Teachers on Fire

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Existential Phenomenological Analysis of Teachers' Burnout in Israel

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Submitted to
the New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling and
Middlesex University Psychology Department
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“As we live, we grow and our beliefs change. They must change.

So I think we should live with this constant discovery.

We should be open to this adventure in heightened awareness of living.

We should stake our whole existence on our willingness to explore and experience”.

Martin Buber (cited in Hodes 1972)

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Abstract

The term 'burnout' was coined almost forty years ago, and since then, the phenomenon of burnout in general and teachers' burnout in particular has become an extensively investigated area. It seems, however, that in the sea of data, figures and inventories, the voice of the individual teacher, the one who faces the daily challenges, is often lost. The current piece of research is an existential phenomenological exploration intent on voicing the subjective experiences of eight Israeli women who chose to become teachers in Israeli public schools, but chose to leave the teaching profession shortly thereafter, of their own accord. Using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), the semi-structured interviews were analysed and the participants' accounts of their experiences were clustered around four superordinate themes reflecting four existential dimensions (physical, social, psychological and spiritual). The findings shed light on daily encounters with ontological givens, such as uncertainty, loneliness and isolation, freedom and meaninglessness. Examining the experience of burnout through the lens of the existential phenomenological approach may help to open a new avenue for helping teachers, as well as other professionals, who face daily existential challenges which lead to burnout. Further existential-phenomenological studies of this phenomenon are recommended.

Key Words

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, IPA, burnout, teachers' burnout, four existential dimensions, existential phenomenological analysis

Statement of authorship

This dissertation is written by Gideon Menda and has ethical clearance from the New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling and the psychology department of Middlesex University. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling and the psychology department of Middlesex University for the degree of doctor of existential psychotherapy and counselling. The author reports no conflicts of interest, and is alone responsible for the content and writing of the dissertation.

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Anonymisation and transcript convention

For the purpose of preserving anonymity and confidentiality of the participants, the transcripts herein were edited and all names of participants were changed.

Transcript notation

[ ]	square parentheses indicate additional material or my summary
…	three dots indicate missing material within the sentence.
….	four dots indicate that the first phrase is a full sentence and the second phrase starts a later sentence

Chapter 1: Introduction

People often start their new careers with high hopes, idealism, expectations and great motivation. However, as soon as we feel that our work is meaningless; if we think our work makes no difference to others nor to the world; if we start to feel stressed, tired or disappointed; if we feel we have failed, then the process of burnout begins. (Brock and Grady 2000, Malach-Pines 2002a; 2004).

This project looks at the experiences of eight Israeli women who chose to become teachers and started their teaching careers both enthusiastic and highly motivated, yet decided to leave those careers after several years at school.

Almost 40 years have passed since Freudenberger (1974) identified the phenomenon of burnout. Since then, thousands of pieces of research, involving thousands of participants of almost every sector of workers have been conducted. This research has identified the symptoms and the causes of burnout, suggested ways to measure it and listed its most significant characteristics.

Teachers were the largest homogenous occupational group that researchers have investigated in their attempts to understand the phenomenon of burnout (Malach-Pines 2002b).

The high rate of teacher burnout indicates that this is a serious problem that needs proper attention. However, despite extensive research on the phenomenon of teachers' burnout (see eg.: Anderson and Iwanicki 1984, Farber 1991, Farber and Miller 1981, Fives, Hamman and Olivárez 2007, Langle 2003, Malach-Pines 2002a; 2002b, Schaufeli, Bakker, Hoodguin, Schaap and Kladler 2001, Tomic, Evers and Brouwers 2004, Tomic and Tomic 2008, Weisberg and Sagie 1999), most studies only focus on

the physical, psychological and emotional symptoms of burnout. The majority of these studies were not conducted in a way that gave voice to the subjective experience of the individual teacher.

Among the studies of teacher burnout that included Israeli participants, some pointed out that this group suffer significant burnout (Weisberg and Sagie 1999), whilst other showed the opposite (Malach-Pines 1984; 2004; 2011). Previous research, however, did not focus on teachers who left their jobs.

Furthermore, looking at burnout from an existential phenomenological perspective is rather rare. A small number of studies included existential aspects, but these researches focused on a specific aspect, and did not look at burnout as a reflection of ontological aspects of existence.

In this project, I therefore aim to explore and describe the subjective experience of eight individual Israeli women who initially chose to become teachers in Israeli public schools but decided to leave their jobs after less than 10 years. In order to voice the subjective experience of these eight women and to ensure an existential-phenomenological framework, I used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and the four existential dimensions of existence as a framework.

According to the data published by the Israeli Ministry of Education (2012), 76% of the Israeli students between the ages 6 to 18 are studying in public schools. Almost 81% of the teachers in Israel, according to the Israeli central bureau of statistics (2005) are women. All eight participants of this study are therefore Israeli women who chose to teach in Israeli public schools.

Their initial choice to become teachers in public schools in Israel led them into a specific environment, a system with its own conditions, rules and givens, over which they had no control. Using Heidegger's (1962) terminology, their initial choice "threw" them into certain context which had limitations, over which they had no control.

For example, the basic framework of teachers in the Israeli educational system is fixed by the regulations published by the Israeli Ministry of Education (2011). Under these, full time teachers at elementary, secondary and high schools are expected to spend 36 hours at school during each 5-day week during term time, with their duties including group and face-to-face meetings with students and others as well as front-line teaching.

Official “at school” working hours depend on individual circumstances (such as full-time or part-time employment, being employed at elementary school or high school, the details of collective agreements between teachers’ unions and schools and so on), but the concept is always the same. Full-time teachers in Israel spend a significant time at school each week, but they are also expected to dedicate a great deal of out-of-school time to school-related activities like trips, holiday celebrations with the children and their parents, phone calls, lesson preparation and marking.

With their work occupying so much of their lives, both in thought and time, it is safe to say that school can be seen as the teachers’ significant environment where they live and through which they experience the world.

This study therefore describes the experience of eight Israeli women in this significant environment. It starts with a literature review describing the developments in the study of burnout throughout the last 40 years, as well as the symptoms and

causes of it. It presents the four existential dimensions of existence that were used as a framework in this study.

It then presents the methodology and my choice to use IPA in this study, as well as the way IPA was used in order to analyse the data collected.

The next section, the findings, then presents the participants' accounts of their school teaching experiences, grouped according to four superordinate themes and emergent sub-themes. This section is followed by a discussion and analysis chapter that discusses the participants' accounts of their experience as seen through an existential phenomenological lens as well as through other theoretical frames. The discussion and analysis section presents the existential anxieties experienced in each superordinate theme, proposing that burnout is an existential phenomenon that reflects the way employees experience certain ontological limitations.

The conclusion chapter summarises the project and includes reflections on the strength and weakness of this project, clinical implications and suggestion for further studies.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Over the past four decades, more than 4,800 books and articles documenting and discussing different aspects of burnout have been published (Malach-Pines 2011). Tens of thousands of participants around the world have taken part in thousands of studies describing and trying to explain this phenomenon. Symptoms, causes and methods of prevention have been described as scholars investigated the nature of burnout as manifested in care workers, social workers, nurses, doctors, dentists, mental health workers, psychologists, managers, clerks, high-tech employees, waiters, police officers, engineers, industrial workers, operators, managers, clergymen, teachers and many others (Malach-Pines 2011, Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter 2001, Schaufeli, Leiter and Maslach 2009).

As one of the most investigated phenomena of the last 40 years, burnout's full complement of aspects is impossible to present. This chapter presents the main developments in its study, the main symptoms described in the literature and the main causes of what is now recognised as a phenomenon that negatively affects both individuals and society.

2.1 Burnout – definitions and research developments

The enormous body of literature mentioned above means that the term burnout is now so widely known and used that it has become almost a cliché. It is common to hear someone complaining of burnout, whether in a chat over coffee or a serious debate.

Burnout has become an intensively studied existential phenomenon and an everyday word, but the term itself is relatively new. It stands on the borderline

between social psychology of work and the psychology of stress (Etzion, Kafri and Pines 1982), having become a label for many phenomena, interpreted in many different ways. That might make the term difficult to define (Shmerling 1999).

Burnout was introduced to the scientific community and to the public in the 1970s, with Freudenberger being the first researcher to identify its symptoms (Malach-Pines 2002b, Langle 2003). In his 1974 study, Freudenberger described a number of symptoms observed among volunteers working for aid organisations. He described exhaustion, irritability and cynicism, all of which developed after several months of great dedication and enthusiasm. Freudenberger described these people as suffering from *burnout*, meaning that they had reached a state of frustration or fatigue induced by devoting themselves to a cause, way of life, or relationship that had failed to produce the expected reward (Freudenberger 1974).

The main purpose of Freudenberger's early studies and Maslach's 1978 study, in which she interviewed human services workers and learned about the stress they suffered at work, was to identify and to describe the basic phenomena of burnout (Angerer 2003, Maslach et al. 2001). A central contribution of these early studies was in creating the ground for understanding that burnout is common, but it was still regarded as something that occurred only in jobs that involved contact with others (Tomic and Tomic 2008).

Studies of burnout from the 1970s were conducted mainly among care-giving and service occupations, in the context of the relationship between the provider of a service and its recipient. They suggested that those occupations are very demanding and often lead the worker to experience emotional exhaustion (Angerer 2003, Malach-Pines 1984, Maslach el al. 2001). These studies found that, in order to protect

themselves, workers developed cynicism and depersonalisation, as well as emotional distance from and negative attitudes towards service recipients (Maslach et al. 2001).

In the 1980s, researchers focused mainly on assessing burnout and developing scales to measure it (Angerer 2003, Maslach et al. 2001). Several measures were developed, the most popular scale being the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), accepted internationally and widely used today. Over 90% of burnout research protocols, articles and dissertations use this scale (Schufeli et al. 2001). Also known as the MBI-Human Service Scale (MBI-HSS), it is a self-report questionnaire, developed by Maslach and Jackson (1981) and based on their definition of burnout. They described burnout as:

> A syndrome of emotional exhaustion and cynicism that occurs frequently among individuals who do "people-work" of some kind. A key aspect of the burnout syndrome is increased feelings of emotional exhaustion. (Maslach and Jackson 1981, p99)

The Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach and Jackson 1981), based on those primary dimensions of burnout, includes references to the following three aspects:

1. Emotional exhaustion, with symptoms such as chronic fatigue, sleep disturbance and other disorders, diffuse physical problems and proneness to illness.

2. Depersonalisation and dehumanisation, such as negative, cynical attitudes towards colleagues and those who seek aid as well as feelings of guilt and skimping on work.

3. Reduced efficiency and discontent with achievement, such as subjective feelings of impotency, failure and of lack of recognition.

Since burnout was initially thought to exist only among those doing 'people-work' of some kind (Maslach and Jackson 1981), the MBI was designed using terms relevant to workers in the human services field.

In 1986, Maslach, Jackson and Leiter developed the MBI-Educator Survey (MBI-ES or MBI-E) in response to the growing scholarly interest in burnout experienced by teachers (Angerer 2003, Malach-Pines 2011, Maslach et al. 2001). The focus of burnout studies in the 1980s was still on very specific occupations: human services, including the aid and education professions.

A lesser known tool to measure burnout, used in 5% of studies (Schaufeli et al. 2001), is the Burnout Measure (BM) designed by Pines, Aronson and Kafri (1981). The BM is a self-report questionnaire, developed under the influence of Pines's and Aronson's definition of burnout:

> A state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion caused by long-term involvement in situations that are emotionally demanding. (Pines and Aronson 1988, p9)

The design of the BM self-questionnaire, unlike that of the original version of MBI, is not limited to particular professions. It includes 21 items, evaluated on seven-point frequency scales, that allow researchers to assess the level of the person's physical, emotional and mental exhaustion (Malach-Pines 2005).

In the 1990s, empirical research into burnout continued and extended into several new avenues. The concept of burnout was applied to other occupations: managers, military services, computer technology and clerical posts. When it became clearer that burnout is not profession-specific, a new version of MBI, the Maslach

Burnout Inventory General Scale (MBI-GS) was introduced in 1996. The items in MBI-GS are more generic and do not refer specifically to a certain group of employees. Nevertheless, the same three dimensions of burnout (emotional exhaustion; depersonalisation; reduced efficiency) originally indicated by Maslach and Jackson (1981) stayed in the core of this questionnaire (Schaufeli, Leiter, Maslach and Jackson 1996)

Statistical tools were more widely used in 1990s studies and many previously unconsidered potential influences of burnout were now examined. Longitudinal research allowed measurement of the continual effect of long-term parameters such as the working environment (Maslach et al. 2001). Other studies worked towards differentiating depression and job dissatisfaction from burnout, which was now proved a distinct phenomenon (Bakker, Schaufeli, Demerouti and Janseen 2000). Over a thousand studies on this topic were published in the 1990s.

The study of burnout has continued into the new century. Now that it has become clear that burnout appears in every occupation, researchers are trying to identify subtle differences between the different occupations. Attention is given to the nature of the job itself (and its conditions) instead of merely to the relationship between the employee and the customers or service receivers. Different studies try to explain this phenomenon through the lenses of different psychological approaches. Table 1 (see next page) summarises the developments in the study of burnout:

Period	Main focus and contribution
1970s	The term burnout was coined and early research initiated. Burnout identified for the first time as a common phenomenon among aid workers, care givers and service occupations. Exhaustion, irritability, and cynicism identified as being among the main characteristics of burnout.
1980s	Focus on developing and assessing scales to help in identifying and quantifying burnout. The MBI developed to measure emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and reduced efficiency. The BM developed to measure levels of physical, mental and psychological exhaustion. The main interest of the studies is limited to human services, aid and education professions.
1990s	Burnout research extended to occupations like managers, military services, computer technology and clerical. Statistical tools come into widespread use. Studies look for potential influences related to environmental conditions rather than merely interpersonal aspects. Longitudinal researches are carried out.
2000s	Researchers now understand that burnout appears in every occupation and start searching for subtle differences or unique characteristics of burnout among different groups and working conditions. Attempts made to explain the phenomenon through lenses of different approaches.

Table 1: Main focus and contribution of burnout studies along the years

2.2 The symptoms and characteristics of burnout

In almost 40 years of study, researchers have described many characteristics of burnout. It is apparent that the intensity of the burnout experience, the length of its existence, its frequency and consequences all differ from person to person. However, three basic elements can be found in most published burnout studies: physical, emotional and psychological exhaustion (Malach-Pines 2011, Pines et al. 1981).

2.2.1 Symptoms of physical exhaustion

The symptoms of physical exhaustion related to burnout include feelings of low energy or lack of energy, chronic and general fatigue and overall weariness and exhaustion (Malach-Pines 2011, Moss 1989). Somatic symptoms include headaches, neck and shoulder pain, muscular tension, changes in eating habits, weight changes and sleeping problems. A person undergoing burnout may feel tired throughout the day but be unable to sleep at night (Moss 1989).

Studies have shown links between heart attacks and burnout. Reinhold (1996) found a relationship between cardiovascular emergencies and stress at work. Brock and Grady (2000) described insomnia, dizziness, nausea, allergies, skin problems, stiffness, menstrual disorder and breathing difficulties. They also found that sore throat, swollen glands, digestive problems and proneness to infections characterise burnout.

Ulcers, gastrointestinal disorders, lower back pain and flare-up of pre-existing medical disorders like asthma, high blood pressure and diabetes have also been reported as symptoms of burnout (Stanley 2004). Researchers have shown that burnout is characterised by a tendency to catch colds frequently and to complain of constantly feeling generally unwell. Other symptoms

reported include a tendency to suffer injuries at work, at home or in car accidents as a result of physical exhaustion (Malach-Pines 1984; 2011).

Malach-Pines (2011) reported a typical complaint of a person suffering physical symptoms of burnout:

> Although the week had just started, I arrived at the office with a tremendous fatigue. For eight hours at work I tried to find myself a quiet corner where I can lay my head on the table and catch a quick nap. All I can do is to dream of the moment when I return home and crawl into my bed. Even death doesn't frighten me because in death I see the only way I can sleep with nobody ever waking me up. Nevertheless, when I finally return home I can't fall asleep as the problems and pressures won't let go of me. (Malach-Pines 2011, p24)

People suffering burnout report dreams in which they fly for their lives. Some of them turn in their despair to alcohol, cigarettes, food, tranquilisers and other drugs (Malach-Pines 2011, Maslach 1982). Sudden death resulting from overwork, known as *karoshi,* has also been reported by Reinhold (1996) as a phenomenon known in Japan.

2.2.2 Symptoms of emotional exhaustion

Emotional symptoms of burnout are similar to those observed in cases of clinical depression. They include feelings of helplessness, and hopelessness as well as believing oneself to be at a "dead end".

These emotional symptoms include feelings of exhaustion, loss of emotional energy and functional decrease (Friedman and Lotan 1985). They may include an inability to form new relations or to maintain present ones as well as a feeling of loneliness, self-pity and a wish to be

left alone (Malach-Pines 1984; 2011). Friends and family are seen as demanding rather than as a source of support (Moss 1989).

The individual undergoing burnout experiences an emotional void and feelings of disappointment, along with nervousness and a short temper. Malach-Pines (2011) reported a typical statement:

> I am trying to avoid looking into the eyes of those who come seeking my help. I have no patience for them or for their problems. Sometimes I feel like saying, "Who cares? You think you are the only one who has problems?" (Malach-Pines 2011, p25)

In extreme situations, suicide is contemplated (Moss 1989). The sufferer feels there is nothing left to offer to self or family and may experience a sense of running in a dark and endless tunnel (Powel 1993). Anger and frustration are also common among the emotional symptoms (Stanley 2004).

2.2.3 Symptoms of psychological exhaustion

Psychological symptoms of burnout include negative attitudes towards oneself, work, other people and life in general (Langle 2003, Moss 1989). Interest in work is lessened, self-esteem is lowered and the sufferer starts to feel inferior and an outsider.

Other psychological symptoms include developing negative opinions towards others, depersonalisation and cynicism. Discovery of once-hidden attributes in oneself, such as rudeness and contempt, have also been reported as psychological symptoms of burnout (Malach-Pines 2011). Another typical symptom is thinking of oneself as of a useless and incapable person (Powell 1993), with a sense of distress and failure in pursuit of ideals. Psychological exhaustion

leads to distancing oneself cognitively from one’s work and finding difficulty in gaining a sense of accomplishment and effectiveness (Fives, Hamman and Olivárez 2007).

Malach-Pines (2011) reported a typical statement reflecting psychological exhaustion: “I made up my mind that if they were victims for so long, they probably got what they deserved” (p26).

Many of the psychological symptoms of burnout, like the emotional and the physical ones, are dangerous signs. They develop slowly through three main stages, labelled by Daley (1979) as:

1. *Alarm stage*, in which the individual uses defence mechanisms, trying to cope with the stressing situation.
2. *Resistance stage*, in which the individual becomes rigid, isolated from others and cynical.
3. *Exhaustion stage*, in which the individual experiences the extreme symptoms of burnout.

Table 2 (see next page) summarises the main symptoms of burnout, in each of the three main groups of symptoms:

Main Symptoms of Physical Exhaustion

- Low energy, chronic general fatigue, overall weariness and exhaustion.
- Somatic symptoms such as headaches, neck, shoulders, back and muscle pains. Breathing difficulties, sore throat, swollen glands, dizziness and allergies.
- Changes in eating habits, digestive problems and severe weight changes.
- Sleeping problems and insomnia.
- Flare-up of pre-existing medical disorders.

Main Symptoms of Emotional Exhaustion

- Loss of emotional energy and feelings of void.
- Inability to form new relationships or to maintain existing ones.
- Loneliness, self-pity and a wish to be left alone; experiencing friends and family as demanding rather than as a source of support.
- Feelings of disappointment, accompanied by nervousness and a quick temper.
- Feelings of hoplessness.

Main Symptoms of Psychological Exhaustion

- Negative attitudes towards oneself, work, others and life in general.
- Depersonalisation and cynicism.
- Lowered self-esteem, experiencing oneself as incapable and useless.
- Cognitive distance from surroundings.
- Failure in pursuit of ideals.

Table 2: The main symptoms of burnout

2.3 Causes of burnout

Previous studies have not only found a large number of symptoms of burnout, they have also defined many causes of and contributors to burnout. For example, work overload is named as one of the main cause of burnout. Freudenberger (1974) initially saw the source of burnout as prolonged overwork and exhaustion. Friedman and Lotan (1985), Malach-Pines (1984) and Maslach et al. (2001) all had similar views – that burnout results from on-going, demanding and stressful work. The workload leads to loss of emotional energy as well as functional decrease, thus causing burnout. A paradoxical finding of those studies is that employees who are especially committed to their work are more likely to experience burnout, because they tend to work too long and too intensely (Anderson and Iwanicki 1984, Fives et al. 2007, Freudenberger 1974, Maslach and Jackson 1981, Maslach et al. 2001, Malach-Pines 1984; 2011).

The second cause of burnout mentioned in many of the studies is lack of appropriate reward to compensate for high emotional, physical and psychological requirements. In a society that constantly becomes more and more competitive, employers demand more from their employees but fail to increase reward in line with those demands. The employee then experiences disappointment, frustration and anger (Angerer 2003, Tomic and Tomic 2008, Malach-Pines 2011, Maslach 2001).

A third frequently-reported cause of burnout is the nature of the work that employees must do. Many studies examined burnout among carers for severely injured, incurable or terminal patients. These workers have to witness and deal with pain, misery, death and difficult scenes on a daily basis, becoming ever more aware of their inability to help or cure in the way

that they had hoped when they started their careers (Farber 1983, Malach-Pines 2011, Maslach and Jackson 1981, Moss 1989).

A fourth cause, explored in many of the studies, is negative working conditions, or at least the absence of positive ones. Comparative studies were made by looking at employees who all held similar jobs in different locations (Malach-Pines 2011). This study and similar ones discovered that working conditions have a crucial effect on burnout.

Poor communication in the workplace is a fifth reported cause of burnout. This includes relationships with superiors, colleagues and service recipients. Social support in the workplace was found to slow the process of burnout, while its absence increased it (Friedman and Gavish 2003). Poor relationships lead the individual to experience loneliness, to feel less appreciated at work and to question his or her ability to do their job. Some studies refer to this experience as *absence of fairness* (Maslach 2001, Angerer 2003, Malach-Pines 2011).

A sixth cause of burnout relates to an individual experiencing their work as unethical or immoral, going on to question the nature of the job and their own morality or values (Maslach et al. 2001, Angerer 2003).

Other causes of burnout include personality differences, inability to cope with stress, cultural issues, objective incapability and perceived lack of talent (Malach-Pines 1984; 2011).

Eventually, as Maslach and Jackson (1981) explained, the causes mentioned above lead to depleted emotional resources and a feeling of having nothing more to give.

Figure 1 (see next page) summarises the literature's findings of the main causes and symptoms of burnout:

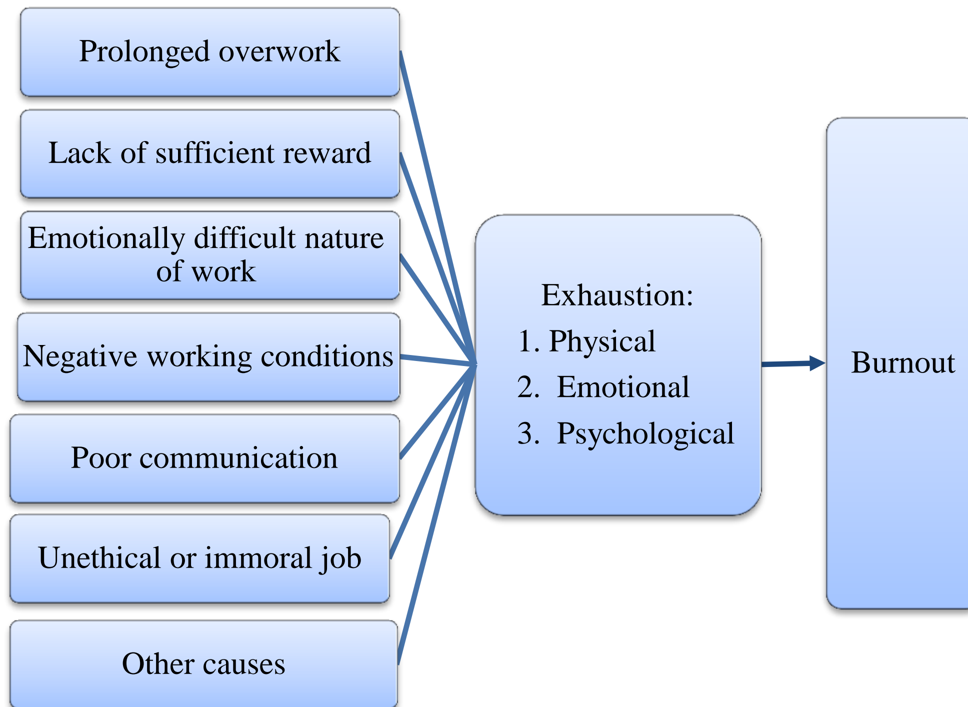

Figure 1: Causes and symptoms of burnout

Although burnout studies have been applied to almost every sector and type of occupation, nurses, doctors, social workers, police officers, managers and teachers have predominated as subjects (Malach-Pines 2002a; 2011, Brock and Grady 2000). As this study concentrates on burnout in teachers, the next section explores research into that subject.

2.4 Teachers' burnout

Researchers started studying teachers' burnout shortly after the phenomenon was identified by the scientific community, and in fact teachers are the largest homogenous occupational group to have been investigated – 22% of all samples (Malach-Pines 2002b).

The common, easily recognisable symptoms of teachers' burnout include anger, anxiety, restlessness, depression, fatigue, boredom, guilt feelings, cynicism and psychosomatic reactions, leading in extreme cases to emotional collapse (Farber and Miller 1981). On the professional level, there is significant decrease in teaching abilities, an increase in long absences from school, extreme rigidity towards students, loss of high expectations from students and low commitment to both teaching and students. Burned out teachers lack motivation, patience and a positive outlook towards their job (Farber 1991).

Many studies have attempted to explain the reasons behind burnout among teachers. Malach-Pines (2002b) concluded that these reasons were: difficulties in managing disruptive students; student violence and apathy; poor relationships between students and teachers; lack of administrative support in dealing with discipline problems; poor salaries; lack of job mobility; public pressure; budget cuts; demanding parents; excessive paper work and testing; lack of voice in decision-making; and lack of feedback from colleagues and administration.

Anderson and Iwanicki (1984) described teachers' burnout as governed by emotional exhaustion, in which the teachers feel they have given all they had to give. Fully dedicated to the job, they had invested all the effort and energy they possessed and had finally run out of all resources. The study of teachers' burnout has developed to the point where Fives et al. (2007) found that burnout starts during the teaching training programme.

Do teachers in Israel suffer significant burnout? Malach-Pines conducted several cross-cultural studies, comparing levels of burnout among managers, nurses and teachers (Malach-Pines 1984; 2004; 2011). Her initial assumption was that the tense political situation would tend to increase levels of burnout, as knowledge that war is a constant and immediate threat, that the

economic situation is challenging and that living costs are high all add to the pressure, especially as Israel is a very small country with few opportunities and little choice of work.

Her assumption was justified, as Israeli participants reported high levels of exhaustion and negative working conditions as well as longer hours and lower salaries than their American counterparts. Nevertheless, their level of burnout was lower. The explanation arrived at was that Israelis are less competitive and more sociable than Americans are. Additionally, the Israeli participants said that the on-going threat made them value life more; they saw their jobs not merely as a means to earn money or gain personal growth, but as a way to contribute to society and as a place to find meaning. Although these studies do not confirm the existence of significant burnout among Israeli teachers, they do show the needs of teachers to feel they contribute, to gain psychological reward and to find meaning in their jobs.

Weisberg and Sagie (1999), however, did report significant burnout in Israeli teachers – so significant that teachers were deciding to leave teaching. Their research examined three dimensions of burnout: physical, mental and emotional exhaustion:

> Physical exhaustion probably emerged as dominant among Israeli teachers because the physical working conditions for teachers in Israel are particularly difficult. About 40 students with different cultural backgrounds are normally grouped in one class and compared with educational facilities in western countries, many of the buildings and classrooms are often shabby. Teaching loads are heavy and wages are relatively low. (Weisberg and Sagie 1999, p338)

The above study supports the premise that teachers' working conditions in Israel affect burnout.

It is also important to mention that since burnout was considered a job-related syndrome, nearly all previous studies were conducted at teachers' workplaces, thus omitting anybody who had already left because of burnout (Schaufeli et al. 2001). A clearer distinction therefore needs to be made between burnout among teachers (and other workers) who are still working despite their burnout and those who have decided to leave their job because of it.

Paine (1982) had already propounded the idea that there are actually two types of burnout: burnout stress syndrome and burnout stress disability. The first suggests a state of being that, although debilitating, allows sufferers to continue working, while the second refers to a much more serious state with such severe symptoms of distress that the employee is forced to stop work. Burnout stress disability may be seen as the end state of the burnout process (Schaufeli et al. 2001).

Numerous as previous studies of teachers' burnout are, very few have been made from existential-phenomenological perspectives, and those focused on the issues of meaning and fulfilment. As Tomic and Tomic wrote: "We do find studies, in which burnout viewed within the framework of existential psychology, was explained as a lack of existential meaning in one's work." (2008, p15)

Tomic and Tomic (2008) conducted a study in the Netherlands, focusing on existential fulfilment and burnout among teachers and principals. They pointed out the absence of meaning in their jobs and related it to burnout (Tomic and Tomic 2008). Langle (2003) conducted an earlier study about meaning and fulfilment, examining existential meaning and existential vacuum and finding a link with psychological exhaustion. Two more studies, conducted by Malach-Pines (2002a; 2002b) combined an existential approach with psychoanalytic and

psychodynamic approaches. The first study examined only one teacher's experience, whilst the second was a cross-cultural study. Both looked at burnout in the context of one's need to find existential significance in life and claimed that the choice to become a teacher is an unconscious one, rooted in childhood experiences. The inability to fulfil one's unconscious need and find significant meaning in a teaching career leads to burnout, according to these studies.

Both studies, although they touched existential aspects, were not purely existential, as they were combined with other approaches and focused on childhood and the unconscious. This shifts the focus from existentialism to the psychoanalytic and psychodynamic approach.

All researchers that consider the existential perspective have emphasised the importance of further existential exploration of teachers' burnout.

2.5 Existential dimensions of existence

In order to explore one's experience in the world, such as looking at one's experience of burnout, an observer needs to look at the conditions and the context that gave rise to that experience (Willig 2001). Using existential terminology, it is necessary to look at one's *Dasein*.

Dasein, a German term coined by Heidegger (1962), translates as *being there*, *being-in-the-world* (Cohn 2002), or *everyday being there* (van Deurzen-Smith 1997). It suggests that, as human beings, we are always part of a wider context. We are never isolated from any context but understand our being through constant interaction with the world we exist in (Spinelli 2005, van Deurzen 1997).

To distinguish the universal from the specific Dasein, Heidegger (1962) suggested considering two levels of being-in-the-world, the *ontological* and the *ontic*.

The term *ontological* refers to the general givens, or basic terms, of existence. They are relevant to *all* human beings as a direct result of being thrown into this world (Cohn 1997, Spinelli 2005). For example, we are all limited in time, as temporality is a given of existence.

The term *ontic* refers to the specific and particular way in which each individual faces the ontological givens, embodies them, understands them and responds to them (Cohn 1997, Spinelli 2005). For example, somebody seeing greying hair in a mirror makes the ontological discovery that age increases with time, but may react ontically in one of several ways, perhaps through denial, the use of hair dye or a resolution to use the rest of life more efficiently.

Inspired by and expanding on Heidegger's idea, Binswanger (1958; 1963) suggested three simultaneous dimensions of being-in-the-world: the *Umwelt*, the physical dimension, which forms the environment within which a person exists; the *Mitwelt*, the social dimension, which is the world of social relation one experiences; and the *Eigenwelt*, the psychological dimension, which includes the privately experienced world of an individual (Frie 2000, Spinelli 2007, van Deurzen-Smith 1997).

To these three, van Deurzen-Smith (1988; 1997) added a fourth, the *Uberwelt* or spiritual dimension, which is related to the spiritual being and the meaning an individual finds in the world he or she exists within, so that ontologically, wherever people go, they are always involved in a four-dimensional world (van Deurzen-Smith 1997).

Figure 2 (see next page) illustrates the four dimensional world in which people are involved.

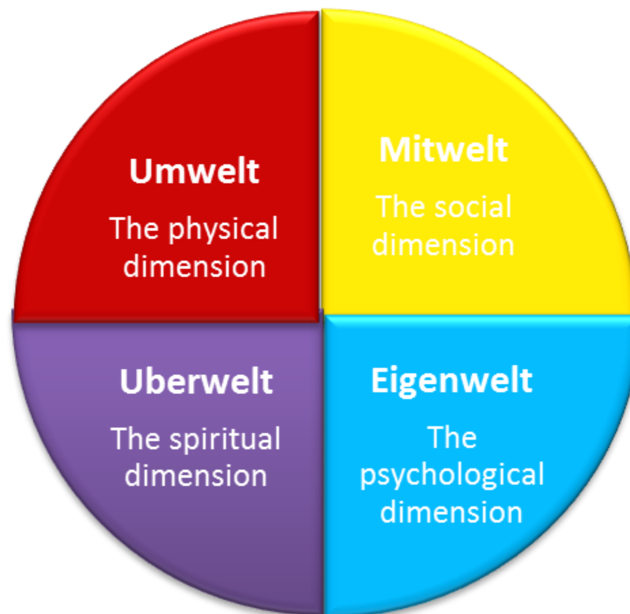

Figure 2: Being in a four dimensional world

These four interlinked dimensions of existence, as van Deurzen (1988) describes, provide a guiding map through which one can learn about people's subjective experience in the world. They may help in exploring and clarifying the way ontological givens are reflected in one's ontic experience.

Following the principles of the existential-phenomenological approach, the current research does not seek to cure or explain. Rather, it seeks to explore, describe and clarify the subjective existential experience within the given challenge. The current study should go beyond the topics of fulfilment and meaning already explored. Instead, in the spirit of existentialism, it aims to open new horizons in the field of burnout and to enable consideration of this well-investigated phenomenon as an existential experience –neither good nor bad, but simply in existence.

This research may shed light on wider existential themes than those that it specifically examines. It may bring to light existential issues such as isolation, freedom, existential guilt, authenticity and responsibility. It may open a new avenue for describing burnout among human beings in general and among teachers in particular, as well as among teachers in general and among teachers in Israel in particular.

2.6 Conclusion

Burnout has been identified and intensively investigated over the past four decades. An enormous number of published researchers around the world have tried to explore, explain and prevent this phenomenon.

The symptoms of burnout can be clustered into three main groups: symptoms of physical exhaustion; symptoms of mental exhaustion; and symptoms of psychological exhaustion.

Many causes for burnout have been discovered, most of them linked to negative working conditions and effort invested for poor mental, psychological or materialistic reward.

Researchers have investigated burnout in teachers more than in any other group, with 22% of all burnout studies involving them. They conclude that Israeli teachers suffer significant burnout.

Several studies have looked at teachers' burnout from an existential point of view. They found that meaning and fulfilment was missing in teachers' experience at work, thus leading to burnout.

It is a great challenge for me to add my own input to such a well-investigated subject. The task has stimulated me to be creative and open to new ideas as well to produce some original

ideas. This is the first study to examine this phenomenon through an existential-phenomenological lens, trying to listen to the subjective experience of the individual yet look at burnout through a wider spectrum of existential dimensions, ontically (personally) and ontologically (generally). This research may add another layer to the exploration and understanding of teachers' burnout as an existential phenomenon.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Method

3.1 Methodology

3.1.1 Aims

This study is qualitative, as it is based on findings "about persons' lives, lived experiences, behaviour, emotions and feelings" (Strauss and Corbin 1998, p11). It is designed to look at the lived experience of eight women in the Israeli public schools where they once worked. It aims to come as close as possible to an understanding of their subjective experience at those schools, and to look at their human experiences from an existential perspective, in a wider context of existence.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was adopted as a method to engage with the transcribed text generated from the interviews. A phenomenological approach, IPA is usually considered inductive, but I have chosen to use the four existential dimensions of existence described by van Deurzen-Smith (1997) as an anchor for this study.

Snape and Spencer (2003, p1) stated, "It is important to recognise that there is no single accepted way of doing qualitative research". As the purpose of this study is to look at the participants' lived experience at the schools were they worked through a phenomenological-existential lens, the four existential dimensions serve as a map or specific framework, enabling one to learn about people's orientation in the world (van Deurzen-Smith 1997).

Theoretical frameworks have been used in several IPA studies in the past. For example Green, Payne and Barnitt (2004), who investigated illness amongst people with non-epileptic

seizures. It was also employed in the study of Turner and Coyle (2000), who examined the experience of 16 offspring donors and the meaning they found by making their donations. My framework for this study, the four existential dimensions of existence, is a structured one that will enable me to analyse the participants' accounts of their experience while maintaining an existential frame.

The phenomenon of burnout is well investigated already, but almost none of the research has offered both a phenomenological approach and an existential-phenomenological perspective, which is my aim with this study.

3.1.2 A phenomenological approach

IPA is one of several phenomenological approaches to qualitative research. All phenomenological research methods seek to describe human experience from the individual's perspective, trying to capture the participants' purest experience and their perception of that experience.

The term phenomenology originates from the Greek word *phainomenon* (φαινόμενον) which means to appear, to come into light. *Logos* (λόγος) comes from a Greek verb which means to say. The philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) is considered to be the founder of phenomenology as a philosophical approach to knowledge (Cohn 1997), but it was the Swiss philosopher Johann Heinrich Lambert (1728-1777) who first combined *phenomenon* and *logos* into the German word *phänomanologie* in 1764, to refer to his theory of appearance. The philosophers Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), George Wilhelm Hegel (1770-1831) and Alexander Hamilton (1755-1804) also used this term in their works (Berrios 1989).

However, Husserl was the first philosopher to develop phenomenology into a philosophical system that grew to become a philosophical movement. The movement was continued by the German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), the French philosophers Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961), Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) and others (Smith, Flowers and Larkin 2009).

According to Husserl's ideas, each man's experience of the world is a unique, intentional construct that contains directional and referential attentions (Spinelli 2005). This understanding led Husserl to develop the founding principle of phenomenology, that an experience should be examined in the way and terms that it occurs. Thus, the task of phenomenology is to find ways through which one can overcome the interpretational layers that are added to experience and unavoidably change our perception of it (Spinelli 2005, Smith et al. 2009).

Husserl was especially interested in finding ways in which one can describe the intentional experience accurately, without using any prior knowledge, biases or explanations. This, according to Husserl, can only be achieved by "going back to the things themselves" (cited in Smith et al. 2009, p1).

To achieve this, one must use reduction, suspending everything that is not actually experienced and bracketing all assumptions, prejudices and expectations when facing other people's experience. This approach enables one to get a closer, more immediate contact with the experience itself (Cohn 1997).

In practice, the phenomenological method consists of three inter-related steps:

1. The rule of *Epoche*, or *bracketing*. This step urges the phenomenologist to suspend or bracket all his or her prejudices, biases' expectations and assumptions. Applying this rule allows full openness to the immediate experience.
2. The rule of description. This rule invites the phenomenologist to describe rather than to explain. While people's immediate instinct is to explain and understand, the rule of description allows one to stay longer with the lived experience before trying to make sense of it and find its logics.
3. The rule of equalisation. This rule prevents the phenomenologist from judging, deciding which parts of the observed experience is more or less important. It invites the phenomenologist to give equal space to all aspects of the actual experience (Cohn 1997, Spinelli 1997; 2005)

These phenomenological ideas and principles created ground for the growth of phenomenological research methods, which aim at capturing and describing the lived experience of the individuals. However, it is crucial to remember that applying these steps is not easy in practice – it is actually impossible to apply the rules perfectly. Into every encounter, the observer brings a fraction of his or her own previous knowledge and perceptions, and is unable to make a complete disconnection from past experiences. Although phenomenology provides a suitable way to describe the experience of human beings, it does have its limitations.

IPA offers a way to overcome these difficulties whilst still taking a phenomenological approach to research. It adopts a phenomenological attitude as Husserl suggested, and is also influenced by the phenomenological and existential perspectives of Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Sartre.

In line with Heidegger's (1962) views, IPA considers phenomenological inquiry as an interpretative process, and sees phenomenological investigation as a process through which a meaning that has been hidden or concealed appears. As such, it acknowledges the idea that the researcher will unavoidably have some degree of interpretation through the process of revealing the hidden meaning and trying to make sense of the experience of the participants' (Shinebourne 2011). Nevertheless, IPA requires the researcher to apply the phenomenological rules, as much as it is possible, to be reflective, to apply a phenomenological attitude and follow methodical steps. These steps are presented in the following section.

3.1.3 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis – IPA

IPA, devised by Jonathan Smith, is suitable for use when trying to find out how individuals perceive a particular situation and how they make sense of their personal and social worlds. It was first used as a distinctive psychological research method in the mid-1990s (Shinebourne 2010), aiming to enable researchers to capture the qualitative and experiential dimensions of psychology. It involves detailed examination of the individual lived experience and the way people make sense of it. At the same time, it maintains its dialogue with mainstream psychology.

IPA is influenced by three main fields of philosophy: phenomenology; hermeneutics; and idiography. Husserl's phenomenology, presented in the previous section, gave IPA a rich and solid base for the examination and comprehension of lived experience (Shinebourne 2011). As such, it adopts a phenomenological attitude and a process of reduction. It also follows the three phenomenological rules: the rule of bracketing; the rule of description; and the rule of equalisation.

IPA also adopts a hermeneutic approach, which encounters the experience or text in a way that allows the meaning behind the appearance to be understood. In that respect, IPA is also influenced by the phenomenological-existential perspectives of Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre which, as explained by Shinebourne (2011) "considered the person as embodied and embedded in the world in a particular historical, social and cultural context". (p18)

Following Heidegger's (1962) view of phenomenological description as a method that inevitably involves some degree of interpretation, IPA also sees the phenomenological work of the researcher as a process involving interpretation.

IPA acknowledges the fact that interpretation is part of phenomenology and allows freedom for the researcher to look for the meaning that may be concealed "by the phenomenon mode of appearing" (Shinebourne 2011, p19).

IPA is also considered idiographic as it aims for an in-depth exploration of a particular experience of a small group of cases, where each case is analysed separately. Similarities and differences in each case help to produce a detailed account of patterns of meaning, while keeping the subjective experience of the individual. It is also a starting point for a process of analysing several cases for more general claims (Shinebourne 2010).

The data analysis in IPA is an iterative, complex and creative process. It requires the researcher's reflective engagement in interaction with the participant's narrative and meaning, but remains flexible enough to enable possibilities to emerge during the interview. It leaves room for fluidity and flexibility, but at the same time offers a frame for the analysis. Once transcribed, the data is analysed through a four-stage process, as described by Shinebourne (2010), Smith et al. (2009) and Langdridge (2007). These stages will be explored later in this paper.

To sum up, IPA is a phenomenological research method, as it focuses on the detailed exploration of the unique personal lived experience of a certain engagement with the world. It is also phenomenological in its exploration of the way that participants make sense of their experience. It is concerned with trying to understand the experience from the point of view of the participant. At the same time, it is aware and acknowledges that understanding the events must be mediated by the context of cultural and socio-historical meaning. It is interpretative as it recognises the role of the researcher in making sense of the participants' experiences.

As this research aims to be phenomenological-existential in its approach, to capture the subjective experience of the individual, allow room for interpretation of the researcher, look at the wider context of the phenomenon and enable a more general understanding, I found IPA to be suitable for this study.

3.1.4 Alternative phenomenological research methods considered

Before choosing IPA, I considered whether other phenomenological methods may be more suitable. As I did so, two questions occupied me:

a. Should I choose a more constructed method or an unconstructed one?

b. Should I choose a method that would be more descriptive or more interpretative?

A constructive research method ensures disciplined creation of a theory formed by examining collected data. It ensures transparency and provides a solid basis for establishing a phenomenological study as legitimate and acceptable (Yerushalmi and Lichtentritt 2010).One option was Giorgi's methodology, rooted in the Duquesne school and offering a prescribed

method of data analysis. Its four steps include reading and rereading the transcript; identifying units of meaning; transforming units of meaning to psychological language; and transforming units of meaning into constructive units that describe the experience of the participant.

These steps are repeated for all transcripts, and their results then used to refine the new mutual units of meaning into the products of the research. Giorgi’s method is considered constructed and empirical because it is based on facts and creates the basis for understanding the phenomenon through a repetitive experience of people (Ehrich 2005).

Rather than favouring a constructed method to transform phenomenological research to empirical research, Bar-On and Sheinberg-Tas (2010) claim that phenomenological qualitative research should not pretend to be empirical or scientific. Instead, it should aim to offer a point of view from a particular perspective without presuming that this is the only explanation of the phenomenon. I tend to agree with this perception. In this particular research, I want to look at a certain phenomenon and offer a way to explore and understand it, but I do not pretend to claim that there are no other ways to do that.

The absence of a constructed method may be challenging, but it is also advantageous as it offers me, as a researcher, the freedom and manoeuvrability to allow a larger variety of insights. It allows space to take a fascinating and unexpected journey to the deepest realms of the phenomenon (Yerushalmi and Lichtentritt 2010). This perception matches with the existential approach that claims that people live in an unexpected world and we must be able to contain all we encounter in the unpredictable journey of life.

As I want to maintain a position of having no previous expectations and to maintain the ability to be surprised, I also considered grounded theory, which has often served as an

alternative to IPA (Smith et al. 2009). It was invented by Glaser and Strauss (1967) as an inductive approach. Grounded theory directs the researcher to approach research with a theoretical question but without any specific assumptions or expectations (Bar-On and Sheinberg-Tas 2010). This method, dominated by positivism, aims to generate a theoretical level account of a particular phenomenon (Smith et al. 2009).

Accordingly, this method requires a relatively large number of samples, and thus risks losing the voice of the individual participant. As I wanted the option to voice the subjective experience of the individual, large samples would not have been suitable, so I ruled out grounded theory.

The other main issue I had considered, as mentioned previously, was whether I would prefer a more descriptive analysis or whether I should allow room for interpretation. This issue relates to the question of whether it is necessary to accept the participants' words as they are or to maintain the freedom to see other layers of the unspoken and unrevealed.

The first tendency in both qualitative and phenomenological researches is to want to accept the participants' words as they are (Bar-On and Sheinberg-Tas 2010). A phenomenological descriptive methodology, such as Giorgi's for example, remains attached solely to Husserl's phenomenology and focuses on the wish to create a precise description of human nature (Ehrich 2005). Applying Husserl's phenomenology strictly, especially the rules of bracketing and description, allow one to get as close as possible to the pure description of the original experience.

On the other hand, hermeneutic approaches, like IPA, support the possibility of interpretation. Hermeneutic approaches claim that it is impossible to avoid interpretation.

Although phenomenology always aims to describe before explaining, some scholars within the phenomenological approach differentiate between those who insist on description alone and those who are also interpretative or hermeneutic. The later ones see that interpretation is an unavoidable part of understanding the world (Finlay 2009). Thus, interpretation is not an added extra, but is a part of phenomenology (Heidegger 1962). I tend to accept the statement that interpretation cannot be completely avoided, so as a researcher I have to be aware of my limitations.

Although it can be argued that the division between descriptive and interpretative methods is artificial (Finlay 2009, Langdridge 2008), I tend to think that a sense of modesty is required of me while I approach the issue of human limitation. I therefore preferred the hermeneutic interpretative approaches, which include IPA.

Phenomenological research can be done in many ways. However, following the aims of this particular study and my wish to give voice to the individual while looking through a wider perspective; my wish to describe and leave room for interpretation; my need for a framework that will also leave freedom; and my wish to be open to all that may arise, I see IPA as the most suitable method.

3.2 Methods

3.2.1 Ethical consideration and recruitment

Ethical approval for this study was given by the Psychology Department of Middlesex University and the New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling in London. Having gained approval, I sent an advertisement about the study to several institutes and schools, inviting

potential participants to contact me. The participants were selected purposively, according to IPA guidelines (Shinebourne 2010). The interviews were carried out in Israel and the criteria were that the participants were Israeli women who had worked for up to ten years in one or more public school in Israel before deciding, on their own initiative, to leave school as their place of work.

The decision to focus on women only based of the fact that the vast majority of teachers in Israel are women. According to data published by the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics (2004), 88.5% of the teachers in elementary schools, 83.7% of the teachers in secondary classes and 70% of the teachers in high schools in Israel are women. Furthermore, according to the planning and budget committee of the Israeli council for higher education (2012), 79% of the students in the academic higher education institutes for teachers are women (Klein-Avishai 2012).

Selective recruitment, as Shinebourne (2010) explains gives: “access to a particular perspective on the phenomenon being studied” (p7). In line with the suggestion of Smith et al. (2009) to interview between four and ten people, I decided to recruit eight participants.

To give voice to all experiences of all participants, IPA requires a deep exploration and thorough analysis of each transcript. These tasks require time, reflection and dialogue, necessitating smaller sample size. Although this may be seen as a disadvantage of IPA, it is important to remember that the small number of participants does allow deeper and richer analysis that gives voice to individual experience.

A large number of participants would tend to inhibit the ability to analyse the data successfully (Smith et al. 2009, p52), while small samples allow the use of direct quotes taken

from all transcripts. This gives voice to all participants while allowing the researcher to "go beyond" the quotes and create a deeper and more interpretative analysis (Smith et al. 2009, Pringle, Drummond and McLafferty 2011). This aligns well with the aims of this research.

All participants who agreed to take part in this study were informed (see appendix 1) that:

- their participation was entirely voluntary;
- data collected in the research would not be identifiable;
- the interview would be recorded and the recording securely stored until a verbatim transcript had been made;
- they had the right to withdraw from the project at any time without having to explain their reasons.

Participants ran the risk of experiencing or re-experiencing painful memories or difficult emotions as they talked about their experiences. They were assured that they had complete control over what they chose to say and that they were not obliged to disclose anything they felt uncomfortable discussing.

I also explained that participants could stop the interview at any point and that they could contact my supervisor or myself should they wish to consult us or discuss any matter they felt was related to the interview. Besides that, and hazards of everyday life, no particular risks were predicted.

Once they had been fully informed, verbally and in writing, the participants signed a consent form (see appendix 2) agreeing to take part in the project, with the proviso that they could stop the interview at any time if they felt they no longer wanted to continue. For their convenience, the forms were written in both English and Hebrew.

At the end of the recruitment procedure, eight female participants between the ages of 28 and 51 took part in this research.

3.2.2 The sample

Eight Israeli women with ages ranging from 28 to 51 participated in this study. All were born in Israel and spoke Hebrew as their mother tongue. Their pseudonyms (to protect their identities) are Alison, Diana, Emilee, Naomi, Jennifer, Rachel, Ruth and Sandra.

They were all teachers in public schools in Israel and had decided to leave their work at school on their own initiative. Four had taught in elementary schools (students aged 6 to 12) only; one in secondary school (students aged 13 to 15) only; one in both elementary and secondary schools; one in high school (students aged 15 to 18) only; and one taught in both secondary and high schools. Table 3 (see next page) shows the main characteristics of the participants.

Name	Age		Number years of teaching	School type	Marriage		Children		Academic Degree	
	Then	Now			Then	Now	Then	Now	Then	Now
Diana	24-26	28	3	SH	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Naomi	31-34	35	3	E	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Rachel	28-35	37	7	E	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Jennifer	27-36	51	9	H	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ruth	24-27	39	3	ES	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
Emilee	28-37	38	9	S	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Alison	25-33	42	8	E	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sandra	25-26	39	1	E	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

- Then = at the time the participant was a teacher
- Now = at the time of the interview
- School type: E= Elementary school; S=Secondary school; H=High school

Table 3: Main characteristics of the participants

The main areas of teaching for the participants were Hebrew Language, Grammar, Biblical Studies, English Language, Sports, Physics, Citizenship and Special Needs Education. They had all decided they did not want to continue their work at school. According to their descriptions, their decision to leave school was based on their difficult experiences at school**,** although it is not possible to isolate one factor from others which might have contributed to the decision to leave the school (such as pregnancy or family problems).

3.2.3 Data collection

As suggested for IPA, the eight participants took part in in-depth, one-to-one interviews, answering a range of semi-structured, open-ended questions. This method helps to guide the interview and enables the participants to provide a detailed account of the experience under investigation whilst leaving room for flexibility (Shinebourne and Smith 2009, Smith et al. 2009).

The aim of the interviews was to capture a rich, detailed description of the participants' experiences of burnout and to learn what these experiences felt (and feel) like and mean to them. To accomplish these purposes, each interview started with a broad question in which the participant was asked to describe her relationship with the field of education, and then, as the interview continued, she was asked to describe aspects of her experience in school in more detail. The interviews also included prompts that allowed further elaboration of the topic under discussion.

Throughout the interview, each participant was encouraged to describe her personal experiences, feelings and thoughts, thus enabling the collection of the most authentic data. At the end, she was asked if she wished to add anything else. Table 4 (see next page) describes the interview schedule, the questions and the possible prompts.

Interview schedule – questions and possible prompts
1. **Can you please tell me what your relation to the field of education is?** *Possible prompts:* **How long have you been teaching? How old were you? Where did you teach? How did you decide to become a teacher? Have you considered other options?** 2. **How would you describe yourself as a person?** *Possible prompts:* **How do you feel about yourself? What characterises you? How do you think other people see you?** 3. **Before deciding to become a teacher or to study education, what attracted you in this profession?** *Possible prompts:* **How did you imagine it? What did you think about it? What did you feel about teaching? Has your actual experience met your expectations? How?** 4. **Can you please describe your experience at school?** *Possible prompts:* **What did you like at school? What was difficult for you? Please describe your feelings at school.** 5. **Can you please describe the conditions you had at work?** *Possible prompts:* **How were the physical conditions? What was mostly difficult for you? How did you feel about it? How do you think it could be improved? Have you felt it in your body? How did you cope with it?** 6. **Can you please describe a significant day at school?** *Possible prompts:* **What made it significant? How did you feel about it? How long did it last? How do you think it could be improved? How did you cope with it?** 7. **Can you please describe your relationships with the people you encountered at school?** *Possible prompts:* **Please describe your relationship with the students/the students' parents/the principal/your colleague teachers.** 8. **Can you please describe your decision to leave school?** *Possible prompts:* **What do you think made you do it? How long has it been before you actually left? Can you describe how you felt about it?** 9. **Do you see yourself now differently than before you started teaching?** *Possible prompts:* **In what ways have you changed? Do you think other people see you differently as well?** 10. **Would you like to add anything?**

Table 4: Interview schedule

The duration of the interviews was between 60 and 105 minutes, with an average interview lasting 71 minutes. The interviews were in Hebrew, the mother tongue of all the participants and the interviewer. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed verbatim.

3.2.4 Reflexivity

In qualitative research, it is acknowledged that the researcher's own life experience, beliefs and assumptions may influence the data collection and its analysis. Yardley (2000) suggests a process of self-reflexivity in order to reflect and become aware of the impact of the researcher on the research process. The subject of my research includes two of my main areas of interest and occupation: existentialism and teaching. As this is a qualitative, phenomenological piece of research designed to present the participants' experience as accurately as possible, I have to pay attention to the points where the research meets facets of my own life. Elevating those points to a conscious level helps me apply the phenomenological rule of bracketing and makes me aware of my own limitations.

I was born and raised in Israel and am a 40-year-old male existential psychotherapist. For the last six years, I have led the existential psychotherapy and counselling programme in Israel's largest teacher-training institution, the Kibbutzim College of Education in Tel-Aviv. As well as managing and teaching in the existential psychotherapy programme, I teach various psychology courses in the college's education faculty, so existentialism and teacher training in Israel are interlinked circles in my professional life.

Having encountered the existential approach for the first time as a small part of my studies for my B.A. in psychology, I chose to continue with studies in existential psychotherapy, as the approach squared with three facets of my character:

a. The wish to comprehend the challenges of life as normal, not pathological.

b. The courage to talk openly about issues that had bothered and challenged me since childhood, such as death and the finiteness of life.

c. The wish to see an individual's existence as it really is, not through a restricted and possibly distorting theoretical lens.

These facets made me seek to continue my studies past my psychology degree. Since studies in the existential approach were not available in Israel, I went to the United Kingdom to take my M.A. in existential psychotherapy and counselling at the New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling (NSPC) at the University of Sheffield. At the end of my studies, I returned to Israel and started to practise in the existential approach. Recently, I decided to continue my professional studies and am now in the final steps of my doctoral research in existential psychotherapy and counselling. This study is part of that.

As I have chosen to look at the participants' experience through the four existential dimensions of existence – a map of the existential being – it would only be fair to reflect on my life through the four existential dimensions.

In the physical dimension of existence, I experience myself as a healthy and stable person. I grew up on a farm, in an agricultural family, so I feel grounded and earthy. My home gives me a sense of existential security and I still do agricultural as well as psychotherapeutic work.

In the social dimension, I see my family as an important and significant part of my being. I maintain social contacts although I don't define most of them as very close. I like people but also keep my privacy and the space I need.

In the psychological dimension, my identity is influenced directly from my "ground of existence" and from my own choices. I grew up in an environment that gave me a solid frame but also freedom of choice. I had never felt that the choices I made were overruled by the significant others, and my family had always encouraged me to make authentic choices that are good for me. I am pleased with my professional choices and my ability to combine my ground of existence with my therapeutic work.

On the spiritual level, I was born into a non-orthodox Israeli Jewish family. I am not a religious man nor do I see spirituality as religious, rather as a way of finding meaning. My grandparents were pioneers who came to Israel from Europe and regarded hard labour and the spirit of equality as a way to achieve meaning. I was raised and educated in this spirit. I find meaning in my actions, integrating labour and psychology. However, I do wonder, from time to time, about the meaning of my life in particular and of human existence in general. In the spirit of Victor Frankl's (1970) ideas, I know that as a part of the world around me I also experience the process of high and low tide.

I would add that I see myself as a sensitive person, attentive to others and curious to discover the being-in-the-world of others. I am also aware that I am a male researcher and all participants in this research are women. Several of the participants are around my age and I shall therefore need to keep the boundaries and be professional. My experience as a psychotherapist may help in this matter. It may also help me in interviewing the participants while at the same

time I am aware that my interaction with the participants is aimed at interviewing them, rather than having a therapeutic session.

I do not feel aware of any feelings of burnout within my own life and work. However, I do pay attention and am sensitive to the environment of my work, the conditions, the level of closeness with my colleagues and my managers, and my ability to express myself at my work. I shall therefore be aware to distinguish my own experience from the participants'. From this level of consciousness, I want to meet the experiences of the participants.

3.2.5 Data analysis

In order to enable themes to emerge that best reflect the participants' experience, each transcript was analysed separately. As Smith et al. (2009, p79) explain, there is no prescribed single way for working with the data in IPA studies. For my analysis, I followed the four-stage process described by Shinebourne (2010), Shinebourne and Smith (2009) and Smith et al. (2009), with the exception that I have applied the frame of the four existential dimensions at the third stage of the analysis.

The first analysis stage consisted of reading and re-reading each transcript several times, searching for meaning and initial coding. My focus was on the individual participant's experience. Observations and reflections of the interview experience as well as my thoughts and comments were written in the right-hand margins. As an engagement process, it focused on the content, the language, the context and interpretative comments arising from the engagement with the transcript.

Table 5 illustrates the first stage. It contains a short extract from the interview with Rachel, one of the participants. The original transcript is presented in the middle and my exploratory comments appear on the right:

Original transcript	Exploratory comments
Rachel: "I thought mainly about the relationship with the students. Forming relationship with them attracted me most. What I didn't think about was all the paperwork around it. I didn't think about all the things I would have to do beside the hours of staying in class with the students.	***A wish to create good relationship with the students.*** ***Describes the paperwork she had to do.*** ***Unexpected additional work at school***
Me: What do you mean when you say 'all the paperwork'?	
Rachel: Oh! Everything discussed with the students, or their parents, or the principal or the inspector had to be recorded. I had to leave a detailed report of every encounter or conversation I had. I also had to submit a weekly report about all the materials I taught and I had to sit with the school counsellor and write down all the conversation I had. It takes a lot of time and energy.	***Having to fill in forms of all encounters; bureaucracy*** ***Time consuming tasks*** ***Interaction with several groups of people at work: students; parents; principal; inspectors; counsellor***
I couldn't understand how come this became the main focus of teaching	***Need to write detailed reports. Expression of tiredness. Time consuming tasks. Inability to understand the reasons.***

Table 5: Exploratory comments

One of the challenges I faced during the first stage was the feelings that arose within me, when engaging with the transcripts. Throughout this stage, I was challenged by my wish to maintain a phenomenological attitude and, as much as it is possible, to bracket my own personal reaction to the information revealed in the transcripts. I was especially conscious of my feelings and thoughts, and, when necessary, I transcribed these feelings and thoughts for myself. This process enabled me to become more aware of my own limitations, to have a more phenomenological approach toward the analysis, and to separate my own set of beliefs and values from those of the participants.

For example, one participant, Naomi, expressed a moment when she held her student's hands and felt she could have slapped his face. She said:

> I couldn't take it anymore. I held his hands, looked into his eyes and said 'Enough!! Enough!!' I'd never hurt a child, but there was a moment that I felt I could have slapped his face.

Reading Naomi's statement, I became acutely aware of my mixed feelings. On the one hand, I understood Naomi's distress, while on the other hand, I was judgemental about her strong reaction. During this realization, I transcribed my feelings for myself in order to focus on Naomi's description of her experience, rather than judging her strong reaction or the possibility that she could actually slap the student's face.

In the second stage, as suggested by Shinebourne (2010), I returned to the transcript and to the initial notes taken in the previous stage, aiming to develop emerging themes. The main task was to formulate concise phrases that contained enough particularity to remain grounded in the text and enough abstraction to offer a conceptual understanding. This stage produced

eventually on the left side margin a list of emerging themes in the left-hand margin and helped me reduce the volume of details. Table 6 illustrates the emergent themes of the extract in Table 5.

Emerging themes	Original transcript	Exploratory comments
A wish for relationships	*Rachel:* "I thought mainly about the relationship with the students. Forming relationship with them attracted me most.	***A wish to create good relationship with the students.***
Unexpected paperwork	What I didn't think about was all the paperwork around it.	***Describes the paperwork she had to do.***
Time consuming tasks	I didn't think about all the things I would have to do beside the hours of staying in class with the students.	***Unexpected additional work at school***
	Me: What do you mean when you say 'all the paperwork'?	
	Rachel: Oh! Everything discussed with the students, or their parents, or the principal or the inspector had to be recorded. I had to leave a detailed report of every encounter or conversation I had.	***Having to fill in forms of all encounters; bureaucracy*** ***Time consuming tasks***
Interaction with: students; parents; principal	I also had to submit a weekly report about all the materials I taught and I had to sit with the school counsellor and	***Interaction with several groups of people at work: students; parents; principal; inspectors; counsellor***
Burden of paperwork/documenting	write down all the conversation I had.	***Need to write detailed reports.***
tiredness *Time consuming tasks.*	It takes a lot of time and energy.	***Expression of tiredness.*** ***Time consuming tasks.***
Inability to understand meaning	I couldn't understand how come this became the main focus of teaching	***Inability to understand the reasons.***

Table 6: Emergent themes

In the third stage, I examined the emerging themes and clustered them together according to the four existential dimensions of existence. They were listed in a table, each theme in its relevant existential dimension, ordered chronologically and tagged with its line number from the transcripts.

Applying the four existential dimensions no earlier than at this stage of the analysis ensured that the participants' subjective and rich experience was not lost, so I could apply existential thinking in a way that was broad enough to include the richness of human experience in the world.

This stage resulted in a table of four superordinate themes, and a list of the relevant themes under each, with their locations in the transcripts. This made it easier to return to the original transcript in order to see the exact words. Table 7 (see next page) illustrates how the emerging themes were listed under each superordinate theme.

Focus on the physical dimension	Focus on the social dimension	Focus on the psychological dimension	Focus on the spiritual dimension
• Paperwork (23) • Paperwork/ documenting (26-27) • Tiredness (33) • On-going changing of programmes (63-64) • Changes and instability (77-78) • Lack on financial reward 134-136 • Low salary (138) Underpayment (140) • Instability at work (186) • Having headaches (195)	• A wish to form relationships (21-22) • Relationship with students are artificial (37) • Principal: anger toward the principal (81) • Teacher colleagues- do not feel part of them (106) • Students: difficult interaction (145-150) • Unrewarding relationships (155) • Principal: fighting with her (159) • Principle- dispute with her (165) • Students- caring for them (177) • Parents- shouting at her (170)	• Perception of Self- sensitive and friendly (14-15) • Lack of free time (33) • Being forced (48) • Has to prove herself (72)	• Inability to understand why (34) • Questioning meaning (151)

Table 7: Emerging themes listed under superordinate theme.

In the fourth stage, I clustered the themes of each superordinate into groups of subthemes, so that they were now listed according to their content rather than their chronological appearance in the original transcripts.

Clustering the subthemes according to their content produced a table of themes that showed the structure of the four superordinate themes (one for each of the four existential dimensions) and the relevant subthemes for each dimension. Table 8 presents a short extract of the superordinate themes and the subthemes that emerged from Rachel's transcript.

Focus on the physical dimension	**Focus on the social dimension**	**Focus on the psychological dimension**	**Focus on the spiritual dimension**
Paperwork • Paperwork (23) • Paperwork/ documenting (26-27) **Financial reward** • Lack on financial reward (134-136) • Low salary (138) • Underpayment (140) **Instability** • On-going changing of programmes (63-64) • Changes and instability (77-78) • Instability at work (186) • **Physical symptoms** • Tiredness (33) • Having headaches (195)	**Desire for relationship** • A wish to form relationships (21-22) **Relationship with students** • Relationship with students is artificial (37) • students- difficult interaction (145-150) • Students- caring for them (177) **Relationship with parents** • Parents- shouting at her (170) **Relationship with principal** • Principal- fighting with her (159) • Principle- dispute with her (165) **Relationship with colleague teachers** • Teacher colleagues- do not feel part of them (106) **Loneliness and Isolation** • Unrewarding relationships (155)	**Self-perception** • Perception of Self-sensitive and friendly (14-15) **Lack of freedom** • Lack of free time (33) • Being forced (48) **Experience of incapability and failures** • Has to prove herself (72)	**Meaninglessness** • Inability to understand why (34) • Questioning meaning (151)

Table 8: Superordinate themes and the subthemes

This interactive process involved moving back and forth between the transcripts and the emerging themes, allowing preservation of the participant's voice (Smith 2003), but also acknowledging, in the spirit of IPA, my role as a researcher.

These analytical steps of analysis were repeated for each of the eight transcripts. In the process, I tried to apply the rule of bracketing while remaining aware that my limitations prevented me from achieving this fully. Once themes were identified for each participant individually, they were integrated across participants to create a master table of themes. This included the four superordinate and several subthemes, reflecting the participants' account of their shared experience at school. Table 9 illustrates a short extract of the master table of themes.

Superordinate theme 2: Focus on the social dimension
Desire for relationship
Rachel: *"I thought mainly about the relationship with the students. Forming relationships with them attracted me most." (21-22)*
Naomi: *"My love for children made me want to become a teacher. My wish to make children smile, my desire to make them happy, hug them, listen to them and create trustful relationships, all made me want to work at school." (18-19)*
Diana: *"I imagined myself having interesting conversations and dialogues with the students (17-19); I was thinking about ways to get into their hearts." (92)*
Jennifer: *"I wanted to create relationship in which I can connect with their souls and have heart to heart talks with them." (103)*

Ruth: *"I think I was pretty clear about what I wanted it to be like. I saw teaching as a mean to create relationships (27); I chose a profession I believed would let me interact with the people around me, both the children at school and the teachers I worked with." (419-420)*

Emilee: *"I wanted to become a meaningful part in the process children go through." (18); "The interaction with the children was so important to me."(183)*

Alison: *"What attracts me most is the idea of working together with others and cooperating with them." (159)*

Sandra: *"The quality of the interaction with the people I work with is something that is really important and meaningful for me." (131).*

Table 9: An extract of the master table of themes

The table of themes and subthemes provided the basis for constructing a narrative account containing relevant extracts in the participants' own words. The master table of themes enables the examination of particular and shared experiences, as well as further interpretation. It serves as a basis for presenting the findings and the discussion to follow the analysis.

Chapter 4: Findings

The participants' accounts of their school teaching experiences are grouped according to four superordinate themes, each focused on one of the four existential dimensions. In most previous IPA studies, the themes were generated from the bottom up, but several (for example, Green, Payne and Barnitt 2004, Swift, Ashcroft, Tadd, Campbell and Dieppe 2002) have employed theoretical frameworks. This study also uses an existential theoretical framework as this suits existential-phenomenological research.

Looking at an individual's experience in the world through the lens of the four existential dimensions (often called the four worlds) offers a framework that helps to map that experience (van Deurzen and Arnold-Baker 2005). This idea will be explored further in the discussion and analysis.

The four superordinate themes used in this study are:

A. Focus on the physical dimension

B. Focus on the social dimension.

C. Focus on the psychological dimension.

D. Focus on the spiritual dimension

This section presents these four superordinate themes and the subthemes for each of them, as shown in Table 10 (see next page).

Superordinate Theme 1: Focus on the Physical Dimension: Conditions and Health	Superordinate Theme 2: Focus on the Social Dimension: Relationships with Others	Superordinate Theme 3: Focus on the Psychological Dimension: Personal and Professional Identity	Superordinate Theme 4: Focus on the Spiritual Dimension: Meaning
Working Environment and Physical Conditions at School	The Desire for Relationships	Self-Perception	Values
Paperwork and Administration	Relationships with Students	Professional Perception by Self and Others	Meaninglessness
Violence, Helplessness and Instability	Relationships with Students' Parents	Lack of Personal and Professional Freedom	
Financial Reward	Relationships with Principals	Experience of Inability and Failure	
Physical Symptoms	Relationships with Other Teachers	Changes in Self-perception	
	Loneliness and Isolation		

Table 10: The four superordinate themes and the subthemes for each of them

4.1 Theme A: Focus on the physical dimension

The first superordinate theme focuses on aspects of the physical dimension. It consists of five subthemes and includes the participants' account of their experience of their workplaces, the conditions at school and the physical symptoms they reported as related to their work – throughout the interviews, all participants described difficult conditions, exhaustion and pain. Other subthemes describe participants' feelings of helplessness and their feelings towards financial reward.

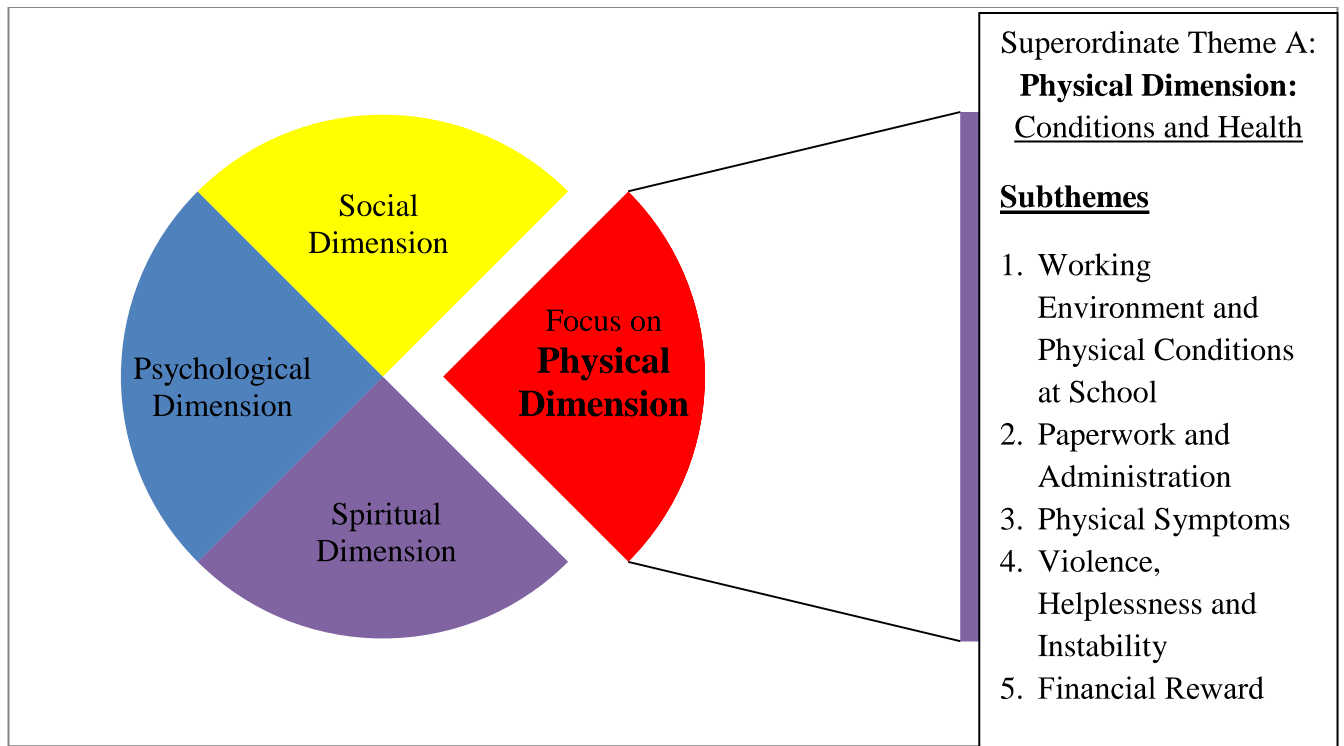

Figure 3: Focus on the physical dimension: conditions and health

4.1.1 Subtheme I: Working environment and physical conditions at school

All participants except Alison referred to the physical working environment, describing conditions at school as "difficult", "insufficient" or "frustrating". All seven thought that there were too many students in each class, most saying that the classrooms were becoming too small to accommodate them all and that there was insufficient equipment.

Diana described the number of students she had in class:

> It doesn't make sense.…I had to handle 45 students in one class. It's insane.…It was so difficult. The weather was hot and it was so hot in the classroom. The air conditioning barely worked. Most classrooms still had chalkboards. Chalkboards! I felt we were still in

> the twentieth century. This may sound stupid, but I had to keep bits of chalk in a plastic bag. It was only three years ago.

Jennifer, an ex-sports teacher, echoed Diana:

> I was working full time, seven hours a day, in the open air or in the gym. Inside or out, I fried in the summer and froze in the winter.…The number of students in class was far too large, often as many as 40 in one class. It was too difficult for me, too intense. The conditions were bad; it was either too hot or too cold.

Naomi applied the term "catastrophe" to the conditions she worked under. There were so many students that she felt she could not take it any longer. It was so crowded that there was no room for things like drawers. She said:

> I entered the classroom to see 41 children, all screaming. I felt I couldn't take it any longer.…I couldn't enter that class. I had to take pills before I could enter that room.… It really felt like a catastrophe. It was so crowded that there was no room for basic things like drawers in class.

Trying to emphasise how terrible she felt the conditions were, Naomi described her work as *slavery*. "I felt like I was totally squashed. It can only be described as slavery". Diana said she hated the place: "I just hated each and every moment I had to actually be there."

Both Emilee and Rachel expressed frustration with their physical environment, the number of students and the size of the classrooms. Emilee, who taught physics at secondary school, said that the large number of students frustrated her. Class numbers kept growing, but the laboratories got no bigger. With those conditions, she was forced to use alternative teaching methods such as internet and films, and she felt she could not do her work properly.

Rachel, who taught at elementary school, said she couldn't walk freely in the classroom and had to create working spaces for the students in the noisy hall. She talked about it being cold in the winter and hot in the summer time. She described these conditions as "difficult" and "frustrating".

Emilee:

> When I started teaching I used to have 25 to 30 students in class, and I enjoyed teaching them inside the physics. They could touch and feel everything we learned about. We could use the microscopes. But then classes grew to 40, and there was no room for them all in the laboratory It all became theoretical. They had to hear everything from me instead of actually experiencing it themselves. I found myself showing films taken from YouTube or other sources. Filmed by a stranger in America. I felt it was not right! I felt it was impossible to teach science like that. I felt frustrated.

Rachel:

> It was very crowded in the classrooms. There were too many students in one class and not enough room to create working spaces for the students. I couldn't walk freely inside the room. I had to create working space in the hall, but then, whenever I wanted to approach the students in the hall I had to actually leave the rest of the class. The hall was hot in summer and cold in winter. It was so difficult and so frustrating.

Sandra also felt the number of students was too high. Like Diana and Jennifer, she compared the conditions at school with those at her current job, and said she now feels totally different. This is how Sandra expressed it: "It was so difficult to stay at work with so many students in one class." "I can't help comparing it with my current job, which feels so different and comfortable."

Diana described it well: “Today I can do basic things like going to the bathroom whenever I want, my office is air-conditioned and I can have a coffee whenever I want.” Talking about the school, she said she hated the place: “I just hated each and every moment I had to actually be there”.

Jennifer said: “Seven hours at school are far more difficult than working 16 hours a day, six days a week at my current workplace. The conditions at school made me feel exhausted.”

To sum up this subtheme, large numbers of students in small classrooms created density. This, with the lack of sufficient equipment, made the participants feel exhausted, tired and frustrated.

4.1.2 Subtheme II: Paperwork and administration

Five participants mentioned the burden of paperwork during their interviews. When choosing their careers, none of them had been aware that this would a duty, or at least that it would be such a time-consuming one. Whatever is done or said must be recorded in detail. This task was described as time-consuming and exhausting. Rachel felt that she had to invest so much energy in paperwork that it became the main focus of her work: “It’s all about the papers you need to fill in.”

In Rachel’s description of her experience, paperwork interfered with the natural flow of her relationship with the students, which she saw as a meaningful part of her job, as well as with her teaching. As she says:

> What I didn’t think about was all the paperwork around the job….Everything discussed with the students, or their parents, or the principal or the inspector had to be recorded. I

> had to leave a detailed report of every encounter or conversation I had. I also had to submit a weekly report about all the materials I taught and I had to sit with the school counsellor and write down all the conversations I had. It takes a lot of time and energy. The thing that most disturbs the natural flow of the relationship with the children and disturbs the teaching, too, is the fact that the teacher has to write everything down.

Just as Rachel did, Diana, Naomi, Emilee and Alison also described the paperwork as an energy drain and a burden. They described it as follows:

Diana said: “There’s so much paperwork. I hated it. It was time- and energy-consuming and I couldn’t understand why they forced us to do it. I tried to avoid it. I couldn’t do it.” Meanwhile, Naomi said: “We were expected to fill all the forms and tables, do all the statistics. Why? I felt as if they trying to drain us of every drop of energy.”

Emilee:

> We’ve reached the point where each and every phone call we have with the parents must be recorded and reported. We had to write down everything. It wasn’t like that at the beginning. It became a great burden. It is so unpleasant. There is so much paperwork to do.

Alison said: “As a special education teacher, I had to fill in so many papers it was like writing a book. I had to present the unique programme I developed for each student…it was very difficult.”

The burden has become heavier over the years, and Rachel reached a point where she said she felt the paperwork overshadowed shadowed her relationship with the students: “It’s not ‘real’... it’s become even worse in recent years. More papers, more reports, more files. Less real meeting and true relationships. It is a great burden.”

To summarise this subtheme, paperwork has increased over the years and become a real burden. Having to write detailed reports of every encounter with the students or their parents was exhausting, energy-sapping and time-consuming.

4.1.3 Subtheme III: Violence, helplessness and instability

This subtheme includes experiences of violence, expressions of helplessness and instability related to the participants' work at school. When asked to describe a significant day at school, Diana and Jennifer described, in detail, actual incidents of violence towards them. Diana was attacked by one student who pushed her away and bitten by another when she tried to break up a fight. Jennifer described an incident in which one of the students attacked her and she felt completely helpless.

Diana:

One of the students attacked me. She pushed me inside one of the classrooms. She wasn't even a student in my own class. I entered another classroom because I wanted to take a chair. She didn't want me to take that chair so she just came towards me and pushed me away. I wanted to report her to the police, but the school they told me she was experiencing some difficulties and persuaded me not to.
In another incident, students were fighting with one another and while trying to calm them down I was beaten as well.
In another case, one student threw a chair at another. I asked him to leave the classroom, but then I was told he had a knife in his pocket. I was scared. I didn't know what to do. I was helpless.

Jennifer:
One of the children attacked me. He started beating me aggressively. If one of the teachers hadn't rushed to help me, I think this child could have killed me. And if that wasn't enough, I ran to the principal to ask for help and eventually they accused the

> teacher who came to help. They claimed he was the aggressor. I couldn't take it anymore. I didn't know what to do. This teacher was sent to trial, of course he was not guilty, but I felt I couldn't live with it anymore.

Experiences of fear for their safety, helplessness and instability were reported by all the participants. Rachel described the everlasting changes and instability as the difficult part. She said that she had a hard time being told to change the structure of a lesson when she had already started giving it. These changes reflect the frequent changes handed down by the Ministry of Education and lead to insecurity. Rachel used words like "driven crazy":

> The most difficult thing is that the study programmes are being constantly changed. Whenever a new Minister of Education takes office, he or she always has a bee in the bonnet about some issue and changes the study programme. Often it happens in the middle of the year – I started teaching one thing and then all of a sudden some new thing arrives. So I stand in front of the child and tell him: "OK, you must stop learning what I was teaching you because we've been told to start something different." It drives the teachers and the children crazy.

When Rachel was urged to say more about the changes, she said that it felt like there was nobody to take the lead all the way through, saying:

> It can happen that once you finish preparing something, the Ministry of Education will say "No, don't do that, we'll send you something else instead." It feels like there isn't any person who can make decisions and take it all the way. It feels unstable. Yes, unstable.

Other participants said they felt they were too weak to cope with the system or that they were lost. Ruth said: "I felt I was too weak, and I couldn't cope with this system". Naomi said*:* "I was lost. I felt helpless."

Emilee and Alison described experiencing instability as well.

Emilee:

> There was a feeling of instability. I was getting all my plans and programmes ready, but things were changed all the time, we were instructed all of a sudden to change everything. I never knew what would come next.

Alison:

> I think the education system is unstable, the only one where everything changes every year. The books change, the techniques change and the teachers have to follow. It was impossible. It was tiring. Hold on, give us something solid to stand on.

To summarise this subtheme, all participants reported they felt instability or helplessness. Several of them described experiencing these feelings being as a result of violence, while for others they were as a result of never-ending programme changes.

4.1.4 Subtheme IV: Financial reward

All participants expressed the feeling that the salary was not enough to compensate for their difficult tasks and stressful conditions. They said it did not reflect the time and energy invested. For example, when Emilee was asked to elaborate her feelings about her salary, she said:

> The work is hard and the financial reward is not fair. It doesn't cover even one tenth of the work I do. I don't just work at school. I work long hours at home as well. The students call me at home. I often talk with them over the phone at ten in the evening. I was doing a special project and invested hours and hours in it, but the principal only paid me two hours extra. She knew how much time and energy I was investing. The

> compensation is not proportional to the amount of the investment. It is ridiculous. People think we should work for free.

Just like Emilee, Alison said that the pay did not reflect her long hours:

> I wasn‘t paid properly. There are many ways to reward workers: fair salaries, business trips, car and all sorts of benefits. None of those exists at school.
>
> The salary is inappropriate and it doesn't square with the amount of work we do. We don't just stop working at the end of the school day. We are still working at home, preparing classes, reading exams, talking to parents. It's not a nine-to-five job like working in an office. Once I'd driven home from school I sat down and carried on working. Those hours don't get included in the pay.

When Rachel was asked about the things that made her quit, she included the issue of payment, saying that perhaps a decent salary could have somehow alleviated their doubts. She spoke plainly: "The salaries – at least if we'd been paid decent salaries, we would have known we were being paid for all that work. But it didn't happen! We were left both poor and frustrated." Diana said: "I wish the salaries were higher. If I'd felt appreciated, than I think I could have managed with the low salary. Anyway, I earn much more money today and I feel much better."

Ruth, Sandra and Jennifer said that their suffering was too great for salaries to compensate and Naomi reported that the low salary could not cover the health problems she experienced at school. Ruth described it like this:

> There was a huge gap between my actual hours worked and the reported hours my pay was based on. People around me were wrong to think that I worked only few hours a day.

> The salary wasn't high; it contributed to my decision to leave. I think I could have stayed at school despite the low salary, if I had at least enjoyed what I was doing. But I didn't enjoy it and I wasn't paid enough anyway.

Sandra said: "Yes, the salary was low, but I wouldn't have stayed there anyway. I couldn't even think about the money, as I was suffering there anyway."

Jennifer:

> I had to be on guard all the time, making sure nothing happened to the children. Anything could happen at any time and I wasn't paid properly for that. I decided I couldn't live with it anymore.

Naomi said: "Once the Offek Haddash[1] scheme was launched, the salaries got a little bit better, but the money didn't compensate for the health problems I suffered at school – it wasn't worth it."

To sum up this subtheme, all participants said that the investment of teaching was high, while the reward was low. A few thought that better compensation could have helped them cope with the difficult experience, while others did not see themselves staying even if the salary was higher.

4.1.5 Subtheme V: Physical symptoms

All participants reported tiredness or exhaustion. Several reported that their energy had been drained to the last drop. As Alison said: "I felt my energy was taken out of my body". The

[1] *Offek Haddash*, Hebrew for *New Horizon*, is the scheme introduced at elementary schools by the Israeli Ministry of Education in December 2009.

participants reported physical symptoms and pain. Jennifer said she: “felt her body was storming”; Rachel said: “I often ended the day suffering from pounding headaches and feeling pressure in my body”; Sandra said: “I lost my voice for three days. I couldn’t speak!” Ruth said she felt sick. Emilee fainted and went to the doctor.

Naomi said she felt she could no longer stand on her feet: “I felt my heart was beating fast. My body couldn’t take it anymore.” Asked to expand that statement, she said:

> I fell apart. My nape and my shoulders ached. Sometimes just thinking about going to school brought on the pain.
> I was coming home tired out. I felt I had no energy left inside me. I felt my eyes couldn’t see and my ears couldn’t hear any more. I suffered. I was in pain. I’m talking about not being able to stand on my feet. Not being able to do it. Could *not*.

Both Naomi and Diana said even thinking about going back to school after the summer vacation brought on the effects. Naomi said: “I started feeling tension headaches before the new school year started.” Diana said: “On September 1, the first day back at teaching, I started crying. No good mood at all. My stomach ached and cramped. I felt as if I had a stone in my chest.”

Emilee, who had fainted at school, described how her body told her she had to leave school:

> It was such hard work, around the clock. I felt I was at war. At some point, I fainted.
> It was a process of frustration. At first, I started feeling unwell. Then I became throaty. I figured my body was trying to tell me something – that I must find another job. I asked for a sabbatical year, but they refused. I went to see a doctor and he wrote the school a formal letter saying that my throat needed rest, so they agreed to give me a year off but refused to pay.

To sum up this subtheme, all participants reported various physical symptoms that they related to their work at school.

4.1.6 Theme A: summary

Research for the first superordinate theme shows that nearly all the participants said they felt that the physical conditions of their working environment were poor. They complained about the large number of students in class and the small size of the classrooms themselves. They complained about the temperature in class and about the equipment that was missing.

Most reported they felt overloaded loaded with time-consuming, energy-sapping paperwork that shifted the focus from the real purpose of their job: teaching, educating and forming relationships with the children.

They all expressed health problems or physical symptoms that they said they felt were related to their work at school. Two reported that they were physically attacked by students, and all participants described feelings of helplessness, instability and uncertainty.

On top of all that, all participants said that the financial reward was insufficient, compensating neither for energy expended nor for long working hours. Several said the poor salary contributed to their decision to quit school and that perhaps, if the salary had been higher, it would have helped them to cope with the bad conditions. Others thought that higher salaries would have made no difference, since they were suffering and their health was more important.

4.2 Theme B: Focus on the social dimension

The second superordinate theme focuses on the participants' interactions with the main groups of people at school. The first of the six subthemes covers the wish to form meaningful relationships at school and the disappointment with the quality of the relationships that actually developed. The next four themes deal separately with the participants' interaction with four main groups – students, students' parents, principals and fellow-teachers. From the accounts of their experiences within the educational system, their relationships with other people were unequal, stressful and difficult, and the final subtheme covers their feelings of loneliness and isolation.

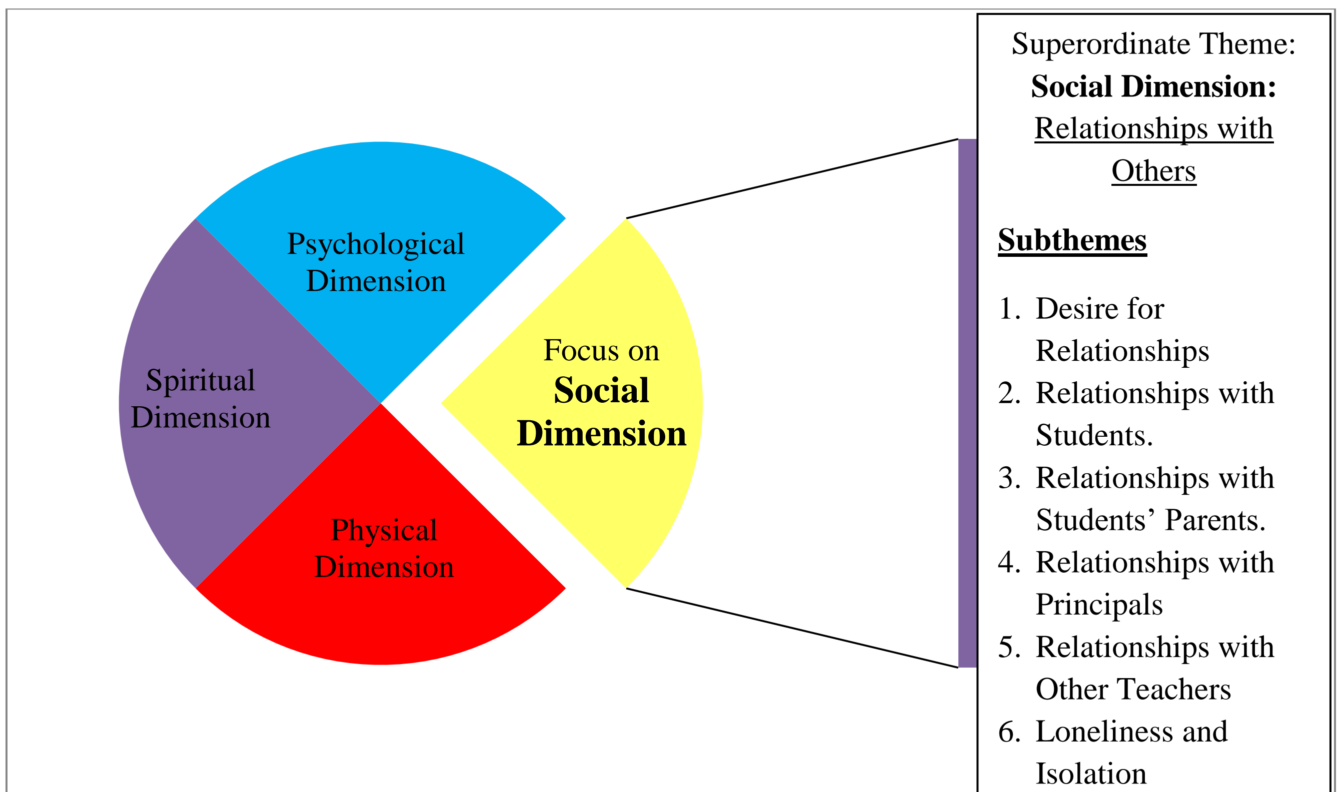

Figure 4: Focus on the social dimension: relationship with others

4.2.1 Subtheme I: The desire for relationships

Throughout the interviews, all participants laid great emphasis on the importance of forming meaningful relationships, mainly with the children/students. Their wish to do that was at the core of their decision to become teachers. Rachel said: “I thought mainly about the relationship with the students. Forming relationships with them attracted me most.”

Naomi said that her wish to make children happy made her choose this profession. Diana and Jennifer saw teaching as a way to reach students’ hearts and souls.

Naomi:

> My love for children made me want to become a teacher. My wish to make children smile, my desire to make them happy, hug them, listen to them and create trustful relationships, all made me want to work at school.

Diana said: “I imagined myself having interesting conversations and dialogues with the students….I was thinking about ways to get into their hearts.” Meanwhile, Jennifer said: “I wanted to create relationships in which I can connect with their souls and have heart-to-heart talks with them.”

Ruth explicitly emphasised that it was important for her to cooperate with both the children and her colleagues. Emilee, Alison and Sandra agreed that they really wanted to work in cooperation with the children and colleagues around them.

Ruth:

> I think I was pretty clear about what I wanted it to be like. I saw teaching as a mean to create relationships….I chose a profession I believed would let me interact with the

> people around me, both the children at school and the teachers I worked with. I love working with others. I feel interpersonal relationships are an essential part of me. Even when I decided to leave school it was important for me to choose work where I can meet and talk to others and communicate with them.

Emilee said: “I wanted to become a meaningful part in the process children go through….The interaction with the children was so important to me.” For Alison: “What attracts me most is the idea of working together with others and cooperating with them.” Meanwhile, Sandra said: “The quality of the interaction with the people I work with is something that is really important and meaningful for me.”

The participants’ hopes and expectations were not fulfilled. However, the reality of the situation was brought home to them only when they had started work. As Diana said, “Before I was actually at school, I could not imagine how what it would really be like.”

Relationships with all groups of people they encountered at school were therefore far from what they had all wished. They were all very definite about the importance of positive interaction, but they all described muddled relationships with everybody with whom they were involved at work. The next four subthemes deal with each group in turn.

4.2.2 Subtheme II: Relationships with students

The participants said they were ready to give the children as much as they could. That was a major motivation in their choice of teaching. They described feelings of responsibility and care for the children. They even pictured a relationship that could be likened to that of a mother and child; one of mutual respect and cooperation for personal growth and development, preparing each student for the future.

Reality eroded this rosy ideal. The participants described experiencing physical, verbal and emotional abuse from their students. When Rachel was asked for an instance of a difficult day at school, she recounted:

> Yes, there are many days like that! I remember a child that had massive aggression attacks. I asked him something and he refused. So I asked him to think with me. It started well, but then all of a sudden he started shouting at me 'I want you to die and I'll bring many flowers to your grave.' He left the class and slammed the door after shouting, saying horrible things to everybody and hitting other children. That was a moment I said, 'For God' sake! What do I need that for? I keep on giving, and for what?'

The passage above shows the negative effect of such situations on Rachel's outlook towards her profession. One can also say, from her choice of words, that the situation left her more frustrated than before. The passage also shows that she was starting to question if there were any point in carrying on.

Like Rachel, Naomi described harsh experiences with children. She even said she felt the interaction with one of them "drove her crazy." Diana said she felt they were looking down at her.

> Naomi:
>
> I gave them all that I could give them. I shared personal experiences of my own childhood. I was trying… there was that child who deliberately repeated the same questions again and again, or disturbed me. I felt all he wanted was to drive me crazy.

Diana:

> They were swearing at me. It was a nightmare…I remember one of the children used to sit in front of me, in the first row, talking to her friends at the other end of the classroom. When I told her to stop or asked why she was doing it, she ignored me. She made me feel invisible, as if I was air. That was worse than when they swore at me. I felt they dismissed me totally.

Trying to visualise the type of her relationships with the students, Diana and three other participants chose words from the world of war or police work.

Diana said: "I don't make a good policewoman. This is not what I wanted to be, but this is what I found myself becoming."

Sandra:

> I felt I was at war. There was that child in one of the classes. He was extremely aggressive. He was ruining everything. He used to throw stones and I didn't know what to do. He never listened to me. There were those strings hanging there and he was climbing on them. I felt I must get some help.
>
> I felt I was playing the role of a policewoman. More than half of the time I had to spend on discipline. And I mean things like asking the children to sit in their chairs.

Alison said: "They have taken all my energy since I had to deal with their bad behaviour, like doing police work. This was not what I wanted."

Emilee:

> There was that child who behaved badly. He was bullying everyone and I felt he was fighting me. I remember he took money off another student. It was so embarrassing and humiliating. When I told him he was suspended – war broke out.

The harsh experiences of the relationships with the children changed their perception and feelings, leading them to question their choice to become teachers. As Diana said, “this is not what I wanted when I decided to become a teacher”. The expectations grew thin and the frustration became more dominant.

Alison:

> I felt they were using me for their own purposes. They were coming back from lunch break looking angrily at me….They were yelling at me in class and even in the bus going back from school. I was giving and giving and giving – but sometimes I felt they didn’t get anything.

Diana:

> I started to hate them. I hated them and they hated me. At some point I told them, ‘look, you don’t want to be here, I don’t want to be here, so let’s just try to complete the learning we have to complete, and break up right after that.’
>
> I burst into tears on my way home. I was crying because I was so frustrated at not being able to reach the children. No matter how I tried – I failed.

Naomi:

> Children these days are horrible! Horrible! I couldn’t take it anymore. I held his hands, looked into his eyes and said ‘Enough!! Enough!!’ I’d never hurt a child, but there was a moment that I felt I could have slapped his face.

Alison said: “It was very frustrating. I felt weak and frustrated. I thought I didn’t have the qualities I needed to be a teacher. Frustration is the word that best describes what I felt.”

Rachel summed up her feelings:

> It really hurts because you do have a relationship with the child and you give him so much. But when he tells you horrible things it feels like a hit below the belt, and you feel you've had enough! So you think what do I need all this for – I'll quit this job and work nine to five in an office!

Those words really capture Rachel's frustration at being bullied by the students she treated as if they were her own children.

It is important to mention that the participants did mention other experiences of interaction with the children. For example, Rachel said, "Of course there are those children who were waiting for me in the mornings, waiting for me, welcoming me. They're the ones who somehow helped me stay there." Emilee mentioned that she had other experiences too, and even today sometimes sees former students who make small gestures of appreciation:

> I do see ex-students of mine from time to time. For example I sat the other day at the coffee shop with my partner, and to my surprise the waitress came over with a piece of cake, pointing at a guy sitting in the coffee shop, saying that he'd paid for it. He'd been one of my students. Another time I went to buy a computer and the owner of the shop was my ex-student. There are those who see me and tell me they hadn't liked me at school, but now understand how important it all was. It makes me feel good, but when I was at school I reached the point where I was counting the minutes, waiting for the day to pass. It is impossible to live like that.

Relationships with the students were therefore far from what the participants wished or imagined. Their difficult experiences changed their feelings and thoughts, contributing to their decision to leave school. The better interactions they experienced

could not keep them at school. Sadly, their relationships with the children's parents were no different.

4.2.3 Subtheme III: Relationship with students' parents

As they had when talking about relationships with students, the participants expressed fear and trembling when they described their experience of the students' parents, who threatened, attacked and bullied them and failed to appreciate their efforts.

The terminology of war was even more evident than it had been in the previous subtheme, with expressions like: "standing in the frontline," "being hit by bullets," or feeling like a "punchbag" being used. Alison said, "They attacked me. There is no other way to describe it."

During the early parts of their interviews, participants said they had started out wanting to communicate with the parents and form good relationships with them, but they soon found they were unable to create clear boundaries to protect themselves.

Rachel:

> He [a parent] used to ring me and shout at me not to tell him what to do and that he doesn't care about anything and that if his child has a problem then the school needs to deal with it. I tried to explain, but he didn't listen.

Emilee:

> I had to suspend one of the students after he bullied another student. As a result, his parents started bothering me. It was close to bullying. They were ringing me at all hours of the day or night, screaming and threatening. They said they'd contact the inspectors at the Ministry of Education unless I let their child back into school immediately. It was a nightmare.

Diana said: “One of the students was bullying another student. We were still trying to decide what to do about it when his mother rang and started yelling at me.” Ruth said: “I always had to compromise and do what the parents wanted me to, because the principal was afraid of the parents, worried they would beat her up.”

Naomi:

> One of the mothers decided that I wasn’t working hard enough with her daughter. She used to ring me saying that she was sad to hear I was the teacher of her daughter, screaming at me for not checking if her daughter had taken all her books home from school. I tried to calm her down but nothing helped.

When she was asked to describe what she felt, Naomi added:

> I felt insulted. I was doing everything I could for her daughter, so how come she was talking to me like that? She used me as her punchbag…. When her daughter celebrated her birthday in class, that mother didn’t even look at me. She was sitting in my class, not looking at me at all and I couldn’t understand why!
> I felt like I was standing in the frontline and getting all the bullets. No one can be constantly criticised and stay calm.

Describing her interaction with another parent, Naomi told the story:

> That father used to come to school in the morning and tell me, ‘here is my child, from now on you are responsible for whatever happens to him.’ Hold on! What do you mean? It is your son, not mine. And your son is a problematic guy, he climbs on the windows and breaks them down. When I asked that father to come to school, he told me it was my problem, not his.
>
> There were no boundaries. A parent could come and tell me this is what I want my son to have, this is where I want him to sit. I felt I had no choice.

It is important to note the tone of the participants as they described their interaction with the parents. It was filled with resentment and hopelessness towards the career that they once cherished as an ideal.

It is also important to mention that participants did point out better interactions as well, though even those were far from what they had wished for or expected. Instead of the cooperation they longed for, they described experiencing attacks and threats that made them feel they were living in a nightmare.

4.2.4 Subtheme IV: Relationships with principals

Naturally, the principals at the participants' schools played a central role among the people with whom the participants interacted. All the participants said they had disputes and arguments with their principals. Sandra said: "The principal got angry with me."

Each participant expected to receive emotional reward from the principal, a superior figure. It was not forthcoming. Diana said: "Emotional reward and appreciation [by the principal] is the most meaningful, but it wasn't there."

They said they felt the principal looked down on them and would not listen. Diana said the principal did not care about her:

> We had some visitors from overseas at school and the principal asked me to prepare a presentation for them. It took me few days to prepare it, at home, after school hours. When the visitors came, I presented it all. The principal hardly said thank you. I felt she didn't see me, didn't care about me at all. I gave so much for her.

Later in the interview, she repeated, “I didn’t feel she cared about me. She was only giving orders.” There was a feeling that the principal ignored the emotional needs of the participants. Alison said: “I was treated as if I was a robot.”

Naomi could not understand why her needs were dismissed: “I am a loving person who knows how to listen and accommodate others, and I need that to be reciprocated by others. But it was missing. It made me angry.”

There was a feeling of one-sided and unsupportive interaction. Sandra said, “I felt she did not support me when I needed her”. Ruth remembered that the principal never listened to her: “I felt the principal was bending my arm.” Asked to explain what she meant, she added, “The principal called me and instructed me to change my teaching programme. She never supported me.”

Alison described she felt she was being used, getting no support or appreciation from her principal: “I felt used … it’s not easy to run a class of so many students…and nobody noticed.”

A similar experience was expressed by Rachel:

> Whatever you do, it’s no good…there are times you can see that teachers, parents and the principal appreciate what you do, but many other times that you do so much, you have all good will – and it is not appreciated....There isn’t really any appreciation or approval for teachers from superiors or the Government.

The relationships with the principal were described as adding pressure. At one point, Rachel said that she could no longer work at the same school as her principal, even if she had to leave the profession. Rachel said she felt that the principal preferred to

create a nice show for the inspector: “I felt that I’d either find another school or quit altogether. We had a terrible dispute…I had nothing to do there.” Jennifer and Naomi reported the same.

Jennifer:

> One of the things that contributed to my decision to leave school was my principal. I remember clearly one event, when I failed one of the students – the principal called me and told me to change that mark because the student was related to the mayor – a similar thing happened with another student. She wasn’t good enough…but the principal told me she’d donated to school….I didn’t think I should do it…I couldn’t bear it.

Naomi:

> I was put under pressure by the principal. She asked me to contain the children, to listen to them, to give each one of them enough time, to develop personal dialogue with each student – but she never did that for me.

Nevertheless, Naomi, Ruth and Diana did recall times when they felt the principal had been more gentle and supportive. This happened when the principal praised them or shared personal things with them. Naomi said: “Once, at the pedagogical meeting, she said I was doing a good job.”

Diana said: “Once we went together, me and her, to visit a special project in the nearby town. On the way, she told me a little bit about herself and how she decided to work in this field. But that was it.”

Diana added that she wasn’t one the principal’s favourite teachers: “She was never too personal with me. She had her favourites among the teachers. I wasn’t one of them.”

Finally, when Sandra announced her decision to quit, to her surprise: “The principal didn’t even try to convince me to stay.”

The participants’ relationships with the principals, key figures at school, were therefore muddled, pressurising, mostly impersonal and unsupportive.

4.2.5 Subtheme V: Relationships with other teachers

We have already seen that the participants expressed frustration with the quality of their relationships with the students, the students’ parents and the principals. As if those were not enough, when they turned to their colleagues, the other teachers, another disappointment awaited. The participants described difficult relationships with some of their colleagues. Rachel said: “I don‘t always feel connected to the team.”

She meant that there was a lack of communication between her and the other teachers. Communication or connecting to other people is crucial to developing a positive and healthy relationship with them. Naomi bluntly described her encounters with one of the teachers as a traumatic experience. She reported she was having a nervous breakdown:

> There was a teacher who refused to cooperate with me. She did everything to fail me. She talked about me behind my back and I was crying … she didn’t let me express myself; she used to shout me down in team meetings…I was left exhausted.
>
> It killed me. I felt I could take it anymore. I couldn’t trust the other teachers anymore; I felt they were gossiping all the time.

One of the difficulties was a clash of views or a dislike of other teachers' behaviour. Ruth said: "I was shocked by the way other teachers behaved. I saw one of them throwing leftovers on the ground. I couldn't understand how she could do it. I felt I was different from the others."

While Sandra preferred to stay away from all of the teachers, Emilee said she felt she should stay away from some of them.

Sandra:

> I didn't like going to the teachers' room, all the things I didn't like happened there….I didn't have any good or meaningful interactions with other teachers and I wouldn't stay there any longer than I had to.

Ruth said: "I had good connections with a few teachers, but there were others I felt I'd better stay away from."

To sum up this subtheme: whilst one might think that relationships with teacher colleagues would be excellent, as they all share similar difficulties and challenges, it seems that the reality was different. Colleagues were often a source of pain and suffering.

4.2.6 Subtheme VI: Loneliness and isolation

The participants revealed feelings of loneliness, isolation and alienation, saying that nobody understood their situation. The participants expressed their pain, their voices often becoming slower and quieter. They found themselves either minimising their stay at school or taking on more tasks in order to feel less alone.

Rachel:

> I don’t feel it’s a natural part of me….I feel angry, alienated….It’s very frustrating…no one understands….You can’t even imagine. A stranger wouldn’t understand it…no one can understand that feeling.

Diana:

> I felt totally isolated. I used to come to school exactly at the time class started, and not one second earlier, avoiding the teachers’ room, eating my lunch-break sandwich quickly and leaving. I didn’t feel I belonged.

Jennifer said: “There were days I felt very lonely.”

Ruth said*:* “I felt I was different from the others. I felt I was aiming towards different targets.”

Naomi:

> I felt I was an alien….I had no one to talk to….I hated going to the teachers’ room. I see myself as a friendly person, yet I didn’t feel good with the others. I found myself volunteering to do all the extra work with the students, avoiding my loneliness….I felt extremely lonely.

Alison said: “At the end of the day I felt I was alone.” Meanwhile, Sandra said: “I experienced alienation....There was nobody with me in my difficult times….I remember I hated going to the teachers’ room. I felt so lonely there.”

Eventually they expressed feelings of wanting to end these feelings. Rachel said: “You feel you’ve had enough…it hurts you so much”. Sandra said: “I think this has somehow determined the end of my teaching career.”

Summing up this subtheme, loneliness, isolation and alienation were the dominant terms the participants used to describe their social experience with their colleague teachers. The feelings mounted to the point when they avoided going to the teachers’ room.

4.2.7 Theme B: summary

Concluding the second superordinate theme: all participants expressed a wish to create meaningful, close relationships with others, but all described unpleasant experiences with all four major groups. This resulted in feelings of loneliness, isolation and alienation that contributed to their decision to leave their jobs.

4.3 Theme C: Focus on the psychological dimension

The third superordinate theme focuses on aspects of the psychological dimension. With five subthemes, it presents the participants’ personal and professional self-perception, their experience of freedom, or lack of it, the responsibility they thought they had and the belief that they had insufficient tools to cope with the challenges they faced. It looks at reported psychological pressure and shows how their school experiences changed their self-perception.

As in the previous superordinate themes, the participants expressed high levels of stress and reported their inability to become the people they wanted to be when they chose to become teachers.

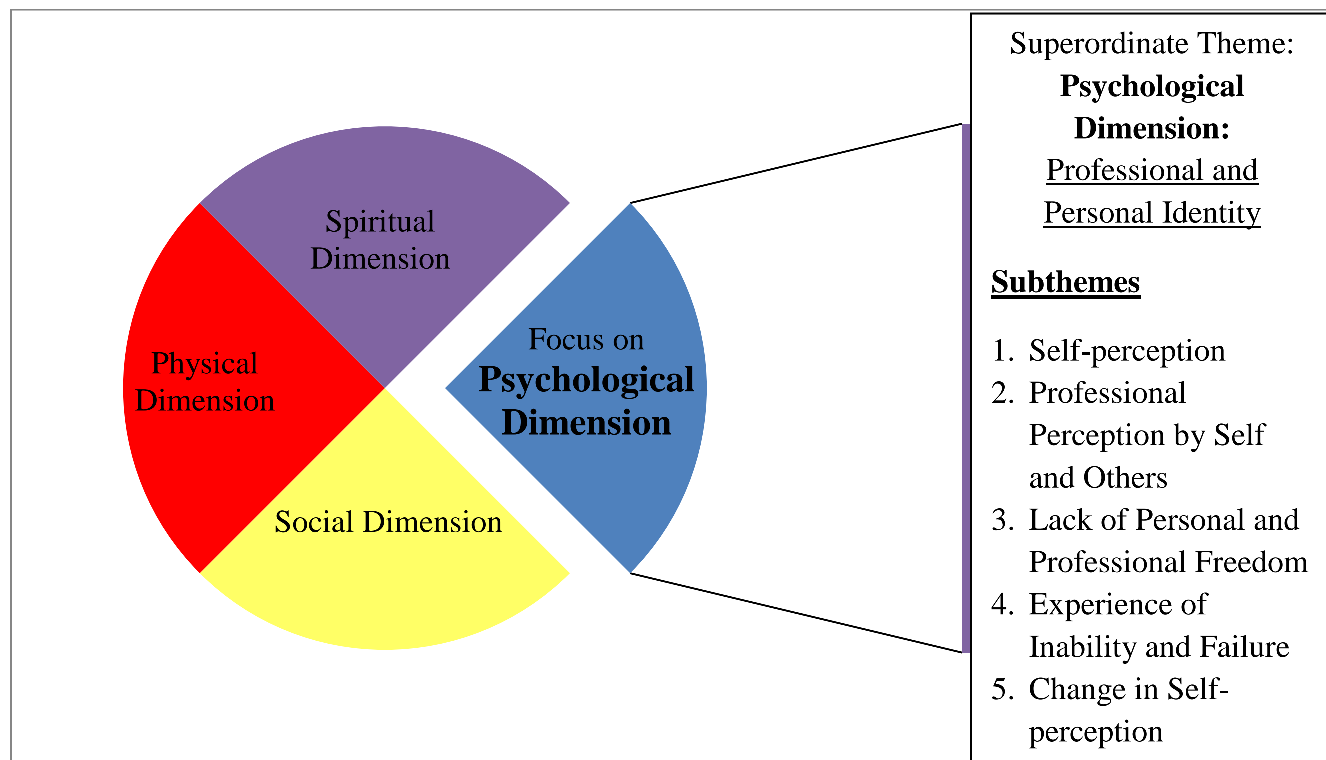

Figure 5: Focus on the psychological dimension: personal & professional identity

4.3.1 Subtheme I: Self-perception

The participants were asked to describe the way they view themselves, in terms of character or personality. They all said that they saw themselves as sensitive women, emotionally generous, who like to give to others. They went on to further explain their self-assessments.

Diana said: "I'm a sensitive person. Things get to me…I don't exactly have an elephant's skin….I am very friendly and sociable, I've got many friends and I invest a lot in preserving my friendships."

Jennifer:

> I'm just an ordinary person…I'm loyal, I have principles and I don't like to cut corners….I can read between the lines and I usually sense others' feelings. I see myself as a sensitive person. It's not easy, sometimes I wish I wasn't as sensitive as I am, it's very difficult.

Ruth said: "I'm a person whose interpersonal relationship is important to her. Education is part of my essence. I tend to take responsibilities." Meanwhile, Naomi said: "I'm a loving person, who knows to listen and to accommodate others….I like to give to others….I'm an independent person…I am a doer, not a person who doesn't make too much noise."

Emilee:

> I'm a person who likes to give and to help others….I am honest...I love teaching; it's a natural part of me. I'm a person who loves giving to others. I don't like fighting, I don't tend to stay where there are fights, I like happy endings.

Alison said: "I'm a person who likes to do thing differently and creatively. I like to feel that what I do is meaningful; I like to bring new things and new ideas….I like teamwork and I like other people." Rachel said: "I like to give to others"; "I am sensitive"; "I love children." Meanwhile, Sandra said: "I am balanced person; I do not act impulsively....I am empathetic; I always try to be a good person, not to be mean to others."

In conclusion, all the participants come across as loving people. They particularly emphasised their sensitivity and their social and interpersonal qualities. This is particularly interesting as it stands in contrast to their description of their actual inter-personal experiences at school.

4.3.2 Subtheme II: Professional perception

While the participants believe that teachers must maintain high standards and that teaching is an important profession, people around them do not share those beliefs. Both professionals and the public seem to look down on teachers, thinking they do not do a good enough job.

Diana said: “I think a teacher is a meaningful and important figure, but I don’t think the parents of the students see it that way.” Emilee said: “I think teachers are a group of givers, educated as altruists, but I don’t think parents have sufficient appreciation for them.” For Ruth: “I think many people believe that teachers are people who can’t do anything else. Many people around me were surprised I wanted to be a teacher. They told me I could do better than that.” Meanwhile, Naomi said: “There’s a public myth that teachers are having fun. Even my husband used to tell me that. He said I was having fun five hours a day. People don’t understand it’s a difficult profession, time and energy consuming.”

To add to their professional burden, they were bound by a policy of continuous improvement and constantly obliged to prove their worth. They said these requirements were not realistic and implied that the Ministry despised them.

Rachel:

> We have to prove ourselves all the time....The teacher has to maintain certain standards and is under constant pressure....Often the Ministry of Education wants standards that don’t meet the reality...it frustrates us and the children, and puts us under pressure.
>
> We have to take extra training each year, and each year we do the same topics because each year they change the standards.

Ruth:

> I think the Ministry of Education believes they can do whatever they want with us teachers. They look down on us and create a belief that what the teachers are doing is not good enough…they keep on telling us to change the teaching programmes. Once we finish creating one, they tell us we have to make a better one. Teaching can be a despised profession.

And, as Rachel added later, if she was not being appreciated professionally as well as personally, then she could not see any good reason to stay at school. “I felt even my professional knowledge and opinions were not being appreciated…I had nothing to do there anymore.”

The participants had initially thought of teaching as a highly appreciated profession. Soon enough, they learned that neither at school itself nor at home is it seen that way. Given that, doubts arose again about their willingness to stay at school.

4.3.3 Subtheme III: Lack of personal and professional freedom

This subtheme refers to two types of freedom that, in the participants’ accounts of their experience, were missing. One was personal, fostering psychological preoccupation that kept the participants constantly bothered, with restless minds. The other was a lack of professional academic freedom, preventing them from using, or even showing, their unique and authentic abilities.

In terms of psychological preoccupation, the participants felt they did not have enough freedom, several expressing frustration. They said their work did not end when they left school; they had to carry on at home, sometimes through the night, so they never had enough time to let

their minds rest. There were no clear boundaries between their working time and their “me time”.

They said they were occupied with things they were not supposed to deal with after official working hours, “twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week,” as Rachel expressed it. She and Alison both said that they were “constantly worried”. Rachel added that sometimes she could not sleep at night because she kept on thinking about school, and Naomi said she needed “to give her head some rest”.

Diana:

> At school I didn’t have any free time. During break time they were all running after me asking questions…and that was it, I had no lunch break. Then they were calling me all afternoon, students and parents. And I had to work from home as well. My head was always occupied, always thinking. All the time.

Rachel:

> The work continues at home, sometimes for the whole night....Sometimes you have no spare time for yourself….We work at home for long hours, dealing with all kinds of things we’re not supposed to deal with….There are times I go home and think, ‘Oh no! Perhaps I didn’t pay enough attention.’ It’s a pressure you carry with you from school into your family life, into home.

As much as they could not free themselves from obsessive thought, they could not free themselves from the chains of the instructed study programmes either. When the participants described their academic freedom, they said they felt under pressure and surveillance. In Rachel’s words*:* “the freedom is very limited. It is within boundaries.”

Throughout the interviews, the participants expressed frustration at having no freedom to choose the way they wanted to be at school, to interact and teach. They said they felt they had to fit into a system with whose teaching programmes they often disagreed. Jenifer expressed her disagreement, as well as her wish to express her creativity: “Why do the children have to do the same exercises they used to do 80 years ago?! I wanted to be more creative than that.”

Negotiation was not allowed. Teaching programmes were forced on them, as if the teachers were robots.

Alison:

> I had to fit in into the system. They told me this is the programme and this is what you have to do. As if I was a robot or something….It was sad for me to understand that I could not deliver the materials I felt I wanted to, as I was told I had to teach other things.

Naomi said: “I was told that this is how school works and that I have to adjust to the given conditions and study programmes, to cultivate good marks and achieve higher average marks.” For Ruth: “I was instructed by the principal to change the study programmes and to fit in with the parents’ demands. There was no room for discussion.”

The moments when Diana felt she was free to teach what she felt was important were mentioned as the joyous ones:

> There wasn’t really any academic freedom. We had to teach what we were told to teach. When the classroom door was shut, and I felt we had covered the essential learning materials, I allowed myself to deliver the materials I really wanted to teach. These were the moments I really enjoyed.

Despite their lack of freedom and restricted subject matter, their sense of responsibility was high. As Diana said: “I felt great responsibility…perhaps more than I needed to”.

Alison said: “If there had been more than one teacher in class, we could have shared the responsibility and perhaps been less worried.” Rachel said: “I feel great responsibility for the children, and since I have at least 30 children, I’m occupied all the time and it kills me.”

Eventually, although they had freely chosen their profession, they reported no inclination to stay within this limiting system.

Alison said: “I could not agree with it. I am not a robot.” Emilee said: “The system is totally inflexible. I came to the conclusion that I couldn’t continue like that. There’s no point of staying in a place that doesn’t let you express yourself freely.” For Naomi: “There was a clear conflict between the way I thought it should be and the way the system said it should be. It was impossible to resolve it.” Diana said: “I rang the school secretary and told her I wanted to quit. It was one and a half months after I started working there, but I couldn’t stay there any longer. She told me I couldn’t quit.”

All the participants’ accounts were characterised by their lack of professional freedom, endless hours of bothering thought, worries and their sense of responsibility. All these factors contributed to their decisions to leave a career to which they had once freely aspired.

4.3.4 Subtheme IV: Experience of inability and failure

The participants reported that they often felt incapable of coping with the huge number of different tasks. They said they lacked the tools and knowledge to help them with the daily challenges they had to face. They did not mean they didn't know what to teach, but that they didn't have enough knowledge on how to deal with behaviour problems, children with special needs and angry parents. Usually they accused the system of failure, as it was the system that should have supplied that knowledge.

When Naomi talked about this, her voice faltered and her tone changed. She seemed in pain:

> How was I supposed to cope with all of these difficulties?! They told me they trusted my ability to cope, but never gave me any tools to do it. They said anybody could handle these situations. But I couldn't! I don't think I had enough knowledge of how to deal with children who had all sorts of different problems.

Emilee, too, said she still feels the pain of not knowing how to deal with angry parents:

> I found myself having to deal with things I never learned or knew how to deal with, for example, aggressive parents. I couldn't handle it. I didn't know how to cope with them. I'm not used to being in a place where people shout at me all the time. It was so difficult. It was several years ago, yet in my memories it is as fresh as if it happened yesterday.

Sandra said: "There was such a mess in class and one of the children wouldn't listen to me. I didn't know what to do with him. Nobody guided me." Meanwhile, Diana said: "I don't think I had the tools to help me widen the spectrum of my reactions. In challenging situations, a teacher with those tools can offer many types of responses, I didn't have them."

Failure bred disappointment. Diana said: “I wanted to succeed, but I felt I failed.” Ruth said: “I was very disappointed with my achievements and with the educational system.” For Sandra: “Knowing that I didn’t complete what I’d started, that I couldn’t cope with it… it’s a kind of failure… I failed.”

Daily experience of inability to cope with all sorts of difficulties led the participants to believe they did not have the needed knowledge, and that in turn led to a feeling of failure.

4.3.5 Subtheme V: Changes in self-perception

Participants were asked whether they think or feel work at school has changed them or the way they view themselves.

Diana, who described herself at the beginning of the interview as a friendly and sociable person who invests a lot of energy in her relationships, said at the end of the interview that her experience at school had taught her not to give too much: “I’ve learned that giving too much is not such a good idea. People understand it wrongly. Today I don’t give others as much as I did back then – I focus on my own needs as well.”

Jennifer, who saw herself as a loyal person, able to read between the lines and good at sensing others’ feelings, now sees herself differently, saying: “I’m aware that I am over sensitive, see ‘too much’ and that doesn’t make my life easy.”

Ruth, who said at the beginning of the interview that education is part of her essence, said towards the end that teaching is not her field – she sees herself more as a therapist. She also added that she is more anxious now:

> I am much more anxious today. I am much more worried, especially for the future of the children and the country we live in….I am a doer and a giver. But I am not a teacher. I am a therapist, which is also a way of dealing with education….And I am not a person who can stay for long in large systems.

Naomi, who earlier described herself as a person who loves to listen, with the ability to give to and accommodate others, now says, following her teaching experience: “I became much more restless, less tolerant, angrier and more alert.”

Emilee, who had said that she liked to help others and did not like to fight, said school had taught her that she could not force rules on others: “I am aware that I am not as capable as I thought I was in forcing rules.”

Alison, who had said she was friendly, liked working with others, and offered creative thinking, now added: “I think I’m a person who likes to know that there is still a chance to grow and I tend to appreciate systems that respect the people that are part of them.”

Rachel had described herself as a sensitive person who liked giving to others and loved children. Assessing herself after her teaching experience, she said: “I learned to accept others, no matter who they are, and to tolerate anybody different.”

Sandra, who had described herself as a balanced person, good and empathetic, learned that she could not demonstrate these qualities at school, as she does not consider herself a good teacher. She realises now that she is better in one-to-one interactions: “I don’t think I’m good at working with large groups. I am a one-on-one person…and I am not a good teacher.”

The main changes the participants described were related to the way they view others, their inner calmness and the way they think of their ability to work within systems like schools.

4.3.6 Theme C: summary

Concluding the third superordinate theme, the participants view themselves as friendly, sociable empathic and good listeners. They think of themselves as people who like to help others, loyal team workers. When asked about the way their work at school might have changed them, they pointed out they became more anxious and concerned, they were worried that their level of sensitivity and generosity was too high, and they questioned whether they were fit to be teachers.

This correlates with several experiences in which they said they were unable to cope with different sorts of situations. They said they felt their knowledge and armoury of tools were not good enough to cope with the daily challenges involved in their work that were not directly related to teaching.

When it comes to teaching methods and learning programmes, the participants said that their professionalism was not appreciated. They were given no academic freedom and had to do whatever they were told. The effect of this lack of freedom was to make them constantly occupied and worried, which in turn led to psychological stress.

Summing up all these accounts of the participants' experiences, doubts about their professional identity arose and contributed to their decision to look for another occupation.

4.4 Focus on the spiritual dimension

The fourth superordinate theme focuses on the spiritual dimension. Its two subthemes are values and meaning. The values are those that the participants said were important to them, that they wanted – but often failed – to deliver to the next generation. The second subtheme describes the participants' experience of being unable to find meaning in their work, so that they came face-to-face with meaninglessness.

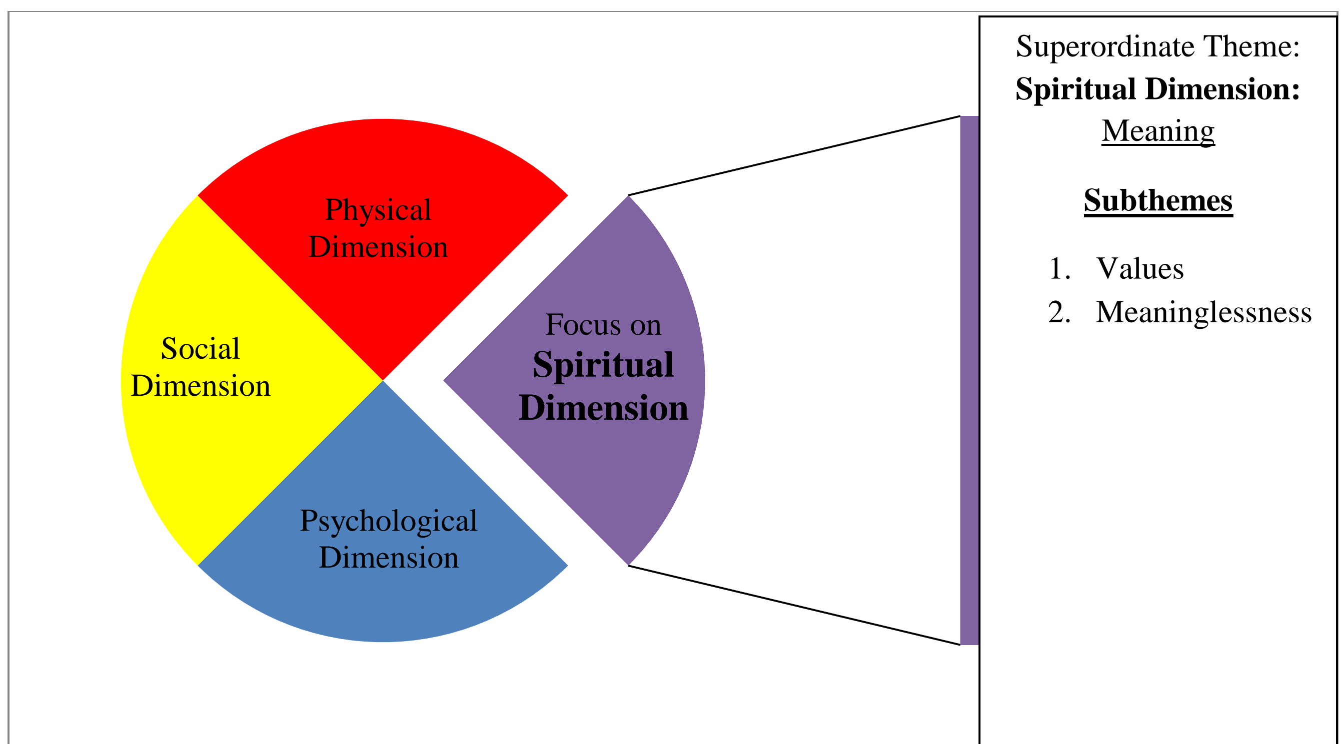

Figure 6: Focus on the spiritual dimension: meaning

4.4.1 Subtheme I: Values

Very notably, the participants said there was a gap between the values they believed should be delivered at school and the values they actually had to focus on at school. They considered that their definition of the meaning of education was different from the one given to it

at school. Ruth said: “This is not what I call education. Education is about values, not merely academic achievements.”

The participants said that focusing on academic achievements was not enough and wanted to focus on interpersonal aspects.

Ruth:

> The Ministry of Education has lost its values. Exams and marks are top priority now…our children are being judged for the marks they get…what about children’s behaviour? What about friendships? What about educating for values? The certificate they get at the end of the year reflects their academic achievement but not their humanity…our society has become very competitive. I don’t think it’s right. I just can’t understand why.

Naomi:

> I wanted to foster trust and confidence within the children. It is a good basis for learning to cooperate….At school, they preferred to concentrate on the marks the students get, the average marks of each class and other statistical measurements. This did not line up with the things I believed in. I thought education was about seeing the individuals.

Diana:

> I wanted them to be able to have meaningful dialogues with each other. I tried to provoke critical thinking. I wanted them to be able to question and think about the news. I wanted to discuss moral issues. These are the important things in my opinion. But I had to finish the study materials first, as they had to be good in the exams.

The participants were interested in promoting deeper thinking and genuine dialogue even if it was neither easy nor flattering, yet they reported they felt that the school preferred to invest in the outer layers, those that look nicer.

Ruth:

I wanted us to study in a loving and caring environment. I wanted them to develop deeper love to the subjects I was teaching, not just do it. For me it was important to help each one of the students understand that they are all capable, that they have the right genes inside them. We all have it. There was no time for that. The programmes of the Ministry of Education said to focus on exercises. This was not the essence of what I believed in.

Emilee:

At school they preferred focusing on the outer layers, the things that can be seen from the outside. Nice ceremonies. Showing guests how nice and good we were. I suddenly realised that I was being asked to concentrate my energy in that direction. But that's not the reason I went there. I wanted to develop the students' scientific thinking, not just to prepare for all these shows.

Rachel:

I thought we should educate for integrity and honesty. But these were not the values at school. What they thought really important was showing the inspector that all the children have good marks and achievement. I believed we had to show the inspector the real picture, even if it wasn't flattering. Sadly the principal didn't see it from that perspective.

Diana:

I made a list of the things I thought I should discuss with the children. Some were a bit shocking. Things people prefer to avoid, like domestic violence, sexual abuse and human

> freedom. I created a list of names and photos of ten women murdered by their partners. I believed I should educate against violence. But I could only discuss it when the doors were shut tight.

Jennifer said: "I think there's some disconnection between the values the educational system emphasises and those really needed in our society. They prefer to focus on achievement. I believed in focusing on understanding and logic, encouraging thinking and creativity."

There was also a gap between the participants' values and those of their colleagues. That caused them deep unease.

Ruth:

> There was a huge gap between the values I believed we should deliver and those that the other teachers believed in. I was shocked by the way other teachers behaved. I saw one of them throwing leftovers on the ground. I couldn't understand how she could do it. I felt I was different from the others. I believed in love for our land and respect for the ground we stand on. A teacher can't just throw leftovers on the ground. What are we teaching our children?
>
> I remember we all went for a tour one day, to see the land, to see nature. I can't remember exactly where it was, but it was a beautiful place, with great history. I was shocked to see that the children and the teachers were all busy with their food and sweets. They preferred chocolate snacks to historical sites.

The participants now expressed they felt unable to deliver their message to the next generation. As Sandra said:

> At some point, I realised I wasn't doing the things I believed in. I felt everything I did was very shallow. I thought it was important to let the children study because they loved

> doing it, but I never got to this. I was dealing with their behaviour or fighting the principal.

The participants were experiencing clashes between their values and the values promoted by the school. This was yet another contributor to their doubts of school as the place for them.

4.4.2 Subtheme II: Meaninglessness

The participants went to describe their feeling that their work supplied no sense of meaning. Their wish for a satisfying and a meaningful job was not satisfied. This seems to have been the straw that broke the camel's back. All eight participants expressed the same emotions on this subject.

Their wish for a meaningful job, or their thought that school could be a place where they would find meaning, was expressed in the following words:

Diana said: "I saw school as a place I could find meaning through." Ruth said: "Working in the field of education was something I felt was part of my destiny." For Alison: "I wanted a job, a meaningful job that would enable me to express my creativity." Meanwhile, Ruth said: "I realised I had to do something meaningful."

The pain they said they felt by not being able to find meaning through their work at school, or to feel their work was meaningful, was intense. The wish to leave became stronger, soon augmented by the wish to find another job.

Diana:

> I felt I was no longer a teacher. The next year, on September 1st, the first day of school, when I didn't have to go to school I felt the purest feeling one could feel. It was so

good….If work isn't meaningful, there's no point in doing it. If you stay in a place for so many hours a day and don't feel connected, can't find a meaning for what you do, it's a problem to stay there.

Jennifer:

On September 1st, I woke up in the morning, getting ready to go to school, and I didn't feel the butterflies in my stomach. I realised 'This is it. It's time to leave.' I stayed for one more year at school, but I felt like there was nothing to keep me in there. I wasn't excited anymore. It didn't mean anything to me.

Ruth:

I realised I must have meaning in my life and school was not the place to create it….I found the way and the place where I can feel my actions are meaningful….I came to the conclusion that being a therapist, not a teacher, is my destiny….What's the point of staying in a place where you give so much and you feel it's all meaningless?

Naomi said: "Knowing that I am doing something meaningful helps me in difficult times. But when this is missing, it becomes too hard to cope with all the rubbish." Emilee said: "The main thing I felt was that I wasn't fulfilling myself….I felt I could do so much more." For Alison: "I felt school was shrinking me instead of enriching me and helping me find meaning in my actions."

Several participants did mention that there were moments when they found their work meaningful, but there were not enough of them to keep them at school.

Diana:

I did have one class that I really enjoyed working with. I knew they'd pass the exams even if I taught them things outside the teaching programme…so, yes, there were those

> moments I felt satisfied and could find meaning. But my general feeling was that inside that great mess, my few meaningful moments did not connect into a wider outcome.

> Emilee:

> When I felt I was doing something meaningful, I was satisfied. The curiosity I managed to provoke within some of the students. Being part of their personal growth made me feel good.

Ruth: "The targets you had and managed to achieve...this is satisfying...and of course there are those children who are waiting for you...they are the ones who help you stay a bit longer in the system."

Others, like Sandra, couldn't remember a single occasion that gave them meaning or fulfilment. Sandra tried to explain it: "It was rather frustrating. I don't think I ever got to the stage of finding meaning. I think I was constantly staying at the lower stages of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. That's how I felt anyway. "

The participants never lost the need and the wish to find meaning, but any hope that the school would help them accomplishing vanished. The few times some of them felt meaning in their work were not enough to fill the void of meaninglessness.

Finally, when the participants were asked about their actual decision to leave and whether they were not afraid, it seemed like the option of staying at school was so horrible that they saw leaving as a valid option.

Diana said: "I wasn't afraid to leave, I was afraid to stay! I ran away from that place." Jennifer said: "Of course it's not easy to leave your job, but it's better than

staying and becoming indignant." For Ruth: "You have to listen to yourself. When I realised what was happening to me, I decided to leave. I wasn't afraid. No. I may have felt a bit uncomfortable telling the principal I was leaving, but I wasn't afraid." Meanwhile, Naomi said: "The day came when that I decided, 'That's enough.' When the alternative was admission to a mental health institute or leaving school – I preferred to leave school"

Sandra said "The wish to leave was burning inside me. The frustration I felt there was so high that leaving school was not a difficult decision." For Rachel: "Staying was no longer an option. I had nothing to do there. What do I need all this for? This is burnout."

4.4.3 Theme D: summary

Concluding the fourth subtheme, there was an unbridgeable gap between the values the participants wanted to deliver and those that the schools preferred. This created frustration among the participants. Their frustration was even greater when they realised that their hopes of finding meaning in their lives through their work at school had collapsed.

The future seemed unbearable, and they saw only one option: leaving school as soon as possible.

The next chapter discusses ways in which these themes and subthemes can be examined and understood through an existential lens as well as through other approaches.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Analysis

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the participants' accounts of their experience as seen through an existential phenomenological lens as well as through other theoretical frames. To distinguish the universal from the specific it discusses both levels of being-in-the-world (Heidegger 1962): the ontological (universal) and the ontic (specific) aspects of each of the four existential dimensions (physical, social, psychological and spiritual).[2]

The chapter begins by exploring the fear of isolation of the social dimension. This dimension, according to the participants' description, was the most meaningful and important to them, yet did not provide them with the answer for their expectations. It then discusses the ontological and ontic aspects of the physical dimension and the fear of not knowing future outcomes; the psychological dimension that provoked groundlessness anxiety within the participants; and the spiritual dimension that confronted the participants with the fear of emptiness and meaninglessness.

School, the workplace of Diana, Jennifer, Ruth, Naomi, Emilee, Alison, Rachel and Sandra, the participants of this study, is a significant place in which they face, and we can see reflected, the universal challenges and opportunities of the ontological givens. In this daily arena, they experience their private desires, wishes, ambitions, yearnings and anxieties in all four dimensions of existence, and I examine these reflections individually for each dimension.

[2] Further exploration of the ontological and the ontic can be found in section 2.4 of the literature review.

The exploration of the existential experience of each dimension includes therefore a discussion of its accompanying anxieties, and the chapter concludes with looking at burnout as a phenomenon in which ontological aspects of existence are being reflected.

5.2 Fear of isolation

The second superordinate theme presented in the findings, the social dimension, explored the participants' accounts of their experience of the social environment at school. The most important aspect of teaching, according to all the participants, is fostering positive relationships with the people encountered at school—indeed, it was the desire for a relationship with students that made a teaching career so appealing to all of them.

Even before they started to teach, the participants had pictured the relationships they wanted to have with their students, rehearsing the dialogues they would enjoy (Diana: "I imagined having conversations and dialogues with them"). The depth of their craving to form relationships is reflected in the sort of relationships they wanted to form (Jennifer: "I wanted to connect with their souls").

Nevertheless, despite their need to have positive relationships at school, the participants said they felt lonely and isolated. This need to experience good and supportive relationships at work is consistent with previous studies that looked at the role of social relationship and emotional support at workplace. For example, Baumeister and Leary (1995), supported by 30 years of studies by Gallup Inc., looked at people's wellbeing in their workplaces.

The analysis of these studies, published by Harter, Schmidt and Keyes (2002) shows that throughout their study, seven out of 12 of the most significant statements are linked directly to

interpersonal relationships at work. They refer to the need for employees to feel they have a best friend at work, as well as the importance of:

- knowing that their supervisor or someone at work cares about them as a person,
- recognition or praise from others for accomplishing good work,
- encouragement for continuing improvement in the job,
- recognition and serious consideration of each employee's opinions,
- having someone at work talk to employees about their progress,
- a sense that all staff members are committed to do quality work.

None of these elements feature in the participants' experience at school. Most of their students showed no recognition for their devotion to teaching them, nor did the students' parents appreciate their work. Their principals took no account of their opinions, but rather forced them to obey orders.

The level of pain the participants felt is obvious from the symbol both Alison and Rachel chose to describe their feelings; Alison says, "I was treated as if I was a robot. Far from being encouraged to develop, they felt they were put under constant pressure. Naomi said, "I was put under pressure," while Rachel says: "It puts me under pressure." None of the participants had a best friend at work, but all said that they had no choice but to work with colleagues who, unlike them, were not committed to quality work.

The importance of having positive relationship and social resources at work has already been stressed in the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model. According to Bakker and Demerouti (2006), who presented the JD-R model, social support serves as "one of the means to buffer burnout and it is probably the most familiar situational variable that has been suggested as a potential defence against job strain" (p314).

The JD-R model identifies two main characteristics that have a significant impact on employees' burnout. The first is job demands, which relates to the effort and skill one has to invest in work; the second is job resources, which includes sources that one can use in order to cope with job demands. As explained by Bakker and Demerouti (2006), high quality relationships at work as well as good communication and social support from colleagues and managers stand among the most important resources. These proved to be helpful in functioning at work and achieving work goals. These factors also provide psychological and emotional support and alleviate the impacts of work stress and burnout. When job demands and job resources are imbalanced, such as in the case of participants’ descriptions of their experiences at school, the process of burnout cannot be eased.

Similar findings were reported by McCarthy, Lambert, Crowe and McCarthy (2010), who focused in their research on teachers' intention to leave school. Their findings show that poor quality of the interaction between school principals and their teachers contributes to teachers' decision to leave school. Such interactions, according to House (1981) include emotional support and feedback. These were missing in the participants' experience at school (for example, referring to their principals, Diana said: "I didn’t feel she cared about me"; Sandra said: “I felt she did not support me when I needed her”.)

The importance of the role of social support at school can also be learned from the study of Brackett, Palomera and Mojsa-Kaja (2010). In their study, conducted among British secondary-school teachers, the researchers have found that emotion-regulation ability (ERA) is an important variant that influence teachers' stress and burnout. ERA refers to the capability to regulate one's own and others' emotional states. Emotion-regulation ability is viewed as a core element of the Emotional Intelligence Theory.

According to this theory, people with greater ERA are more capable of maintaining desirable emotions and reducing unwanted emotions, both within themselves and among the people they encounter. Furthermore, Sutton (2004) showed that teachers' greater ability to regulate emotions is believed to help them in achieving their academic goals, managing their classrooms better and forming better social relationships with their students.

According to the findings of Brackett et al. (2010), such an ability can be enhanced through the support of school principals. School principals who supported their teachers helped them develop better ERA, and thus mediated in forming better interactions between the teachers and their students. As a result the teachers' level of stress decreased, their job satisfaction increased and the teachers were less vulnerable for burnout.

In the current study, without any meaningful close and supportive relationships, with their principals, the parents or their colleagues at school, the participants were left alone to deal with their own as well as with their students' emotional challenges, thus making them vulnerable to experience burnout.

The importance of social interactions in is also stressed in Existence, Relatedness, and Growth theory (ERG). This theory is an outgrowth of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, and provides

theoretical foundation for several pieces of research about motivational influences in the workplace (Caulton 2012).

ERG identifies three categories that characterise human needs. Relatedness needs are placed right after the basic needs of existence and just before the needs of growth and fulfilment. These include the needs for social contact and satisfying interactions. People who fail to achieve their social needs turn to the lower needs of existence to remedy this (Bernstein 2011).

In this study, the participants reported that all three needs were not accomplished. As a result, even turning to the lower needs, as ERG suggests, was not an option since, as discussed in the physical dimension, these lower needs were rickety as well. Turning to higher needs, as an alternative, could not have been an option since the participants said they did not have a sense of fulfilment at school.

We can therefore say that there were not sufficient resources to satisfy the social needs of the participants, despite this being the need that was most important to them, according to their description; nor could these needs have been replaced by fulfilling other needs. Thus, all needs identified in ERG theory were left unsatisfied.

All of the above studies support the findings of the current study and help in understanding the experience of the participants at school. Lack of any rewarding, supporting and meaningful social interactions, in all four circles of significant others at school (students, students' parents, principals, colleague teachers), quickly led to feelings of alienation and loneliness.

Although at first sight it looked like the participants were surrounded by students, colleagues and parents at school, they all describe unrewarding relationships leading to feelings of disappointment, loneliness and isolation. From an existential perspective, loneliness and isolation are seen as one of the four fundamental existential concerns of human beings (Yalom 1980).

Loneliness is not simply a desire for company, but a need for meaningful relationships where one can gain a sense of belonging (Baumeister and Leary 1995). The need to belong is a powerful, fundamental and extremely pervasive motivation in human life. It has two main features: personal contacts and stability.

Personal contacts, or interactions with others, should be, in the main, free from conflicts and negative effects. Those interpersonal bonds should be marked by stability, affective concern and continuation into the foreseeable future.

This aspect provides a relational context to one's interactions with the other person, so the perception of the bond is essential to satisfy the need to belong (Baumeister and Leary 1995). According to Yalom (1980), the inability to experience a genuine and meaningful relationship with others (as described by the participants of this study) leads to the feeling of loneliness known as interpersonal isolation (Yalom 1980).

However, from an existential perspective an even more basic isolation, known as existential isolation, underlies interpersonal isolation. This type of isolation, as Yalom (1980) describes, persists even in the light of the most gratifying engagement with other individuals. It reflects the unbridgeable gap between oneself and others that, once recognised, leads one to experience an existential anxiety defined by Bugental (1965) as fear of isolation.

Looking at the participants' accounts of their experience through an existential lens, we can say that their great wish to form good relationships and their disappointment at this not happening, described in the second superordinate theme, confronted the participants with isolation, the ultimate challenge of the social dimension of existence.

Indeed, according to Binswanger (1963), the social dimension, the *Mitwelt*, is the second dimension to challenge and involve human beings. In this dimension, as van Deurzen-Smith (1997) describes, people interact socially and emotionally with others. Ontologically, the social dimension is a world in which people form relationships with others or ignore them, and are offered friendship by others or being ignored by them. They are motivated by their need to be loved and connected.

However, as people strive for love, connectedness and symbiosis with others, the social dimension unavoidably makes people aware of, and challenges them with, separation and loneliness through ever-recurring experiences of banishment, rejection, hate and condemnation (van Deurzen-Smith 1997).

Ultimately, awareness of one's challenges in the social dimension provokes the ultimate ontological concern of this dimension: fear of isolation (Bugental 1965).

A need to overcome that fear prompts a drive for social relations and the pursuit of belonging (Baumeister and Leary 1995) as well as acceptance, love and admiration (van Deurzen-Smith 1997). Paradoxically, the greater the effort to find those qualities, the greater becomes the awareness of their absence. This cyclical activity leads to the ultimate anxiety of this dimension; an anxiety of loneliness and isolation

Figure 7 (see next page) illustrates the ontological cycle of the social dimension of existence. It shows that the search for complete acceptance and love through relations with others (1) is a search that ontologically can never be fully successful (2), and that people's inability to achieve this leads to the awareness of the ontological isolation which is innate in existence (3), thus creating existential anxiety – fear of isolation (4). Such existential anxiety provokes a search for acceptance, belonging and love through relationship with others in the world. As this is not fully possible in the world of being-with-others, human beings come to realise that they are isolated in this world and the cycle starts again (van Deurzen-Smith 1997).

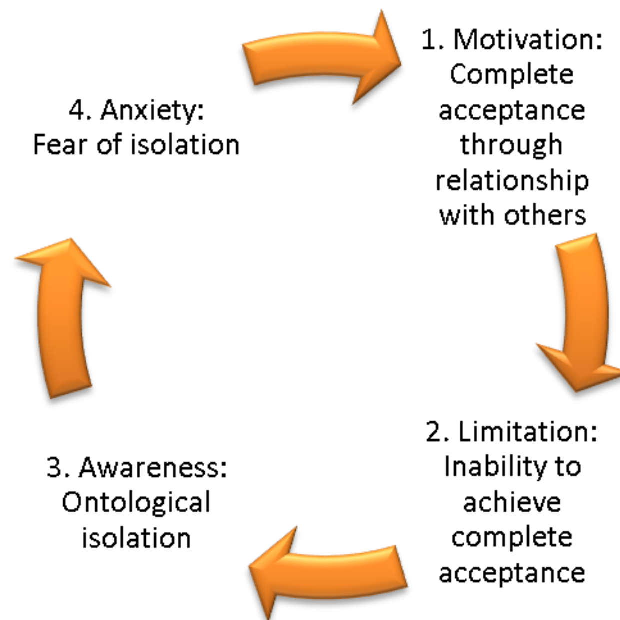

Figure 7: The ontological cycle of the social dimension

Looking at the participants' account of their experience from an existential perspective, we can say that the ontological cycle of the social dimension is reflected in their ontic experience at school. School, a place in which they encounter and communicate with so many significant

others, the place where they had hoped, according to their descriptions, to create genuine relationships, to love and be loved, turned to be the place that confronted them with their loneliness and isolation. All four major groups of people failed their initial desire to feel acceptance, belonging and love.

Figure 8 illustrates what can therefore be seen as the ontic reflection of the participants' challenges in the social dimension. The outer circle illustrates the ontic experience of the participants' social dimension at school. It starts with their search for love and acceptance at school through their relationship with everyone they meet there (1). Failure to form good, genuine, loving and supporting relationships with their students (2), their students' parents (3), their principals (4) and their colleagues (5) causes the participants to be disappointed by all four meaningful groups of the people around them, and thus to experience loneliness and fear of isolation (6).

The continuity of the outer circle reflects the everlasting motion of the ontological circle in the inner circle. As we saw in the discussion of Figure 7, no relationship can entirely eliminate isolation, since human beings are ontologically isolated creatures.

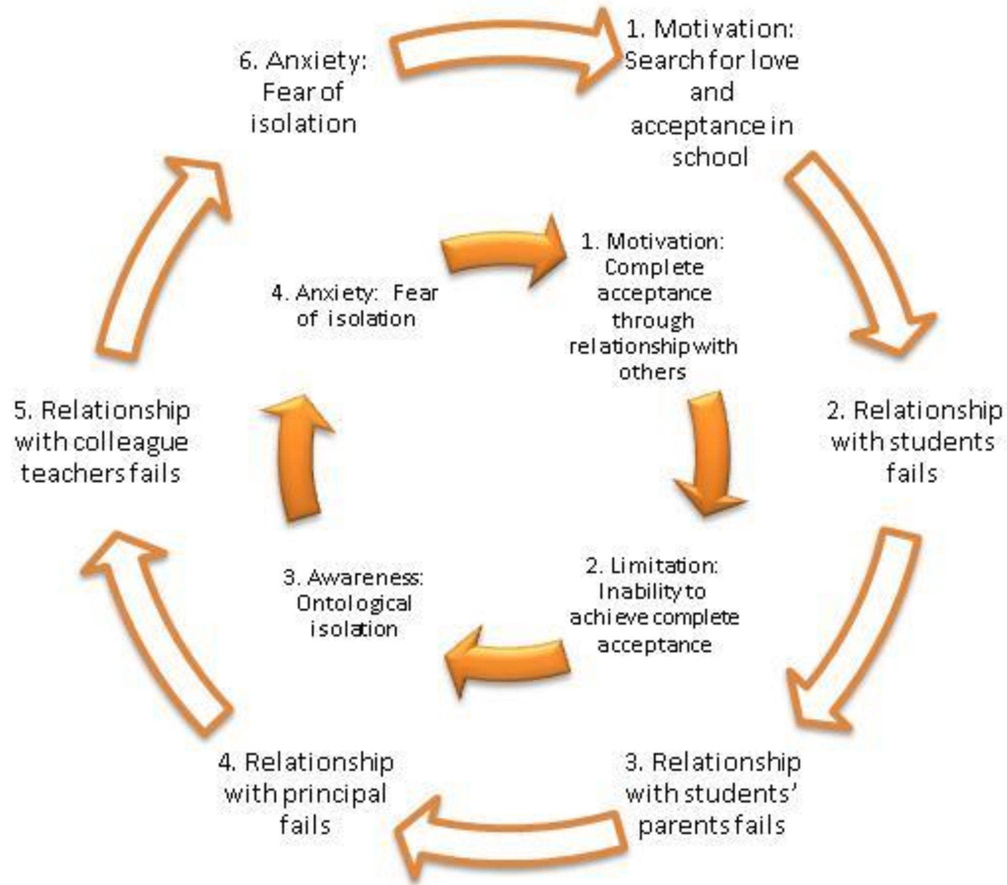

Figure 8: The reflection of the ontological social dimension in the participants' ontic experience

Most of the previous studies of burnout consider emotional exhaustion as one of three main characteristics of burnout in general (Brock and Grady 2000, Malach-Pines 1984; 2005; 2011; Moss 1989, Pines et al. 1981, Reinhold 1996) and of teachers' burnout in particular (Malach-Pines 1984; 2011, Schaufeli et al. 2011, Weisberg and Sagie 1999). From an existential perspective, the accounts of participants' experience in their social dimension can also be seen as an ontic reflection of the wider ontological aspect of the challenges of the social world.

The participants’ disappointment in the social dimension was influenced by the teachers' inability to foster positive relationships with the people they encountered at school. Their inability to interact with their students, coupled with the lack of support by colleagues, principals, and students' parents, hindered the participants' ability to cope with all the challenges that they encountered in all other three dimensions of existence; this entailed that their success in the physical, psychological, and spiritual dimensions was doomed to fail.

the participants enter

5.3 Fear in the absence of knowing future outcomes

The first superordinate theme explored the participants’ accounts of their experience of the physical environment and the conditions they described they experienced at school. Their descriptions show that their powerful need to find a stable, safe and rewarding working environment in school. This need shared importance with their wish to create relations and deliver a message to their students. However, according to the participants’ descriptions, this need was not met. Instead, the workplace provoked sense of instability and unsafe feeling.

The need for a convenient, comfortable, safe and rewarding workplace described by the participants is consistent with earlier research in the field of employment. Previous studies have shown that a secure and comfort physical environment (Jackson 2000), together with effort-rewarded balance (Hanushek and Rivkin 2007, Osborg 2005), are essential to create the sense of security, satisfaction and stability that empowers employees to produce high-quality work (Hanushek and Rivkin 2007, Kinzl et al. 2004).

Previous studies have also indicated that salaries have been rated as highly important by employees when asked about the most important aspects of their work (Dolezelova and Sovobadova 2009). An explanation for that may be found in studies that have shown that people associate money emotionally with power, security, freedom and love (Dunn, Aknin and Norton 2008, Furnham, Wilson and Telford 2012, Zhou, Vohs and Baumeister 2009).

Money is one way in which people can create a security blanket to help cope with anxiety and to see themselves as independent beings with the ability to purchase all that they needs (Goldberg and Lewis 1978). This sense of security or ability to purchase goods is, of course, greater than the actual physical ability, but is also somewhat psychologically and emotionally motivated.

Alongside salaries, work environment studies have pointed out several essential elements that contribute to a sense of stability and safety at work. These include: a spacious and comfortable workplace; quality construction, maintenance and appearance of the room and building; flexibility and ability to rearrange the workspace and its contents; good atmosphere and adjustable temperature; ability to create some privacy; and efficient, well-maintained equipment (Davis 1984, Kinzl et al. 2004, Passmore 2008, Preffer 1982, Steele 1973). Workplaces that do not foster the above conditions are likely to lose employees through resignation and transfer requests.

At first sight, one may consider that the participants of this study had steady jobs with regular commutes and reliable payment throughout the year. Even so, all of them believed they were underpaid, or at least that they were insufficiently compensated for the physical challenges they faced. They felt that they were not paid enough to develop a sense of power and security

through their salaries. (Emilee: “The work is hard and the financial reward does not make up for it.” Alison: “I wasn’t paid properly.” Diana: “I wish the salaries were higher.”)

Additionally, in the participants' accounts of their experiences, none of the essential factors that mentioned above that contribute to a sense of stability and safety at work were mentioned as existing in their work environments. Seven of the eight participants called attention to the difficulties caused by unsatisfactory working conditions. Most mentioned overcrowded classrooms as well as high room temperatures and lack of equipment. Two participants expressed their difficulties with physical conditions particularly graphically by comparing them with those encountered at their new workplaces, now that they have ceased being teachers. Jennifer, who works much longer hours at her new workplace, said, “Spending seven hours at school was far more difficult than working sixteen hours a day, six days a week at my current workplace,” while Diana said “My office is air-conditioned and I can have coffee whenever I want.”[3]

Physical violence from students and parents exacerbated participants’ experience of threatened security and low stability to the extent that they needed to call for an external “saviour” in the form of the principal (Jennifer: “I ran to the principal for help") or police (Diana: “I wanted to report the violence to the police”). The ever-changing study programmes added to the sense of instability, and all the teachers could see that any attempt to achieve security from their superiors was bound to fail. In that respect one may say that the environment in which the teachers worked was a threatening environment.

[3] It is significant that the accounts in this paragraph, as other accounts in the following sections, are all of participants who left the profession. This may be seen as a limitation of the study. Nevertheless as an existential phenomenological study it aims at presenting the subjective experience of the participants. Further discussion can be found in section 6.3 strengths and limitations of this study.

There are rather many models and theories that attempt to explain and suggest strategies through which people cope with threatening situations. Lazarus and Folkman (1986) identified two strategies people use in order to cope with stressful and anxiety provoking situations. The first way is problem focused and the second way is emotion focused. In problem focused coping, the threatened person actively targets the cause of their anxiety and searches for ways to change it or reduce contact with it. These can be done by, for example, removing the threatening cause or by walking away from it.

In emotion focused coping, the threatened person looks for strategies to reduce the unpleasant feeling itself or find ways to calm down. Emotion focused coping will usually be used when a person realises he or she cannot eliminate the cause of the unease nor reduce contact with it. In that respect, we can say that the participants of this study used problem focused strategies. All eight of them eventually left school, meaning that they avoided contact with the source of their anxiety.

The participants' account of the threatening experience can also be looked at through the eyes of the appraisal theory. According to Matthieu and Ivanoff (2006), the appraisal theory identifies two type of appraisal while confronting unsafe environment: primary appraisal and secondary appraisal.

In a primary appraisal, the anxious person tries to evaluate the degree of the threat or the danger he or she faces. He or she also tries to evaluate to what degree his own personal safety is threatened because of the difficult conditions.

In the secondary appraisal, the person tries to evaluate both his or her own sources and his or her ability to cope with the unsafe situation. The integration of both appraisals determines the reaction of the individual to the situation. It means therefore that both the evaluation of the danger and the ability to cope with are subjective (Witte 1992, Witte and Allen 2000). In the current study, it seems as though the participants evaluated the conditions as highly difficult or unsafe, and saw their own ability to cope with them as low. As a result, similarly to the problem focused strategy, they have decided to leave school.

A more classical approach, the psychoanalytic one, according to Goldstein (1995), suggests that unconscious processes determine coping strategies. According to this approach, when one encounters threatening and anxiety provoking situations, the 'ego' uses a defense mechanism in order to reduce one's awareness to the threat. This defense mechanism may include suppression, denial, reaction formation or isolation. It seems however that in this study the participants experienced difficulty in operating defense mechanisms. This can be learned by the fresh memories they recalled, their rich description and the emotions they revealed when describing their experiences at school.

Their fresh, rich and emotional descriptions indicate that the participants have been very conscious of the threats they experienced at school. This view stands in line with the existential approach that, unlike the psychoanalytic approach, focuses on conscious choices rather than emphasising the role of the unconscious (Cohn 1997).

According to the participants' descriptions, the ontic experiences that faced them regularly were difficult physical conditions, inability to deal with work overloads, low salaries,

on-going changes and physical illness. Such physical aspects served as constant and repeatedly reminders of their fragility and insecurity, and thus provoked anxiety within them.

In fact, from an existential view point, we can say that all subthemes described in the first superordinate theme were merely a reflection of wider, ontological givens of the physical dimension of humans' existence. Thus, becoming aware of these ontological givens provoked existential anxiety within the participants. The level of the participants' unease reflects the level of their awareness of the challenges and limitations presented to human beings by the physical dimension of existence, the *Umwelt*, as Binswanger (1963) named it.

Indeed, according to Binswanger (1963), the physical dimension is the most basic dimension that challenges humans' existence. Human beings, as van Deurzen-Smith (1997) describes it, are ontologically fragile. They are thrown into a physically unsafe, unstable and insecure world. Becoming aware of the challenging limitations of such a world, provokes anxiety. This anxiety was named by Tillich (1952) as “fear in the absence of knowing future outcomes”. In trying to avoid this anxiety, people turn to search for safety and complete stability through physical means such as solid ground, wealth and health.

The struggle in this dimension is therefore between the quest for domination, safety and security, and the acceptance of the limitations and the natural boundaries of existence (van Deurzen and Adams 2011).

Furthermore, according to Yalom (1980), people's awareness over their personal limitations in the physical dimension provokes a greater concern, which is the ultimate concern of human beings: death anxiety. This anxiety is the most basic and fundamental anxiety, and

accompanies people's awareness of their physical fragility and immortality. In that respect, the existential approach shares view with terror management theory (TMT).

According to TMT, death anxiety is a primary source of human beings' psychological stress. Like other creatures, human beings have a primary survival instinct, yet, unlike other organisms they also have cognitive abilities through which they try to make sense of their experiences and understand causality and effect (McGregor et al. 1998, van Marle and Maruna 2010).

According to Pyszczynski, Greenberd and Solomon (1999), by trying to live a meaningful life and by gaining a sense of self efficacy, people try to overcome death anxiety. Alas, when one feels unable to experience oneself as capable, when self-esteem is low and when people fail in experiencing their deeds as meaningful, death anxiety awakens again.

Indeed, the participants' descriptions show that they were unable to experience themselves as capable, that their self-esteem was low and that they failed in finding meaning in their deeds. Nevertheless, from an existential perspective, we can still question whether these meanings can ever eliminate existential anxiety (death anxiety), which is ontological and rooted in existence.

According to the existential approach, people do often attempt to overcome death anxiety by various means, such as trying to create a safe and stable environment (Yalom 1980), or by striving for health, wealth, pleasure and other means that may lead to feeling more secure (van Derzen- Smith 1997). This, however is doomed to fail anyway as it touches the ontological limitations of humans’ existence which are unchangeable (van Deurzen and Adams 2010). Therefore, it is impossible to escape the givens and the limitation of the physical dimension and

as long as one tries to gain absolute safety in an unsafe world, one is doomed to exhaust oneself in the cycle of the physical dimension.

Figure 9 illustrates the on-going ontological cycle of the physical dimension. This figure shows the search for safety through physical means: for example (1) a quest which is ontologically not fully possible to be achieved (2) leads one to awareness of living in an ontologically unsafe world (3). Such awareness leads to an existential death anxiety (4) that triggers once again the search for safety through physical means (1) and the cycle starts again.

Figure 9: The ontological cycle of the physical dimension

Looking at the participants' account of their experience at school through the lens of the ontological cycle of the physical dimension, we can say that school was the specific arena in which the challenges and limitations of the physical dimension were presented to the participants. An awareness of those challenges and limitations then provoked anxiety.

Figure 10 (see next page) illustrates what can be seen as the *ontic* reflection of the participants' challenges in the physical dimension.

The outer circle illustrates the ontic experience of the participants at school. It starts with their search for safe physical conditions (1) and is followed by the difficult working conditions the participants actually faced at school (2). Next, the participants face their inability to cope with overload of paperwork (3) and their insufficient salary (4). This leads to experiencing instability and un-ease (5), which is amplified by constant changing of teaching programmes. The following stage shows how the participants' un-ease turns into dis-ease, which then manifests itself through physical symptoms (6). This leads to an anxiety and fear of not knowing what the future may bring as Tillich (1952) described it (7), which ultimately provokes within the participants the initial search for safe physical condition (1) and the cycle starts again.

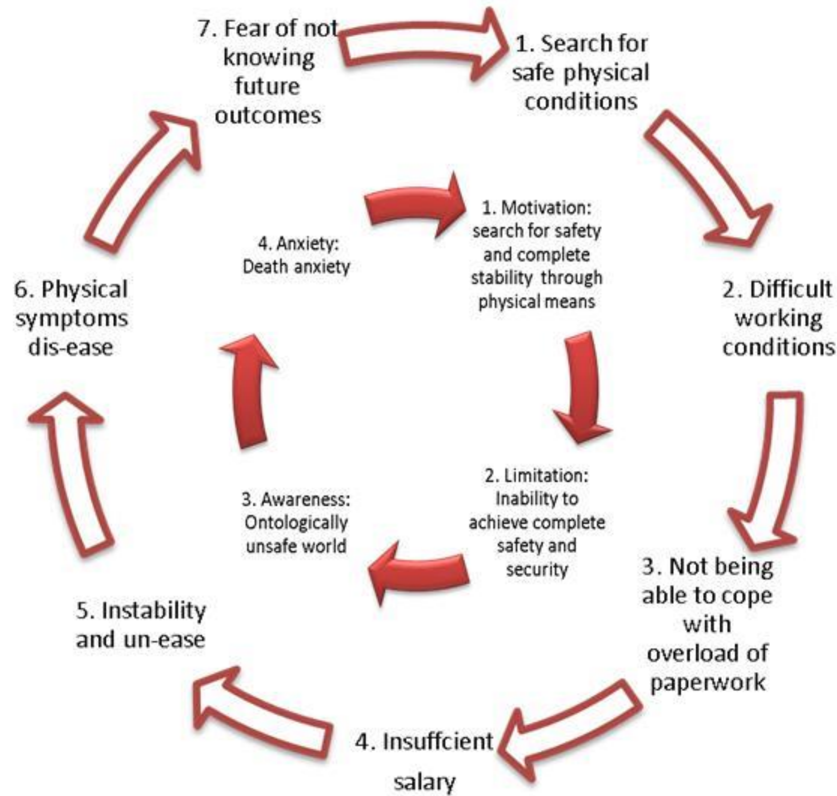

Figure 10: The reflection of the ontological physical dimension in the participants' ontic experience

This anxiety, whose eventual outcome is an inability to remain in an environment in which the future is unknowable, is an expression of basic existential uncertainty, a feeling that we are all living in a world where we can never tell what will happen in the future (Yalom, 1980).

Most of the previous studies of burnout consider physical exhaustion as one of three main characteristics of burnout in general (Brock and Grady 2000, Malach-Pines, 1984; 2005; 2011, Moss 1989, Pines et al. 1981, Reinhold 1996) and of teachers' burnout in particular (Malach-Pines 1984; 2011, Schaufeli et al. 2011, Weisberg and Sagie 1999). However, from an existential

perspective, the accounts of participants' experience in their physical dimension can be seen as an ontic reflection in the face of such difficulties of the wider ontological aspect of the physical world.

Given the instability of their physical dimension, the fundamental dimension of being-in-the-world, and with no remedy in the social dimension, the participants have engaged with the third dimension, that is, the psychological dimension, in a weak and physically exhausted state.

5.4 Groundlessness anxiety

The psychological dimension presented: the participants' account of their perception of their self-identity; the changes they experienced within that identity; and how their professional experience at school led them to these changes.

The influence of the professional identity on the personal identity, as presented in the findings, is consistent with previous research (Kozminsky 2008).

Teachers' professional identities were described in previous studies as an aspect of personal identity (Kozminsky 2008). Both personal and professional identities are often described as a dynamic and continual process of development (Burns and Bell 2011). While personal identity enables one to know who one is as a person, professional identity helps one to know who one is as a professional. One's professional identity is therefore an aspect of one's personal identity or one's concept of the self (Mead 1934).

The definition of self varies across theories and approaches. It is a wide, subjective term (Alpert 1955) that includes one's thoughts, memories and feelings (Gordon 1968) as well as one's set of beliefs and stances towards oneself (Lahav 1992).

According to Cooley (cited in Lahav 1992) one's perception of self is shaped mainly through social interactions and, as Mead (1934) says, the self develops through an on-going process of transactions with the environment. Cooley (1964) named this process "a self-looking glass process". In this process, people shape their sense of self through interpreting and imagining the way other people view them and judge their deeds.

In line with the findings of the current study, we can therefore say that the social environment the participants operated in and the interpretation they gave to it shaped their perception of the self. This can be learned from the participants' descriptions.

Initially, and regardless of their teaching profession, all eight participants described themselves in terms of sensitivity, empathy, generosity and love of humanity. Their descriptions testify to the participants' choice of positive social self-images and identity. However, all participants said that their years at school changed them.

The participants described themselves after their teaching experiences as overly sensitive, angry and anxious. These findings are consistent with previous studies that looked particularly at teachers' professional identity. The studies pointed out the mutual influence that personal and professional identity have on each other for teachers (Coldron and Smith 1999). Furthermore, according to Beijard, Meijer and Verloop (2004), teachers' professional identities have also been described in previous studies as consisting of several sub-identities.

In their work at school, the participants have several sub-identities, as leaders, as colleagues and as subordinates. The participants' first sub-identity is in class, in front of their students and when talking to students' parents. In this sub-identity, they are leaders. Their second sub-identity is with other teachers at school. Here, they are equal colleagues. In their third sub-identity, their organisational work, the teachers are led by the principals and by the Ministry of education. Here, they are subordinates.

None of the interactions described by the participants in these sub-identities contributed to a development of a positive professional identity, nor to a sense of worthiness, professional self-efficacy or personal self-efficacy.

According to Bandura (1997), a sense of self-efficacy is the key factor in developing a positive self-identity and a sense of ability to cope with one's challenges (Bandura 1997). This includes faith in one's ability to control one's own life and a perception that one can raise the resources and motivation needed to overcome the challenges of life (Bandura 1997, Erhard 2008).

Similarly to the distinction and the links between self-identity and professional identity, professional literature distinguishes between self-efficacy and professional self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy is the subjective perception of one's ability to face challenges, while professional self-efficacy includes one's perception as a professional and one's ability to control professional challenges (Friedman 1997, Friedman and Kass 2000; 2002).

Previous studies among teachers have found that professional self-efficacy is influenced by the professional support they received in school, by their opinions being considered before

decisions are made (Kass 2000) and by the level of freedom they received for doing their duties (Erhard 2008, Kass 2000).

School principals who were concerned mainly with discipline and order, and who failed to appreciate or encourage their teachers to function independently, attained poor professional achievement by their teachers.

Coldarci (1992) found that encouraging a sense of independence, academic autonomy and efficacy by principals, helping teachers to achieve better results, positive feedback and creation of an atmosphere of cooperation and togetherness proved to be important in the process of establishing a safe professional self-efficacy.

This view helps in understanding the inability of the participants to stay at school – an environment that, according to their description, did not allow for any academic freedom. Through their descriptions, we can learn that next to a feeling an inability to cope, the participants felt they were not trusted and had no freedom.

When asked about the amount of freedom given to them, they related to freedom in the sense of time and in the sense of academic-professional freedom. It is the latter that concerns the psychological dimension.

The participants' experience of a lack of academic-professional freedom can be learned from their descriptions. For example, Alison said: “I had to fit into the system.” Naomi said: “I was told that this is how school works,” and “There was no room for discussion”. As a result, their self-confidence in their professional abilities and their perception of self deteriorated further.

According to Spinelli (2005), the greater external pressure one feels whilst doing tasks, the greater dissatisfaction one feels, meaning that the activity becomes less and less attractive.

The participants' experience of incapability and lack of academic freedom can also be looked at through the lens of self-determination theory (SDT). As described by Gagne and Deci (2005), SDT points out three basic psychological needs of human beings: competence; autonomy; and relatedness.

The need for autonomy refers to one's experience of behaviour out of willingness and freedom (Gagne and Deci 2005). It refers to interactions where one can express one's personal identity (Niemiec and Ryan 2009). The need for competence refers to one's sense of self efficacy (Ryan and Dici 2000), as well as to one's sense of feeling capable to meet the challenges one encounters and to see one's behaviour as effectively enacted (Niemiec and Ryan 2009).

The third need, a need for relatedness, refers to one's experience of being connected to others; belonging or being part of a group. This can be achieved by feeling that others within one's environment genuinely respect, appreciate, like and value one's deeds (Gagne and Deci 2005, Niemiec and Ryan 2009).

According to SDT, satisfying the needs of autonomy and competence is essential in order for people to maintain intrinsic motivation. Satisfying the need of relatedness enables people to internalise the values and the beliefs of the environment or organisation they operate in. People who are guided by their intrinsic motivation act in harmony with their natural self rather than being led by external sources (Niemiec and Ryan 2009). Thus, intrinsic motivation leads to feelings of wholeness and encourages further action.

The findings of the current study show that none of the above three basic psychological needs were fulfilled. As mentioned before, the participants were not given academic autonomy and, as they said, they had to prove themselves constantly, were challenged with extremely high standards and compelled to participate in the same workshops repeatedly. Rachel said: “We have to take extra training each year, always on the same topics.”

The participants said they felt they were never good enough and that their efforts are always in vain. For example, Ruth says: “They create a belief that what the teachers are doing is not good enough.” According to their description, they were not given tools to help them cope with their duties. Naomi said: “They never gave me the tools.” Emilee said: “I dealt with things I never learned how to deal with.” Sandra said: “Nobody guided me.”.

Thus, it can be said that the participants of this study did not act out of intrinsic motivation; rather, they were led by extrinsic motivation. Their motivation to stay at their schools therefore grew thinner accordingly.

Similarly to SDT, the role of autonomy or freedom in one's life is stressed in Glasser's theory of choice. According to Glasser (1998), people's behaviour is motivated by internal drive to fulfil five basic needs. Freedom is one of them. The need for freedom is a basic one, shared by all human beings. It leads people to fight for it whenever they experience its absence. This view is reflected in the participants' choice to leave school.

The links between one's freedom and the 'self' are central to the existential approach as well. However, from an existential perspective, people are not *given* freedom by others. Rather, freedom is seen as an existential given of existence (van Deurzen-Smith 1997). In fact, both

freedom and the concept of self-identity stand in the core of the psychological dimension, the *Eigenwelt* as Binswanger (1963) named it.

The psychological dimension of existence involves, according to Laing (1969), people's need to distance themselves from others in order to achieve a sense of freedom and autonomy. This is a need that is rooted in the fear of being controlled by others and in losing one's own self-identity. On the other hand, this need simultaneously encompasses people's quest for principles, rules and guidelines (van Deurzen and Adams 2011).

In order to overcome this challenge and freely meet another person, a firm sense of one's own autonomous identity is needed (Erikson 1980). People who cannot establish this sense will fear being controlled or taken over by others. This kind of fear was termed by Laing (1969) as an engulfment anxiety.

Engulfment anxiety is typical in people who fear their identity is weak and that any connection with the outer world could lead to engulfment by others; it prevents them from developing and expressing their identity. One can see this anxiety as fear of a psychological death.

Laing further mentioned the fear of implosion; fear that one is already an empty vessel, stripped of content and identity, open to invasion by external reality. These two anxieties may eventually lead one who fears their freedom to protect themselves by leaving or by creating a protective shield (Laing 1969).

The participants' accounts of their experience at school and their decision to leave school can therefore be seen as an act of protecting themselves from engulfment or implosion anxieties

bought about by their principals or the ministry of education since, according to their description, their academic freedom was very limited. Staying at school, submitting to the demands of their principals and the changing programmes can be likened to what Cohn (1997) described as separating themselves from what they truly are. Using Laing's (1969) terms, staying at school could have been seen as the emergence of their false self.

The false self develops as a response to what one believes is expected of him or her by others, thus concealing the true self. According to Cohn (1997), Laing linked the concept of 'self' and Heidegger's concept of 'authenticity' when he said, “the false self is one way of not being self” (Laing 1969, p95). In that respect, the false self can be likened to inauthenticity. However, says Cohn, it is not the self that is authentic or inauthentic. Rather it is the way of being one chooses that makes one authentic or inauthentic.

This view questions the idea whether leaving school is the key for acquiring autonomy and authenticity. For it means that it does not matter where one is (at school or elsewhere), rather it is how one is and how one chooses to be that matters.

Ontologically, no matter where people are, they are always given the freedom to choose any way of being they want (Sartre 1943). Furthermore, human beings are not merely able to choose, but ontologically they are doomed to freedom and can never escape it. Thus, from an existential perspective, each person holds sole responsibility for choosing and shaping their own life and identity, and is free to do so (Yalom 2009).

However, according to Yalom (1980), while on the one hand people are free and able to choose any way of being they want, their awareness of the inseparable and inescapable responsibility attached to this freedom is deeply frightening. This is because this awareness leads

people to realise that they alone are the sole and only bearers of responsibility for their life, and they alone are the creators of their lives.

This realisation ultimately provokes one of the major existential concerns of the psychological dimension, which is coined as groundlessness anxiety (Yalom 1980). This anxiety, according to Yalom, is even greater than death anxiety. It refers to one's ultimate responsibility for his life and contains one's deep understanding that there is no given ground beneath oneself, unless one creates it. This anxiety is indeed so terrifying that it leads people to look for ways of escaping it.

Several existential theoreticians and philosophers referred to ways through which people try to avoid the anxiety linked to their freedom of choice and responsibility. According to Fromm (1941), people often try to escape their freedom and responsibility either by authoritarianism while submitting to others; by extreme conformism; or by self-destruction. Laing (1969) suggested that people create false self, Heidegger termed it as living inauthentically and Sartre (1943) saw it as living in bad faith.

Indeed, according to Boss (1963), people can use various strategies to escape their freedom. Freedom is therefore, alas, ontologically innate in existence, and thus, there is no such thing as not to choose. Choosing to escape is still a choice one makes.

In this sense, any choice the participants' would have made, whether to stay in school or leave it, would not provide them an escape route from the anxiety provoked by knowing that, ontologically, no matter where they turn to, they will always bear the sole responsibility for their faith.

This paradox is further amplified by the fact that even the choice to leave school, avoid submitting to the false self and emphasising the emergence of unique self indentity, would give rise to feelings of loneliness and isolation, from which, as mentioned earlier, people also wish to escape (Spinelli 2005). Thus the wish to be with others and at the same time the strive for an autonomous self creates an unavoidable tension within oneself

Figure 11 summarises the ontological circle of the psychological dimension. It shows how people strive for an autonomous self-identity (1). This leads to the awareness that people hold endless possibilities. Alas, each choice means losing other options (2). This realisation leads to the awareness that unlimited freedom means unlimited responsibility (3), which provokes groundlessness anxiety, an anxiety rooted in the understanding that one bears sole responsibility for one's life (4). That triggers a search for ideal identity (1) and the cycle starts again.

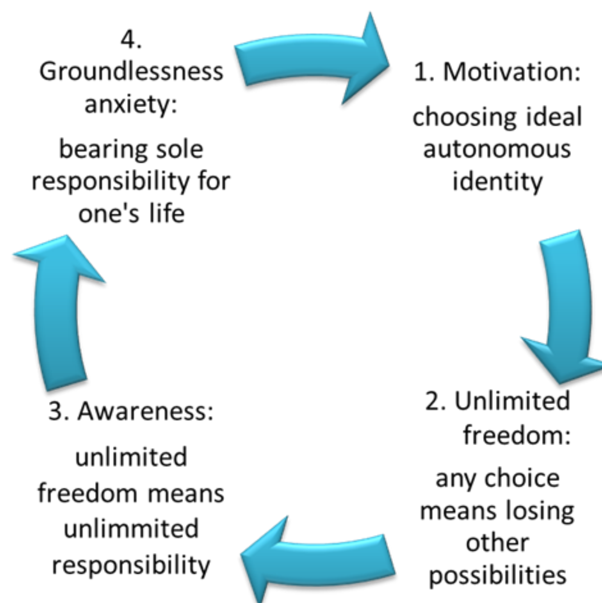

Figure 11: The ontological cycle of the psychological dimension

Looking at the participants' experience in the psychological dimension from an existential perspective, one can tell that the ontological cycle of the psychological dimension of existence is reflected in the ontic experience of the participants at school. These reflections are presented in figure 12 next page.

The outer circle represents the ontic experience of the participants' psychological dimension at school. Initially, the participants described themselves as loving, caring and friendly – characteristics thought to help them in school (1). Soon, they experienced a lack of academic freedom, a sense of inability and lack of professional and self efficacy (2) that intimidated their professional identity and thus their personal identity (3). As free human beings, they are not only free to choose how to react and how to cope with this experience at school (4), but they must also bear sole responsibility for any choice they make (5). This leads to groundlessness anxiety, which reminds one of the inability to escape responsibility for shaping one's life and identity (6). This leads the participants to reconsider their professional and self-identity (1), and thus the cycle starts again, either at school or anywhere else they choose to be at.

The recurrence of this cycle and the fact that from an existential perspective it can be seen as a reflection of an ontological givens questions whether by leaving school the participants can ever escape the challenges of freedom and choice.

Furthermore, looking at this cycle in the wider context, the wish to be with others, which according to the participants was one of the most important thing for them, will always create a tension between that wish and their wish for an autonomous and unique self.

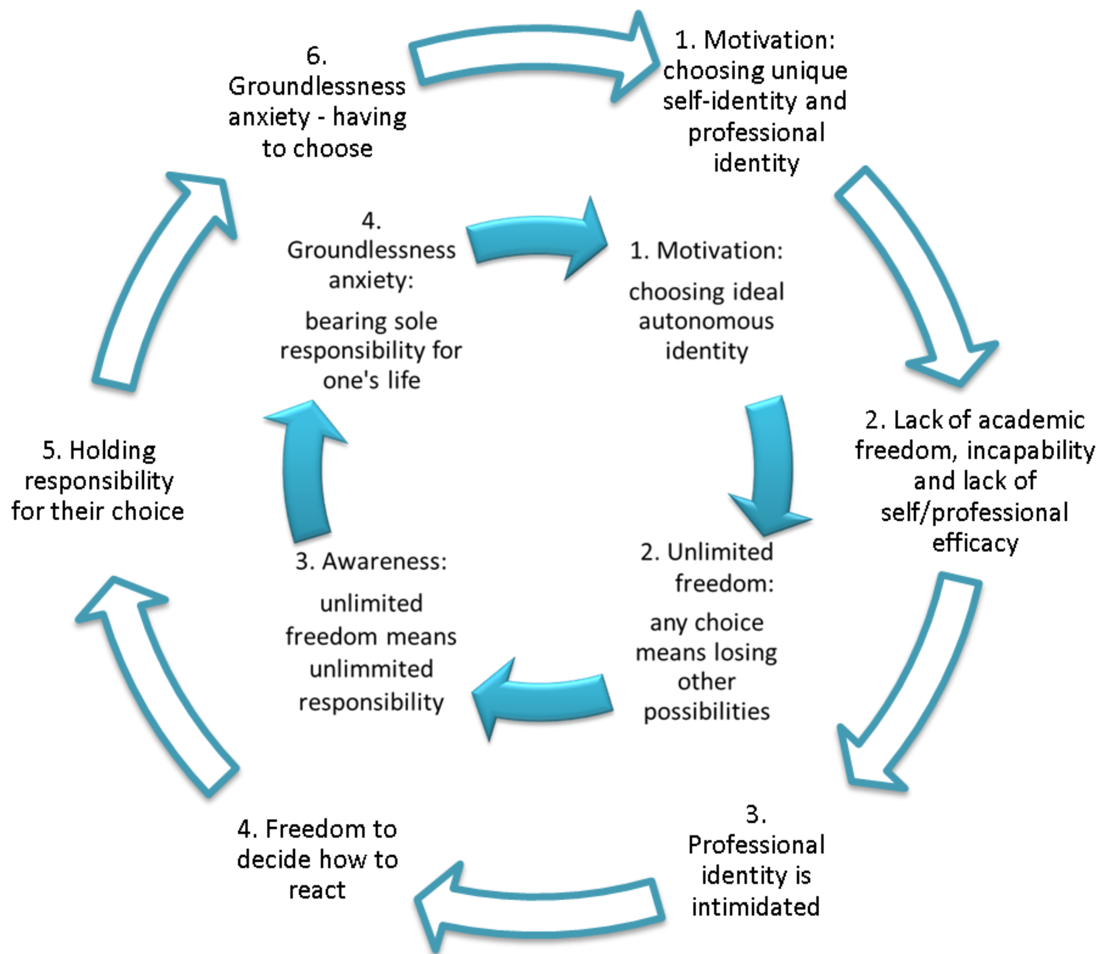

Figure 12: The reflection of the ontological psychological dimension in the participants' ontic experience

Most of the previous studies of burnout considered psychological exhaustion, just like physical and social exhaustion, as one of three main characteristics of burnout in general (Maslach 1978; 2001, Malach-Pines 1984; 2005; 2011, Moss 1989, Pines et al. 1981) and of teachers' burnout in particular (Malach-Pines 1984; 2011, Fives et al. 2007, Schaufeli et al. 2011, Troman 2000, Weisberg and Sagie 1999). From an existential perspective, thoughts are the operating mode in the psychological dimension (van Deurzen 1997). They are the experience of

people’s resonance with the world of self (van Deurzen and Arnold-Baker 2005). The accounts of the participants of this study, in terms of their psychological dimension, can therefore be seen as an ontic reflection of the wider ontological aspect of the psychological world. As with their descriptions of the physical and social dimensions, this may not be unique to teachers’ burnout, but rather a psychological expression of this dimension.

5.5 Fear of meaninglessness and emptiness

The fourth superordinate theme, the spiritual dimension, presented the participants' descriptions of their inability to deliver the values they believed in to their students and the discordance between the values they saw important and those they said the educational system prioritised. It also presented the participants' inability to find meaning in their work and their experience of a lack of fulfillment.

The participants' description of their quest for meaning and fulfillment at work is consistent with previous studies of Tomic and Tomic (2008) and Langle (2003). Their studies linked teachers' burnout with inability to experience fulfillment and find meaning at work.

According to Brooks, Hughes and Brooks (2008), who researched teachers' experience of alienation at school, in order to avoid a sense of meaninglessness in the workplace, one has to feel that the content of the work he or she is doing is of value. Having an input merely on the way the work is done is not enough to make one feels his or her work is meaningful and to create a sense of belonging to the workplace.

In contrast to Brooks et al. (2008), Bassuck and Goldsmith (2009) point out that meaning at work can be achieved by other means than the content of the work itself. According to them, both primary and secondary factors may help one in finding meaning at work. Primary factors refer to meaning achieved directly from the work itself. For example, if a teacher sees educating and delivering certain values to the students as the purpose of his or her work, than once these goals are achieved, this teacher may find meaning in his or her workplace. Secondary factors refer to means other than the content of the work itself. For example, positive social relationships at work; being part of a future vision; being able to express one's creativity.

In the current study, neither primary nor secondary factors enabled the participants to find meaning in their work. Thus the wish for meaning expressed by the participants was left unfulfilled.

From an existential perspective, and according to Frankl (1988), the will for meaning accompanies humans' existence and is even more basic than the will for pleasure or power described by Freud. People will suffer and sometimes even sacrifice their lives for their values and for the search for the meaning of life.

Both Baumeister (1991) and Frankl (1988) saw the great importance of having meaning in one's life and the harsh consequences of losing it. However, according to Frankl's (1988) view, it is a will for meaning that characterises human beings rather than a need for meaning or drive for meaning as Baumeister described it.

By using the term will for meaning, Frankl (1967) suggests that if people were only driven to meaning, they would have embarked on meaning fulfillment merely in order to get rid of the unpleasant drive, and would not be concerned with the meaning itself.

In fact, according to Frankl (1967), people are always free and responsible to find meaning, even in challenging times and while suffering. One may not always be able to bring the meaning forth, but it is there even while concealed. What matters, says Frankl (1970), is not the meaning of life in general; rather it is the specific meaning of a person's life at a given moment.

It is the individual’s responsibility to come to an understanding of his or her life. In that respect, we can say that the difficult experiences the participants described at school are in themselves sources for meaning. However, the participants described their inability to find meaning in their suffering.

The inability to find meaning leads, according to Frankl (1970), to a sense of emptiness and to an experience of existential vacuum. This term, coined by Frankl, describes a person’s experience of empty and meaningless life.

In line with Frankl's view, previous studies have also indicated that the ability to find meaning in life effect positively people's well-being (Clausen and Borg 2011, Ryff 1989, Zika and Chamberlain 1992), physical and mental health (Debats, van der Lubbe and Wezeman 1993, Steger, Frazier, Oishi and Kaler 2006) as well as happiness (Chamberlain and Zika 1988, Debats et al. 1993). Furthermore, finding meaning is a prerequisite for happiness (Frankl 1970) and the yearning to find meaning in life is a primary motivational force of all people (Yalom 1980).

According to King, Hicks, Krull and Del Gaiso (2006), the positive effect of meaning on people's well-being, health and happiness can be found from adolescence to late adulthood, thus the search for meaning is seen as crucial throughout the lifespan.

Nevertheless, despite the proven great importance of having meaning in life, according to Baumeister (1991) the ability to find meaning is not innate and is dependent upon the individual's ability to successfully satisfy four basic needs: the need for purpose; the need for value and justification; the need for efficacy; and the need for self-worth.

The need for purpose refers to people's ability to experience their deeds as a build up towards a desirable outcome, and to see the reasons behind their activities. The need for value and justification refers to people's ability to define their actions as 'normal' and 'good'. A coherence between one's values and beliefs and one's deeds leads to satisfaction of the need for value and justification.

The need for efficacy refers to people's ability to feel they are capable to cope with challenging events, and to have an autonomy and control over situations they encounter. The fourth need, self-worth, refers to people's need to experience themselves as 'good' and even superior to others.

Achieving these four needs, according to Baumeister and Wilson (1996), enables people to gain a sense of meaning in their lives. Looking at the participants' descriptions in the current study, none of these four needs were satisfied at their work at school. Two of these unaccomplished four needs are particularly absent, according to the participants' descriptions. The first one is the participants' inability to find purpose at work and the second one is their inability to find any coherence between the values they believed in and the values that were prioritised at school.

Values are often described in literature as a person's concepts or beliefs on the desirable and right way to behave (Schwartz and Bilsky 1987). Schwartz (1994, p2) defined them as,

“desirable transitional goals varying in importance that serve as guiding principles in the life of a person or other social entity”. Rokeach (1972) saw values as a mean through which one gives meaning to actions.

The huge gap between the values the participants believed in and the values that they were allowed to (or could) teach their students is evidenced by the participants’ descriptions. Even their understanding of the meaning of the term education was completely at odds with the one they felt was given by the Ministry of Education. Ruth said: “this is not what I call education.” Naomi said: “I wanted to foster trust and confidence…in school they preferred marks.” For Diana: “I wanted them to be able to have meaningful dialogues…but they had to be good in the exams”.

Thus teaching fails in its objectives to be a profession that was meant to give affirmation and meaning to the participants' life. Emilee said: "I wanted to develop the students’ scientific thinking, not just to prepare for all these shows." Ruth said: "For me it was important to help each one of the students understand that they are all capable, that they have the right genes inside them. We all have it. There was no time for that."

The participants' wishes to educate their students, the next generation, and to deliver to their students the values they believe in can also be seen as a healthy stage of their psychological development. According to Erikson's (1963) psychosocial model of development, the primary motivation of people in their middle adulthood is contributing in guiding the future generation. This, according to Erikson, is the meaning of the term generativity.

The wish and the ability to share one's own values, knowledge and life experiences, and to deliver those to the next generation is a characteristic of human beings. While the ability to

accomplish this task helps one to fulfill the need of generativity, the inability to do it leads one to experience stagnation.

The prohibition of expression of values was so limiting that Jennifer used the term disconnection, saying “I think there is some disconnection between the values the educational system believes in and those really needed”. None of the participants’ colleagues appeared to share their values, meaning that emotion escalated to shock. Ruth said: “I was shocked.”

Another way to learn about the degree of crisis and the inability to find meaning is from the way the participants expressed themselves with questions instead of statements. The words ‘why’ and ‘what for’ appear much more frequently at this stage, showing that their minds were full of questions.

Asking “why?” is similar to a request for meaning. Once again, we see the contradiction between the participants’ idealised understanding of teaching as a profession, and the reality that struck so hard that they decided to quit their jobs. The very aspect of teaching that had attracted them had now lost its meaning.

According to Minkowski (1958), when people feel that nothing appeals any more, as experienced by the participants of this study, there seems to be no wish to go further. The present is harsh and the future is blocked by the certainty that the next day will only bring another unpleasant, destructive and unfulfilling experience, instead of a lively, meaningful day to be treasured. Knowledge that the future may bring good outcomes is crucial to having a meaningful life, as Minkowski (1958) explains.

However, it is still questionable whether the desire for meaning that makes one's future worth living for is preordained or created following the dynamics of life. According to the participants of the current study, their arrival at school was driven with an early expectation and a preconception about the essence, the meaning, of their work at school.

Having a pre-meaning, a prior essence, is stressed in Appleton's concept of essentialism (Golomb 1990). Following the perception that the essence precedes existence, as long as the participants' ideas about what the essence of teaching and education will not manifest itself, the participants will not be able to actualise themselves as teachers.

According to Golomb (1990), pre-organised meaning and concepts may work well for objects or things, but not for human life. Life is too dynamic and constantly changing in order for it to hold firmly pre-organised essence, meanings and ideas.

In contrary to essentialism, Sartre (1972), as an existential philosopher, suggested that existence precedes essence. Instead of trying to contain preordained meaning on an actual experience, one has to live and experience, and only then give meaning to the experience. As long as one holds a preordained idea, one is destined to experience disappointment and meaninglessness in one's dynamic and ever changing reality.

However, ontologically speaking, one can say that the participants' disappointment and inability to find meaning on a wider context of existence is rooted in human existence. According to Camus (1991), people's trial to find meaning is constantly challenged by a deeper understanding that life is meaningless to start with, since human beings are doomed to die.

A similar view is expressed by Tillich (1952), who says that people's experience of meaninglessness is ontological and is rooted in human's mortality. The knowledge that one's life might end any time without achieving anything meaningful and significant unavoidably leads people to experience the existential anxiety named anxiety of emptiness and meaninglessness (Tillich 1952).

This view is reflected in van Deurzen-Smith's (1997) description of the spiritual dimension of existence, the *Uberwelt*. According to van Deurzen-Smith (1997), in the spiritual dimension, people try to make sense of the causality of existence in general rather than merely finding meaning in their own existence. This is done primarily by asking "why" questions and by searching for meaning.

Ontologically, people were thrown into a world that is meaningless to begin with, and in which humans' lifespan is limited in time (van Deurzen 1997). While human beings seem to require meaning (Yalom 1980), in the spiritual dimension of existence they come to an understanding that there is no given meaning to life.

Even the religious man, says Leibowitz (1979) who believes in God and in higher power is still given the freedom to choose the meaning and how to respond to life's experiences and challenges.

This tension between the wish to have meaning and the understanding that there is no preordained meaning leads one to experience anxiety of emptiness and meaninglessness (Tillich 1952). Paradoxically, the more people pursue meaning and understanding, the more they become aware that human beings are living in a meaningless world. Since all are destined to die, life itself may seem meaningless anyway.

This leads to an experience of emptiness and a feeling of void (Yalom 1980). Thus, humans' search for meaning and the experience of meaninglessness is ontologically unavoidable and accompanies humans' existence wherever they go.

Figure 13 illustrates the ontological on-going search for meaning as a main motivation in life (1) that is doomed to fail as life's constant challenges deny the ability find meaning in a temporal life (2). This leads to the awareness of the idea that we are all temporal creatures in a meaningless world (3) and breeds existential anxiety, fear of emptiness and meaninglessness (4). This anxiety motivates people to find the meaning and understand of what life is about (1). As this is not fully possible in a meaningless world, people come to realise that they do not know what life means and the cycle starts again.

Figure 13: The ontological cycle of the spiritual dimension

Following this concept, looking at the participants descriptions of their experience at school from an existential perspective, we can say that their ontic experiences are a reflection of the wider ontological cycle of the spiritual dimension.

Figure 14 (see next page) illustrates the reflection of the participants' ontic experience of the ontological one. The outer circle illustrates the ontic experience of the participants' spiritual dimension in school, the participants' wish to deliver the values they believe in to their students, their search for meaning and their failure to achieve either.

The cycle starts with the participants' wish to follow their values, deliver a message to their students and find meaning at their work (1). However, they are denied the chance to deliver the message they believe in (2) and are unable to find meaning in their work (3). As a result, they experience emptiness and meaninglessness (4). This provokes a wish to find meaning in an environment that is meaningless (1), but as this mission is impossible, the cycle starts again. In this particular study, the participants chose to deliver their values and search for meaning outside of school.

The continuity of the outer circle reflects the everlasting motion of the ontological inner circle, where people search for meaning in a meaningless world, be it at school or elsewhere.

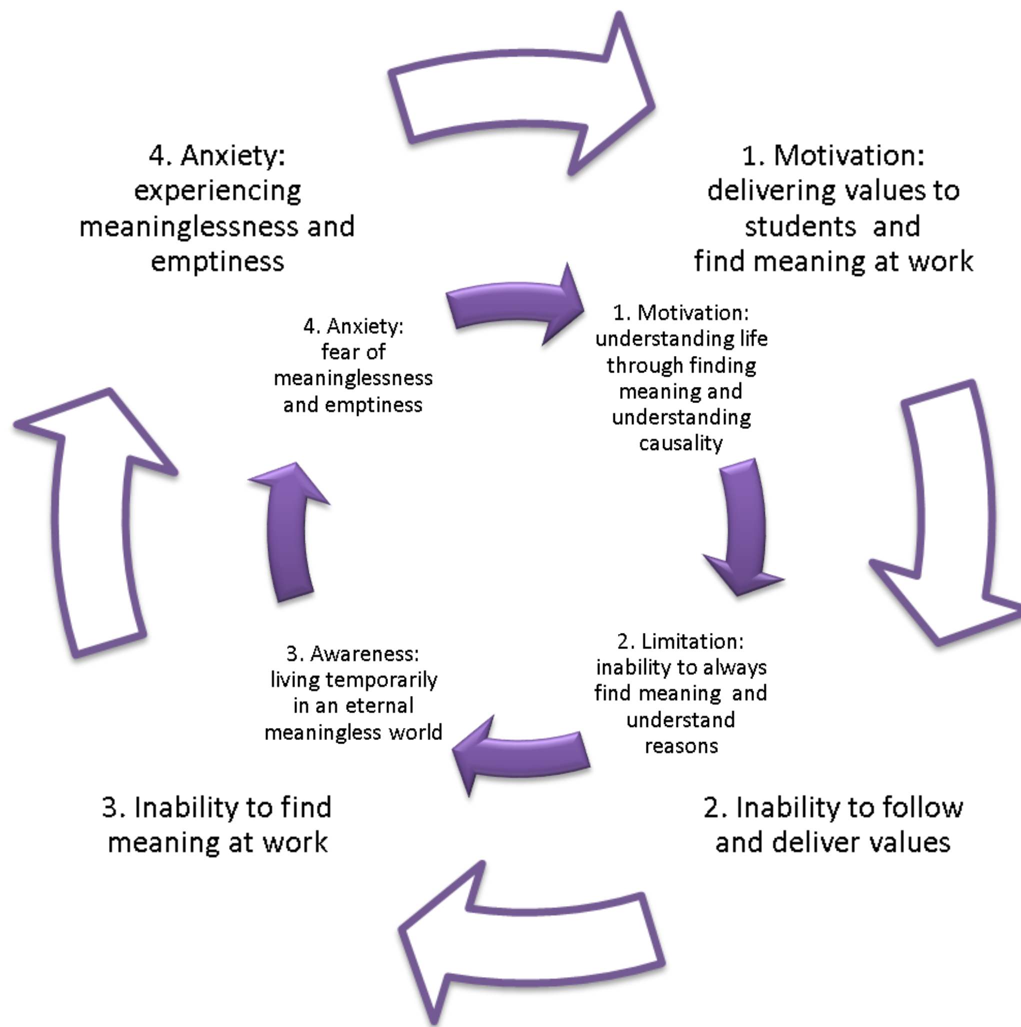

Figure 14: The reflection of the ontological spiritual dimension in the participants' ontic experience

Previous studies of teachers' burnout considered inability to find meaning as a source of burnout (Tomic and Tomic 2008, Malach-Pines 2002a, Langle 2003). This characteristic adds to the three other main characteristic of burnout explored earlier: physical, emotional and psychological exhaustion. Nevertheless, the existential lens reveals the search for meaning as an

inevitable part of human existence due to the ontological givens. The accounts of the participants of this study in their spiritual dimension can therefore be seen as an ontic reflection of the wider ontological aspect of the spiritual world, similar to that shown by their accounts in all three previous dimensions.

The reflection of the ontological spiritual dimension of existence in the participants' ontic experience at school adds to the reflections of the previous three dimensions of existence in their daily experience at school as well.

The challenges and the difficulties the participants described in all four dimensions of existence can therefore be seen as reflections of ontological experiences and anxieties of humans existence in general.

5.6 Facing reality

All eight participants, having been certain of their choice to become teachers, were thus disturbed by unrewarding relationships, unstable conditions, , self-doubt in their personal and professional abilities and an inability to express the values they believed in.

The analysis of the teachers' account of their experiences at school demonstrates that each of the four existential dimensions provoked existential anxieties within them.

The social dimension provoked the fear of isolation, as the participants confronted their failure to accomplish the greatest need, a need for love and acceptance. The physical dimension provoked the fear of not knowing future outcomes, as the participants

felt insecure in their endeavour to find safe physical conditions. The psychological dimension gave rise to a groundlessness anxiety, as it disturbed the participants' motivation to choose a unique self and professional identity. Lastly, the spiritual dimension provoked the fear of meaningless and emptiness, as the participants had to cope with their inability to transmit values and to find meaning at work.

Figure 15 (see next page) summarises the challenges and main anxieties that the participants experienced in all four existential dimensions of existence. The inner circle represents the four existential dimensions of existence, while the outer squares show the participants' ontic experience as a reflection of the ontological givens that universally affect people.

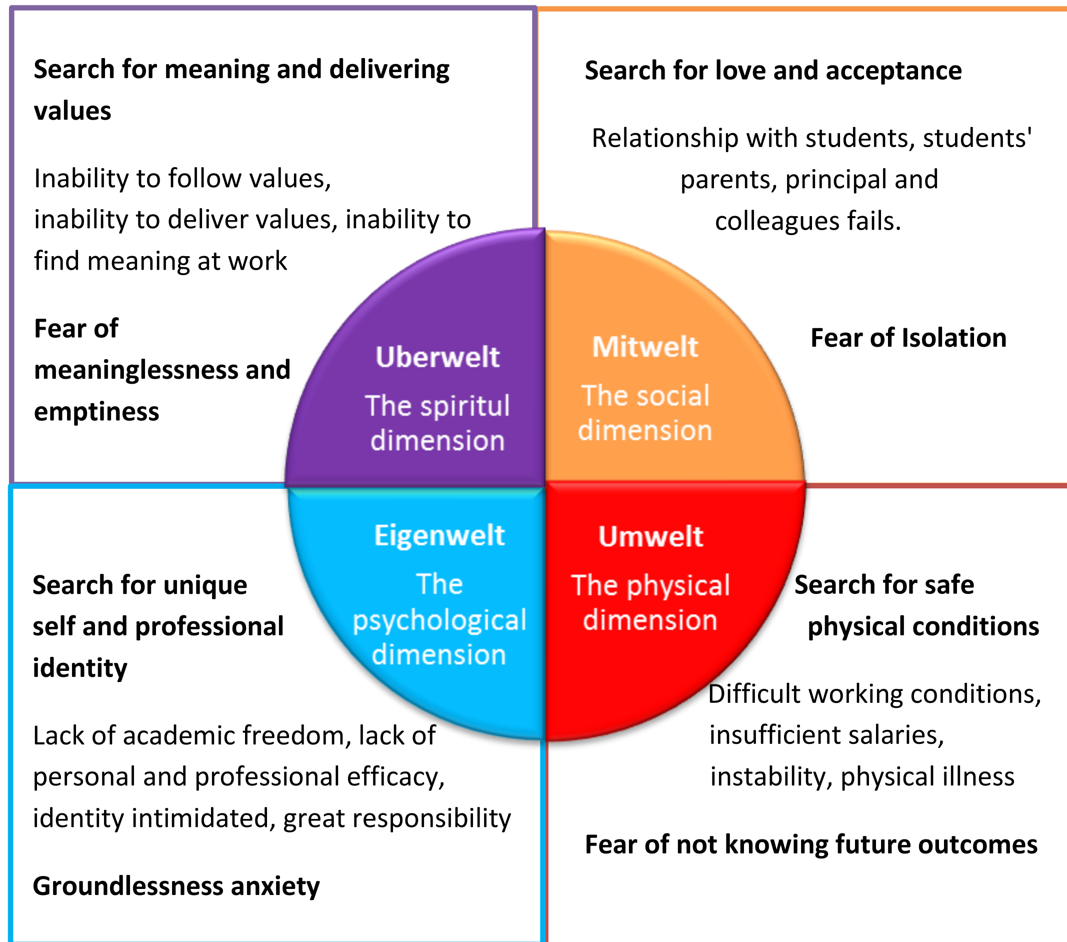

Figure 15: The reflection of all four existential dimensions in the participants' ontic experience

The above factors were prominent in the participants' accounts of their decisions to leave school, as shown below by quotes from six of them:

Diana said: "I wasn't afraid to leave, I was afraid to stay! I ran away from that place." For Jennifer: "Of course it's not easy to leave your job, but it's better than staying and becoming indignant." Ruth said: "One has to listen to oneself. As soon as I realised what was happening to me, I decided to leave. I wasn't afraid. No!" Meanwhile, Naomi said: "The day came when I decided I'd had enough. When the alternative was admission

to a mental health institute or leaving school, I preferred to leave school." For Rachel: "Staying was no longer an option. I had nothing left to do there." Sandra said: "The longing to leave was burning inside me. The frustration I felt there was so great that leaving school was not a difficult decision."

The participants' choices to leave school can be seen as an exercise of their freedom. Staying at school despite their disappointing experiences can be seen as a state of bad faith (Sartre 1943). Leaving school can be regarded as an expression of the eruption of the true self, the self that has been suppressed and refuses to continue wearing the mask of lies (Laing 1969). The choice can also be regarded as a response to the call of their authentic voice, the one that wishes to express the authentic self (Heidegger 1962). They responded to the unease and anxiety created within them in a place where they felt alien and estranged. At the same time, the choice to leave the school can be considered as a failure to face the complex and difficult realities of working in the school environment.

It is important to remember that while the participants of this research chose to leave school, other teachers choose to stay. However, from an existential perspective, one should also ask whether the participants would be able to avoid repeating their school experiences in other locales and sets of circumstances. This question becomes particularly valid since from an existential perspective, as Cohn (1997) says, anxiety is seen as "an inevitable aspect of existence itself" (p70).

Indeed, in order to reduce sources of anxiety, school principals may be called to invest energy in creating more stable working environments; stability and safety; salaries that better reflect the amount of time and energy teachers invest in their work at school.

Job demands and rewards must be more balanced. An effort must be made in order to create a more intimate, friendly and supportive environment in all of the social circles that teachers encounter at school.

A greater academic freedom and trust may need to be given, and special attention should be given to escalate teachers' professional and personal self-efficacy. Teachers should be more involved in shaping the values they deliver to their students and finding greater coherence between the values they believe in and those the school wish to deliver.

However, as well as paying attention to the above – hopeful changeable – aspects, one should also look at suffering and anxiety sources which are, as Frankl (1970) describes, unchangeable. One has to take into consideration that there might always be aspects that will not be changeable and, as van Deurzen and Adams (2011) describe, will always be imposed upon people in each of the four existential dimensions. As such, ontological givens may potentially always be reflected in the participants' ontic experiences and may give rise to existential anxiety wherever they go.

While, as van Deurzen (1988) describes, such existential anxiety may create an urge to leave within people, in order to halt the anxiety (as may have been done by the participants of this study), it is also important to remember that the ability to confront this very same existential anxiety, and accommodate it, may lead to the potential to live a more passionate life.

Therefore, alongside paying attention to the particular difficulties expressed by the participants in each one of the four existential dimensions, difficulties that reflect

their ontic encounters at school, helping teachers face the ontological existential issues themselves may be a relevant mode of action..

For the teachers who wish to stay in their work at school, they must first become aware of the various anxieties to which they may be prone. Subsequently, they must discover the way that their particular existential anxiety reflects a greater ontological challenge as an inevitable part of human existence.

In order to do so, an individual has to accept that from an existential perspective burnout is not rooted solely in a specific working environment. Rather, it mirrors the burden and limitations of human existence. Therefore the aim is not to merely let the burnout go away, but rather to examine and understand the way that individuals confront various existential givens at work. As stated by van Deurzen (2009), "the focus should therefore be shifted slowly from the issue at hand to the wider perspective of their life" (p82).

Therefore, teachers must view school as the arena in which life challenges reveal themselves. By having a greater awareness and by constantly shifting from the particular to the universal, from the ontic to the ontological, from the particular experience at school to the general way of-being-in-the-world, the individual teacher might be able to distinguish between the things that are changeable and those that are reflections of the existential givens, which must be bravely faced by all humanity. The ability to face these challenges may lead one to find meaning in one's suffering.

In order to benefit from seeing burnout as an existential phenomenon, one has to agree to embark on a journey that entails confronting life's challenges. One has to accept

that existence includes certain limitations that cannot be changed, and one has to want to change one's own way within the given limitations. However, there is a caveat, as van Deurzen (1988) states, "becoming aware of the possibility of taking direction of one's own life does not automatically lead to ideal conditions" (p194). Yet, van Deurzen (1997) also adds that the existential purpose is to help people to bravely confront reality..

The aim is not to make things look better or different from what they really are, but rather to see them in all their damning reality, and then find a way to accommodate that reality and help people become more full of life.

Therefore, strengthening teachers' ability to encounter, discuss, and cope with the existential limitations and challenges that are to be found in each one of the four existential dimensions of human existence will allow the teachers themselves to better cope with the difficulties they encounter in their professional and private lives.

As a result, from the teachers knowing these issues and their ability to confront those issues by themselves, the teachers would also be able to teach those issues to their students and thus to prepare them for life's span and its ever existing challenges.

Such an attitude may help those teachers who, like the participants of this study, feel they can no longer remain at school to reverse their decision. It may also help those teachers who stay at school to do their work more passionately. For all teachers, it may be useful to remember that they share a desire to form relationships. Thus, forming supportive relationships among the teachers who face similar challenges at school may help them successfully confront any existential burnout.

Indeed, as Yalom (1980) states, "no relationship can eliminate isolation. Each one of us is alone in existence. Yet, alones can be shared in such a way that love compensates for the pain of isolation" (p363). Good relationships, adds Buber (cited in Yalom, 1980), breaches the barriers of solitude and "throws a bridge from self-being to self-being across the abyss of dread of the universe" (p363).

Chapter 6: Conclusions

6.1 Summary

This study has viewed the public school teaching experiences of eight Israeli women through the lens of an existential phenomenological approach. All of these women started their careers as teachers, equipped with hopes of forming meaningful relationships and finding meaning in their work. Their actual experiences did not match these hopes.

The interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) conducted in the present study revealed a clustering of their experiences at school around four superordinate themes that reflected the four existential dimensions of existence commonly used in existential thinking. These themes, together with a number of sub-themes, revealed the participants' experiences that included descriptions of uncertainty and unsafe environments, unfulfilling relationships, lack of freedom and meaningless days at work.

These experiences all created a solid ground for the emergence of existential anxieties. In existential terminology, their anxieties included fear arising from the lack of knowledge of future outcomes, fear of isolation, engulfment anxiety, implosion anxiety, groundlessness anxiety and fear of emptiness and meaninglessness. These experiences can be seen as ontic reflections of greater ontological existential anxieties, which are part of human existence and accompany people's awareness of the limitations and challenges of existence.

No relationship can eliminate isolation, and full control can never be gained over one's life in order to avoid uncertainty – the idea that there is meaning is constantly challenged by life. Nevertheless, as Buber (1955) says, human beings are creatures of the "between." The longing for relationship is innate, and so is the need to be reconfirmed and reassured (Buber 1970). So too is the need to find meaning in one's life (Frankl 1970). When one realises that he or she is being used rather than engaged (Yalom 1980), when one can find no meaning in his or her suffering (Frankl 1970), and when one has no faith in one's ability to change the circumstances (Tillich 1952), one searches elsewhere for a more fulfilling environment.

Existentially, by seeing these anxieties as ontic reflections of ontological givens and limitations, one may wonder whether these sought-for needs can ever be fully found. Wherever one may go, one may encounter similar experiences.

6.2 Significance of this study

More than 4,800 studies of burnout have appeared over the last four decades, indicating that burnout in general – and teachers' burnout in particular – is a well-investigated phenomenon. Nevertheless, as mentioned earlier, very few studies of this phenomenon have looked at it from an existential perspective. The few studies that did take an existential approach usually looked solely at the victim's inability to find meaning.

The present study offers a phenomenological-existential perspective of teacher burnout. Its intention is not to dismiss previous studies; rather, its value is that it regards teachers' burnout specifically, and the phenomenon of burnout in general, as an

existential experience. It suggests a view of burnout as an existential phenomenon that is a reflection of ontological challenges.

The suggestion to observe the subjective experience of the participants' burnout as an ontic reflection of a wider ontological givens validates the subjective experience and at the same time presents it as a "normal" phenomenon rather than a "pathological" experience. It may well be that other people would react differently for, as Cohn (1997) states, individuals may differ in the way they respond to existential givens and how they experience existential anxiety. Such differences depend on past experiences and on the experiential patterns that people develop throughout their lives.

This concept is in alignment with the uniqueness of the existential approach as van Deurzen-Smith (1997) describes it:

> The existential project is to retrieve the intensity and fullness of human existence as it is reflected in an individual's life and which is paradoxically exposed in personal predicament. The objective is not to make all suffering go away but rather to welcome it as evidence of one's particular position in the world, which can reveal our possibilities and limitations to us. (p188)

The objective of the present study is not to make burnout dissipate but rather to come to view it as evidence of one's particular position in the world. Seeing the particular and the universal, the ontic and the ontological, and the tension between them in all four existential dimensions may help one to make sense of his or her experiences. It may help one to accommodate rather than to avoid the unavoidable, and make one capable rather than a victim. This does not mean in any way that one should suffer, but it suggests that

one needs to look at a deeper realm and question that which can be changed and that which will persist even in the light of the most suitable and gratifying external conditions.

6.3 Strengths and limitations of this study

In this study, I have used IPA. As such, and in line with the recommendation for IPA studies (Shinebourne 2010, Smith et al. 2009), the sample was relatively small and homogeneous. It included eight Israeli women who taught and left the teaching profession on their own initiative. As such, this might present a rather particular angle and is based upon a limited number of experiences of teachers who left school teaching. These teachers may wish to construct their life stories in ways that attempt to justify and explain their past behaviour in a certain light, according to their dominant narratives.

Use of a small and homogenous sample group can be seen as a weakness as it is difficult to generalise from a small sample to a more universal phenomenon, which could leave the empirical value of this research in doubt. Furthermore, the sample is homogenous, as all participants are female. Although the vast majority of teachers in Israel are female, as discussed earlier, this may present difficulties in drawing general conclusions, as male participants might have reacted differently. However, the small and relatively homogenous group are in alignment with the aims of this research. As stated by Bar-On and Sheinberg-Tas (2010), phenomenological qualitative research should not pretend to be empirical or scientific. From an existential perspective, as van Deurzen and Adams (2011) describe, life is indeed a matter of personal interpretation and choice, without any fixed essence. Subjective thinking and reflection play a central role in creating who we are.

This research also seeks to provide space for voicing the experience of the individual participant. A small sample enables a deeper analysis of data and a greater opportunity for expression for each individual participant. This fact came to light, for example, in the findings chapter, which contains a large number of direct quotes from the original transcripts of all eight participants.

Another limitation of this research may involve the implementation of the four existential dimensions of existence as a framework for this study. This implementation can be perceived as a weakness since it creates the risk of the participants expressing themselves according to this framework only. However, the four existential dimensions are sufficiently wide to contain many existential and daily experiences, the participants were not forced to describe certain experiences unless they mentioned them first, and application of this particular framework ensured that the study would have an existential perspective yet leave sufficient room for whatever experiences the participants might reveal. This stands in line with the aims of this research.

One could regard the semi-structured interview as being a limitation, as these interviews can promote a situation where the participants are driven to tell about their experiences in a way that matches the researcher's expectations. However, as mentioned above, I took every precaution to allow the interview to occur as an open and natural conversation. This helped to ensure that irrelevant issues would not emerge, whilst – on the other hand – issues that were not mentioned in the pre-arranged questions could be voiced.

A further weakness in this research is possibly the issue of language. I and all eight of my participants have Hebrew as our native language. All interviews were conducted in Hebrew and so were the transcriptions. Since this study is to be presented in English, the participants' experiences eventually had to be translated into English. Transforming ideas and feelings from one language to another could result in the loss of some degree of the original experience and some words could possibly have no accurate translations.

I attempted to stay as close as possible to the original experiences of the participants by conducting the interviews and the analysis in Hebrew – the mutual language of the participants and myself – and only then did I translate them into English. Heidegger (1962) addressed these types of language barriers and claimed that that language can never fully express the unique individual experience. Every attempt to transform an experience into a verbal description is bound to result in some loss of quality during the process and this potential for loss extends beyond the issue of translating from one language to another. It is an existential limitation that reflects the phenomenological-existential approach and is therefore a general ontological limitation. For this reason, this limitation is addressed in this study as part of the discussion and analysis. The recognition of the existence of this limitation supports the choice of IPA in this study as IPA acknowledges these types of human limitations.

In order to ensure awareness of my own challenges and limitations, as well as those of IPA and phenomenological studies, and in order to ensure the quality of this study, I attended a course on phenomenological research methods at the New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling in London and I was supervised by an experienced IPA

supervisor. I have made efforts to increase my awareness of the strengths and limitations of IPA research and of my human limitations as a researcher. This research offers a fresh look at a long-standing phenomenon. Its strengths lie in the provision of a voice to the individual participant and its offer of a wide existential perspective.

6.4 Clinical implementation

This research illuminates new aspects of teacher burnout in particular and the burnout phenomenon in general. The information revealed can be helpful for teachers, for students who are in the process of becoming teachers and for those who are considering a teaching career. The importance of the study resides in its ability to prepare these groups for the difficulties and challenging experiences awaiting them in the educational system. This aspect is particularly important because the study reveals a gap between the participants' expectations before they started their work at school and the reality that they actually experienced as teachers.

This research also has value for school principals who face their own burnout in addition to the burnout of their teachers. In particular, this research may help in developing attentiveness to the existential aspects of burnout at school. Possible applications of the results are identified on two levels:

a. aspects that can be changed and improved.

b. consideration, discussion and acknowledgment of what cannot be changed or improved but is part of existence.

As mentioned in Chapter Five, the discussion and analysis chapter, Frankl (1970) indicated that suffering may arise from sources that are beyond one's control as well as from sources that are within one's control. The Ministry of Education, municipalities, inspectors and principals can endeavour to change the daily elements that are under their control. A more meaningful application, perhaps, is to change the attitude towards aspects beyond one's control, namely the ontological givens that accompany one's existence at all times and in all places.

The ability to express these issues and to bring them into discussion among workers might not eliminate the uncontrollable and unchangeable limitations and difficulties. However, this could provide another point of view for these experiences as well as impart a sense of greater understanding of their ontological origins.

My own academic freedom as a lecturer in a higher education institute for teacher training has already given me the ability to include lectures that present existential issues, limitations and opportunities and to promote discussion of these aspects in class. I can also extend this type of discussion by writing articles in teacher training journals.

The Ministry of Education and the teachers' training institutes might also conduct seminars or include, as an integral part of their teachers' training programmes, lectures that address existential issues.

Teacher training institutes could allocate space in their syllabi for courses dedicated to existential philosophy, which link burnout and existentialism; this may help to prepare future teachers to better cope with the existential aspects they may face as part of their work.

This would allow exploration of the phenomenon of burnout through the lens of an existential approach and perhaps lead to a two-step process that specifically addresses issues faced by teachers. The first phase would involve teaching and discussion of ontological existential issues by pedagogical supervisors or lecturers who would also discuss their reflections on the ontic experiences of the teachers at school. This could identify coping strategies to address these issues among students who are soon to be teachers

In the next phase, these teachers would then have the capacity to teach their own student trainees about these issues. These two phases would enable both the teachers and their students to benefit from understanding the existential givens, limitations and anxieties, in order to better cope with them .

Another helpful application of this strategy would be to seek the involvement of psychotherapists who help clients undergoing burnout. Currently, teachers may find support mainly through their school counsellors or by turning to psychotherapists and counsellors subsidised by the teachers' unions. Educating school counsellors and psychotherapists who meet with teachers could widen the point of view and thought circles that are relevant to the burnout phenomenon. This would provide a helpful existential perspective to these challenging experiences that teachers encounter.

Furthermore, as presented in Chapter 2, the literature review of this study, burnout appears in every occupation. As this study suggests thinking of burnout as an existential experience, the research and implications may be useful for psychologists and psychotherapists who work with clients suffering burnout from any occupation.

Understanding burnout as an experience that confronts the individual with the existential challenges of existence may help clients in their self-development process. This process may go beyond focusing on solving the particular or the ontic experience, and extend to helping people understand the ontological givens, and the way that these givens are intrinsic part of their personal lives.

6.5. Validity

The criteria for evaluating the validity of qualitative research are different from those used in qualitative research. The evaluation of IPA as qualitative research was addressed by Smith et al. (2009), who suggested the use of Yardley's (2000) four principles: sensitivity to context; commitment and rigour; transparency and coherence; and impact and importance.

6.5.1 Sensitivity to context

Sensitivity to context, according to Yardley (2000), can be achieved by paying special attention to the collection of data and to existing literature. Smith et al.(2009) claim that the choice of IPA is already a sign of sensitivity, since the spirit of IPA requires "skills, awareness and dedication" (p180).

The quality of the data is a product of the researcher's awareness of the importance of the quality of the interview. The researcher must show empathy for the participants and sensitivity toward the potentially uncomfortable situation of the participants during the interviews, while creating a relaxed atmosphere for them. This

sensitivity must continue throughout the data analysis period and be reflected in the presentation of the findings and discussion of the data.

In conducting this research, I made a concerted effort to remain highly sensitive to the participants, to their experiences during the interview and to the quality of the interview environment. During data analysis and its presentation in the findings section, as well as in the discussion, I presented a substantial amount of text taken verbatim from the participants. My aim was to show sensitivity to each participant and to give each one a voice in the research findings.

Additionally, as Smith et al. (2009) suggest, sensitivity is also achieved through linking aspects of the literature to the subjective experience of the participants and allowing a forward movement to additional literature not previously introduced in the original literature review. Thus, this research demonstrates sensitivity and openness to the subjective individual experience of the participants, not only in regard to what was already known before, but by hearing them in a wider, different and new context.

6.5.2 Commitment and rigour

Smith et al. (2009) state that commitment and rigour is demonstrated in IPA studies by recruiting an appropriate sample in alignment with the research questions, as well as by maintaining a high level of attentiveness to the participants and to the process of the analysis and its presentation. IPA studies include in-depth interviews that require the researcher to invest time, attention to detail and seriousness. The interviews should be deep and thorough. The researcher should always remain able to respect the participants'

boundaries, yet at the same time be able to "hear between the lines" what is said quietly and to encourage the participants to share and describe their experiences.

A rigorous analysis will be interpretive; it will have a grasp of the participants' verbatim responses and will pay attention to the literature review but will also go beyond it. It will introduce something new that extends beyond each participant's immediate words – something with a greater meaning. As described by Smith et al. (2009), a good IPA study will, "tell the reader something important about the particular individual participant as well as something important about the themes they share" (p.181).

In line with these parameters, this research included a sample of eight Israeli teachers who had left the teaching profession on their own initiative. This sampling is in alignment with the aim of the research. During the interviews, I paid special attention to being respectful of the participants' boundaries but I also encouraged and enabled them to share their experiences. In my role as a professional psychotherapist and counsellor, I used my interview skills and listened carefully to the participants' words. The findings of the study link the participants' accounts of their experiences to earlier studies of burnout as well as imparting a new and wider context of existential thinking. Therefore, the demands for commitment and rigour were met.

6.5.3 Transparency and coherence

The transparency and coherence of a study, according to Yardley (2000), refer to how clearly the research process and its stages are described in the study. Smith et al. (2009) suggest that IPA studies will include a description of the recruitment process, the questions included in the interview and the steps that were taken during the analysis

process. A reader of a research report should be able to follow the process the researcher applied and should be able to imagine the double hermeneutic process through which the researcher endeavoured to make sense of the participants as they tried to make sense of their experiences.

In this research, I have included a full description of the recruitment process and the interview schedule, and have provided a step-by-step description of the analysis process. Each step was supported with an illustration to enable the reader to follow and understand the development of this study. The findings and the results were presented as the participants' accounts of their experiences, their understanding of the events, and an additional interpretation suggested by their experience and understanding. This detailed description met the criteria of transparency and coherence.

6.5.4 Impact and importance

Yardley's (2000) impact and importance criteria indicate whether the study tells something interesting, useful or important. This study looks at burnout in a wider context of existence. It suggests further qualitative research that would help to get closer to the subjective individual experience (see below) while still offering an interpretation that was not found in earlier studies of this phenomenon. It may have clinical implementation and may help to open another avenue for investigation of this phenomenon. Therefore, it may have both theoretical and applied impacts.

6.6 Suggestions for future studies

This study presented an account of the experience of eight Israeli women who were formerly teachers at public schools in Israel but had decided to leave that profession. The literature review identified several studies that showed significant burnout in Israeli workers compared to other cultural groups (Friedman and Sagie 1999). However, as also discussed in the literature review, other studies have suggested the contrary (Malach-Pines 1984; 2004; 2011).

Future studies should look at the phenomenon using a similar method, namely IPA, with a framework of four existential dimensions but should include a cross cultural component. This may help to reveal whether ontological reflections in the phenomenon of burnout can be found in teachers in other cultures and whether the phenomenon is significant among certain cultures. The use of IPA and the four existential dimensions as a framework may also be applicable to other groups of employees, including male participants.

This study raised the question of whether one can ever escape the existential givens or whether one would experience burnout wherever he or she may go. A worthwhile research direction would be investigation of teachers and other professionals who decided to stay at their workplaces despite experiencing burnout. This may aid in understanding people's decisions to stay at a job and carry on with their daily grind even while suffering from burnout.

As suggested in the section on clinical implementation, the findings from this study might be useful in helping teachers, principals, inspectors, the Ministry of

Education and institutes of teacher training to view the phenomenon of burnout through the lens of existential thinking. It would be interesting to determine whether discussing job burnout with teachers, or other employees, against a background of existential thinking would help individuals to cope with their burnout issues. This could be examined by comparing two groups of participants where one group takes part in discussions or seminars that address the existential aspects of burnout, while the other group does not.

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Chapter 8: Appendices

8.1 Apepndix1: Information sheet for participants

New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling/Department of Psychology, Middlesex University, Queensway, Enfield, Middlesex EN3 4SF

Gideon Menda
gideon_menda@hotmail.com

Information Sheet for Participants

Dear participant

You are being invited to participate in a research study. Before you decide to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it involves. Please take your time to read the following information carefully, and discuss it with others if you wish.

Please ask for clarifications if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take your time to decide whether you do or do not wish to take part in this research.

What is the purpose of this research?

This research focuses on existential and phenomenological perspectives of teachers' burnout in Israel. This means that I am interested in exploring the subjective experience of teachers who used to teach at the Israeli educational system.

A proposed benefit of the research is the increased understanding of teachers' burnout. This information could be of benefit to the education system in Israel and institutes who train teachers. It may also be interesting to researchers who are interested in burnout or in existential thinking. It may fill a gap in the literature since very little research has taken place looking at the experiences of this phenomenon from an existential-phenomenological perspective.

Why did I contact you?

I have contacted you since I thought you might be interested to take part in this research. I am looking for people who used to teach children at elementary schools in Israel for a maximum

period of 10 years and who decided to quit. I am interested in hearing the daily experience, as well as significant events and interactions.

What will happen to you if you take part in this research?

If you choose to take part in this research, I will ask you to come to my office in Tel-Aviv, where I will interview you. I will ask you several questions regarding your job as a teacher, your feelings, your memories and your experiences. I am interested in hearing your interpretations of the events you experienced as part of your role as a teacher.

It is anticipated that the interview will take several hours and will be recorded on a digital device for later transcription. Later I will analyse the interview in order to find the main themes arise and help me with the research.

What are the disadvantages and risks of taking part in the research?

A possible risk involved in the research may be the experience or re-experiencing of painful memories or difficult emotions as you talk about your experiences. You have complete control over what you say and you have no obligation to disclose anything that you do not feel comfortable discussing. You may withdraw from the study at any time without needing to provide an explanation. If you wish to stop during the interview then please indicate your wish to do so and the interview will immediately be terminated. The information you give will be kept confidential and removing any identifying information will protect your identity.

Your data will be handled in accordance with the requirements of the Israeli privacy and data protection Act (1981), and you have the right to request to view any information I keep about you.

All of your information, including the digital recording, will be kept in a locked filing cabinet. The interview transcript will be kept in a separate place from any other identifying information. You will receive an interview number so your data will be recognised by both of us in case you wish to withdraw from the study and your information can then be destroyed.

We will discuss how you are feeling at the end of the interview and if you have any concerns or need further support then I can provide you with information about local services and resources

where relevant.

Do remember that participation in this research is entirely voluntary. Do not take part in it unless you want to.

Who is organising or funding the research?

The research is being completed as part of my Doctoral studies in existential psychotherapy and counselling at the New School of Counselling and Psychotherapy in London, and is being externally validated by Middlesex University. The research is self-funded and there are no external interests in the project.

Who has reviewed the study?

All proposals for research using human participants are reviewed by an Ethics Committee before they can proceed. The Middlesex Psychology Department's Ethics Committee have reviewed this proposal.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or concerns:

My email is: gideon_menda@hotmail.com

My research supervisor is Dr. Pnina Shinebourne and if you need any verification you can email or write at the following address:

The New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling, Royal Waterloo House, 51-55 Waterloo Road, London, SE1 8TX

Email: pnina.shinebourne@nspc.org.uk

Thank you for taking the time to read this information and for your interest in this research.

Gideon Menda

Participant information number:

8.2 Appendix 2: Consent form

New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling/Department of Psychology

Middlesex University – School of Health and Social Sciences

<u>Consent Form</u>

~

Research Title:	**Teachers on Fire: Existential – Phenomenological Perspectives of Teachers' Burnout in Israel**
Researcher:	**Gideon Menda**
Supervisor:	**Dr. Pnina Shinbourne**

I have understood the details of the research as explained to me by the researcher, and confirm that I have consented to act as a participant.

I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary, the data collected during the research will not be identifiable, and I have the right to withdraw from the project at any time without any obligation to explain my reasons for doing so.

I further understand that the data I provide may be used for analysis and subsequent publication in an anonymous form, and provide my consent that this might occur.

I understand that a recording is being made of this interview and will be securely stored until a verbatim transcript has been made

פרטי המחקר הוסברו לי על ידי החוקר והבנתי את נושא המחקר ואת פרטיו. אני מאשר/ת כי הסכמתי ליטול בו חלק. השתתפותי הינה על בסיס התנדבותי ופרטיי האישיים לא יפורסמו.

אם ארצה בכך, אוכל להפסיק את השתתפותי במחקר ולא אהיה חייב/ת לנמק את בחירתי לעשות זאת.

ידוע לי כי הנתונים הנאספים יוכלו לשמש כבסיס לניתוח ולמחקר והם עשויים להתפרסם, ואני נותן/ת את הסכמתי לכך.

הראיון המוקלט ישמר בצורה בטוחה ודיסקרטית לשם הכנת תמלילים .

______________________	______________________
Name of participant	Participant’s signature
______________________	______________________
Name of researcher	Researcher’s signature
Date ______________	Date ______________

8.3 Appendix 3: Ethical clearance

NSPC/ Psychology Department

REQUEST FOR ETHICAL APPROVAL

Applicant (specify): *UG* ***PG*** *(Module:D.Prof Existential Psychotherapy & Counselling.) PhD STAFF Date submitted:…21/08/2009…………………*

No study may proceed until this form has been signed by an authorised person, indicating that ethical approval has been granted. For collaborative research with another institution, ethical approval must be obtained from all institutions involved.

This form should be accompanied by any other relevant materials, (e.g. questionnaire to be employed, letters to participants/institutions, advertisements or recruiting materials, information sheet for participants[1], consent form[2], or other, including approval by collaborating institutions). A fuller description of the study may be requested.

Is this the first submission of the proposed study? **Yes**

Is this an amended proposal (resubmission)? **No**

Is this an urgent application? (To be answered by Staff/Supervisor only) Yes/No

Supervisor to initial here

Name(s) of investigator(s) Gideon Menda

Name of supervisor(s) Pnina Shinebourne

Title of study:
Teachers on Fire: Existential – Phenomenological perspectives of teachers' burnout in Israel

1. Please attach a brief description of the nature and purpose of the study, including details of the procedure to be employed. Identify the ethical issues involved, particularly in relation to the treatment/experiences of participants, session length, procedures, stimuli, responses, data collection, and the storage and reporting of data.

See attached project proposal

2. Could any of these procedures result in any adverse reactions? **YES**

If "yes", what precautionary steps are to be taken?

A possible risk involved in the research may be the experience, or the re-experiencing, of unpleasant memories and difficult emotions. However, the participants will have complete control over what they say and will not be obligated to disclose anything that they do not feel comfortable discussing. They may withdraw from the study at any time without providing an explanation. If they wish to stop during the interview, they will be asked to indicate their wish to do so and the interview will immediately be terminated.

At the end of the interview, we will discuss how the participant feels; if they have any concerns or need further support, I can provide them with information about relevant local services and resources.

3. Will any form of deception be involved that raises ethical issues? **NO**

(Most studies in psychology involve mild deception insofar as participants are unaware of the experimental hypotheses being tested. Deception becomes unethical if participants are likely to feel angry or humiliated when the deception is revealed to them).

Note: if this work uses existing records/archives and does not require participation per se, tick here ……….and go to question 10. (Ensure that your data handling complies with the Data Protection Act).

4. If participants other than NSPC or Middlesex University students are to be involved, where do you intend to recruit them? *(A full risk assessment* *must* *be conducted for any work undertaken off university premises)*[6,7]

The participants are teachers who used to work in the Israeli educational system. An invitation to take part in this research will be published in higher education institutes for teacher training as well as in schools in Israel. An invitation will also be published in the local newspaper.

5. When did you receive programme planning approval for this study: 15th May 2009

(If you were asked for revisions to your original proposal, this date should be when you received approval of the revisions)

Please attach a copy of the programme planning approval.

6. Does the study involve:

Clinical populations **NO**

Children (under 16 years) **NO**

Vulnerable adults such as individuals with mental health problems, learning disabilities, prisoners, elderly, young offenders? **NO**

7. How, and from whom (e.g. from parents, from participants via signature) will informed consent be obtained? (*See consent guidelines*[2]*; note special considerations for some questionnaire research)*

From participants, via signature

8. Will you inform participants of their right to withdraw from the research at any time, without penalty? (*see consent guidelines*[2] **YES**

9. Will you provide a full debriefing at the end of the data collection phase? **YES**

(*see debriefing guidelines*[3])

10. Will you be available to discuss the study with participants, if necessary, to monitor any negative effects or misconceptions? **YES**

If "no", how do you propose to deal with any potential problems?

11. Under the Data Protection Act, participant information is confidential unless otherwise agreed in advance. Will confidentiality be guaranteed? **YES**

(*see confidentiality guidelines*[5])

If "yes" how will this be assured *(see*[5]*)*

All data, including the digital recorder, will be kept in a locked filing cabinet. The interview transcripts will be kept separately from other identifying information to protect the participants. The names of the participants will not be published, and confidentiality will be maintained.

If “no”, how will participants be warned? *(see*[5]*)*

(*NB: You are not at liberty to publish material taken from your work with individuals without the prior agreement of those individuals*).

12. Are there any ethical issues which concern you about this particular piece of research, not covered elsewhere on this form? **NO**

If "yes" please specify: [ ]

	Yes	No
13. Some or all of this research is to be conducted away from Middlesex University	X	
If "yes", tick here to confirm that a Risk Assessment form is to be submitted	X	
14. I am aware that any modifications to the design or method of this proposal will require me to submit a new application for ethical approval	X	

15. I am aware that I need to keep all materials/documents relating to this study (e.g. participant consent forms, filled questionnaires, etc) until completion of my degree	X	

16. I have read the British Psychological Society's *Ethical Principles for Conducting Research with Human participants*[4] (for D. Psych) or the relevant Universities Counselling and Psychotherapy Association guidelines (for D.Prof) and believe this proposal to conform with them	X	

(NB: If "yes" has been responded to any of questions 2,3,5,11 or "no" to any of questions 7-10, a full explanation of the reason should be provided -- if necessary, on a separate sheet submitted with this form).

Researcher………………….. ……….. date ………………

Signatures of approval: Supervisor………………………………. date ……………..

Ethics Panel ……………………………. date ……………..

(signed, pending completion of a Risk Assessment form if applicable)

[1,2,3,4,5,6,7] **Guidelines are available from the Ethics page of Oas!sPlus**

8.4 Appendix 4: Risk assessment

INDEPENDENT FIELD/LOCATION WORK RISK ASSESSMENT FRA1

This proforma is applicable to, and must be completed in advance for, the following fieldwork situations:

1. *All fieldwork undertaken independently by individual students, either in the UK or overseas, including in connection with proposition module or dissertations. Supervisor to complete with student(s).*
2. *All fieldwork undertaken by postgraduate students. Supervisors to complete with student(s).*
3. *Fieldwork undertaken by research students. Student to complete with supervisor.*
4. *Fieldwork/visits by research staff. Researcher to complete with Research Centre Head.*

FIELDWORK DETAILS

Name: Gideon Menda ………………………….

Student No M00252785

Research Centre (staff only)……………………

Supervisor Pnina Shinebourne

Degree course D.Prof Existential Psychotherapy & Counselling

Telephone numbers and name of next of kin who may be contacted in the event of an accident

Next of Kin

Name ………. ……………………..

Phone ……………..……………..

Physical or psychological limitations to carrying out the proposed fieldwork

none

Any health problems (full details) Which may be relevant to proposed fieldwork activity in case of emergencies.	none
Locality (Country and Region)	Central Israel
Travel Arrangements NB: Comprehensive travel and health insurance must always be obtained for independent overseas fieldwork.	Private car Research takes place at my homeland and permanent address.
Dates of Travel and Fieldwork	September 2009 – September 2010

PLEASE READ THE INFORMATION OVERLEAF VERY CAREFULLY

Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment **PLEASE READ VERY CAREFULLY**

List the localities to be visited or specify routes to be followed **(Col. 1).** Give the approximate date (month / year) of your last visit, or enter 'NOT VISITED' **(Col 2).** For each locality, enter the potential hazards that may be identified beyond those accepted in everyday life. Add details giving cause for concern **(Col. 3).**

Examples of Potential Hazards :

Adverse weather: exposure (heat, sunburn, lightening, wind, hypothermia)
Terrain: rugged, unstable, fall, slip, trip, debris, and remoteness. Traffic: pollution.
Demolition/building sites, assault, getting lost, animals, disease.

Working on/near water: drowning, swept away, disease (weils disease, hepatitis, malaria, etc), parasites', flooding, tides and range.
Lone working: difficult to summon help, alone or in isolation, lone interviews.
Dealing with the public: personal attack, causing offence/intrusion, misinterpreted, political, ethnic, cultural, socio-economic differences/problems. Known or suspected criminal offenders.
Safety Standards (other work organisations, transport, hotels, etc), working at night, areas of high crime.
Ill health: personal considerations or vulnerabilities, pre-determined medical conditions (asthma, allergies, fitting) general fitness, disabilities, persons suited to task.
Articles and equipment: inappropriate type and/or use, failure of equipment, insufficient training for use and repair, injury.
Substances (chemicals, plants, bio- hazards, waste): ill health - poisoning, infection, irritation, burns, cuts, eye-damage.
Manual handling: lifting, carrying, moving large or heavy items, physical unsuitability for task

If no hazard can be identified beyond those of everyday life, enter 'NONE'.

Give brief details of fieldwork activity:

Interviewing 10 adults in an office in the centre of Israel.

1. LOCALITY/ROUTE	2. LAST VISIT	3. POTENTIAL HAZARDS
Tel – Aviv	Daily	None beyond those of everyday life.

The University Fieldwork code of Practice booklet provides practical advice that should be followed in planning and conducting fieldwork.

<u>Risk Minimisation/Control Measures</u> **PLEASE READ VERY CAREFULLY**

For each hazard identified **(Col 3),** list the precautions/control measures in place or that will be taken **(Col 4)** to **"reduce the risk to acceptable levels",** and the safety equipment **(Col 6)** that will be employed.

Assuming the safety precautions/control methods that will be adopted **(Col. 4),** categorise the fieldwork risk for each location/route as negligible, low, moderate or high **(Col. 5).**

Risk increases with both the increasing likelihood of an accident and the increasing severity of the consequences of an accident.

An acceptable level of risk is: a risk which can be safely controlled by person taking part in the activity using the precautions and control measures noted including the necessary instructions, information and training relevant to that risk. The resultant risk should not be significantly higher than that encountered in everyday life.

Examples of control measures/precautions:

Providing adequate training, information & instructions on fieldwork tasks and the safe and correct use of any equipment, substances and personal protective equipment. Inspection and safety check of any equipment prior to use. Assessing individuals fitness and suitability to environment and tasks involved. Appropriate clothing, environmental information consulted and advice followed (weather conditions, tide times etc.). Seek advice on harmful plants, animals & substances that may be encountered, including information and instruction on safe procedures for handling hazardous substances. First aid provisions, inoculations, individual medical requirements, logging of location, route and expected return times of lone workers. Establish emergency procedures (means of raising an alarm, back up arrangements). Working with colleagues (pairs). **Lone working is not permitted where the risk of physical or verbal violence is a realistic possibility.** Training in interview techniques and avoiding /defusing conflict, following advice from local organisations, wearing of clothing unlikely to cause offence or unwanted attention. Interviews in neutral locations. Checks on Health and Safety standards & welfare facilities of travel, accommodation and outside organisations. Seek information on social/cultural/political status of fieldwork area.

Examples of Safety Equipment: Hardhats, goggles, gloves, harness, waders, whistles, boots, mobile phone, ear protectors, bright fluorescent clothing (for roadside work), dust mask, etc.

If a proposed locality has not been visited previously, give your authority for the risk assessment stated or indicate that your visit will be preceded by a thorough risk assessment.

4. PRECAUTIONS/CONTROL MEASURES	5. RISK ASSESSMENT	6. EQUIPMENT
No risks beyond those of everyday life		

PLEASE READ INFORMATION OVERLEAF AND SIGN AS APPROPRIATE

DECLARATION: The undersigned have assessed the activity and the associated risks and declare that there is no significant risk or that the risk will be controlled by the method(s) listed above/over. Those participating in the work have read the assessment and will put in place precautions/control measures identified.
NB: Risk should be constantly reassessed during the fieldwork period and additional precautions taken or fieldwork discontinued if the risk is seen to be unacceptable.

Signature of Fieldworker (Student/Staff) ……….……………..…….. ……………………………. **Date** …….…………….. …

Signature of Student Supervisor ……….……………..…… **Date** …….……………..

APPROVAL: (ONE ONLY)

Signature of Curriculum Leader (undergraduate students only) ……….……………..…… ……….………..………… **Date** ……….…………… ….

Signature of Research Degree Co-ordinator or Masters Course Leader or Taught Masters Curriculum Leader ……….……………..…… ……….………..………… **Date** ……….……………

Signature of Research Centre Head (for staff fieldworkers**)** ……….……………..… **Date** ……….……………

FIELDWORK CHECK LIST

1. Ensure that **all members** of the field party possess the following attributes (where relevant) at a level appropriate to the proposed activity and likely field conditions:
   - ✓ Safety knowledge and training?
   - ✓ Awareness of cultural, social and political differences?
   - ✓ Physical and psychological fitness and disease immunity, protection and awareness?
   - ✓ Personal clothing and safety equipment?
   - ✓ Suitability of fieldworkers to proposed tasks?
2. Have all the necessary arrangements been made and information/instruction gained, and have the relevant authorities been consulted or informed with regard to:
   - ✓ Visa, permits?
   - ✓ Legal access to sites and/or persons?
   - ✓ Political or military sensitivity of the proposed topic, its method or location?
   - ✓ Weather conditions, tide times and ranges?
   - ✓ Vaccinations and other health precautions?
   - ✓ Civil unrest and terrorism?
   - ✓ Arrival times after journeys?
   - ✓ Safety equipment and protective clothing?
   - ✓ Financial and insurance implications?
   - ✓ Crime risk?
   - ✓ Health insurance arrangements?
   - ✓ Emergency procedures?
   - ✓ Transport use?
   - ✓ Travel and accommodation arrangements?

Important information for retaining evidence of completed risk assessments: Once the risk assessment is completed and approval gained the **supervisor** should retain this form and issue a copy of it to the fieldworker participating on the field course/work. In addition the **approver** must keep a copy of this risk assessment in an appropriate Health and Safety file.