

**RURAL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF LEADERSHIP PRACTICES  
INFLUENCING EFFICACY**

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## **Dedication**

To all the leaders who have been the yin and yang to my journey as an educator -  
to those who have fueled my conviction that education can be so much better and those  
who have shown me that it's entirely possible.

## **Abstract**

Teacher efficacy and resilience have been shown as influential in teacher retention, achieving student outcomes, and educational change. This study sought to gain insights into leadership practices that highly efficacious teachers perceived to impact their effectiveness. Nine highly efficacious teachers from a rural school division in Alberta were interviewed. Data were analyzed using a phenomenological thematic approach. Findings revealed the importance of relationships, collective responsibility, clear direction, positive reinforcement, investment, communication, learning, and feeling part of a team. Recommendations outline key leadership characteristics and practices that may influence teacher efficacy, including: developing strong personal relationships; being visible and present to remain connected to classroom practices and pedagogy; cultivating trust; utilizing strong communication skills to support and guide teachers, as well as set direction and expectations; effective and responsive instructional leadership; and providing structures to support teacher collaboration.

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## Table of Contents

Dedication .....	iii
Abstract .....	iv
Acknowledgements .....	v
Table of Contents .....	vi
List Of Tables .....	xiii
List Of Figures .....	xiv
Chapter One: Introduction .....	1
The Purpose of the Study .....	3
Rationale and Significance .....	4
Context .....	5
Definition of Key Terms and Constructs .....	8
Chapter Two: Literature Review .....	12
Conceptualizing Efficacy and Its Measurement Tools .....	12
Rotter's theoretical framework .....	13
Bandura's social learning theory .....	16
Bandura's sources of efficacy .....	18
Processes regulating the activation of efficacy .....	20
Combined Theoretical Frameworks .....	22
Distinguishing Between Self-Efficacy and Other Constructs .....	23

Other related and competing conceptualizations .....	24
General criticisms of self-efficacy theory .....	26
Connections Between Self-Efficacy and Teacher Effectiveness .....	28
Retention of teachers within the profession .....	28
Classroom outcomes .....	31
Teacher belief systems about students, learning, and their ability level .....	31
Pedagogical strategies and classroom environment .....	32
Impacting and Changing Self-Efficacy .....	34
Efficacy and years of teaching experience .....	34
Situational factors .....	35
Leadership and Efficacy .....	36
Fostering resilience in teachers .....	37
Goal setting and visionary leadership .....	38
Charismatic and collegial leadership qualities .....	41
School climate .....	42
Professional development and efficacy .....	44
Current Efficacy and Efficacy Related Research .....	45
Efficacy and The Research Question .....	46
Chapter Three: Methodology .....	48
Epistemological and Ontological Assumptions .....	48
Utilizing a Phenomenological Method .....	50
Participant Selection .....	53

Data Collection: Self-Efficacy Scale .....	57
Survey data analysis.....	60
Survey results.....	64
Data Collection: Conducting Interviews.....	65
Interview data analysis.....	70
Validity and Trustworthiness.....	74
Validity .....	74
Trustworthiness.....	76
Verisimilitude .....	78
Researcher Bias.....	79
Study Timeline.....	80
Summary.....	81
Chapter Four: Results and Findings.....	82
Contextual Variables Impacting Efficacy .....	83
Relationships.....	84
Teacher voice .....	85
Trust and autonomy .....	86
Honesty, feedback, and vulnerability.....	87
Collective Responsibility .....	87
Sense of belonging and collaboration .....	88
Engagement and student-centred philosophy .....	89
Follow through and realistic expectations .....	92



Direction .....	93
Instructional leadership .....	93
Communication and clarity of expectations, purpose, and vision .....	94
School culture .....	97
Positive reinforcement .....	98
Acknowledgement, encouragement, and reassurance .....	98
Social and Emotional Supports Perceived by Teachers to Impact Efficacy .....	100
Investment .....	100
Relationships, care, personalization, and flexibility .....	100
Involvement with students .....	102
Communication .....	104
Conversation and a non-judgemental approach .....	104
Experience and listening .....	105
Learning .....	106
Relevant professional development and collaboration .....	106
Modeling .....	108
Feelings of Efficaciousness .....	109
Protection .....	109
Support, safety, and trust .....	109
Team Feelings .....	112
Collaboration and feeling confident and valued .....	113
Clarity of expectations .....	114
Leadership Characteristics Valued by Highly Efficacious Teachers .....	115

Relationship centred.....	116
Relationship focused, student-centred, and caring .....	116
Intentional, present, and visible .....	118
Cultivates trust .....	119
Trustworthy and trusting .....	119
Believes in people and provides autonomy .....	120
Vulnerable, transparent, honest, and open .....	121
Effective communicator .....	123
Communicating and listening .....	123
Supportive and strength-based .....	124
Instructional leader.....	125
Understanding classroom realities and being action oriented.....	126
Knowledgeable, growth oriented, and being a learner .....	126
Collaborative.....	128
Collaborative and team oriented .....	128
Shared leadership .....	129
Chapter Five: Discussion and Conclusions.....	136
Interpretation of Findings Through Existing Literature.....	136
Sources of efficacy.....	137
Retention of teachers within the profession.....	139
Collaboration.....	140
Instructional supports.....	140
Changing and impacting efficacy .....	143

Efficacy and experience .....	144
Professional development and efficacy .....	146
Leadership and efficacy .....	148
Goal setting and visionary leadership .....	151
Charismatic and collegial leadership .....	153
Contrasted Results .....	154
Sources of efficacy .....	154
Novice teachers and efficacy supports .....	155
Recommendations .....	157
Competency one: Fostering effective relationships .....	158
Competency two: Modeling commitment to professional learning .....	159
Competency three: Embodying visionary leadership .....	160
Competency four: Leading a learning community .....	161
Competency five: Supporting the application of foundational knowledge about First Nations, Métis and Inuit .....	163
Competency six: Providing instructional leadership .....	164
Competency seven: Developing leadership capacity .....	165
Competency eight: Managing school operations and resources .....	166
Competency nine: Understanding and responding to larger societal context .....	167
Implications for Areas of Future Research .....	167
The Research Questions .....	170
Conclusion .....	171

References.....	175
Appendix A – Efficacy Scale Online Survey Participation Invitation Script .....	190
Appendix B – Survey Informed Consent.....	191
Appendix C – Desrochers Efficacy Scale: Efficacy Survey Questions .....	192
Appendix D – Interview Participation Email Invitation Script .....	195
Appendix E – Letter of Consent .....	197

## List Of Tables

### Table

1. Key Themes and Subthemes: Contextual Factors Impacting Efficacy .....	131
2. Key Themes and Subthemes: Social and Emotional Supports Provided by School Leaders .....	131
3. Key Themes and Subthemes: Feelings Participants Associated With Efficacy .....	132
4. Key Themes and Subthemes: Leadership Characteristics Perceived to Impact Efficacy .....	132
5. Contextual Factors Impacting Efficacy: Subtheme Mentions Differentiated Years of Experience .....	133
6. Social and Emotional Supports Provided by Leaders: Subthemes Mentions Differentiated by Years of Experience .....	133
7. Feelings of Efficaciousness: Subthemes Mentions Differentiated by Years of Experience .....	134
8. Leadership Characteristics Perceived to Impact Efficacy: Subthemes Mentions Differentiated by Years of Experience .....	134

## **List Of Figures**

### Figure

1. Model for selecting interview participants from the efficacy scale results. .... 61
2. Overview of specific aspects of the coding and data analysis process. .... 74

## Chapter One: Introduction

Within the Alberta context, it has been shown that “approximately 40% of beginning teachers leave teaching within five years” and “25% of graduates from Alberta post-secondary institutions did not assume teaching positions in Alberta” (Clandinin et al., 2015, p. 1). Clandinin et al. (2015) asserted that teacher attrition is a challenge facing education systems around the globe. Similarly, Pas, Bradshaw, and Hershfeldt (2012) posited “there is a great need for research on factors commonly associated with teachers' job satisfaction and retention, such as teacher efficacy and burnout” (p. 129). They further discussed the potential of identifying and addressing predictors of low efficacy and high burnout to increase staff retention and positive student learning outcomes. These studies highlighted the need to develop a greater understanding of factors contributing to and influencing teacher efficacy. One potentially important influence of teacher efficacy within schools has been attributed to leadership (Leithwood, 2006). Leithwood (2006) asserted that leadership was a valuable component that contributed to teacher working conditions and thus impacted teacher efficacy. Therefore, it is seemingly relevant to explore experiences of highly efficacious teachers and how leadership practices impact their perceptions of effectiveness. Additionally, as suggested by Leithwood (2006) there may be potential avenues principals can use to contribute to the learning and growth of teachers. Some factors that may be included for consideration are the provision of collaborative structures, resources, and instructional supports.

Schools and school district leaders are continually striving to ensure they are employing effective practices to support student learning. The *School Act* (Government of Alberta, 2018) highlights the primary responsibility of teachers is to provide

competent instruction and “encourage and foster learning in students” (p. 26).

Furthermore, the *School Act* requires principals to provide a safe and welcoming environment and offer instructional leadership to all members of the community. This requirement is linked to the Alberta Education (2018a) *Leadership Quality Standard* (LQS) which indicates principals have the responsibility to create “the conditions within which quality teaching and optimum learning can occur and be sustained”, and foster “collaboration, engagement and empowerment of all partners in the education system to enable all students to achieve their potential” (p. 2).

There are many facets of education and the daily operation of schools that are outside of the locus of control of individual school leaders. Hence, it seems crucial that principals develop a clear understanding of which variables within a school they can impact and leverage in order to increase student and teacher success. One such variable that is potentially within the scope of principals is that of teacher efficacy. Principals may benefit from being aware of the impact their practices can have on the efficacy experienced by teachers. This belief is supported by Pas et al. (2012), who asserted that “teacher efficacy and burnout are also linked with effective instruction and a number of student outcomes” (p. 130). Furthermore, they contended that by identifying predictors and factors of low teacher efficacy and increased burnout levels, and how these change over time, principals could potentially increase levels of staff retention and improve student learning outcomes by attending to issues related to teacher efficacy. These challenges of teacher efficacy, retention, burnout, and managing stress levels are facing many schools, not just provincially in Alberta (Clandinin et al., 2015), but globally (Kutsyuruba, Walker, Al Makhamreh, & Stroud Stasel, 2018).



The notion of self-efficacy is one that often arises when discussing the link between teacher burnout, attrition, stress levels, and student outcomes. In the early 1980s, Bandura (1982) recognized the importance of teacher efficacy and defined efficacy beliefs as “judgments of how well one can execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations” (p. 122). More recently, Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) described teacher efficacy as teachers’ “capabilities to bring about desired outcomes of student engagement and learning, even among those students who may be difficult or unmotivated” (p. 793). Furthermore, Klassen, Virginia, Betts, and Gordon (2011) contended that self-efficacy is considered to be one of the key factors when it comes to motivational beliefs that influence the professional behaviours of teachers, as well as student learning outcomes. Therefore, it seems possible that if leaders choose to purposefully consider teacher efficacy as a factor when reflecting on the practices they employ, strong benefits could be seen for students and teachers (e.g., Klassen et al., 2009; Pas et al., 2012; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001).

### **The Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore the nature of teachers’ sense of efficacy and their perceptions of the influence of leadership practices upon their efficacy. Furthermore, it explored ideas associated with the utility of collaborative structures and resources; and the instructional supports employed by principals on their impact on teachers’ sense of efficacy. In addition, it seemed appropriate to also explore teacher perceptions of what it is that principals do to impact their resilience as professionals. This exploration was accomplished through a qualitative study using a phenomenological

epistemology to investigate how these experiences are perceived by highly efficacious teachers.

By finding teachers who self-reported as highly efficacious, the study hoped to glean an understanding of leadership behaviours that may have contributed to those strong feelings of efficacy. After a group of highly efficacious teachers was identified, a series of one-on-one semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect qualitative data on teacher perceptions about how a school leader's practices impact their teaching efficacy. Qualitative interviews with self-identified highly efficacious teachers were used to inform the nature of the relationships between these teachers and school principals regarding the phenomenon of efficacy. It seems possible that teachers hold beliefs about leaders' practices that impact how successful they feel within their schools and classrooms.

### **Rationale and Significance**

Developing a strong understanding of the factors that influence teacher efficacy could be considered important for a number of reasons. High teacher efficacy has been positively associated with effective and proactive classroom management strategies, as well as more effective instruction. Furthermore, high efficacy has been linked to increasing students' academic outcomes (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007, 2010; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001; Wolters & Daugherty, 2007). Stajkovic and Luthans (1998) noted the importance of developing a stronger understanding of motivational factors. They asserted motivational variables were more closely related to teacher effectiveness than varying personality traits because of higher specificity and contextualization. Finally,

certain non-teaching behaviours that can impact student learning have also been linked to efficacy (Cooper & Good, 1983).

Literature and research regarding teacher efficacy has a history dating back to the early 1980s. Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) believed that teacher efficacy impacts student outcomes and achievement, teachers' motivation, teachers' classroom behaviour, level of effort teachers invest, goals they set, openness to new ideas, willingness to experiment to better meet student needs, persistence, and resilience. Additionally, teachers with high efficacy were more empathetic when students make mistakes (Ashton & Webb, 1986) and tended to work longer with struggling students to ensure they reach a point of understanding (Gibson & Dembo, 1984). Consequently, when it comes to ensuring students are successful by fostering and sustaining strong instructional practices and creating effective classrooms and schools, it is likely that attention must be paid to notion of teacher efficacy (Berman, McLaughlin, Bass, Pauly, & Zellman, 1977; Brandt, 1986; Guskey, 1988). As stated by Klassen and Tze (2014), "convincing evidence reveals that in any education system, teacher effectiveness is a critical factor driving variation in student achievement, and is more influential than class size, classroom composition, SES, or previous student achievement" (p. 60). Thus, impetus for understanding the impact leadership practices can have upon teacher efficacy and related factors is evident.

### **Context**

Over the course of my teaching career as an elementary generalist, I have worked in several schools, with a variety of different teachers, and several teams of administrators. Throughout these experiences in various educational settings and working with many different types of leaders and leadership styles, I have observed positive and

negative ramifications of different leadership practices. As a newer teacher experiencing such an immense array of schools and leadership situations, I became aware of how these different leaders impacted my feelings of success in my classroom, my levels of stress, and my desire to continue being an educator. Though I was influenced by many factors, leadership practices seemed to be a pervasive and noticeable variable.

In my first teaching position in the months directly following graduation, I worked with a principal who was highly supportive and who made her beliefs in my abilities clear. While I only worked with her for two months, she continued to be a support for me in the coming years as I found my place as an educator. Then, during my first full year as an educator, I traveled overseas to teach at a brand new international school. While the experience had several challenging aspects and did not meet my expectations as I had anticipated, I was supported fully by my principal to make some very tough, heart-wrenching decisions. He demonstrated unwavering respect and care for every person working at that school. His energy, vulnerability, and genuine consideration for others was unquestionably strong, even as individuals made decisions that were the best for them, yet increased the challenges he faced. I left that situation shaken by some of my experiences, yet with a sense of optimism and a feeling of certainty about what kind of leader I wanted to work with in the future.

The following years brought me to a couple of different schools and led me to more experiences with different principals. For two years, I worked at schools where I didn't feel secure, heard, or trusted. Near the end of this two-year period due to repeated negative interactions and experiences, I had decided I could no longer move forward with the school division I was working for, and chose to walk away from my continuous

teaching contract to start fresh in a new division. My principal at this time threatened me and belittled me for this decision, making it clear she did not think I would succeed.

However, thanks to the first two principals I worked with, I felt steadfast in my belief that teaching and my relationship with the leaders I was working with did not have to feel the way it had for the past couple of years.

I was extremely fortunate to begin teaching at a school in a new school division, where the vice-principal exuded the exact leadership I had been longing for. Over that first year she made me feel welcome, capable, and helped me to become a better educator. This principal had compassion and empathy, she never lost sight of what it was like to be in a classroom, and she had a vast amount of practical knowledge. On more than one occasion, she supported me when I was questioning my desire to be a teacher. When I was moved to a new school, she continued to be an anchor for me as I spent another two years at a school that didn't closely align with my beliefs and mission as an educator.

My first five years of teaching were tumultuous, adding to the already steep learning curve facing me as a brand new teacher. While these experiences are my own, I know many of my colleagues were impacted by these principals as well. If it had not been for a number of positive principals who showed me what effective leadership really looked like and anchored me when things were the most challenging, I am certain that I would not have stayed an educator. Hindsight has allowed me to understand just how vulnerable I was in those first years of teaching and how greatly I was impacted by the actions of people that I felt were positive leaders.

My experiences as an educator within a wide range of contexts has led to my curiosity about the ways in which teachers' experiences with principals impacted their feelings of effectiveness. It seems possible that principals' actions and practices may influence many things within a school. This idea was supported by Coladarci (1992) when he asserted that principals have the power to influence teachers' commitment to the profession through multiple school-level variables. These variables include positive instructional leadership, as well as strong decision making, and cultivating meaningful relationships with students and staff.

These aforementioned experiences have led me to a deep curiosity regarding the perceptions of self-identified highly efficacious teachers' about what leadership practices influence their desire to be the best teachers they can be. In other words, it was my hope that I would be able to uncover connections between teachers' experiences with practices that leaders could incorporate to help them flourish and feel efficacious. Furthermore, through this exploration I aimed to find prospective implications for ways that school leaders can sustain positive school cultures and learning environments through practices that foster the efficacy of the teachers within their buildings.

### **Definition of Key Terms and Constructs**

A key term that will be used throughout this study is *efficacy*. The literature review will delve deeper into various definitions, meanings, and interpretations of the construct of efficacy. However, for the purpose of this study, *efficacy* will be defined as "judgments of how well one can execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations" (Bandura, 1982, p. 122). Bandura (1977) described the functional value of efficacy and its applicability to all life situations. He theorized that self-efficacy

influences many aspects of life, including choice of activities. People tend to avoid tasks that they feel they are not capable of and confidently perform tasks that they perceive themselves capable of handling.

*Teacher efficacy* is broadly agreed upon in the literature as teachers beliefs in their ability to bring about desired or valued outcomes in the classroom (Armor et al., 1976; Bandura, 1977; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) described these desired outcomes as “student engagement and learning, even among those students who may be difficult or unmotivated” (p. 783). The construct of *teacher efficacy* was further developed by Ashton and Webb (1986) when they suggested two distinct components: *general teaching efficacy* and *personal teaching efficacy*. They argued that general teaching efficacy explained teachers general beliefs that teaching can have an impact on student outcomes, “despite external obstacles such as family background and student ability” (Ashton & Webb, 1986, p. 4). Additionally, they differentiated personal teaching efficacy as the “individual’s assessment of their own teaching competence” (p. 4). For the majority of this study, unless otherwise stated, general teaching efficacy and personal teaching efficacy will be referred to in the broader sense of the definition of *teacher efficacy*, meaning teachers beliefs in their ability to bring about desired outcomes within their classroom. Furthermore, unless otherwise indicated, wherever the term *efficacy* is used, it will be referring to *teacher efficacy*.

Another set of terms requiring clarification for this study include *school climate* and *school culture*. While climate is more commonly utilized in the literature in connection with teacher efficacy and related constructs, it is valuable to differentiate the

subsequent definitions between both terms for further clarity. Currently, there is not one generally accepted definition of school climate (Malinen & Savolainen, 2016). However, for the purposes of this study, school climate was defined as “the quality and character of school life” (National School Climate Center, 2007). Malinen and Savolainen (2016) referred to the TALIS 2013 study (OECD, 2014) and described several indicators of school climate including opportunities to participate in decision making, teacher-teacher relationships, and student-teacher relationships. Similarly, Hoy (1990) defined school climate as “teachers’ perceptions of their general work environment; it is influenced by the formal organization, informal organization, personalities of participants, and the leadership of the school” (p. 151). While there is not one universally accepted definition of school climate, there is also no generally agreed upon definition of school culture. Nevertheless, Peterson and Deal (1998) defined school culture as “the underground stream of norms, values, beliefs, traditions, and rituals that has built up over time as people work together, solve problems, and confront challenges” (p. 28). They posited that culture is an informal set of values and expectations that shapes the way people act, feel, and think within a school.

Furthermore, this study will refer to *instructional leadership*. The construct of instructional leadership is one that takes many forms and has varying definitions and foundational beliefs; however, for the purpose of this study, the explanation put forth by Bedard and Mombourquette (2016) is likely the most relevant as it is specific to the Alberta context. They described instructional leadership as a myriad of behaviors including: attention to the effect teachers have on student learning and development; promoting best instructional practices and co-learning with teachers; determining a



shared vision and mission for the school; and maintaining ongoing monitoring, modeling and dialogue with faculty about teaching and learning. Furthermore, they depicted one of the core facets of instructional leadership as “the belief that student learning can increase through direct work with teachers and improvement of their practice” (pp. 17-18).

Similar to the construct of instructional leadership is the term *leadership practice*. This construct is another notion that does not have one clear definition presented within the literature. Many authors list several types of leadership practices, giving examples, but not qualifying the term in a general sense. Eacott (2010) aptly noted this when he stated:

Leadership practice exists in a social space given life through constant power struggles. It is this contestation that defines leadership, and arguably leaders, moment-by-moment. It cannot be captured in a static framework or separated from the context in which it occurs. (p. 221)

With that said, for the purposes of this study *leadership practices* will be described as an intentional process of influence in order to achieve certain outcomes (Bush, 2011). As indicated by Eacott, these practices can be present in moments and along a larger scale, and are context specific. Given this level of context specificity, it may be important to note that some of the competencies listed in the LQS (Alberta Education, 2018a) may form a basis for exemplars of leadership practices relevant to the Alberta context. However, it is possible that other practices may emerge through interviews with the respondents.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

Within the literature there exists various viewpoints and definitions related to the notion of self-efficacy. There are two main branches of social learning theory that have contributed to the development of efficacy theory across the literature. Subsequently, many varying theories and measurement tools have since been proposed in the last few decades; however, one important factor of note regarding this body of literature is the lack of contemporary contributions. While there are a mere few studies that have emerged in the last decade, it seems research regarding the notion of efficacy has waned in recent years, leading to a gap in relevant research. Regardless, the development of a strong understanding of this foundational knowledge regarding efficacy is imperative to understanding the basis and importance of this study.

### **Conceptualizing Efficacy and Its Measurement Tools**

The notion of efficacy, specifically self-efficacy, is one that has been widely studied. The general understanding of this concept has evolved over the past few decades. Emerging from the literature are two main branches of foundational knowledge: one stemming from Rotter's (1966) work based on social learning theory; and another established by Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory. Both of these efficacy theories have been simultaneously developed. Furthermore, there seems to be an inextricable link between the definitions used to describe efficacy and the measurement tools used to quantify it. The various measurement tools used to quantify efficacy beliefs have varied greatly and consequently so have the specific constructs they have measured. While research to discover the extent of the relationships between various methods of measurement has been conducted, and some overlap was present, it still remains unclear

as to what extent the individual scales were measuring efficacy and to what extent they were measuring other constructs (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001).

**Rotter's theoretical framework.** Rotter (1966) initially proposed the idea of internal versus external locus of control as a facet of social learning theory. He believed that the way people attribute causal relationships between their actions and rewards or desired outcomes was key to understanding how learning is reinforced. "If the person perceives that the event is contingent upon his own behavior or his own relatively permanent characteristics, we have termed this a belief in internal control" (Rotter, 1966, p. 1). It is hypothesized, then, that when a reward is seen as contingent on an individual's behaviours, it is more likely to impact the occurrence frequency of that particular behaviour. These perceived causal relationships, at least partially, determine the outcome expected by the individual, therefore influencing decisions made. Alternatively, he speculated if an individual does not perceive any contingency of their behaviour upon a given outcome, then there is minimal influence on the frequency of a given behaviour.

Closely related to Rotter's theory about internal and external locus of control, Rand researchers defined a teacher's sense of efficacy as "the extent to which teachers felt they could reach even the most difficult or unmotivated student in their classroom" (Berman et al., 1977, p. 139). This understanding and definition developed as a by-product of a larger study. Initially, the Rand Corporation researchers created and delivered an extensive survey as part of their initiative to introduce and increase innovative practices in schools in the United States in the 1970s. One of the most notable findings that emerged from this multi-year study stemmed from two of the questions asked in this survey (Bandura, 1977; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). They used a two-

question instrument utilizing a Likert-Scale, which was derived from the simple notion that a teacher's perceptions of their own capabilities is important (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001, p. 784). These two questions assessed the level of control teachers perceived to have over factors influencing student learning. Together, the score of these two items became the first measurement of teacher efficacy. These have become known as Rand items 1 and 2 (Berman et al., 1977).

Rand item 1 asked: *“When it comes right down to it, a teacher really can't do much because most of a student's motivation and performance depends on his or her home environment”* (Berman et al., 1977, pp. 136-137). With Rand item 1, teachers were given the opportunity to rate the impact of environmental factors on student learning. Consequently, teachers who closely identified with this statement believed the locus of control was external, meaning outside circumstances strongly determined the amount a student was capable of learning. Alternatively, Rand item 2 stated: *“If I really try hard, I can get through to even the most difficult or unmotivated students”* (Berman et al., 1977, p. 137). Teachers who believed this statement to be true tended to have a more internal locus of control, meaning they were more likely to have strong confidence in their abilities and therefore believed they were able to overcome factors that make learning difficult for students (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001).

Stemming from Rotter's (1966) locus of control theory, other similar methods of measuring efficacy were developed. These methods continued to utilize the locus of control model to attempt to measure and understand the concept of teacher efficacy. The Teacher Locus of Control Scale (TLC) was created by Rose and Medway (1981) to measure elementary school teachers' perceptions of control within their classrooms. The

28-question TLC used a dichotomous choice system in which each question had two possible options, one that indicated internal locus of control and one that indicated external locus of control. Their study found that teachers who had a high belief of internal control were more likely to have fewer disciplinary issues with students, had students who displayed higher levels of independence, were more likely to try varied pedagogical approaches, and were also able to maximize their instructional efficiency (Rose & Medway, 1981).

Similarly, Guskey (1981) developed the Responsibility for Student Achievement Scale (RSA) to measure the level of responsibility assumed by teachers for students' academic successes and failures. This measurement tool exclusively focused on academic achievement in school settings, aiming to gauge beliefs about internal and external locus of control. Of the 30-items included, each item alternately described a positive and negative student experience. Guskey's (1981) questionnaire utilized a unique format, such that while questions were also in an either or forced-choice format, akin to other similar measurement tools (Armor et al., 1976; Berman et al., 1977; Rose & Medway, 1981), participants were given 100-points to allocate as they deemed appropriate. Thus, they could allocate points to both options within the question, while giving one choice more points, and therefore a higher weighting of importance. This system was determined to be of value, based on the ideal that "most teachers view classroom events as being complex and stemming from more than a single cause" (Guskey, 1981, pp. 44-45). By allowing participants to allocate percentages to each of the options, this study aimed to capture the intricacy of daily occurrences, denoting an understanding that sometimes the outcomes of events were not mutually exclusive of one another.

A finding that emerged from Guskey's (1981) study was a distinction between teachers' acceptance of responsibility for student successes and failures. These two aspects were found to be relatively independent of one another, and seemed to be assessing two different phenomena within teachers. This mirrored results found by Crandall, Katkovsky, and Crandall (1965). In their study, they utilized the Intellectual Achievement Responsibility Questionnaire (IAR) in which they sought to assess children's beliefs about the level of control they had over their own academic successes and failures. Akin to Guskey's findings, Crandall et al. also noticed a distinction between students' acceptance of responsibility for successes and failures, and attributed a potential cause of this towards children learning to attribute ownership of these outcomes separately. While the measurement of student efficacy is not directly relevant to this study, it helps to develop an understanding of methods used to study and measure efficacy. These two studies reinforced the idea that, regardless of age, it seemed two distinct orientations were present when it came to processing cognitive information around events that were perceived as positive and negative.

Rotter's (1966) theory emphasized the connection between internal and external locus of control and delivered foundational understandings that began the underpinnings of modern day understanding of efficacy. As mentioned, many studies and theories were modeled after Rotter's conceptualizations of locus of control. Over time, the overall understanding of the notion of efficacy grew and deepened as other researchers theorized about social learning theory, motivation and efficacy beliefs.

**Bandura's social learning theory.** Another prominent conceptualization of efficacy is derived from the work of Bandura (1977). His notion of efficacy originated

from theories of motivation and how it impacts choices made by individuals. As he stated, “through cognitive representation of future outcomes individuals can generate current motivators of behavior” (Bandura, 1977, p. 193). This was considered to be a cognitively generated source of motivation. Another cognitive source of motivation he noted was the idea of self-evaluation and goal setting, whereby individuals make assessments of performance against self-created standards. The hypothesis was that any negative discrepancies between the standards and actual performance would likely lead to dissatisfaction and would consequently initiate a change in behaviour.

This understanding of motivation led to Bandura’s (1977) interpretation of self-efficacy, whereby he distinguished two separate elements of efficacy. One element was outcome expectancy, described as “a person's estimate that a given behavior will lead to certain outcomes” (p. 193). While this is similar to Rotter’s (1966) idea that there is a distinct causal link between an individual’s behaviours and the outcomes they anticipate, Bandura’s theory included the cognitive aspects that are involved with an individual’s thoughts when making such estimates. The second element of efficacy, as described by Bandura, was what he termed an efficacy expectation. This element was determined to be the “conviction that one can successfully execute the behavior required to produce the outcomes” (Bandura, 1977, p. 193). Differentiation between these two elements is due to the fact that simply because an individual believes particular behaviours will lead to a certain outcome, does not necessarily preclude their conviction that they are capable of successfully executing the requisite behaviours. The level of self-efficacy belief is, however, not the sole determinant of behaviour, as there also needs to be a perceived

relevant incentive to engage, regardless of how positively one feels towards their chances of success at a given task.

Therefore, perceived self-efficacy influences the choices one makes since people tend to participate in situations where they feel they will likely be successful, and avoid situations where they feel they will not be. The higher the considered level of self-efficacy, the greater the effort expended. Furthermore, Bandura (1977) proposed that these self-efficacy beliefs will also influence the level and amount of coping efforts a person will employ given a challenging situation. “In this conceptual system, expectations of personal mastery affect both initiation and persistence of coping behavior. The strength of people's convictions in their own effectiveness is likely to affect whether they will even try to cope with given situations” (Bandura, 1977, p. 193). Consequently, it is this conceptual system of beliefs that led to Bandura’s definition of self-efficacy as a determinant of “how much effort people will expend and how long they will persist in the face of obstacles and aversive experiences. The stronger the perceived self-efficacy, the more active the efforts” (Bandura, 1977, p. 194). Essentially, Bandura (1982) described perceived self-efficacy as the judgements individuals make about how well they can accomplish actions required to navigate future situations, and determines how much effort is expended towards perseverance during challenging experiences.

***Bandura’s sources of efficacy.*** In addition to clearly defining the concept of self-efficacy, Bandura (1977, 1995) posited that there were four main sources of the efficacy beliefs individuals hold. He termed these four sources mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal and social persuasion, and physiological states. Bandura argued that mastery experiences were indeed the most powerful source of efficacy due to the idea



that those experiences helped people to realize what they were capable of. In reality, experiencing success at a given task is highly reinforcing and has the capability to exert strong influence over one's beliefs about tasks in which they display competence. The same effect works negatively. When an individual experiences an event of failure, it can decrease self-efficacy. This notion can be loosely linked to Rotter's (1966) theories, such that when a person associates their behaviours as linked to outcomes, it can reinforce an increase or decrease in the frequency of that action.

While mastery experiences can be highly influential, those experiences are not the sole source of information individuals rely upon when making efficacy judgements. Vicarious experiences are another important source of efficacy beliefs. Bandura (1977) postulated a correlation between the innate value of seeing others perform difficult tasks with positive outcomes. This can lead an observer to "generate expectations...that they too will improve if they intensify and persist in their efforts" (p. 197). This persistence is most likely to be influential when the observer perceives a high level of similarity between themselves and the model. Alternatively, vicarious situations can also impact efficacy in a negative manner. If, for instance, an observer watches a model they perceive to be highly similar to themselves fail, it can lead the observer to believe they would also experience failure at a similar task.

Moreover, efficacy beliefs are determined within the bounds of social situations and can happen through verbal and social persuasion (Bandura, 1977). This can occur when an individual attempts to verbally convince someone they are capable of performing a given task successfully, even if this task was found to be challenging in past experiences. Verbal persuasion is used often, as it is almost always easily accessible.

However, it is important to note that as a source of efficacy it tends to be “weaker than those arising from one's own accomplishments because they do not provide an authentic experiential base for them” (Bandura, 1977, p. 198). Bandura outlined a number of factors that could increase the success of persuading someone verbally (1995).

Successfully increasing efficacy in another individual requires going beyond positive affirmations of one's performance, and requires the persuader to structure events to help the individual find success. Additionally, the persuader must avoid placing the individual in situations that are likely to cause failure. Finally, “they encourage individuals to measure their success in terms of self-improvement rather than by triumph over others” (Bandura, 1995, p. 4). In other words, effective verbal persuasion goes far beyond the words that are said.

Lastly, Bandura (1977, 1995) denoted the impact of physiological states on the cultivation and processing of efficacy information. An individual's mood and feelings of physical well-being influence the way in which a person interprets the world around them, as well as events they perceive to be stressful. The physiological indicators present guide the way in which efficacy information is integrated.

***Processes regulating the activation of efficacy.*** While the sources of efficacy beliefs are fundamental to understanding the nature of the concept, comprehending the processes regulating efficacy are equally essential. Human functioning is regulated by efficacy beliefs through four main processes: cognitive, motivational, affective, and selection (Bandura, 1977). Each of these processes plays a role in determining the actions individuals take. These processes are a key part of the way in which self-efficacy beliefs actuate action. As described by Bandura (1986, 1995), as well as Locke and Latham

(1990) and Raudenbush, Rowan, and Cheong (1992), self-efficacy is one of the most important factors in determining the level of effort expended at a given task. When individuals have higher perceived efficacy they are more likely to seek out bigger challenges and loftier goals, and are subsequently more prone to strong commitment to those goals.

Cognitively, efficacy beliefs end up operating in a type of self-perpetuating feedback loop (Bandura, 1995). That is, those with high self-efficacy beliefs, tend to have strong resilience in the face of adversity, persevering through challenges, therefore cultivating and reinforcing high beliefs of efficacy. Alternatively, those with low self-efficacy tend to think erratically and lower their aspirations to align with their perceived level of ability. This becomes self-reinforcing and propagates a corresponding level of efficacy beliefs. Hence, efficacy beliefs impact the cognitive processing of individuals, creating an anticipatory belief set about what they predict will happen. Consequently, this becomes a mediator of behaviour, impacting the choices one makes.

Motivation is another process by which efficacy beliefs are activated. As asserted by Bandura (1995), “most human motivation is cognitively generated” (p. 6). While there are a variety of cognitive motivational theories, they will not be discussed at length in regards to this study. It is important to note however, the role efficacy beliefs play in modulating the self-regulation of motivation. Efficacy beliefs have a function in determining what goals individuals set, as well as what resources they assemble and what level of effort is employed to meet such goals (Bandura, 1995; Locke & Latham, 1990).

### **Combined Theoretical Frameworks**

As the various conceptions of efficacy and teacher efficacy developed, some researchers began to merge parts of Rotter's (1966) and Bandura's (1977, 1995) theories to create new models to measure efficacy beliefs. As previously mentioned, one of the major criticisms with the concept of efficacy continues to be the lack of construct validity found within the various measurement tools utilized across studies (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Part of this struggle emerged as two distinct dimensions of efficacy presented themselves, but were unable to be fully explained.

The idea that there are two distinct dimensions of teacher efficacy has been noted by different researchers, including Ashton and Webb (1986) as well as Gibson and Dembo (1984). Based upon the notion that the two different Rand items seemed to measure different things, the belief was that efficacy could be divided into the dimensions of general teaching efficacy and personal teaching efficacy.

General teaching efficacy is the belief an individual holds that they are able to influence student learning regardless of external circumstances, such as a student's background or ability level (Gibson & Dembo, 1984). Correlated with Rand item 1 (Berman et al., 1977), this type of belief also aligns with Rotter's (1966) idea of external locus of control, as well as Bandura's (1977) notion of outcome expectancy. Therefore, the general outcome expectancy is interconnected to general teaching efficacy, the individual's overall conviction regarding the relationship between teaching and learning and the general outcome expected.

Moreover, personal teaching efficacy indicates teachers' assessment of their own level of teaching competence, which can be linked to Rand item 2 (Berman et al., 1977).

There is a correlation between personal teaching efficacy and Bandura's (1977) dimension of self-efficacy, the belief that one is capable of bringing out the desired outcome because they have the necessary skills. Further research supported the conclusion that Rand item 1 was closely linked to general teaching efficacy, and Rand item 2 was associated with personal teaching efficacy (Coladarci, 1992; Woolfolk Hoy & Hoy, 1990). Accordingly, the expectations from these two independent dimensions are integrated by teachers to create a course of action that determines decisions made and a multitude of teaching and non-teaching classroom behaviours.

Gibson and Dembo (1984) took this idea of two dimensions of efficacy and used it in their framework combined with the understandings gleaned from the Rand researchers (Armor et al., 1976; Berman et al., 1977), elements of Rotter's (1966) theory of locus of control, and ideas from Bandura's (1977) social learning theory. They utilized these two dimensions to create a new measurement instrument that could distinguish between the dimensions of general teaching efficacy (general outcome expectancy) and personal teaching efficacy (efficacy expectations).

The literature shows that different researchers have continued to build upon the current understandings of efficacy and its measure. There is a distinct interconnectedness of ideas and measurement tools, showing the vast complexity of the topic of teacher efficacy and the facets that it impacts. Further adding to that complexity is the confusion and lack of clarity that sometimes exists about the definition of self-efficacy.

### **Distinguishing Between Self-Efficacy and Other Constructs**

Thus far, this literature review has discussed in depth the ideas and notions surrounding self-efficacy. However, there are pertinent opposing, and sometimes parallel,

conceptualizations of topics that may be, to some extent, intertwined with self-efficacy theory. These include, for example, frameworks of self-concept and self-esteem.

Furthermore, some critical theorists posit that self-efficacy research is misguided and focuses its efforts incorrectly (Labone, 2004). Moreover, there are also general criticisms related to the field of study itself and the methods that have been used to understand self-efficacy beliefs.

**Other related and competing conceptualizations.** There are a number of concepts that are related to, and often confused with the notions of self-efficacy. Consensus among differing positions does not currently exist. These related concepts range from parallel and intertwined to opposing sets of beliefs. For example, self-concept and self-esteem have a sordid and complex, often unclear relationship. These two terms have often been used interchangeably with self-efficacy (Reyes, 1984) adding to confusion and creating a lack of cohesive understanding of each concept. This has led to a lack of clarity or agreements about the conceptual differences between these concepts (Pajares, 1996).

In his work around self-efficacy, Bandura (1977) addressed his conceptualization about the differentiation between the aforementioned concepts. He asserted that self-concept was one's self-view, as formed through interactions with others. It represents one's outlook and attitudes towards life. Conversely, Byrne (1984) described self-concept as the self-defined feelings and knowledge about their abilities and skills. Further to that, Bandura argued that self-concept may be a piece of self-efficacy but that it does not fully explain or account for the complexity of the nature of efficacy beliefs. He noted one of the key differences distinguishing self-efficacy beliefs is that they are highly correlated

with predicting people's behaviours and choices, while self-concept does not share that level of connection with actions. Self-concept reflects beliefs in efficacy, but loses its influence on behaviour when self-efficacy is not a factor. Somewhat contrary to what Bandura believed, Pajares (1996) posited, "self-efficacy is considered an important component of an individual's self-concept" (p. 557). He asserted that self-concept is a broader notion, that encompasses personal evaluations of competence and self-worth. It seems then, that these concepts become a bit of a "chicken or the egg" conundrum, with uncertainty and varying opinions on what begets what, and how these conceptualizations fit together.

Despite the lack of consensus on origins and schemas regarding self-concept and self-efficacy, the specificity of the scope of each idea evokes slightly greater accord. Both Pajares (1996) and Bandura (1997) do ultimately agree that a distinguishing factor between the two formerly mentioned concepts is level of specificity. Self-efficacy relates to task specific instances and beliefs about capabilities, while self-concept is believed to be a more global, overarching belief set that is less context specific.

While there may exist some agreement on the topic of level of specificity, other opinions are still ever present. For example, some believe that self-esteem is actually a more generalized form of self-efficacy (Harter, 1990); however, Bandura (1997) argued that self-esteem alone was not enough to motivate people to successfully execute actions. He differentiated these concepts by arguing that self-esteem regards one's judgements of their self-worth and self-efficacy is a specific judgement of one's capabilities. This definition was supported by Kayalar (2018) when he postulated that self-esteem referred

to a “group of perceptions of the extent to which someone appreciates themselves positively” (p. 3472).

Furthermore, Bandura (1997) theorized that there was no fixed relationship between how positively people feel about themselves and their belief in their capabilities, denoting a relative separation and strong differentiation between the two concepts. Conversely, others believed that high self-efficacy leads individuals to employ more effective task strategies, which forms a reciprocal relationship where the use of these strategies leads to increased self-confidence (Durham, Knight, & Locke, 1997; Locke & Latham, 1990; Wood & Bandura, 1989). Hence, there is no singular conclusion that can be drawn to reconcile the different belief systems. Therefore, it is helpful to have a basic understanding of the complex nature of the relationship between concepts.

**General criticisms of self-efficacy theory.** Further adding to the ambiguity among varying definitions and components of self-efficacy are outright criticisms of the theory itself. An overall criticism is that when referring to self-efficacy in a general sense, it is not different than the idea of Rotter’s (1966) “generalized expectancies” (Guzzo, Yost, Campbell, & Shea, 1993; Kirsch, 1986). However, Bandura’s (1997) theory differentiated self-efficacy from expectancies, as he argued the importance of specificity as a defining facet of self-efficacy. He described it as related more specifically to particular tasks or situations. This distinction of specificity further establishes the breadth and cumulative capacity of Bandura’s conceptualization of self-efficacy.

There has been ongoing discussion in the academic community about maturing the concept of teacher efficacy and what is required to further develop not only the meaning of the concept, but also how it is measured (Henson, 2002; Labone, 2004;



Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, & Hoy, 1998). One major critique put forth by Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998) is the limitations of the concept, which has been based entirely in psychological theories, imploring research to utilize other types of methodologies and different perspectives when studying the concept. Similarly, Labone (2004) asserted that even though efficacy has been studied for decades, many paradigms have been ignored, and she called for the need to “broaden both the foci and methodologies used to explore teacher efficacy” (p. 342) in order to account for vast and changing social contexts. The first paradigm Labone cited in critiquing efficacy research was the antinaturalist’s, that disparaged the apparent lack of context taken into account when studying this construct. Moreover, interpretivists feel current research demonstrates a lack of understanding of perspective and the meaning stemming from it. Finally, she noted the critical theorist paradigm, which criticized the isolation of the objective scientific research from the greater social context.

Labone (2004) praised Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998) for creating a model that accounted more for contextual variables, as well as perspective and derived meaning. She continued by disparaging Bandura’s (undated) scale for focusing too heavily on instructional aspects, therefore disregarding the greater social context, imploring the research to move beyond only the instructional focus and shine light on other aspects of the teaching profession as they relate to teacher efficacy. Overall, the enduring message of many criticisms was a call for a clearer view of efficacy as it relates to teaching, including the need to broaden conceptions to include tasks beyond the classroom.

### **Connections Between Self-Efficacy and Teacher Effectiveness**

As denoted in Chapter 1, one of the reasons the concept of teacher efficacy is so crucial lies in the need to understand the relationship between a teacher's level of efficacy and the breadth of impact it can have on students within a classroom setting. As suggested by Raudenbush, Rowan, and Cheong (1992) efficacy is the mediator between knowledge and action, meaning teachers need much more than just conceptual knowledge, or the know-how, in order to be successful in the classroom and to achieve positive student outcomes. Therefore, it seemed pertinent to explore how efficacy beliefs are linked to classroom behaviours and pedagogical practices of teachers.

**Retention of teachers within the profession.** The ability to maintain teachers is a key aspect of teacher effectiveness and is thought to be impacted by teacher efficacy. It was noted by Chester and Beaudin (1996) that in order for teachers to maximize their level of instructional effectiveness, it is imperative that there is a level of consistency for new teachers and measures in place to keep these teachers in the profession. They posited that a teacher's experiences in the first year or two of teaching are a highly determinant factor in the trajectory of their career. Further to this, experience is seen as a crucial variable needed for teachers to be instructionally effective (Murnane & Phillips, 1981). Noting how vital experience is seen to be, a teacher's level of long term commitment is then a crucial part of gaining experience in order to develop effective instructional practices. As indicated by Chester (1991, 1992) there are specific school practices that can contribute towards the quality of new teachers' experiences, impacting their efficacy and subsequent likelihood of staying in the profession, potentially impacting their entire career path. He posited these factors would include: the opportunities to collaborate with

other professionals, the quality and availability of resources to support teaching, and principals who attend to instructional issues. Not only did he surmise these factors as especially important for novice teachers, he suggested they are important factors in principals supporting high efficacy in all teachers. Furthermore, Coladarci (1992) made assertions that supported the beliefs of Chester et. al when he suggested that an individual's general teaching efficacy and personal teaching efficacy were one of the strongest indicators of commitment to the profession. Consequently, experience can be seen as key to developing effective teachers, and time and commitment to the profession are required to gain this needed level of experience. Given this, it seems that understanding how to nourish this commitment in teachers would be an important place to look when building and developing staff. This link between efficacy and teacher attrition was indicated by Coladarci (1992) when he stated: "The central finding of the present study was that personal and general efficacy were the two strongest predictors of commitment to teaching" (p. 334).

Similarly, teacher stress levels have also been closely linked to commitment to the profession across a broad range of literature. It is widely accepted that teachers who experience higher levels of job stress tend to have much lower job satisfaction, and are therefore more likely to leave the profession (Klassen & Chiu, 2010; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007). It seems there is a clear presence of a relationship between established teachers' levels of stress and their efficacy. Klassen and Chiu (2010) believed that teachers with higher self-efficacy experience much lower overall stress levels within their profession. Further to this, they found higher stress to be directly linked with lower job satisfaction, and classroom stressors to be indirectly linked to job satisfaction.

Ashton and Webb (1986) delineated this relationship between stress and efficacy slightly further. They dissected the concept of efficacy into two specific categories: teaching efficacy and personal teaching efficacy. Teaching efficacy was defined as universal feelings about teaching and student learning. Conversely, personal teaching efficacy was described as one's beliefs about their own individual teaching abilities. Therefore, they regarded the resulting stress levels differently, depending on which set of efficacy beliefs were low (Ashton & Webb, 1986). If teaching efficacy beliefs were low, teachers were apt to demonstrate a universal helplessness, deeming failures in the classroom as not personal to them due to the belief that no one would be likely to have a positive impact on student learning. These individuals do not expect students to succeed, and consequently do not take their failures personally. Therefore, they believed these low teaching efficacy beliefs do not cause stress in teachers due to their preconceived expectations. This idea of self-perpetuating systems of thinking driving self-efficacy beliefs links closely to Bandura's theories (1995).

Alternatively, Ashton and Webb (1986) described personal teaching efficacy as having a different impact on teacher stress levels. Low personal teaching efficacy led teachers to perceive student failures, at least partially, as their fault. These teachers believed the student outcomes were somewhat due to their lack of ability, and that these students could likely learn effectively with a different teacher in a different situation. When personal teaching efficacy is low, this tends to create high levels of stress for the individual.

Overall, it seems that there is a complex, and potentially self-reinforcing, link between stress levels, efficacy beliefs, and teachers' perceptions of their profession. As

suggested by Ashton and Webb (1986), there is value in determining where the source of stress emanates from, and which efficacy beliefs are low. How a leader supports and provides interventions for teachers who are struggling should depend on whether the lacking belief is related to learning in general, or a perceived deficit in their abilities.

**Classroom outcomes.** The potential positive links between a teacher's efficacy and how effective they are in the classroom, goes beyond just influencing experience, stress levels and the willingness to stay committed and working as an educator. While those reasons noted above are an important piece of the puzzle, there are larger implications regarding efficacy and a teacher's classroom practice. A teacher's self-efficacy has been linked to numerous aspects of classroom teaching and student learning. These beliefs impact how teachers think about students and learning, the pedagogical strategies that teachers employ, and the classroom environment they create. Aptly, teachers with similar efficacy beliefs tend to share common traits and characteristics. (Berman et al., 1977; Brandt, 1986; Guskey, 1988).

**Teacher belief systems about students, learning, and their ability level.** Some researchers suggest that one of the biggest influences of individual differences in teachers' instructional capabilities is derived from their beliefs about their own abilities (Berman et al., 1977). The idea that how much teachers believe in their abilities to teach students effectively could actually determine, at least in part, their level of success, is one that holds enormous power for student learning and educational change and reform. In fact, Berman et al. (1977) believed that an individual teacher's perceived level of self-efficacy was one of the strongest determinants of how likely they were to become a change agent. Guskey (1988) discovered a correlation between efficacy and the

willingness to adopt instructional initiatives, as well as demonstrating positive attitudes towards innovation and implementation of new strategies. Essentially, when teachers strongly believe they can teach all students and help every student learn, they are highly likely to be a part of positive educational changes and are increasingly likely to help students achieve positive academic outcomes. This idea was summarized by Newmann, Rutter, and Smith (1989) when they theorized the following: “We suspect that teachers with a high sense of efficacy are more likely to invest serious professional effort in teaching and, therefore, are more likely to boost their students' achievement” (p. 223).

**Pedagogical strategies and classroom environment.** Many different studies have concluded that teachers with high self-efficacy are more likely to exhibit particular behaviours that are associated with instructional best-practice and student learning success (Henson, 2001; Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). These teachers tend to create strong learning opportunities for students, creating potential for students to experience mastery at tasks related to learning (Bandura, 2000). The learning environments cultivated by teachers with high self-efficacy also look quite different than those of teachers with low efficacy. The teachers with high self-efficacy are more inclined to: teach with a mixture of whole class and large group situations, keep students engaged while teaching small groups, support low-achieving students through a variety of challenges and failures, and praise learners more often while criticizing less (Chester & Beaudin, 1996). Furthermore, these teachers are more likely to positively influence students that are perceived as challenging or low achieving (Fackler & Malmberg, 2016; Guskey & Passaro, 1994; Woolfolk Hoy & Hoy, 1990). Rosenshine (1978) and Gibson and Dembo (1984) theorized that teachers who had high efficacy beliefs were more likely

to spend more time focused on academic learning and less time filling instructional minutes with fillers. Teachers who are usually effective at having their students learn well share common characteristics such as: high teacher efficacy, a strong belief they can help all students learn, possessing positive feelings towards teaching, and are confident in their abilities (Berman et al., 1977; Brandt, 1986; Guskey, 1988).

Another important factor noted in the research is the idea of teacher expectations. It isn't simply a teacher's belief that they will be successful that makes a student successful. However, the beliefs an educator holds about their abilities definitively influences their action, and therefore the educational outcomes of their students (Bandura, 2000). Gibson and Dembo (1984) surmised that teachers who had high expectations of themselves and their ability to positively influence learning persisted longer with challenges, were more focused on academics and provided students with different types of feedback than teachers with low expectations of their abilities. Similar relationships were found between a teacher's beliefs about their students. If a teacher conveys to students a high degree of confidence in their ability to learn, students are more likely to attain academic success and achieve at higher levels (Newmann et al., 1989). Conversely, Ashton and Webb (1986) indicated that non-teaching behaviours such as beliefs about gender, minorities and low achieving students, can be attributed at least in part, to personal teaching efficacy, and can also have a direct impact on student learning. For example, if a teacher believes girls cannot be successful in math, they may call on girls less, give them less time to answer, be less forgiving of mistakes and provide less positive reinforcement. Subsequently then, efficacy could be considered an expectancy construct, meaning belief sets translate into action (Ashton & Webb, 1986).

## **Impacting and Changing Self-Efficacy**

While many researchers appear to be in agreement about the inherent value of self-efficacy for teachers and their classroom practice, the same cannot be said about how the research suggests one can go about impacting and changing those efficacy beliefs – if at all. Bandura (1997) advised that in order to achieve positive changes in self-efficacy, one must be faced with strong evidence and feedback that powerfully disrupts the current pre-existing beliefs one holds about their abilities.

**Efficacy and years of teaching experience.** One area of study regarding the change in teacher efficacy has been regarding years of teaching experience. Unfortunately, there is no consensus concerning the nature of this correlation. There have been studies which found mixed correlations, negative correlations, and positive correlations (Klassen & Chiu, 2010). Therefore, it seems there is currently no definitive answer about how one's experience is related to efficacy beliefs. Klassen and Chiu (2010) theorized that this may be due to the fact that the relationship between experience and efficacy is indeed not linear. They further suggested that perhaps teachers' efficacy ebbs and flows over the course of a career based upon a wide array of situational and life factors. Furthermore, it is also possible that the sources of efficacy that impact teachers may change over the course of a career. For example, verbal persuasion and school contextual variables may play a more influential role in newer teachers than in those that are more experienced (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001, 2007).

While the exact nature of the relationship between teacher efficacy and experience has not been definitively captured, there are existing theories. Klassen and Chiu (2010) delineated a teacher's career into various career stages. They defined stages



ranging from the early years of survival and grappling with reality versus ideals characterized by low or declining efficacy, to a stabilization and empowerment mid-career, to a decline of engagement, energy and self-efficacy in the later career stages. Similarly, Woolfolk Hoy and Burke Spero (2005) found that teacher efficacy rose through pre-service years, dropping at the start of a teacher's career.

Another set of theories regarding how teacher efficacy changes over the course of a career indicated that self-efficacy may be more malleable in early career stages, becoming more fixed, and therefore hard to change as a teacher's career progressed (Henson, 2001; Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998; Woolfolk Hoy & Hoy, 1990). Henson considered self-efficacy beliefs to solidify over time and experience. Similar to Bandura (1997), Henson discussed the need for compelling professional development that encouraged teachers to think critically about their classrooms, in order for efficacy to be meaningfully impacted.

**Situational factors.** Beyond years of experience, there have also been a multitude of situational factors that have been found to potentially have an impact on teacher efficacy. Ashton and Webb (1986) noted that factors such as class size, student characteristics, and subject matter could all influence a teachers sense of self-efficacy. Smylie (1988) found that when teachers had instructional interactions with colleagues, this was apt to indirectly increase self-efficacy through what is called certainty of practice. Conversely, he also discovered that the number of low-achieving students in a classroom negatively impacted teacher efficacy. Likewise, Pas et al. (2012) summarized findings from several studies which concluded factors that increase demand on teachers

such as large school size and high levels of student behaviour incidents could very likely negatively affect teacher efficacy and burnout levels.

Fackler and Malmberg (2016) found that when teachers had positive, informal experiences within the classroom, this increased their self-efficacy regarding student engagement. They also noted a positive relationship between efficacy beliefs and emotional intelligence, and negative correlations between job tension and discontent. Moreover, Liu and Ramsey (2008) found that women experience higher job stress and lower job satisfaction than men, potentially because women may have higher overall workloads.

While Labone (2004) cited doubt as a necessary factor in inducing changes in self-efficacy, Bandura (1997) indicated a more specific set of steps. He argued:

Efficacy beliefs are best instilled by presenting the pursuit as relying on acquirable skills, raising performers' beliefs in their ability to acquire skills, modeling the requisite skills, structuring activities in masterable steps that ensure a high level of initial success, and providing explicit feedback of continued progress. (p. 105)

Overall, the ways in which efficacy beliefs can be impacted or changed are obviously quite complex and hinge upon numerous factors.

### **Leadership and Efficacy**

Though there is relatively extensive research on efficacy, teacher-efficacy, and related measurement tools, there have been very few studies that have delved into the relationships between teachers and school leaders and the subsequent potential impact upon efficacy (Fackler & Malmberg, 2016; Klassen & Chiu, 2010). Fackler and

Malmberg (2016) indicated this gap in the literature when they stated, “at the school level there are very few existing studies that take into account the influence of principal- and school factors on TSE [teacher self-efficacy]” (p. 186). There are, however, a few studies that have drawn preliminary conclusions about these relationships and the prospective influence of leadership styles and practices on the efficacy of teachers, as well as upon school climate. It is important to note that the literature currently does not offer consensus on the definition of school climate (Malinen & Savolainen, 2016). For the purpose of this review, a satisfactory explanation of school climate is “the quality and character of school life” (National School Climate Center, 2007, p. 5). A deeper examination of school climate will follow in a subsequent section.

**Fostering resilience in teachers.** As noted earlier, there has been limited research that directly examines the relationship between teacher efficacy and the actions of school leaders. However, there have been some studies conducted that have examined how leaders can promote resilience, mostly in novice teachers (Kayalar, 2018). Bandura and Cervone (1986) discussed the importance of the connection between self-efficacy and resilience. They asserted that resilient self-efficacy helped people bounce back after successive failures and had a key role in the way in which individuals sustain motivation. Kayalar (2018) noted that principals play a key role in developing and nurturing resilience in novice teachers, and argued that their perceptions of situations regarding this phenomenon were key to how they were managed and mitigated. He defined resilience as psychological toughness, or the ability to recover quickly from challenges and setbacks.

Additionally, Kayalar (2018) argued for the importance of social and emotional supports for novice teachers as being key for developing resilient teachers that are

effective in the classroom and committed to teaching. This included effective collaboration and communication skills to help relieve stress as well as mitigate negative effects of stress. Interestingly, this parallels the notion set forth by Ashton and Webb (1986) in which they described stress as being an important factor determining efficacy, as well as low efficacy being closely linked as a potential source of stress. The theme of stress and the way in which it impacts teacher wellness, classroom performance, commitment to the profession, and self-efficacy beliefs has been an area of interest within the literature (Coladarci, 1992; Klassen & Chiu, 2010; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010).

The findings of Kayalar (2018) also reflected the idea that there must be measures in place to support novice teachers and their development, and that principals can have a direct impact on the quality of a new teacher's experiences (Chester, 1991, 1992; Chester & Beaudin, 1996; Murnane & Phillips, 1981). Kayalar added to this argument when he noted there must be systems in place to support and train not only novice teachers, but teachers who are new to a building. He believed leaders would be remiss to assume that all teachers are coming in with adequate knowledge, expertise, and confidence. He suggested several measures a principal could take to support the development of resilience: providing adequate time for PD; demonstrating trust in novice teachers; supporting novice teachers in communicating their needs; developing strong relationships through one-on-one meetings to determine hopes, fears, and dreams; and helping teachers find purpose, have clear goals, and be open to criticism. This list hints at the complexity of the role of a principal and the varying ways in which teachers require support.

**Goal setting and visionary leadership.** Additionally, some researchers have also discussed the power of goal setting and visionary leadership as a means for positively

impacting teachers' efficacy. As indicated by Locke and Latham (1990), when a leader is willing to set difficult goals, it impacts the goals a group sets, and can therefore impact efficacy. Furthermore, Durham et al. (1997) posited that the way leaders set goals and structure goal setting for their teachers has the possibility to have a direct impact on teachers' efficacy beliefs. They found that groups benefit from having the ability to set their own goals, and that these goals are often reflective of a team's collective beliefs about what they can achieve. The suggestions leaders make during the goal setting process can indicate to individuals and teams the valued level of performance, as well as demonstrate a belief of level of confidence in the team. Eden (1990) went one step further with this idea of goal setting and reflected upon the idea of self-fulfilling prophecies. He specified a strong link between expectations and motivation, as well as expectations and leadership effectiveness (Eden, 1992). He indicated that the expectations a leader has for those he works with can increase performance and effectiveness. Thus, the expectations individuals have of themselves, as well as the expectations leaders have of others, can become self-fulfilling prophecies. Further to this, he surmised that a leader can impact self-efficacy of their coworkers through persuasion. Interestingly, this is reflective of Bandura's (1995) theory of verbal persuasion being one of the four main sources of efficacy beliefs.

Related to verbal persuasion and goal setting is the notion of visionary leadership. Some authors have drawn a correlation between visionary leadership styles and the performance of those they lead (Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1996). While this study did not directly delve into the relationship between self-efficacy and visionary leadership, it indicated that there may be a potential association. As shown by many sources, goals and

self-efficacy can have strong and immediate effects on one's performance (Bandura, 1982; Locke, Frederick, Lee, & Bobko, 1984; Locke & Latham, 1990). Subsequently, there may be a link between visionary leadership and goals. However it is important to note that a goal and a vision are not necessarily synonymous, as a vision is an overarching transcendent idea and a goal is generally more specific and tangible (Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1996). Therefore, the way in which a vision is implemented could potentially be indirectly related to goal setting and acquisition, and subsequently impact an individual's efficacy.

Given this, Kirkpatrick and Locke (1996) suggested several key components of effective vision implementation for leaders which include: serving as an appropriate role model; providing individualized support; recognizing accomplishments; and traditional supervisory structure, such as providing task cues (Bass, 1985; Conger & Kanungo, 1987; Locke et al., 1991). These notions of the impact of vision realisation by leaders could find some parallels amongst Bandura's (1995) theory around the sources of efficacy beliefs. For example, serving as an appropriate role model could be a form of generating vicarious experiences, wherein an individual's efficacy can be altered through watching someone they perceive as similar to themselves perform a given task. He asserted that watching others, who are perceived as similar to oneself, perform challenging activities "without adverse consequences can generate expectations in observers that they too will improve if they intensify and persist in their efforts" (Bandura, 1995, p. 197). Therefore, the way a teacher perceives the actions of a school leader could potentially influence their own efficacy. Moreover, the idea of providing individualized supports and recognition of accomplishments could be related to

Bandura's notion of verbal persuasion and mastery experiences as sources of efficacy. He indicated that verbal persuasion is most effective when the individual is put into a situation that is specifically structured in a way to create success, which is one way individualised supports could manifest. This, coupled with positive affirmations regarding performance, could potentially impact one's perceived efficacy. Overall, while the research has not indicated any clear and direct links between self-efficacy and visionary leadership, it seems possible there are some existing congruencies that may be worth noting.

**Charismatic and collegial leadership qualities.** There have been positive associations between certain leadership styles and increased teacher efficacy. One prominently noted leadership style which has been associated with positive teacher efficacy is collegial leadership style (Pas et al., 2012). Teachers saw increased efficacy when a principal addressed and supported school-wide issues, such as those regarding student behaviour (McCoach & Colbert, 2010), and in general when teachers felt greater overall support from their principal (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Hepburn and Brown (2001) found that when teachers displayed higher satisfaction with the decisions made by a principal, and the overall support they received, they were more likely to have a more positive outlook towards their job. Due to this, it was hypothesized by Pas et al. (2012) that "better perceptions of principal leadership would be associated with higher teacher efficacy and lower burnout" (p. 132). Furthermore, it was posited by Kirkpatrick and Locke (1996) that charismatic and transformational leadership have been influential as well (Bass, 1985; Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Locke et al., 1991). Through these models, they defined charismatic leadership as having three core components that are consistent

across all theories: communicating a vision, implementing the vision, and communicating in a charismatic way.

Bandura (1977, 1995), through his charismatic leadership theory suggests that the actions of leaders have the ability to influence followers. Furthermore, Kirkpatrick and Locke's (1996) analysis of charismatic leadership theories, indicated that the way a leader manages information and disseminates this information to teachers is important. They depicted effective communication to include an overall captivating and confident way of interacting with others through making direct eye contact, using dynamic facial expressions, and speaking in an appealing tone. Locke et al. (1991) delineated this management of information as providing appropriate information that is relevant to given tasks, also known as task cues.

**School climate.** Further to specific leadership styles, some researchers have noted a link between leadership, school climate, and teacher efficacy (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Kayalar, 2018; Pas et al., 2012). It has also been argued that there are direct and indirect relationships between the organizational health of the school and staff perceptions and teacher efficacy (Hoy & Woolfolk Hoy, 1993). Therefore, it seems the relationship between school climate and teacher efficacy is complex and while the research has not yet provided succinct answers regarding those interrelationships, some preliminary conclusions can be drawn. Complicating this issue further, is the lack of agreement in the research community about how to effectively define school climate. However, as previously mentioned, for the purposes of this review we will utilize the National School Climate Center (2007) definition of “the quality and character of school life” (p. 5).



Efficacy beliefs can play a role in either reinforcing a positive school climate or creating a divisive school climate (Newmann et al., 1989). As suggested by Newmann et al. (1989), having a level of cohesion and similarity among teachers' efficacy beliefs within a school is an important factor that can influence school climate. When teachers share similar efficacy beliefs, it can help to reinforce a positive climate. Alternatively, when there are immense variants between teachers' efficacy beliefs, this can create a negative school climate. Hoy and Woolfolk Hoy (1993) noted a positive correlation between a positively perceived school climate and lower feelings of stress, as well as higher efficacy and overall job satisfaction. Additionally, Malinen and Savolainen (2016) discovered when teachers demonstrated positive evaluations of school climate near the beginning of the year, they tended to display higher satisfaction at the end of that same year. They also found "teacher self-efficacy in managing behavior had a positive effect on job satisfaction and a negative effect on burnout" (p. 149).

Once again, it is worth noting the recurring theme of complex interrelationships between self-efficacy, stress, job satisfaction, and burnout. Reaves and Cozzens (2018) contended that the creation of a safe and welcoming work environment, a positive school climate, and teacher buy-in are the "pillars upon which retention of teachers is built" (p. 48). From this notion one can infer the importance of the relationship between teacher retention and the development of positive self-efficacy beliefs among teachers (Coladarci, 1992). Likewise, teachers credit their commitment to the profession, even in the face of challenges, to positive school climates, feeling safe and supported, and overall job satisfaction (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Reaves & Cozzens, 2018).

**Professional development and efficacy.** One final, yet important factor relating to leadership and efficacy can be linked to professional development (PD). It has already been noted several times that strong professional development opportunities that allow teachers to critically assess their practice may be one of the most effective ways to influence efficacy in more veteran teachers (Bandura, 1995). While school principals are often governed by factors outside their school when it comes to designing and implanting PD opportunities, it still seems worth noting the connections between PD and teacher efficacy.

As noted earlier, many researchers have found teachers with high efficacy are more likely to be involved in new initiatives, school change, and reform. This idea was supported respectively by Mann (1986) and Guskey (1988), when they indicated that the teachers who were least in need of instructional improvement tended to be the most likely candidates to get involved in new practices. Guskey suggested this is why strong instructional leadership becomes imperative for “educational improvement efforts, especially those that involve the implementation of instructional innovation” (p. 68). He discussed the need for leaders to provide strong guidance for teachers, paired with a vision and knowledge of how to implement that vision. He insists that for real changes to occur, “substantial assistance and support so that implementers can increase their skill, ownership, and stable use of the innovation” (p. 68) is necessary. While Guskey could not definitively tie these findings specifically to self-efficacy, the role of PD in teacher efficacy is one area that may be worth exploring in future studies.

### **Current Efficacy and Efficacy Related Research**

As previously mentioned, there is a notable lack of more contemporary research regarding efficacy. It seems that the concept of efficacy has not ceased to exist in the minds of current researchers, but may have evolved to become a foundational part of a broader concept – resilience. While recent studies relating explicitly to the concept of efficacy are rare, the concept of efficacy appears to be ever present in literature that studies teacher resilience (Gibbs & Simon, 2014; Gu & Day, 2013; Keogh, Garvis, Pendergast, & Diamond, 2012; Li, Gu, & Wenjie, 2019). For instance, Li et al. (2019) described self-efficacy as a cognitive component of resilience (p. 153). They argued that there is a cyclical nature between job satisfaction, self-efficacy, and commitment to the teaching profession which all contribute to the larger concept of teacher resilience. This idea that efficacy plays a complex role in resilience and other factors impacting teachers was also demonstrated by Keogh et al. (2012) when they asserted: “In a returning cycle, resilience can be viewed as a product of developing teacher self- efficacy which, in turn, contributes towards their feelings of positive agency and their ability to intervene proactively in the classroom” (p. 60).

It also seems that there are many parallels and much crossover between resilience and self-efficacy and the concepts related to both notions. For example, ideas of stress, teacher burnout, retention, commitment to the profession, and student outcomes are concepts that emerge when in literature discussions regarding both efficacy and resilience (Gibbs & Simon, 2014; Gu & Day, 2013; Li et al., 2019). Therefore, it seems that while studies specific to teacher efficacy have not been a part of the current research landscape,

it is a concept that is still being explored with researchers seeking to understand the potential impacts of efficacy through different lenses, such as resilience.

### **Efficacy and The Research Question**

Based on the evidence presented in this review of the literature and my own observations of the various types of leadership I have witnessed in my tenure as a teacher, the main research question then for this study will address the ways in which highly efficacious rural teachers perceive leadership practices to influence their effectiveness. While there is a plethora of research regarding efficacy, and more specifically, teacher efficacy, there have been few studies that have explored connections between the practices of leaders and the subsequent impact on teacher efficacy, from the perception of the teachers themselves.

The current research has shown teacher efficacy to be important for a number of different reasons. The review of the literature has revealed that a case has been made for the importance of efficacy as a factor associated with teacher effectiveness, student success, and the potential of a teacher to be a change agent. Furthermore, past studies have posited a link between efficacy and stress levels, teacher burnout, and commitment to the profession. The most direct links in the current literature to leadership practices and efficacy have indicated that principals play a role in encouraging the development of teachers who are new to the profession or new to a school. Further to this, some studies have indirectly connected the principal's role in cultivating a positive school climate to efficacy. The literature suggests there may be a relationship between how leaders interact with teachers and the subsequent efficacy of those teachers. Hence, it seems pertinent to

begin to explicitly explore how teachers perceive leadership practices to directly impact their efficacy.

The *School Act* (Government of Alberta, 2018) and the LQS (Alberta Education, 2018a) prescribe the important and complex role of principals in the province and the responsibilities they have to students, teachers, and the greater community. The current climate in Alberta, as well as around the world, implores the importance of understanding ways in which principals may be able to influence teacher efficacy to leverage a myriad of benefits (e.g., Bandura & Cervone, 1986; Fackler & Malmberg, 2016; Kayalar, 2018; Klassen & Chiu, 2010). These benefits have been documented repeatedly in the literature and help make a case for the development of a strong understanding of how to support teacher self-efficacy beliefs (e.g., Bandura & Cervone, 1986; Fackler & Malmberg, 2016; Kayalar, 2018; Klassen & Chiu, 2010). Given the arguable importance of teacher efficacy, this study then aims to discover facets of the complex relationship between teachers' efficacy experiences and the potential impact leadership practices have on these experiences. Therefore, the primary question that will be explored in the study will be: What are the experiences of highly efficacious teachers about leadership practices that impact their perceptions of effectiveness? The secondary research questions to be explored will include: What are the collaborative structures and resources that highly efficacious teachers believe principals provide?; What instructional supports do highly efficacious teachers feel principals provide?; and how do highly efficacious teachers perceive a principal can contribute to their resilience? The past and current literature, along with my personal curiosities stemming from my experiences as an educator have led to and helped mold these primary and secondary research questions.

### **Chapter Three: Methodology**

This study investigated teachers' individual perceptions of the ways in which leadership practices impact their efficacy within their teaching practice. It sought to answer the primary research question: What are the experiences of highly efficacious teachers about leadership practices that impact their perceptions of effectiveness? The secondary research questions that were explored within this study included: What are the collaborative structures and resources that highly efficacious teachers believe principals provide?; What instructional supports do highly efficacious teachers feel principals provide?; and how do highly efficacious teachers perceive a principal can contribute to their resilience? Thus, this study attempted to determine the nature of highly efficacious teachers' perceptions of a school principal's actions that impact them and their classroom practice. In order to successfully gather such data, the methodology selected for this study made considerations to allow for teachers to share their experiences, current or past, and discuss the ways in which leaders have impacted their perceived efficacy. This study utilized a qualitative phenomenological approach. It employed a quantitative survey instrument in order to utilize purposive sampling to filter participants based upon self-reported efficacy, then applied qualitative methods based on phenomenological theory for interaction with the selected respondents. Ultimately the goal of this study was to understand the phenomenon of teacher efficacy in order to better understand the leadership practices that influence rural teachers' sense of efficacy.

#### **Epistemological and Ontological Assumptions**

The ontological underpinnings of this study were closely related to the social constructivist paradigm. As indicated by Hatch (2002), reality is subjective to individual

truths and experiences. Additionally, while there are likely shared elements that can be found across similar social groups, there lies an inherent uniqueness to the realities of different individuals due to the distinct lenses with which they view the world (Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Neuman, 2011).

This study then, was undertaken with the epistemological and ontological assumptions that there are multiple, valid realities that may be realized, dependent on different individuals and their experiences. Furthermore, there exists the underlying belief that a researcher can never truly be separated from their assumptions and experiences, and this is understood to be an integral part of the research experience (Hatch, 2002). A further foundational belief to this study is discussed by Crotty (1998) and Creswell (2014), when they indicated that the constructivist assumes the ways in which a person builds subjective meaning of events is through social interactions with others, alongside the cultural and historical norms that are active within a person's life. They described the researcher's task as acknowledging how their own experiences will influence their interpretation of the meanings others have of the world, then using this as a foundation to inductively seek out patterns. These patterns should be sought while searching for the complexity of the views of participants, with a focus on the "processes of interaction among individuals" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 24). Furthermore, these epistemological assumptions include the notion of a co-construction of a subjective reality through the interactions of the researcher and respondent (Hatch, 2002). This co-construction of reality will be achieved through a semi-structured interview approach (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). As stated by Kvale and Brinkmann (2015), "the qualitative research interview attempts to understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold the meaning

of their experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations” (p. 3). This notion of the purpose of the interview process aligns with the idea that individuals have differing and true realities that are shaped by their experiences, and an understanding of these perceptions can be uncovered through the interaction between researcher and respondent.

### **Utilizing a Phenomenological Method**

Aligning with the aforementioned ontological and epistemological frames of reference, is the assertion that researchers cannot be separated from their assumptions, and therefore should not try to claim they can be (Hammersley, 2000). Additionally, Kvale (1996) indicated that phenomenological methodology can utilize interviews as an exchanging of viewpoints between two individuals around a theme of mutual interest; in this case that mutual interest involved the theme of teacher efficacy. He suggested that the core of phenomenology is seeking to understand the phenomena and to provide a rich description of the way in which that particular aspect of the human experience is lived by the individual. I attempted to discover meaning through individual experiences surrounding the phenomena of high teacher efficacy and how the practices of principals are perceived to support or hinder that efficacy.

Similarly, van Manen (1990) asserted the idea that the lived experience is temporal in nature, meaning that experiences are often not grasped while they are happening, and meaning can only truly be made upon later reflection. He described the purpose of phenomenology as aiming to translate the lived experience into its essence, noting that the “lived experience is the starting point and end point of phenomenological research” (p. 36). It is through the lived experience, as well as through thought,



reflection, and conversation, that meaning is derived. Williiis (2001) concurred with these ideas when he stated: “Before human activities and events can be subjected to analytical abstracting knowledge, they are received as experiences” (p. 1). Therefore, the purpose of interviewing participants was to begin to grasp a piece of their lived experience in regards to the individual’s perceived efficacy and the impact principals behaviours have had upon it.

This study further followed a phenomenological method through data analysis approaches that were utilized. Hycner (1985) and Giorgi (2009) both emphasized the notion that phenomenology is not a set of steps to be followed and that data explication must always honour the phenomena above all. However, Hycner set up a framework based upon phenomenological principles that informed the analysis in this study. He outlined several main steps to guide phenomenological research. One key component of phenomenology as suggested by Hycner and Williiis (2001) is the idea of bracketing, or essentially approaching the data with a true openness to whatever emerges. Overall, he suggested a practice of utilizing the data gathered through interviews to get a sense of the whole, then searching for the participant’s meaning, clustering similar ideas to create themes and creating a composite summary. Similarly, Williiis described empathetic phenomenology as: “interviews, thematic analysis and clustering of interview transcripts looking for the common meanings an experience had for a group of [participants]” (p. 7).

As described by Williiis (2001) the first step of phenomenological inquiry requires description of the phenomenon. This was achieved in this study through the use of the literature review which has earnestly attempted to distill the complex notion of self-efficacy into an understandable phenomenon as it relates to the classroom practice of

teachers and the practices of principals. Moreover, the utilization of the *Teaching Quality Standard* (Alberta Education, 2018b), was used to help generate meaning about the experience of teaching in the Alberta context, as well draw out as a set of standards in which subjects will measure their efficacy on the efficacy scale designed for this study. This variable was a key component used to help ground the nature of a teacher's daily lived experience since it is based upon the standards and framework to what should be the foundation of their practice.

Subsequently, while Hammersley (2000) maintained it is not entirely possible to remove one's assumptions for the inquiry, it is arguably possible and essential to the phenomenological process to focus on bracketing the assumptions and allowing the phenomenon to "declare itself" (Williis, 2001, p. 9). In this study, the bracketing of assumptions was attended to by developing and stating clear recognition of epistemological beliefs held by the researcher. Heron (1992) agreed that this step of bracketing assumptions was essential to the phenomenological research process, indicating the researcher is more likely to be able to look past personal assumptions and beliefs, in order to focus a clearer understanding on that which is being studied. As the inquiry progressed, I continued to focus on letting the experiences declare themselves as they were. This was supported by the understanding that a phenomenon doesn't necessarily have one absolute, unchanging structure and may present itself in various ways based on different viewpoints (Williis, 2001).

Through thematic analysis, it is important to find what aspects are essential segments of the phenomenon, and which are purely inadvertent (Spiegelberg, 1975). This can be accomplished via grouping units of meaning together to develop themes (Creswell

& Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Furthermore, Hycner (1999) noted the importance of referring to interview transcripts and field notes repeatedly, as a means of finding overlap in clusters to distill key aspects of the phenomenon. By utilizing this process, I attempted to view the phenomenon as it “presents itself through different windows of experience” (Willis, 2001, p. 9). Therefore, I endeavoured to provide an interpretation of the nature of teachers’ self-efficacy as they are related to the practices of principals.

### **Participant Selection**

Participants in this study were classroom teachers who were currently working within a rural school division, located in southern Alberta. Upon receiving approval from the appropriate ethics board and school division, an email (See Appendix A for invitation) was sent out to all divisional principals, asking them invite their teachers to participate in an online survey about their perceived efficacy. This survey was confidential, and was conducted through Qualtrics to ensure there was confidentiality of identities and no chance for responses to be traced back to an individual by anyone besides the researcher (Bandura, 2006a). It was essential that this survey was easily accessible through a link, and did not require sign-in of any kind. Included in this email was information regarding further steps in this study. The survey contained information regarding informed consent at the beginning, requiring participants to provide their consent before starting the survey (see Appendix B). Additionally, it provided an option for those interested in participating in an interview, to enter their email address. Again, there was assured confidentiality, even for participants interested in being interviewed. As suggested by Bandura (2006a), participants chosen were assigned random identification numbers which were used to refer to them in all notes and records, and for

the interview process later on. The master copy of the list that linked names and numbers was kept safe at the home of the researcher and only viewed by her. Furthermore, the survey data was safeguarded by being kept on a password-protected computer.

Information obtained from the confidential survey was used to select participants. It has been suggested by many researchers that there are various influential factors that can dictate a teacher's individual efficacy. For example, factors such as gender, cultural background, and nationality are all believed to play a role in determining efficacy (Klassen & Chiu, 2010). Evidently, it would not be possible in the scope of this study to delve into all of these factors or to use such a vast array of factors as a basis to choose participants. Therefore, an overall mean value was used to determine teachers who scored high on the survey instrument and, therefore were treated as being highly efficacious. For this study, in order to ensure the phenomenon could be appropriately studied, only teachers with high self-efficacy beliefs were interviewed. This was done to help ensure that the participants had positive experiences regarding their efficacy and that they would be more likely to speak to how a principal may have played a role in developing and supporting these beliefs. Teachers with low self-efficacy may not have experienced the phenomenon of principal practices in a positive sense, and that could potentially limit the depth of their responses and experiences.

Given the size and scope of this study, as well as the indications from research of importance, there were two factors that could conceivably be accounted for in this study. Those two factors were the grade level being taught by the teacher and years of teaching experience. These variables had been noted in existing literature as being influential upon teacher efficacy (Bandura, 2006b; Klassen & Chiu, 2010; Woolfolk Hoy & Burke Spero,

2005). Therefore, in order to more effectively answer the question of how highly efficacious rural teachers perceive leadership practices to influence their efficacy, this study sought to take into account the experiences of teachers representing a broader array of backgrounds, including the grade level taught and years of teaching experience.

Bandura (2006a) suggested that efficacy may vary at different stages within a given pursuit. Subsequent studies have attempted to ascertain the relationship between years of teaching experience and efficacy beliefs (Klassen & Chiu, 2010; Woolfolk Hoy & Burke Spero, 2005). While this exact relationship has not been definitively correlated, Woolfolk Hoy and Burke Spero (2005) posited that efficacy ebbs and flows over the course of a career. Thus, it is possible that years of experience may be an influential factor on how individual teachers perceive their efficacy beliefs. Accordingly, this study sought to include participants that reflected differing years of experience to see if any patterns emerged that converged or diverged from the existing literature base. Additionally, it has been noted that efficacy can vary depending on the grade level taught, with elementary teachers displaying higher efficacy than their secondary level counterparts (Wolters & Daugherty, 2007).

Given the size of this study, and the improbability of sampling that accurately represents the entire population of Alberta teachers, it seemed prudent to utilize the chosen research question to guide the focus of purposive sampling. Therefore, the primary goal was to ascertain participants who taught different grade levels. These levels were divided into three categories for the purpose of this study: elementary (kindergarten through grade 6); junior high (grade seven through nine); and high school (grade ten through twelve). These groupings were reflective of grade level groupings utilized in

most schools in the school division being studied. The primary goal with the survey results was to select three highly efficacious teachers from each of the three grade level categories, for a total of nine participants. The secondary focus of the purposive sampling was to achieve diverse years of teaching experience, wherever possible. Teaching experience was recognized as three distinct groups, based upon the distinctions made by Klassen and Chiu (2010). These groups were comprised of: early years (zero to six years); mid-career years (seven to eighteen years); and late career years (nineteen to thirty years or greater). The ultimate goal, where possible, based upon the results of the efficacy scales, was to have three teachers representing each of the experience level categories. In actuality, the purposive sampling utilized had deviations from this ideal plan, which will be discussed in-depth in the survey data analysis section.

Consequently, within the realm of this study it was fitting to use purposive sampling (Creswell, 2014; Neuman, 2011) to attempt to select participants whose practice reflected different grade levels and who had different years of teaching experience. This supported the goal to achieve a more representative cross-section of teachers within the rural school division being studied. As previously mentioned, there are multiple factors that influence teacher efficacy levels, and it is possible that teachers with different amounts of experience, and who teach different grade levels, may find different degrees of influence given certain leadership practices. By striving to interview teachers who represented these different variables and backgrounds, it was hoped this could help determine a more robust understanding of how leaders can support teacher efficacy with their actions.

**Data Collection: Self-Efficacy Scale**

One of the main purposes of the first stage of data collection was to discern teachers who self-reported high efficacy from teachers who did not. This was done in order to create a pool of potential participants for further interviews. As indicated by Neuman (2011), surveys are appropriate when collecting data about self-reported beliefs or behaviours. Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, and Taubmans' (1995) ideas of phenomenological research speak about the necessity of focusing on and orienting to the phenomenon in order to acutely pay attention to the lived-experience of the individual. Furthermore, Creswell and Poth (2018) suggested the need for participants to be carefully chosen and ensure all participants have experienced the phenomena being studied. Therefore, the efficacy survey attempted to find teachers who self-reported as highly efficacious for the purposes of discovering an accurate common understanding.

Consequently, the lived-experience this study hoped to delve into was that of the nature of the relationship between teachers who self-report high efficacy and their experiences with formal leaders within the schools where they currently work, or have worked at in the past. Through choosing to focus this inquiry solely on teachers who shared the same high beliefs about themselves, it would conceivably be more likely that the collected data would provide a clearer picture of whether or not there were themes among a group of people who shared similar convictions about their efficacy beliefs. This tenably distinguished participants who were able to discuss their perceptions of how leadership practices have impacted their efficacy.

The initial step of data collection utilized a Teacher Efficacy Scale designed with Bandura's (1997, 2006a) guidelines in mind. This scale used questions directly from

Bandura's (undated) unpublished Teacher Self-Efficacy scale, and was also modeled off the Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale (TSES) created by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001). Woolfolk Hoy and Burke Spero (2005) described the TSES to be "superior to previous measures of teacher efficacy" (p. 354) because of how closely it aligns with self-efficacy theory (Klassen & Chiu, 2010). However, as indicated by Bandura (1997, 2006a), there is not one globally applicable measure of efficacy. Indeed, he described how when attempting to use an all-purpose measure, this often limits explanatory and predictive value because the measurement tool often has little or no link to relevant domains of functioning. He stressed the importance of strong knowledge of the relevant domains of functioning as a key step in the construction of sound efficacy scales.

Therefore, in order to find specific and relevant domains of functioning for teachers within an Alberta context, I referred to the Alberta-based *Teaching Quality Standard* (TQS) (Alberta Education, 2018b). Since the TQS is the framework from which teachers in Alberta are evaluated upon, as well as which guides their development and practice, it seemed reasonable that there was a relationship between teachers' everyday functioning and domains of practice that could be relevant in measuring self-efficacy in the Alberta context. Subsequently, in collaboration with Bandura's guide (1997, 2006a), Bandura's scale (undated), the scale created by Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998), and the TQS, a scale for use in this study was created that will be referred to as the Desrochers Efficacy Scale (DES) (See Appendix C).

The DES that was used as the efficacy scale in this study was aligned with each of the competencies outlined in the TQS (Alberta Education, 2018b). Included in the DES are 31 -questions utilizing a 9-point scale listed under six categories. Each category was



created to align with a TQS Competency, and used the same language that was found in the competency title. The survey items were developed using the language present in the indicators, which are “actions that are likely to lead to the achievement of a competency” and “are measurable and observable” (Alberta Education, 2018b, p. 3). Additionally some survey items were taken directly from Bandura’s (undated) scale and placed under the category that each item most closely aligned with. These items directly extracted from Bandura’s scale include: 3, 5, 6, 9, 26, and 27. Language used within the survey items was chosen purposefully to align with TQS standards, as well as to be focused on current capabilities. Since “self-efficacy is concerned with perceived capability” (Bandura, 2006a, p. 308), items were phrased using the words *can do* instead of *will do*. Bandura asserted that *can* is a judgement of someone’s capability, while *will* indicates a statement of intention. Therefore, he avowed that using the word *can* increases the likelihood of measuring the desired phenomena of perceived self-efficacy.

A 9-point scale was chosen for a number of reasons. As indicated by Bandura (2006a), “scales with a few steps should be avoided because they are less sensitive and less reliable” (p. 312). He also asserted that people tend to avoid the extremes on a scale, therefore, in actuality a scale may shrink due to this when respondents use it. While Bandura often emphasized the value of utilizing 100 point scales and 10 point scales, a 9 point scale was chosen as an arguably well accepted tool for measuring something along a continuum (Mertler, 2017). Additionally, the 9-point scale was utilized in Bandura’s (undated) scale, as well as the scale created by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001). Since this scale was modeled after the two aforementioned scales, it logically utilized the same type of rating scale. As indicated by Mertler (2017), there is a substantial argument for

and against scales that provide an option for people to choose a neutral opinion, therefore further justification for having a neutral option stems from being modeled after other widely utilized scales. The nominal descriptors being used were changed slightly to be grammatically correct and to align appropriately with the language of the question, as the stem “to what extent” was used for all items. Both Bandura’s and Tschannen-Moran et al.’s scales were anchored with nothing (0), very little (3), some influence (5), quite a bit (7) and a great deal (9). Similarly, the nominal descriptors used for this study were: not at all (0), very little (3), some influence (5), quite a bit (7) and a great deal (9).

**Survey data analysis.** The main purpose of the Desrochers Efficacy Scale was to find participants for the interviews who had high perceptions of self-efficacy. Accordingly, and because the quantitative analysis would not be used to further disaggregate the results, the data analysis of the scale was kept relatively simple: As indicated by Bandura (1997), strength of perceived efficacy for a certain domain can be found through the summation of scores divided by the total number of items; in other words, a simple means analysis performed through descriptive statistics. Furthermore, he suggested that an efficacy level can be determined by choosing a cut-off value. In his future work, Bandura (2006a) conceded that choosing the wrong cut-off value, either too high or too low, can produce artificial differences between perceived self-efficacy and actual performance. However, the purposes of this study are solely concerned with perceived efficacy and were not intending to measure the congruence of these perceptions with performance. Therefore, the concern of creating discrepancies with a chosen cut-off was not particularly relevant.

As suggested by Creswell (2014), six to eight participants is seen as ideal and sufficient for this type of study. For this study, twelve participants were contacted for further interviews, to account for participant attrition, in hopes that nine would actually be interviewed. Of those initial twelve contacts, 8 participants responded and a further two invitations were sent out; one of which was responded to. Due to the fact that this study hoped to delineate the factors of years of experience and grade levels taught, the initial plan was to contact teachers with the top three highest mean scores each group (See Figure 1).

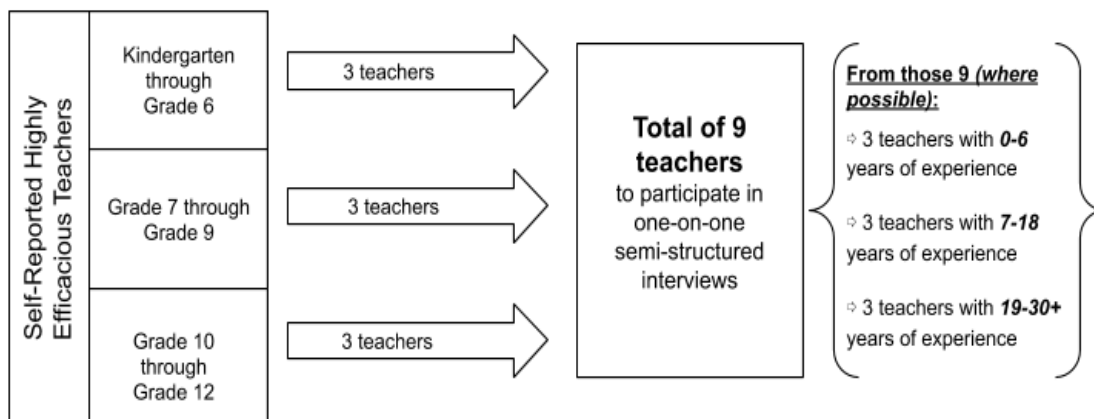


Figure 1. Model for selecting interview participants from the efficacy scale results.

As indicated by Figure 1, the primary consideration for the selection of participants was grade level taught. Those groups for grade level included three from each: kindergarten through grade six; grade seven through nine; and grade ten through twelve. These three groups were chosen to represent the division of grade levels within the rural school division. Within this school division, kindergarten through grade six is considered elementary school, grade seven through nine is junior high, and grade ten through twelve is high school. Hence, the groups used for this study were representative of the natural grade groupings already occurring across most schools in the division being

studied. In actuality, there were no participants who taught grades ten through twelve who completed the study and indicated willingness to participate in an interview. Therefore, the consideration of grade taught was not utilized in the selection of participants.

Figure 1 also specified the secondary focus of participant selection. This focus attempted to account for years of teaching experience, the subgroups included: early years (zero to six years); mid-career years (seven to eighteen years); and late career years (nineteen to thirty years or greater). This participant selection process had the aim of finding the three most efficacious teachers from each group. However, there were only two participants in the zero to six year category who indicated willingness to be interviewed. Given this, two participants from the early years category, three participants from the mid-career years category, and four participants from the late career years category, were interviewed for a total of nine participants. The justification for these groupings was formed based upon the study by Klassen and Chiu (2010) and the groupings for years of experience they used. While they suggested early years could be further characterized by zero to five years and four to six years, that level of delineation is not necessary for the purposes of this study. They indicated there may be a level of stabilization that happens to teachers around four to six years of experience, and that these early years are also a time when many teachers either leave the profession or choose to commit for the longer term. For the purposes of this study, the early years were considered years zero through six. Klassen and Chiu identified two sub groups in the later years, which were nineteen to thirty and thirty-one to forty. They indicated that years beyond thirty may often be characterized by declining levels of efficacy and motivation.

However, for this study, it was relevant to place both subgroups into the later years category since results would be aggregated by highest reported self-efficacy. This naturally excluded any teachers experiencing those declining beliefs as indicated by Klassen and Chiu.

Since the initially proposed representation could not be achieved based upon the willing respondents' experiences, the method and criteria used for participant selection was adjusted accordingly. Grade level taught was ignored as a selection criteria due to lack of participant diversity. Delineation by years of experience was achieved with the modification of only two teachers in the zero to six years category, and four teachers in the nineteen or more years category to still maintain a total of nine interview participants. In this alternative, when analyzing the survey data to disaggregate the most efficacious teachers, a ranked list of the most efficacious teachers surveyed was created that did not differentiate the years of teaching experience. The purpose of this was to have a larger list to draw upon to account for participant attrition and any declined invitations to participate. Simultaneously, a ranked list of efficacy scores was also created for each years of teaching experience category. The three (or two, where applicable) participants with the highest efficacy scores in each category were contacted. Subsequently, when after ten days, a potential interview participant didn't respond, the survey participants with the next highest efficacy scores were contacted, regardless of years of experience. This was done to ensure the teachers with the highest efficacy levels would be contacted next to participate in interviews. From this process, nine highly efficacious teachers were contacted and participated in interviews: two participants with zero to six years of

experience; three participants with seven to eighteen years of experience; and four participants with nineteen or more years of experience.

**Survey results.** A total of 53 participants completed the DES survey. Of the respondents, 34 indicated they taught kindergarten through grade six; 7 indicated they taught only junior high (grades seven through nine); 2 indicated they taught high school (grades ten to twelve); and 10 indicated that they fell into more than one of the grade level categories. For those that fell into multiple categories, they denoted that they taught multiple grades, mostly spanning from grades eight through twelve. Furthermore, 11 of the survey responses came from teachers indicating they had zero to six years of teaching experience, 17 responses came from teachers who shared they had seven to eighteen years of experience, and 25 responses came from teachers who indicated having nineteen or more years of teaching experience. The mean efficacy score for all participants was 7.12; and the mean efficacy score of participants interviewed for this study was 7.33. On the scale utilized for the DES, a score of 7 was correlated the nominal descriptor of “quite a bit” in regards to the extent to which the participants felt they could do certain tasks.

For the selection of participants, there was no singular cut-off value chosen, as per Bandura (2006a). Mean scores were calculated for each participant based upon their survey results, and highly efficacious participants were deemed so in comparison to the other participants. In other words, those with the highest mean score in each category were contacted first for interviews given that they were the most efficacious teachers willing to participate in this study. Highly efficacious teachers were the focus of this study as the aim was to speak with teachers who had positive experiences with the

phenomenon to uncover possible high yield strategies with the greatest potential impact for leaders.

### **Data Collection: Conducting Interviews**

Potential participants were chosen once the survey stage was completed and a participant pool from which to draw from was established, based on individuals who self-identified as highly efficacious and whom also provided contact information. An appropriate adequate number of participants to achieve saturation in a qualitative study is six to eight individuals (Creswell, 2014). However, twelve individuals were initially contacted and invited to participate to account for participant attrition. Participants were selected based on years of teaching experience. I then proceeded to invite these potential participants through an email message (see Appendix D for the invitation). For any of those initial invitations that were declined or did not elicit a response, I extended a further invitation to the next individual or individuals with the highest reported self-efficacy.

Once informed consent and permissions had been completed (see Appendix E for Letter of Consent), I set up a meeting time and place for the interview. In order to help build trust and ensure my participants were as comfortable as possible, I allowed them to decide when and where they would like to meet. I also had some possible suggestions in case they were unsure. This included an option to meet over Zoom and have the interview in a video conference format. For instance, a teacher may have been most comfortable in their own school, meeting in their own classroom. This aligns with the idea of utilizing a natural setting as an integral part of qualitative research (Creswell, 2008).

Prior to conducting my formal interviews for the study, I completed three pilot interviews with colleagues from other school divisions. This provided an opportunity for

me to develop a comfort level with the interview process, as well as the specific interview questions. As suggested by Rubin and Rubin (2012), researchers need to develop a grasp of their stylistic preferences during the interview process. For myself, this included chatting and building rapport with participants before beginning the formal part of the interview process. The purpose of this was to make each individual feel more comfortable, and offer an opportunity for them to ask any questions they had and get acquainted with how the interview process was going to look and feel, including the use of recording equipment. This aligns with the ideas of Kvale and Brinkmann (2015), as they asserted the need for “interviewees to have a grasp of the interviewer before they allow themselves to talk freely and expose their experiences and feelings to a stranger” (p. 154). They suggested that this is established through attentive listening, showing interest, empathy and respect, and transparency about the purpose of the interview.

During the interview process, I recorded the conversations so they could be transcribed verbatim afterwards (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The interviews were recorded onto a laptop through the use of an external microphone to ensure clear audio recording, leaving less room for transcription errors. For the interviews that took place over Zoom, the meeting was recorded, and the video file was deleted immediately after the interview concluded. The transcript was created from the saved audio file of the Zoom recording. Additionally, I took notes by hand as the interview progressed. The reasoning for this was twofold. First, it helped me to understand and recall details more effectively when reviewing the transcripts and analyzing the data. Second, it was also helpful during the interview to help cue myself to anything I wanted to come back to or delve into in greater depth. As indicated by Rubin and Rubin, a researcher must decide what amount of follow



up they will use during the interview. I endeavoured to conduct the interviews more like a conversation, striving to balance active listening with following up to achieve depth where necessary. Therefore, by taking notes during the interview, this helped me to recall things I wanted to come back to, especially if they come up at a moment where it wasn't fitting to interrupt a thought and dig deeper.

Rubin and Rubin (2012) suggested some key components of what they term “responsive interviewing” (p. 36). This style of qualitative interviewing puts the emphasis on building a relationship based upon trust between the interviewer and the participant. They recommended a conversational, non-confrontational tone to permeate the interview, with questions that allow for flexibility and that can evolve based upon individual participants' responses. They stressed the importance of the relationship: transparency about privacy and protection of the respondent, options for participants to review and edit what was said, a focus on respectful listening, and an empathetic awareness of the feelings and emotions of all involved parties. Arguably, the goal of these interviews and this study is to “build a solid, deep understanding... based on the perspectives and experience of your interviewees” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 38).

I utilized the interview model described by Rubin and Rubin (2012), whose protocol recognizes that the interview “process is embedded within a larger sequence of research” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 165). Rubin and Rubin suggested several types of questions as being integral to the interview process itself. These include main questions, follow-up questions, and probes. The purpose of main questions are to structure the interview. These questions are prepared in advance and are carefully designed to answer the research question. Follow-up questions are used to help ensure thoroughness, to dig

deeper, and to provide detail. These often stem from a comment the respondent made and are worded in such a way as to reflect a connection to prior answers. Finally, probes are utilized to help peek out slant or bias, seek clarification, and to keep the interview on target. Additionally, the manner in which these questions are used depends on the stage and purpose of the research. For example, my interviews were more expansive on given topics since discussions were basically with strangers. Rubin and Rubin argued that interviews of this nature should remain focused on broad questions with a limited number of follow ups.

As indicated by Kvale and Brinkmann (2015), interview questions have two relevant dimensions which must be considered. Thematically, questions need to be focused and able to answer the research question. Dynamically, questions need to be designed in such a way that allows for positive interaction and flow of the interview. When a good interview question is balanced between these two dimensions it should “contribute thematically to knowledge production and dynamically to promoting good interview interaction” (p. 157). They further suggested that interview questions be short and simple, utilizing the researcher as an effective research tool.

Accordingly, the questions in this study utilized Creswell’s (2012) structure of five open ended questions to allow for flexibility in responses (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The five questions that guided interviews included:

1. What does efficacy feel like to you?
  - a. Describe a time when you felt highly efficacious?
  - b. Describe a time where you felt particularly inefficacious?

2. What events or experiences have you had that make you feel the most effective in your classroom?
  - a. Have you felt more effective at certain points in your career?  
Describe this experience.
  - b. Have you felt less effective at certain points in your career? Describe this experience.
3. Describe experiences in which you had an interaction with a principal or school leader that impacted how you felt about your teaching practice?
  - a. Describe a time that a leader left you feeling unsupported and ineffective as a teacher?
  - b. Describe a time that a leader left you feeling supported and effective as a teacher?
4. What are key characteristics of a leader who makes you feel efficacious in your teaching practice? Describe anecdote(s) that illustrate these characteristics.
  - a. Has a principal supported your collaboration with others in a way that impacted your efficacy? Describe this experience.
  - b. Has a principal supplied resources in a way that impacted your efficacy? Describe this experience.
  - c. Has a principal attended to instructional issues in a way that impacted your efficacy? Describe this experience.
5. Has there been a time when a principal helped foster or hindered your resilience?

- a. If fostered, what were specific social and emotional supports your principal provided? Describe this experience.
- b. If hindered, in what ways did your principal impact your social and emotional well-being? Describe this experience.

Prior to asking the interview questions, I provided participants with the definition of efficacy. I also debriefed with each participant at the end of the interview by asking, “I have no further questions at this time. Is there anything else you would like to share with me or ask about before we finish the interview?” As indicated by Kvale and Brinkmann (2015), it is not unusual for important new information to be discovered at this point in the interview. Furthermore, I conducted a participant check after the interview by sending the respondent a copy of my transcribed notes from the interview. I asked the respondents at the end of the interview if they would prefer a digital or print version. This gave each participant the opportunity to ensure the interview accurately reflected their ideas, beliefs and experiences, as well as to make any changes they felt were necessary. Additionally, they had the opportunity to volunteer any new perspectives they had.

**Interview data analysis.** Analysis of the data from this study was based upon qualitative research frameworks. Neuman (2011) described the process of analyzing qualitative data as one that seeks to “systematically organize, integrate, and examine” (p. 507). He reasoned that this process involves identifying general ideas, themes, and concepts that are found within the interview transcripts. He referred to three types of coding for qualitative data as a means of accomplishing this process.

Neuman’s (2011) coding process begins with *open coding*. The purpose of this stage involves the preliminary passes through the data that was collected to identify main

themes or ideas. He indicated this helps a researcher to identify themes that are emerging at a glance. From this, it is helpful for a researcher to remain open and flexible to creating new themes or changing initial codes as the analysis proceeds (Neuman, 2011). During this stage, the researcher focuses on the data, assigns labels and codes to themes, and utilizes this process to create further questions and hypotheses.

Subsequently, *axial coding* follows. This is considered a second look through the data, in which the researcher revisits the organized codes, themes, and preliminary concepts (Neuman, 2011). The purpose is to find the axis of the key concepts and look for commonalities between categories and concepts. It is likely that new themes or codes may emerge during this stage.

Finally, the third step in the data analysis is *selective coding*. This stage begins only after concepts are well developed and several core ideas have been identified. The researcher then reviews the data to find examples and cases that help to more clearly illustrate the themes that have emerged from the data.

During the three stages of coding, I also engaged in note taking through *analytic memos*. Neuman (2011) defined analytic memos as “notes a qualitative researcher takes while developing more abstract ideas, themes, or hypothesis from the examination of details in the data” (p. 447). He described this type of note taking as writing notes to yourself about your thoughts and ideas regarding the coding process. The purpose is to help the researcher make sense of the data by linking “concrete data or raw evidence to abstract, theoretical thinking” (p. 515). This note taking process was done in a notebook. These notes served as a running record and helped to solidify ideas and provide cues for concepts that needed revisiting.

The formal coding processes were completed through a combination of digital and paper analysis. For the initial stage of coding, four topics were utilized based upon the interview questions. Those topics included: contextual variables impacting efficacy, social and emotional supports, feelings of efficaciousness, and leadership characteristics. For each topic, key information regarding this topic was pulled from all parts of each of the nine interview transcripts. As information related to each topic was elicited, it was copied into a spreadsheet. The spreadsheets were further delineated by the three categories depicting years of experience, and data was initially analyzed within these three separate categories. Once compiled, these spreadsheets were printed and main themes and ideas began to be obtained. A legend of coding marks was used to delineate new ideas, something that was previously mentioned, or potentially notable comments from participants.

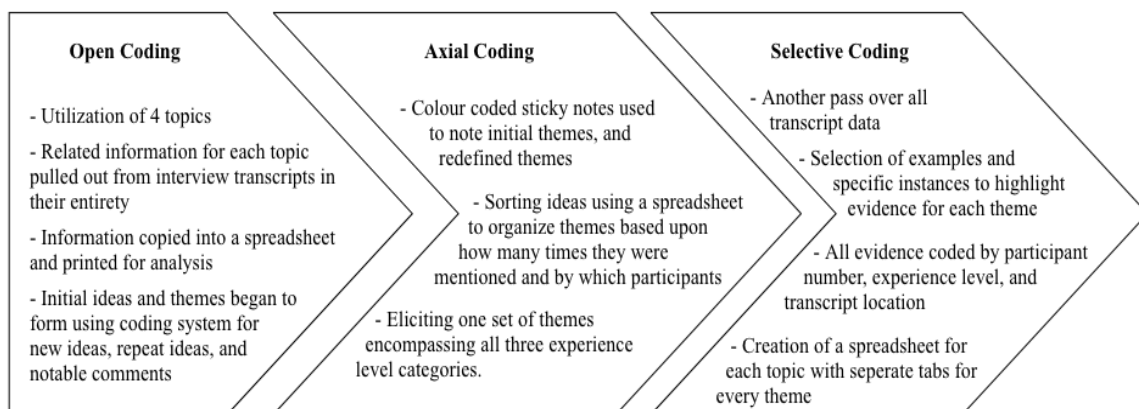
Once all the initial themes and ideas had been drawn out from all three categories, there was regular revisiting to the experience category analyzed first as what was seen as themes or key ideas morphed through the analysis of each topic. Sometimes the language being used changed, or sometimes something new emerged up that required revisiting to ensure that new idea was captured across all three experience level categories. This was very reflective of Neuman's (2011) notion that new themes would emerge and the researcher needed to remain open to ideas changing and morphing as the analysis progressed.

Once the iterative process of back and forth started to seem complete, *axial coding* began. Here a colour coded sticky note system was used to indicate key ideas that emerged in that topic. Once again, themes being pulled out were separated into the three

experience categories. Themes for each participant were compiled on a large sticky note. For some topics a second sticky note was used to reimagine the themes where needed. Once these themes were relatively solidified across all participants and all three experience categories, the themes were entered into a spreadsheet tagged with the participant numbers of those who spoke to that theme. Within Excel, participants were referred to by their number and colour code, based on which experience level they fell into. That data was then sorted based on frequency of mentions. Subsequently, the next sticky note stage began to analyze the data across the entire topic, not delineated by experience level. Themes and ideas that were mentioned eight or nine times were assigned one colour, and themes mentioned by four to seven participants were assigned a different colour. Thus, there was a creation of one set of themes for the topic, with clear links to the number of participants who mentioned each idea.

Finally, *selective coding* was utilized to review the data again and find examples and specific instances to illustrate each theme. This part was completed digitally by referring back to the printed topic spreadsheets. Within each topic, information from participants was organized digitally by theme in a separate tab, tagged by participant number and transcript location. This resulted in four main spreadsheets – one for each topic. Each spreadsheet included an overview of the themes in the topic, and tabs for each

subsequent theme with related illustrative examples. A general overview of the coding and analysis process can be found in Figure 2.



*Figure 2.* Overview of specific aspects of the coding and data analysis process.

This process of coding and note taking supported the phenomenological inquiry process by allowing me to systematically develop an understanding of the lived experiences as represented through the interview process. By coding themes, I was able to find what was common between multiple individual lived experiences, while separating what was incidental from that which was essential to the phenomenon (Williis, 2001). My note taking supported my developing understanding of the anticipated and unexpected phenomena that emerged.

### **Validity and Trustworthiness**

Areas concerning validity and trustworthiness were two-fold for this study. There was validity of the survey to contend with, as well as the trustworthiness of the interviews and subsequent results of that process. In the context of this study, they were addressed separately, as they were each being utilized for separate purposes.

**Validity.** One important aspect of self-reported survey results is that high self-efficacy does not always translate to effective teaching behaviour. This is a limitation of utilizing a survey as a means to filter participants. Neuman (2011) stated this limitation



when he indicated that surveys only gather information from a given person or organization, and what someone self-reports may be different than what they actually do. However, because this study was seeking out teachers' individual perceptions of their own efficacy and how that is impacted by the practices of leaders they have worked with, challenges between the issues of self-reporting and actual behaviour may not impact the interpretation of results.

Another challenge surrounding validity in research regarding perceptions of self-efficacy has consistently been in respect to the survey items used to measure efficacy. In fact, Pajares (1996) stated "specificity and precision are often purchased at the expense of external validity and practical relevance" (p. 561). Bandura (1997) held similar beliefs about finding the right balance between specificity and validity to ensure what was intended to be measured was indeed being measured. This balance was further contested with by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) when they created a new measurement scale that expanded on Bandura's (undated) scale to include more teacher capabilities. The Ohio State Teacher Efficacy Scale (OSTES) developed by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy is a 24-item scale based upon Bandura's 30 item-scale. By basing the scale for this study upon those two scales, there was transfer of some of the inherent validity since many of the same items were used. It is important to note however, that many scales, including the ones employed by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy, displayed stronger correlations with personal teacher efficacy than with general teaching efficacy (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Given that the scale for this study was based upon a scale that had less success measuring general teaching efficacy, it can be assumed that that was an area of weakness for the scale used for this study as well.

The scales created and tested by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) and Bandura (undated) formed the basis of the survey created for this study. Many of the items used for this survey were taken directly from the two aforementioned surveys, which were chosen for their validity and reliability. Furthermore, the other items that were added to the survey were created using the TQS (Alberta Education, 2018b). As indicated by Bandura (1997), a measurement tool must have specific links to relevant domains of functioning to have explanatory and predictive value. In order to ensure those relative domains were accounted for within the Alberta Context, the TQS language and competencies were also used as the basis of some of the items on this scale.

**Trustworthiness.** Another area of this study for consideration is the trustworthiness of the interview process. Guba and Lincoln (1981) and Guba (1981) suggested four components of trustworthiness that should be present in naturalistic inquiries, such as this study. They described those four components as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility was described by Guba and Lincoln (1982) as congruence between the data of the inquiry and the phenomena represented by the data. In regards to qualitative interview studies, this would mean ensuring the data source, in this case the interview respondents, found the analysis and interpretations to be credible. This credibility was accomplished for this study through the member validation or member checks (Neuman, 2011). Through this validation, participants were asked to review the interview transcript to ensure accuracy and to confirm that the meaning captured was the meaning intended. During this transcript review, participants had the opportunity to add, remove or clarify details as needed to ensure accurate representation of their ideas and experiences.

Moreover, peer debriefing was utilized with supervisors to test insights and receive advice regarding subsequent methodological steps, as well as separate personal feelings and stresses of the researcher that may adversely affect the study (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). Peer debriefing also served to help create the “audit trail” to delineate and make transparent all steps of the inquiry (Guba & Lincoln, 1981).

Subsequently, transferability was demonstrated by “showing that the data have been collected from a sample that is in some way... representative of the population to which generalization is sought” (Guba & Lincoln, 1982, p. 247). While the ability to generalize the results of this study to a greater scale was not an implicit goal, it remained important that the data is able to demonstrate a “thick description” (p. 247) that is sensitive and relative to the context being studied. Interviewing teachers who taught at various grade levels and who also had differing years of teaching experience helped to achieve this goal. Purposive sampling was also used via the survey to ensure there were individuals interviewed that represented varying viewpoints across the rural school division being utilized for this study, therefore maximizing the range of information collected.

Next, dependability was described as a facet of trustworthiness that allows for “stability after discounting such conscious and unpredictable (but rational and logical) changes” (Guba & Lincoln, 1982, p. 247). For this study, the written report delineated “all methodological steps and decision points” and provided “access to all data in their several raw and process stages” (Guba & Lincoln, 1982, p. 247). This level of dependability was partially achieved through stringent note taking procedures utilized at all stages of data collection and analysis referred to in the earlier section, which created

an “audit trail”. Furthermore, the use of acceptable practice was also ensured by regular consultation with, and feedback from, the supervisors of this study.

Finally, confirmability was proffered as placing the “onus of objectivity” upon the data and removed from the inquirer (Guba & Lincoln, 1982, p. 247). They suggested practicing reflexivity to uncover one’s own underlying epistemological assumptions, motivations, biases and prejudices. For this study, that was initially reflected upon in earlier chapters of this report, and ongoing reflection was achieved via note taking and journaling throughout the process. Furthermore, the notion of a “confirmability audit” was employed to verify “that each finding can be appropriately traced back through analysis steps to original data, and that interpretations of data clusters are reasonable and meaningful”(p. 247). This was ensured through note taking, transcribing of interviews, and stringent record keeping.

Through a multitude of steps this study aimed to effectively account for concerns regarding validity and trustworthiness. Items for the survey were grounded in other surveys that had been extensively tested and validated, thus increasing the likelihood of validity of the survey used. Additionally, the four facets of trustworthiness as described by Guba (1981) and Guba and Lincoln (1982) have been accounted for in multiple ways to confirm that trustworthiness is accounted for from many different angles.

***Verisimilitude.*** Another aspect worth considering when reflecting upon the notion of trustworthiness of the interview data is that of verisimilitude. Guba and Lincoln (1982) denoted the importance of qualitative research to be able to provide a thick description of that which is being studied. Alongside that notion, Ponterotto (2006) described the role of verisimilitude when he stated: “Thick meaning of findings leads readers to a sense of

verisimilitude, wherein they can cognitively and emotively “place” themselves within the research context” (p. 543). Given this, it was the aim of the sharing of participant experiences regarding the phenomena of how highly efficacious teachers perceive leadership behaviours to impact their effectiveness to invoke a sense of verisimilitude within the reader.

### **Researcher Bias**

This study was undertaken within a phenomenological framework to explore the nature of the relationships between teachers’ sense of professional efficacy and leadership practices. There were particular researcher’s viewpoints and experiences that needed to be outlined in regards to this study. As mentioned formerly, I am an educator who has worked in a variety of schools and school districts and with a variety of different principals. These experiences, at least in part, have led me to my interest in understanding how a principal’s actions can support or undermine teacher efficacy. Moreover, in my personal experiences, my interactions with different principals have impacted me greatly in both positive and negative ways. Those experiences likely impact the lens at which I view school leaders and their potential role in impacting teacher efficacy. Furthermore, my experiences with this study and exploring the literature have further defined my personal values and dispositions regarding self-efficacy beliefs and leadership impacts upon them.

This study comes with implicit limitations. I did not seek to generalize, or create a prescribed course of action. One possible outcome included making suggestions based upon the themes that emerged as potential implications for leaders. However, these implications took into account the limited scope of the study. Additionally, in choosing to

use purposive sampling to speak with teachers who reported themselves as highly efficacious, this study only considered the viewpoints of those teachers. This means that any understandings gained from this study are limited to that set of viewpoints and do not account for teachers who did not consider themselves highly efficacious.

Bias was mitigated in this study through member checks and consultation with supervisors. By sharing interview transcripts and notes with interview respondents, they were able to confirm conclusions drawn were accurate and representative of their experiences. Furthermore, the thesis committee and thesis supervisors critically examined and questioned methodology, themes, and conclusions. The greater experience and expertise of those on the committee provided guidance throughout the entire research process.

### **Study Timeline**

The following was the timeline for the completion of the various stages of this study:

- December 2019 – Completion of Thesis Colloquium and subsequent amendments to the proposal
- January 2020 – Completion of HSR Approval
- February – June 2020 – Data Collection
- July – August 2020 – Data Analysis
- October 2020 – Thesis Completion
- November 2020 – Thesis Defense

## Summary

Over the years, there has been a developing understanding of the important role teacher efficacy plays within the education system. While the development of a definition of the construct and the associated measurement tools have been subject to many changes and contradicting opinions over the past few decades, there has also been a growing body of research which has indicated the possible positive effects of strong teacher efficacy beliefs (e.g., Ashton & Webb, 1986; Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Guskey & Passaro, 1994; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Some examples of these positive effects include increased student outcomes, better classroom management, greater perseverance with challenging or unmotivated students, and a stronger commitment to the teaching profession. Furthermore, closely tied to efficacy beliefs are other arguably important notions of teachers' early years and experiences in their careers, teacher stress levels and burnout, as well as teacher attrition levels. These issues are ones that are relevant not only in the Alberta context, but in schools and countries around the world.

Henceforth, discovering ways that schools can nurture and positively impact teacher efficacy seems particularly pertinent. This study attempted to capture teacher perceptions of how leadership practices impacted their sense of efficacy. Through the development of a deeper understanding of the potential relationship between leadership practices and teacher efficacy, it was my hope that this study could describe possible best practices that school leaders could employ to support and nurture their teachers in the area of efficacy.

## **Chapter Four: Results and Findings**

Three stages of coding for thematic analysis were used to examine the experiences and information provided by the nine participants interviewed in this study. These nine participants were kindergarten through grade 12 teachers who completed the online survey containing the Desrochers Efficacy Scale (DES) and who self-reported being highly efficacious. Of the survey respondents, teachers with the highest efficacy rating were contacted for an interview. Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format which consisted of five main questions. The goal of these interviews was to explore the primary research question: What are the experiences of highly efficacious teachers about leadership practices that impact their perceptions of effectiveness? Furthermore, these interviews also sought to discover ideas associated with the utility of collaborative structures and resources; and the instructional supports employed by principals and their impact on teachers' sense of efficacy. In addition, the interviews attempted to gain insights about teacher perceptions of what it is that principals do to contribute to their resilience.

Through the thematic analysis, four main topics emerged from the five interview questions posed to participants. Given the nature of thematic analysis, evidence for each topic was cultivated throughout all parts of the interview and was not strictly tied to responses to a single question. The four topics included contextual variables impacting efficacy; social and emotional supports perceived by teachers to impact efficacy; feelings of efficacy; and leadership characteristics valued by highly efficacious teachers. Within each of these topics, the thematic analysis uncovered multiple themes and subthemes that will be discussed thusly. Therefore, themes will be presented by topic, with the primary



and secondary questions of the study being addressed directly in the final chapter of this report.

Evidence and supporting examples of participant experiences will be provided for the themes and subthemes within each of the topics. Due to the fact that some of the interview questions asked participants for both examples and counter examples to highlight their experiences with school leaders, both instances in support of certain leadership behaviours, as well as contrary examples will be offered. In question one, participants were asked to describe times they felt highly efficacious, as well as particularly inefficacious. Similarly, in question two participants were asked to describe points in their careers where they felt more effective and less effective. Participant were asked to describe times that a leader left them feeling supported and effective, as well as unsupported and ineffective in question three. Finally, in question five participants were asked to describe instances that principals fostered or hindered their resilience. Given this, it seemed pertinent to include examples that highlighted all parts of the experiences of participants.

### **Contextual Variables Impacting Efficacy**

During the interviews, question one asked participants about experiences they had in which they felt most effective in their classrooms. Furthermore, participants were asked to discuss times that an interaction with a school leader had an impact on their feelings of efficacy in question two. This included interactions with a school leader that left them feeling effective and supported as a teacher, as well as interactions that left them feeling unsupported and ineffective. Finally, in question three participants were asked about times they were left feeling supported and effective, as well as unsupported

and ineffective based upon an interaction they had with a school leader. The answers given by participants to these questions, as well as throughout the interviews as a whole, led to an emergence of four key themes regarding the contextual variables which these participants indicated as impacting their efficacy. These themes were relationships, collective responsibility, direction, and positive reinforcement.

**Relationships.** All nine participants engaged in this study shared the importance of strong relationships as a key contextual variable impacting their efficacy. Indeed, this variable could be considered foundational to all of the others, as it is an essential component that must first be present before any other contextual pieces have a potential positive impact on teachers' feelings of effectiveness. While many participants mentioned how having strong relationships with students, colleagues, and school leaders impacted their efficacy, the focus of these findings will highlight areas directly related to school leaders. Participants described ways in which principals prioritized relationships with them by getting to know them on a personal level, supporting their growth and learning, being supportive, and showing genuine care and concern not only for their teaching practice but for them as people.

When describing how integral relationships were to her ability to ask for help and in supporting her as she strived to learn and grow, Participant 006 indicated the importance of relationships to her when she said:

It's instant, right? Like they put you as if you're the number one most important person at that moment in time. I think because of that, I've never been afraid to say, I don't know how to do this. Can you help me?

She spoke of how these strong relationships have helped her to be a better teacher, to feel more effective in her classroom, and to continue to be progressive with pedagogy.

Conversely, two participants noted how the lack of a strong relationship was a variable that had a notably negative impact on their efficacy. Participant 002 described negative feelings associated with interactions where she felt her relationship with her principal and vice-principal were not as strong as that which some of her colleagues had. She described how this made her feel less heard, valued, and part of a team. Additionally, she spoke to how it seemed that her ideas and input were not taken as seriously because she did not have as strong of a relationship with her administrators.

Within the theme of relationships, participant responses led to the formation of six subthemes. These subthemes were: teacher voice, trust, autonomy, feedback, honesty, and vulnerability.

***Teacher voice.*** Six participants mentioned how an important contextual factor underlying their feelings of efficacy was having their voices heard by their leaders within their school building. Multiple teachers discussed the importance of open conversations they had with their leaders and how the feedback they gave was heard and often turned into action. Participants discussed having their voice heard in regards to resources being purchased, student learning and instruction, teacher involvement in school based committees, decision making, class lists, and to their principals querying how they were doing and what they needed in a more general sense. One participant described a time where she spoke candidly with her principal about some issues that were happening. She described how her principal didn't deal with the issues exactly the way she would have liked, but she addressed them nonetheless, leaving this participant knowing that her voice

had been heard by her principal, subsequently allowing her to support her students more effectively.

***Trust and autonomy.*** Alongside the participants' willingness to share their voices and ideas, another important contextual variable noted by the participants was trust. Seven of the participants interviewed indicated that trust was a key element that needed to be present to support their efficacy. Participants spoke of trust having many different facets, such as principals trusting in their teaching practice; trusting they would be safe if they made a mistake; feeling free to share ideas and seek advice or help; trusting in the knowledge and experience held by the school leader; and trusting the actions and motivations of the school leader. Participant 005 described her experiences with this type of trust when she said:

So even setting up committees to help with figuring out...learner profile comments...and asking for our input on things. Also, being able to, if I have an idea, I feel comfortable enough to approach them on something and to raise that idea. For example, running a little school store opportunity through my windows in my school, which may seem absolutely ridiculous to some people.

Closely related to trust, five participants spoke of having autonomy as being an important piece of the contexts in which they felt efficacious. They described their principals "having their backs" and "going to bat" for their actions and intentions. Participants described feeling trusted to make decisions in their classroom and not being micromanaged. Furthermore, they portrayed principals who allowed them to run with their ideas and who gave them space to do the things they knew their students needed, but who were also there to support them if needed.

***Honesty, feedback, and vulnerability.*** Other key contextual variables that were mentioned by six participants as being important pieces of a context to support efficacious feelings were honesty, feedback, and vulnerability. When participants referred to vulnerability, they described their school leaders' willingness to demonstrate vulnerability, as well as their own comfort level with being vulnerable within their school environment, especially with their leadership team. Participants in all three categories of teaching experiences mentioned the importance of each of these subthemes, but the discussion around these ideas was more prevalent in teachers with more experience, with teachers in the two categories with greater than six years experiences speaking more to these subthemes.

Interview participants spoke frequently of the value of relationships in regards to their efficacy. They consistently described contextual factors of their relationships they felt were necessary to be present, such as teacher voice, trust, autonomy, feedback, honesty, and vulnerability.

**Collective Responsibility.** In addition to strong positive relationships, participants spoke about collective responsibility as being another key contextual variable that supported their efficacious beliefs. While only four participants explicitly described collective responsibility, a large number of participants described in direct and indirect ways, facets of what will be termed collective responsibility for the purposes of this thematic analysis. Subthemes supporting this theme include: sense of belonging, being student-centred, engagement, following through, collaboration, and being realistic. Taken together, within these subthemes participants described a general sense of feeling like their formal leaders were as engaged and conscientious towards student success as they

were. This was described by Participant 006 as “having people like your leaders understand that it's not all up to us [as teachers]. They are ALL of our kids.”

***Sense of belonging and collaboration.*** Of those interviewed, seven and nine participants respectively, revealed having a sense of belonging and strong opportunities for collaboration as contextual factors that supported their efficaciousness. When referring to a sense of belonging, participants often spoke of feeling like they were part of a team. Participants expressed they felt a strong sense of belonging when they were collaborating with colleagues to support student learning, their work and experience were valued, food and coffee were brought in by school leaders, and principals and vice-principals “walked alongside” them in the work they were doing. Participant 006 noted how this felt for her when she shared the following reflection about her interactions with a vice-principal she worked with: “You never felt like you had to do cartwheels and all of this stuff to please her. She was working as hard as you were to make the school an amazing place.” These feelings of a sense of belonging showed up in many ways for participants from having their principal support with a challenging situation with a student, to team teaching with a colleague. Conversely, Participant 007 noted the negative effect on her efficacy when she did not have a school context that cultivated this sense of belonging when she said, “I felt less effective when I didn't have somebody supporting and being a team member with me.”

Often, when participants were speaking of when they most felt part of a team they also referred to meaningful collaboration with colleagues and school leaders. A few participants spoke of the ways in which their leaders facilitated collaboration within their building and with their fellow teachers. They described:

- structured and designated time for collaboration,
- opportunities to team-teach and being supported to collaborate beyond the walls of their building,
- mentorship programs,
- having collaborative structures “built in to the culture of the building”,
- having close proximity within their school building to collaborative partners,

as some of the ways that principals provided supports to facilitate collaboration and subsequently a strong sense of belonging. Alternatively, some participants described how having a brand new teaching partner each year or feeling isolated due to lack of colleagues with a similar teaching assignment negatively impacted their efficacy. Additionally, participants described principal and vice-principal involvement in collaborative times and meetings, as well as informal collaboration with those leaders as having a positive impact on their efficacy and sense of belonging.

***Engagement and student-centred philosophy.*** As participants described collaborative practices that enhanced their sense of belonging and subsequent efficacy beliefs, they also detailed the importance of school leaders who were strongly engaged in the daily school operations and who acted from a student-centred perspective.

Participants with nineteen or more years of teaching experience described engaged leaders as those who knew what was happening in their classrooms, who were present and visible all around the school, and who took responsibility for finding solutions to

challenges faced by teachers and students. Participant 007 explained her experiences with her principal's level of engagement:

I think having strong leadership within the building... that will walk the walk. [In my current school], there's not that same investment in what I'm doing than there would be because there's just no time. Right? Like they don't have the time.

She further discussed how reliant she became upon friends and colleagues, inside and outside of her building to find that support and team feeling that she was missing from her principal, as she navigated the opening of a new school. Two other participants depicted engagement as leaders being in-tune with the teachers, students, and classrooms within their building. These participants described how leaders were constantly present in their classrooms and supporting learning, had a strong knowledge of the individual needs of their student population, and who according to Participant 003, “keep their pulse on the business of a classroom, and who don't get so removed from what it's really like in a classroom that they unintentionally overload people.”

Overall, five out of the nine participants spoke of engagement as directly impacting their efficacy. While teachers with the most experience defined engagement as the level of involvement of their school leaders, the participants with less experience referred to student engagement within their classroom. Participant 001, who was in the zero to six years of experience category, and Participant 005, who was in the seven to eighteen years category, described their own practices that engaged or failed to engage students. They spoke of authentic learning opportunities where students could demonstrate their knowledge and of being prepared, organized, and confidently orchestrating student learning, as times that student engagement was high and their



efficacy was positively impacted. Conversely, Participant 001 also spoke of when he was feeling run down, tired, or struggling to get the students to connect to the learning as times that his efficacy was negatively impacted by student engagement.

Seemingly related to school leader engagement, the contextual variable of leaders being student-centred was also perceived by participants to impact their efficacy. Five participants detailed examples of working in schools and with administrators that were student-centred as environments where they felt the most efficacious. Participant 002 spoke of extraordinary time and effort her principal invested into students to make school their “home away from home.” She explained how this principal did special spirit events every Monday and celebrated holidays in special ways. She described that while this leader cared deeply about student learning, she never lost sight of building relationships with students who often had challenging home contexts. Conversely, one participant spoke of a principal whose sole focus was on minutia of academics and this participant explained how she felt the lack of understanding of student relationships, supports, and needs by her principal was a detriment. Similarly, another participant explained she once worked with a principal who seemingly made decisions simply because he could and there was a lack of obvious student-focused reasoning behind his choices. She contrasted this with another principal she worked for, whom she felt continually helped her to be a better teacher because she was always operating from a student-centred lens.

I would say the two of them never once made me feel like I was lesser than them.

They didn't want to make me feel stupid for asking questions. We did laugh at some of my questions over the years, but it was always genuinely, they just

wanted the best for the kids. So they wanted me to be my best so that it came across in my classroom.

Several participants noted in various ways how valuable and empowering it was to work in a school with leaders who were consistently student-focused and who were truly engaged in all aspects of the school community.

***Follow through and realistic expectations.*** Related to the notion of leadership engagement are the contextual variables defined by participants as leaders having realistic expectations and leaders following through with their actions. Four participants described various anecdotes about when their school leaders had realistic expectations regarding their classroom practice, that this not only supported them in being more successful in their classrooms, but it also supported them in not feeling like a failure when things went wrong and helping them to bounce back more quickly from challenges. Participant 003 highlighted the importance of a principal maintaining the “pulse on the business of a classroom” so as to not “overload teachers.” Similarly, Participant 005 described her willingness to try new things when she felt an administrator was coming from a place that was grounded in their own classroom experience, causing expectations to feel realistic and grounded in the realities of a classroom.

In addition to being in touch with classroom realities and having realistic expectations, participants noted that principals demonstrating follow through with their words and actions was another important underlying contextual variable that supported their efficacy. Four participants described the importance of follow through. Participant 004 described a time when a principal promised support with student discipline issues, but in practice that teacher felt they were left to “fend for themselves.” Similarly,

Participant 006 described how new initiatives were never completed and they just moved onto the next thing, without really ever addressing what that teacher felt like were the real issues in the building.

Repeatedly, participants discussed that feeling a sense of belonging and having meaningful opportunities for collaboration were contexts in which they felt most supported and effective. Working for school leaders who were deeply engaged, student-centred, had realistic expectations and demonstrated follow through were further aspects that provided these teachers with a context that supported and strengthened their efficacy beliefs.

**Direction.** Participants expressed that working within a school that had a strong direction set by leadership was another contextual variable that they perceived to positively impacted how efficacious they felt. Alternatively, participants also expressed how a lack of such direction within their context often negatively influenced their beliefs about their abilities and their teaching practice, as well as left them feeling unsupported. Participants indicated that direction was set and conveyed by school leaders through instructional leadership, communication, clarity of expectations, clarity of purpose, clarity of vision, and school culture.

***Instructional leadership.*** Of the participants interviewed, seven communicated that various instructional leadership practices were a key circumstance that impacted how effective or ineffective they felt within their teaching practice. A few participants noted that they felt their teaching practice was supported by their principal being able to supply resources that they needed to sustain their learning and growth. This was described as physical resources such as a book, professional development opportunities that the

teacher perceived to be particularly engaging, or personnel resources. Participant 005 depicted her principals ability to notice what needs she might have, then bring her attention to resources and offer support she may not have been aware existed. She described things like partnerships with outside agencies such a speech pathologists, or internal school supports such as additional time with an educational assistant, or the suggestion of a different teaching strategy. She expressed how her principals vast amount of knowledge allowed her to feel supported regardless of circumstances.

Moreover, participants expressed the need for their leaders to have more than just pedagogical and curriculum knowledge. Participant 006 spoke of a principal she worked with who had been working in a role outside of the school for an extended period of time. She portrayed the struggles she had when she felt that her principal did not understand the social and emotional needs of the classroom or the challenges of dealing with certain types of parents. She felt that this caused her principal to be short-sighted and unable to support her efficacy in the big picture of modern teaching. In all, participants discussed how having leaders with vast knowledge of all things related to schools and classrooms was essential to feeling supported and effective within their role.

***Communication and clarity of expectations, purpose, and vision.*** The concept of communication was woven into the notion of clarity for the participants in this study. Seven participants discussed the consequence of having direction clearly established through communication, clear expectations, and a clear purpose. Four participants also indicated leaders having a clear vision was an important contextual piece that supported their efficaciousness.

Communication was described by interview participants in a broad range of ways and for a plethora of purposes. It was interpreted as transparency, open dialogue about teaching practice and students, discussions around feedback, compliments or acknowledgement of hard work, and asking good questions. Communication was a pervasive variable that came up directly and indirectly in multitude of ways across the interviews. Participant 003 described how conversations and communication made her feel more engaged and excited about her teaching practice when she said, “I love to talk about learning...I love to talk about ideas and ways to help kids learn better and ways to reach kids. And she was always willing to have those conversations.”

Beyond formal and informal conversations that administrators have with their staff, participants indicated that communication was essential to achieving clarity – of expectations, of purpose and of vision. One participant described how a lack of communication and clarity about responsibilities while she was working part-time and sharing a homeroom led to a student being put in an unsafe situation. This predicament caused this teacher to feel that her job was on the line and impacted her confidence as an educator. Contrastingly, two participants in this study indicated that having clear expectations and knowing what is expected of them helps lessen the mental load required to do their job. Participant 003 summed this up when she said:

I think clarity of things like rules.... I've always really liked that. I don't really care if you allow hats or not. I just want to know... I don't like wishy washy stuff. I prefer just to know. I also don't want to spend a lot of time wondering what I'm supposed to do.

Similarly, another participant noted how lack of clear expectations not only hindered her efficacy but also her resilience because she never knew where she stood with one principal she worked for. She explained how this left her feeling constantly uncertain and afraid to take risks or try new things because she was not certain she would have support.

Along with clear expectations, participants also indicated the importance of having a clear purpose for events and choices as a contextual variable that supported efficacy. Many of the comments regarding this subtheme centred around times when there was a lack of purpose conveyed. Participants mentioned not understanding why certain decisions were made, being required to attend or complete professional development that had no clear tie to their teaching practice, and not understanding the purpose of educational choices being made. Participant 006 discussed an administrator's lack of communicated purpose in the following way:

It is a little bit belittling that an administrator felt that she hand-picked her staff and that her staff didn't know how to write a paragraph or teach kids how to write it. It's that nitpicky stuff that you're like, what is the purpose? What is her purpose behind it?

This participant explained that this really made her question herself and her abilities as a teacher.

Closely related to expectations and purpose is the notion of having a clear vision. Participant 005 described how she felt valued and empowered because her leaders lived what they spoke and modeled what teachers were expected to do. She illustrated the actions that communicated their vision:

So it's not just a setting of expectations or making us sort of accomplish a certain list of things, but that we understand why we're doing it. And we understand how it will look and we understand that they will be walking us through it. It's not like, okay, here's some expectations have at 'er, let us know how it goes. They listen to us, they get our feedback and then they also walk it out and model it along with us, which is, I think such a significant thing when it comes to leadership.

Yet, another participant clearly articulated how when she was a staff member at a new school, her principal had a strong vision for how things would be. She indicated that this vision was implemented with limited flexibility and that even when it felt clear things weren't working, this principal held tight to the vision by focusing on seemingly inconsequential things like furniture placement. She described how this environment left her and many of her colleagues feeling “deflated” by the end of that school year.

***School culture.*** Overall, participants described the pervasive nature of communication in a variety of formal and informal ways. An additional way that beliefs and ideas were less explicitly communicated seemed to be through the school culture. Four participants explicitly mentioned school culture as a contextual variable they felt impacted efficacy. No participants in the zero to six years of experience category mentioned culture; it was only teachers with greater than seven years of experience who made reference to this variable.

Participant 004 clearly depicted an anecdote in which a “toxic culture” within his school and school board was the impetus for him moving across the province to join a new school division, and almost forcing him to quit teaching all together. This toxic culture was one where he felt constantly undermined and led to unnecessary RCMP

involvement with a student incident. Alternatively to that, two participants spoke of how a positive culture seemed to convey a value system that included collaboration, teamwork and open communication.

Participants communicated the need for direction set by leadership as a valuable contextual variable to support them in their efficacy. Direction was conveyed in many overt and latent ways including instructional leadership, communication, clarity of expectations, clarity of purpose, clarity of vision, and culture.

**Positive reinforcement.** The final theme related to contexts impacting efficacy is positive reinforcement. Repeatedly throughout the interviews, participants mentioned how greatly acknowledgement, encouragement, and reassurance impacted their confidence and efficaciousness. All participants discussed at least one, with six participants considering at least two of those types of reinforcement as valuable. While this could be argued as a branch of communication, the prevalence of mentions led them to being their own category for the purposes of this thematic analysis.

***Acknowledgement, encouragement, and reassurance.*** Acknowledgement was the most frequently used word to describe positive reinforcement that supported participants confidence and efficacy in a variety of ways. Participants mentioned acknowledgement of their hard work and perseverance, getting a pat on the back for doing a good job, and recognition of strengths as the ways they most felt acknowledged by their school leaders. Participant 002 noted how those words helped her to find success as a novice teacher as she moved to a new school because she held onto the acknowledgment of her strengths from a previous principal. She also described that those acknowledgments served as something for her to fall back on when she was struggling.



Four participants described how words of encouragement served to make them feel good about themselves as people and as teachers. Participant 003 also observed how one administrator had a knack for providing encouraging feedback that helped her to improve her teaching practice and feel like she was a more effective educator.

Finally, participants noted how reassurance, especially during challenging times, helped them to keep going and feel like they were on the right track. Participant 002 spoke of a negative experience with a parent early in her career that diminished her confidence. She detailed how reassurance from her principal supported her in moving forward from that incident in a positive way. Participant 005 spoke of how that reassurance helped her work through challenges she was having in the classroom and was a huge support for her when she was struggling to believe in her own abilities. All participants mentioned their need and desire to have positive verbal reassurance that they are doing their job well, it is acceptable to make mistakes, and that things will be okay. Participants in this study conveyed this as an invaluable part of their context that had the ability to impact their efficacy beliefs.

As has been detailed above, participants clearly conveyed a variety of important contextual pieces that have the ability to impact their efficacy – both positively and negatively. Relationships, collective responsibility, direction, and positive reinforcement were the four main themes that depicted the ways in which context plays a role in supporting or diminishing efficacy. Anecdotes from teachers regarding these experiences showcased both instances of the presence and absence of many of these themes and subthemes and the potential ways that can impact overall teacher efficacy.

### **Social and Emotional Supports Perceived by Teachers to Impact Efficacy**

While the thematic analysis provided evidence that participants had a clear awareness of which contextual variables had the potential to influence their efficacy, the analysis also presented substantiation regarding specific social and emotional supports that these participants also perceived to impact their efficacy. Question five in the interview questions asked participants to describe a time a principal helped foster or hindered their resilience. This question also asked if there were specific social and emotional supports their principal provided, and if they had any experiences in which a principal impacted their social and emotional well-being. Once again, given the nature of this thematic analysis, evidence for this topic was discerned from question five and any other relevant part of the interview response in its entirety. The analysis of participant responses uncovered three key themes under the topic of social and emotional supports: investment, communication, and learning.

**Investment.** There are a variety of subthemes that contributed to the overall theme of investment. These include: relationships, personalization, student involvement, flexibility, and care. Taken together, the common thread of all of these subthemes was that participants felt that their principals and vice-principals were truly invested in them, their school, and their students.

***Relationships, care, personalization, and flexibility.*** Once again, all participants in this study indicated relationships were an important social-emotional support provided by their leaders. Relationships, whether they were described as strong or lacking, were depicted by every single participant as playing a role in experiences impacting their social and emotional well-being, as well as their efficacy. When participants had strong

relationships, they shared that they felt cared for, and there was safety in knowing someone had genuine concern for their well-being. Participant 006 described how having a leader work with her skillset made her less likely to dig her heels in and much more likely to try something new. She believed that a leader must know her strengths well to be able to personalize interactions in a way to get her to buy-in.

Participants 008 and 009 both discussed years of their teaching career during which they dealt with sickness and death of a loved one. Both described how their leaders used their strong relationship and how well they knew them individually to provide meaningful supports. Some examples of these supports were encouraging them to take the time they needed, providing understanding and flexibility, as well as checking in with them regularly to see how they were doing and what they needed. While these two participants were veteran teachers who had more than nineteen years of experience, Participant 008 described how her efficacy and confidence suffered when she was going through a difficult time because she felt unable to meet her own standards for the type of educator she strived to be. The support provided by her leader gave her the reassurance to know that it was not a true reflection of her abilities and allowed her to bounce back more quickly.

Every one of the nine participants also discussed how a leader knowing them very well on a personal level was a support that impacted their overall well-being. Both participants who had zero to six years of experience spoke about how their leaders knew them and their teaching practice well, and was therefore able to vouch for them and reassure them during challenging instances as a newer teacher. Participant 005 described the way which her leadership used personal knowledge of individuals and strong

relationships within her school context: “They understood what was going on and the individual needs of each of those teachers, which then allowed him to be able to come alongside and be able to encourage each person individually as well as collectively.” She emphasized how this supported her growth as a teacher, as well as the growth of her colleagues.

Moreover, closely related to strong relationships based on personal knowledge is the notion that flexibility can also be provided as a social emotional support. Participants described the value of flexibility from their school leaders in a variety of situations they faced. This included the flexibility to arrive late for meeting when there was a conflict with extra-curriculars that teacher was running, freedom to meet the needs of her students in the way she deemed best, having clear expectations with room for individual creativity, and choice in how to approach new learning or instructional practices. By providing flexibility, participants felt that leaders knew them well and understood their unique, individual needs.

Finally, six of the participants noted that a principal genuinely caring about them was an impactful emotional support that had the potential to positively influence their efficacy. Principals demonstrated their genuine care for their staff in a diverse number of ways. A few examples given by the participants included informal check-ins, showing concern for their well-being beyond the school walls, demonstrating empathy for the challenges of teaching, and generally listening and being present.

***Involvement with students.*** Another social and emotional support that participants felt impacted their well-being was the level of involvement with students on the part of their school leaders. Participants in the zero to six years of experience category

commented on the equal importance of school leaders having their own direct involvement with students and modeling those relationships, but also in the way they supported teachers to support students. Some examples of how these teachers felt supported to support their students included giving the teacher the space and freedom to meet students' needs in the way they felt was best, or contributing time and effort into a project started by a teacher to recognize student achievements.

While teachers in the two categories with greater experience (seven to eighteen and nineteen or more) also felt that school leader involvement with students helped support their teaching efficacy, their comments centred more around classroom involvement. Similar to the first category of participants, these participants also valued when administrators modeled relationships and showed genuine care for the students in the school. However, teachers in the latter two categories also felt particularly supported when leaders were in their classrooms, and working with or supporting students, especially when it came to challenges. Participant 007 described this type of involvement as, "It is not a directive. It's a wraparound support. It's somebody who will ask: What have we tried? What can we do? What can I do to support you?", in regards to dealing with students who need exceptional levels of supports. Regardless of experience level, many participants felt socially and emotionally supported within their schools when their school leaders took purposeful and active responsibility in involvement with students.

In all, there are various ways that leaders demonstrated sincere investment in the people within their school building. The participants in this study perceived strong caring relationships, having leaders know them very well, flexibility, and student involvement as important facets of investment. When feeling socially and emotionally supported,

participants expressed that they felt safer, more willing to take risks, more resilient, and more effective.

**Communication.** Further to leaders demonstrating genuine investment in the people and students within their buildings, participants in this study also conveyed communication as another important social and emotional support impacting efficacy. Through the analysis, four subthemes of communication developed: conversation, experience (wisdom and advice), listening and feeling heard, and non-judgemental.

*Conversation and a non-judgemental approach.* All of the nine participants in this study discussed ways in which simple conversations with their school leaders were consistent social and emotional supports that often had the ability to impact their efficacy beliefs. Participants with zero to six years of teaching experience spoke mostly of conversations in terms of reassurance, check-ins regarding their well-being, and as a way leaders helped rebuild and support their confidence after a tough situation. Whereas teachers in the two categories with the most experience (seven to eighteen, and nineteen or more) also valued reassurance after challenging days or situations, they offered a more broad range of insight into how conversations with their school leaders provided social and emotional support. A couple of participants spoke of leaders being able to provide helpful and insightful feedback to support their growth. Three participants mentioned that they perceived opportunities to have personal conversations with their school leaders as a helpful and impactful support; particularly when the leader took time in these conversations to acknowledge the teachers abilities' and strengths. Participants also mentioned that during these often informal conversations principals asked good questions

to help a teacher grow, teachers were able to seek help and advice, and it made them feel like their principal “had their back.”

Further to the ability to engage in regular and meaningful conversation with their school leaders, teachers in both categories representing greater than six years of experience also mentioned the importance of a leader whom they felt was non-judgemental. Participant 005 identified how her principal and vice-principal never left her feeling judged and never questioned her abilities when an issue arose. She described those interactions by saying:

I never feel like I in approaching my administration or my leadership, that I will walk away feeling like degraded or feeling like I have not lived up to the measure, but at the same time, if there are things that I need to learn from that experience, I know that they'll let me know about that.

Likewise, three other participants described similar experiences with their leaders in which they felt they could ask for help, support, or advice without feeling judged or having their admin think they were not capable of doing their job well.

***Experience and listening.*** Somewhat related to the notion of conversations, six participants specified that having a principal who listened and made them feel heard, and four participants stated leaders with wisdom and experience, were also appreciated social and emotional supports. Participants from all experience level categories mentioned how valued and supported they felt when their school leaders were open to listening to what they had to say. Participant 008 spoke highly of an administrator that had the ability to really listen to her and she declared that “by the end, you've almost talked yourself out of your problem.” Other participants spoke of administrators who used truly listening to

their teachers as the impetus for action, leaving teachers feeling heard, and that their voice and input were regarded.

Along with being good listeners, school leaders who had advice and wisdom to offer based upon their wealth of experiences was another support valued by four participants, all of whom fell into two the categories with greater than six years of experience. Participant 005 depicted a leader who she described as knowledgeable and who understood what it is like to be in the classroom: “They understand the heartbeat of your building and they are understanding of the context in which you teach, but they also have tried things themselves.” She illustrated how this supported her growth within her classroom and helped her to tackle challenging situations. Conversely, Participant 006 referred to a leader she worked with who she felt lacked practical experience. She described how this leader seemed overwhelmed and focused on things that felt unimportant to teachers. Furthermore, she described how steps were missed which lead to frustration and the creation of barriers that hindered her ability to do her job successfully.

**Learning.** The final theme of social and emotional supports identified by participants as important in this study was that of learning. Participants indicated that having learning sustained by their leaders through relevant professional development, collaboration, and modeling were all integral social and emotional supports that had the potential to impact their efficacy.

***Relevant professional development and collaboration.*** No participants in the zero to six years of experience category offered input into the notion of relevant professional development; however, it was mentioned by six of the seven participants in the two categories of higher experience. A few participants spoke of leaders who were excellent



at meeting the complex needs of different teachers within their building. They described how they did not take a “cookie cutter” approach and met each individual teacher where they were at in regards to grade level and subject taught, as well as experience and background knowledge. As indicated by Participant 005, she valued their ability to bring forth relevant and new instructional practice or ideas, yet “also recognizing that your individual needs and your individual context will be different in terms of what's best for you.” Overall, these participants described leaders who were constantly sharing and presenting learning to their staff, but who also allowed for choice and personalization.

While participants felt relevant professional development was an important social and emotional support that impacted their efficacy, all nine participants also indicated that collaboration was an integral part of this process. In terms of collaboration, participants indicated various ways this emerged within their contexts and experiences. They described how sometimes this was simply being encouraged to pursue professional learning of interest, feeling supported to connect with colleagues outside of their building, or more official mentorship programs with another more experienced teacher. Moreover, participants also discussed how collaboration was facilitated within their school, in formal ways. This included having time or routines built in for collaboration, as well as collaborative structures. These structures were referred to by a variety of names but most included timetabled slots with specific people and a clear goal or purpose for the time. These participants spoke of how their leaders facilitated collaboration for all staff, across grade levels and subject areas. Additionally, multiple participants also spoke of receiving release time to watch other teachers teach, both within their buildings and in different schools. They described how these experiences with collaboration helped them

to learn from their colleagues and to expand their practice, ultimately making them feel more confident and effective.

Participants referenced an assortment of formal structures that were in place to enable collaboration; additionally, they also readily discussed more informal, ongoing actions that cultivated genuine collaboration. Participant 002 described several instances in which she had ongoing collaboration with her principal to support her in supporting her students. Similarly, Participant 007 discussed the collaboration that was ongoing when she was dealing with a student with very complex needs, and how the team approach was vital to her success that year. Likewise, Participant 005 believed that collaboration was “built into the whole culture of our building.” She depicted the ways it was present in many daily aspects and how collaboration was also consistently modeled by her school leaders in all of their actions.

***Modeling.*** Modeling was depicted by six of the nine participants as a social and emotional support that was woven into many other aspects of leadership practice. In general, participants shared experiences of school leaders actively supporting students and teachers by “walking alongside them.” These teachers felt that anything they were asked to do was something their leaders were already doing or were also more than willing to do. Participant 006 described such a quality in her principal this way: “She was working as hard as you were to make the school an amazing place.” A couple of participants described how this behaviour supported them in feeling safe enough to try new things. Furthermore, these participants noted that when leaders were modeling what they expected of their staff, it seemed their expectations were more relevant and feasible.

Overall, there were a variety of effects school leaders can have upon teachers and their efficacy with the social and emotional supports they chose to provide. The participants in this study felt that by being genuinely invested, having strong and open communication, and facilitating and supporting learning, leaders were able to support them both socially and emotionally, with the potential to have a positive impact of how efficacious they felt.

### **Feelings of Efficaciousness**

In addition to contextual variables and social and emotional supports, there were certain feelings that the teachers participating in this study perceived to be connected to their efficacy. During the interviews, the first question participants were asked was “What does efficacy feel like to you?”. During this question, they were further asked to describe instances where they felt highly efficacious and particularly inefficacious. Additionally, in question two participants were asked what made them feel most effective in their classrooms, and to provide anecdotes about times in their careers they felt more effective and less effective. Through their answers to those two question and the interviews as a whole, two main themes emerged from the analysis regarding feelings of efficaciousness – feeling protected and feeling like they were part of a team.

**Protection.** Participants spoke of feeling protected in their practice in such a way that three subthemes surfaced: support, safety, and trust. All nine participants mentioned support and trust during various parts of their interview. As well, five participants mentioned safety as something they associated with feelings of efficaciousness.

***Support, safety, and trust.*** The thematic analysis of this theme and subthemes was dichotomized into positive and negative experiences, as the ideas participants

discussed clearly fell into one of those categories. There was a general lack of neutrality when discussing these feelings. Participants demonstrated clear inclinations about how these feelings and experiences were perceived. For example, in regards to feelings of support, participants spoke of times where they felt wholly and unconditionally supported, or contrastingly of times where they felt that support was entirely absent. “I wasn't even sure what support I had” was a reflection made by Participant 005 about an experience with a leader in which she felt that absence. She went on to describe how she didn't think there was any ill intent on the part of her leaders, it was “just the fact that I didn't have supports in place for me as a new teacher moving into that role, I was kind of just sort of left to try and figure it out on my own.” She spoke of immense struggles she had in those years and how she felt it might have been a different case if those supports for her had been present. When participants discussed instances where they felt that support was present, it was often in the form of verbal reassurance that they were doing their job well. Furthermore, it also showed up as leaders being there to walk beside a teacher through a difficult challenge. Generally, it seemed that these teachers felt that support would continue even if they made a mistake or were not at their best.

Closely tied to unwavering support was the feeling of safety. When teachers felt certain that they would be supported by their administrators, there was an underlying foundation of safety that they felt within their interactions with those leaders, and within their school building in a more general sense. Participant 004 described his experiences as a novice teacher, and how his growth and learning was supported because his principal “saw some of the mistakes I was making and he approached it with positivity.” Similarly, Participant 009 relished in how safe she felt to make mistakes and have confidence she

would not be “lambasted” for it: “You can take risks and you can make bold statements and know that it's safe.” She described how she knew with certainty and had absolute trust that her principal would have her back.

Finally, trust emerged as an important component of participants perceiving feelings of protection and efficacy. Again, the notion of trust was highly entangled with both support and safety. Participants in this study spoke of trust in two ways: having trust in others (i.e. their leader), and their leaders having trust in them. The latter seemed aligned with some notions of professional autonomy, which was discussed in greater depth in the section regarding contextual variables impacting efficacy.

Participants in this study spoke of trusting that their school leader would follow through on a commitment, general trust in them as a person, trust in the advice and experience they offered, and trust that the teacher would feel supported and safe. In contrast, Participant 006 spoke of multiple experiences she had with different principals where she did not feel that trust was there, for a few different reasons. In one instance, she described how the rules and expectations were constantly changing, resulting in her receiving positive feedback some days and being told she was a failure on others. She said, “I walked in the door everyday waiting to find out what I did wrong the day before.” This led her to have very limited trust in her principal, as well as question why she chose to come back to teaching, as she felt extremely ineffective and inefficacious. In a subsequent situation faced by Participant 006, she described another administrator who seemed to micromanage all inconsequential aspects of the school, without ever addressing the glaring issues that were happening. She explained how this impacted her

trust in this leader, and subsequently her trust in this leader's vision, expectations, and decision making skills.

In addition to trusting in their school leaders, participants also communicated feeling that their school leaders had trust in them was a factor that impacted their feelings of efficacy. Participants in this study described how feeling trusted as a professional in their practice helped them to feel more confident in themselves. Participant 004 described this trust when he stated: "I feel like they know I have the best wishes of the student at heart and that that trust is there." Conversely, two participants also mentioned how during times they did not feel trusted by their leaders, not only did they find it immensely stressful, they were also seriously considering leaving the profession.

Participants indicated a variety of factors that allowed them to feel protected which impacted many facets for them, including their feelings of efficacy. They communicated the need to feel supported, safe and trusted in their interactions with their school leaders. Participant 007 described the effect it had upon her when she was faced with a situation where she felt undermined and did not feel, supported, trusted, or safe: "[That situation] impacted me tremendously professionally and how I felt [as a teacher]." Therefore, participants clearly articulated how feelings regarding efficacy had the potential to have a noticeable impact upon their beliefs about themselves as educators.

**Team Feelings.** Another set of feelings that teachers in this study perceived as related to their feelings of efficacy was related to feeling like they were part of a team. The analysis discovered four main subthemes that teachers in this study attributed to team feelings. These were clarity of expectations, collaboration, confidence, and feeling valued.

***Collaboration and feeling confident and valued.*** Of the participants involved in this study, eight indicated that feelings of confidence were tied to their feelings of efficacy. As well, four participants shared that feeling valued also contributed to having an impact upon those efficacious feelings. Multiple teachers specified a relationship between being involved in meaningful collaboration and feelings of confidence in their teaching. They not only spoke explicitly of confidence but also of feeling like a stronger educator who was truly making a difference with their students. A few participants also mentioned that they really lacked confidence early on in their careers or when they were new to a teaching assignment that was unfamiliar. Participant 009 told an anecdote that reflected this when she shared the following about one of her first years of teaching: “I didn't know any better, but I look back now and I remember coming home in tears being like, someone's going to figure out I'm a fraud. Like I don't actually know what I'm doing.” Likewise, Participant 002 shared how her principal having strong confidence in her abilities and pointing out her strengths that she was blind to helped her to build and develop her confidence in her first few years of teaching. Similarly, Participant 005 shared an experience where she was brand new to a grade or subject, and though she had several years of teaching experience, she really struggled and constantly compared her abilities to that of her colleagues who had been teaching that particular grade for many years. Yet, she explained how her principal helped her to find her unique strengths and to see value in what she brought to the role. Participants in this study closely equated confidence with their efficacy and their confidence levels were conveyed as malleable depending on circumstances.

Beyond confidence and collaboration, four participants also spoke of how feeling valued was something that impacted their feelings of efficacy. Notably, no participants in the zero to six years of experience category made mention of feeling valued. Moreover, for those participants that did mention it, they discussed feeling valued as a professional and feeling valued as a person. Participant 007 described how her principal complimented her abilities as reasoning for why she would be changing to a new grade in the coming school year. She depicted how this made her feel truly valued by her principal. Furthermore, Participant 005 summed up how being valued made her feel with the following statement: “I feel that I am valued as a teacher, and I feel empowered in my position.” Similarly, Participant 008 described how when she was going through a challenging time and experiencing terminal illness of a loved one, she continually felt like a valued member of the team, even when she didn’t feel like she was capable of being at her best.

***Clarity of expectations.*** Lastly, five participants in this study shared how having clear expectations also impacted their feelings of efficaciousness. Two participants described how minimal clarity on the purpose of rules or expectations left them feeling frustrated, and even had the potential to undermine their beliefs in their abilities. Participant 006 described how expectations that felt unclear impacted her when she stated:

It is a little bit belittling that an administrator felt that she hand-picked her staff and that her staff didn't know how to write a paragraph or teach kids how to write it. It's that nitpicky stuff that you're like, what is the purpose? What is her purpose behind it?



Antithetically to the aforementioned anecdote, Participant 005 portrayed the way in which her leaders executed expectations:

So it's not just a setting of expectations or making us sort of accomplish a certain list of things, but that we understand why we're doing it. And we understand, how it will look and we understand that they will be walking us through it.

Overall, the clarity of expectations and the way these expectations were communicated were something that participants deemed as linked to their feelings of efficacy.

In all, participants felt connections between times where they felt particularly efficacious or acutely inefficacious and situational factors and general feelings they were experiencing. These teachers gave anecdotes and shared experiences that highlighted how important it was for them to feel protected, which included feeling supported, safe and trusted. Moreover, they indicated they valued feeling part of a team. This team feeling was buoyed by clarity of expectations, collaboration, confidence and feeling valued.

### **Leadership Characteristics Valued by Highly Efficacious Teachers**

The final topic of this thematic analysis reflects the characteristics of leaders that are valued by teachers who self-report as highly efficacious. Participants were asked in question four to describe anecdotes of experiences that highlighted key characteristics of a leader who made them feel efficacious in their practice. In follow up, they were asked to speak to any experiences in which a principal supported collaboration, supplied resources, or attended to instructional issues in a way they found impactful. Throughout the interviews, participants spoke of a plethora of leadership characteristics that had an impact upon them, as well as upon their teaching practice. From this, five themes

regarding leadership characteristics emerged. These were: relationship centred, cultivates trust, effective communicator, instructional leader, and collaborative.

**Relationship centred.** There were an assortment of subthemes that delineated the importance of the leadership characteristic of being relationship centred to teachers who participated in this study. Included were: relationship focused, student-centred, present, intentional, visible, and being caring. Once again, relationships presented as a central and intertwined notion throughout these themes and subthemes.

***Relationship focused, student-centred, and caring.*** Eight of the participants in the study expressed valuing the leaders who were relationship focused in a general sense. Additionally, four participants delineated this idea further and described appreciating school leaders who operated from a student-centred philosophy. Inextricably intertwined with both of these relationship pieces, was the characteristic of caring, which six participants indicated as an important quality in a leader.

Many of the participants described leaders who placed relationships before and above all else. They shared about leaders who treated relationships as the foundation to all other aspects of teaching and learning. Additionally, they depicted these relationships as authentic and steadfast in nature. Participant 008 detailed what it was like to work with leaders who took that approach: “Leaders, who even in different roles when they were these leaders and for many years now, and the whole time, their true core quality is relationship and connection.” She felt the genuineness of the relationships and intentions because these leaders demonstrated the same value system regardless of the role they were in. Furthermore, participants spoke about having these strong relationships with

their leaders sustained their learning, made feedback more impactful, and cultivated their growth. Participant 005 described this when she shared the following:

[This principal] sought to be right in with their people so that they understood what was going on and the individual needs of each of those teachers. Which then allowed him to be able to come alongside and be able to encourage each person individually as well as collectively.

Beyond relationships with teachers and staff, participants also spoke of the importance of leaders who consistently led from a student-centred lens. They portrayed these leaders as people who not only cared about students deeply and who cultivated strong student relationships, but whom also were in tune with students. Participant 008 described this type of leader as one who continually sought to make connections with staff and students and who was “passionate about doing what's best for kids.” A couple of participants expressed that it mattered to them that their leaders cared as much about their students as they did. Similarly, Participant 006 described how disconnected and disjointed it felt working in a school with a leader who didn’t use relationships and connection as the foundational piece.

Closely related to the characteristic of leaders who build strong relationships and who are student-centred, participants mentioned the quality of being caring. Six participants indicated this trait was important to them, which they described as just knowing their school leaders cared about them. This care was demonstrated through interest and investment in their teaching, as well as in their more personal lives. This quality was often referenced when participants were speaking about the strong relationships they held with their leaders.

*Intentional, present, and visible.* While participants clearly expressed their desire to work with leaders who valued building caring relationships and who put students first, they also shared other characteristics that were demonstrated by leaders who led with relationships.

Seven teachers in this study suggested the importance of a leader who was intentional with their actions and choices, especially with, but not limited to, relationship building. All seven teachers in the two categories composed of educators with more than six years of experience made mention of intentionality, while neither of the teachers with zero to six years of experience communicated this idea. These participants spoke of this intentionality in two distinct ways. They spoke of leaders who were intentional in their actions. Some examples of this were in the way they provided feedback, built trust, asked questions, made decisions, and scaffolded professional development and learning.

Moreover, participants also described intentionality as their leaders having an acute awareness of individual needs. Once again, teachers in the zero to six years of experience category did not convey that this characteristic was important to them. Principals were intentional in various ways, including seeking out ways to support teachers' learning and development that were personally relevant; recognition of where a teacher might need help or support and then providing it; and deliberately working towards a teacher's unique strengths. Teachers communicated that principals acting intentionally elevated relationships and allowed them to feel more successful.

In addition to being intentional, teachers also demonstrated a strong appreciation for leaders who were present, engaged, and visible. Multiple participants described this engagement as presence in their classrooms and engagement in the learning that they

facilitated for students. Participant 006 described these leaders as the ones that “want to know what you're doing in the classroom” and who, because they are aware of what you are doing, are also conscious of the amount of effort and investment required to do that work. Participant 003 echoed this sentiment in her assertion of the importance of leaders never losing their pulse on the classroom and the work that teachers do. She explained how when leaders are no longer grounded in this, they can lose touch and overwhelm and overwork teachers.

Similar to being present and engaged, the participants in this study also valued leaders who were visible – in classrooms, hallways, and meetings. Their physical presence was valued in ways that was analogous to how much their engagement was appreciated.

**Cultivates trust.** The thematic analysis of this data defined eight subthemes describing ways in which participants in this study saw the importance of a leader who has the ability to cultivate trust. These subthemes included the following characteristics: trustworthy, trusting, believes in people, provides autonomy, vulnerable, transparent, honest, and open.

***Trustworthy and trusting.*** Within the interviews in this study, participants regularly denoted two main types of trusting behaviour: leaders who they felt were trustworthy, as well as school leaders who were willing to trust others. Six participants conveyed the importance of having a trustworthy leader, with many sharing that it was a key determinant in the type of relationship they had with that leader. Participant 007 described a situation where she was removed from her role while she was on a leave. The events surrounding that change undermined her ability to trust in that principal. She said,

“I think that it impacted my relationship with my principal from that day on forever. I no longer saw him as a leader. I saw him as someone that I didn't care for and didn't trust.”

Furthermore, she shared her unwillingness to engage with him on a variety of levels after that incident. Contrastingly, Participant 005 shared what it felt like working with leaders who she felt were genuinely trustworthy and how it felt when she was approaching them with new ideas she wanted to try:

I felt very comfortable approaching them on it, giving them my idea. And I never felt like if I was entering that room might be shut down or that I wouldn't be told that it was a horrible idea....I think the open door policy is huge. I feel like I can communicate with them, express my ideas.

In addition to assessing how trustworthy their school leaders were, eight out of nine participants also noted the importance of a principal who displayed a willingness to trust others. They shared how that could mean giving them space to do their job, providing them the benefit of the doubt in all situations, or a general faith in their abilities.

***Believes in people and provides autonomy.*** Six participants delineated the importance of their leader providing them professional autonomy, and five participants indicated the school leaders believing in them and believing in their abilities were specific characteristics of trusting leaders. The experience shared by participants demonstrated close ties between the notions of autonomy and their leader believing in them. Participants felt they were provided autonomy when their leader demonstrated trust in what was happening in their classroom, they had freedom to make decisions regarding how best to support their students, and when they had the choice in the instructional

strategies they utilized. Participant 002 described how this looked in her context. She described that her students were the type of students who needed vast amounts of social and emotional supports. Given that, her principal gave her the freedom to “shut off” curriculum sometimes to be able to address and support those needs for her students.

A contrary example, where a lack of autonomy was present, was shared by Participant 006. She described how after more than fifteen years of teaching, she had a principal who required her and her colleagues to spend a large amount of time learning how to teach paragraph writing. Furthermore, she told of how she not only felt belittled, but felt that her time could be better spent in other ways.

In both of those examples, the level of autonomy provided also sent a message to these participants about the extent to which their leader believed in them and their abilities. Participant 002 described how she experienced this confidence when she stated “there was an underlying in belief in my ability as well. Kind of empowering me and giving me that resilience to keep going and not to give up.” She shared how this level of belief impacted her in a positive way. Similarly, Participant 009 said the following when speaking about her principal, “she believes in me and she believes in the work I do. She’s always good at acknowledging [that].” These participants verbalised the importance of feeling trusted by their leaders, both through the autonomy they provided and the genuine belief their leaders had in their abilities.

***Vulnerable, transparent, honest, and open.*** Additional characteristics that were seemingly associated with leaders who effectively cultivated trust were the qualities of being vulnerable, transparent, honest, and open. Of the participants involved in this study, six indicated the quality of vulnerability as the characteristic of a leader who made them

feel efficacious. Only participants in the two categories with more than seven years of teaching experience commented on the quality of vulnerability. These participants described vulnerability in two ways. First, they described leaders who were vulnerable with their staff. This included demonstrating a willingness to make mistakes and learn, being able to say they didn't know, and showing genuine emotion. Moreover, Participant 009 also described this vulnerability as key to strong relationships, because she asserted that authentically showing up as themselves was the best way a leader could forge strong bonds with others. Secondly, participants spoke to their comfort level with being vulnerable with their principal or vice-principal. When they felt safe to be vulnerable they were able to share challenges and struggles, make mistakes, and ask for help.

Related to vulnerability was a leader's willingness to be transparent and honest with their staff. Six participants indicated that honesty, and five participants shared that transparency were key characteristics of leaders that supported their efficacy beliefs. Participant 002 described honesty as "that feeling like you can have faith in what they're saying is what they're saying to everybody, as opposed to having two faces." Participants felt that they could trust the words their leaders said and had confidence that they were hearing the truth. Similarly, participants also expressed the need for transparency with certain things such as decision making, rules, and expectations. Participant 006 spoke of a principal who seemed to have different rules for a few "elite" people within their school, which undermined the trust of her and her colleagues. Finally, openness was another trait five participants valued in their leaders. They deemed this openness to mean openness to new ideas, learning, change, and individual needs of teachers.



Consequently, participants in this study conveyed trust as a multifaceted characteristic that required ongoing vulnerability, openness, honesty, and transparency. Through providing autonomy, trusting in others, and consistently demonstrating trustworthiness, leaders had the prospective ability to make teachers feel more efficacious.

**Effective communicator.** Another key set of leadership qualities that participants defined as valuable to them, in addition to being relationship centred and cultivating trust, was being an effective communicator. The subthemes of effective communication included being: a communicator, a listener, supportive, and strength-based.

***Communicating and listening.*** The majority of participants in this study made note of the importance of leaders displaying the traits of effective communication and listening. All nine participants conveyed the consequences of leaders who were effectively able to communicate towards impacting their efficacy beliefs. They expressed that communication was a foundational piece to many other aspects of relationships and qualities that made effective leaders. Whether it was clear guidelines about responsibilities or what was required to happen or communication surrounding learning and general expectations, the ways that leaders communicated formal essential information mattered to these participants. Alternatively, participants also shared the need for effective communication in less formal ways such as for building relationships or to acknowledge hard work and a job well done. Participant 008 described how important this informal type of communication was to her. She shared how a principal with this quality made her feel supported and gave her strength to continue when things were challenging, especially after a rough day with students:

Having that ability to talk it out informally, often you're like at the end of the day.

[Those conversations] being in the moment helped a lot. To have that reassurance

that it's not just you, it's this situation we've had this for years with this student.

By her principal being able to communicate about past experience and current expectations, this teacher was able to feel relieved, reassured, and understood.

In that anecdote, Participant 008 shared that her principal was an effective communicator but was also an active listener. Alongside her, seven other participants also noted the importance of good listening as a facet of communication. They expressed how important it was to feel heard – whether that was concerns they were sharing, or those leaders listening to their staff in order to change and set direction. Participant 004 simply stated: “It all comes back to listening. Everybody has felt valued and listened to.”

Overall, participants felt that communication coupled with listening were traits that were valued and supported teachers in feeling effective.

***Supportive and strength-based.*** Another way leaders used communication to help teachers cultivate their efficacy was by being supportive and strength-based. Every participant in this study repeatedly conveyed how important feeling supported was to their effectiveness. Often, participants discussed verbal reassurance they were given during a challenging time or uncertain situation. Participant 002 shared how her leadership team supported her through a challenging situation and the consequent impact it had upon her:

In those types of situations, your support from admin is huge... Everything was very quickly blown over because admin had my back, right? Like there were no big blow out or consequences. I was able to continue on doing my job and having

the confidence that I needed very shortly after, because my admin reassured me that everything was fine.

Several participants described a certainty that their principal “had their back,” with many sharing how that helped them to feel more confident and effective.

In addition to being supportive, seven teachers shared how much they valued leaders who were strength-based. Teachers in this study commented on how often times their leaders were able to point out strengths they had that they were not aware of and this helped boost their confidence. Some participants also discussed how being positive and strength-focused made their leaders more effective at having hard conversations, giving feedback, and helping teachers through changes. Participant 004 described how one leader he knew turned his mistakes into positive chances for growth:

They say yeah, ‘okay, you screwed up’. Let's look at this as an opportunity of how we can grow from this and learn from it. Let's just hash it out. Let's see what happened and where it could have gone better. But they also focus on what went well in that situation too.

Multiple participants also described that leaders who knew their strengths well often played into them and worked within their skill set to help build them up and move them forward.

Overall, participants in this study shared that leaders who can effectively communicate, listen, provide support, and focus on strengths were more likely to impact their efficacy and feelings of effectiveness in a positive manner.

**Instructional leader.** An additional leadership quality denoted by the participants in this study as impacting their efficacy was found in the ability of leaders to demonstrate

instructional leadership. Within this theme, the relevant subthemes included being: realistic, action oriented, growth oriented, knowledgeable, and a learner.

***Understanding classroom realities and being action oriented.*** Four and five teachers respectively shared that leaders who had the willingness and ability to understand classroom realities, and who were action oriented displayed characteristics that could potentially positively impact their efficacy. These participants shared that their leaders were able to stay grounded in what being in a classroom was like and what was truly possible, and then base their expectations upon that. By being clear on what a teacher's day-to-day life looked like, these leaders were better able to set teachers up for success. Similarly, participants discussed follow through, or more often, a lack thereof. Instances of minimal follow through on professional development, school initiatives, support with students, or on decisions being made left teachers feeling like their leaders misunderstood them and their jobs. Participant 009 described a leader she worked for who failed to consistently follow through in a variety of ways and how it impacted her feelings about her practice. She said, "It reduces your efficiencies or effectiveness because you question so much. Because you're unsure what the fallout might be." Participants conveyed the need for their leaders to have a realistic understanding of classroom operations, as well as being able to follow through as foundational leadership characteristics.

***Knowledgeable, growth oriented, and being a learner.*** In order for participants to view their school leaders as effective instructional leaders, they needed to see that they were knowledgeable, growth oriented, and willing to learn. Teachers in this study communicated in multiple ways, including in the topic of social and emotional supports,

that learning was imperative to their efficacy. Therefore, they valued leaders who were able to guide, direct, and facilitate that learning.

Key to guiding that learning was leaders who were knowledgeable – not only in pedagogy but also in other areas such as classroom management, behavioural supports, and other classroom skills. Six participants described several ways that leaders could be knowledgeable. These included being knowledgeable about: classrooms, different types of students, instructional strategies, available resources and supports, relationship building, and leading professional learning. They shared how this knowledge supported them in their growth, allowing them to be more effective educators.

While being knowledgeable was important, four participants also noted that leaders who made them feel more effective were also willing to learn alongside their staff. They were people who had vast amounts of knowledge and experience but never took for granted that there was always more to learn. Participant 004 described the work of education and shared leadership as analogous to people working together to pull a cart. He shared how he believed effective leaders were not “sitting up in the cart with a whip, screaming at their people,” but rather were down on the ground, pulling the cart with their staff and guiding its direction. Closely tied with the characteristics of vulnerability and openness, a few participants expressed gratitude for leaders who were willing to say they didn’t know something. For example, Participant 005 stated:

If they don't have an answer right away, they're willing to try and figure it out and let you know if they've got something that would be beneficial or to be honest and say, you know what? I don't know...but we can keep looking into it or to be creative and find other ways that we can kind of work around it.

While participants in this study valued leaders who were knowledgeable, they also valued leaders who were willing to learn and grow alongside them and who could be honest about their limitations.

Similarly, four participants also mentioned that in addition to being a learner themselves, leaders who were growth-oriented helped them to feel more effective as educators. These participants expressed that they were able to make mistakes, as well as that their leaders could provide feedback in a positive and constructive way. Participant 003 expressed how empowered she felt working for a leader who was always encouraging her ability to learn and grow: “I would have done backflips for her because she was so respectful and she encouraged growth.”

Participants in this study shared various ways that leaders can demonstrate instructional leadership. They disclosed how effective learning was an underlying variable in their efficacy and that certain leadership characteristics directly supported that. When leaders were realistic, action oriented, knowledgeable, learners and growth oriented, teachers perceived positive impacts on their efficacy.

**Collaborative.** The final theme that emerged regarding valued leadership characteristics amongst teachers who participated in this study was the quality of being collaborative in nature. The subthemes of being collaborative included: shared leadership, being team oriented, and being collaborative.

***Collaborative and team oriented.*** Both the notions of collaboration and being team oriented were already discussed in relation to this thematic analysis. However, participants distinguished between those two items being contextual variables, social and emotional supports, as well as leadership characteristics. Therefore, while there is notable

crossover between these topics, mention also needed to be made under the topic of leadership characteristics.

Eight participants from all three experience level categories mentioned being collaborative as a leadership quality that made them feel efficacious in their teaching practice. These leaders demonstrated collaboration in multiple ways: directly collaborating with teachers, facilitating collaboration for their staff, and supporting teacher driven collaboration.

Similarly, eight teachers in this study expressed that leaders who were team oriented had a positive impact on their efficaciousness. Teachers expressed the affirmative influence having the opportunities to work and learn with others had upon them. Many participants also shared that leaders cultivated a team environment in many ways, such as through collaboration, food, relationships, and culture. Participant 004 spoke of how contrasting one school division was from the next. He explained how he went from feeling marginalized, excluded, and incompetent to the exact opposite. He said, “I have at, all times felt valued, felt part of a team and, felt the work I was doing was needed and valuable.” Because of this, he went from considering a career change to wanting to become a school leader one day. That anecdote clearly demonstrated the profound effect leaders who demonstrated collaborative and team focused qualities can have on the teachers they work with.

***Shared leadership.*** Another way that leaders facilitated feelings of efficacy for teachers is when they operated through shared leadership. Four participants spoke of different ways that leaders not only walked alongside them, but allowed their staff’s unique strengths to shine through. Participant 001 espoused his understanding of shared

leadership when he said, “I think the most effective school leader puts everybody else around them in a place to succeed. And then fills in the necessary gaps themselves.”

Other participants discussed how this could be as simple as engaging teacher voice through different committees, or asking teachers to share their practice and lead their colleagues through learning. Participant 003 discussed how she felt good leaders know that they aren’t capable of doing everything, nor do they need to. There was a general sense among participants that schools were stronger when everyone had an important role to play.

Overall, these participants conveyed the importance of leaders who demonstrated that they were collaborative, team-oriented and who valued shared leadership. They shared how these characteristics could impact how effective they felt in their practice in a number of direct and indirect ways.

Throughout this thematic analysis, participant responses demonstrated the complex and intertwined nature of principals actions and the subsequent impact on their efficacy. They highlighted that there were many facets to this including context, social and emotional supports, feelings surrounding efficacy, and leadership characteristics. Their reflections and experiences painted a picture that demonstrated the enormous task before school leaders. Moreover, they conveyed the immense influence formal leaders possess in regards to impacting teachers’ feelings of efficacy. The key findings of the thematic analysis are summarized in Tables 1 through 4 (see below). Additionally, Tables 5 through 8 breakdown the mentions of each theme by years of teaching experience level (see below).



Table 1

*Key Themes and Subthemes: Contextual Factors Impacting Efficacy*

Contextual Factors Impacting Efficacy	
Theme	Subthemes
Relationships	Teacher voice, vulnerability, autonomy, feedback, honesty, trust
Collective Responsibility	Sense of belonging, student-centred philosophy, engagement, follow-through, collaboration, understanding of classroom realities
Direction	Instructional leadership, clarity of expectations, clarity of purpose, clarity of vision, communication, culture
Positive Reinforcement	Acknowledgement, encouragement, reassurance

Table 2

*Key Themes and Subthemes: Social and Emotional Supports Provided by School Leaders*

Social and Emotional Supports Provided By School Leaders	
Theme	Subthemes
Investment	Relationships, personalized approaches based on individual needs, involvement with students, flexibility, caring
Communication	Experience (offering wisdom and advice), listening/ feeling heard, non-judgemental, conversation
Learning	Relevant and meaningful professional development, collaboration, modeling

Table 3

*Key Themes and Subthemes: Feelings Participants Associated With Efficacy*

Feelings of Efficaciousness	
Theme	Subthemes
Protected	Support, safety, trust
Part of a Team	Clarity of expectations, collaboration, confidence, feeling valued

Table 4

*Key Themes and Subthemes: Leadership Characteristics Perceived to Impact Efficacy*

Leadership Characteristics Perceived to Impact Efficacy	
Theme	Subthemes
Relationship Centred	Relationship focused, student-centred, present, intentional, visible, caring
Cultivates Trust	Believes in people, provides autonomy, vulnerable, transparent, trustworthy, trusting, honest, open
Effective Communicator	Strength-based, communicator, supportive, good listener
Instructional Leader	Realistic, action-oriented follow through, growth-oriented, knowledgeable, learner
Collaborative	Shared leadership, team-oriented, collaborative

Table 5

*Contextual Factors Impacting Efficacy: Subtheme Mentions Differentiated Years of Experience*

Contextual Factors Impacting Efficacy	
Sub Theme Mentions by Experience Group	Sub Themes
All (0-6, 7-18, 19+)	Relationships, collaboration, clarity expectations, clarity of purpose, sense of belonging, acknowledgement, instructional leadership, teacher voice, respect, autonomy, engagement, , student-centred, trust, collective responsibility, clarity of vision, vulnerability, engagement, realistic, reassurance, feedback
Only 7-18 and 19+	communication, honesty, culture
Only 0-6 and 7-18	Follow through

Table 6

*Social and Emotional Supports Provided by Leaders: Subthemes Mentions Differentiated by Years of Experience*

Social and Emotional Supports Provided By School Leaders	
Sub Theme Mentions by Experience Group	Sub Themes
All (0-6, 7-18, 19+)	Collaboration, relationships, conversation, caring, listening/ feeling heard, modeling, personalization, flexibility, student involvement
Only 7-18 and 19+	Relevant PD, experience (wisdom and advice), non-judgemental

Table 7

*Feelings of Efficaciousness: Subthemes Mentions Differentiated by Years of Experience*

Feelings of Efficaciousness	
Sub Theme Mentions by Experience Group	Sub Themes
All (0-6, 7-18, 19+)	Support, trust, confidence, collaboration, clarity of expectations,
Only 7-18 and 19+	Safety, feeling valued

Table 8

*Leadership Characteristics Perceived to Impact Efficacy: Subthemes Mentions**Differentiated by Years of Experience*

Leadership Characteristics Perceived to Impact Efficacy	
Sub Theme Mentions by Experience Group	Sub Themes
All (0-6, 7-18, 19+)	Communicator, supportive, relationship focused, trusting, good listener, strength based, vulnerable, knowledgeable, trustworthy, honest, caring, collaborative, believes in people, provides autonomy, follows through (action oriented), shared leadership, open, team-oriented, transparent, realistic, student-centred
Only 7-18 and 19+	Intentional, growth-oriented, learner, present (engaged), visible

Exploration of the interview responses from the nine participants utilized three stage thematic analysis. From the five interview questions, four topics emerged which guided the analysis: contextual variables impacting efficacy; social and emotional supports; feelings of efficacy; and leadership characteristics perceived to be associated with feelings of efficacy. Within each of these four topics, several key themes and subthemes developed. Participants felt that the key contextual variables impacting their

efficacy were relationships, collective responsibility, direction, and positive reinforcement. Additionally, they described investment, communication, and learning as key social and emotional supports provided by school leaders. Moreover, participants indicated how they perceived their feelings of efficacy to be linked to times when they felt like they were protected and part of a team. Finally, participants communicated several key leadership characteristics they perceived to impact their efficacy, including: relationship centred, cultivates trust, instructional leader, effective communicator, and collaborative. In order to develop a deeper understanding of these participant's experiences and the discoveries of the thematic analysis in relation to previous literature, subsequent examination of these ideas will be done by comparing and contrasting them with the literature review of this study.

## **Chapter Five: Discussion and Conclusions**

### **Interpretation of Findings Through Existing Literature**

Three stage thematic analysis was used to understand the data collected from one on one interviews with participants to answer the primary research question: What are the experiences of highly efficacious teachers about leadership practices that impact their perceptions of effectiveness? Furthermore, these interviews also sought to discover ideas associated with the utility of collaborative structures and resources; and the instructional supports employed by principals and their impact on teachers' sense of efficacy. In addition, the interviews attempted to gain insights about teacher perceptions of what it is that principals do to impact their resilience. Broadly, the participants in this study indicated beliefs and experiences that were generally reflective of the literature.

Participants' responses conveyed insight into what they perceived to be sources of their efficacy. Additionally, they shared ideas about teacher retention within the profession, collaboration, and instructional supports in relation to their feelings of effectiveness. Furthermore, some of their reflections aligned with ideas in the literature about what factors helped to change or impact their efficacy, as well as the impact situational factors had upon efficacy beliefs. Participants also made comments that mirrored the literature in regards to leadership styles and characteristics that previous academic research posited as valuable to cultivating and supporting teacher efficacy and resilience. The following chapter will discuss the aforementioned findings of this study through the lens of the existing literature. This will be done through comparison, to demonstrate the ways in which participants' experiences aligned with what has

previously been understood about efficacy. Furthermore, results that are of contrasting nature to the previous research will also be discussed.

**Sources of efficacy.** Bandura (1977, 1995) found that there were four main sources of efficacy: vicarious experiences, verbal and social persuasion, mastery experiences, and physiological states. Throughout the interviews, participant responses illustrated the importance of the former three sources in their comments. Most frequently, participants referred to the notions of acknowledgement, reassurance, and encouragement as key contextual variables that impacted their efficacy, which made up the theme positive reinforcement. These ideas were also mentioned in the topic of social and emotional supports and leadership characteristics under themes related to communication.

Participants identified how verbal persuasion helped them at various points in their career. Participant 002 described how verbal reassurance helped her to build confidence as a new teacher, and how those words served as a safety net to fall back on when she was facing challenges. Another participant also mentioned that verbal reassurance was helpful to build their confidence, improve their teaching practice as part of effective feedback, and kept them moving forward through adversity. However, it is important to note that it does not seem that this form of verbal reassurance is effective for teachers in isolation. They discussed how it was most impactful when they had a strong relationship with their administrator, based upon trust, respect, and vulnerability. It also appeared that positive reinforcement was closely entwined with other themes such as communication, being part of a team, and investment. Similar to what Bandura (1977, 1995) theorized, effective verbal persuasion goes far beyond just the words that were said. In the context of this study, that seemed to be true in that verbal persuasion from

someone with who you do not share a close relationship, and when other contextual variable and social emotional supports are absent, may not have the same impact as when those factors are present.

Alongside verbal and social persuasion, participants also noted how they perceived vicarious experiences to impact their effectiveness. These vicarious experiences included: modeling by their school leaders, mentorship, watching other teachers teach, and professional learning led by their colleagues. This reflects what Bandura (1977) stated about the potential influence of seeing others perform difficult tasks, especially others with perceived similarities to the observer, upon one's own feelings of efficacy. Participants valued school leaders who provided them opportunities for these vicarious experiences and they saw this as influential upon their perceived effectiveness.

Similarly, Bandura (1977, 1995) stated that mastery experiences were likely to have the most impact on efficacy. Participants in this study did mention this in a few instances. For example, Participant 009 shared that during a particular instance when she was revamping her math program, she was given the autonomy to make all the changes she felt necessary. It ended up being a huge success, making her feel effective and confident. Bandura argued that mastery experiences, combined with verbal and social persuasion, and with structured events to ensure success, can have a strong impact upon efficacy. This was reflected by Participant 005 when she shared about making some changes to her practice and how she was supported through the process with verbal support, instructional ideas, and what she felt was unwavering belief in her underlying



abilities. Her leaders helped her to tackle obstacles as they arose, helping her through a challenging time her career.

Thus, participants in this study noted the importance of leadership practices in regards to sources of efficacy. They spoke about verbal and social persuasion, vicarious experiences, and mastery experiences as factors that had impacts upon their perceived effectiveness. Furthermore, they indicated that their school leaders played an integral role in facilitating and creating those experiences.

**Retention of teachers within the profession.** The importance of keeping new teachers in the profession and providing opportunities for them to have consistency in gaining experience was noted by Chester and Beaudin (1996) and Murnane and Phillips (1981). Chester (1991, 1992) asserted there were several factors that could influence novice teachers' efficacy, subsequently impacting their likelihood to stay in the profession. These factors included opportunities for collaboration, availability of quality resources to support teaching, and principals who were able and willing to attend to instructional issues. Furthermore, he posited that these were important supports for all teachers, not just teachers new to the profession. These ideas were clearly reflected in the experiences of participants in this study. More recently, Zhu et al. (2017) completed a study that found correlations between what they described as teacher self-concept, teacher efficacy and burnout. Their description of teacher self-concept is closely related to the definition of teacher efficacy used in this study. They discovered that self-concept and teacher efficacy could be strong protective factors for teachers against burnout. Thus, the need to develop teacher efficacy was important for teachers at all stages of their careers to ensure continued ability to commit to staying in the profession. Participant 002

provided her insights into this idea when she discussed her general experiences as a new teacher. She spoke of how she had very supportive school leaders who helped her to see some of her strengths as an educator. She referred to how this was something she always came back to when she was struggling. It could be argued that these early experiences had an impact on the trajectory of her career because she explained how important those early experiences were to her when she was facing challenges and questioning herself as an educator.

**Collaboration.** Additionally, all participants referred to collaboration in various ways as a school practice impacting their effectiveness. Several participants referred to mentorship opportunities and the structure, or lack thereof, during collaborative times as school leadership practices that impacted their efficacy. Participant 002 discussed how having strong structures, with clear goals, and substantial school leader involvement led her and her colleagues to planning and executing strong differentiated learning opportunities that she perceived to strongly impact student learning, thus, building her confidence and allowing her to feel more effective. Other participants described opportunities to collaborate that supported their efficacy such as team-teaching, collaborating with colleagues in other schools, mentorship programs, having built-in time, proximity to those they collaborate with, and an overall culture of collaboration within a school. Additionally, participants also valued when school leaders were involved in the collaborative process, and when there were opportunities for formal and informal collaboration with them.

**Instructional supports.** Furthermore, Chester (1991, 1992) noted that availability and quality of resources was another factor that could support teacher

efficacy. The teachers in the category with the least years of experience, zero to six, did not mention resources. However, teachers in the mid-years of experience category, seven to eighteen, did. Yet, what they perceived as quality resources varied greatly. Participant 007 loved doing book studies, while Participant 006 felt they were useless and just repurposed old ideas. Therefore, the task for leaders to provide quality resources for all teachers is one that seems deeply complex.

Finally, Chester (1991, 1992) noted the importance of leaders who were able to attend to instructional issues as a key factor impacting efficacy. In this study, the term “instructional issues” seemed to have a negative connotation with teachers. Participants regularly spoke of instructional leadership and knowledge as an important leadership characteristic that they perceived to impact their effectiveness. The importance of this instructional leadership, as well as the need for leaders to be learners alongside their staff was noted by Adams, Mombourquette, and Townsend (2019). Therefore, it seems possible to argue a connection between attending to instructional issues and instructional leadership. Participants valued leaders with strong knowledge who provided social and emotional supports through effective learning opportunities. They valued leaders who had skills and experience to support their individual needs within their classroom. This included leaders who could recognize their needs, provide resources and support to aid their growth, and support them when they were problem solving through new challenges. So, while participants may have shied away from the exact language used by Chester, it was clearly indicated that leaders with the ability to attend to instructional issues were seen as impacting how teachers perceived their effectiveness.

Given this, participants generally described leadership practices impacting their efficacy as: effectively facilitated opportunities for a wide array of collaboration; providing a variety of perceived high quality resources; and providing strong instructional leadership by being able to support in a variety of instructional situations. These participant experiences also begin to draw some conclusions for two of the sub questions of this study including: What are the collaborative structures and resources that highly efficacious teachers believe principals provide?; What instructional supports do highly efficacious teachers feel principals provide?

First, these highly efficacious teachers indicated collaborative structures provided by school principals had the ability to impact their efficacy. They described these collaborative structures as built-in time, with a clear agenda and expectations. Additionally, they described these structures as team-teaching opportunities, mentorship programs, and proximity to colleagues they were collaborating with. Finally, these participants perceived school leader involvement to be an integral part of the structure of collaborative opportunities that supported efficacy. This concept was reinforced by Adams et al. (2019) when they posited the value of teams, collaboration, and principals being learners alongside their teachers as important aspects of effective leadership. Another conclusion that can be drawn in regards to this sub question is the resources provided by principals that were perceived as impactful by teachers in this study. They described physical resources such as books, professional development opportunities, and personnel resources. Personnel resources included things like being connected with another teacher who could support them or being connected with another type of expert such as a speech language pathologist or physical therapist.

Moreover, the participants in this study also indicated some instructional supports they felt principals provided, allowing conclusions to be drawn about the second sub question: What instructional supports do highly efficacious teachers feel principals provide? These instructional supports included a variety of things that all fell under the category of instructional leadership. Some examples are applicable and meaningful professional learning, effective feedback, and providing structured supports when a teacher is struggling. Therefore, Chester's (1991, 1992) ideas regarding how to support the retention and efficacy of novice and more experienced teachers seemed to be reflected clearly in the experiences of the teachers in this study. Moreover, the notions set forth by Adams et al. (2019) about effective feedback using generative dialogue, prioritizing leading meaningful professional learning, and being aware of the possible consequences of judgement and criticism are also reflective of participants' experiences and perceptions about instructional supports they felt leaders provided.

**Changing and impacting efficacy.** An underlying facet of this study was the notion that participants felt certain experiences, interactions, or situations had the ability to influence their efficacy. As previously mentioned, there is no current consensus in the literature regarding if, how, and to what extent teacher efficacy can be influenced. Some of the factors theorized to potentially have an impact upon efficacy were years of teaching experience (Klassen & Chiu, 2010; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001) as well as a variety situational factors (Fackler & Malmberg, 2016; Pas et al., 2012). Participants in this study shared experiences that reflected varying levels of efficacy that they associated with both experience levels and situational factors.

*Efficacy and experience.* Some researchers have posited that efficacy is the most malleable in early stages of a teacher's career, and becomes more fixed as experience level increases (Henson, 2001; Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998; Woolfolk Hoy & Hoy, 1990). While that may indeed be true, participants in this study clearly indicated a plethora of experiences they felt impacted their efficacy throughout their careers. With that said, there was no objective measure of efficacy levels at various points in their educational careers, and this was a snapshot based upon reflection and perception. Therefore, any conclusions drawn must bear that context in mind.

Several participants referred back to early in their teaching careers as a time they felt highly inefficacious. For example, Participant 009 spoke of how in those early years she felt like a fraud and how looking back it was clear she had no idea what she was doing. She also described a valuable mentorship opportunity she was given was in those early years. Not only was it supported by her principal, but it was funded and coordinated through her school division. She discussed the strong relationship she built with her mentor as one in which she was safe to be vulnerable and ask questions, allowing her to improve her skills as a teacher.

Similarly, Participant 005 discussed how she felt inefficacious when she began teaching a new grade in a new school. She spoke of the lack of supports available to her, and how she was unaware of who to turn to when she needed help. What she wished existed was a system and process for new teachers and teachers who were new to the building, which she later attempted to help set up. She described how having a dedicated colleague to be a support person, even just for mundane things such as where supplies were and how to use the photocopier, would have been immensely instrumental in

lowering her stress levels. This idea was represented in the literature by Kayalar (2018), who described that new teachers and teachers new to a building need a systematic and purposeful set of supports. Furthermore, Participant 005 emphasized her need for clarity of expectations of her as a teacher and how she wished she had known what they were, as that would have supported her in feeling more successful.

Additionally, Participant 005 also described how years later, when she moved from high school to elementary, she experienced a similar dip in her efficacy. While she was an experienced teacher, being new to a grade level and curriculum was overwhelming and left her questioning her abilities and worth as a teacher. Multiple other participants noted in passing, or in more depth, that being new to a school or grade level was a time they felt more ineffectual, regardless of how long they had been teaching. Participant 005 once again referred to expectations in her new situation and how having these clear expectations, where she felt supported along the way toward meeting them, allowed her to feel more effective. Furthermore, at this school, she felt she was able to communicate her ideas, needs, and concerns without her abilities as an educator being called into question. She spoke of the open door policy these school leaders had, and how that communication and openness empowered her as a teacher. Through this, she described how her principal was able to help her see what made her unique as an educator and to celebrate that.

Multiple participants noted that early in their careers, when they felt they had limited knowledge, was a time when their efficacy was at its lowest. Overall, many participants in this study described instances when they felt a dip in their efficacy when they were new to teaching a different grade level. Even participants with several years of

teaching experience described this phenomenon. This idea was supported by the research of Woolfolk Hoy and Burke Spero (2005), as they theorized that teacher efficacy levels dropped in the early years of teaching, especially after entering the classroom from teacher preparation programs and being faced with the realities of being fully responsible for a classroom. A study conducted by Peters and Pearce (2011) indicated a correlation with a strong relationship between novice teachers and their principals and the resilience of these new teachers. This study indicated that principals do indeed have a role to play in supporting teachers and their efficacy and resilience when it comes to many factors, one of which is experience level.

**Professional development and efficacy.** Bandura (1997) advised that one of the most likely ways to impact efficacy, especially later in a teacher's career, is to be faced with strong evidence and feedback to effectively disrupt old beliefs regarding abilities. He suggested that professional development was one of the best avenues for this sort of disruption. More recently, this notion was corroborated by Voelkel Jr. and Chrispeels (2017) when they found that Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) had a positive correlation with increased collective teacher efficacy. They described the need for PLCs to have a concerted focus on goal setting and results by collaborating to use data to create a plan for action. This idea was supported by Donohoo (2016) when she detailed seven characteristics of effective professional learning, including that it reinforces meaningful collaboration, is grounded in an educator's current practice, involves reflection based on student evidence, taps into sources of efficacy and builds capacity for leadership. Participants in this study indicated that one of the key social and emotional supports provided by school leaders to support efficacy and resilience was that of learning. They



described learning to include relevant and meaningful professional development, collaboration, and modeling. Participant 002 described the collaborative time structured by her principal, and how they used student data to plan and alter their courses of action. Similarly, Participant 006 described how much her teaching practice changed when she came back to teaching after a long hiatus. She detailed the way in which a leader she worked with provided her alternative ways to teach. These alternatives were presented in a personalized, non-judgemental, and supportive way, and were also modeled by this leader. Participant 006 described how this experience caused her to completely change her practice and pedagogy and how this vastly increased her feelings of efficacy. She also described how this change in her pedagogy was effective because it was provided with ongoing support that was specific to her practice. This was reflected by Adams and Townsend (2014), who implored the need for differentiated and personalized professional development. Guskey (1988) further suggested that leaders need to provide strong guidance, assistance, and support for teachers along with knowledge of how to implement the desired vision. This was also demonstrated by Participant 005 when she shared that this was exactly how her leaders implemented new initiatives. She described how they had a clear direction, how they provided step by step support to get to the end goal, as well as how they modeled what that looked like. To her it was very valuable to be walked through a process and the steps rather than be expected to find her own way there.

Shared leadership was also something participants noted as an important facet of collaboration, professional learning, as well as a quality valued in their school leaders. Mann (1986) and Guskey (1988) indicated that the teachers who were least likely in need of instructional improvement tended to be the most likely to engage in the learning. Since

participants in this study valued shared leadership and indicated value in seeing their colleagues' work, it could be possible that this may also be a reflection of Bandura's (1995) sources of efficacy, specifically vicarious experiences. These ideas were reflected by Adams and Townsend (2014) when they ascertained necessary elements of what they termed collaborative inquiry. They described the need for shared responsibility, as well as a shared rather than private approach to learning, where teachers were not isolated. Donohoo (2016) echoed these ideas when she posited the need for teachers having knowledge about the work of others as a condition that enables collective efficacy. Once again, perhaps if teachers with low efficacy, less willing to engage in professional learning, saw colleagues of perceived similarity engaging in new practices, it may be more impetus for them to engage. Participants in this study, while highly efficacious, truly valued not only opportunities to share their own work, but to experience the craft of their colleagues whether through formal professional learning, informal conversations, or through classroom observations.

In all, the past research and the participant experiences in this study point to professional development and learning as being highly impactful upon teacher efficacy. Not only can it provide strong impetus for change if teachers have strongly set efficacy beliefs, it can provide opportunities for shared leadership which was also perceived to positively impact teachers' feelings of effectiveness. Furthermore, scaffolded professional learning can be considered an instructional support that principals provide to teachers to support their efficacy.

**Leadership and efficacy.** As indicated by Fackler and Malmberg (2016), to date there are a limited number of studies focused on the relationship between the influence of

the principal and school factors on teacher efficacy. This study ultimately sought to discover some potential conclusions about the nature of the relationship between principal actions, as well as subsequent school factors, that the highly efficacious participants perceived to impact their feelings of efficacy. Through the primary research question, as well as the sub question regarding how highly efficacious teachers perceive a principal contributes to their resilience, some conclusions can be drawn about the experiences of the teachers who participated in this study. The thematic analysis described several key characteristics of leaders that participants valued. These were school leaders who were relationship centred, cultivated trust, effective communicators, instructional leaders, and collaborative. Furthermore, participants also linked a variety of contextual variables to their feelings of efficacy that fell within the influence of their school leaders. Teachers felt most effective in schools where relationships were highly valued, leadership took collective responsibility for students, leaders set a clear direction, and there was ample positive reinforcement. Participants also viewed specific social and emotional supports as a way that a school leader contributed to their resilience. They described these supports as high levels of investment, clear and effective communication, and a focus on learning. Again, while previous research is limited, many of these findings are mirrored in the research that is available.

Kayalar (2018) pointed out a variety of opportunities principals had to support resilience in novice teachers. Similarly, Peters and Pearce (2011) suggested that through the development of strong relationships with novice teachers, a principal had the ability to positively impact their resilience. Additionally, there seems to be noteworthy overlap between those ideas and the notions of teacher stress and teacher efficacy (Ashton &

Webb, 1986; Coladarci, 1992; Klassen & Chiu, 2010; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010).

Therefore, it is likely that Kayalar's assertions regarding teacher resilience have inextricable links with the notion of teacher efficacy. He suggested that principals should: provide adequate time for PD; demonstrate trust in novice teachers; support novice teachers in communicating their needs; develop strong relationships through one-on-one meetings to determine hopes, fears, and dreams; help teachers identify purpose and set clear goals; and be open to criticism.

Overwhelmingly, all participants also repeatedly referenced the need for strong relationships as a foundational piece to all other facets regarding efficacy and resilience. While Kayalar (2018) denoted the importance of one-on-one meetings to build relationships, and participants did value such formal and informal interactions, they also indicated that relationships were built through many other types of interactions. They shared how principal supervision and presence in hallways and classrooms built relationships as well as trust. Similarly, they described how principals who not only provided effective feedback, but who were open to hearing feedback, often used this as an opportunity to build relationships. Additionally, school leaders built strong relationships when they espoused characteristics such as being intentional, vulnerable, trustworthy, visible, and caring.

Participants also discussed how important it was to them to feel trusted by their school leaders, and how part of this trust was characterized by the professional autonomy to make decisions regarding their classroom and practice. Similarly, the theme of teacher voice was one that emerged, with six of the nine participants indicating its importance. All participants in the categories with the most experience shared how they valued having

their voice heard, while most in the middle category did, and only one teacher in the early years category indicated this. Kayalar (2018) also specified the need for novice teachers to be supported in communicating their needs. Perhaps, the more experienced teachers were able to articulate this need better, as they were more assured in their needs and more confident in the fact that their voice mattered. Nonetheless, both Kayalar and the participants in this study shared the importance of having their voice heard and the important role a principal plays in cultivating the culture and space for that to happen.

Finally, participants also discussed the role that principals play in cultivating purpose and clear goals. While Kayalar (2018) described this as helping teachers to find their purpose and develop clear goals, participants in this study saw clarity as a much more global contextual factor. The theme of direction emerged and underscored how teachers valued leaders who demonstrated strong instructional leadership; clarity of expectations, purpose and vision; and strong communication within the school's culture to set a path for the future. While participants in this study absolutely valued being recognized as individuals and being provided personalization, they also demonstrated that they required leaders to set this direction on a whole school level. Overall, there was a clear indication from both Kayalar's research and the participants in this study of the integral role school leaders play in setting purpose, goals, and direction.

***Goal setting and visionary leadership.*** During the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s there were a number of studies that demonstrated a focus on the notion of visionary leadership and its impact upon goal setting. Previously in the literature review, the possibility of a connection between visionary leadership and efficacy was discussed. Kirkpatrick and Locke (1996) suggested key factors that were important in the effective

implementation of a vision. These included: serving as an appropriate role model; providing individualized support; and recognizing accomplishments. Indeed, Kayalar (2018) argued “the fact that the school principal is an effective leader is one of the most important conditions for the schools to reach their goals” (p. 3471). Similarly, Donohoo (2016) argued that effective leaders were able to create a strong vision and set effective goals, as well as include teachers in that vision and goal setting process. Participants in this study indicated that a clear vision and purpose were valued as a way that a school leader could set direction, thus impacting their efficacy. Additionally, they suggested that modeling, providing personalized support, and recognition of accomplishments were also vital factors that supported their efficacy.

Given this, the connections posited in the literature review seem to be reflected in the experiences of participants. Aligned with Bandura’s (1995) sources of efficacy, principals who modeled behaviour that was expected had the potential to act as a vicarious experience, allowing teachers to see someone they perceived as similar to them completing challenging tasks, therefore potentially increasing their own beliefs about their abilities. Additionally, as previously mentioned, the provision of individualized supports and acknowledgement of accomplishments reflects Bandura’s notions of verbal persuasion and mastery experiences. Participants in this study repeatedly shared how feeling supported in general, having personalization to meet their needs, and verbal reassurance were pervasive ways they felt principals supported them in feeling more effective. Therefore, it can be concluded that within this study, participants perceived these characteristics of visionary leadership as leadership practices that contributed to their effectiveness.

***Charismatic and collegial leadership.*** In addition to visionary leadership, there were also more direct connections to efficacy found in studies about charismatic and collegial leadership styles. Pas et al. (2012) noted positive associations between increased teacher efficacy and collegial leadership styles. Furthermore, teachers saw increased efficacy when a principal addressed and supported school-wide issues (McCoach & Colbert, 2010), and in general when teachers felt greater overall support from their principal (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). In addition, this notion was also reflected by Hepburn and Brown (2001), who posited that teachers' overall satisfaction with decisions made by principals and support they provided was closely tied to a more positive outlook towards their job. Participants reflected this within their interview responses. For example, Participant 009 spoke of a leader whom she worked with who did not clearly and decisively make decisions. She described how this left her feeling not only uncertain and unsupported, but less effective overall. Similarly, a main theme that emerged regarding participants' feelings of efficacy was the need to feel protected, including support, safety, and trust. Participants indicated that when they experienced those feelings, they felt most efficacious. Therefore, as was posited by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy, when teachers felt overall support was often when they felt their highest feelings of efficacy. Given this, it can be concluded that providing meaningful and ongoing support, as well as purposefully addressing school wide issues were practices of principals perceived by participants to impact their feelings of effectiveness.

Finally, Bandura (1977, 1995) and Kirkpatrick and Locke (1996) indicated the potential positive impacts of charismatic leadership styles and related communication methods. They expressed the importance of the way in which leaders managed and

disseminated information. Eye contact, expression, and tone were all seen as important facets of effective communication. Effective communication was seen by participants as one of the key leadership characteristics that supported efficacy. Participants indicated that this included being supported and heard by someone who was an active listener.

This study attempted to draw conclusions about the primary research question regarding the ways in which highly efficacious teachers perceived leadership practices to impact their effectiveness. Many of the conclusions drawn by past studies were also reflected by participants in this study. Participants valued leadership qualities such as being relationship focused, cultivating trust, and effective communicators. Additionally, teachers perceived that leaders who demonstrated trust, supported teachers in having their voices heard, set direction, and developed strong relationships helped support and cultivate resilience.

### **Contrasted Results**

**Sources of efficacy.** Bandura (1977) argued that while verbal persuasion was the most readily accessible source of efficacy, he believed that it was the weakest and did not have the ability to impact one's efficacy as much as one's own accomplishments would. This may be considered a contrasting result in the sense that every single participant mentioned the considerable impact verbal persuasion had upon them, with most mentioning it several times. With that said, this may not be a true contrasted result due to the fact that within this study it is not possible to quantify a measurement of the true impact upon one's efficacy, nor was that the intended goal of this study. Yet, given the pervasiveness of this concept in the interviews, the conclusion can be drawn that these



highly efficacious teachers perceived verbal persuasion as a leadership practice that was highly impactful towards their effectiveness, contrary to Bandura's findings.

**Novice teachers and efficacy supports.** As mentioned previously, a somewhat contrasted result of this study arises in regards to Tschannen-Moran and Hoy's (2001) assertion that verbal persuasion and school context have a greater impact on newer teachers. The qualification of the level of impact of factors was not within the scope or purpose of this study; however, perceptions of participants indicated that both verbal persuasion and school context were important variables contributing to their efficacy beliefs throughout their career. Every participant in this study shared the importance of verbal praise – they called it reassurance, conversation, acknowledgement, or encouragement. They expressed the value of this at every stage in their career; it didn't matter how long they had been teaching, they still needed to hear that they were doing a good job or that their hard work was valued. Based upon participant responses, it seems that this verbal reassurance was a key factor in supporting efficacy as a standalone, but also because it was an integral piece of so many other facets they felt supported their efficacy. They shared experiences of leaders who gave verbal reassurance as those who were also in tune with their strengths and needs, who were effective listeners and communicators, and who were still very much in touch with the daily realities and struggles of a classroom. Providing genuine and meaningful verbal assurance also relied on a strong, authentic relationship that were based upon mutual trust. Therefore, while some research asserted the importance of these as increasingly less valuable in later stages of one's career, participants in this study clearly delineated the value and

importance of verbal reassurance, and a swath of intertwined factors, throughout every part of their teaching career.

Additionally, participants also shared how school context continued to impact their efficacy in ways they felt were significant, even when they had been teaching for a number of years. This was most poignantly highlighted by Participant 006. She shared how she moved to a new school, and while she had over a decade and a half of experience, the context of the school and the behaviours of her principal negatively impacted her efficacy. It was a struggle for her to feel effective when she felt the focus was on the wrong details and not on the big picture. Indeed, that new context caused her to truly question her abilities as a teacher and why her principal chose to hire her. Along with other participants, she highlighted the fact that school contextual variables do impact the perceived efficacy of teachers in all career stages.

Kayalar (2018) also presented findings similar to Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) regarding the importance of certain strategies to support novice teachers. It is plausible that those practices have the ability to support ongoing resilience and efficacy in all teachers. Participants in this study also indicated the value of Kayalar's suggested supports for novice teachers as equally important to them even when they were at a later stage of their career.

In all, the responses and experiences of participants in this study were highly reflective of what is currently understood in the existing literature. Participants indicated certain leadership practices that they perceived to impact their effectiveness that spanned several literature topics. They also discussed how specific collaborative structures and instructional supports also supported their efficacy. Additionally, they provided insights

into how they perceive a principal can support their resilience as a teacher. Given these indications, there are a host of implications that can be concluded for the practice of school leaders.

### **Recommendations**

The underlying goal of this study was to determine specific leadership practices that were perceived by highly efficacious teachers to impact their effectiveness. Additionally, this study hoped to glean specific collaborative structures and resources, as well as instructional supports that were also seen as impacting how effective these participants felt. Finally, this study hoped to learn the ways in which highly efficacious teachers perceive principals as contributing to their resilience. From the perceptions and the detailed participant experiences, there are a number of potential recommendations relevant to school leaders. Each of the following recommendations reflect the various competencies found within the Leadership Quality Standard (Alberta Education, 2018a), which is the legislated document guiding the practice of school leaders within Alberta. Based upon the findings and interpretations of this study recommendations will be made regarding eight of the nine competencies. Due to the scope and nature of this study, some competencies aligned more closely with possible recommendations for school leaders when it came to supporting and fostering teacher efficacy. There were some competencies that were less directly affiliated with the notions of this study. For competency five and eight there were loose associations and conclusions that could be drawn, but limited specific measures that were relevant to those particular competencies. Lastly, competency nine did not present direct enough connections for recommendations to be made.

**Competency one: Fostering effective relationships.** The first competency detailed by Alberta Education (2018a) states the need for leaders to build positive relationships with school members, as well as members of the community. All participants in this study noted on multiple occasions the importance of relationships as foundational to their feelings of efficacy. In fact, it seems woven into all of the thematic topics. It directly presented as a valued leadership characteristic, as well as part of contextual variables that impacted efficacy. Furthermore, it was an underlying factor of social and emotional supports such as investment and communication. Additionally, strong relationships were foundational to the instances where participants described feeling most efficacious, as well as feeling protected and part of a team. Competency one requires leaders to act with genuine empathy and care; create a welcoming, safe, and caring learning environment; and form collegial relationships that model and promote open and collaborative dialogue. It seems that the development of strong relationships was valued by participants as a way to support and cultivate their feelings of effectiveness. Their experiences suggest the following actions might be helpful when school leaders are striving to cultivate these strong relationships:

- Make relationships a priority within all of their actions and decisions;
- Strive to get to know teachers on a personal level; demonstrate genuine care and concern by getting to know staff personally as educators, as well as individuals;
- Being consistently and regularly visible and present around the school and within classrooms;

- Demonstrate strong knowledge of individual strengths and needs;
- Seek and utilize teacher voice in decision making and school-wide planning;
- Display vulnerability with staff, especially being willing to be honest when unsure of an answer or next steps,
- Provide autonomy to teachers by being aware of what is happening in their classrooms and demonstrating trust in their professionalism;
- Providing effective and meaningful feedback that is honest and strength-based;
- Offering wisdom and advice through formal and informal conversations; being a source of support and a sounding board for teachers;
- Provide consistent and regular positive reinforcement to teachers through reassurance or acknowledgement of a job well done.

**Competency two: Modeling commitment to professional learning.**

Competency two details the responsibility of leaders to engage in “career-long professional learning and ongoing critical reflection to identify opportunities for improving leadership, teaching, and learning” (Alberta Education, 2018a, p. 4).

Participants in this study expressed how leaders who were collaborative, elicited feedback, had strong knowledge of current pedagogy, genuinely sought teacher voice, and were dedicated learners themselves were more likely to have a positive impact on a

teacher's feelings of effectiveness. Given that, the following suggestions are reflective of the experiences shared by participants:

- Create committees where teachers and leaders can work together;
- Use surveys or another means to elicit teacher/ general staff voice;
- Use informal opportunities to check-in with teachers and gauge how they are feeling and doing;
- Share current relevant educational research with teachers who it may be of particular interest or benefit to;
- Create opportunities to foster leadership capacity in others (i.e.: leadership or professional development committee);
- Demonstrate a commitment to learning by knowing current pedagogy and embedding that knowledge with contemporary educational research;
- Engaging teachers and other staff in the process of analyzing school data and choosing a course of action from that data.

**Competency three: Embodying visionary leadership.** Competency three outlines a leader's responsibility to collaborate "with the school community to create and implement a shared vision for student success, engagement, learning and well-being" (Alberta Education, 2018a, p. 5). The notion of visionary leadership was directly referenced in the literature as being a potentially important factor in teacher efficacy. Furthermore, participants in this study portrayed how leaders who shared a clear vision, purpose, and expectations better supported their efficacy. In order for a school leader to

embody this type of visionary leadership they may want to consider the following actions:

- Scaffold learning opportunities in a way that provides the end goal as well as ongoing support and clear steps on how to get there;
- Model a student-centered belief system by being present in classrooms and hallways and having strong relationships with students. Additionally, communicate this philosophy by grounding decisions in what is best for students;
- Communicate with transparency and honesty about school decisions, direction, and goals;
- Demonstrate interest and provide acknowledgement and support of teachers who are using innovative practices. This would also include allowing those teachers to fail without judgement, and using expertise to help them grow from their failures and challenges;
- Sharing opportunities for professional learning that align with school goals and vision;
- Create opportunities for discussion and input around school-based data and next steps resulting from those data, allowing teachers to use this to collaboratively make decisions to improve their classroom practice.

**Competency four: Leading a learning community.** Competency four depicts a principal's role as a leader of learning who can nurture and sustain a "culture that

supports evidence-informed teaching and learning” (Alberta Education, 2018a, p. 5).

Participants in this study, as well as the literature review, suggested the importance of engaging professional learning as a means to support, cultivate and impact efficacy and resilience. Many teachers who were interviewed discussed that learning and collaboration was woven into the culture of their school. They also shared how learning happened in many formal and informal ways. Given this, the following recommendations may be considered:

- Foster a sense of belonging for staff. This could look like acknowledging hard work and encouraging and supporting teachers who are facing challenges, both verbally and through actions;
- Providing honest and meaningful feedback to teachers while ensuring their skills and worth are still honored even when focusing on an area of growth;
- Modeling collective responsibility by engaging teachers who have previously taught a student to support and provide input when needed;
- Celebrating and recognizing students’ successes in formal and informal ways;
- Clearly communicating expectations and purpose so teachers have clarity on their roles and responsibilities; providing physical and emotional support where needed;



- Leading professional learning by modeling the best practices and ensuring learning and expectations are directly applicable to classroom practice;
- Creating opportunities for shared leadership, cultivating the knowledge and expertise of other educators within the school;
- Provide embedded time for collaboration with teachers, support staff, and outside agencies so that all voices are heard.

**Competency five: Supporting the application of foundational knowledge about First Nations, Métis and Inuit.** Competency five designates the expectation of leaders to support the school community in “acquiring and applying foundational knowledge about First Nations, Métis and Inuit for the benefit of all students” (Alberta Education, 2018a, p. 6). However, this study had limitations in its scope, and the participants who chose to participate in this study either did not identify as First Nations, Métis, or Inuit, or did not choose to disclose this information. Given that, while there may be some general implications to be gleaned from this study that may be applicable for leaders when working towards meeting the expectations of competency five, meaningful and genuine conclusions are difficult to ascertain due to the limitations of this study. With that said, it is possible that the notion of foundational relationships – relationships that respect diversity, culture, and different backgrounds – could potentially be a good starting point for addressing this competency. Further to this, developing relationships with local Indigenous Leaders may be a way to enabling all school staff and students to “gain knowledge and understanding of, and respect for, the histories, cultures, languages,

contributions, perspectives, experiences and contemporary contexts of First Nations, Métis and Inuit” (Alberta Education, 2018a, p. 6). Through this, school leaders could begin to develop shared leadership and general capacity amongst their staff.

**Competency six: Providing instructional leadership.** This competency outlines the need for school leaders to ensure that “every student has access to quality teaching and optimum learning experiences” (Alberta Education, 2018a, p. 6). Participants in this study described how leaders who displayed strong instructional leadership effectively supported efficacy and resilience. Some possible recommendations for leadership practices to support competency six include:

- Create a culture of collaboration that includes providing proximity for collaborative partners; and embedding time, structure, and norms for collaboration;
- Supporting teachers in collaborating with other colleagues outside of the school, either by finding ways to help them make it happen or facilitating connections;
- Connecting new teachers, or teachers who are new a subject/ grade, with a go to person or people who can be a source of support;
- Providing and supporting opportunities for mentorship. This could be a formal district wide program or supporting teachers in finding funds/ coverage so they have the opportunity to engage with mentors;

- Providing time and support for teachers to observe other teachers teach,
- Perform regular supervision, being present in classrooms, to ensure they have a strong grasp on classrooms realities, as well as a teachers' practices, including their strengths and how they might be supported;
- Having an open door policy where teachers feel comfortable seeking guidance and support, but where they also feel a high level of trust and professional autonomy;
- Using knowledge of curriculum and pedagogy to support teachers in innovative practices;
- Facilitating and coordinating teacher access to meaningful and relevant resources and outside agencies by having strong relationships and a strong awareness of their individual classrooms;
- Facilitating opportunities for shared and distributed leadership by engaging the current strengths of teachers and cultivating opportunities for these strengths to be shared.

**Competency seven: Developing leadership capacity.** Competency seven requires principals to provide opportunities “for members of the school community to develop leadership capacity and to support others in fulfilling their educational roles” (Alberta Education, 2018a, p. 7). Participants in this study depicted leaders who demonstrated value of their strengths by giving them opportunities to use those strengths

for the good of their school community. Multiple participants referred directly to the notion of shared leadership and described how that was a leadership characteristic they felt had the ability to positively impact their efficacy. Therefore, the following recommendations may be taken into consideration:

- Build strong relationships to increase personalization of strategies used to support individual teachers;
- Engage teachers in the process of making decisions through formal and informal consultation;
- Engage teachers in the process of designing and delivering professional learning;
- Capitalize on teacher strengths and helping teachers to realize their own strengths;
- Facilitating opportunities for teachers to try new things and engage in distributed leadership opportunities based upon their areas of expertise;
- Providing teachers with acknowledgement and feedback around their areas of strength;
- Cultivate and maintain a school culture that works to acknowledge and empower staff based upon their strengths.

**Competency eight: Managing school operations and resources.** This competency contains the expectation that a leader “effectively directs operations and manages resources” (Alberta Education, 2018a, p. 7). By capitalizing on teacher voice and feedback, and by having an acute awareness of the pulse of the school building, a

principal could potentially be able to more efficiently and effectively plan for areas of need. In this planning and decision making also lies an opportunity to consider aforementioned recommendations and use those to help guide the management of operations and resources. Furthermore, within this competency lies continued opportunity for modeling of “principles of effective teaching and learning, child development, and ethical leadership” (Alberta Education, 2018a, p. 7) when making decisions.

**Competency nine: Understanding and responding to larger societal context.**

Competency nine requires a leader “understands and appropriately responds to the political, social, economic, legal and cultural contexts impacting schools and the school authority” (Alberta Education, 2018a, p. 7). While there may be some aspects of this competency that provide tie-ins in indirect ways, it was not an area that was discussed or speculated upon by the responses within this survey or interviews.

**Implications for Areas of Future Research**

Based upon further curiosities that arose from this study, as well as the inherent limitations of this study, several potential areas of future research are possible. First, it is important to denote the small sample size of this study as a limiting factor. Not only was the size of the sample limited, it was also limited to one school division in Alberta with a primarily rural population. Future research consideration could be made for expanding this study to multiple school divisions across the province, to include a snapshot of both small rural and large urban teachers. Furthermore, it would be informative to determine how many of these beliefs and feelings are universally held by teachers, and if there are regional and school divisional differences that could potentially impact results.

Another limitation of this study is that it only included teachers who self-reported as highly efficacious. Further investigations might also include teachers who do not report as highly efficacious and whom rate their efficacy as being lower. This could provide insight about whether teachers with low efficacy perceive the same practices to impact their efficacy. Gaining insight from teachers with low efficacy might be a crucial step towards understanding the population who would be most likely to benefit positively from intentional strategies to cultivate and support efficacy. Thus, that seems like an important voice to add to the efficacy literature.

An additional area for further consideration might include a longitudinal study that followed teachers over a longer period in their career. Another limitation of this study was that it was reliant on memories of experiences over a career. While these perceptions are real and important, it would be interesting to have these discussions with teachers as they progress through different stages of their career to get more real-time data. Having these participants rate their efficacy using the Desrochers Efficacy Scale (DES) at various points in their career would potentially allow the data to be studied in a longitudinal manner, allowing responses to be compared across different career stages and events.

One other limitation of this study was construct validity on the DES. Since the survey was purely intended to distinguish teachers who self-reported as highly efficacious, it did not focus on ensuring the efficacy of those teachers in practice. The literature suggested that verbal persuasion was a weak source of efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1977, 1995). However, participants in this study felt it was one of the strongest sources that impacted their efficacy. Given this, a study that was able to ensure construct

validity with its efficacy survey, may be able to determine the level of accuracy of that perception to ascertain whether verbal persuasion truly has the impact on efficacy that teachers perceive it does.

Additionally, while not directly related to this study, another potentially interesting tangent could be regarding principal efficacy. The literature often noted how teacher efficacy is a strong predictor of the impact upon student efficacy and success (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007, 2010; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001; Wolters & Daugherty, 2007). Given that, a future study that attempted to correlate the impact of highly efficacious principals' actions on teacher efficacy versus the impact of low efficacy principals might provide continued insights into the complex world of school leadership.

Finally, it was clear in this study that self-efficacy has possible overlap with resilience. Of the variables and factors that teachers in this study perceived as impacting their efficacy, some were also seen as impacting their resilience, including: leaders who were highly invested in them as individuals and professionals, clear and effective communication, and a strong focus on learning. Some literature suggests efficacy beliefs are more stable as a teacher progresses in their career, and therefore harder to change (Henson, 2001; Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998; Woolfolk Hoy & Hoy, 1990). Further research might attempt to find any relationships between efficacy and resilience. Moreover, it might also consider more specifically studying teacher resilience and how negative situations impact teacher efficacy at different points in their career to perhaps ascertain the role resilience plays with self-efficacy. If indeed efficacy is more difficult to impact in experienced teachers, it might be relevant to attempt to measure to what extent

resilience factors into those feelings and beliefs. While teacher efficacy research has waned in recent years, or perhaps become engulfed or overshadowed by similar types of inquiries using different terminology, it is clear that more research is needed about both efficacy and resilience to continue to inform best practice for school leaders.

### **The Research Questions**

This study aimed to answer the primary research question regarding the experiences of highly efficacious teachers about leadership practices that impact their perceptions of effectiveness. The analysis of interview data from the participants in this study uncovered that they perceived a variety of factors to influence their efficacy including contextual variables, feelings of efficacy, social and emotional supports, and several key leadership characteristics. While there was a host of particulars, such as feeling safe and protected, leaders modeling expected and desired behaviours, and opportunities for meaningful learning and collaboration, participants ultimately indicated that strong relationships were foundational to the success of all leadership behaviours impacting their efficacy.

Additionally, this study sought to draw conclusions regarding the question of the collaborative structures and resources that highly efficacious teachers believe principals provide. Participants in this study indicated a variety of ways they experienced these structures. They spoke of having built-in time, with a clear agenda and set expectations or norms. Similarly, they described opportunities to work with colleagues, whether formally through mentorship programs or team-teaching opportunities, or more informally through proximity in their schools to colleagues they were collaborating with. Participants mentioned that school leader involvement, and leaders being willing to learn alongside



them was an integral part of the structure of collaborative opportunities that supported their efficacy. Furthermore, the participants described an array of resources principals could provide to support their efficacy, including: physical resources such as books, facilitating and leading professional development opportunities, as well as personnel resources. Personnel resources included things like being connected with other teachers, outside agencies, or experts who could support their growth and development.

This study also aimed to understand what instructional supports highly efficacious teachers felt principals provided. These included: applicable and meaningful professional learning; effective feedback about their practice; and providing structured supports when a teacher is struggling or facing challenges.

Finally, this study hoped to uncover ways that highly efficacious teachers perceived a principal contributed to their resilience. Participants described the key social and emotional supports principals provided that impacted their efficacy as high levels of investment, clear and effective communication, and a focus on learning. When leaders were focused on building strong relationships, and were invested in them on a personal and professional level, teachers felt that school leaders had the potential to positively impact their resilience.

## **Conclusion**

Teacher perceptions of leadership practices that impact their feelings of effectiveness is arguably an important area of understanding not only in a local context, but globally as well. Teacher efficacy has been correlated with job satisfaction, burnout, retention in the profession, and numerous student outcomes (Clandinin et al., 2015;

Kutsyuruba et al., 2018; Pas et al., 2012). The complexity of the role of formal school leaders is one that was highlighted in the literature review, as well as through the analysis of interview participant responses. Leaders have a deeply intricate set of factors and circumstances to navigate in order to effectively influence the efficacy of others. If leaders can develop an awareness of their ability to impact teacher efficacy and resilience, it may present some universal best practices to support teachers and students simultaneously. Furthermore, if leaders can use their knowledge of ways to positively impact teacher efficacy and resilience as a lens to evaluate potential decisions and actions, it could lead to an immensely powerful ripple effect within their schools.

The purpose of this study was to ascertain insights regarding the primary research question: What are the experiences of highly efficacious teachers about leadership practices that impact their perceptions of effectiveness? Furthermore, this study aimed to discover the utility of collaborative structures and resources; and the instructional supports employed by principals on their impact on teachers' sense of efficacy. In addition, it attempted to gain insights about teacher perceptions of what it is that principals do to impact their resilience. This was accomplished first by utilizing a survey, the Desrochers Efficacy Scale (DES), to discover teachers who self-reported as highly efficacious. Subsequently, nine participants were interviewed about their experiences and their perceptions using a semi-structured interview.

Participants responses were analyzed using a three stage thematic analysis approach and ascertained four key categories of importance regarding leadership and teacher efficacy: contextual variables impacting efficacy; social and emotional supports; feelings surrounding efficacy; and leadership characteristics. Within the first category,

four key themes were present. These themes included: relationships, collective responsibility, direction, and positive reinforcement. Participants described that they were more likely to feel effective and experience high efficacy when these contextual pieces were present.

Participants also described three main social and emotional supports they believed school leaders provided: investment, communication, and learning. These supports were discussed by participants as ways that leaders supported not only their feelings of efficacy, but also helped cultivate their resilience.

Two main themes were identified by participants regarding what feelings were present when they felt the most efficacious. They described feeling protected and feeling that they were part of a team as underlying sentiments connected with their feelings of efficacy.

Lastly, several key leadership characteristics were perceived by participants to support their feelings of effectiveness. When it came to leaders who cultivated feelings of efficacy, participants associated the following qualities: relationship centered, cultivates trust, effective communicator, instructional leader, and collaborative.

Within this study, participant perceptions regarding leadership practices that impacted their feelings of effectiveness provided insights into possible strategies school leaders can utilize to support teacher efficacy and resilience. While it is evident that there is plenty for researchers to learn about the impact of leadership practices on teachers in this regard, it remains exciting to imagine potential future implications of this study on schools, teachers, and ultimately students. Participants in this study shared an abundance of experiences, all of which were underpinned by one foundational thing - the strength of

the relationships they shared with their school leaders. Participant 008 described the unwavering nature of this quality in leaders who impacted her the most deeply when she said, “Leaders, who even in different roles...for many years now, and the whole time, their true core quality is relationship and connection.” Therefore, if there is one thing most clearly demonstrated in this study that will perhaps continue to be replicated in future studies is the notion of relationships and the value they provide not only to teacher efficacy and resilience but to all aspects of teaching and learning. This belief was clearly demonstrated by Participant 006 when she described a vital leadership characteristics that impacted her efficacy: “[They have] to be a people person. I think they genuinely show they care about you and the kids. It's not just all business.”

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## **Appendix A – Efficacy Scale Online Survey Participation Invitation Script**

Email Subject Line: Univ. of Lethbridge Study – Practices of Principals and the Impact on Teacher Efficacy

Dear teacher,

My name is Kathryn Desrochers. I am a graduate student in the Faculty of Education at the University of Lethbridge studying the relationship between the practices of school leaders and the subsequent perceived impact on teacher's sense of efficacy. You are receiving this email as an invitation to participate in a Teacher Efficacy Online Survey. The purpose of this survey is to gather information about teacher-efficacy levels and find potential participants who are interested in being interviewed about this topic. I am inviting kindergarten through grade 12 teachers within Foothills School Division to participate in a brief survey that would take 10-15 minutes to complete.

Any personal and identifying information provided is completely optional. You have the option to complete the survey and provide no identifying information. However, if you are interested in being interviewed for the study, you will be asked to provide your email address so that you can be contacted if you are chosen as a participant. Your name and any other identifying information will not be shared with anyone or revealed in any publications. There are no anticipated risks to taking part in this survey and you can stop at any time.

If you have questions about the study or are interested in the findings, you may contact me at [kathryn.desrochers@uleth.ca](mailto:kathryn.desrochers@uleth.ca) or 403-629-9179. You may also contact my supervisor, Dr. Pamela Adams, at 403-332-4070 or [adams@uleth.ca](mailto:adams@uleth.ca) or Dr. Carmen Mombourquette, at 403-329-2018 or [carmen.mombourquette@uleth.ca](mailto:carmen.mombourquette@uleth.ca). You may also contact the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Lethbridge at [research.services@uleth.ca](mailto:research.services@uleth.ca) or 403-329-2747 if you have questions about your rights as a participant. This research has been reviewed for ethical acceptability and approved by the University of Lethbridge Human Participants Research Committee.

If you would be interested in completing the survey, please go to the following URL:  
(insert link here)

Thank you in advance for your participation.

Kathryn Desrochers  
Graduate Student – University of Lethbridge  
403 629 9179  
[kathryn.desrochers@uleth.ca](mailto:kathryn.desrochers@uleth.ca)

## Appendix B – Survey Informed Consent

The purpose of this survey is to gather information about teacher-efficacy levels and find potential participants who are interested in being interviewed about this topic. I am inviting kindergarten through grade 12 teachers within Foothills School Division to participate in this brief survey that should take 10-15 minutes to complete.

Any personal and identifying information provided is **completely optional**. You have the option to complete the survey and provide no identifying information. However, if you are interested in being interviewed for the study, you will be asked to provide your email address so that you can be contacted if you are chosen as a participant. Your name and any other identifying information will not be shared with anyone or revealed in any publications. Please note, due to the nature of online surveys, privacy of your information if you choose to provide it, cannot be guaranteed for this survey. All possible precautions to protect your identity will be taken and the results of this survey will not be shared with anyone within Foothills School Division. There are no anticipated risks to taking part in this survey and you can stop at any time.

If you have questions about the study or are interested in the findings, you may contact me at [kathryn.desrochers@uleth.ca](mailto:kathryn.desrochers@uleth.ca) or 403-629-9179. You may also contact my supervisor, Dr. Pamela Adams, at 403-332-4070 or [adams@uleth.ca](mailto:adams@uleth.ca) or Dr. Carmen Mombourquette, at 403-329-2018 or [carmen.mombourquette@uleth.ca](mailto:carmen.mombourquette@uleth.ca). You may also contact the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Lethbridge at [research.services@uleth.ca](mailto:research.services@uleth.ca) or 403-329-2747 if you have questions about your rights as a participant.

This research has been reviewed for ethical acceptability and approved by the University of Lethbridge Human Participants Research Committee.

## **Appendix C – Desrochers Efficacy Scale: Efficacy Survey Questions**

### **Building and Fostering Relationships**

1. To what extent can you build positive, productive relationships with students?
2. To what extent can you ensure all students feel that they are treated with empathy and respect?
3. To what extent can you get students to believe they can do well in their learning?
4. To what extent can you build positive, productive relationships with parents/guardians?
5. To what extent can you get parents to become involved in school activities?
6. To what extent can you support parents in helping their children do well in school?
7. To what extent can you build positive, productive relationships with colleagues?
8. To what extent can you build positive, productive relationships with community stakeholders?
9. To what extent can you collaborate with community service professionals (such as mental health, social services, justice, health and law enforcement)?

### **Engaging in Career-Long Learning**

10. To what extent can you engage in career-long professional learning and ongoing critical reflection to improve your teaching and learning?
11. To what extent can you maintain awareness of new technologies and practices to enhance knowledge and inform practice?
12. To what extent can you collaborate with other teachers to build your own knowledge and skills?
13. To what extent can you collaborate with other teachers to build others' capacities and skills?

### **Demonstrating a Professional Body Knowledge**

14. To what extent can you plan and design learning activities that address learning outcomes outlined in the program of studies?

15. To what extent can you build student capacity for collaboration?
16. To what extent can you build student capacity to use technology for developing critical thinking skills?
17. To what extent can you consider student variables (demographics, social-emotional factors, maturity, classroom relationships, cultural and linguistic factors, physical/ social/ cognitive factors) when planning for and designing learning?
18. To what extent can you use varied instructional strategies to engage students in meaningful learning activities?
19. To what extent can you apply student assessment and evaluation practices that generate evidence of student learning to inform future teaching practice?
20. To what extent can you apply student assessment and evaluation practices that provide multiple methods through which students can demonstrate their understanding?
21. To what extent can you apply student assessment and evaluation practices that provide accurate, constructive and timely feedback on student learning?

### **Establishing Inclusive Learning Environments**

22. To what extent can you foster a school community that promotes equality and respect for all students?
23. To what extent can you utilize appropriate universal and targeted strategies to address student strengths and support challenges and areas of growth?
24. To what extent can you employ classroom management strategies that promote positive, engaging learning environments?
25. To what extent can you incorporate students' personal and cultural strengths into teaching and learning?
26. To what extent can you motivate students who show low interest in learning?
27. To what extent can you overcome the influence of adverse community conditions on students' learning?

**Applying Foundational Knowledge about First Nations, Metis and Inuit**

28. To what extent can you apply foundational knowledge about First Nations, Metis and Inuit for the benefit of all students?
29. To what extent can you enhance your understanding of First Nations, Metis and Inuit worldviews, cultural beliefs, language and values?
30. To what extent can you use the program of studies enhance your students' understanding of First Nations, Metis and Inuit worldviews, cultural beliefs, language and values?

**Adhering to Legal Frameworks and Policies**

31. To what extent can you understand and adhere to the legal frameworks and policies of the Alberta education system (i.e.: School Act, your school Division policies, Teaching Quality Standard)



## **Appendix D – Interview Participation Email Invitation Script**

Email Subject Line: Univ. of Lethbridge Study – Practices of Principals and the Impact on Teacher Efficacy

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

My name is Kathryn Desrochers. I am a graduate student in the Faculty of Education at the University of Lethbridge studying the relationship between the practices of school leaders and the subsequent perceived impact on teacher's sense of efficacy. You are receiving this email because you completed the Teacher Efficacy Scale Online Survey, and indicated you may be interested in being an interview participant. The information collected from this study will be presented in a Master's thesis, in addition to other scholarly publications and presentations (no personal identification will be disclosed).

This research will require about 60 - 90 minutes of your time for a one-on-one interview at a time and location of mutual agreement. During this time, you will be interviewed about your experiences with principals throughout your career and how this has influenced or not influenced your beliefs about your teaching practice. The interview will be audio-recorded with your permission. If you do not wish to be audio-recorded, I will take written notes during the interview with your permission.

There are no direct benefits to you from participating in this study; however, you will be contributing to a better understanding of the best practices principals can employ to support teachers and their efficacy.

There are no anticipated risks or discomforts related to this research. Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation. You may choose to not answer any question or you may withdraw from the study at any time for any reason. If you do this, all information from you will be destroyed.

Several steps will be taken to protect your anonymity and confidentiality. The transcription of the interview will be done by me and only I will have access to the audio-recording. All of the data collected in this study will be kept in a locked cabinet or on a password-protected computer, and only I will have access to them. The transcript will be edited to remove any personal identifying information. The audio-recording will not be used for any purpose other than data collection. The transcript and video-recording will be destroyed once I have completed my Master's thesis for this research study. The thesis and any other presentations will not contain any mention of your name and pseudonyms will be used for any quotations used.

The results from this study will be presented in scholarly publications and presentations. At no time, however, will your name be used or any identifying information revealed

unless you have given consent. If you wish to receive a summary of the results from this study, you may contact me at [kathryn.desrochers@uleth.ca](mailto:kathryn.desrochers@uleth.ca).

If you require any additional information about this study, please call me at 403-629-9179 or email me at [kathryn.desrochers@uleth.ca](mailto:kathryn.desrochers@uleth.ca). You may also contact my supervisor, Dr. Pamela Adams, at 403-332-4070 or [adams@uleth.ca](mailto:adams@uleth.ca) or Dr. Carmen Mombourquette, at 403-329-2018 or [carmen.mombourquette@uleth.ca](mailto:carmen.mombourquette@uleth.ca).

Questions regarding your rights as a participant in this research may be addressed to the Office of Research Ethics, University of Lethbridge (Phone: 403-329-2747 or Email: [research.services@uleth.ca](mailto:research.services@uleth.ca)).

This research project has been reviewed for ethical acceptability and approved by the University of Lethbridge Human Participant Research Committee. Thank you for your consideration.

If you would be interested in participating in a one on one interview with myself, please respond to this email, or contact me at the telephone number provided so we can arrange for an interview.

Thank you in advance for your participation.

Kathryn Desrochers  
Graduate Student – University of Lethbridge  
403 629 9179  
[kathryn.desrochers@uleth.ca](mailto:kathryn.desrochers@uleth.ca)

## Appendix E – Letter of Consent

### LETTER OF CONSENT

*(Place on Letterhead with University logo)*

**Study Title: Rural Teachers’ Perceptions of Leadership Practices Influencing Efficacy**

December 14, 2020

Dear Participant:

You are being invited to participate in a research study on teachers’ perception of how leadership practices influence their efficacy. The purpose of my research is to learn about people’s experiences with principals and how this has impacted their feelings of effectiveness within their classroom and school. The information collected from this study will be presented in a Master’s thesis, in addition to other scholarly publications and presentations (no personal identification will be disclosed).

This research will require about 60 - 90 minutes of your time for a one-on-one interview at a time and location of mutual agreement. During this time, you will be interviewed about your experiences with principals throughout your career and how this has influenced or not influenced your beliefs about your teaching practice. The interview will be audio-recorded with your permission. If you do not wish to be audio-recorded, I will take written notes during the interview with your permission.

There are no direct benefits to you from participating in this study; however, you will be contributing to a better understanding of the best practices principals can employ to support teachers and their efficacy.

There are no anticipated risks or discomforts related to this research. Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation. You may choose to not answer any question or you may withdraw from the study at any time for any reason. If you do this, all information from you will be destroyed.

Several steps will be taken to protect your anonymity and confidentiality. The transcription of the interview will be done by me and only I will have access to the audio-recording. All of the data collected in this study will be kept in a locked cabinet or on a password-protected computer, and only I will have access to them. The transcript will be edited to remove any personal identifying information. The audio-recording will not be used for any purpose other than data collection. The transcript and video-recording will be destroyed once I have completed my Master’s thesis for this research study. The thesis

and any other presentations will not contain any mention of your name and pseudonyms will be used for any quotations used.

The results from this study will be presented in scholarly publications and presentations. At no time, however, will your name be used or any identifying information revealed unless you have given consent. If you wish to receive a summary of the results from this study, you may contact me at [kathryn.desrochers@uleth.ca](mailto:kathryn.desrochers@uleth.ca).

If you require any additional information about this study, please call me at 403-629-9179 or email me at [kathryn.desrochers@uleth.ca](mailto:kathryn.desrochers@uleth.ca). You may also contact my supervisor, Dr. Pamela Adams, at 403-332-4070 or [adams@uleth.ca](mailto:adams@uleth.ca) or Dr. Carmen Mombourquette, at 403-329-2018 or [carmen.mombourquette@uleth.ca](mailto:carmen.mombourquette@uleth.ca).

Questions regarding your rights as a participant in this research may be addressed to the Office of Research Ethics, University of Lethbridge (Phone: 403-329-2747 or Email: [research.services@uleth.ca](mailto:research.services@uleth.ca)).

This research project has been reviewed for ethical acceptability and approved by the University of Lethbridge Human Participant Research Committee. Thank you for your consideration.

I agree to the audio-recording of the interview.

\_\_\_\_\_ (Printed Name of Participant)

\_\_\_\_\_ (Signature)

\_\_\_\_\_ (Date)

I have read (or have been read) the above information regarding this research study on impact principals have upon teacher efficacy, and consent to participate in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_ (Printed Name of Participant)

\_\_\_\_\_ (Signature)

\_\_\_\_\_ (Date)