

**LEADERSHIP PRACTICE AND  
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

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## Dedication

I dedicate this project to my supportive, patient, and understanding husband, Greg, who supported and encouraged me to continue my education. Without his help with all household chores, keeping up with our two sons and their daily endeavors, and providing opportunities for me to dedicate my time to my project, I would have not been able to complete this project.

To my two sons, Barrett and Jesse, who gave up cuddle time with mom, and allowed me to have more than my share of time on the computer.

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## Abstract

In the Spring of 2005, members of the Education Leadership Cohort participated in the Education 5500 (OL) course, *Understanding Professional Practice and Professional Development-Leadership Series*, instructed by Dr. Art Aitken. The aim of this leadership course as summarized from the Education 5500 (OL) course outline (2005), was to introduce the constructs and processes of understanding professional practice and professional development within a school leadership context. More specifically, the goal of examining the role of leadership related to systemic, school, and individual professional development was explored in the school improvement environment.

Objectives of the course were outlined as follows:

1. Understanding the Professional Practice of School Leaders
2. Understanding Professional Development in the Knowledge Creation School
3. Means of Understanding School Improvement as it Relates to Professional Development
4. The Facilitation of Professional Development in a Learning Community

The purpose of this manuscript is to summarize and synthesize the online discussions, submissions, and responses of the Spring 2005 (OL) Leadership Cohort members as they read and conversed about professional practice and professional development within a school leadership context. More specifically, the purpose of this manuscript is to report on the views, experiences, similarities, and future needs of professional practice and professional development within a school leadership context.

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## Chapter I

### Introduction

#### *Statement of Purpose*

Various approaches to school improvement were presented during this course through assigned readings with an emphasis on the integration of theory and practice in the application of Professional Development in the participants' work places. Members of the cohort engaged in summarizing and critiquing the key points of the readings assigned in this course. Relevant examples from participants' real life settings were shared to illustrate the extent to which principles or constructs from the readings were applied in practice. Participants also suggested alternate arguments and strategies, which would implement the context and intent of the readings.

Upon discussion about this significant database with Dr. Aitken, we mutually concluded that such valuable data should be summarized, synthesized, and analyzed. Next, the data would need to be organized into a format that would contribute to overall knowledge, improve practice, inform policy debates, and improve current practices of professional development and professional practices of leaders.

This manuscript will aim to add voices of the participants to existing knowledge about professional practice and professional development. Most if not all of these participants' voices have not been heard, nor have their views been profiled with regards to leaders' professional practice and professional development in education.

“Contributing to overall knowledge” implies that I will conduct research to contribute to existing information about professional practice and professional development (Creswell, 2002). I will aid in improving practice by assisting educators in



becoming more effective professionals. Creswell states that educators' effectiveness translates into better learning for kids.

Furthermore, this manuscript strives to facilitate personnel involved in teacher and leadership education programs through analyzing content, and sifting through the results to determine which results will be most useful to their unique contexts (Creswell, 2002). It will assist educators in evaluating existing approaches and new approaches to professional practice and professional development within their educational contexts. Most importantly, this manuscript offers the opportunity for educators to connect with other educators in various locations and contexts.

Therefore, it is intended that the information reported in this manuscript, if disseminated, will have an influence on professional development and professional practice of school leaders.

### *Background/Rationale*

As a member of the Spring 5500 (OL) Leadership Cohort, I discovered myself deeply immersed in the process of understanding professional practice and professional development within a school leadership context. As a life-long learner, I have a passion for professional development and improving best practices in education to improve learning. Thus, I was compelled to search for more knowledge and information on leadership practice and professional development.

After searching and reviewing several articles about professional development, I found that very few of them were specifically targeted to professional development for school leaders. However, a leader's development has a positive correlation with staff development, student learning, and educational reform (Bredeson & Scribner 2000, cited

in Kochan, Brederson, & Riehl, 2002). This clearly suggested a purpose to examine, re-define, and re-culture the framework for school leaders' professional development.

Acknowledged effective professional development strategies designed to develop effective school leaders are leadership programs being offered at the graduate level which give aspiring leaders the opportunity to study, inquire, research, observe, practice, and reflect with exemplary school leaders of today (Kochan et al., 2002). Creating effective schools implies that we need to recruit, develop, nurture and support effective school leaders (Fullan, 2002). Our Leadership Cohort's program is an existing example of this. Alberta's Commission on Learning supports this by recommending that a quality practice standard be developed for principals, a new program be established to prepare and certify principals, and a new Council of Education Executives be established to provide certification, ongoing support and professional development for principals and vice principals (Alberta's Commission on Learning, 2003).

The Commission's recommendations state that the program for developing principals should be designed in consultation with principals and superintendents (Alberta's Commission on Learning, 2003). Support and counsel of other professionals is one of the most efficient means of developing professional development (Kochan et al., 2002).

A credible, solid, rich, database about school leaders' professional development and professional practice has been prepared from the submissions of the participants of the Spring 2005 (OL) Leadership Cohort course (A. Aitken, personal communication, April 2005). These submissions have created conversations about the educational issues of school leaders' professional practice and professional development. Concerns relating

to these issues, were debated by both administrator and teacher participants across the province of Alberta during this course. The participants' discussions and positions on these important educational issues may be helpful in informing policy makers about current debates and stances taken by educators in Alberta.

### *Operational Definitions*

The following definitions of professional development will be adopted and considered for the purpose of this project.

#### *Professional development.*

According to the thesaurus of the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) database, *professional development* refers to "activities to enhance professional career growth" (Cook & Fine, 1997). Fullan, along with Steigelbauer (1991) expands the definition to include "the sum total of formal and informal learning experiences throughout one's career from pre-service teacher education to retirement" (p. 326). Professional development is also defined as "learning opportunities that engage educator's critical, creative, and reflective capacities in ways that strengthen their own practice and the practice of other educators" (Kochan et al., 2002, p.291).

#### *Professional practice.*

Although a definition for "professional practice" was not found, I will use the following to define what I understand it to be for the purpose of this project: Professional is someone who takes the job seriously, who has specialized experience and formal qualifications (Hudson, 1983, cited in Barrow, & Milburn, 1990, p. 250). Practice is the carrying out the rules, principles, or criteria by which levels or degrees of adequacy,

acceptability, quantity, quality, or values are measured or judged (Educational Resources Information Center, 2001).

*Professional learning communities.*

Additionally, Alberta Education Goals (2005), and The Commission's Report (2003), have outlined a framework for schools and districts to develop as professional learning communities. The three capacities of professional learning communities are personal, interpersonal, and organizational capacity (ATA, 2001). A professional learning community is defined as "a school in which the professionals (administrators and teachers) continuously seek and share learning to increase their effectiveness.

Learning organizations are where people are continually expanding their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free and where people continually learning to see the whole together (Senge, 1993).

## Chapter II

### Literature Review

Educational reform requires school leaders to continuously update their skills and information. It transforms their role as a leader. Fullan (2002) defines a strong school leader as “one who develops school’s capacity to engage in reform” (p.2). School leaders must be capable of developing school capacity to achieve effective learning and change. Thus, re-culturing must occur along with restructuring (Fullan, 1999).

Smylie and Hart (1999) admit that school reform efforts have been somewhat unsuccessful in the past due to emphasis being placed solely on structural reform, which lacks consideration of the human elements within the structures. Fullan (1999, 2002) states that leaders of today are vulnerable to overload and packaged solutions and are constantly being bombarded by overwhelming and unconnected innovations. As a result, it is extremely important for school leaders to participate in planning and directing their own professional development programs and frameworks within their school contexts.

#### *Professional Practice*

There is a need to acknowledge the learning needs of our school leaders. Professional development for school leaders is defined as “learning opportunities that engage educator’s critical, creative, and reflective capacities in ways that strengthen their own practice and the practice of other educators” (Kochan, et al. 2002, p. 291). Leaders of today must reflect upon and engage in personal growth and development in addition to facilitating the professional development of the faculty and staff within their own context (Kochan, Bredeson & Riehl, 2002). The authors go on to say that leaders must anticipate

and deal with challenges, engage in reflective learning and inquiry, and that the leader's learning must be designed to enhance the learning of all. It is necessary that leaders assume the role of model learners, stewards of learning and community builders (Kochan et al., 2002). Most importantly, it is essential that teaching practices are influenced by theory and research rather than individual recollections and past schooling experiences (Vasquez-Levy, 2001).

Without the knowledge base to operate from, administrators are setting up the kind of professional development described by Sparks (1994) "At its worst, teachers are asked to implement poorly understood innovations with little support and assistance" (p. 30). In reality, these staff development efforts are often one-shot workshops with no thought given to follow-up or how it fits in with previous techniques (Sparks, 1994). Consensus among researchers indicates that most often leaders are expected to take part in professional development that has very little or no relevance to their job, and rarely results in change or improvement (Kochan et al., 2002). In addition to this, principals spend most of their day responding to problems that require immediate attention, and therefore are biased towards solution oriented professional development (Kochan & Spencer, 1999, cited in Kochan et al., 2002). Even more, current professional development fails to determine the things students need to know and be able to do, and working backwards from there in determining what knowledge, skills and attitudes educators require in order to achieve those student outcomes (Sparks, 1994). As a result, Kochan et al. (2002) believe that professional development which deals with efficient ways to respond to legislative requirements is frequently practiced rather than professional development which engages them in innovation, reflection, and risk-taking

actions. Consequently, schools seldom invest time, and support in professional development because it is often not viewed as a legitimate use of time, or an essential component of teaching (Kochan et al., 2002). Thus, professional development for leaders must be redefined and re-cultured to overcome these paradoxes (Kochan et al., 2002).

Clearly, the school leader's role is evolving into a more complex and complicated role. Site based decision-making models and other accountability related practices have resulted in principals having to take on an added role as business manager. The Alberta Commission on Learning (2003) report states that in addition to their leadership role, principals are expected to handle public relations, communicate with parents and community members, contribute to school board policy direction and initiatives, manage substantial budgets often in the millions of dollars, evaluate staff, ensure their schools are safe and secure...and on top of all that, get to know their students, manage discipline, and motivate them to achieve their best (p.122).

Three factors that are required of principals in schools attempting to make essential school restructuring are the ability to share authority, the ability to facilitate the work of the staff, and the ability to participate without dominating (Hord, 1997, p. 4). Leaders' efforts aim to "engender predictability, dependability, and a climate of stability; respect, assurance, and psychological safety" (Smylie & Hart, 1999). According to Aness (2000), continuous teacher learning, and implementation of innovative, and best teaching practices in each school's context, must be part of the reciprocal, evolving restructuring process. This will increase the schools' capacities to provide an intellectually challenging education (Aness, 2000).

Reflective strategies are essential for principals to function in their roles as a leader (Coombs, 2003). However, it is imperative that the process of reflection be revealed (Coombs, 2003). Leaders must have time to practice, reflect, and consult with others (Kochan et al., 2002). In fact, the support and counsel of other professionals is one of the most efficient means of developing professional development (Kochan et al., 2002). The use of values and reflective practice coincide in recognizing and resolving problematic situations (Coombs, 2003). Principals must be strategic thinkers who facilitate the development of the organizational members, envisioning what they believe to be critical issues facing school improvement (Schlechty, 2001).

There is consensus among researchers that best practices and principles of adult learning must be incorporated in the delivery of pedagogical learning and as a means of generating leadership density (Jackson, 2000). In order for professional development of leaders to be successful, it must incorporate adult learning principles and high quality standards (Kochan et al., 2002). Knowles' (1973) theory of andragogy is recognized by Kochan et al. as being an accepted foundation in which to base adult learning. Continuous organizational and professional renewal must be supported by the creation and expansion of improvement capacity (Jackson, 2000). Unless leadership articulates values and visions, has a range of pedagogy, and promotes and models professional development, then participants will not take ownership in the projects and student learning will be obstructed (Hopkins, 2002).

### *Knowledge Creation*

The current instructional innovation process requires content knowledge, general pedagogical knowledge, pedagogical content, curricular knowledge, and



knowledge of learners' educational contexts and practice (Spillane et al., 2001). School leaders must also pursue technical knowledge, practical knowledge or emancipatory knowledge (Kochan et al., 2002). These instructional practices are changing the core dimensions of education (Spillane et al., 2001). Thus, it is imperative that educators remain current with all aspects of education to employ best practices and improved learning. Often times, educators prefer to work in isolation and superficially disseminate knowledge. Yet, the practice of large-scale improvement is the mobilization of knowledge, skill, incentives, resources and capacities within schools and school systems to increase student learning (Elmore, 2002). The validation and dissemination of meaningful knowledge and pedagogy requires hard work on the behalf of educators. Leaders must be prepared to lead their staff in auditing their professional working knowledge, managing the process of creating new professional knowledge, validating the professional knowledge created, and disseminating the created professional knowledge (A. Aitken, personal communication, January 14, 2005).

### *School Improvement*

A recurring theme throughout the literature is the emergence of capacity-building as a leadership focus to achieve effective learning and change (Hord, 1997, Fullan, 2002, Senge, 1993). In addition to this, the review of literature views leadership as an organizational property (Smylie & Hart, 1999). "Managing teacher's work, establishing channels for new information, fostering social trust, communicating and enforcing norms and expectations, and balancing internal and external ties" are aspects of leadership that contribute to human and social capital (Smylie & Hart, 1999, n.p.). More specifically, teacher inquiry is effective professional development that assists in aligning

pedagogical and organizational structures with the learning needs of the students (Ancess, 2000). Furthermore, students as well as staff must be an integral part of leadership, and cultural diffusion functions (Jackson, 2000). Improvement frameworks should involve university staff supporting schools' work with theory, research, professional development support, and accreditation of participant teacher (Jackson, 2000).

Moreover, Jackson (2000) hypothesizes that systems' pathologies, organizational "dysfunctionalities" and other barriers that have historically inhibited school improvement efforts need to be challenged by leadership approaches in actively improving schools. Jackson also points out that unless hierarchies are dissolved and "unhelpful, irrelevant, redundant or contextually incongruent practices are shed, overload and conflict are inevitable" (p. 75). Building strong relationships and trust permeate the infrastructure of collaboration, leadership, school improvement, and professional development (Smylie & Hart, 1999). "Without credibility and trust, there are no followers" (Dufour & Eaker, 1998, p. 193). Nevertheless, "A leader, by definition, is someone who has followers" (cited in Dufour & Eaker, 1998, p. 193).

Alberta Learning's Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AIS I), suggests that they have removed some barriers to school improvement such as lack of funding, irrelevance of initiatives to school context, and irrelevant professional development activities, to contribute to professional development and professional practice for improved learning in Alberta. Alberta Learning (2004) professes that AIS I is an improvement initiative which has had a profound impact on the culture of schools in Alberta. Alberta Learning's report claims that AIS I has positively impacted Alberta schools by improving student learning, developing a culture of continuous improvement,

renewing a focus on teaching and learning, promoting innovation and creativity, sharing common language, encouraging research in the classrooms, creating new knowledge, making evidence-based decisions, providing job-embedded professional development, sharing and distributing leadership, and engaging parents in learning and improvement strategies.

### *Professional Learning Communities*

The administrator plays a key role in influencing, initiating and supporting social and human capital among teachers (Smylie & Hart, 1999). The principal's role is to cultivate social trust, channels for new information, norms, expectations, and sanctions (Smylie & Hart, 1999). School leaders are the key facilitators in building a team relationship necessary to distribute knowledge (Spillane, Coldren & Diamond, 2001). Principals must "work with" teachers rather than "work on" the teachers (Smylie & Hart, 1999, n.p.). Even more important, the authors also found that teacher collaboration and learning were strongest where the principal actively encouraged and participated in collegial work. The leader needs to act as a passionate catalyst to guide, support and mobilize their members towards purposeful action (Vasquez-Levy, 2001).

Research suggests that leaders in schools with the highest levels of collaboration and strong learning communities valued social relationships as the "taproot" of high performance (Goldring & Rallis, 1993; Louis & Murphy, 1994, as cited in Smylie & Hart, 1999, n.p.). More specifically, social capital enhances essential human capital (Smylie & Hart, 1999). "Human capital refers to knowledge, skills, and other attributes that affect a person's capacity to do productive work" (Smylie & Hart, 1999, n.p.). Beyond that, experts recommend developing a portfolio culture to, "foster individual and

organizational growth and development and promote reflection and critical analysis” (Kochan, et al., 2002).

The most dominant consensus of leading researchers from within and from outside of education have agreed that the characteristics of a professional learning community (PLC) are essential to the sustained improvement of any organization (Eaker, Dufour & Dufour, 2002). A cultural shift from a culture of teacher isolation to a culture of deep and meaningful collaboration is essential in the development of a PLC (Eaker et al., 2002, p. 10). A leader’s role in a PLC is to “sustain learning by creating a culture of continuous learning for adults tied to student learning and school goals” (Hargreaves & Fink, p. 693). It is the leader’s responsibility to encourage individuals who are not committed and ensure that they are on board (Eaker et al., 2002)

Current research indicates that sustainable school improvement acknowledges the development of leadership capacity within all members (Jackson, 2000). Smylie and Hart (1999) report that the literature on social and human capital sees leadership as being infused throughout the school “from the center” rather than “from the top” ( Dufour and Eaker, 1998, p. 184). Shared leadership promotes collective responsibilities, mutual trust and obligation, and joint accountability (Smylie & Hart, 1999). Similarly, Spillane et al. (2003) declare that their distributive leadership framework forms the appropriate unit of analysis for studying leadership practice. However, transformational leadership is suggested by Hopkins (2000) to be the most effective leadership model in addressing school improvement. Kochan et al., (2002) believe that, “The principal must become a transformative leader who reflects upon and engages in personal growth and development and facilitates the professional development of the faculty and staff” (p. 299).

Transformational leadership creates high levels of personal commitment to organizational goals (Leithwood, 1999).

“Administrators no less than teachers, urgently need the chance to rethink practice, and to learn the new perspectives and skills that are consistent with reformers’ visions of teaching and learning for understanding” (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin 1995, p. 9). Professional development is a critical tool for leaders to stay current with issues in education, implement innovations and refine their practice. Inevitably, continuous professional development and support is crucial to a leader’s success. It is essential for facilitating systematic reform. Most importantly, there is an exact relationship between leadership, professional practice, professional development, and enhanced student learning (Hopkins, 2002).

## Chapter III

### Research Question

How does the Leadership Cohort construct professional practice and professional development within a school leadership context?

#### *Sub Questions*

1. In the view of the Leadership Cohort, what are the positive and negative experiences with professional practice and professional development within a leadership context?
2. What type of professional practice and professional development in a school leadership context does the Leadership Cohort convey as most effective?
3. What does the Leadership Cohort identify as future needs of professional practice and professional development within a school leadership context?

## Chapter IV

### Methodology

This was a Quantitative study in which units of analysis were collected, coded, and counted from the Qualitative data of the textual submissions, responses and online discussions of the twenty-one Spring 2005, 5500 (OL) Leadership Cohort participants from the University of Lethbridge WebCT. I applied content analysis was applied to all of the data collected with respect to the number of occurrences of types of statements and emerging themes to answer the research questions. Such an analysis is conducted through a sequential process. Key terms used in this research were defined. Descriptive categories, based on the purpose of this research, were created as a framework to help sort the data. After the sample was drawn, categories were defined with emergent coding following some preliminary examination of the data (Stemler, 2001). Categories are groups of words with similar meaning or connotations (Stemler, 2001). A representative sample of the content was read and coded according to objective rules. The validity and reliability were checked, and the rules revised accordingly. All text was read and coded using propositional units which break down the text in order to examine underlying assumptions (Stemler, 2001). Sampling, context, and recording units were employed. Content analysis enabled me to study this topic in an indirect way, through an analysis of the participants' communication (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003).

#### *Definitions*

*Quantitative research* is often contrasted with *qualitative research*, which is the examination, analysis and interpretation of observations for the purpose of discovering underlying meanings and patterns of relationships, including classifications of types of

phenomena and entities, in a manner that does not involve mathematical models.

Although a distinction is commonly drawn between qualitative and quantitative aspects of research, it has been argued that the two go hand in hand.

*Qualitative data analysis* often employs an inquiry approach, which is useful for analyzing data by collecting the detailed views of participants in various forms such as written responses, and reflections.

*Content analysis* has been defined as a systematic, replicable technique for compressing many words of text into fewer content categories based on explicit rules of coding (Stemler, 2001). Holsti (1969) offers a broad definition of content analysis as, "any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages" (cited in Stemler, 2001, p. 1). Content analysis is also useful for examining trends and patterns in documents. Content analysis is a powerful data reduction technique that provides an empirical basis for monitoring shifts in public opinion (Stemler, 2001).

### *Sampling*

To answer the research questions posed in this project, a total of twenty one members' responses, and submissions to the ten assigned readings for the course, and the online discussions between these cohort members and their professor throughout the course were collected, coded, and analyzed.

### *Participants*

The participants in this study were either professors, teachers or administrators from various communities and school configurations across Alberta.



### *Data Collection*

One copy of all the responses, submissions, and discussions were printed to paper. One copy was kept in original condition on the WebCT, while the printed copy was used to color code words and phrases. To help with coding, a color-coded highlighting system was used in the data collection process. Color-coding was applied to all of the textual submissions, responses and online discussions. A different color code was used to organize data into themes. Words and phrases that were representative of the cohort's view of positive and negative experiences with professional practice and professional development within a leadership context were highlighted in yellow. Words and phrases that were representative of the types of professional practice and professional development that the cohort conveyed as most effective were highlighted in pink. Future needs of professional practice and professional development within a school leadership context that were identified by the cohort were highlighted in blue. The following are sampling units of words and phrases in each of the three recording category units were collected as context units from the data.

#### *Positive and negative experiences.*

- educators prefer to work in isolation and superficially disseminate knowledge
- the principal's role has become complex
- random professional development programs lack cohesion
- staff discuss strategies and implement actions together as a staff to improve student learning

*Effective practices.*

- it is imperative that educators remain current with all aspects of education to employ best practices and improved learning
- the most successful and effective professional development strategy designed to develop effective school leaders is the Leadership programs being offered at the Graduate level
- leaders discover emancipatory knowledge by observing and learning from master teachers and subject experts

*Future needs.*

- educational reform requires school leaders to continuously update their skills and information
- leaders must become continuous learners and stimulate and motivate others to engage in learning together
- school leaders must become model learners, stewards of learning, and community builders.

*Data Analysis*

A sample unit of data was drawn and categories were defined. The data was prepared and organized for analysis by the course module numbers. Next, the data was explored several times, scanning, coding, and developing categories and themes from the data. Text was segmented and labeled to form descriptions and broad themes in the data (Creswell, 2002). Similar themes were combined together to form a major idea in the database (Creswell, 2002). Initially, ten categories were developed for section and

document classification in this research project. Table I shows the number of submissions, and responses collected for each category.

Table I

*Submissions and Responses Analyzed for Each Category*

Category	Number of Submissions	Number of Responses
Development and distribution of knowledge	11	0
The professional development of school leaders	10	0
Instructional leadership and school improvement; staff development	11	5
Visioning the school improvement process	10	5
Reflective practice	11	6
School improvement and its relation with leadership	10	5
Alberta Initiative for School	11	5

Improvement		
A human and social capital development perspective	10	5
Professional Learning Communities	11	6
The reciprocal influence of teacher learning, teaching practice, school restructuring, and student outcomes	10	5
Total	105	42

---

The categories and themes were reviewed and some slight changes were made to them as seen in Table II. Evidence was collected and synthesized according to these categories. Quite a bit of duplication and overlap was discovered once the process of sorting data began, and some reorganizing had to be done. Some objective rules for categorizing were set in an attempt to be consistent in sorting the data. Next, the data was coded and analyzed for descriptions and themes based upon the context of the three sub-questions for this study. Once again, some rules were set for coding the data, and employing ruthless decision-making, as there was potential for redundancy and overlap while coding the data. Common themes within each sub question category were then identified and coded with + (1-15) for positive experiences, - (1-15) for negative

experiences, E (1-15) for effective, and an F (1-15) for future needs. The numbers 1-15 represent the themes for which the data was sorted and tabulated. Table II shows common themes, and how they were coded for their occurrences which emerged in the second round of coding.

Table II

*Coding of Emergent Themes*

Emergent Themes	Positive Experiences	Negative Experiences	Effective Methods	Future Needs
	+	-	E	F
AISI	+1	-1	E1	F1
Leadership Styles	+2	-2	E2	F2
Reciprocal Influences	+3	-3	E3	F3
Communication	+4	-4	E4	F4
Knowledge	+5	-5	E5	F5
Creation/Transfer				
School Climate/ Culture	+6	-6	E6	F6
Collaboration	+7	-7	E7	F7
Capacity	+8	-8	E8	F8

PLC's	+9	-9	E9	F9
Accountability	+10	-10	E10	F10
Professional	+11	-11	E11	F11
Development				
Vision/Mission/	+12	-12	E12	F12
Beliefs/Values				
Shared Decision	+13	-13	E13	F13
Making				
Reflective Practice	+14	-14	E14	F14
Social and Human	+15	-15	E15	F15
Capital				

---

Next, findings were interpreted and reported to answer the research questions. A written, narrative discussion summarizes in detail, the findings from the data analysis (Creswell, 2002). Comments with regards to the main findings of this study, and the possible direction for future studies of this nature conclude this study. A solid understanding of the information collected from the data has been interpreted for meaning, by drawing on personal reflections and past research. In making this interpretation, personal views and perspectives have ultimately shaped the interpretations (Creswell, 2002). These findings can now be used to check other research findings (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). Reflecting upon personal memories, experiences and

perspectives is important to note, as perspective can create a very different view depending upon one's role, position and experience in the whole picture.

### *Reliability*

Fraenkle and Wallen (2003), note that reliability and validity are seldom checked in content analysis. In the content analysis conducted in this study, propositional units are employed, which are considered the most complex method of defining coding units (Stemler, 2001). Secondly, emergent coding is implemented with somewhat different rules (Stemler, 2001). Categories within this study could not be made mutually exclusive and exhaustive. Furthermore, since there was only one person analyzing and coding the text, the reliability cannot be measured using inter-rater reliability. However, the consistency employed in the systematic categorizing, coding, and in the sampling, context, and recording units which were explicitly established for this analysis, can be relied upon to contribute to the reliability of the study. This assumption is attributed to the fact that the production of the data and the cohort who contributed the data were worked with closely. Thus, the validity of the inferences from the text may be considered intra-rater reliable.

### *Validity*

The data analyzed in this study is representative of administrators, teachers, and professors from across the province of Alberta over a four month period. Each of these contributing members possesses a diverse background, and multiple years of experiences. Currently, these members are employed in various levels and forms of education positions across the province. The data provided knowledge to better examine, understand, define, and construct professional development and practice of school

leaders, and the state in which many schools are currently operating. The data could be made available for other researchers to analyze in order to validate the results further. Therefore there is belief that the data is authentic, believable, valid and reliable. It is intended that this study will assist in future planning and preparation of leadership programs, and professional development opportunities for leaders, which are focused on improving leadership practices for sustained school improvement.



## Chapter V

### Results

The twenty-one cohort members submitted a total of one hundred and forty-seven assignments. All one hundred and forty-seven assignments were analyzed. Table III shows the number of occurrences for each emergent theme within the sub-question categories.

Cohort members recorded 866 positive experiences with relation to professional practice and professional development within a school leadership context. Positive experiences with professional learning communities were the most dominant with 144 occurrences. The least positive experience occurrences were recorded in leadership styles and roles in improvement with 12, communication with 11, capacity with 11, and social and human capital with 9 occurrences.

Negative experiences with relation to leaders practice and professional development was the next highest with a total of 1238 occurrences recorded. Negative experiences with professional development were the most dominant with 293 occurrences, while AISI recorded 236 occurrences. The least number of positive experience occurrences were recorded in capacity with 22, decision making with 0, and reciprocal influences in teaching and learning with 0 occurrences.

Effective practices for leaders' professional practice and professional development recorded the highest number with 1652 occurrences. Cohort members identified the largest number of effective practices in leadership styles with 356 occurrences, followed by school climate and culture with 258, and professional learning

communities with 218 occurrences. Significantly lower in the group of effective occurrences was capacity with 43, AISI with 42, accountability with 29, shared decision making with 16, communication with 11, and reflective practice with 6 occurrences.

Future needs for leaders' professional practice and professional development was just below effective practices and professional development occurrences with 1416 occurrences recorded. Cohort members offered 491 occurrences of future needs in leadership styles and roles in school improvement.

Future needs for professional development had the next highest with 204 occurrences, followed by vision, mission, values and beliefs with 152 occurrences.

The following observations can be made from the more prominent results recorded in Table III. Although there seemed to be differing views with respect to AISI, our cohort did not have many effective solutions or future needs to offer and suggest in this area. Leadership styles drew some attention with a large number of negative experiences in comparison to positive experiences. The cohort also constructed vast numbers of suggestions for effective leadership styles and roles, and for the future needs of leadership styles and roles in school improvement. The cohort conveyed many effective strategies for school climate and culture, collaboration, reciprocal influences, and social and human capital in comparison to their other three categories. Professional learning communities, and vision, values, mission and beliefs collected many more occurrences in positive experiences and effective strategies than in their other two categories, while reflective practice had the most occurrences with positive experiences. A stark observation is that the professional development theme has significantly more

negative experiences' and future needs' occurrences recorded than positive experiences and effective strategies.

Table III

*Occurrences of Emergent Themes*

Emergent Themes	Positive Experiences +	Negative Experiences -	Effective Methods E	Future Needs F
AISI	123	236	42	66
Leadership Styles	12	148	356	491
Reciprocal Influences	66	0	132	66
Communication	11	41	11	11
Knowledge	36	102	98	73
Creation/Transfer				
School Climate/ Culture	21	99	258	49
Collaboration	43	63	112	F7
Capacity	11	22	43	F8
PLC's	144	53	218	69
Accountability	75	80	29	11

Professional	72	293	95	204
Development				
Vision/Mission/ Beliefs/Values	142	44	136	152
Shared Decision Making	46	0	16	41
Reflective Practice	55	12	6	23
Social and Human Capital	9	45	100	40
Totals	866	1238	1652	1416

## Chapter VI

### Discussion

Themes were re-grouped into the following four broader themes under each sub-question category for the purpose of this discussion.

1. Professional Practice of School Leaders
2. Knowledge Creation
3. School Improvement
4. Professional Learning Communities

#### *Positive and Negative Experiences With Professional Practice and Professional Development Within a School Leadership Context*

##### *Professional practice.*

The cohort recognizes that the development and new emphasis in education in recent years has changed many of their teaching and leading practices. The cohort identifies the empowerment of staff movement, the decentralized decision making reform, and more recently the distributive leadership philosophy, as contributing to significant implications for leaders and relationships.

The cohort believes that there is a renewed emphasis on professional development as it surfaces from isolation on its way to a more visible, public, and accountable subject. Cohort members recognize that The Alberta Teacher's Association offers an extensive network of trained professionals to conduct in-services with staff on current methodologies and pedagogy. Educational conferences and workshops available for teachers are numerous and extensive. However, members note that random

professional development programs lack cohesion, and fail to acknowledge the context of each school and the need for important leadership skills.

Next, the cohort focuses on reflective practice. As with many leadership strategies studied, the cohort concurs that reflection is human nature. Whether one realizes it or not, one reflects throughout their day. Persons are constantly making decisions in which they rely on previous knowledge, experience, values, and anticipated outcomes. However, major decisions do require more time and thought. In which case, waiting until a quiet moment in the day or evening to question, mull over ideas or maybe even discuss the issue with a trusted friend is necessary. Reflection once again becomes a time issue. Interesting enough, but not surprisingly, it is constructed that time always seems to be an issue in education. Although a lot of reflection occurs instantly and naturally, one still needs the time for some deeper reflection, recording, and planning from reflection.

Reflection is occurring when one is talking “shop” with others in similar positions at meetings, conventions, staff functions, and social establishments. From these experiences, one can conclude that expertise about leadership is inherent in leaders themselves.

The cohort continues to discover that school improvement and accountability promotes critical issues in leader relationships with teachers and collegial relationships. Undoubtedly, the assessment and achievement accountability has discouraged practices which position teaching as an isolated, private practice. This triggers tension in many relationships between school members. The cohort realizes that accountability, role responsibility, legislated requirements, shared leadership, and the development of social

and human capital within a collegial environment, are expected of leaders. In sum, The cohort views the principal's role as continually becoming increasingly more complex.

*Knowledge creation.*

Cohort members convey that often times, educators prefer to work in isolation and superficially disseminate knowledge. They either experience or realize that validation and dissemination of meaningful knowledge and pedagogy requires hard work on the behalf of educators. With increasing workload and demands on leaders and teachers The cohort's concern is about where will we find the time for professional development requiring reflection and study to enhance continuous learning? Furthermore, the cohort feels that educational research does not necessarily relate to practice. There are too many variables and contexts involved within each educational setting to make generalizations found in such research.

Cohort members agree that the dissemination of knowledge within the teaching profession is a very difficult task. It is noted that teachers often work in isolation, perfecting their own knowledge without accessing the invaluable knowledge of all school members. In doing so, teachers do not realize what knowledge is missing or is insufficient.

The cohort believes that the transfer of knowledge is influenced by the degree of authority, perception of expertise, and the type of knowledge to be transferred. Department heads and faculty leaders are seen as instructional leaders and experts in specific knowledge networks at higher levels of education, while administrators are seen as leaders in general school knowledge and activities.

The cohort is discovering that artifacts, routines, and boundary objects assist teachers in transferring knowledge between communities of practice. It is clear that the cohort members all agree that boundary objects such as lesson plans, textbooks, unit plans, and other daily resources are very effective in disseminating knowledge, yet often the hardest objects to access due to teacher isolation and ownership issues.

Hierarchies and incongruent practices are considered as barriers to school improvement. Cohort members feel that often there is a lack of a shared sense of purpose in schools which inhibits change. Cohort members cite that many of their previous experiences with visioning exercises have had a lack of real connection and ultimate validity. Cohort members also note that outcomes to shared visions may not always be congruent. However, the value of a unified purpose in our schools is recognized. Furthermore, inconsistent practices are very common even with a common vision. Consistency of practice in relation to change, which has been agreed upon by staff, is often dubious. Members seem to lack true reflection of the goals they establish. Staff members need to reflect on goals and establish the data necessary to link practices to student achievement.

Additionally, very few resources are being allocated to building foundations for collaboration. Opportunities for open discussions and decision-making are non-existent in a large group setting in some schools. This is when you get the “parking lot” meetings occurring. Over a period of time, the teachers who remain in these schools are bound to become unhappy, unproductive, stale, and isolated robots. In schools where these exist, members share experiences of conflict and ineffective practices. Motivated teachers are



frustrated in these school environments. As professionals, the cohort believes that all members need to respect each other's opinions, suggestions, and voices.

It is shared that some schools still have traditions set in stone. Habitual leading by the same individual or leading without awareness of one's own strengths and weaknesses often results in losing credibility with staff when other staff members are more knowledgeable or skilled in specific areas and are not granted the opportunity to lead. All too often members entrench compliance rather than commitment with superficial actions of empowerment.

*School improvement.*

Cohort members contend that the greatest struggle for school leaders is to facilitate school improvement. Evaluating school improvement efforts is essential, yet often disregarded. Members believe it is important to realize that improvement initiatives impact each school to differing degrees.

Even more importantly is the issue of what sort of student achievement should be measured. Cohort members all seem to contend that student achievement and improvement should be recognized and measured in many different modalities such as academics, moral intelligence, and responsible, productive citizens. If one thinks about AISI in particular, members decided that they could look at the data collected throughout the projects to suggest the impact that professional development is having on student learning. Currently the absence of concrete evidence to measure the success of AISI projects is noted. Beyond that, the use of data analysis from provincial exams or standardized tests can be utilized and examined over a period of time as members engage

in professional development in that specific area. But members also convey increasing concern about how they could measure other student achievements.

Mostly, members ponder and wonder how to measure the impact of professional development on student achievement? They understand that if professional development is occurring as Hopkins (2002) and Sparks (1994) suggest, then they should see supporting evidence that professional development is improving student learning. So far, they feel that schools are falling short in citing evidence of improvement in most cases. Furthermore, the cohort constructs that there is very minimum evidence to suggest that there is a connection between leadership practices, professional development, and student achievement.

Another topic in the cohort's discussions is AISI. It is important to point out that members discover that even though AISI has been created to improve professional development in Alberta Schools, there are still some schools, which are not benefiting from this program simply because of its absence. Therefore, some cohort members admit to their lack of knowledge or experience with AISI and its benefits. Even more, some schools are currently trying to keep programs and support in place from recently expired AISI funded initiatives, thus realizing that the improvements initiated by AISI may not be sustainable.

It is suggested by some cohort members that the constructs of educational standards can inhibit meaningful innovation. Cohort members also reference circumstances in their schools that frustrate school improvement efforts. It is even noted by a few cohort members that often school districts interfere with this process. Lack of time needed for necessary collaboration while attempting school improvement tasks, is

cited by most cohort members as a barrier. Inevitably it takes commitment to look at data, evaluate our progress towards goals, reflect on pedagogy, and share our knowledge.

Cohort members also caution that it is important to recognize when lack of time becomes an excuse for resisting the hard work necessary for school improvement. Issues such as lack of commitment, and effective time management need to be considered and addressed amongst our staffs by our leaders. Members conclude that in many cases, they may have to move the organizational paradigm outside of the original, traditional box to get the job done.

The cohort expresses a wide range of impressions with respect to the effectiveness of AISI projects in Alberta schools. In most cases, the synopsis appears to suggest that schools are on a continuum of improvement in Alberta. Collaborative practices surface as being favorably valued with respect to AISI. Some members of the cohort report progress in measuring success. Shared leadership is viewed by the cohort as becoming omnipresent with such initiatives.

Conversely, cohort members unfold that although some AISI initiatives provide some of the best professional development, members seem to be gravitating toward isolated school improvement practice. For other members who have students involved in initiatives, the benefits that the initiative offers to students is observed, but most members are not directly involved with the initial planning, delivery, data collection or analyses, and reporting of the initiative. Consequently, they are not gaining experience in these areas to sustain the initiative. Even though funding for many projects has ended, it is noted that some components of the projects are managing to be sustained. In such cases, even though extra support offered by these projects is most valuable and appreciated,

there is no real soft or hard data being collected to evaluate the program because there is no longer a need to “prove” success for funding.

Some members of the cohort convey that AISI has the potential to be similar to “one shot” professional development initiatives. Without properly providing professional development, research, skills, knowledge, and pedagogy to AISI leaders, it is felt that they will not be able to develop plans for collaboration, improvement, and equally important, for sustained improvement. Furthermore, members believe that the leadership and processes need to be equally distributed and shared between all staff involved, not just the AISI leaders. In fact, in many instances, AISI leaders are being hired as distinct positions, or have AISI time built into their timetables, which also removes them from their class. Inevitably, members note that formal leaders must support the projects to make them successful and reduce some of these issues of leadership.

Cohort members continue to discover that in many AISI projects, schools are failing to measure growth and improvement. Members believe that data, which measures growth, should depend on a mixture of hard and soft data. There is no evidence to date that AISI is improving achievement at the provincial level. Finally, members are discovering that there are no measures to report the extent to which school members are buying into the school improvement process.

Presently, cohort members report that often data collection and student results are collected to “ensure funding for future years”. AISI projects require sustained involvement of the teachers and significant changes to their teaching practices. Members agree that in order for AISI to be successful, synergy between staff members needs to be

sustained, all staff members need to have “real” ownership in the project, and collaboration must occur to discuss possible project proposals or results.

On a positive note, there are many success stories relayed from some cohort members’ experiences. Members comment about being cautious about any “sweeping generalizations” regarding AISI. Everyone has different experiences based upon the context in which they teach. Professional development is flourishing and the process of professional development is becoming better structured as a result of AISI in some schools. In addition to this, many schools are adopting a cycle of inquiry approach to their research. Furthermore, varying degrees of teacher leadership are being developed in schools where AISI is being embraced.

*Professional learning communities.*

Although the cohort communicates a strong need for pedagogical inquiry, they also realize that school members are limited by time and knowledge in this area. Even more disconcerting, is the omission of the evaluative process, which measures the results of the implementation of these strategies. School leaders need to be educated in this area also, in order to lead in evaluating the degree of school improvement. However, once again time is identified by cohort members as a common barrier in developing a professional learning community.

The challenge cohort members are experiencing and anticipating is developing the ability of school members to function as professional learning communities. Cohort members are currently struggling or anticipating the struggle of moving school members from isolation to collaboration. The cohort generally believes that schools have failed to build truly collaborative cultures.

However; the cohort notes that little research has been done on how to create a PLC and the initial actions of school administration in developing a professional learning community. Experiences from cohort members portray situations where school members continue to use the lack of time as an excuse for any new initiative. Questions of dedication and commitment amongst staff members arise as a result of this discussion.

Cohort members also emphasize that in the absence of well-developed collegial relationships, staff will not engage in analysis, reflection, and re-development of personal practices that will lead to pedagogical improvement. The cohort is able to agree that there are still schools in which such “trust” has not been established due to the current leadership style and social repertoire of the leader. It is suggested by cohort members that the common structure of public education is a barrier to sharing amongst members. It is noted by others within the cohort that sharing within public schools is not an institutionalized practice nor is it a social norm, yet leaders must play an important role in establishing expectations for shared personal practice. The implementation of a PLC in a school could be perceived as a threat to teacher empowerment and the reluctance of individuals to buy in. Teachers often like to guard their ingenuity rather than having to share it. A teacher possesses authority and gains status as an authority of knowledge.

Cohort members feel that school structures often diminish against values and norms of sharing, measuring and analyzing data. Cohort opinions convey that the “top-down” approach to improvement fails to develop essential links between teacher learning, teacher practice, and student outcomes. Furthermore, the belief is that the failure of PLC’s in many schools is reflective of this approach.

Curricular innovation is somewhat limited by the standards-based approach to evaluation. Accountability to external forces further restricts effective, sustainable school improvement strategies. Very few members have the energy, time or finances to do research, attend conferences, collaborate constantly, reflect, and measure and analyze data.

Cohort members believe that schools are resistant to change. Honest reflection by cohort members discloses that the actual patterns of the school's leadership interactions and implementation of new strategies, and the reality, do not correspond to the foundational principles of PLC's. In fact, many cohort members refer to democratic structures that enable leadership capacity, but exist under autocratic leadership. This results in superfluous PLC's which lack authenticity. In such cases, goals can be accomplished but care needs to be taken in that an authentic impact is developed, celebrated and validated by the formal leader.

### *Effective Professional Practice and Professional Development Within a School*

#### *Leadership Context*

##### *Professional practice.*

Cohort members agree that all school leadership must have a sound understanding of educational pedagogy in order to lead the staff. Members conclude that at the least, school leaders should have sound confidence in the strategies and importance of implementing change in order for it to become a part of the school's culture.

Principals are catalysts who provide support, identify and acquire resources, and provide tools to connect plans at all levels. School leaders must be capable of developing superior school capacity to achieve effective learning and change.

Professional development is essential for facilitating systematic reform. Based upon the theory of andragogy, professional development for leaders should engage them in understanding the process of teaching and learning, align learning with goals, and provide follow-up and support. Cohort members suggest that the motivation, context, support, and diversity of learning experiences need to be addressed when planning and delivery professional development for school leaders.

Some cohort members share examples of administrators who model specific teaching skills to teachers who need some support and guidance in their practice. In such cases, lessons are planned and delivered to the students while instruction is modeled for the teachers. Cohort members communicate that this support proves to be very effective and appreciated.

Leaders discover emancipatory knowledge by observing and learning from master teachers and subject experts. Leaders who include experts on school leadership teams will benefit from attaining emancipatory knowledge. Leaders model learning when they collaborate with their staff or other leaders and attend sessions and conferences. When leaders return to their staff and share their learning and knowledge with the staff, they illuminate them, and ignite their enthusiasm. In turn, this will get staff motivated to learn too! Leaders can promote professional development by encouraging and supporting their staff to engage in professional development. The school leader who develops a culture of inspiration and innovation while using standards to assess student and teacher learning is truly an instructional leader.

The cohort members agree that permission must be given by leaders for structured discussions of differing values, beliefs, procedures, and knowledge.



Furthermore, flexibility, creativity, and willingness to take risks must be modeled, encouraged and supported at all levels. After all, school capacity determines the degree and level of development, and maintenance of school improvement. Creating and nurturing a staff's PLC is a step in the right direction.

Cohort members agree with Kochan, Bredeson and Riehl (2002) that the most successful and effective professional development strategy designed to develop effective school leaders is a Leadership program taken at the Graduate level. Such courses give aspiring leaders the opportunity to study, inquire, research, observe, practice, and reflect alongside exemplary school leaders of today. Cohort members also point out that it is obvious that their leadership cohort's program is an existing example of this.

The cohort views reflective practice as a means in which one considers, and re-considers, how they influence teaching, learning, and an orderly school environment. It is very clearly communicated by cohort responses that reflection should be routine, so that one does not become stuck in ineffective, unproductive routines. Persons must always consider and ponder other possibilities and outcomes. Everyone learns from experience through reflection whether they are conscious of it or not.

However, professionally, some of the most effective reflections are indeed the ones in which members have to record and re-visit over a period of time. For instance, writing Personal Platform Statements. In addition to this, one reflects by writing and reviewing their Personal Growth Plans and those of others. Persons can revisit and edit their written philosophies of education. Journal writing is another great way to reflect. Additionally, creating portfolios of learning experiences and processes is a strategy for

reflection. Each of these examples creates an artifact to refer back to and can be utilized for all three temporal styles of reflection.

Cohort members agree with Coombs (2003) that by reflecting they become conscious of their own actions and intentions as well as their biases and motives. Furthermore, being able to construe the actions and intentions of others comes with social experiences and skills. Continuous reflection keeps one current and on course.

*Knowledge creation.*

Individuals who take on the roles of boundary spanners are often seen as leaders within their respected areas within schools. Flow of information goes both ways through these people. Boundary spanners also function as knowledge conduits between outside organizations and schools. Sharing of knowledge upon returning from conventions, conferences, workshops, or in-services are all examples of sharing knowledge through boundary spanners identified by the cohort. Schools all seem to be functioning at various levels with respect to these examples. Once again leadership practices and school culture influence the degree to which boundary spanners effectively operate in the dissemination of knowledge.

Members of the cohort identify various conditions and factors, which assist in knowledge creation. They include: collaborative planning; distributive leadership; networking, functioning as a learning community; a culture that supports continual improvement; identifying and recognizing the value of staff expertise; opportunities for reflection, collaboration, dialogue, inquiry, and sharing; appreciation of diversity and deliberation; liberal approach to new ideas and initiatives; collaborative knowledge creation; and student centered approaches.

*School improvement.*

It is recognized that AISI has been created to improve the delivery of professional development in Alberta schools. The initiative funds staff growth and learning through action research, collaboration, team planning and professional in-service. The cohort constructs that the efficacy of the AISI programs largely depend on the leadership of the school. In reviewing some of the AISI projects and statistics, members conclude that school leadership paralleling the characteristics suggested by Hopkins (2000) supports sustainable improvements to student learning in AISI.

School improvement is viewed as being contingent on school culture. When individuals know and internalize exactly what “underlying assumptions” are desired within the school, they are more likely to cooperate and take ownership in the cause. Creating unique structures, processes, and common values and norms are viewed as essential in guiding school members towards successful improvement. School improvement is intended to be a collaborative, professional endeavor to improve learning for all members of the school community.

Improvement radiates from the most influential aspects of the school such as the administration and the teachers. Cohort members agree that administrators must involve themselves in the provision and improvement of instruction. The cohort finds much merit in Vasquez-Levy’s (2000) four-point plan for school improvement. Members convey that common vision, shared decision making, involvement in curriculum conversations, and pedagogical inquiry, are fundamental for change. The underlying essence of the cohort’s responses is that school improvement is essential to improve learning.

*Professional learning communities.*

Even though a few cohort members have not had the opportunity to participate in a professional learning community, they have no hesitation in finding the merit in functioning as professional learning communities. All members recognize that collaboration, inquiry into practice, action research and student voice are necessary for change. Furthermore all Alberta schools, parents, students and schools' staffs ideally will be involved in the PLC process, not just schools and staff with approved proposals and funding. Cohort members who include their entire school community members in their improvement processes attribute the degree of success to this strategy. Schools won't be producing and collecting data and results simply for "funding", but rather for identifying needs in areas where best practices for developing improved student learning are needed. Schools are planning and looking past a "three year cycle" in PLC's. They are not on a time limit for improvement projects. Schools are involving more staff and team leaders for continuity of the PLC development process. They are providing job-embedded, relevant, professional development opportunities for all staff. Most often cohort members report that much of their current professional development is failing because it does not follow these principles.

In addition to this Professional Growth Plans, if valued and used effectively, will allow individuals the opportunity for identifying their own professional growth needs. PLC's are systems strategies that recognize learning communities have goals to maximize learning by creating a community that is supportive of the individuals' needs for empowerment through a collective shared mission.

*Future Needs of Professional Practice and Professional Development Within a School Leadership Context*

*Professional practice.*

The cohort agrees that it is imperative that educators remain current with all aspects of education to employ best practices and improved learning. An andragogical framework centered around sound practices which form on the foundation of school leaders as model learners, stewards of learning, and community builders is essential. A very common sense hypothesis cohort responses noted was that best practices and principles of adult learning must be incorporated in developing school members as leaders. Furthermore the cohort agrees that these principles will improve adult learning, and motivate and encourage adults to continue learning.

Leaders need to spend more time designing solutions that best fit their situations rather than accepting packaged, quick-fix solutions. This way, professional development will be effectively linked to their own practice and context in which they lead. As a result it is extremely important for school leaders to participate in planning and directing their professional development programs and frameworks. They need to have input into the type of professional development that would best suit their needs. In addition to this, the cohort members' experiences indicate that there are rarely sessions for leaders at teacher conventions. One solution may be for stakeholders in education such as board members, administrators, teacher leaders, community members, and university faculties to engage in ongoing discussions about the adequacy of existing professional development. District administrator meetings, mentorship programs for practicing and developing leaders, leadership sessions at conventions, creating PLC's for leaders, and conferences would

support these activities. Retreats, peer visiting and time to collaborate with other leaders are strategies to help support these recommendations. Equally important is the use of technology for professional development. It is an unlimited resource, and often time and cost effective.

Cohort members believe that it is important for leaders to realize that their school culture and traits are very unique. Leaders must embrace the distinctive and inclusive context and culture of the school. The role of the principal may need to be revised with consideration to each school's context. School culture influences the way in which one responds to change and reform efforts. It determines how one creates a culture of improved learning. Leaders need to create structures and cultures of learning. They must model and share learning. Cohort members believe that successful leaders must take the lead in learning even though they are responsible for addressing many other overwhelming, management and administrative demands. It is essential for leaders to become continuous learners and stimulate and motivate others to engage in learning together. Members believe that exercising transformational leadership internally will initiate the process for teacher leaders to uphold continuous professional development. Leadership that is shared, dispersed, or distributed among all members at all levels is a common thread to school improvement being mentioned by the cohort.

Hierarchies need to be dissolved and staff empowered to engage in meaningful, long-term, deliberate, and supported school improvement. Teachers need to be empowered to engage in practices which will offer them increased ownership and responsibility for desired changes. In fact, they recognizably parallel Vasquey-Levy's (2001) strategies for a grounded cultural foundation. Cohort members commonly identify

the following constructs that they believe school improvement requires for a cultural foundation: collaboration; focus on continuous learning; time for members to engage in reflection; analysis; knowledge based research and learning; context sensitive change initiatives; continuous improvement efforts; and sustaining school improvement.

Leaders are challenged to support and enhance professional development by combining internal and external influences. Engaging in active action research will support methods and test new innovations. Funding, district policies, and educational experts are necessary external influences needed for successful professional development. Pedagogical inquiry can be enhanced through partnerships with education-oriented organizations such as universities or community organizations. In any event, learning must be celebrated through sharing and presenting new knowledge to others. Staff should have the opportunity to share their professional development experiences with the staff.

Leaders must keep the focus on improving learning. They must possess a repertoire of pedagogical skills, insights, and understanding in order to sustain improvement, measure successes against goals, and make observations purposeful and meaningful. Reflective practice is a skill which helps leaders to make purposeful, inclusive, and values focused decisions, and predict and plan for the future. The process of reflection needs on the job modeling, training and support in order to connect the theory and practice behind it. Furthermore, one needs to be critical with their reflections.

Cohort members maintain that creating effective schools means that they need to recruit, develop, nurture and support effective school leaders. The Alberta's Commission on learning supports this by recommending that a quality practice standard be developed for principals, a new program be established to prepare and certify

principals, and a new Council of Education Executives be established to provide certification, ongoing support and professional development for principals and vice principals (Alberta's Commission on Learning, 2003).

*Knowledge creation.*

Knowledge audits should be designed for schools so that a planned and coordinated strategy can be employed to share existing knowledge and create new knowledge. Explicit knowledge can be audited in schools fairly easily. Tacit knowledge is not easy to audit, as it is not as easily articulated. Therefore, it is vital to create a collaborative school culture where sharing and curriculum conversations aid in the transfer of explicit knowledge to tacit knowledge within the school. The use of artifacts to disseminate knowledge also assists in forming a common language and an atmosphere of sharing within school settings.

Leaders are viewed as visionaries who must empower others. Teacher empowerment appears to be the common element in successful school improvement. Rotating responsibilities allows for renewal and for perspective. Leadership for active and sustained school improvement requires that all participants share roles and learn new skills. Cohort members note that genuine commitment of all members as an additional element necessary for school improvement. Leaders must be able to recognize and encourage those who are not committed to the school improvement process. On that note, administrators as well as staff should be partners in school PLC teams. They should take an active role on the teams rather than just supervising and leading the direction of the teams. This is a great opportunity for administrators at all levels to expand their



repertoires and learning capacities. School members must model continuous learning and collaboration if they expect others to follow by example.

It is the leader's responsibility to create leadership capacity among members. Leaders must figure out how to motivate and inspire their members' commitment and desire to learn. They need to provide opportunities for organization members to exchange ideas and discuss issues. Teacher engagement must permeate the structure for the temporary membership concept to occur. Time is needed for members to research current beliefs, and methodology in a timely fashion that must be considered when creating structures that enhance the culture of the school. Leaders must be involved and aware of what is happening within their school in order to establish parameters for critical action research. The principal must feel ownership and set the direction of change for others to follow and lead. It is important to note that principals must have enough of a knowledge base to espouse desired organizational changes based upon their moral imperative and educational philosophy.

Schools with evidence to support their school improvement efforts have lead teachers who synchronize the agenda, and promote the vision. Cohort members emphasize the importance of ensuring that all school members are on board and working towards a collective vision. School visions should be reflected in the school improvement plan. Reflection of the district's vision, individual beliefs, and collective values are essential in determining the degree of support for resources, optimal motivation, and ownership, which is necessary for sustainable organizational improvement. As a result, it is important for leaders to recognize, respect, and encourage the sharing of the knowledge and skills of their school members.

The leader's role is to endorse, protect, and defend the school's vision and values and to confront any behavior that is incongruent with the school's vision and values. Effective leaders passionately facilitate a deliberate focus on clear, evolutionary visions and allow best practices to flourish. Deliberate focus is necessary to guide manageable, desired change. The vision acts as an action statement, which allows for critical reflection, analysis, and revision. Vision statements should be revisited regularly with the staff to adjust and refine the vision. Vision statements reflect the moral purpose of the leader, and even more important for leaders, create continuous discourse amongst members to reaffirm and promote the shared vision of the school. This will also reduce inconsistencies of practice amongst members. Organizational members who are willing to take risks in the exploration of the vision, are those who will sustain improvement efforts. Such individuals require administrative support both emotionally and structurally.

Cohort members realize that providing time is certainly an area where schools need to become more creative with scheduling and planning to allow for PLC, professional development, collaborative time, planning initiatives, and meaningful reflection. Schools also have to focus and make time for staff to share new learning or encourage the integration of new approaches into existing practices. Hopefully schools will work towards supporting and encouraging the sharing of new knowledge and practices by creating more time for the staff to accomplish these processes. It is important to deal with this issue of organization and process.

Cohort members are very clear on insuring that school members and their time must be valued and respected by providing authentic, collaborative, and reflective development. This is seen as vital in order to model and generate enthusiasm and

motivation to encourage inquiry, collaboration, organizational learning, and learning about leadership which are all required for sustained school improvement. Flexibility, creativity, and willingness to take risks must be modeled, encouraged and supported at all levels.

Consensus building and trust are essential to collaborative decision-making. Collaboration promotes accountability, respect, ownership, and empowerment. Collaboration requires a shift in many existing school cultures, and is necessary for improvement. In order to develop professional communities focused on improving lifelong learning, leaders must be innovative in finding ways of decreasing teacher isolation and breaking down the barriers to provide opportunities for collaboration and reflection to occur. Even more important however, is the need to provide members with some of the skills necessary to facilitate for collaboration and reflection.

It is important for leaders to listen to the collaboration and support the collaborative whole. Supporting teacher growth and organizational change are considered to be the grass roots approach of collaboration and sharing of best practices, which develop social networks and curriculum leaders. This leads to commitment, ownership, and sustainability rather than compliance. Staff members are more likely to assume accountability for the education of all students with a collective approach to school improvement.

Leaders demonstrate faith in their members and are rewarded with loyalty, and commitment from these members toward school improvement. Cohort members find merit in including the voices of all school community members in decision-making and leadership roles. Instinctively, staff and students who have these opportunities are more

motivated, engaged in learning, and committed to school. They take ownership and buy into the process. Staffs' and students' collaborative approach to assessment is a great example of this.

Effective leaders must plant the seeds for discussion and purposeful action. Cohort members commonly value curriculum conversations. Members report that such conversations are important for both subject specific groups, and across curricular areas. School improvement relies on a deep understanding of curricular relationships.

Teacher supervision and evaluation should be part of effective school improvement and professionalism. Pedagogy and effective planning must continually be led and supported by the leader. Principals must be well informed before initiating ideas and strategies for change in order to assist and support purposeful change. As a result, it is imperative that resources are available to continuously educate our administrators.

#### *School improvement.*

Cohort members recognize that improvement in student learning must be the desired outcome of school change and improvement. Leaders have to orchestrate making teaching and learning important, making school improvement everybody's business, and making personal commitment a reality for their members. Schools must focus on best practices that result in best results within their unique school contexts. Increasing capacities within the school is anticipated to improve student learning. Most importantly, it is when restructuring can be continued or sustained that school improvement will occur.

Learning communities do not evolve by chance. Leaders create learning communities through a determined effort to building the capacity of the school and its'

community to function as a true learning community. Cohort members construct that school improvement is rooted in building a capacity for learning. Members convey that capacity building should be the fundamental work within a school. The cohort identifies Jackson's (2000) framework of Improving the Quality of Education For All (IQEA), as a credible framework for a persuasive journey in school improvement. Members view IQEA as having a strong foundation, being well grounded, and multi-dimensional. The structure of IQEA is viewed as flexible in response to ongoing growth and the changing needs at the individual and school level.

Cohort members agree that if they want their school improvement to be ongoing and sustainable, they must build their school's improvement and learning capacities. In order to create capacity for a learning community, leaders need to focus attention on personal, interpersonal and organizational capacity. Schools need to build an internal capacity within their school to deal with and support new understandings. As a result, schools need to infuse school improvement practices into their members' daily practices.

Cohort members also believe that they must focus on broader measures of school success, rather than just academic achievement and efficient management. Schools have become the center for a range of community services and supports that address student and family needs. This means that all school personnel must work collaboratively with students, families, community members, and human service providers in goal setting, program planning, problem solving and sharing responsibility for the outcomes of their work.

AISI assists in de-privatizing the knowledge base of some organizational members. Many of these projects provide opportunities for deep pedagogical

conversations to occur. In these cases, members are able to discuss, experiment, and respond to their knowledge. Furthermore, members are able to reflect on their own practices, learn new practices, and reflect on their new knowledge.

Cohort members recognize the need for a structure that sustains a comprehensive, cohesive, measurable approach to school improvement. In essence the members of the cohort identify that school improvement must be linked to measurable improvement in student results. In order for school members to be able to conduct meaningful discussions about school improvement they must analyze baseline data, set targets, and outline the evidence that they will collect to determine progress. It is important to collect both quantitative and meaningful qualitative data. Principals must ensure that they initiate and facilitate the collection and interpretation of, and reflection about assessment data.

*Professional learning communities.*

Cohort members unanimously identify the development of professional learning communities as one of the most effective strategies for sustained, substantive school improvement. Cohort members value a shared mission, collective vision, common goals, values and beliefs, and collaboration as essential elements in developing as a PLC. The cohort's collective voice continually references the school's vision as being vital in the impetus to develop as a PLC.

Cohort members discuss the relative importance of collegiality within the PLC. In fact, it is noted that collegiality nurtures leadership capacity in members. An effective school leader needs to distribute responsibility for assessment and reflection amongst their members. They need to be able to share authority and participate in leadership and

follower capacities. One distinction that cohort members state is that leading in today's schools involves adequate social skills to lead PLC's, group reflection, shared decision-making, collaborative cultures, and the ability, confidence and trust to distribute leadership. Schools are a reflection of our community's traditions and values. Thus, the collective, shared voice of all members prior to implementing a significant change is crucial.

The cohort concurs with the prevalent belief that supports capital development primarily through social relationships. Building strong relationships and trust are two ambiances, which seem to pervade the entire process of school improvement. This statement relates to almost all aspects of student, teacher, and leader learning, and sustained improvement at any level of the school organization. Schools are composed of individuals who carry human frailties of fear, vulnerability, and complacency. The human element must be attended to before productive learning will occur. Leaders will only be effective leaders if they are truly sensitive to, and aware of the needs of those with whom they work.

Social capital is crucial to frame relationships. It is closely tied in with school climate and culture. Social capital and its components are essential and delicate tools for school leaders interested in establishing a culture of collaboration, reflection, and inquiry. Cohort members identify social capital as trust, reliability and integrity of staff members, and social relations. Professionalism and respect should be adhered to on both sides in all professional relationships. For sustained change, all community members must become more professional in how they act and interact. Professional behavior simplifies and clarifies complex roles regardless of the level of social and human capital.

Cohort members strongly believe that these social attributes are the foundation for developing human capital. Cohort members profess that social capital allows the human capital of some group members to assist in the development of the human capital of other group members. It is conveyed by cohort members that the development of human elements within the structures must be made a focus during reform. Social and human capital dramatically influences school climate and culture. Leaders must desire the development of human and social capital amongst their staff and school the same way that teachers desire to develop it within their classrooms. Leaders play a key role in this development. Leaders' connections with staff must be based on respect, congeniality, and mutual confidence. However; one must not ignore collegiality. Schools require deeply talented and committed leaders to develop their individual and collective social and human capitals. There is an enduring need for school leaders who can craft a balance between strong ties within their staff and connections to external professional sources. Leaders who foster strong staff relationships and nourishing external ties are indicative of complex and involved skill sets. A blend of skills and understandings is necessary to successfully develop the social capital of a staff, consequently increasing their productivity. Strong social relationships and interactions are also essential to reveal essential and valuable tacit knowledge. Cohort members reflect that effective leaders value, participate, encourage, and facilitate strong social relationships amongst their members.

School members must be aware that, distributing leadership or delegating responsibilities alone, does not work. It is crucial for leaders to share cooperative leadership opportunities with their members. There are two opinions on the notion of



leaders being actively involved in PLC's. Some cohort members feel that it was important for leaders to actively encourage and participate in collegial work, while others feel that this would simply cause further dependency upon the leader, or restrict members' freedom and risk-taking. Many members support the notion of administrators being actively involved in PLC teams, continued professional development and teacher collaboration. As a result, it is felt that leaders will be able to provide a supportive relationship between themselves and the teachers. Furthermore, it is being experienced or anticipated by cohort members that this type of leadership promotes responsibility, trust, and accountability.

Social capital enhances the knowledge, skills and efficacy of the teachers, being their human capital. Teaching practicums, mentoring, peer observations, team teaching and collaboration result from a person's social context. Naturally, these processes increase human capital.

Cohort members outline balancing internal and external ties, fostering trust amongst their members, managing the work of their members, communicating and enforcing norms and expectations, and initiating and establishing channels for new information as leadership responsibilities. Once again the "finding time" issue, and monitoring the effective use of time for teachers is a managerial responsibility. The creation and monitoring of such time is evidence that administrative creativity and commitment to the PLC is strong. Providing time for members to reflect and study is seen as critical in the development of a PLC. Many members caution that schools should be focusing on the effective use of time rather than the amount of time made available.

Changing the structure will challenge, but not necessarily change, one's natural leadership style, personality, morals, values, beliefs, and relationships, if one does not let it. On the other hand, qualitative findings presented by the Alberta Administrator's Council at convention, suggests that since Ontario and British Columbia's administrators have been removed from their respective unions, their social and human capital development is benefiting. They did not discuss how this decision is affecting the teachers in these unions. Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, they were unable to find any data on the benefits that this decision is offering to the students. Nonetheless, it was clearly stated, that the decision would be political, regardless of school members' input. Despite the government's decision on the direction in which this recommendation will assume, school members will adapt.

The common theme explored by the cohort while they examine reciprocal influences is capacity building. In fact, it is revealed that capacity building is a theme that had transcended throughout all of the discussions throughout the cohort's course. Capacity building emphasizes the significance of transformational leadership in creating a positive school culture that allows for notable change to occur. Structures must be developed in each school that allow for an increase in shared responsibility for student outcomes. Capacity building requires shared responsibility amongst all stakeholders with a collective vision that translates into improved learning. Practicing shared leadership to develop change agents, in addition to gradual and prudent implementation of change, results in meaningful improvement for all members.

All cohort members agree with Ancess (2000) that change must come from within. Members' responses to this notion indicate that flexibility in district policies is

needed in order to accommodate various school populations, and increase the schools' capacities to provide cerebral education. It is apparent from cohort responses that flexibility is key to providing purposeful, contextual, and meaningful learning for all.

Cohort members state the importance that the reciprocal, evolving restructuring process must include continuous learning for all members, implementation of innovative and best teaching practices in each school's context. A common thread recognized in responses from cohort members is, that teachers need to generate their own knowledge through experimentation, discovery, and application, rather than reproducing it from external professional development programs. A continual process of self-reflection and collaboration amongst teachers fosters advanced teacher learning by focusing not only on the product, but on the process as well. Thus professional development should be site-based, relevant, timely, teacher led, and developed for the context in which it will be applicable. Uniqueness of each school's culture and its impact on student outcomes must be considered. Furthermore, this type of professional development reveals the extremely valuable tacit knowledge form members.

Cohort members feel that Ancess' (2000) timely advise with his cluster of nine conditions which make change possible, assists in aligning pedagogical and organizational structures with the learning needs of the students. This advise and merges perfectly with PLC's where the intent is to focus on activities such as action research, backwards design, assessment for learning, peer mentoring, team teaching, and collaborative teams in striving to generate contextual, goal oriented, relevant knowledge.

Cohort members are intrigued by the fact that Ancess' (2000) findings observed student benefits as more than simply, improved academic success. It is exciting for

members to discover that there is actually proof of diversity in measuring student improvement in Ancess' (2000) studies. The study irrefutably focuses on a cycle of continuous inquiry and improvement and reveals certain change processes which concentrate on improving the whole child as well as their learning success. Even more impressive for members, is their discovery that educators who were interviewed, supported and valued the development of students as responsible, disciplined, contributing, productive members of society. Schools are responsible for educating each and every student.

It is sensed that Ancess' meaningful and effective process of school reform would certainly prompt dialogue amongst staff members within a school. In fact, members suggest that it could be used to assess a school's current state of affairs, form a basis of a brainstorming tool, generate questions, and ensuing research in reference to other models of school structure.

The importance of continuously ensuring that the extra effort is put into applying learning to "real life" situations, and goals is recognized. Schools need to look beyond the walls of public education and innovate to adequately prepare our students for a life long journey. Student education is not just about academics. Practical, artistic, problem-solving, and experimental programs are necessary to improve student education. Students can then apply their knowledge and skills in context for more meaningful and purposeful learning, achievement of goals, and assessment. Furthermore, cohort members believe that it reinforces the importance of student involvement in their learning and assessment for learning.

### *Summary*

Undoubtedly educational change is conveyed by the cohort as being complex, non-linear, and often random. School members must expect unpredictable shifts and fragmented initiatives. As a result, it is essential that school leadership be future oriented and strategically focused. The data suggests that cohort members view leadership as the main factor in school improvement.

The cohort examines how leadership influences and correlates with professional development and professional growth. Members believe that leaders must provide a vision for the school community, focus their members on continuous improvement, and stay current with research and best practices within the educational field. Furthermore, they profess that professional development needs to be anchored in a quest for knowledge that links current pedagogy, and stimulates improved student achievement. Professional development is viewed as a critical tool for leaders to stay current with issues in education, implement innovations and refine their practice. More specifically, cohort members believe that it is essential for facilitating systematic reform.

Essentially, the data presented conveys that changes are needed in the ways that professional development is presented and delivered. Inevitably, continuous professional development and support is crucial to a leader's success. All stakeholders in education must collaboratively design and support a framework for re-defining and re-culturing the professional development of school leaders. It is hypothesized that leaders are the key to ensure not only their own professional development, but also the development of others in the school community. They must be able to create strong learning cultures. Leaders

who allow for learner innovation will foster inspiration as a teaching standard. When school cultures articulate continuous positive growth in a nurturing safe environment, learning becomes infectious. Leaders who inspire teachers to set high learning standards positively influence school culture. Effective leadership places standards on student learning and professional development within a culture of inspiration and innovation.

The cohort constructs that professional development must be continuous, aligned with goals, accountability provisions, and new initiatives, build pedagogical knowledge, model best instructional practices at all levels, be collaborative, collegial, context sensitive, and school-based. This Elmore and Burney quote cited from in Fullan (2001) sums up the link between professional development and leadership: “ professional development is what administrative leaders do when they are doing their jobs, not a specialized function that some people in the organization do and others do not” (p. 57). The leader’s role is to build in professional development so that it is perceived as a regular routine rather than an add-on. Schools need to be creative in planning and scheduling. School members need to use the time of each and every staff member more effectively and productively. Teachers must be accountable and committed to their own professional development. Schools cannot take time for professional development away from student learning time.

The challenge for all leaders is to recognize the value of reflective practice, to develop the habit of reflection practices, and to keep the past in sight but at the same time, focus on what can be for student learning. Reflective thought for transforming practice by reconstructing problems, individuals’ teaching practices, and assumptions related to the problem are very relevant for school members in Alberta due to the current

framework of accountability, and the budding development of leadership standards. Practical reflection results in moral and ethical decision making, which shapes moral character. Effective leadership encourages, supports, enhances, and compliments the process of problem reconstruction.

Some Alberta schools' knowledge dissemination processes are successfully functioning similar to Spillane, Coldrin, and Diamond's (2001) theory of knowledge dissemination. However, disparity exists in other schools' knowledge dissemination processes, while still other schools must address strengths, weaknesses, and completely absent aspects in their process of knowledge dissemination.

Cohort members recognize that knowledge must be created, but most importantly, validated. It is important for school members to be able to distinguish between a good idea, good practice, and best practice. Knowledge validation has been somewhat unrefined and nebulous in schools. This is an area which needs improvement in order for knowledge validation to become more effective. The importance of actually exploring these processes within schools needs attention.

Leaders need to know the intellectual inventory of their school and be able to imbue this knowledge into individuals on staff who lack such knowledge. Teachers should be included in the creation of professional knowledge, so that it can be applicable within their school's context. Leaders need to foster and encourage meaningful knowledge creation and dissemination. Essentially, leaders must prepare and engage teachers in auditing, managing, validating, and disseminating meaningful knowledge about pedagogy and curriculum. It is imperative that knowledge dissemination is authentic rather than synthetic.

Communication is the most important boundary object for effective professional development and practice between teachers and administrators. Artifacts provide the substance for learning, while boundary spanners will ensure that the knowledge spans to the entire professional learning community. Leaders must empower their members and validate their efforts. Providing the foundation upon which teacher knowledge and pedagogy will be learned and unlearned, debated, and constructed is imperative. Leaders must then establish a culture and climate for sharing and learning.

The foundational boundary object that facilitates continuous learning is consensus decision making. Teachers only choose to work in isolation when they feel incompetent or insecure. The investment of time to develop a process of consensus decision-making and building trust amongst all members of the learning community will strengthen the commitment of the members, and sustain improvements.

Alternative approaches to leadership must work in both principle and practice. Cohort members believe that there is no perfect, single style of leadership. The cohort constructs that schools today require leaders who will employ a number of leadership styles that met the needs their unique school settings with an emphasis on transformational and instructional leadership, acknowledge and promote independent professional development, student achievement, and school improvement with meaningful feedback and evaluation, restructure our organizations to accommodate professional development, and educate teachers, public, and government on the impact and importance of professional development on student achievement.

Education is a dynamic profession where the knowledge and skills are ever changing as are the needs of the client. Value is seen by cohort members in Spillane's et



al. (2003) suggestion that is imperative for educators to remain current with all aspects of education, knowledge of the subject matter content, general pedagogy, pedagogical content, curriculum, educational contexts, and educational ends, purposes, and values. One solution to this is the theory of distributive leadership where leadership roles are distributed amongst experts on staff.

Cohort members believe that accountability framed within a paradigm of control may destroy improvement initiatives as moral responsibility and commitment are eroded away and compliance is all that prevails. In such cases, transformational leadership needs to be injected with a strong dose of moral leadership. Shared and participatory leadership throughout all levels is crucial.

AISI is one initiative, which presents many of the favorable conditions and factors that are considered regarding knowledge-creation. Although AISI initiates the flow of information, the implementation of new knowledge remains marginalized. AISI promotes informal, distributive leadership to establish more effective and meaningful professional development. Knowledge is contextual and develops through interaction. Knowledge is constructed, engaged in, and divested amongst AISI groups through social interaction, but fails to disseminate this knowledge to the larger school community.

Cohort members view student outcomes and quality of student performance as influential methods of inspiring the restructuring of teacher learning, and teacher practice. Review and changes of leadership and professional development practices are identified as a type of pedagogical reform that will lead schools to continuity and sustainability. Sharing of cohort members suggests that schools are progressively abandoning traditional

methods and are attempting to focus on revealing effective strategies and conditions that promote teacher inquiry, which is targeted on improving student learning in most schools.

Cohort members warn about falling short of evaluating the benefits that fostering and cultivating social and human capital development have on improving learning. Schools are so wrapped up in all of this, and yet they ignore the importance of providing evidence to support the benefits for students. This refers to any possible benefits for students, not just academic. It is not possible to prove that schools and instruction are improving without measuring the benefits to the students. If schools and instruction are improving, schools should naturally observe the students benefiting. The opinions of Cohort members are clear in nailing the importance of focusing on social, emotional, and academic improvement for all members.

Essentially, the quality of school members' relationships is the crux in all of this. Schools can have all the material things and great people in an organization, but unless the social relationships are built on trust and strong among the people, and human elements such as beliefs, habits, knowledge, methods, behaviors, and skills are in sync at all levels, sustained improvement will not occur. Effective leaders are essential to establishing successful learning communities and effective schools. Successful and effective schools operate as learning organizations.

Realistically speaking, it is recognized by cohort members that it is unreasonable to expect that all schools will have all of these conditions present. Regardless, schools must not use excuses to keep themselves from trying to do their best within the conditions that exist while they toil to improve learning.

Cohort members convey that school environments are very complex. Schools house much more than education, and have become a forum for an overabundance of societal issues. Society relies on school organizations to find solutions to societal issues and reconstruct problem situations in society. Fundamental to all this, schools are struggling as professionals to enhance trust and credibility with society, develop as professional learning communities to improve and sustain learning, and preserve the teaching profession. The professional development that was delivered for the cohort as a result of their deliberations in this Ed (5500 OL) course has addressed these issues. Cohort members realize that they all labor in various complex, unpredictable, diverse, and accountable cultures. As a result, professional development and growth opportunities, experiences, and outcomes are divergent for each of them. Clearly the specific context in which each member functions, influences their approaches to achieving professional commitments.

Cohort members have been well informed about the nature of leadership, the practice of inquiry, establishing a learning culture, and conducting professional growth collaboratively and coherently by aligning their strategies with system goals, needs, and resources. The degree to which they value and benefit from this knowledge is contingent upon their exploitation of it. Without doubt, cohort members conclude that shared, distributed leadership is imperative to establish the foundation for building capacity and sustainable improvement in their highly complex, diverse school environments.

## Chapter VII

### Conclusion

The participants in this study were a selected group of twenty-one cohort members. Rubrics for the assignments analyzed in this study indicate that cohort members had an obligation in this course to suggest strategies that would implement the context and intent of the assigned articles in practice. In doing so, the results from this study suggest that the cohort mainly focused their assignment efforts on sharing and conveying what they considered to be effective practices and professional development within a school leadership context for school improvement. In addition to this, members offered extensive views on the future needs to improve practices and professional development within a school leadership context for school improvement.

Cohort members were also required to construct real life situations and settings to illustrate the extent to which principles or constructs from the assigned articles were applied in practice. Thus, positive and negative experiences with leadership practices and professional development evolved from cohort responses and submissions in an effort to fill this requirement.

Irrefutably examining, critiquing, reflecting, and discussing various juxtaposing methods, pedagogies, and outcomes of each issue and initiative in practice at all levels, was to all intents and purposes, a predominantly constructive form of professional development for improving practice. This course provided cause for reflection and knowledge to better examine, understand, define and construct professional development and practice of school leaders, and the state in which many of their schools are operating.

By design, it cautions school members not to be drawn into overemphasizing one aspect of reform at the expense of other equally imperative components. Educators must thoughtfully and systematically examine weaknesses in their practice with the obdurate courage to continually self-assess for learning as professionals, for the enrichment of those whom they influence.

Currently in Alberta, professional development is becoming closely aligned with new understandings about pedagogy, school improvement plans and goals, school improvement initiatives, and high expectations for student achievement. Furthermore, professional development must be planned so that the areas of inquiry are connected to school outcomes and data. School leaders must recognize their influence on school culture in promoting improvement of pedagogy, and promotion of data analysis. Professional development has been the means to school improvement, and plans must be developed for schools and leaders that are responsive to the school's context, coherent amongst school members, aligned with goals, and diligently tracked through student achievement.

Many questions about AISI still remain unanswered: Have divisions implemented the learning from cycle one into their policies and programs? What about the schools or the staff who do not have the opportunity to be involved in AISI? Are they left in the dust? Is the province monitoring which schools and which grades are involved and encouraging or expecting that all schools and grades will get on board? Kindergarten to Grade three seems to have had the most projects. Does this mean that these groups of educators should be ahead in capacity building, professional development and improved student learning? How valid are locally developed tests, assessments and reports? There

were no “large” effects on achievement in table 4.6 (AISI, 2004, p. 34). Are satisfaction results then, more important in the beginning of an initiative? Will the higher satisfaction results in cycle one lead to higher achievement results in cycle 2? It is promising to read that cycle two should focus on finding better measures and more in-depth analysis of results (AISI, 2004). How do we know which variables actually increased the satisfaction and student learning? For example, the small, focused group variable is bound to improve results whether it is an AISI project or not. Furthermore, there are too many uncontrollable variables in this type of report.

AISI sounds wonderful, realistically however, as with any initiative, it is only as good as the resources, which support it, and the people who surround and embrace it. As with most initiatives, money is the key, which transforms into people and time. It has been doubted that AISI has created more intelligent educators, but it certainly has provided the money for the resources to improve student and teacher learning.

Professional Learning Communities propose to do the same thing, but with much less money. Having developed even as far as some schools have with PLC's, schools would be better prepared to understand and effectively implement AISI today than they were five years ago. In essence, that is what schools are doing in their PLC's, but without all the paper work, timely pressures, reporting and funding. PLC's seem to be a more natural, realistic, common sense approach to sustained school improvement.

If schools can create PLC's slowly but surely, through school based professional development, expert teacher leaders, collaboration, and shared learning experiences, knowledge and pedagogy, this initiative may sustain improvement more

efficiently and effectively in the long run, than AISI. In summary, successful and effective schools operate as learning organizations.

Generalizations derived from such findings should always be made with prudence. Even so, the data provided is representative of a vast number of experiences with leadership practices and professional development strategies from multiple schools and divisions, within rural and urban Alberta. Thus, it is practical to assume, that the findings of this study will have a degree of significance for other schools and divisions in Alberta and beyond. Consequently, these findings have a corresponding degree of relevance to the future planning of professional development and fundamental practices of school leaders.

Future studies, which continue to examine the professional development and practice of school leaders and the influence and effect that they have on school improvement, will be essential and constructive in advancing and sustaining school improvement efforts in the continuous pursuit of improved learning and school improvement.

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