher is a variable.

## Teachers' Voices

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Job sharing may occur for a variety of reasons. Most commonly, teachers who apply to job share are seeking a better balance between their personal and professional lives. By teaching half-time, individuals are better able to meet their family goal of spending more time with their own children, yet at the same time maintain their professional identity.

Other reasons for wanting to job share are diverse. Some people have health concerns that make it impossible to maintain the lifestyle and the pace of a full-time teacher. Job sharing offers them the opportunity to continue teaching and properly look after their own physical needs. Others want to be actively teaching, but have separate interests or priorities that make it too difficult to operate a classroom without a partner. Other interests requiring teachers' time may be a family-owned business, a second career or hobby, such as painting, or perhaps a desire to further their education. New teachers may choose to job share as a way of getting into the education system in their area. If only half-time job share positions are available, becoming the partner of a more experienced teacher can be an excellent way to begin a career and get a permanent contract. Finally, and very importantly, when teachers recognize symptoms of burn-out in themselves, embarking upon a job share arrangement for a year, or whatever time is necessary, can ease the professional burden and provide time for rejuvenation. The job share may be temporary or permanent, depending on what teachers need to regain their spirit, improve their health and determine what is best for themselves and their students.

## Proposing a Job Sharing Arrangement

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When a teacher begins to consider job sharing, she should do some research before making any formal requests. The best information can be obtained by talking with other teachers who have job shared. Besides answering your questions, they may bring things to your attention that you never thought of before. The opinions that you hear will help you to decide what it is that you want.

The teacher must be very confident and prepared before bringing her request to the attention of others. When you can articulate your desire for becoming a job share partner and support it as a viable alternative for your classroom, then approach your principal. In-school administrators need to be well informed and "on board" before you meet with central office administrators. The next step is to make a formal presentation to the board. In preparation for this meeting you may need:

- a formal request written to the board;
- a compilation of positive remarks gathered from other teachers, administrators and/or parents with job share experience;
- a possible timetable and year plan for yourself and another individual demonstrating that curriculum objectives and Saskatchewan Education time allotments for the required areas of study will be met; and
- a suggestion about the type of person you believe would make a good partner.

Partner selection seems to be the greatest stumbling block when teachers and boards negotiate specific job sharing arrangements. In many cases, teachers believe that it is necessary they select their own partners based on some personal criteria. Teachers told me that they felt it was best to be familiar with the partner to ensure that cooperation and collaboration would be simplified. Many pairs presented plans to their board members that included who the two partners would be and how they specifically would share the responsibilities of the classroom. Boards of education cannot always accommodate such arrangements because they need to place part-time teachers who have been away on leaves, whose positions have become redundant, or who have requested either transfers or some other amendment to their contracts. Teachers who initiate job sharing must be receptive to all the factors that the boards need to take into consideration.

## Getting Started

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Once a job sharing arrangement is established, there are many things to accomplish before teaching begins. The two teachers must invest time and energy in first getting to know one another as individuals. The development of a relationship on a personal level is not essential, but can be beneficial. There are a number of topics and issues that should be addressed together:

- Consider personal preferences, then make decisions about how to share the job. While some teachers like teaching on an alternate day schedule, others prefer the morning/afternoon split. Often the schedule is set by the school principal rather than the two teachers because of division policy or the personal beliefs of the administrator.
- Decide what subjects each educator will teach. Special consideration should be given to comfort levels and degree of expertise with each discipline. Concessions may need to be made in order to serve the children best. Generally, one person teaches mathematics and science, and the other covers language arts and social studies. Arts education, physical education, health and computer are divided up equally and sensibly.
- Create a plan for the year so that themes or units that complement each other can be taught at the same time. Work together to design a school year that provides the richest possible educational experience for children.
- Thoroughly discuss vital topics, such as teaching styles, classroom management strategies and discipline techniques. Some teachers present typical scenarios to each other and compare their likely reactions in order to develop a consistent classroom.
- Make decisions about the general operation of the classroom. Routines should be jointly established so there is no confusion for children. Morning exercises, money collection procedures and letters for home should be handled in the same way by the two teachers.
- Everything from cupboard space to bulletin boards must be divided fairly. Both professionals must feel equal ownership for the classroom and the class.
- Split the chores between the two teachers equitably. Nothing should be regarded as trivial and nothing should be taken for granted. Designate who will be responsible for

maintaining the register, doing the book orders, operating special lunches, planning classroom parties, etc.

- Meet with the principal to create a schedule that somehow allows for equal sharing of preparation time and supervision duties. If the perks or chores are assigned unevenly, the relationship will become strained.
- Sketch out individual roles for extra-curricular functions such as concerts, programs, and track and field day. No plan needs to be regarded as if it were law. When changes need to be made, be flexible.
- Develop a procedure for finishing incomplete work. Whether job sharing involves an alternate day or morning/afternoon arrangement, sometimes one teacher needs to help the other by allowing students to finish a task. Partners have to agree to either regularly repay this favor, or to teach the other's lesson to make up for the lost time.
- Prepare for the first days of school as a team. Some teachers choose to be present together in the classroom for the first day. This joint presence helps younger students recognize that both teachers are leaders in the classroom. The first morning of school is a vital time for every teacher in creating an effective classroom. It is especially beneficial for job share partners to be in the room when students and their parents arrive. Both individuals are then regarded as the teachers. Everyone sees that they work together and will provide consistency for children. When rules and expectations are developed with the students, they know that both teachers will enforce them. Partners who cannot or do not attend school during their regularly scheduled time off will naturally establish themselves as the other teacher for the class once they meet the children. At this time, they should reinforce the rules and routines so students are aware that it does not matter which adult is teaching; the expectations and procedures are consistent.

## Communication

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As with any relationship, effective communication is a key to the success of a job sharing relationship. Teachers strongly suggest that protocol should be established immediately to guide discussions about the job share. Both partners must feel welcome to express any concerns they have about their relationship, identify changes they would like to make and explain problems they are experiencing. It is necessary to confront each other with honesty and openness so that any complications are addressed before they can affect the students. The two teachers are adults who should be able to listen and respond to each other's concerns. If the situation becomes too difficult, they should involve the principal quickly.

Communication with parents should resemble that in other classrooms. Frequent, relevant notes should be sent home jointly with information contributed by both teachers and signed by the two colleagues. When problems with a student arise, the teacher who is at school needs to make a professional decision and telephone the parents promptly. Contacts about isolated events do not need to be made jointly.

An invaluable tool for the smooth operation of a job share classroom is some form of daily record written by the teachers solely for each other. In every partnership I studied, the teachers described their own version of a communication book. Here is some of their advice about the use of these books:

- Use the book daily. Writing in it should not be seen as a courtesy, but as a requirement. The information you supply to your partner is necessary for keeping both of you well informed.

- Keep it in a convenient, yet private location. Teachers who each had their own desks wrote in the book or binder and routinely placed it in the top drawer of their partners' desks.
- Use the book to record pertinent information such as attendance, anecdotes of student behaviour and other matters, notes from parents and school news. Jot down anything that your partner needs to know.
- Be sure to document any incidents that resulted in consequences to students. This documentation serves two purposes: it ensures that the consequences are timely, and a written record is available if parents have questions.
- Don't make the communication book an ominous task. Be brief, concise and informal. Your partner is not grading you on your writing style; she just needs the facts.

Teachers whose job share involves a morning/afternoon split sometimes have the opportunity to see each other over the lunch break. This overlap allows for a verbal exchange about ongoing student issues and an opportunity to touch base with each other for the sake of their personal and professional relationship.

Alternate day job share partners do not see each other often so they tend to supplement their written communication book with telephone conversations. Some partners phone each other regularly, especially during the beginning of a school year when the routine is being developed in the classroom. Others phone only when they need to confer about something that needs prompt attention. Since some things are very difficult to document, open conversations provide clarification. A time must be established when school-related telephone calls will have the least intrusive effect on the partners' personal lives.

## Report Cards and Interviews

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Assessment and evaluation of students are so important to teaching that formal reporting needs to be given a section in any document related to education. Job share teachers work out the details and time frame for coordinating the reporting process, but generally, all the teachers I spoke to had similar approaches. Report cards may be done in three ways:

- Some partners meet together about a week before the documents are to be sent home. At this time, they fill in together the social/behavioural sections and the comment portion of the reports. This joint activity is very good preparation for interviews.
- Other partners use rough copies of the report cards. They each fill in the reports for half the class independently, then switch cards. Each teacher studies the other's marks and comments, then the two meet together to address any discrepancies and fill in the good copies of the report card.
- A third approach is to have one teacher fill in these sections for the first term, while the other is responsible for this task during the second term. The partners then split the report cards evenly for year end. Although this approach is more likely to halve the work, it may lead to complications and make parent/teacher interviews awkward if the teachers disagree on a student's performance.

The academic portions of the report cards are filled in by the teacher responsible for each subject area. The only decision that needs to be made together is when each teacher will take the report cards home or if they will split them and trade on a certain day.

Joint preparation for interviews is necessary. The two job share teachers need to spend time together discussing each child and focusing on what will be included in the interview with parents. This task can be accomplished at the time when report cards are being completed together. Each partnership must design a form that will guide them through the interview and keep them focused on their objectives. Filling in these forms together ensures that the interview will run more smoothly and they will present themselves as a working team.

Both teachers need to attend the parent/teacher interview for each student. In some schools, it is a professional obligation. Other schools leave it to the teachers' discretion. Having a second teacher at the interview can be very reassuring as you both deliver the same messages to families. The most popular option for conducting interviews is to take turns during each meeting. One teacher shares a positive anecdote, then the other teacher does the same. The first shows a particular piece of student work; the second follows. Alternate who begins each interview so both are regarded as leaders by the parents. Be prepared to support one another around any issues that arise.

## Personal and Professional Gains

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Part of my research focused on learning teachers' reasons for wanting to participate in job sharing. I was also interested in their opinions about the effects that job sharing had on them either personally or professionally. I found that it was difficult to differentiate the changes that came about at school from those that resulted at home because improvements in one aspect of life result in greater satisfaction overall. The teachers interviewed made the following points:

- Teaching becomes much more enjoyable since the job is not so overwhelming. Most teachers report that their time at school is more fun because they want to be there. They are happier people.
- Job sharing allows you to be a more well-rounded person. There is time and energy for the job and other commitments. So many people involved in job sharing are parents of young children. The job share makes the balancing act of teaching/parenting much simpler. Partners do not need to make choices between one role or the other, but can feel good about both roles they play. Some teachers reported that job sharing made them a better teacher and a better mom.
- Teachers required fewer sick days away from school after they began job sharing. They were not exhausted by their dual role, but felt fresher and revitalized in the classroom. My survey participants also said that they could get through a half day even if they were not feeling 100 percent, because they knew they could rest after lunch. The alternate day teachers similarly stated that they could teach a full day when they weren't well because they would take care of themselves on the following day.
- When substitute teachers are needed in job share classrooms, it is often an expectation that one partner will teach for the other. It is very easy for the teacher to plan for a sub who is completely familiar with the class and the routines. It also causes little disruption for students. Nevertheless, the practice raises a number of issues that need to be considered. First, it is important that such substituting does not occur so often that the teacher filling in feels she is being taken advantage of and forfeiting the benefits of the job share. Also, substitute teaching for a job share partner is not popular with some teachers. It contradicts the very nature of the contract amendment, and it cannot become a requirement by the school division because some job sharing teachers are not available to teach during their regularly scheduled time away from school. At the same time, other teachers, who have taken the job share position because there were no full-time jobs available, may be happy to have the additional time

and experience in the classroom. In each job sharing situation, the two teachers and their principal must reach an agreement about substitution procedures when they meet about other details of the job share.

- Teachers recognize that their styles and personalities change when they are job sharing. Because they are happier while at school, they are generally more relaxed and enjoy their students more. They have the energy to be creative and adventurous when planning and teaching lessons. Their patience is greater and their relationships with students are more positive. Everyone in the classroom benefits.
- Teachers who have had different partners become more flexible. They learn to adapt their classrooms to accommodate new partners. A new job sharing arrangement is a learning experience for the teachers involved, offering rich professional development as each teacher learns strategies from the other.
- Although educators disagree about the perfect partner, the teachers I interviewed argued for two different kinds of job sharing teams. Some advocated a junior/senior type of partnership in which the newer teacher brings energy, enthusiasm, innovative teaching methodologies, and youth to the classroom, while the more experienced person contributes confidence, knowledge, resources and stability. Both the junior and the senior teacher grow under each other's influence, and the children grow under the influence of both teachers. Other people appreciated a more equal partnership, in which the two teachers have similar education and the same amount of teaching experience. As a result, neither teacher feels like she has to supervise the other, which may make it easier to work cooperatively. No one assumes a dominant role, but the teachers grow and learn together as teammates.
- Job sharing is sometimes regarded as an excellent way to begin a teaching career. The part-time teaching job that results is challenging and exciting, but not overwhelming or life-consuming. A beginning teacher has only five or six curricula to cover, which allows her to attend to detail and realize success. Later, when she has accumulated resources and gained confidence, she will feel prepared to move into a classroom of her own.
- One of the most practical considerations when embarking upon job sharing is the lower wages that come along with the lower stress and lighter work load. Teachers need to be informed about and prepared for the loss of income. If money becomes a problem, the many pluses of job sharing will fade.