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Implementation of Four Leadership Competencies within an Alberta High School

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Implementation of Four Leadership Competencies within an Alberta High School

by

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A THESIS

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Abstract

The purpose of this exploratory single case study was to focus on a high school principal's enactment of high-leverage leadership practices that positively influenced teachers' instructional practices in one high-performing high school in Alberta with a student population above 1,000. Four competencies were examined: (a) embodying visionary leadership, (b) leading a learning community, (c) providing instructional leadership, (d) and developing leadership capacity in determining a shared instructional leadership approach. The study included 10 participants: one principal, three vice principals, five teachers, and one long-serving superintendent within the school authority. The theoretical framework was based on a systems thinking approach. Analysis of the data collected from interviews, documents, artifacts, and reflective journals yielded 11 findings: (a) redesigning the organization; (b) cultivating strategic alignment to the vision; (c) facilitating shared responsibility; (d) promoting and participating in learning and development; (e) developing a robust mentorship program; (f) managing the instructional program; (g) fostering student-centered instructional approaches; (h) improving visibility and accessibility; (i) being data informed; (j) establishing a distributed leadership structure; and (k) identifying, empowering, and recognizing staff. This study concludes with recommendations, including the key recommendation of making a long-term investment in developing a shared approach to instructional leadership capacity at the jurisdiction and school level to support teaching and learning.

Keywords: standards, LQS, TQS, competencies, leadership practices, principal, high school education, case study, systems thinking theory

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Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Table of Contents	iv
List of Tables	ix
List of Figures	x
List of Abbreviations	xi
Chapter 1: Background	12
Context of the Study	18
Statement of the Research Problem	20
Purpose of the Study	21
Research Questions and Approach	22
Research Perspectives, Assumptions, and Rationale	24
Definition of Key Terms	26
COVID’s Impact on School Systems	28
Summary	31
Chapter 2: Literature Review	33
Education in Alberta	34
The Alberta High School Context	35
Education for 21st Century Schools in Alberta	36
Leadership to Support Knowledge-Based Education	37
Ensuring Standards Across the Education System	38
The Role of the Principal	41

Relational Trust.....	42
Leadership Practices	44
The Four Competencies Toward Shared Instructional Leadership	46
Embodying Visionary Leadership Competency	48
Leading a Learning Community Competency.....	50
Providing Instructional Leadership Competency	53
Developing Leadership Capacity Competency	59
Teaching Quality Standards.....	63
Determining Teaching Quality Through Frameworks.....	65
Quality Teaching Contributions to Optimum Student Learning.....	68
Theoretical Framework: Systems Thinking Approach.....	73
Systems Theory.....	75
Theoretical Framework.....	78
Summary	80
Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods	82
Research Paradigm and Rationale for Qualitative Research.....	82
Using a Case Study Methodology	85
Research Design and Methods	87
Research Setting	87
Criteria for School Choice	87
Participant Sample	88
Participant Selection	90
Data Collection Methods	91

Data Analysis.....	97
Timeline.....	102
Ethical Considerations.....	103
Informed Consent	103
Privacy and Confidentiality	104
Balancing Harms and Benefits	104
Trustworthiness	105
Credibility.....	105
Dependability.....	106
Confirmability.....	107
Transferability.....	108
Limitations	109
Delimitations	110
Summary	111
Chapter 4: Findings.....	113
Theme Development	114
Theoretical Framework: Systems Thinking Theory.....	116
Challenges With Creating a High-Leverage, Shared Instructional Leadership Approach	166
Challenges to Fostering Relationships in an Ever-Evolving High School Environment	166
Challenges to Embodying Visionary Leadership.....	168
Challenges to Leading a Learning Community	169
Challenges to Providing Instructional Leadership.....	170
Challenges of Developing Leadership Capacity.....	172

Verification of the Main Themes and Codes	174
Summary	176
Chapter 5: Discussion of the Findings	177
Theme 1: Establishing a Culture of Learning.....	179
Theme 2: Setting the Direction.....	183
Theme 3: Leading Learning.....	186
Theme 4: Developing People.....	190
Conclusion	192
Contributions to Research and Practice in the High School Context.....	194
Research Assumptions Revisited	196
Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations	198
Conclusions	199
The Importance of Leadership.....	199
The Importance of Systems Structure—Inside the School.....	200
The Importance of Systems Structure—Outside the School	202
The Importance of Policy to Be Aligned and Clear	204
Implications of Study Findings	205
Recommendations	207
Recommendations for Leadership, System Structure, and Policy Implementation in Schools	207
Recommendation for Practice: School Leaders and Teachers: Inquiry-Based Teaching....	208
Recommendation for Practice: Collaborative Leadership Approaches	209
Recommendations for Further Research	210

Researcher Reflections on Successes and Challenges	211
Conclusion.....	213
References.....	215
Appendix A: Invitation Emails	236
Appendix B: Consent Form	244
Appendix C: Interview Questions.....	248
Appendix D: Artifacts and Documents Collected.....	261
Appendix E: Data Analysis Competency Factors and Challenges	262
Appendix F: Key Themes and Concepts	283

List of Tables

Table 1 <i>Leadership Practices</i>	45
Table 2 <i>Research Questions and Data Collection Tools</i>	92
Table 3 <i>List of Documents Collected for Analysis</i>	96
Table 4 <i>Data Analysis Methods</i>	100
Table 5 <i>Participant Profiles</i>	115
Table 6 <i>Competency Development and Emerging Subthemes</i>	127
Table 7 <i>Summary of Research Questions and Findings</i>	165
Table D1 <i>Details of Documents Collected for Document Review</i>	261
Table E1 <i>Principal Competency Factors and Challenges</i>	262
Table E2 <i>Vice Principal 1: Competency Factors and Challenges</i>	264
Table E3 <i>Vice Principal 2: Competency Factors and Challenges</i>	266
Table E4 <i>Vice Principal 3: Competency Factors and Challenges</i>	268
Table E5 <i>Teacher 1: Competency Factors and Challenges</i>	270
Table E6 <i>Teacher 2: Competency Factors and Challenges</i>	272
Table E7 <i>Teacher 3: Competency Factors and Challenges</i>	274
Table E8 <i>Teacher 4: Competency Factors and Challenges</i>	276
Table E9 <i>Teacher 5: Competency Factors and Challenges</i>	278
Table E10 <i>Long-serving superintendent: Competency Factors and Challenges</i>	280

List of Figures

Figure 1 <i>Funded Schools in Alberta</i>	34
Figure 2 <i>Supporting Implementation of the Professional Practice Standards</i>	40
Figure 3 <i>Framework for Effective Teaching Practices</i>	67
Figure 4 <i>Open System</i>	76
Figure 5 <i>Theoretical Framework</i>	79
Figure 6 <i>Data Collection and Analysis</i>	102
Figure 7 <i>Strategic Planning Document Analysis (Main Themes)</i>	117
Figure 8 <i>Input</i>	119
Figure 9 <i>Environment</i>	120
Figure 10 <i>Transformation Process</i>	128
Figure 11 <i>Output</i>	161
Figure 12 <i>Feedback</i>	163
Figure 13 <i>Modified Systems Thinking</i>	179

List of Abbreviations

CASS	College of Alberta School Superintendents
CIP	Continuous improvement plan
LQS	Leadership Quality Standard
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PD	Professional development
PGP	Professional growth plan
SLQS	Superintendent Leadership Quality Standard
TQS	Teaching Quality Standard

Chapter 1: Background

This chapter provides an overview of the context and background leading to this study. The problem statement, purpose of the study, and the overarching and supplementary research questions are outlined. The research approach is explained along with the chosen methods and methodology guiding the study. Included are my assumptions and limitations as the researcher. This chapter concludes with an explanation of the rationale and significance of this research study, as well as definitions of the key terminology used throughout the study and the impact of COVID-19 on school systems.

School leadership policies are key to improving the quality of teaching and learning, while also impacting student achievement and well-being outcomes (Breakspear et al., 2017). Educational policies provide assurance to parents and members of the public that governments create and enact principles and practices to govern educational decision-making, supporting the development of quality education for students (Alberta Education, n.d.-a; Council of Ministers of Education, n.d.-a; Riley, 1997; Rzayeva, 2021). In Alberta education, elected officials create policies to support administration in monitoring, maintaining, and enhancing quality teaching and student learning (Alberta Education. (n.d.-a)). According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD; 2021),

Increasing demands for quality and equity in education, growing pressures for public accountability and transparency, a trend towards more decentralization and school autonomy, and a greater capacity for knowledge management have resulted in an increasing interest in evaluation and assessment in education. (para. 1)

Education contributes to the well-being of society and is essential in preparing students to enter the knowledge based, information rich world. In providing assurance to parents, many countries

have introduced a variety of measures to evaluate and improve student learning, quality teaching and school leadership along with overall school and system improvement.

Improving student learning is at the core of educational policy development. Standards create the framework of competency in a particular domain (professional or educational); communicate what is most worthy or achievable, and set measures or benchmarks for performance (OECD, 2013). Developing and implementing standards aligned with educational policies will lead to improved student achievement if implemented effectively (Breakspear et al., 2017).

To support teaching and learning within an inclusive kindergarten to Grade 12 education system with the vision of becoming more student-centered, innovative, and competency-based, Alberta Education legislated three professional practice standards for the teaching profession. The research-based standards “identify the competency requirements for members of the profession” (Alberta Education, n.d.-a, Overview section, para. 1) that guide educational programming for teachers and leaders, provide the foundational elements for certification, mentorship, induction, and continuous professional learning, as well as growth, supervision, and evaluation of professional practice, with the ultimate aim to support student learning and well-being. Alberta requires principal certification based on the *Leadership Quality Standard (LQS)* reflecting a strong approach to high-stakes accountability and assurance to the public (Alberta Education, 2018b).

On February 7, 2018, then Education Minister David Eggen signed three ministerial orders marking an era of significance for education and system leaders throughout the province of Alberta, while bringing assurance to the public. Eggen (as cited in Himpe, 2018) stated, “These standards set a common vision for what it takes to deliver high-quality education in

Alberta's classrooms" (para. 3). The first ministerial order was to update the *Teaching Quality Standard* (TQS; Alberta Education, 2020d) in order to meet the evolving changes needed for teaching in contemporary education. The second and third orders were to introduce two new professional practice standards: LQS (Alberta Education, 2020b) and *Superintendent Leadership Quality Standard* (SLQS; Alberta Education, 2020c). These two standards outline the professional practices that leaders need to demonstrate in order to create the conditions for teaching quality and optimum student learning. "For the first time ever, all system leaders and all school leaders in Alberta's public, separate, francophone, charter, First Nations and independent school authorities will be expected to meet a common set of competencies" (Litun, 2018, para. 1). Litun, former executive director of the College of Alberta School Superintendents, commented that he "believed this level of assurance to the public does not exist anywhere else in the world" (2018, p. 5). This statement was supported by Fullan (2017), who stated, "I am unaware of a standard for superintendents in any other jurisdiction in the English-speaking world" (p. 1).

Quality standards in education systems include ensuring the public that all Alberta students have access to quality learning experiences in their achievement of learning outcomes and that all members of the school community support the establishment of safe, welcoming, and inclusive environments that respect diversity; develop and foster collaboration and engagement of all stakeholders to enable students to achieve their potential; and create conditions for the occurrence of quality teaching and optimum learning toward sustainability (Alberta Education, 2020b, p. 1).

With the passing of the three ministerial orders, Alberta's educational system has

embarked on forward-thinking, intentional leadership development for all school jurisdictions¹ leaders and principals. Collectively, these standards align with and build upon one another to ensure shared responsibility and a common set of expectations in supporting the teaching and learning for all Alberta students. As Brandon and Saar (2017) indicated, “For the first time in the history of this province, there is a strong through line in the professional practice expectations for teachers, principals, and superintendents” (p. 1).

Knowing this, each educational organization within the kindergarten to Grade 12 system is responsible for the implementation of professional practice standards. The LQS (Alberta Education, 2020b) will be maintained and monitored through professional learning at the jurisdictional level, in school leaders’ professional growth plans (PGPs), and within the evaluation process for probationary school leaders. Overseeing this process are senior leadership teams under the direction of the superintendent. The chance that standards will impact teaching and learning is remote unless jurisdiction and school leaders agree with the purpose of standards and appreciate what is required to make standards work (Darling-Hammond, 2012; Leithwood et al., 2004). Two of the challenges face senior leadership teams with the implementation of the LQS: (a) supporting the understanding and purpose of the LQS within the daily work of school leaders and (b) finding ways to gather evidence to ensure there is an impact on teaching and student learning and compliance to the standard (Brandon & Saar, 2014).

In schools with higher achievement gains, academic goal focus is both a property of leadership (for example, the principal makes student achievement a top priority) and the quality of school organization (Robinson et al., 2008). Successful leadership influences teaching and

¹ In Alberta, school jurisdictions can also be referred to as school authorities, school divisions or school districts. In this study, school jurisdiction will be used.

learning both through face-to-face relationships and by structuring the way those teachers do their work (Ogawa & Bossert, 1995). Classroom practices occur within larger organization systems that can vary exponentially in the extent to which they support, reward, or nurture good instruction. School leaders who ignore or neglect the larger context of the system can experience frustration with their direct efforts to improve instruction (Fullan, 2014; Leithwood & Seashore Louis, 2012). Therefore, successful leadership practices include both careful attention to classroom instructional practices and other issues that are critical to the ongoing health and welfare of school organizations.

The purpose of this case study was to highlight one of the professional practice standards, the LQS (Alberta Education, 2020b), in one Alberta high school. Elected officials assert that the successful implementation of the competencies within the LQS will develop school leadership knowledge, skills, and attributes to support quality teaching and optimal learning for students (Eggen, 2018, as cited in Himpe, 2018). Although all the competencies within the LQS are important to the development of school leaders in Alberta, it may be the principal's enactment of four leadership competencies within the LQS—namely (a) embodying visionary leadership, (b) leading a learning community, (c) providing instructional leadership, and (d) developing leadership capacity—that creates the overall shared instructional leadership practices needed to improve teaching and learning (Brandon et al., 2015). These four competencies purposefully enacted in a coherent approach could positively influence teaching and learning in schools.

This case study of one principal in a high-performing high school contributes to the knowledge of leadership practices that support quality teaching, the single most important factor leading to optimum student learning (Hattie, 2015). Each year in Alberta, school jurisdictions administer Alberta Education's (n.d.-a, 2020) Accountability Pillar, now referred to as the

Assurance Education Survey, in their schools to students in Grades 4, 7, and 10, as well as to teachers and parents. There are 16 measures within seven categories that provide school jurisdictions a consistent method to assess their progress while ensuring accountability to the public. The categories include (a) safe and caring schools; (b) student learning opportunities; (c) student learning achievement: Grades K–9; (d) student learning achievement: Grades 10–12; (e) preparation for lifelong learning, world of work, and citizenship; (f) parent involvement; and (g) continuous improvement (Alberta Education, 2020).

For this single case study, data from the Alberta Education Accountability Pillar was used to choose a high-performing school based on the above-mentioned categories. The Accountability Pillar, a student-centered model, “gives schools and school boards a consistent way to measure their success and assess progress using a broad spectrum of measures” (Alberta Education, 2020, para. 1). The results and evaluations of the Accountability Pillar provide information to school jurisdictions on performance and trends over time, ensuring that continuous improvement is supported and maintained.

Through in-depth interviews with teachers and the high school principal, I sought to identify four leadership competencies outlined in my research. Systems theory, or systems thinking, provided the theoretical framework for this study, supporting school leaders in the alignment of organizational structures and processes toward school improvement. A school can be viewed as a system consisting of many key components, each working together to achieve a desired output or goal. Wallace (2009) explained that “a school is a complicated system” (p. 1). Kast and Rosenzweig (1972) and Shaw (2009) agreed on similar components within systems theory, whereby information, energy or material are exchanged within environments creating an open system. The process consists of importing inputs from the environment, transforming the

input, and then exporting them back into the environment, in a cyclical way towards desired results. Essentially, “education is a system with many such inputs” (Wallace, 2009, p. 1).

Context of the Study

Research supports that effective school leadership is one of the main drivers of quality of teaching as leaders focus on setting directions, designing the organization, leading learning, and developing teachers’ strengths which are leading contributions to student learning outcomes (Barber et al., 2010; Wahlstrom et al., 2010, Leithwood, 2012). Knowing that the professional practice standards were introduced four years ago to school leaders in Alberta, this study focused on four competencies within the LQS (Alberta Education, 2020b) that may influence teaching and learning in the area of instructional leadership. To ensure all Alberta students have access to quality learning experiences, the standard states: “Quality leadership occurs when the leader’s ongoing analysis of the context, and the leaders’ decisions about what leadership knowledge and abilities to apply, result in quality teaching and optimum learning for all students in the school” (Alberta Education, 2020b, p. 3).

The nine competencies within the LQS are (a) fostering effective relationships; (b) modeling commitment to professional learning; (c) embodying visionary leadership; (d) leading a learning community; (e) supporting the application of foundational knowledge about First Nations, Métis, and Inuit; (f) providing instructional leadership; (g) developing leadership capacity; (h) managing school operations and resources; and (i) understanding and responding to the larger societal context (Alberta Education, 2020b). School leaders are expected over time to meet the LQS through measurable and observable demonstrations of nine competencies, each with numerous indicators. The competencies of (a) embodying visionary leadership, (b) leading a learning community, (c) providing instructional leadership, and (d) developing leadership

capacity were the focus of this study. I chose these four competencies because they can be considered a way to develop overall and shared instructional leadership practices supporting leadership, quality teaching, and student success (Brandon et al., 2015; Fullan 2014).

In a broad study of instructional leadership within the past 25 years, Hallinger (2005) maintained that instructional leaders need to focus on creating clear goals focused on student learning, coordinating the curriculum and monitoring student learning outcomes, fostering continuous improvement through school improvement plans, developing a climate of high expectations for teaching and learning, supporting continuous professional learning of staff, and modelling the school's vision and mission for learning. The four LQS competencies selected for this study connect to Hallinger's (2003, 2005) research on effective instructional leadership practices.

With the legislation of the LQS (Alberta Education, 2020b), school leaders, superintendents, and system leaders have the opportunity to reexamine their leadership practices. In order for school leaders to continue the focus of developing quality teaching, they need to clearly identify the most impactful research-based practices and develop the skills and capabilities to enhance their leadership repertoire. Unfortunately, two persistent challenges, (a) the complexity challenge and (b) the learning challenge, and how they impact the implementation to effective leadership practices, should be recognized (Brandon & Saar, 2014). Based on a study by Brandon and Saar (2014), obstacles contributing to the complexity challenge include "time to attend to such matters as budgeting, student and parent concerns, preparing reports, other bureaucratic requirements, and more immediate organizational tasks often take precedence over working to support instruction" (p. 3). The learning challenge, on the other hand, is essentially a lack of professional learning. School leaders need support developing

instructional leadership knowledge and skills (Brandon & Saar, 2014) to address these two persistent challenges because they shift the focus of school leaders away from the important goal of student-centered learning. A clearer understanding of leadership knowledge, skills, and capabilities will “explicitly inform leaders what they need to know, do and be in order to have a positive impact on teaching and learning” (Breakspear et al., 2017, p. 8).

Statement of the Research Problem

Researchers, practitioners, and policy makers want to know if school leaders can make a difference in how teachers think about their work and the quality of their instruction in the classroom (Printy, 2008). Wahlstrom (2012) believed that “high quality instructional leadership and high-quality classroom instruction are linked, and together they impact student learning” (p. 70). Wahlstrom (2012) categorized instructional leadership practices into two complementary behaviours, these being instructional ethos and instructional actions. The first category, instructional ethos, exemplifies “a culture orientated toward learning, as expressed in high achievement standards and expectations of students” (Wahlstrom, 2012, p. 69). Continual professional learning is supported in the culture, and “principals whose teachers rate them high on instructional ethos emphasize the value of research-based strategies and are able to apply them in the local setting” (Wahlstrom, 2012, p. 68). The second category, instructional actions, includes principals’ direct observations and conversations with teachers about instruction, which is more evident in elementary schools than high schools.

A gap in the research has been identified whereby high school teachers do not see principals as supportive in their instructional practice (Leithwood & Seashore Louis, 2012; Printy, 2008; Robinson, 2011; Stein & Nelson, 2003). Unlike their elementary school counterparts, high school principals cannot be expected to have expertise in all the subject areas,

so their ability to offer guidance on instruction is limited (Ippolito & Fisher, 2019; Stein & Nelson, 2003). Reasons for this lack of guidance could include the complexity of high school systems in addition to principals' time being taken up in the roles of managers, counsellors, and peacekeepers. With attention given to high-stakes testing and accountability as well as the multitude of subjects with deep content or the belief that teachers do not perceive principals as having the content knowledge to enhance teachers' instruction, high school principals may not be perceived as instructional leaders. To counter these issues, high school principals often delegate to department heads, who may be underutilized, provide little to no instructional leadership, or not have the authority to enact change in teaching practices. Basically, there is a "lack of research on principals' instructional leadership practices and the effect on quality teaching at the high school level" (Leithwood & Seashore Louis, 2012, p. 87). Highlighted in my study are leadership practices exemplified by a principal and characterized by teachers in one high-performing high school to support teachers with improving their practice.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this exploratory single case study was to examine a high school principal's enactment of high-leverage leadership practices that positively influenced teachers' instructional practices in one high-performing high school in Alberta with a student population above 1,000. Four competencies were examined: (a) embodying visionary leadership, (b) leading a learning community, (c) providing instructional leadership, (d) and developing leadership capacity in determining a shared instructional leadership approach. Teachers' perceptions of how these leadership actions influenced their instructional practices in high school was also investigated. The intent of this research was to document leadership knowledge, skills, and

capabilities that may contribute to quality teaching in a high-performing Alberta high school while maintaining alignment to a provincially mandated leadership quality standard.

Research Questions and Approach

To explore the four leadership competencies and the influence of these leadership actions on teaching practice, the following research questions were addressed:

1. How does a school principal perceive their leadership practices contribute to quality teaching in an Alberta high school?
2. What practices of the principal support teaching practice in an Alberta high school?

Supplementary questions were as follows:

3. How have the four competencies—embodying visionary leadership, leading a learning community, providing instructional leadership, and developing leadership capacity—contributed to the overall shared leadership practices of the principal?
4. In the daily work of the principal, how are the competencies helpful?

Reflecting on the variety of roles I have held as a Catholic schoolteacher, principal, and currently superintendent, I am drawn to the field of social science from a postpositivist, constructivist viewpoint. Researchers from a postpositivist perspective “recognize that knowledge is relative rather than absolute” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 8). In addition, researchers theorize that “all knowledge can be derived from direct observation and logical inferences based on observation” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016, p. 42). Constructivist researchers are interested in “how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 15). Reciprocity between researcher and participant enables knowledge to be co-constructed in a meaningful way through describing, understanding, and interpreting multiple perspectives and understanding the

historical, social, and cultural norms that guide individuals as well as context where people live and work. Stein and Nelson (2003) contended that researchers need to place less focus on what leaders “do” and begin to look at how leaders think about what they do as they “identify and frame problems in their school” (p. 424). The “how” is the leader working and learning in communities that create “a socially interactive, constructivist orientation toward teaching and learning” (Stein & Nelson, 2003, p. 426).

I worked with one high-performing Alberta high school as a baseline case study to gain a deeper understanding of the enactment by the principal of four leadership competencies within the LQS (Alberta Education, 2020b) that contribute to overall shared instructional leadership. This school is considered high performing because of an increasingly positive trend in their Accountability Pillar in the seven categories: (a) safe and caring schools; (b) student learning opportunities; (c) student learning achievement: Grades K–9; (d) student learning achievement: Grades 10–12; (e) preparation for lifelong learning, world of work, and citizenship; (f) parent involvement; and (g) continuous improvement (Alberta Education, 2020). The study included a principal, vice principals, teachers, and a long-serving superintendent within the school jurisdiction. Foundational to case study research is that the researcher engages with participants so they can share their views (Patton, 2002). Participants’ descriptive evidence of leadership practices supporting their teaching practice was the emphasis of this work along with the principal’s perception of their own leadership practices.

As a researcher, I did not complete my research in my school jurisdiction for two reasons. First, my superintendent position may have been seen as a position of power, and second, I wanted to gain different perspectives and experiences from another school to share with others. I also wanted to ensure that participants did not interpret this study as evaluative, but rather as a

celebration of their success. Hence, I decided to complete the study in a high-performing high school outside of my school jurisdiction utilizing open-ended interview questions and voluntary participation. Semi-structured, one-on-one interviews, school improvement plans, and school-wide professional development (PD) plans were used for data collection to determine leadership practices that influence quality teaching.

Research Perspectives, Assumptions, and Rationale

At the time of conducting this research, I was in the role of superintendent in a Catholic school jurisdiction. For the past seven years in my various roles at the central office level, the senior leadership team was concerned with plateauing and, at times, decreasing standardized test scores. In addition, high school teachers seemed averse to changing their instructional and assessment strategies to meet the needs of high school students. Some teachers may have been content with teaching content and may not have understood the growing complexity and diversity of student needs in the classroom. With the structure of high school, the mindset of teachers was to utilize streaming; that is, moving students from one course to a lower course if they were not succeeding within the given time period. Knowing this, I understand that I brought bias and assumptions to the research. As the result of 35 years of experience as an educator and administrator, I believe I brought diversity and a variety of experiences to the role of leader. I am committed to learning about the high school environment and supporting the knowledge, skills, and abilities of school leaders to support quality teaching.

As a senior administrator, I took an outsider stance during the research and completed my research in another school jurisdiction. From an ethical standpoint, I needed to consider my position of power and the limitations on the project regarding bias, assumptions, perceptions, and needs. Based on the outsider role, from a social-constructivism lens, the work of determining

leadership practices that support high school principals and teachers has been based on interactions between myself and administrators, and myself and teachers.

Having been a jurisdiction leader for the past 10 years, of which two were in the position of superintendent, I needed to be continually aware of my researcher assumptions and my own bias about leadership practices. I believe learning systems need to have high expectations for all learners including the teachers within the system. Additionally, I assumed that leaders have knowledge and understanding about change theory and system improvement requiring a collaborative inquiry approach shared by all participants in the system. I had to continually reflect on my assumptions and bias after each interview and develop a narrative that encompassed rich, thick descriptions to establish trustworthiness within the study. My assumptions can be summarized as follows:

1. Learning systems need to have high expectations for all learners.
2. Learning systems require a comprehensive understanding of curriculum, strong pedagogical practices, and assessment.
3. The role of a high school principal is complex, involving both managerial responsibilities and instructional leadership practices.
4. System improvement requires a collaborative inquiry approach focused on student learning at all levels of the learning system through shared leadership and collective responsibility.
5. Learning systems need a systematic approach to change.

In terms of rationale, this study may be of interest to school system leaders, central office administrators, school principals, vice principals, teachers, and other researchers who are interested in overall shared instructional leadership practices in high school systems. These

findings may also be informative to educators and policy makers in Alberta and other provinces and states. Last, this study adds to the research literature that relates to the LQS and competency-based leadership as well as instructional leadership with a particular focus on the context of high schools.

Definition of Key Terms

In the context of this study, terms are defined as follows.

Accountability: The obligation for school systems to produce improvement in student achievement. (Eighty-Eighth Annual Representative Handbook, 2005)

Case study: An in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system. The most defining characteristic is delimiting the object of study: the case. The case can be a single person, a program, a group, an institution, a community, or a specific policy. The unit of analysis, not the topic of investigation, characterizes a case study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Competency: An interrelated set of knowledge, skills, and attitudes developed over time and drawn upon and applied to a particular leadership context to support quality leadership, teaching, and optimal learning (Alberta Education, 2020b).

Distributed leadership: The expansion of leadership roles in schools beyond those in formal leadership or administrative positions. Leadership that is shared within, between, and across organizations. Influence and agency are widely shared. The principal plays a key role in the leadership distribution and developing quality leadership capacity of others throughout the school (Harris, 2012, 2013).

Growth mindset: In a growth mindset, people believe their most basic abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work – brains and talent are just the starting point. This

view creates a love of learning and a resilience that is essential for great accomplishments (Dweck, 2016).

Instructional leadership: A set of practices and beliefs resulting in a focus on instructional improvement that is intended to achieve increased learning for students (Leithwood, 2012).

Leader: A principal or school jurisdiction leader (Alberta Education, 2020b).

Networks: Flexible, temporal, and constantly changing relationships and processes, which are part of a web of agents, their meanings, and the interrelations versus the structures or parts (Kowch, 2013).

Pedagogy: The method and practice of teaching (Darling-Hammond, 2002).

Principal: A school administrator responsible for the daily operation at a particular school site (Education Act, Statutes of Alberta, 2021).

Professional development: Activities that develop an individual's skills, knowledge, expertise and other characteristics as a teacher (OECD, 2009).

Professional learning: An active process of systematic inquiry into the effectiveness of practice for student engagement, learning, and well-being, and through this process become self-regulated learners (Timperley, 2011).

Professional learning communities: Educators working together in collaborative structures to achieve their collective purpose of learning for all (Stoll et al., 2006).

Quality teaching: Occurs when the teacher's ongoing analysis of the context, and the teacher's decisions about which pedagogical knowledge and abilities to apply, result in optimum learning for all student (Alberta Education, 2020d).

School culture: School's collective norms, values, beliefs, rituals, symbols, celebrations, and stories that make up its persona (Deal & Peterson K., 2002).

School structure: The way schools are organized and how they operate (Deal & Peterson K., 2002).

Shared leadership: Teachers' influence over, and participation in, school-wide decisions alongside principals, with the main focus on classroom practices to improve student learning (Leithwood, 2012).

System leader: A central office staff member, other than the superintendent or chief deputy superintendent, required by their leadership position to hold an Alberta teaching certificate (Alberta Education, 2020b).

COVID's Impact on School Systems

In March 2020 the world changed dramatically with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. In Alberta, within a 24-hour period, schools moved to at-home online learning. People began to work from home. Businesses, recreational and community centres, and places of worship were not accessible to the public except for essential needs. This reaction to the pandemic was prevalent throughout the world (Harris and Jones, 2020; Sokal et al., 2020). In Alberta, students stayed home until the following September 2020 and opened their new school year in their school communities with restrictions such as social distancing, masks, cohorting, contact tracing, and quarantining. That year would be a roller coaster ride of moving classes and entire school communities back and forth from at-home and online learning to in-school learning. Middle schools and high schools were most affected by this movement because of increased cases in this age group. On the other hand, Alberta Education continued to keep students from kindergarten to Grade 6 in schools because of low case numbers, the impact on

working families of keeping young children at home, and decreased child care openings because of the pandemic (Alberta Education 2021). School leaders, administrative assistants, and teams of teachers became part of COVID-19 Crisis Response Teams with roles as contact tracers, communicators of self-isolation, quarantining, and outbreaks as well as cheerleaders, counsellors, and caregivers providing a sense of hope for all.

During the pandemic, school leaders felt a high amount of stress. In the continual move from remote learning back to in class, school leaders were concerned that they were not doing enough for their students and staff (Dewitt, 2021). They needed to continue to shoulder the load, support teachers, shield staff from challenging parents, and present an attitude of positivity with the motto, “We got this!” Leaders had to continue focusing on creating and maintaining orderly, safe, and supportive environments while ensuring their teachers received technical and pedagogical PD in an online learning environment. School leaders had to develop strong communication techniques to support students and parents in synchronous and asynchronous platforms while creating structures and processes in order for teachers to maintain daily connections with students.

With the onset of the pandemic and its lingering effects on teaching and learning, challenges facing teachers included increased mental wellness concerns, struggles to foster effective relationships through an online platform, decreased student engagement, and increased absenteeism, difficulty getting timely assessments, technology issues, and parent pressure (Fisher et al., 2021, Harris and Jones, 2020; Sokal et al., 2020). With multiple quarantines, more and more students were relying on Google Classroom. This meant that teachers needed to prepare and support curriculum twice, both within the classroom and on a Google learning platform, effectively increasing their workload. Although new, unique, and innovative learning

communities of teaching, learning, and support were fostered and people began learning from one another in the process, COVID-19 took a toll on teachers and the quality of education.

School leaders soon learned that stress and anxiety were undeniable. As a trusted school leader, it is all about getting the balance right at an emotional and very difficult time; the balance between needing to be reassuring, calming, and accepting but also to challenge others to rise to the occasion. There is also a need to find the pulse, to find out what is needed today versus tomorrow, and to avoid exhaustion/burnout. (Dewit, 2021, p. 77)

The pandemic had educators questioning everything. Leaders were making internal shifts in mindset and practices in response to the external shifts of the pandemic. School leaders found they were leading with more grace, empathy, and compassion while they modelled calmness, positivity, and gratitude (Dewit, 2021; Willams, 2022). They learned to slow down the learning and keep things in perspective as they acknowledged their people's hard, sacred work. School leaders were more visible as they walked through classes daily doing regular check-ins with staff and students. They embraced a growth mindset (Dweck, 2016) creating space for deeper discussions on wellness and trauma and began to understand trauma at a more personal level for all (Dewit, 2021; William, 2022).

For instructional leaders, the focus shifted to essential learning outcomes and formative assessments in the realm of knowing, understanding, and responding to the student holistically. Timely, targeted feedback and responsive support became pivotal to the work of educators. Student engagement, rigour, stamina, and work ethic in an online learning environment became key focus areas as well as ensuring digital resources were accessible for all students. The evolution of successful practices of online learning continued while new processes emerged to support all learners (Dewit, 2021). A community feeling emerged as people found unique ways

to care for one another and maintain balance in an online world that was accessible 24/7.

Through collaboration, a strong sense of connectedness was formed with the core attributes of caring, welcoming, belonging, and nonjudgment emerging within communities. People were gentle on one another. They were not alone during this scary time.

This research study was designed prior to March 2020 when COVID-19 impacted the world. The pandemic impacted my research, as the principal's main priorities were keeping the school community orderly, safe, and secure, as well as acknowledging the mental wellness of staff and students. Teachers were exhausted when interviews occurred during February to April 2021. Knowing I did not have a relationship with teachers at the chosen high school, I found it difficult to encourage participants to interview. Interviews were conducted through Zoom, a cloud-based video conferencing tool (<https://zoom.us/>), instead of meeting face to face.

Summary

School leaders as instructional leaders play an instrumental role in facilitating, supporting, monitoring, and developing teacher capacity to achieve optimum learning in the classroom. The problem is the perceived absence of instructional leadership within the realm of high school education. This study focused on the overall shared instructional leadership practices that contribute to quality teaching in high schools based on four competencies within the LQS (Alberta Education, 2020b). This chapter outlined the research problem, purpose of the study, and the research questions that were explored. The research approach, researcher perspective, and study assumptions were explained. The chapter concluded with the rationale and significance of the study in addition to definitions of key terminology.

Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature beginning with education in Alberta from the high school context, education for 21st century schools, leadership to support knowledge-based

education, and ensuring standards across the education system. I then cover the role of the principal, relational trust, leadership practices, and the four competencies within the LQS that lead to overall shared instructional leadership. In addition, I outline teaching quality standards, determining teacher quality through teaching frameworks, and quality teaching that leads to optimum student learning. Finally, I present a description of the theoretical framework explaining the open systems thinking theory within a high school setting.

Chapter 3 describes the methodology of the study within the field of qualitative research. Detailed description of the research paradigm, rationale for qualitative research, and case study methodology are provided. The research design and methods, along with document analysis, ethical considerations, and trustworthiness are examined. Finally, limitations and delimitations of the study are presented. Chapter 4 discusses the findings of this qualitative study from multiple data sources and establishes themes of respondents' feedback. My document analysis triangulated the school jurisdiction's assurance plan, the school's continuous improvement plan (CIP) and PD plan, as well as the principal's PGP to determine if alignment existed between participants' feedback and these documents.

Chapter 5 presents the analysis, interpretation, and synthesis of the findings within the study. Connections to the research participants, the literature review, and the theoretical framework within the framework of a high-performing high school are discussed in this chapter. Last, Chapter 6 summarizes the study and discusses the conclusions drawn from the research. Researcher recommendations for future research are also included in this final chapter.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this exploratory single case study was to focus on a high school principal's enactment of high-leverage leadership practices that positively influenced teachers' instructional practices in one high-performing high school in Alberta with a student population above 1,000. Four competencies were examined: (a) embodying visionary leadership, (b) leading a learning community, (c) providing instructional leadership, (d) and developing leadership capacity in determining a shared instructional leadership approach. The chapter is divided into five main parts. The chapter starts with a historical overview of education in Alberta as the education system addresses societal changes in a knowledge-based economy. Within this section, I describe the Alberta high school context and education as well as leadership in 21st century schools. Second, I explain the role of the principal and the professional practice standards as pivotal policies supporting teaching and learning, in addition to providing assurance to the public that education ministries are striving to achieve optimum student learning. In this section, the responsibilities of the principal in supporting teaching quality and student achievement are outlined as per the Education Act (2012). Relational trust and an overview of leadership practices are also provided. Third, the four high-leverage competencies within the LQS (Alberta Education, 2020b) are outlined: (a) embodying visionary leadership, (b) leading a learning community, (c) providing instructional leadership, and (d) developing leadership capacity that contributes to overall shared instructional leadership (Alberta Education, 2020b). The fourth section distinguishes between effective teaching (teaching quality) and effective teachers (teacher quality) in relationship to the TQS (Alberta Education, 2020d), a policy implemented for all teachers to support quality teaching and optimum student learning. Finally, this chapter details

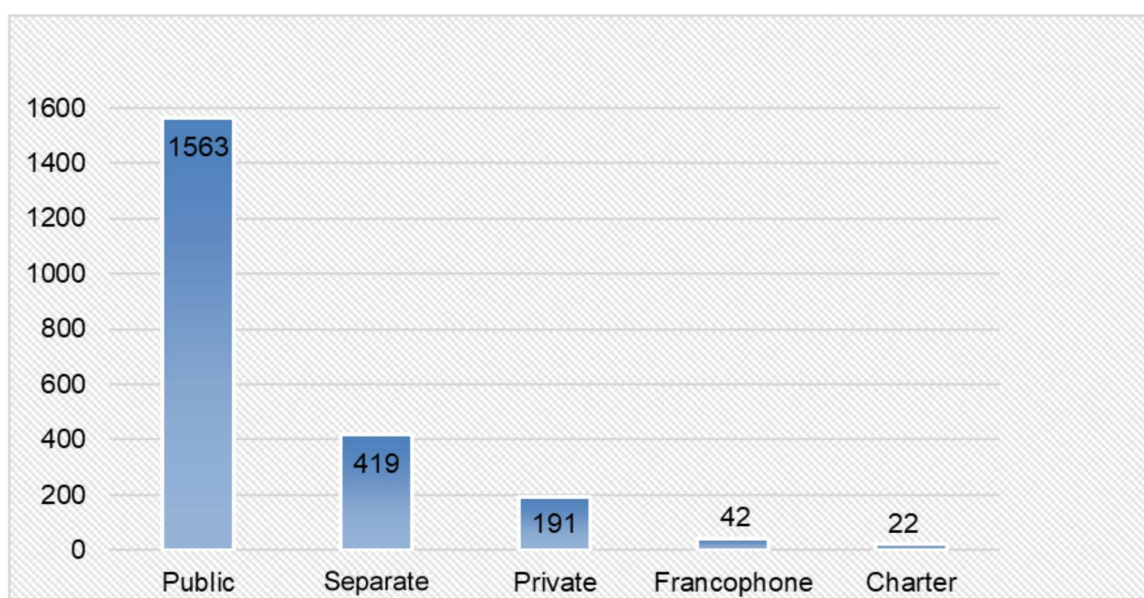
the systems theory approach that was the basis of the theoretical framework within this single exploratory case study research.

Education in Alberta

Alberta, one of 10 provinces and three territories in the country of Canada, is known for being one of the top educational systems in the world (Fullan & Rincón-Gallardo, 2018; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2012; O’Grady et al., 2015). Educators and government officials from all over the world visit Alberta to observe both the levels of governance and school communities to which this success is attributed. Alberta Education, led by an education minister, oversees 67 school jurisdictions including public, separate, Francophone, private, and charter schools. Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of schools in Alberta. There are 227 school jurisdictions in total. Public schools are open to every child in Alberta and provide free education from kindergarten to Grade 12. Currently, there are over 785 public high schools in Alberta (Alberta Education, 2018).

Figure 1

Funded Schools in Alberta



Note. $N = 227$.

Elected school boards employ superintendents as chief executive officers to operate these school jurisdictions. Each school jurisdiction employs its own senior administrators, school administrators, and teachers to implement curriculum and standards set by Alberta Education (Council of Ministers of Education, 2022). The ministry is responsible for 727,000 students from kindergarten to Grade 12 with school jurisdictions employing 39,300 administrators and teachers (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2018).

This study dealt with a single case study of one high school in Alberta, Canada. Secondary education, or high school, in Alberta includes students aged 14 to 19 years old attending Grades 9 to 12.

The Alberta High School Context

Alberta Education alongside school jurisdictions have designed two systematic strategies to develop exemplar leadership and teaching practices toward improved student learning in high school settings. These strategies led to significant change processes evolving at the same time for high school principals; one being the mandated LQS (Alberta Education, 2020b) and the other was the continuation of the initiative Moving Forward with High School Redesign, under the umbrella of the High School Completion Strategic Framework (Alberta Education, 2012). This initiative focused on school culture, school leadership, school pedagogy, and school structure towards a rethinking of how to create student-centered learning environments in Alberta high schools. High School Redesign, initiated in 2008, supported high schools with improving overall student engagement, student achievement, and well-being (Alberta Education, 2012). The two strategies, LQS and Moving Forward with High School Redesign, aligned with the work Alberta Education was undertaking to support high school students as they transition to postsecondary, poly technical schools and the workforce (Alberta Education, 2012). Below is an explanation of

the rationale behind Alberta Education's focus on all Alberta students in preparing them for a knowledge-based society.

Education for 21st Century Schools in Alberta

In 2010, the Government of Alberta unveiled the much-anticipated *Inspiring Education* document, which was the culmination of two years of intense face-to-face facilitated dialogues with Albertans and the result of the Alberta Commission on Learning's (2003) report entitled, *Every Child Learns, Every Child Succeeds*. *Inspiring Education* outlined a long-term vision for Alberta's education system based on feedback from a multitude of stakeholders expressing their hopes, dreams, and aspirations for Alberta's children (Government of Alberta, 2010). The Government of Alberta's main question throughout the stakeholder process was that although every child in Alberta has access to a publicly funded education system that is widely known to be the best in the world, would this be enough to prepare a child for the world of 2030?

Numerous challenges that governments now face include an increase in knowledge-based, diverse industries within the world's economy, whereby innovation, creativity, and management of knowledge are skills needed for the next generation (Alberta Education, 2010). Children, who are already living in a world of increasing interdependence and competitiveness, need to possess the skills of critical thinking and problem-solving in order to make impactful decisions about the global world (Alberta Education, 2010). For example, the impact of climate change, use of resources, large-scale conflict, poverty, safety, security, and well-being encompass global issues that face our youth. Additionally, government officials know that children are entering a time with increased migration of diverse populations, resulting in enhanced interactions with people of different cultures, languages, and religions more than ever before.

With these factors in mind, Alberta launched its vision of education for 21st-century learning with the aim to ensure that students in the kindergarten to Grade 12 system would develop the qualities and attributes of engaged thinkers, entrepreneurial spirits, and ethical citizens, coined the “three E’s,” as key skill sets for the future world of work (Government of Alberta, 2010). In July 2018, then Education Minister David Eggen announced the draft kindergarten to Grade 4 curriculum within the New Democratic Party’s curriculum development plan; it included eight competencies, which are “combinations of attitudes, skills, and knowledge that students develop and apply for successful learning, living and work” (Alberta Education, n.d.-b, para. 1). The competencies within the new curriculum are critical thinking, communication, collaboration, problem-solving, managing information, cultural and global citizenship, creativity and innovation, and personal growth and well-being. When developed collectively, these competencies would support students in their mitigation of unfamiliar or challenging situations.

Leadership to Support Knowledge-Based Education

To support the development and enactment of competency-based learning, school leaders and educators need to be open to the paradigm shift and new mindset this new curriculum requires. As society moves towards more innovative practices, there is a growing concern that formal education institutions continue to operate traditional models of teaching and cling to traditional concepts and methods. The digital, collaborative dimension is increasingly affecting society, but there are growing concerns that schools continue to operate in a classical “information delivery” paradigm (Krishnan, 2020). According to Scimeca et al. (2009), “This dimension is shaping social, economic, and political activities on a global scale, changing the nature of social interaction and knowledge creation” (pp. 489–490).

Uhl-Bien and Arena (2018) posited, “Leadership development and education needs to identify and train leaders in skills that are needed to operate in our new organizational world” (p. 101). Young leaders need to know not only how to enact the top skills of complex problem-solving, critical thinking, creativity, and people management, but how to do so in systems that will likely not be structured to adapt easily. Kowch’s (2016) research has shown educational leaders embracing the idea of leading learning to solve problems within networks of specialists. Focus on the development of a “newer generation of co-connected specialist leaders who will likely combine perspectives on change, tensions, innovation and experimentation by using new principles for leading education organizations that never stop changing” (Kowch, 2016, p. 502). The leadership approach is more distributed, involving a sharing of credit and collaborative work. “Effective leaders recognize the importance of interactions, correlation, and unpredictability among ensembles or aggregates of individuals [and]...allow them to emerge through engaging in non-linear processes” (Regine & Lewin, 2000, p. 12)). Ministries of education created standard-based policies to support the development of leaders, ensuring the knowledge, skills, and capabilities needed to lead knowledge-based education systems; leverage their school system in a competitive environment; and uphold public assurance mechanisms. Alberta Education, in its development and implementation of professional practices standards for superintendents, school leaders, and teachers, is ensuring that all levels of the school system are moving in alignment with one another to support the success of all students in a knowledge-based society.

Ensuring Standards Across the Education System

A standards-based approach can be defined as “dimensions of performance or domains of learning that are valued and that are worthy of being promoted, but they can also be used to

assess if what is valued is actually being achieved or not” (OECD, 2013, p. 14). Adams and Allan (2019), in their national and international review of research on school leadership standards, outlined three pervasive rationales for developing and implementing professional standards for school leaders: (a) support for student learning and well-being, (b) guiding and facilitating continuous professional learning, and (c) evaluating the performance of leaders. Standards are purposeful in that, “at the most essential level, professional standards clarify and delineate a jurisdiction’s expectations for the knowledge, skills, attributes, and competencies of its school leader. . . with student outcomes being the ultimate end point” (Adams & Allan, 2019, pp. 91–92).

In Alberta, collaborative actions and shared responsibility toward the implementation of professional practice standards for teachers, school leaders, and superintendents have begun. Although the standards are relatively new legislation, it is Alberta Education’s hope that these three standards will help set the direction to provide assurance to the public that “the ministry is striving for an education system that can achieve robust student outcomes” (Alberta Education, 2018a, p. 51). Collectively, these standards align with and build upon each other to ensure a common set of expectations among superintendents, school leaders, and teachers in supporting the teaching and learning of all Alberta students. Professional competence of the three practice standards is conceptualized in Figure 2.

Figure 2 demonstrates the importance that all three standards are interrelated and interdependent. All three ensure the ongoing analysis and understanding of the context, whether as a superintendent, school leader, or teacher (yellow section); decision-making about what relevant knowledge and abilities to apply leading to action (orange section); and the ability to develop quality leadership and teaching ultimately resulting in optimum learning for all students

in the school authority (green section). In essence, “Leaders all have professional practice standards to address. . . for the ultimate benefits of all students they collectively serve” (V. Olekshy, personal communication, May 12, 2020).

Figure 2

Supporting Implementation of the Professional Practice Standards



Note. Reprinted with permission from “Professional Practice Standards,” by College of Alberta School Superintendents, 2018 (<https://cass.ab.ca/resources/professional-practice-standards/>).

As mentioned previously, the nine competencies specifically within the LQS are (a) fostering effective relationships; (b) modeling commitment to professional learning; (c) embodying a visionary leadership; (d) leading a learning community; (e) supporting the application of foundational knowledge about First Nations, Métis, and Inuit; (f) providing instructional leadership; (g) managing school operations and resources; and (h) understanding and responding to the larger societal context (Alberta Education, 2020b). Several indicators

designed to provide illustrative examples of competent leadership practice are provided after each competency to support the implementation of the LQS. These indicators may vary between school jurisdictions based on the context leaders and teachers are working in; for example, schooling in northern rural Alberta will be different than a large urban centre. Therefore, the understanding and application of applying the standard first, followed by the competency, is important in developing coherence within the system of leadership and teaching resulting in improved student learning.

The Role of the Principal

Aligning with professional practice standards are policies developed by the Ministry of Education to ensure a shared responsibility for all members within the education system to support all students to reach their potential. The Province of Alberta Education Act (2021) is the policy that establishes the goals for the education system while identifying the roles and responsibilities of the Ministry of Education, school jurisdictions, charter, and private schools in addition to teachers, parents, and students. Section 197 of the Education Act specifically outlines the responsibilities of the principal within a school. The principal is one of only five people or groups mentioned in the Education Act, meaning that the role of principal is of utmost importance to student learning and well-being.²

Within the 10 responsibilities listed for a principal in Section 197, six deal directly with instructional leadership. The most important of these roles is the responsibility to provide a “welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment that respects diversity and fosters a sense of belonging [for all]” (Education Act, 2021, Section 197 a.1). Learning occurs when

² The five people or groups mentioned in the Education Act are trustees, superintendent, principal, parent, and student.

people feel safe and welcome. Another key responsibility of the principal is to oversee the effective instruction and evaluation of the approved and authorized curriculum. Principals need to ensure that all students have opportunities to achieve Alberta Education's standards of education through the supervision and evaluation of student learning. Aligning with instructional leadership is the responsibility of the principal to implement effective and supportive teacher evaluation processes through teacher growth, supervision, and evaluation of probationary and continuous teachers. These processes include meeting with teachers to review teacher PGPs, as well as providing support and guidance to teachers through observation and feedback about the quality of teaching they provide to students while simultaneously identifying practices that may need improvement.

Based on the responsibilities listed in Section 197 of the Province of Alberta's Education Act (2021), the principal is a key member of the education system team assuring the public that teaching and learning are taking place daily in the classroom, supporting the development of optimal student learning. Knowing this, the principal has the responsibility to promote collegiality, cooperation, and collaboration within the school and the community that it serves. To do so, the principal should focus attention on building trust within and outside of the school.

Relational Trust

Effective leaders know that trust is a foundational building block in leading successful organizations. Relational trust is built through social exchanges within the school community. Positive exchanges reduce vulnerability among members and foster mindsets of risk-taking and innovation. Accountability for shared expectations of enhanced student learning is facilitated through social exchanges. The first competency within the LQS is focused on fostering effective relationships. This competency states, "The leader builds positive working relationships with

members of the school community and local community” (Alberta Education, 2020b, p. 3).

There are significant findings from Robinson’s (2011) research identifying five leadership dimensions (or practices) as having the greatest impact on student achievement: (a) establishing goals and expectations; (b) strategic resources; (c) planning, coordinating, and evaluating teaching; (d) promoting and participating in teacher learning and development; and (e) ensuring an orderly and supportive environment. Although relationship-developing strategies are important, Robinson (2011) believed that all five dimensions of her evidence-informed student-centered leadership model involve building relationships. The research of Bryk and Schneider (2002) provided compelling evidence that the level of trust among members of the school community has an impact on the social well-being and academic progress of students. Bryk and Schneider (2003) categorized relational trust into four parts: personal integrity, respect, competence in role, and personal regard.

Tschannen-Moran and Gareis’s (2015) study on principals, trust, and cultivating vibrant schools supported the implications of trust as a “mediating variable of school leadership and student achievement” (p. 268). Trusted principals act with fairness, respect, and integrity while demonstrating genuine concern and empathy for others. Principals who show competence as instructional leaders build trust and credibility. This characteristic could be especially important in a high school setting because teachers do not perceive principals as having the content knowledge base needed to impact their quality of teaching. Trust cultivates the growth of interpersonal relationships that support communities of interdependence, risk-taking, and collaboration. These relationships ultimately lead to trusted environments whereby generative conversations foster academic optimism and shared understandings of high expectations for all students. Effective leaders do not get the relationship right and then tackle the educational

challenges—they incorporate both sets of constraints into their problem-solving (Kirtman, 2013; Leithwood et al., 2004; Robinson, 2011).

Leadership is about creating the conditions for safe, caring, welcoming cultures in a climate of trust. “Leaders build collaborative structures with the qualities of supportive, responsive attitudes towards students and a sense that teachers are part of the community focused on good instruction” (The Wallace Foundation, 2013, p. 8). Building trust involves learning how to be direct and honest about performance expectations, follow through on commitments, clearly understand key communication, and have critical conversations with stakeholders (Kirtman, 2013; Robinson, 2011). Murphy and Seashore Louis (2018) stressed that “authentic, relationship-based leadership promotes employee trust, a sense of organizational justice, and a willingness to contribute voice to promoting the collective good” (p. 37). Teacher and student success, engagement, learning, and well-being are fostered as the result of developing relationships of trust. Murphy and Seashore Louis provided evidence that when positive school leaders create meaningful work, teachers experience personal enrichment, a sense of meaning, and self-determination, which could enhance teachers’ willingness to engage in deeper learning. Lambert (2002) stated, “The days of the lone instructional leaders are over. We no longer believe that one administrator can serve as an instructional leader for the entire school without the substantial participation of other educators” (p. 37).

Leadership Practices

After quality of teaching, school leadership is the second most important in-school factor that predicts student outcomes (Hattie, 2008). School leaders need to be agile, adaptive, and flexible when translating challenges and opportunities within different contexts into effective practices that will be sustained and have a positive impact on both teachers and students. Table 1

captures five research-based leadership practices that support leadership, teaching, and learning; the focus is on improved student learning while building on an overall shared instructional approach. The research within these leadership practices supported my use of the four competencies within the LQS as foundational competencies to support instructional leadership.

Table 1

Leadership Practices

Leadership practice	Characteristics
Instructional leadership	<p>Instructional leaders focus more on students and the impact teachers have on students. Instructional leaders need to focus on</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • creating a sense of purpose in the school, including clear goals focused on student learning; • fostering continuous improvement of the school through cyclical school development planning that involves a range of stakeholders; • developing a climate of high expectations and school culture aimed at innovation and improvement of teaching and learning; • coordinating the curriculum and monitoring student learning outcomes; • shaping the overall reward system of the school to reflect the school’s mission; • organizing and monitoring a wide range of activities aimed at the continuous development of staff; and • being a visible presence in the school, modelling the desired values of the school’s culture. (Hallinger, 2005, p. 13)
Student-centered leadership	<p>Five leadership practices describe the “what” of student-centered leadership:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • establishing goals and expectations; • resourcing strategically; • planning, coordinating, and evaluating teaching and the curriculum; • promoting and participating in teacher learning and development; and • ensuring an orderly and supportive environment. (Robinson, 2008)
Transformational leadership	<p>Core leadership practices are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • setting the direction; • developing people; • redesigning the organization; and • managing the instructional program. (Leithwood, 2012)

Leadership practice	Characteristics
Integrated leadership	<p>Practices that combine both instructional and transformational leadership (Hallinger, 2005; Marks & Printy, 2003; Sheppard, 1996):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • principals share instructional leadership with teachers and both parties influence assessment, curriculum, and assessment; • a supportive culture develops teacher leaders; • an establishment of relationships conducive to improving quality of instruction and creating conditions that support academic progress of all students is formed; and • teachers perceive principals' instructional leadership behaviours to be appropriate fostering growth in commitment, professional involvement, and willingness to innovate.
Shared, distributed, and collective leadership	<p>All three leadership styles are positively associated with teacher motivation, teachers' working conditions, and increased student achievement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a leader fosters the development of shared values, a common focus, and collective responsibility for student learning; • these leadership styles are accomplished by distributing formalized leadership roles within the schools' context (Leithwood, 2012); and • when principals and teachers share leadership, teachers' working relationships are stronger and student achievement is higher (Seashore Louis & Wahlstrom, 2012, p. 25).

The Four Competencies Toward Shared Instructional Leadership

The foundation of this study was instructional leadership with a focus on the practices of the principal that support teachers in order to ensure that every student receives the highest level of instruction every day. Crowe and Kennedy (2020) suggested, "Of all the skills a principal needs to succeed, the most vital, in terms of increasing academic achievement, is that of instructional leadership" (p. 3). They further stated that if a "principal is to ensure a students' academic success, they must focus on the learning of the teacher through the actions of instructional leadership" (Crowe & Kennedy, 2020, p. 8). Principals who exhibit the traits of instructional leadership toward improved student achievement have a vision of academic success for all students based on high expectations. They provide the conditions that support training for

teachers to promote continual professional learning. Principals create data-informed environments to inform school practices and promote collaborative teacher inquiry toward improving student learning while establishing climates that foster personal and collective efficacy to develop the capacity of teachers toward a shared responsibility and response to the learning needs of all students. According to Marzano et al. (2005), collective efficacy is a shared belief that group members can enhance the effectiveness of an organization through cooperative efforts.

Based on the LQS (Alberta Education, 2020b), the achievement of instructional leadership competency is demonstrated by indicators such as ensuring that the program of studies, the curriculum, is fully utilized and that teachers have a strong understanding of effective pedagogy and evidence-informed student assessment in meeting the learning outcomes outlined in the curriculum. Instructional leadership is also evident when the principal implements professional growth, supervision, and evaluation processes to ensure all teachers are meeting the TQS (Alberta Education, 2020d), and establishes mentorship and induction supports for teachers. In addition, student learning, development, and well-being are achieved through instructional leadership that facilitates resources, agencies, and experts within and outside the school community.

The LQS comprises nine competencies or interrelated sets of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that leaders develop over time, draw upon and apply to different leadership contexts to support quality teaching and learning (Alberta Education, 2020b). In the following subsections, I unpack four LQS competencies to illustrate their alignment to research and provide a coherent approach to leadership practices that support the development of quality teaching. These four competencies are (a) embodying visionary leadership, (b) leading a learning community, (c)

providing instructional leadership, and (d) developing leadership capacity that contributes to overall shared instructional leadership.

Embodying Visionary Leadership Competency

“A leader collaborates with the school community to create and implement a shared vision for student success, engagement, learning and well-being” (Alberta Education, 2020b, p. 5).

Kouzes and Posner (2012) claimed that “only shared visions have the magnetic power to sustain commitment over time” (p. 125). Kouzes and Posner (2012) have said that leaders need to lead with heart; listening to the hopes, dreams, and aspirations of stakeholders, which leads to sustainability in the future because people believe in a cause. Robinson’s (2011) first dimension of student-centered leadership, establishing goals and expectations, serves to “reduce fragmentation and promote coherence” (p. 45) because of the ever-growing complexity of schools as organizations. Although having a moderate impact on student outcomes, goal setting “works indirectly by focusing and coordinating the work of adults around promoting the learning and achievement of students” (Robinson, 2011, p. 46). In Robinson’s (2011) study of high-performing schools, the principals placed importance on effective communication of goals and expectations, while recognizing and celebrating academic success and achievement. These principals possessed the knowledge and skill set to promote and participate in professional learning alongside teachers, provide high-quality collaboration opportunities while giving feedback, and using student data to change instructional and assessment practices.

One of Leithwood’s (2012) essential components of a leader’s repertoire is “setting directions” (p. 59). This component aligns with the competency of embodying visionary leadership. Leithwood outlined four specific practices principals need to utilize to set direction to

help improve instruction: “building a shared vision, fostering the acceptance of group goals, creating high performance expectations and communicating the direction” (2012, p. 59). Overall, these four practices are intended to establish a moral purpose and a system where all students learn, the achievement gap is reduced, and learning creates successful citizens (Fullan, 2003). The leadership skill of setting directions includes developing shared understanding about the learning organization while outlining the purpose and importance of goals and activities within the context of the work. Murphy and Seashore Louis (2018) provided evidence that when positive school leaders create meaningful work, teachers experience personal enrichment, a sense of meaning, and self-determination, which enhance their willingness to engage in deeper learning. Key to goal setting is forming meaningful relationships. Leaders can set goals that will change the course of the school, but if they do not have relationships with the people whose efforts will help accomplish the goals, they remain empty words and phrases. “All of these practices are aimed at bringing a focus to the individual and collective work of staff members in the school or district” (Leithwood, 2012, pp. 59–60).

Wahlstrom (2012), in studying instructional ethos and instructional actions, revealed that “when administrators serve effectively as instructional leaders, student achievement is likely to improve” (p. 84). It is not enough to create a vision for instructional improvement; rather, administrators need to engage in targeted actions to improve student learning. These goals need to be linked to the instructional goals of teachers through a collaborative process. It becomes clear that embodying visionary leadership means more than creating a mission and vision for a school. It involves detailed planning utilizing data to narrow the school’s improvement focus through the establishment of goals, strategies, and measurement. Visionary leaders promote innovation and foster a commitment to continuous improvement, as well as communicate a

philosophy of student-centered education, while establishing principles of effective teaching and leadership.

Collins (2001), drawing lessons from the corporate business world, suggested that leadership needs to focus with great clarity on what is essential, what needs to be done, and how to get it done. Schmoker (2019) agreed by describing the need for principals to focus on a few key improvement goals: “When leaders narrow their focus to one or two powerful initiatives, they can get amazing results—and love their jobs” (p. 25). Fullan (2009) stated, “The skinny is about finding the smallest number of high-leverage actions that unleash stunningly powerful consequences” (p. 16). In schools, the leader who has clarity around, and commitment to, high standards and success of all students will embody visionary leadership. Vanderbilt University researchers (2008, as cited in The Wallace Foundation, 2013) asserted that “the most effective school leaders who explicitly spell out high expectations for all, rigorous learning goals and clear and public standards, understand the keys to closing the achievement gap and raising overall achievement for all students” (p. 7). When leaders and teachers work collaboratively to develop school goals and feel personally connected to the work, they believe they have the capacity to achieve success, which leads to self and collective efficacy (Marzano et al., 2005).

Leading a Learning Community Competency

“A leader nurtures and sustains a culture that supports evidence-informed teaching and learning” (Alberta Education, 2020b, p. 5).

Fullan (2014) described a learning leader as someone who not only models learning, but also shapes the conditions for all to learn on a continuous basis. Based on Robinson’s (2011) meta-analysis of research on the impact of school principals and student achievement, “the most powerful way that school leaders can make a difference to the learning of their students is by

promoting and participating in the professional learning and development of their teachers” (p. 104). Of Robinson’s (2011) five dimensions, leading teacher learning and development was the most significant factor, twice as impactful as the other four dimensions. Robinson (2011) found that the principal who makes the largest impact on learning participates as a learner alongside teachers in school improvement.

Leading learning means being proactively involved with teachers such that principals and teachers alike are learning; learning becomes a priority for both and reciprocal in nature. Within the dimension of teacher learning and development, Robinson (2011) extrapolated two critical factors: (a) the ability of the principal to make progress a collective endeavour and (b) the skills for leading professional learning. Both factors require the principal to be present as a learner. Principals can create and shape the conditions for high-quality collaboration among teachers, coherence of the instructional program, and effective implementation focused on positive student outcomes when learning takes place side by side. Based on Robinson’s (2011) study and supported by Wahlstrom (2012), principals in high-performing schools were accessible to teachers’ inquiries about instruction and knowledgeable about instructional techniques. Robinson (2011) was clear that most of her evidence came from studying elementary schools. Hence her statement,

The notion of a high school principal being a source of instructional advice, at least in specialist subjects, is probably not realistic, but if one substitutes vice principal for instruction, curriculum chair, or head or subject department for principal, then the points are probably equally applicable to high school leadership. (p. 105)

Timperley (2011) questioned, “How can leaders support teacher learning when they cannot be experts in the full range of curriculum areas as well as knowing how to support

students' engagement and well-being?" (p. 20). Timperley (2011) advocated for a paradigm shift in mindset in both principals and teachers for this important work to take place. Principals need to be involved in teachers' professional learning in order to challenge and support them as well as provide the conditions for teachers to learn and then implement strategies in their classrooms. Of interest from her research, Timperley (2011) believed that principals need to start thinking of teachers as "their class" to become more deeply invested in promoting learning for their classroom of teachers.

Contradicting the notion that principals need to be content specialists, Fullan (2014) asserted that principals are spending more time on instruction and this, he maintained, is not time well spent. Instead, principals should be focused on developing the group "within the context of creating a collective culture of efficacy" (Fullan, 2014, p. 55). He believed hierarchical leadership cannot influence the masses, but purposeful peers can. Developing professional capacity should include human capital, social capital, and decisional capital as key components to spreading change efforts from individuals, to groups, to schools and jurisdictions (Fullan, 2014; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2012). A collaborative culture as the "powerhouse" within the system leads to day-to-day learning, teacher growth, and supervision, as well as cohesive PD, all key features of professional capital. The principal's role is to "lead the school's teachers in a process of learning to improve their teaching, while learning alongside them about what works and what doesn't" (Fullan, 2014, p. 55). Fullan (2014) stated that success at the school level is defined as

a function of the work of principals, themselves acting as lead learners, who ensure that the group focuses on a small number of key elements: specific goals for students; data that enable clear diagnosis of individual learning needs; instructional practices that

address those learning needs; and teachers learning from each other; monitoring overall progress and making adjustments accordingly. (p. 63)

Principals who lead inclusive learning communities encompass the development of a shared responsibility mindset involving students, staff, parents, and the community. Equality and respect are fostered, and a sense of belonging is emphasized. Leading learners provide opportunities and expectations for the positive involvement of parents in supporting student learning. They engage with community services agencies to provide support to those who need them while continually enhancing a welcoming, safe, and inclusive school community for all (Alberta Education, n.d.-a).

Effective high schools have stronger cultures of learning with distinct cultures and practices that distinguished them from the less-effective schools. These practices include frequent opportunities for formal collaboration, shared goals centered on universal high expectations, structured opportunities for participatory leadership, and deliberate supports to help student engage and achieve in academics (Tichnor-Wagner et al., 2016).

Providing Instructional Leadership Competency

“A leader ensures that every student has access to quality teaching and optimum learning experiences” (Alberta Education, 2020b, p. 6).

As the result of a renewed focus on teaching and learning, policymakers and practitioners focus their inquiry on the essential conditions that enhance the most effective methods of learning and teaching in schools (Hallinger, 2005). Consequently, training for the instructional leadership role is at the forefront of this focus. More specifically, and in alignment with effective instructional leadership practices in high school settings, Hallinger (2005) stated that most of the research on instructional leadership has been in elementary schools and “there is a need for

adaptation in secondary schools which are often larger and more complex organizations” (p. 11). In addition, the research brings into focus the reality of high schools in that “normatively, the classroom has traditionally been the private domain of teachers in which principals may not be welcome. Moreover, in many cases principals have less expertise in the subject area than the teachers whom they supervise” (Hallinger, 2005, p. 12).

These circumstances have made instructional supervision a challenge in high schools (Marshall, 2004). Factors working against principals getting into classrooms are many, varied, and difficult to overcome, even when principals possess strong intentions to do so. Thus emerged the construct of shared instructional leadership from a transformational leadership approach. Marks and Printy (2003) explained that strong transformational leadership by the principal is essential in supporting the commitment of teachers. Because teachers themselves can be barriers to the development of teacher leadership (Smylie & Denny, 1990), transformational principals are needed to invite teachers to share leadership functions. When teachers perceive principals’ instructional leadership behaviours to be appropriate, they grow in commitment, professional involvement, and willingness to innovate (Sheppard, 1996). Thus, instructional leadership can itself be transformative (Hallinger, 2005).

The principal, as an instructional leader, has a pivotal role in developing, supporting, facilitating, and supervising teachers’ capacity to influence student learning significantly and positively. An instructional leadership mindset includes an intense moral purpose focused on promoting deep student learning, professional inquiry, trusting relationships, and seeking evidence in action (Timperley, 2011). Crucial to instructional leadership are goals that have an academic focus. Instructional leaders have the greatest impact on student learning when they set high expectations for students and equip teachers with the beliefs, knowledge, skills, and

motivation to achieve them (Fullan, 2014; Leithwood & Seashore Louis, 2012; Robinson, 2011). Teachers and principals must agree on the most instructionally helpful leadership practices, which are “focusing the school on goals and expectations for student achievement; keeping track of teachers’ PD needs; and creating structures and opportunities for teachers to collaborate” (Leithwood & Seashore Louis, 2012, p. 57). Robinson (2011), in her work on ensuring quality teaching, outlined four actions principals should take to establish a community focused on instruction:

1. Planning, coordinating, and evaluating teaching and learning.
2. Implementing strong instructional leadership that focuses on ambitious learning goals with respect to program coherence, effective teaching, and creating a culture of inquiry.
3. Involving leadership in collegial discussions about teaching and how instruction affects student achievement.
4. Observing classrooms and providing feedback, using data and evidence to monitor student progress and next steps.

School Leader Demonstrating a Strong Understanding of Effective Pedagogy and Curriculum. Ippolito and Fisher (2019) summarized the largest challenge in middle and high school instructional leadership practices as the fact that every principal wants to be an instructional leader but is not versed in every discipline. Even less is known about how middle and high school principals might best support the work of instructional leadership, especially given the variability in principals’ teaching backgrounds. “Imagine a principal who previously taught history for 12 years trying to mentor and coach a physics or calculus teacher. In such cases, the instructional leadership provided often focuses on generic strategies” (Ippolito &

Fisher, 2019, p. 51). Ippolito and Fisher identified three major problems in their study on instructional leadership of disciplinary literacy in secondary schools. Although the focus was on literacy, these problem areas can be generalized to instructional leadership within high school settings. These problems are as follows:

1. Instructional leadership for middle and high school classrooms requires knowledge of multiple disciplines. Most leaders are not deeply knowledgeable in every discipline and there is variability in leaders' professional background.
2. Complex structures and competing expectations. Most middle and high schools are subdivided into numerous departments, grade levels, technical focus, or academics. Although partitioning may support teachers in teaming with colleagues and customizing learning for students, such fragmentation can undermine a leader's attempts to guide school-wide professional learning.
3. Competing role expectations. More is expected of middle and high school leaders today than ever before. From managing personal issues, to keeping students safe, to navigation ever-changing standards and policies, middle and high school leaders may find themselves hard-pressed for time and headspace to act as true instructional leaders. (p. 52)

Leadership Content Knowledge. Stein and Nelson (2003) argued, "The study of administrators' understanding of subject matter and how it must be transformed for the purposes of leadership has been neglected in research on educational administration. Research has not examined the subject-matter knowledge requirements of effective instructional leadership" (p. 424). They stressed that principals who profess to be instructional leaders must have some degree of understanding of the subject areas they oversee. As demands increase for principals to

improve teaching and learning in their schools, they must also be able to know strong instruction when they see it, to encourage it when they do not, and to set the conditions for continuous academic learning among their professional staff. Leaders need to create the conditions for continuous learning for all. “We need to place less focus on what principals do and begin to look at how principals think about what they do as they identify and frame problems in their school” (Stein & Nelson, 2003, p. 424).

Principals with leadership content knowledge will have the knowledge and skill set to equip them to be strong instructional leaders. Leadership content knowledge is defined as “the knowledge of subjects, how teachers teach subjects and how students learn them that is used by administrators when they function as instructional leaders” (Stein & Nelson, 2003, p. 426). Stein and Nelson (2003) claimed that knowledge about subject matter is related in complex ways to knowledge about how to lead. In some cases, subject-matter knowledge appears to be transformed for the purposes of providing leadership for instructional reform. In other cases, administrators’ knowledge of how to lead, how to build the culture of a school community, how to use PD programs and other resources well, how to conduct a curriculum selection process, and how to plan for the systemic array of inventions appears to be transformed by the newly learned subject matter (Stein & Nelson, 2003).

Stein and Nelson (2003), based on their research, recommended two ways to respond to the challenge of instructional leaders developing stronger leadership content knowledge: One focuses on the education of administrators and the conditions under which they might continue acquiring subject matter knowledge throughout the course of their careers. The other focuses on the distributed nature of leadership and the opportunities

that provides for administrators to build working groups that collectively have the needed knowledge. (p. 443)

Supervision: Implementing Professional Growth. High-performing leaders are very visible. Principals in effective schools spend time in classrooms making formative observations about learning and professional growth. They engage with teachers in ongoing and informal conversations about teaching and learning (The Wallace Foundation, 2013) and continually look within the school, and to outside experts, to support teachers. Glanz (2000) defined supervision as being “of vital importance to promote instructional improvement, promote teacher growth, foster curriculum development, and support instruction” (p. 77).

To support student learning, Alberta Education (2015) developed the *Teacher Growth, Supervision, and Evaluation Policy*. In 2017, an independent research study of the policy generated 14 merged findings and 10 recommendations to support implementation of proposed changes (Brandon et al., 2018). The study outlined five approaches to supervision developed by leading scholars: developmental, differentiated, clinical, constructivist, and informal (Brandon et al., 2018). An example of an informal supervision approach is instructional walk-throughs. Ginsberg and Murphy (2002) valued walk-throughs “as one component of a more comprehensive supportive program of teaching and learning” (p. 33) that “can foster focused, reflective, and collaborative adult learning: generally, teachers welcome the opportunity for discussion that walk-throughs provide” (p. 34).

Supervision: As Instructional Support. To foster supervision as informed instructional support, Wahlstrom (2012) believed “principals engage in two complementary behaviours to influence instruction” (p. 68): *instructional ethos*, which sets the tone or culture in the building that supports continual professional learning, and *instructional actions*, which involve taking

explicit steps to engage individual teachers about their own growth. Instructional actions can be direct observations and conversations with teachers, in their classrooms and in team meetings (Wahlstrom, 2012).

Supervision should be both varied and informed in that it differentiates “pedagogical styles, developmental stages, and learning needs evident in the community of professional practice” (Brandon et al., 2018, p. 37), while gathering of evidence such as observations, pedagogical conversations, and artifacts to inform administrators of instruction and strengthen instructional practices (Brandon et al., 2018). Formative walk-throughs, for example, build an atmosphere of trust and support for all learners—the principals, the teachers, and the students. This focus creates a collaborative learning environment for all. Fullan (2014) cautioned instructional leaders when considering teacher supervision:

Supervising individual teachers into better performance is simply impossible if you have a staff of, say, more than twenty teachers... They can't be experts in all areas of instruction, and they will end up neglecting other aspects of their role that would make a bigger difference. (p. 40)

In agreement, DuFour and Marzano (2009) stated that “time devoted to building the capacity of teachers to work in teams is far better spent than time devoted to observing individual teachers” (p. 67).

Developing Leadership Capacity Competency

“A leader provides opportunities for members of the school community to develop leadership capacity and to support others in fulfilling their educational roles” (Alberta Education, 2020b, p. 7).

As Leithwood (2012) noted, “It is not enough to create a vision for instructional improvement; rather administrators need to engage in targeted actions to improve student learning” (p. 84). These actions need to be linked to the instructional goals of teachers through a collaborative process. Kirtman (2013), in his findings from interviewing over 600 educators in the development of seven leadership competencies linking leaders and instruction, summarized the role of the principal as

a balance between content and organizational leadership. These competencies involve building instructional leadership into the culture of the school and building strong leadership in teachers. The educational leader is the overall leader of instruction, but he or she needs to have time and skills to motivate and build teams and develop leadership capacity in his or her school to change. The educational leader should try not to do too much on his or her own in the instructional arena. (p. 8)

Principals who encourage the development of leadership create a strong climate for instruction. In a Minnesota–Toronto study, researchers found that “students performed better on math and reading tests as a result the effective leadership coming from all sources—principals, influential teachers, and staff teams” (The Wallace Foundation, 2013, p. 14). The researchers stated that the relationship between leadership and student outcomes was indirect and more related to teacher motivation and work settings, which can strengthen classroom instruction.

Higher-performing schools involved all stakeholders in the decision-making process, which inherently develops leadership capacity. “The higher performance of these schools might be explained as a consequence of the greater access they have to collective knowledge and wisdom embedded within their communities” (The Wallace Foundation, 2013, p. 10). Noted within the study is the fact that principals do not lose influence as others gain influence. Seashore

Louis et al. (2010) explained that “when principals and teachers share leadership, teachers’ working relationships with one another are stronger and student achievement is higher” (p. 282). Structures such as professional learning communities and communities of practice illustrate how teachers and leaders in collaborative settings focused on the work of improved student outcomes and well-being. When leaders and teachers undertake evidence-informed inquiry and use it to work collaboratively towards change and improvement for learners, it establishes a professional community and makes inquiry the everyday work of schools. This creates a culture of sustained improvement.

Related to this competency is developing collective leadership and teacher capacity. “Principals build the capacity of teachers to respond to the learning needs of all students” (Alberta Education, 2020b, p. 6). This outcome is accomplished by explicitly engaging teachers about well-defined instructional pedagogy and assessment, professional goals, and the curriculum. A leader fosters the development of shared values, a common focus, and collective responsibility for student learning by distributing formalized leadership roles within the school’s context. Building collective leadership means that principals establish collaborative structures whereby teachers’ beliefs and values are established, learning goals are identified, and the principal becomes a lead learner alongside teachers. The principal can enhance the structure in several ways:

- supporting the development of high-quality teaching by leading content-specific, grade-level collaborative time;
- engaging teachers in cycles of observation, feedback, and reflection to adapt and refine their instruction to meet their students’ needs;
- teaching and modeling how to apply a continuous improvement mindset to teaching,

- learning, and leading;
- tracking and monitoring student level data to ensure school-wide student progress; and
 - providing other relevant professional development/learning supports. (Brookhart & Moss, 2013)

The leadership practice of developing people results in direct connections for both the principal and the people who are integrated into experiences within the context of the school community. Positive school leaders demonstrate genuine concern for others' career growth and development while encouraging self-confidence for risk-taking (Murphy & Seashore Louis, 2018). This growth can be fostered through principals providing opportunities for sharing educational beliefs and values, engaging in professional interactions, supporting goal-aligned PD, mentoring partnerships within and outside of school, and providing exemplar instructional and assessment practices fundamental for improving student learning. Fullan (2009) spoke about the positive effects of collaborative cultures. Leadership is a shared responsibility with teams of leaders bringing their collective expertise to the forefront to create solutions to challenges while enhancing their motivation.

High-performing schools depend on both the individual and collective actions of teachers and school leaders, but, at times, policies and procedures from the government or jurisdiction level can hinder their work. When organizations determine that small or whole jurisdiction redesign needs to occur, it is important for leaders to provide the rationale of this change for stakeholders to move forward. Within the change process, effective practices of teachers and leaders need to be supported and sustained. To develop teacher capacity towards a collective

leadership approach, school leaders need to focus on the teaching within the classroom of the individual teacher and collective group.

One of the key responsibilities of school leaders is to oversee the effective instruction and evaluation of the curriculum. In a review of literature about quality teaching, Darling-Hammond (2010) made the important distinction between effective teaching (teaching quality) and effective teachers (teacher quality). This distinction necessitates the importance of understanding teacher quality and teaching quality, which I explain in the following section.

Teaching Quality Standards

Based on the work of Darling-Hammond (2005), “The importance of education to individual and societal success has increased at a breathtaking pace as a new knowledge-economy has emerged” (p. 237). The skills needed within the 21st century workforce include critical thinking and problem-solving along with the ability to analyze, synthesize, and apply knowledge to unique situations. Interpersonal and communication skills within and across cultural contexts are essential, in addition to the ability to be self-directed to deal with complex problems. Economists have linked economic growth and the quality of educational systems (McKnight et al., 2016). “When students learn more in school, they remain in the educational system longer and become more skilled and effective participants in the states workforce” (Hanushek et al., 2016, p. 53). As a result of the rapid changes and diversification of knowledge, many countries have focused their attention on reforming their education systems through a systematic approach in the development of teacher knowledge and skill set leading to the creation of professional teaching standards. “The quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers” (Barber & Mourshed, 2007, p. 16).

Darling-Hammond (1999) emphasized that performance-based standards reflect knowledge about teaching and learning that supports a view of teaching as complex, contingent on students' needs and instructional goals, and reciprocal—that is, continually shaped and reshaped by students' responses to learning events. Darling-Hammond et al.'s (2019) most recent research on educational practices within the science of learning and development emphasized that

developing these skills requires a different kind of teaching and learning than that emphasized in prior eras of education when learning was conceptualized as the acquisition of facts and teaching as the transmission of information to be taken in and used “as is.” (p. 4)

With the pressure on the education system from policymakers to practitioners toward producing results, there is a recognition of the pivotal importance of strong teaching practices. Danielson (2007) contended that teaching standards provide a roadmap for meeting beginning teachers' needs, while enhancing veteran teachers' skills in a shared understanding of teaching. Standards provide a structure for teachers to assess and improve their teaching practice. In addition, standards “are the public's guarantee that the members of a profession hold themselves and their colleagues to high standards of practice” (Danielson, 2007, p. 2).

Teaching is complex. The complexity extends over several facets of teachers' work: physically, emotionally, and more recently, cognitively. “Teaching is a thinking person's job; it is not simply a matter of following a script or carrying out another person's instructional designs” (Danielson, 2007, p. 2). Based on an extensive literature review of quality teaching by Brandon et al. (2019), there is a strong correlation between quality teaching and optimum student learning. Brandon et al. (2018) and Danielson (2007) also advised ensuring a clear distinction

between the understanding of effective teaching and effective teachers. Teacher quality involves “the bundle of personal traits, skills, and understanding an individual brings to teaching, including dispositions to behave in certain ways” (Darling-Hammond, 2010, p. 3), whereas teaching quality (effective teaching) focuses on providing instruction that “meets the demands of the discipline, the goals of instruction, and the needs of students in a particular context” (Darling-Hammond, 2010, p. 3).

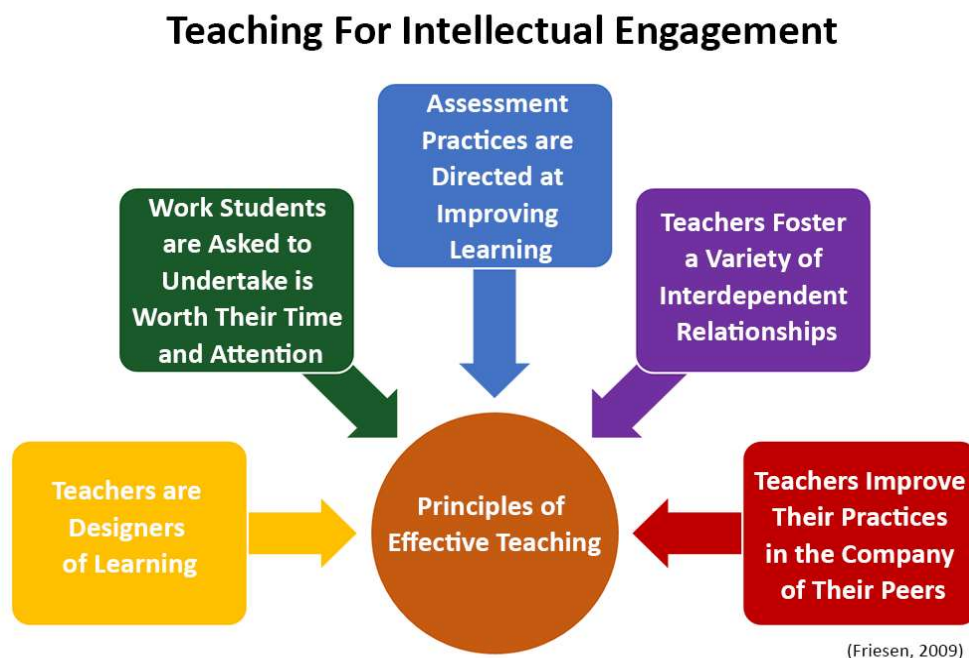
As of September 2019, the professional practice of all teachers in Alberta has been guided by the revised and updated TQS, which states, “Quality teaching occurs when the teacher’s ongoing analysis of the context, and the teacher’s decision about which pedagogical knowledge and abilities to apply result in optimum learning for all students” (Alberta Education, 2020d, p. 2). This standard focuses on teaching within contemporary education and frames the expectations of all teachers on developing optimum student learning. The TQS is in alignment with the LQS (Alberta Education, 2020b) and the SLQS (Alberta Education, 2020c). The six competencies that teachers need to meet within the TQS are (a) fostering effective relationships; (b) engaging in career-long learning; (c) demonstrating a professional body of knowledge; (d) establishing inclusive learning environments; (e) applying foundational knowledge about First Nations, Métis, and Inuit; and (f) adhering to legal frameworks and policies (Alberta Education, 2020d). Indicators for each competency provide teachers with measurable and observable actions leading to the accomplishment of the competency. All Alberta teachers are expected to reach the provincial standard of teaching quality, as outlined in the TQS, throughout their careers.

Determining Teaching Quality Through Frameworks

Instruction, pedagogy, and curriculum create the foundational pillars of many well-established frameworks for teaching. Danielson (2007) described a framework that organizes

teaching standards into four domains: planning and preparation, classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities. Warner (2016) defined excellence in teaching as “moving away from the traditional process-product teacher effectiveness research to include definitions of teaching that measures excellence not just in terms of student achievement on standardized tests, but also upon more interpretive and personal outcomes” (p. 21). Friesen’s (2009) research on teaching and learning in today’s complex classrooms identified five core principles as a foundational framework for effective teaching practices. These core principles are listed below and illustrated in Figure 3.

1. Effective teaching practice begins with the thoughtful and intentional design of learning that engages students intellectually and academically.
2. The work that students are asked to undertake is worthy of their time and attention is personally relevant and deeply connected to the world in which they live.
3. Assessment practices are clearly focused on improving student learning and guiding teaching decisions and actions.
4. Teachers foster a variety of interdependent relationships in classrooms that promote learning and create a strong culture around learning.
5. Teachers improve their practice in the company of peers.

Figure 3*Framework for Effective Teaching Practices*

Note. Adapted with permission from “What Did You Do in School Today? Teaching Effectiveness: A Framework and Rubric,” by S. Friesen, 2009. Copyright 2009 by Canadian Education Association (<http://www.galileo.org/cea-2009-wdydist-teaching.pdf>).

The nature of learning is more complex in today’s knowledge-based society. As educators make learning more visible for students, educators are reminded that the student is the central participant as students learn to understand themselves as the learner. Meaningful experiences create an environment of co-constructed learning, reflections, and interaction with others such as service learning, career experiences, and real-life situations. For high school students, the learning environment and curriculum need to be learning-focused and knowledge-centered. Teachers need to create opportunities for high school students to become more aware and

engaged in global events and issues. Learning opportunities should align with students' talents, passions, and career aspirations.

More concisely focused than the framework in Figure 3 is Marzano's (2007) framework, which includes three components of effective classroom pedagogy: (a) use of effective instructional strategies, (b) use of effective classroom management strategies, and (c) effective classroom curriculum design. Marzano (2007) has argued that research will never be able to identify instructional strategies that work with every student in every class:

In short, effective teaching is a dynamic mixture of expertise in a vast array of instructional strategies combined with a profound understanding of the individual students in class and their needs at particular points in time. . . effective teaching is part art and part science. (p. 5)

Teachers who understand learner-centered, inquiry-based instructional approaches know their learners and design the learning environment to support students as the key participants in the learning. Teachers are sensitive to both individual differences in learning as well as the importance of the social nature of learning. Quality teachers design optimum learning environments with the whole student in mind—academically, socially, physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

Quality Teaching Contributions to Optimum Student Learning

Teachers have the ability and expertise to ensure learning is optimized through the acknowledgement and organization of the learning conditions needed to support students to be more self-aware of their learning. Teachers' understanding of the learning environment, their own pedagogical knowledge, and their ability to cultivate a supportive learning environment may contribute to optimum student learning (Hattie, 2003).

Teachers as Designers of Learning Environments. Learning for all can be defined as both individual and social while being personally meaningful and authentic and built from prior experience and background knowledge. Within the learning environment, teachers need to be expert learners, continually growing, changing, and challenging themselves. Teachers know how to design learning through their response to instruction, adjustment of curriculum, and use of formative assessment. They are models and mentors to students of the process of learning while taking risks and exposing their learning through explicit action and personal reflection. In high-performing communities of learning, both the teacher and student learn from one another, value opinions, and support risk-taking in inquiry-based classrooms (Hattie, 2003). Optimal learning environments include the following components:

- Supportive environments, which promote strong attachments and relationship, sense-of-safety and belonging, and relational trust;
- Productive instructional strategies that connect to the student experience, support conceptual understanding, and develop metacognitive abilities;
- Social and emotional development that promote skills, habits, and mindsets that enable self-regulation, interpersonal skills, perseverance, and reliance; and
- System of supports that enable healthy development, meet student needs, and address learning barriers. (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019, p. 2)

In high-performing high school learning environments, a shift from teaching to the average to a focus on personalized learning has emerged. This shift has been evident in the high schools involved in Alberta Education's High School Redesign initiative where the focus was improving overall student engagement, student achievement, and well-being (Alberta Education, 2012). Teaching and learning through a personalized approach reflect teachers' understanding of

students' strengths and weaknesses, learning styles, and unique needs. Teachers have an awareness of individual needs of students and know how to universally design the learning environment through a deep understanding of their content area, differentiated instruction, authentic assessment, and explicit instruction. In other words, teachers know, understand, and respond to each student. They know their students as individual learners—academically, socially, and emotionally. Based on Brandon et al.'s (2019) research, contemporary education, or knowledge creating systems, “place design at the center of the system... . In a school all students and adults are working together towards advancing knowledge instead of simply transmitting or receiving knowledge and disciplinary understanding” (p. 139).

Teachers need to continually be responsive to student interests, strengths, and learning styles when designing their learning environments. In a United States high school study, Schernoff et al. (2003) found that students were more engaged when they were provided the appropriate level of challenge for their skill level in both individual and group work activities. “To design challenging work that engages all learners, teachers require a deep understanding of their disciplines, the students they teach, how people learn, the resources available to them, as well as the curriculum outcomes” (Brandon et al., 2012, p. 11). Tomlinson and Imbeau (2010) noted that it is difficult for high school teachers to embrace more contemporary and effective ways of thinking about teaching and learning even with evidence that one-size-fits-all instruction fails many, if not most, students. On the other hand, research that Brown et al. (2020) conducted on the Alberta Education High School Redesign initiative illustrated how teachers were open to change, collaboration, reflection, and improvement. One of the key findings in the research was that “participants recognized the strengths of colleagues and the importance of their collective efforts and commitment to learning” (Brown et al., 2020, p. 102).

Teachers as Experts in Pedagogical Knowledge. Quality teaching involves understanding the content of the course aligned to the curriculum, and also applying the most effective instructional strategies and assessments leading to deeper, more authentic, and engaging learning for all students. While providing intellectually challenging work, effective teachers link curriculum to students' lives and interests (Hattie, 2003). Project-based learning tied to real-world problems, community service projects building a sense of responsibility, and dual-credit opportunities providing exposure to postsecondary institutions all support authentic learning opportunities for high school students. Darling-Hammond (2002) defined authentic pedagogy as "instruction [that is] focused on active learning in real world contexts [and calls] for high-order thinking, consideration of alternatives, extended writing, and an audience for student work" (p. 36).

Teachers who have effective instructional practices and possess an understanding of assessment for learning (formative assessment) are able to provide feedback to students to help them move confidently forward through learning outcomes (Hattie, 2003). Recognizing scaffolding as a component of assessment for learning, Bennet and Mulgrew (2010) concluded that "assessment for learning provides teachers with information about student progress towards learning goals so teachers can make adjustments to instruction" (p. 5) while providing information to students to revise their work based on feedback. As a result, students become more involved in the learning process. Assessment embedded into instruction clarifies and communicates expectations for student learning, while making students' thinking visible to both teacher and student (Brandon et al., 2012; Frey & Fisher, 2011). This is accomplished through the establishment of success criteria along with "substantial, regular, timely, specific, meaningful feedback to improve [student] learning on an ongoing basis" (Brandon et al., 2012, p. 13).

Teachers as Cultivators of Quality Learning Environments. Everyone in a school community shares the responsibility of creating, maintaining, and promoting a welcoming, caring, respectful, and safe learning environment that respects diversity, equality, and human rights, and fosters a sense of inclusion and belonging (Alberta Education, 2020b, 2020c, 2020d). Schools aspire to develop responsible, caring, and respectful members of a just, peaceful, and democratic society. Creating a safe school climate supports students' mental health development, helps reduce antisocial behaviour and discipline problems, contributes to higher morale, promotes positive interpersonal relationships, and allows students to learn at the most favourable levels (Marshall, 2004).

Developing trusting, compassionate relationships with students is foundational to creating a safe, positive, and productive teaching and learning environment. This foundation includes the teacher's ability to relate to students, value and feel compassion for students as human beings, and serve as a role model or mentor. Barber (1995) referred to the relationship between teacher and child as the "unknown universe" of teaching: "That crucial part of education that is to do with the classroom interaction of learner and teacher and with the extraordinary ability of teachers to generate sparks of learning, even in the most inauspicious of circumstances" (p. 76).

High school settings seem to work counterintuitively to the research. Teaching 150 to 200 students a day would make it difficult for teachers to connect with students. Eccles and Roeser (2009) contended that high school structures underscore the importance of personal connections with adults. Academic evaluation and competitive ranking of students create pressure on high school students who are most sensitive to social comparisons and in most need of developing a strong sense of belonging (Eccles & Roeser, 2009). Contrary to this, in Brown et al.'s (2020) research on Alberta Education's High School Redesign, two of the key factors of redesigning

were relationship building and student input. The findings noted that “participants emphasized the significance of interactions and having strong teacher–student relationships throughout a student’s high school experience. Participants described the student–teacher relationships as a partnership” (Brown et al., 2020, p. 193).

Along with building relationships to support student learning, teachers need to be attuned to the diverse learners in their classrooms and learn about culturally responsive instruction. Teachers need to understand the varied views and experiences that children bring to the school community. Gay (2000) suggested that such culturally responsive teaching uses “the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference and performance style of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant and effective for them. It teaches *to* and *through* the strengths of the students” (p. 29). This recognition can support stronger student learning. In a study of teachers who taught Latino students, researchers found that teachers’ beliefs and reported behaviours related to the role of Spanish in instruction, use of students’ prior knowledge, and teachers’ own critical awareness were positively related to student reading outcomes (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019). When teachers consider the importance of building relationships and understanding the background experiences of others, they form social emotional connections that create safe, caring, respectful, and engaging learning environments for all students.

Theoretical Framework: Systems Thinking Approach

Instructional leaders influence the quality of school outcomes through the context, culture, and alignment of school structures, for example, by setting academic standards, creating timetables, supporting professional learning, and aligning curriculum. Benson (2019) shared that “school leaders know that most teachers want to be excellent at what they do and that the

impediment to excellence is not primarily in the teachers but in the system itself” (p. 77). At this time, unfortunately, policymakers, practitioners, superintendents, and school leaders do not seem to understand how to change the system in a cohesive manner. “In the absence of the power to impose systematic structural change, an instructional leader’s worth is based on his or her impact on the performance of individual teachers” (Benson, 2019, p. 77). An effective instructional leader knows with confidence where their school’s strengths and challenges lie as the result of setting the educational direction of the school, working with teams supporting both effective instructional and assessment practice, participating in PD and instructional walk-throughs, and working collaboratively on data analysis to enhance the learning community. Basically, school leaders play a pivotal role in establishing effective systems in schools.

This section examines systems theory or systems thinking and its theoretical framework to support school leaders in the alignment of organizational structures and processes toward school improvement. According to Betts (1992), systems are characterized by synergy whereby the whole (system) is greater than the sum of its parts (elements), because the relationship among the different elements adds value to the system. Based on the work of Garland et al. (2018), school and jurisdiction leaders need to be in touch with the synergy as it ebbs and flows, making sure the elements are performing efficiently and effectively. They believe “in successful improvement efforts the energy constantly shifts amongst the different elements while the system continues to flex and bend moving forward” (Garland et al., 2018, p. 10). Leaders need to be aware of the interconnectedness of the moving parts and identify trends that may indicate a possible disconnect in the system.

Systems Theory

According to Kast and Rosenzweig (1972), systems theory provides a vital structure in understanding organizations. The key feature within this theory is that all systems are organized and composed of interdependent components in some type of relationship (Ball, 1978; Kast & Rosenzweig, 1972; Wilsey, 1969). For example, a school consists of many components. They include teachers, administrators, students, school and classroom structures and processes, and parental involvement. Each of these components must have an interdependent relationship to be successful. The concept of a system within complex scientific thinking can be defined by several simple basic concepts (Strauss, 2002). The following three statements support the explanation of the meaning of systems theory, which is evident in school systems:

1. Stability and change are frequently identified as the two most significant features of organizations, communities and societies, and their environments.
2. Systems thinking promotes holism as its primary intellectual strategy for handling complexity.
3. Systems thinking has embraced a process philosophy in order to grasp the way systems develop over time. (Strauss, 2002, p. 163)

A school can be viewed as a system consisting of many key components, each working together to achieve a desired output or goal. Kast and Rosenzweig (1972), Scott and Davis (2007), and Shaw (2009) have agreed on similar components within systems theory whereby information, energy, or material are exchanged within their environments, creating an open system view. Shaw (2009) explained that before any system can be fully evaluated, the components below must be fully realized:

1. Inputs refer to the sacrifice of resources expended by the system in performing the set

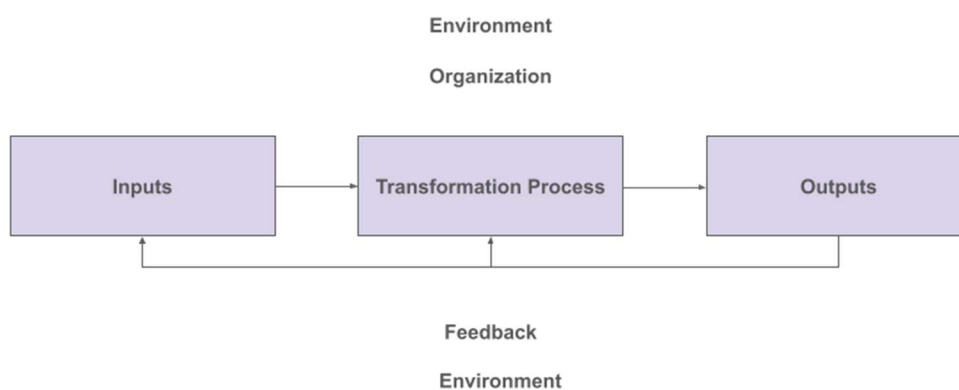
of activities, which constitutes the process.

2. Process is the operating mechanism of the system by which activity results in the transformation of inputs and outputs.
3. Outputs refer to the actual results produced by the process for achieving the system's goals.
4. Goals refer to the desired (planned or potential) results sought by the system. How well the process is working towards achieving the system's goal is evaluated through feedback.
5. Feedback is the control mechanism of the system for monitoring and correcting deviations in the input–output process and the achievement of system goals. Feedback provides information to evaluate the performance variables of inputs, outputs, and goals. (Shaw, 2009, p. 861)

As illustrated in Figure 4, an open school system has inputs, a transformation process, outputs, and feedback (Lunenburg, 2010).

Figure 4

Open System



Note. Adapted with permission from “Schools as Open Systems,” by F. C. Lunenburg, 2010. *Schooling*, 1(1), p. 2. Copyright 2010 by National Forum Journals.

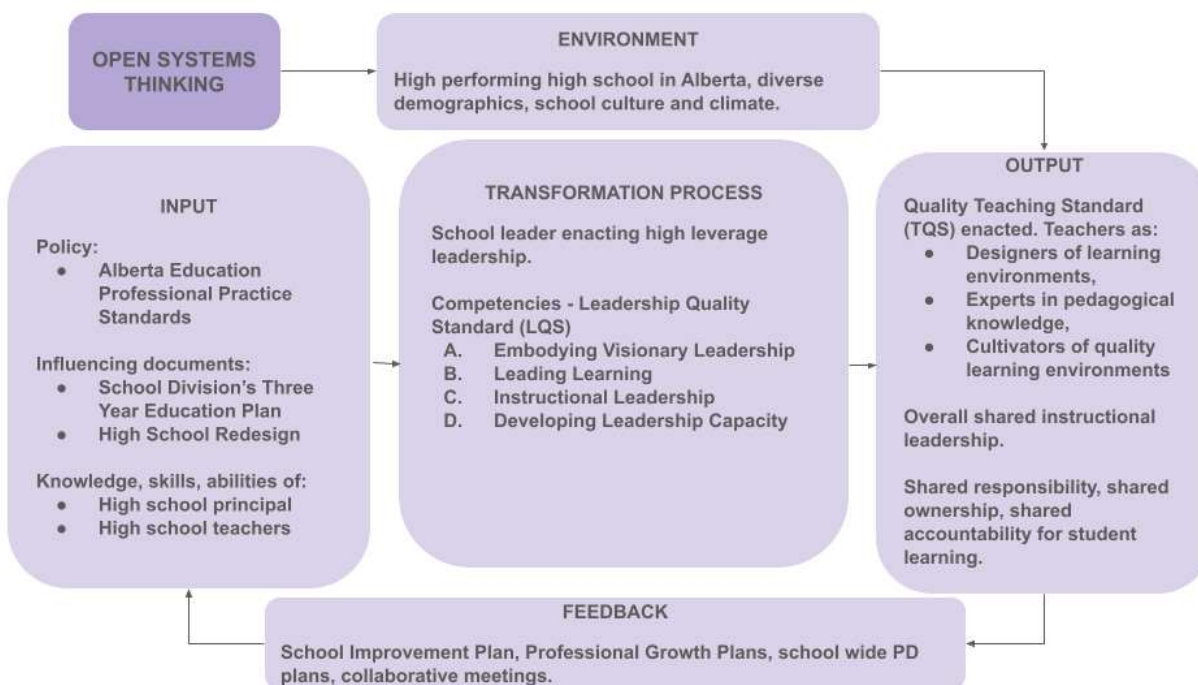
The systems theory approach encourages the development of teamwork, collaboration, learning for life, and exposure to accumulated knowledge and wisdom in an organization; in this case, the school (Laszlo & Krippner, 1998). The members of the organization work together in flexible, adaptive, and productive ways towards a common goal, which seems fitting for a school system focused on student success. Based on a study of understanding through systems theory, White (2013) summarized the components of an open system by stating, “A school system, [such as the one being examined], relies heavily on a cycle of events to achieve the desired results” (p. 36). Zivi (1987) explained that “a system imports inputs from the environment, transforms them, and exports outputs back to the environment” (p. 25). Wilsey (1969) similarly maintained that the input–output cycle is basic to systems operation. This allows the cycle to remain in a repetitive state. As Zivi stated, “Systems maintain a dynamic equilibrium such that the basic character of the organization is highly stable, even though the organization evolves over time in response to internal or environmental changes” (1987, p. 25). This process is what enables systems to survive and adapt to various changing factors. Information processing is also a key ingredient to the functioning of the system (White, 2013). Without both positive and negative feedback, a determination of the success of the system cannot be properly achieved (Zivi, 1987).

Wilsey (1969), in his study of a public high school economic model, contended that “a system is a complex set of elements in regular mutual interaction directed toward reaching goals or outputs. Each component part must be in interaction with the others” (p. 7). Ball (1978) stated, “Systems theory is holistic; it begins with the concept of organization, not of parts which happen to be related, but of relationships which may be studied by examining relevant subfields” (p. 66). Essentially, systems theory begins with conceptualizing reality as consisting fundamentally of relationships among relationships (Ball, 1978).

According to Garland et al. (2018), PD enhances the quality of leadership, which advances the quality of feedback to teachers, that in turn improves the quality of instruction and results in increased student learning. The process of managing such a system requires knowledge of the interrelationships between all the subprocesses within the system and of everybody that works in it (Demming, 1990). Within this single case study of a high school, I used systems theory to gain a perspective of the alignment of organizational structures and processes toward leadership practices and quality teaching.

Theoretical Framework

Figure 5 provides my theoretical framework of an open systems thinking approach. The environment in which this study took place was a high-performing high school in Alberta. I used measures within the Alberta Education's (2020) Accountability Pillar as determinants for the choice of school. Input factors in this system consist of the Alberta Education professional practice standards and guiding documents that served to develop education policies with the goal of creating a robust education system to meet the demands of a knowledge-based society. Additionally, the perspectives, knowledge, skills, and actions of the principal and teachers in the daily enactment of leadership and teaching practices are considered as inputs.

Figure 5*Theoretical Framework*

Ideally, the employment of the four competencies within the LQS enacted by the principal should create an overall shared instructional leadership approach in the school community. Through this approach, principals set the direction for the school, model learning, and shape the conditions for all to learn on a continuous basis, while engaging in targeted actions to improve instruction through collaborative processes. This leadership and collaboration should result in shared responsibility, shared ownership, and shared accountability as quality teaching develops and optimum student learning is fostered. Positive outputs of the system include the development of safe, caring, and trusting environments along with increased teacher efficacy emulated through stronger, united voices, risk-taking behaviours, and confidence in the important work of teaching. Factors such as school improvement plans, personal and school-wide PD plans, collaborative meetings, walk-through processes, and stakeholder feedback

processes will provide principals with continuous feedback to adapt their leadership practices within this open system.

Summary

This literature review focused primarily on the research supporting school leadership practices that align with the four competencies within the LQS (Alberta Education, 2020b); namely, embodying visionary leadership, leading a learning community, providing instructional leadership, and developing leadership capacity. These competencies create overall shared instructional leadership practices that can be purposefully employed toward the improvement of teaching and learning. I chose to explore high school education and the leadership practices of the principal within this context because of a gap in the leadership research regarding principals' abilities to support high school teachers in their instructional practices. The possible reasons for this gap that were outlined in the research included the complexity of the high school environment, the principals' involvement in the management of the school, and principals not having the content-area expertise or pedagogical expertise to support teaching.

A distinction between effective teaching (teaching quality) and effective teachers (teacher quality) was made along with an explanation of the TQS (Alberta Education, 2020d), a policy implemented for all teachers to support quality teaching and optimum student learning. I then explored the learning environment, along with effective teaching frameworks. For high school students, the learning environment and curriculum need to be learning-focused and knowledge-centered. Meaningful experiences that create an environment of co-constructed learning, reflections, and interaction with others are important to these students. Teachers who are designers and cultivators of welcoming, inclusive, safe, and respectful learning environments as well as experts in pedagogical knowledge and inclusive educational practices will become

quality teachers who develop optimum student learning within their classrooms while contributing to the improvement of learners within the entire school community.

Finally, this chapter concluded with an explanation of the systems theory approach as the basis of the theoretical framework for this single exploratory case study research. I explained systems theory from an educational perspective, providing examples of the five components of an open system: environment, input, transformation process, feedback, and output. Knowing that a systems approach can support school improvement, principals need to understand the varying parts within an open system for the transformational process to produce the anticipated outcome.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods

As stated previously, effective school leadership is one of the main drivers of quality teaching, and developing teachers is a leading contribution to student learning outcomes (Barber et al., 2010; Wahlstrom et al., 2010). Knowing that professional practice standards were introduced to school leaders in Alberta in 2018, this study focused on four competencies within the LQS (Alberta Education, 2020b) that may have the most impact on teaching and learning in a shared instructional leadership approach: (a) embodying visionary leadership, (b) leading a learning community, (c) providing instructional leadership, and (d) developing leadership capacity. To explore the leadership practices of a principal and the influence on teaching practice, the following research question was addressed: How does a school principal perceive their leadership practices contribute to quality teaching in an Alberta high school? A supplemental question guiding this research study was: What actions/practices of the principal support teaching practice in an Alberta high school?

This chapter provides an overview of the research process aligned to the focus on school leadership in a high school setting. I explain my chosen research paradigm along with the rationale for using a single case study within qualitative research. A description of the case study research in addition to its suitability and limitations are outlined. I cover data collection methods, data analysis, ethical considerations, and issues of trustworthiness. Using the systems thinking theory, I gained perspective of the alignment of organizational structures and processes used by the principal. I end the chapter with a discussion of the study's limitations and delimitations

Research Paradigm and Rationale for Qualitative Research

I am drawn to the field of social science from a postpositivist, constructivist viewpoint. The paradigm of postpositivism “recognizes that knowledge is relative rather than absolute”

(Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 8), and that “all knowledge can be derived from direct observation and logical inferences based on observation” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016, p. 42). Constructivist researchers are interested in “how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 15). Reciprocity between researcher and participant enables knowledge to be co-constructed in a meaningful way through describing, understanding, and interpreting multiple perspectives and understanding the historical, social, and cultural norms that guide individuals as well as context where people live and work.

From a constructivist-perspective, Crotty (1998) stated “that all knowledge, and therefore meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world and developed and transmitted with an essentially social context” (p. 42). Crotty also pointed out the differences between constructivism and constructionism. Patton (2015) did as well, stating that constructivism focuses on “the meaning making activity of the individual mind... [whereas constructionism focuses on] the collective generation [and transmission] of meaning” (p. 122). Constructivism refers to how individuals make sense of the world as valid and worthy due to their unique experiences, whereas constructionism focuses on how cultural norms affect the perception and understanding of the world as a collective whole (Patton, 2015).

Based on the perspective of Mintzberg (2005), effective leadership “inspires more than empowers; it connects more than controls; it demonstrates more than decides” (p. 143). Currently, as superintendent in Alberta, I am blessed to work collaboratively alongside effective leaders. These leaders include principals, vice and assistant principals, directors, and senior administrators supporting one another in their work, preparing students intellectually, socially,

and physically to care for the world. In selecting a topic of study for my doctoral work, I was drawn to my school jurisdiction's administration team although my ultimate participation site was not from my jurisdiction so as to avoid any conflict of interest. Their average age is 42 years old; youth, creativity, and innovation are abundant, but what comes with youth may be inexperience and lack of confidence with developing systems thinking approaches and engaging in complex change processes. These administrators are master teachers. Their complex role of administrator continually takes them away from the important work of supporting teachers with the instructional core toward optimal student learning. Instructional leadership was not top of mind for administrators, because managing the schools, with all their complexities, had become the priority.

Within this research on school leadership, I hoped to support meaningful conversations and reflections on effective leadership between research participants and I, which provided more insight and understanding into leadership practices that support high school leaders and teachers. Through the interactions, we recognized that we have shared experiences as leaders and teachers. Through generative dialogue and meaningful engagement, an understanding of leadership emerged.

My chosen methodology was qualitative research using a case study approach. The inductive process of qualitative research has three main purposes: "to achieve an understanding of how people make sense out of their lives, delineate the process (rather than the outcome or product) of meaning-making, and describe how people interpret what they experience" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 15). Researchers, school leaders, and teachers understand that praxis involves both theory and action, as "each informs the other, and we must remain open to allow for changes, disagreements, and growth as the result of inquiry" (Kincheloe et al., 2017, p. 240).

This idea speaks to the importance of fluidity, adaptability, and openness as new information presents itself within research to bring about enhanced positive change for both leaders and teachers, who indirectly and directly affect student learning. From a leadership perspective, qualitative research speaks to the very core of the collaborative nature of leadership—professionals engaging in deep conversations about inclusive, authentic, safe environments within the context of their work. The natural setting for school leaders, therefore, is the context they are currently leading in and their ongoing analysis of the context. In addition, the decisions about what leadership knowledge and abilities school leaders apply could result in creating, developing and/or enhancing quality teaching practices for teachers.

Using a Case Study Methodology

Case study research has undergone significant methodological development over time and has evolved into an effective methodology to explore complex issues within real-world settings, particularly in the areas of social sciences, education, business, law, and health. Case study research as a form of qualitative research methodology is defined as “an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system, a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries” (Merriam, 2009, p. 40). Creswell (2012) defined the case study as “an in-depth exploration of a bounded system (e.g., activity, event, process, or individuals) based on extensive data collection” (p. 465). This study was bounded to one high-performing high school in Alberta, the high school principal, vice principals, teachers within the school. The phenomenon or unit of analysis is principal’s leadership practices. Yin (2018) pointed out that the case is studied in-depth and within a real-world context. Differences in perspectives occur in the process of conducting case study research, specifically in the unit of study, the case, and the outcome of the inquiry.

Taking these definitions into consideration, Merriam (2009) concluded that “the single most defining characteristic of case study research lies in delimiting the object of the study (the case)” (p. 40), and that is identifying the “what” of the study within the unit of analysis and the “interaction of significant factors characteristic of the phenomenon” (p. 43). Yin (2018) summarized case studies as “the study of a contemporary phenomenon within its real-world context” (p. 88). Within the unit of analysis, an in-depth focus on the principal’s leadership practices, the context, and the structures and processes developed to support teachers, a more holistic view of leadership emerged in the study.

The phenomenon in this study was the principal’s leadership practices. This could be the result of the principal’s lack of expertise in all subject areas, the complexity of high schools pulling principals to managerial duties, and/or the attention drawn to high stakes testing and accountability. The focus of this study was on one high school principal’s perceptions of their daily enactment of high-leverage instructional leadership competencies that positively influence teachers’ instructional practices. I took a heuristic approach because I am passionate about the role of the principal and curious how principals’ actions can continue to influence and support the quality of teaching in Alberta high schools. Through the implementation of the four competencies, principals collaboratively create the vision for a school toward a more coherent approach to instruction and improvement (Fullan, 2009; Kouzes & Posner, 2021; Leithwood, 2012; Murphy & Seashore Louis, 2011; Robinson, 2011). Principals who become learners alongside teachers challenge and support them, as well as shape conditions for teachers to learn (Hallinger, 2005; Leithwood, 2012; Marks & Penty, 2003; Robinson, 2011; Sheppard, 1996; Timperley, 2011). Principals who have strong instructional leadership practices set high expectations for student achievement, keep track of teachers’ professional learning needs, and

create structures and processes for effective collaboration to occur (Hallinger, 2005; Marks & Piny, 2003; Robinson, 2008, 2011; Smylie & Denny, 1990; Timperley, 2011).

Following Merriam and Tisdell's (2016) definition, in this single case study of leadership practices I used the theoretical framework of systems thinking theory to focus on the practices of a principal exemplified in a high-performing school and characterized by teachers as they focused on improving instructional practices.

Research Design and Methods

This section outlines the qualitative single case study design, including the research setting, criteria for school choice, and participant sample and selection. It also covers data collection methods, data analysis methods, ethical considerations, and trustworthiness, as well as a timeline of the study.

Research Setting

This study dealt with a single case study of one high school in Alberta, Canada. Secondary education or high school in Alberta includes students from the ages of 15 to 19 attending Grades 9 to 12.

Criteria for School Choice

Purposeful sampling was used to select a high school (Maxwell, 2005). There are three benefits of purposeful sampling. First, it allows researchers to capture the heterogeneity of the selected population by representing the various events, settings, activities, and individuals. Second, it enables researchers to highlight the similarities and differences among individuals and the settings in which they work. Third, through purposeful sampling, researchers are able to solicit new findings that could be missed from other forms of sampling (Maxwell, 2005).

At the time of this study, the school was selected because it was a high-performing school based on trending data within the three-year average on Alberta Education's Accountability Pillar overall summary. This summary is now called the Alberta Education Assurance Measure, which came into effect in September 2021 (Alberta Education, n.d.-a). These documents are publicly available to stakeholders on school websites. Four areas guided the selection of the chosen high school: (a) safe and caring schools; (b) student learning opportunities, including data on the program of studies, education quality, high school completion, and dropout rates; (c) student learning achievement (Grades 10 to 12), including diploma acceptable and excellence data; and (d) continuous improvement, which focuses on school improvement in the past 3 years.

Participant Sample

“Qualitative researchers work with small samples of people, nested in their context and studied in depth” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 31). In this case study, nonprobability sampling methods were used to determine what leadership practices are demonstrated and the implications of these practices on teaching. I used purposeful sampling to help me discover, understand, and gain insight into the phenomenon under study.

A high school consisting of 500 or more students was selected. Demographics included a diverse student population base with considerations of academics, special needs, and socioeconomic status. Funding in Alberta is based on a per student enrolment grant. A certain percentage is allocated for school administrator designations. The sample included one principal, three vice principals, and five teachers within the school community. A long-serving superintendent of the school jurisdiction was also interviewed.

The purpose of this single case study was to explore the perceptions of one high school principal and how they enacted in their daily work the leadership practices and the four high-

leverage competencies within the LQS (Alberta Education, 2020b) that contributed to the overall shared instructional leadership. I also investigated teachers' perceptions of how these leadership actions positively influenced their instructional practices in high school. In the selection process, I was careful to ensure balance in experience, current assignment, and range of positions. To guarantee adequate exposure to the high-leverage leadership practices, I used the following criteria for selecting the participants:

- The principal must have been a practicing high school principal at an Alberta school with students in Grades 9 to 12. They must have been at their current school, as a principal, for three to four years or more. The duration of experience was important in this study to observe the structure and processes the principal had put in place. Understandably, the first year of the principalship may focus more on relationship building, observations, and learning about the school climate and culture, gathering data and feedback from staff in regard to areas of improvement. In the second year, the principal is setting up the school goals established from all the work in the first year. The third and fourth year consist of going deeper into the school goals to ensure implementation is happening for these goals to become part of the school climate and culture.
- The vice principals must have had two years of teaching experience and been a practicing high school vice principal for two years.
- Teachers must have had two years of teaching experience and have been teaching in the school for two years or more.
- The superintendent must have been five years leading the school jurisdiction.

Participant Selection

Knowing that it was best not to perform my research in my school jurisdiction, because my superintendent position could be perceived as a position of power, I worked with another Alberta school jurisdiction that supported my case study research. Based on reviewing the Alberta Education Accountability Pillar's overall summary, I emailed six superintendents of high-performing high schools to seek permission to conduct research in their school jurisdiction (see Appendix A for all invitation emails). Two superintendents gave me permission via email to study in their school jurisdiction. I then studied both the school jurisdiction and their high schools' Accountability Pillar results. As well, I read their jurisdiction three-year education plans and school improvement plans. I narrowed my selection to one high school in rural Alberta.

After this step, I sent an email to one high school principal (accessing the email address through the school website), asking them to voluntarily take part in this research study. Within the email, I outlined my research study and made the principal aware that I would be interviewing teachers in addition to the principal interview. After receiving permission from the principal, I sent an email to all teachers and vice principals in the school with an invitation to participate in the study (see Appendix A). Details in the email provided information on interview structure, types of questions, and confidentiality, as well as the option to withdraw from the study before the data were analyzed. Teachers were aware that the interview was not evaluative, but rather an opportunity to discuss leadership practices that supported their teaching within their department and/or subject areas. As noted, participants included one principal, three vice principals, five teachers, and one superintendent. Each participant signed an informed consent (see Appendix B) and participated in a one-on-one interview. Participants received the consent form and the interview questions via email before the scheduled interview. I asked a different set

of interview questions based on job role (see Appendix C). At the outset of the interviews, participants were asked to share their years of experience, current assignment, school, and school demographics.

Patton (2002, 2015) argued that there are no rules for sample size. Essentially, the size is dependent on what the researcher wants to find out, what is considered useful, and what is doable based on the set time and resources allocated to the study. Hence, there were 10 participants in this study, and the sample size enabled me to obtain detailed multiple perspectives. Data analysis occurred in tandem alongside the data collection. I realized that the same responses were being given to the interview questions, causing redundancy of information. A point of saturation was reached with the fifth teacher, who was the 10th participant. Based on research by Merriam et al. (2016), “saturation occurs when continued data collection produces no new information or insights into the phenomenon you are studying” (p. 199). Similar responses to the interview questions were evident and no new insights were being presented, thus a state of saturation was reached.

For the superintendent who indicated interest in the study, but whose high-performing school was not chosen, I sent a follow-up email thanking them for their interest and informing them that based on the interest and criteria of sample selection, their input was not needed at this time.

Data Collection Methods

Foundational to the case study is that the researcher engages with participants so they can share their views (Patton, 2002). Data were collected using the following methods: (a) semi-structured, one-on-one interviews; (b) documents provided by the participants; and (c) reflective field notes. Table 2 shows the multiple sources of data collected and how they were aligned with

the main research questions to ensure that data were triangulated, helping in the credibility and confirmability (trustworthiness) of the findings.

Table 2

Research Questions and Data Collection Tools

Research question	Semi-structured, one-on-one interview questions	Documents
How does a school principal perceive their leadership practices contribute to quality teaching in an Alberta high school? (principal)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What strategies have you implemented as the principal that have contributed to this high performance? • Describe which leadership practice(s) has had the greatest influence on moving your educational community forward? • What evidence do you have to support this? • In your opinion, do you feel quality teaching is aligned to high performance in a high school? • What leadership practices as principal have contributed to quality teaching within this high school? • What are your challenges as a leader in this area? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School improvement plans • Leadership documents • Collaborative meeting agendas • School PD plans • Principal PGP • Alignment with literature review
What practices of the principal supporting teaching practice in an Alberta high school? (principal/teacher)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you describe the culture of your school? • How does your school define student success? • How is the vision for student success, engagement, learning, and well-being shared with staff? How are teacher's part of creating and implementing a shared vision? • Please provide some examples of support that the principal has given teachers in the area of teaching. • What is the benefit to you and the school community in developing leadership capacity among staff? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborative meeting agendas with principal and with subject team members • Professional documents that align with school goals

Research question	Semi-structured, one-on-one interview questions	Documents
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What challenges does the principal have in leading learning? 	

Semi-structured Interviews. Interviews are a common method in case study research design. As deMarris (2004) stated, a research interview is “a process in which a researcher and participant engage in a conversation focused on questions related to a research study” (p. 55). Cannell and Kahn (1968) defined interviews as “a two-person conversation initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research-relevant information ... [focused on] content specified by research objectives” (p. 530). The interview allows for a collection of rich, very personalized information in terms of one’s research questions, providing explanations of the why and how of key events. According to Brinkman and Kvale (2015), interviews are defined as an “attempt to understand the world from the subject’s point of view, to unfold the meaning of the subject’s experiences, to uncover their lived world” (p. 1). Therefore, semi-structured interviews provide researchers with information they cannot directly observe: feelings, thoughts, behaviours, intentions, and interpretations of events. Through interviews researchers can hear another person’s perspectives (Patton, 2015). In case studies, interviews are fluid, guided conversations with a purpose as opposed to more rigid, structured approaches to questioning the participant (Rubin & Rubin, 2011; Yin, 2018). In case study interviews, researchers need to be continually aware of following a line of inquiry to explore their research question while balancing the verbalization of the interview questions in a conversational, unbiased manner (Yin, 2018) through the semi-structured interview process.

For this study, the participants comprised three groups in the high school: principal, vice principals and teachers, and one superintendent. These participants were chosen to highlight the

phenomenon being studied. These participants, through their lived experiences, confirmed details that were known, extended their current experiences, and discovered new meaning and perspectives through the interview process. I conducted the interviews by focusing on different elements within the theoretical framework: the systems thinking theory (Scott & Davis, 2007). The framework helped develop the questions for the individual interviews, which focused on the culture of the school, structures, processes, and strategies implemented by the principal, and the strategies' influence on teaching.

One-on-one interview questions were the primary means of gathering data. I sent the interview questions to participants ahead of time to support the focus of the research study data (see Appendix C). Flexibility was built into the interview process to allow for a deeper focus through probing questions as needed. Interviews with participants were held online via Zoom. Responses were audio-recorded in addition to me taking notes. Both methods were transcribed in such a manner that participants could not be identified directly through identifiers linked to a subject. During the transcription of interviews, each participant was assigned a code number, which was kept separately from their identity. All recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim by a qualified transcriptionist and labelled with the participants' name, school, and date of interview. The transcriptionist signed a nondisclosure form to ensure confidentiality. Data were stored in a password-protected laptop and folder.

Trust, which is key to research, was difficult to develop in just one interview, in addition to the interview being hosted through Zoom. I was cognizant of staying open to all responses and being aware of the types of probing questions I asked. This awareness was achieved through reflections after each interview in developing field notes, revising my interview approach and questioning techniques, and completing transcript verification. I recorded post interview notes

immediately after the interviews as reflective field notes to allow for reflections on verbal and nonverbal behaviour, my thoughts, and links to the research literature. To review the transcripts of their interviews, participants were provided the opportunity through email to clarify meaning, and make additions, deletions, or corrections to the transcription, as part of this process.

Researcher interpretations were not shared with participants. With the completion of this process, no participants chose to change any of the information in their interview transcript.

Artifacts and Documents. Alongside the interviewing process I chose to gather artifacts and documents that were part of the research setting. In the collection of documents and artifacts, I did not intrude or alter the setting, and requesting these documents did not impact the flow of the conversation in the interview process. Artifacts “are usually three-dimensional physical ‘things’ or objects in the environment that represent some form of communication that is meaningful to the participant and/or setting” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 162). In this research study, two text-based conceptual framework artifacts were reviewed, one for staff and the other for students. Some details were not included in this study to help protect the confidentiality of the participants and identity of the school jurisdiction.

Documents were used as sources of data as they were already present in the research setting and determined as both primary sources of data and a pivotal part of the principal’s leadership approach. The principal was asked to share relevant public documents or artifacts that supported their understanding of their leadership approach. These documents provided context to the study, insights into the phenomenon under study, and additional sources of data as forms of descriptive information providing stability within the data collection process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Some of the documents were required by Alberta Education and the school jurisdiction whereas others had been created by the principal to use in a multitude of ways (see Appendix D,

Table D1, for a full document list). The documents were presented in a “wide range of written, visual, digital, and physical material relevant to the study” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 162), which added to the rich, deep description of the narrative developed within the study. For example, the principal shared school improvement plans, leadership documents, collaborative meeting agendas, and PD plans that informed their leadership practices. Table 3 provides a list of the documents collected and analyzed. Documents were kept private, and no sensitive data were shared in the study.

Table 3

List of Documents Collected for Analysis

Documents collected	Justification
School improvement plans	To determine how the principal ensures that the four provincial outcomes in Alberta Education’s (2018a) strategic plan are acted upon through the development of a strategic plan including goals, strategies, and measures.
Principal’s PGP	To explore the professional goals and focus areas of the principal.
Leadership documents	To examine if the principal and/or school administrative team provided information to teachers on focus areas within strategic planning.
Collaborative meeting agendas	To understand focus areas through the examination of topics discussed, format of agenda, and action plans as follow-up for improvement.
Yearly school PD plans	To determine if alignment existed between the school jurisdiction’s goals and the school improvement plan as well as provided a roadmap of professional learning for staff.
Alignment with literature review and theoretical framework	To clarify data from interviews with the literature and begin to summarize findings.

Teachers did not share their PGPs, collaborative team meeting agendas, or lesson plans. These documents were not requested during the interview or used as an interview data source. Knowing that these documents are both professional and personal growth plans, I believed that a close enough relationship was not formed in the limited amount of time with the teacher participants to request these plans. The teacher participants referred often to the PGP process throughout the interview as an important structure that aligned with the TQS (Alberta Education, 2020d), school improvement plan, and their own PGP, resulting in common language and common understanding. These aligned processes were pivotal to move the school forward in the advancement of student learning and well-being.

Data Analysis

Document Analysis. As a researcher I was guided by the research questions and emerging themes and findings from my initial data analysis. I chose a systematic approach to the analysis because as the “primary instrument in gathering data, the researcher relies on skills and intuition to find and interpret data from documents” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 175). In document analysis, authenticity and accuracy need to be assessed, as do the conditions under which the documents were produced. As an educator and now researcher, I was aware of the need to ensure strategic alignment to Alberta Education’s (2018a) strategic plan; therefore, the collection of the school jurisdiction’s 3-year education plan and the school’s CIP were primary sources of documents. Other document sources were the principal’s PGP, the school’s PD plan, and leadership documents.

After assessing the authenticity and accuracy of the documents, I began content analysis and comparison through coding and cataloging. Content analysis is “an unobtrusive technique that allows researchers to analyze relatively unstructured data in view of the meanings, symbolic

qualities, and expressive contents they have and the communicative roles they play in the lives of the data's sources" (Krippendorff, 2013, p. 49). I wrote scripted notes alongside the documents in the development of themes based on frequency and variety within the content and created anchor codes to develop categories to answer the research questions and align to the theoretical framework.

Limitations of document analysis are incongruence to the findings in the interview data and incomplete information in the interview data. Moreover, biased perspectives, distortions, and documents that are not useful for the research or understandable to the researcher can create limitations in analysis. To mitigate these limitations, I structured the interview questions to provide a more in-depth narrative of leadership practices and actions. Probing questions allowed for detail and context within the high school setting. As a researcher, I remained open to the data and did not formulate opinions based on bias.

Data Analysis Methods. The interweaving process of data collection and analysis in this single case study, focused on one school community, led to rich descriptions in relation to answering the research questions and aligning to the theoretical framework. My systematic approach to data analysis first consisted of preparing and organizing the data, then developing themes through the process of coding, and finally presenting the data.

Initially, through the analysis of interviews and document data, focusing on the four research questions, theoretical framework and literature review, I employed an inductive-analysis approach (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Miles et al., 2014) by manually coding first. This coding allowed for the drawing out of themes, keywords, concepts, and categories using data from interviews, reflective field notes, and documents. A manual coding process occurred after each interview as I reviewed my field notes, read the transcripts in their entirety several times, wrote

reflective notes in the margins of the transcripts, and created a Google spreadsheet in the creation of a matrix to support the development of main themes and sub themes. I used a constant comparison method, which involved “systematically comparing sections of text and noting similarities and differences” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016, p. 191). Anchor codes were developed in the analysis of interview data an inductive coding process. Data were managed using a data-accounting log to ensure a repository of participants, sites, and supplemental notes were recorded accurately.

After the initial inductive data analysis, I switched to a more deductive approach to determine the connection between the research questions and related literature about instructional leadership practices, as shown in Table 4. Two methods of coding were used: first- and second-cycle coding (Miles et al., 2014). In first-cycle coding, data were initially summarized through process-coding and values-coding. Process-coding using gerunds (“-ing” words) represented conceptual action in the data. Perceptions of leadership actions were interwoven with (a) the strategic implementation of leadership or teaching strategies, (b) emerging ideas from the introduction of research, (c) change in processes as the result of new learning, or (d) different practices established as the result of feedback. Within qualitative research, process-coding “extracts participant action/interaction and consequences” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 75). Values-coding was used as a coding strategy to develop themes. Throughout the interview process, participants’ beliefs reflected their perspectives on leadership. As Miles et al. (2014) explained, “A belief is part of a system that includes values and attitudes, plus personal knowledge, experiences, opinions, prejudices, morals, and other interpretive perceptions of the social world” (p. 75). Throughout the analysis, participant interviews solicited information in

regard to their opinions on leadership and what they valued in a leader based on their personal experience and knowledge within a high school.

Table 4

Data Analysis Methods

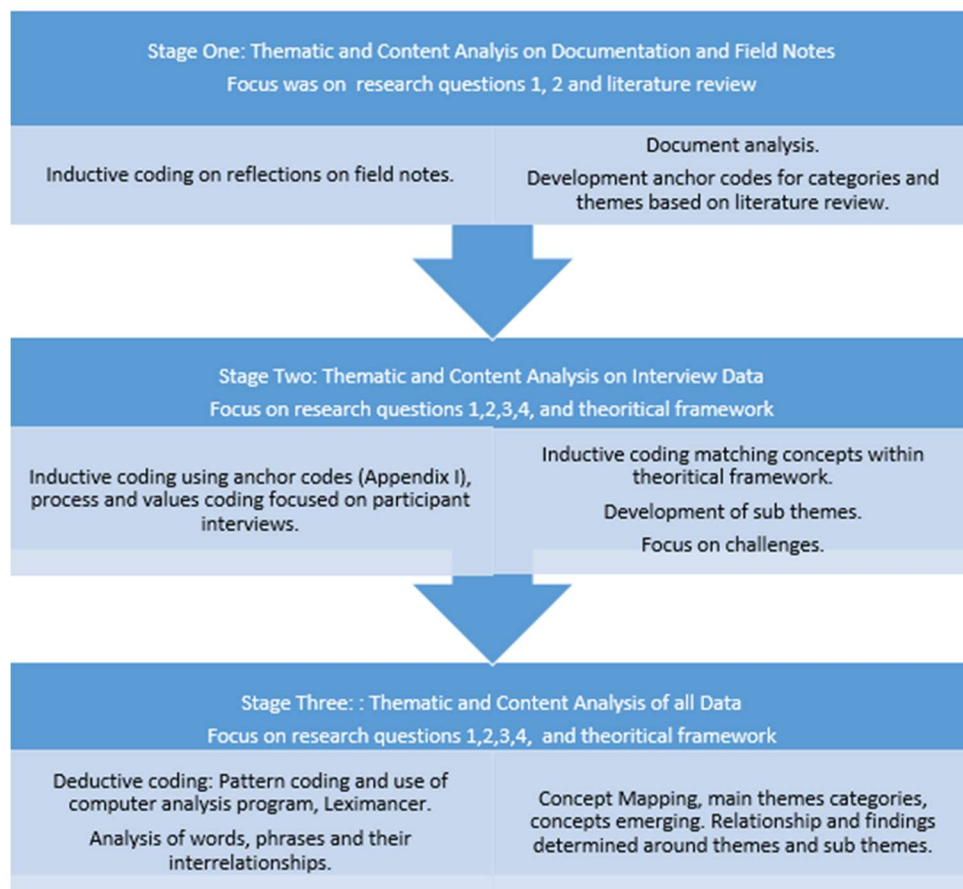
Coding type	Coding level	Relevance to study
Process	First	Conceptual action in the data. Focuses on participants' action/interaction and consequences.
Values	First	Reflect the participants' values, beliefs and attitudes that form their perspective or worldview.
Pattern	Second	Groups together large amounts of information based on commonalities and similarities.
Computer analysis program	Second	Analyzes words, phrases, or collections of words that frequently appear in the text and then extracts key concepts.

Note: Created from *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*, Miles et al., 2014

A computer analysis program, Leximancer (<https://www.leximancer.com/>), supported pattern coding along with reinforcing and affirming the themes developed through the manual coding process. Leximancer is a text analytics tool that analyzes words, phrases, or collections of words that frequently appear in the text and then extracts key concepts. As it is a text-mining software, it provides an impartial and objective context analysis, and serves to verify the codes and categories found in the initial stage of qualitative content analysis. Basically, I used Leximancer to assist with content analysis of the data collected. The concepts and their interrelationships were presented visually through a concept mapping approach. Leximancer coding supports qualitative research while ensuring that the researcher “prioritizes and honors the participant’s voice” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 74).

Whereas Leximancer analyzed the frequency of words and phrases and then provided key concepts, pattern coding supported interview data analysis in finding similarities and differences with large amounts of information; for example, under the concept of the leading learning as a leadership practice. Pattern coding allowed information to be processed into more manageable and meaningful categories and themes in answering the how and why of the study. As shown in Table 4, pattern codes consisted of four interrelated summarizers: categories or themes, causes/explanations, relationships among people, and theoretical constructs (Miles et al., 2014, p. 75).

From the coding process, I created a narrative description supported by interviews and reflective field notes to generate meaning from participants' experiences of school leadership in high schools. Categories were established highlighting themes. Comparisons and contrasts were noted throughout the data analysis. Coding inductively and deductively and using thematic and content analysis, the data were analyzed to examine the leadership practices of the principal (Research Question 1), the influence of these practices on quality of teaching (Research Question 2), and the implementation of the four professional practice competencies on the principal's daily work (Research Question 3). The three stages of the data collection and analysis are illustrated in Figure 6.

Figure 6*Data Collection and Analysis***Timeline**

There were four levels of approval to obtain for this research study to move forward. First, the Conjoint Facilities Research Ethics Board at the University of Calgary approved my ethics application. Second, I sent a letter to one Alberta superintendent in March 2021 requesting permission to complete research in one high school in its school jurisdiction (see Appendix A for all letters of invitation). As part of this permission request, I prepared a school jurisdiction research application process as well. Third, in April 2021, I emailed a letter of invitation to a high school principal in this specific school jurisdiction. Based on participant response, and in

consultation with my supervisor, the participant was matched based on the selection criteria and notified via a participant information email. Fourth, after the principal had accepted the invitation, I sent the invitation emails to teachers and vice principals within the selected school, inviting their consideration to participate in the study. Respondents who were not selected for this study because they did not fit the selection criteria were notified through a follow-up email and asked if they would like to receive information on the study upon completion. Interviews occurred during the months of April to June 2021. Transcripts were shared within 2 weeks of each participant's interview. Participants were asked to review the transcript for errors in participant responses to the questions or to provide additional information to the interview questions.

Ethical Considerations

Merriam (2009) stressed that attending to ethical issues is vital in relation to the protection of participants in a research study. Of key consideration within this research study was ensuring the trustworthiness of the study while protecting the participants and their need to know they were being treated fairly (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The rights of the participants were protected by aligning the research design to the guidelines within the University of Calgary ethics review. The study was also subjected to the selected school jurisdiction's ethics review process. The following safeguards were utilized to protect the participant: informed consent, privacy and confidentiality, and balancing harms and benefits.

Informed Consent

Participants were asked to voluntarily participate in the study via an introductory email outlining the research objectives and design, including data collection methods and procedures. Within this email and before the interview process, participants were assured that the study was

nonevaluative. To participate in the study, each participant was asked to read and sign a consent form based on the information described above (see Appendix B).

Privacy and Confidentiality

To ensure privacy and confidentiality, in the initial invitation letter and immediately before each interview, participants were informed that they could opt out of the study, refuse to answer questions or be audiotaped, and request that any information shared during the interview be removed up until data analysis began. Interviews were held via Zoom video conferencing in private settings convenient to both parties and away from nonparticipants. An opportunity was provided for participants to ask clarifying questions. Transcript verification occurred once interviews were completed and transcribed. The interview transcript was sent via email from my University of Calgary account to each participant to review, edit, and approve.

All participant information, such as individual interview recordings and transcripts, were kept in strict confidence. Pseudonyms were used for participants, school name, and location. As well, I have used the neutral pronouns *they* and *them* to refer to the principal to avoid revealing gender. Research-related records and data will be stored in my home office in Red Deer, Alberta, in a locked cabinet for 5 years. My supervisor has had access to my raw data, but participant identities have remained confidential. If participants have further questions about the study, my university supervisor or I will be available via phone, in person, or via email.

Balancing Harms and Benefits

Participating in this research study may benefit the school principal, additional school leaders, and teachers in continuing their collaborative work toward enhancing leadership skills and teaching quality. A potential harm was participants feeling a power imbalance, which I

mitigated, and when compared to benefits, the potential benefits far outweighed the possible harms.

Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, from a constructivist worldview, focus should be directed on methodological rigour to ensure trustworthiness (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) because of the pivotal role the researcher plays within the study. To ensure research findings are conducted in an ethical manner, the research design needs to be well thought out and employed. Lincoln and Guba (1985) adopted the concepts of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability to ensure study rigour and to support researcher interpretations.

Credibility

In qualitative research, “people’s construction of reality—being holistic, multidimensional, and ever-changing—and how they understand the world is being investigated” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 243). Lincoln and Guba (1985) referred to credibility as a way of making sense to both the participants involved and to the readers; credible studies are convincing, believable, and trustworthy in answering the research questions. To create a research study that is credible, the researcher needs to recognize that gathering data from multiple sources and by multiple methods yields a fuller picture of the phenomenon under review (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016, p. 176).

Within this study on leadership practices, I adopted several techniques to ensure that the study was credible and illustrated congruency of the findings to reality (Merriam, 2009). First, I piloted the interview questions with principals in my school jurisdiction to ensure clarity and purpose. From this feedback, I created an interview protocol which ensured each interview that occurred over a 3-month period was structured in a similar manner. After each interview, the data

were read, carefully recorded, and organized into initial themes and concepts (see Appendix E). I used a field journal to exercise reflexivity to recognize and clarify any research bias and assumptions. Verification of transcripts was employed for feedback from the participants of their interview. This step helped to ensure that the data was correct and credible. Supervisor reviews and peer checks to discuss research findings were also employed.

Second, the strategy of triangulation was used for increasing the credibility of my study. As Patton (2015) explained, “Triangulation, in whatever form, increases credibility and quality by countering the concern (or accusation) that a study’s findings are simply an artifact of a single method, a single source, or a single investigator’s blinders” (p. 674). For this study, triangulation of planning documents (see Appendix D), interview transcripts (see Appendix E), and conceptual framework artifacts, as well as peer reviews of emerging findings, were strategies used to help cross-examine the research findings in the study. Finally, Leximancer was used as another tool to ensure credibility in coding and theme development (see Appendix F for a sample of the code verification). Leximancer is a computer text-mining software that aids in the triangulation of data through multiple data analysis (Lemon & Hayes, 2020)

Dependability

Dependability refers to the extent the operations of a study and the research findings can be replicated in other studies and will yield the same results. It relates to “whether the results are consistent with the data collected” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 251), and “if the findings are consistent with the data presented, the study can be considered dependable” (p. 252). In quality research, it is important to understand inconsistencies and not exclude them when they occur (Janesick, 1998). To ensure the study’s dependability, factors included following a case study protocol, peer examination, my position as the investigator to check assumptions, and the

creation of an audit trail to illustrate my process of data collection, development of categories, and decision-making throughout the inquiry process.

The findings are consistent and dependable with the data collected (Lincoln & Guba, 2000) by describing in detail how the study was conducted and how the findings were derived from the data. This was achieved through the documentation of my research procedures and coding process whereby themes and categories were consistently recorded (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). In addition, I also drew upon my theoretical model—systems thinking theory (Scott & Davis, 2007). I described and analyzed my findings according to inputs or resources expended, the process leading to transformation, the output or actual results from the process, the environment or setting in which the study took place, and finally, feedback, whereby the system was constantly monitored, corrected, and evaluated based on the performance variables. These factors and that of following a case study protocol led to a more dependable study that could be replicated for future research.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to objectivity in qualitative research; that the research findings are derived from the participant narratives rather than the researcher's assumptions and bias. Confirmability can be achieved through continual researcher self-reflexivity, establishing an audit trail, and triangulation of data. Understanding my role as a superintendent and being an administrator for the past 20 years, and now as a researcher, I needed to continually take a stance of critical self-reflection. I was constantly aware of my identity and positionality—psychologically, socially, and institutionally—as well as my assumptions, worldview, biases, and my relationship to the study on leadership. Then I illustrated how the data were traced back to their origins, the research problem and research questions, in alignment to my theoretical

framework, data collection, and analysis. Becoming more conscious of my stance, the creation of an audit trail helped with reflexivity while also demonstrating dependability in the study. The audit trail ensured continual engagement with the data towards saturation. Reflective field notes illustrated my thought process through journaling; an unstructured, ongoing, informal way to ask myself questions as well as engage in thoughts, ideas, experiences, and struggles. Records of interview transcripts occurring immediately after each interview ensured participant verification of information. In addition, my supervisor, Dr. Chua, double checked my interpretation of the data, raised questions, asked for further clarification, and questioned my understanding and possible biases in my interpretation of the data to ensure my objectivity throughout the study.

Transferability

Transferability is the degree to which the research results can be generalized or transferred to other contexts, situations, or settings. It is the responsibility of the researcher to provide rich, thick descriptions of the phenomenon under study through detailed accounts of the experience. The reader, who then has a fuller understanding of the research, has the responsibility to determine the why and how the research applies to their context. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested, “The burden of proof lies less with the original investigator than with the person seeking to make an application elsewhere. The original inquirer cannot know the sites to which transferability will be sought, but the appliers can and do” (p. 298). Data collection, data analysis, and interpretation of the data will support the reader’s determination of whether and to what extent the phenomenon being studied within a particular context can transfer to another context (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Another technique to determine transferability that I used was to document in sequential order the steps that I took from research design to participant recruitment, interview protocol, and data collection. Rich, thick descriptions of the participants

and their context within the study as well research findings will help readers determine the extent to which the research applies to their context to be transferable to other high school principals, teachers, and school communities.

Limitations

In every research design, there are methodological limitations not in the researcher's control associated with the research design and sampling strategies. One limitation was the choice of using only four of the nine LQS (Alberta Education, 2020b) competencies to determine the practices and actions of the principal influencing the quality of teaching. Another limitation was recognizing that this case study focused on one high school and not multiple sites for research; therefore, subjectivity and positions of power are possible limitations. Designing the study and maintaining rigour within the research process were important considerations. Trust, which is key to the research, may not have been developed throughout the time period of participant engagement; thus, the phenomenon of participant reactivity may have developed (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). That is, participants may have said what they thought I wanted to hear or have been guarded in their responses. Recognizing this limitation, I needed to continually reflect on, and recognize how, I was influencing participants' responses while "creating an atmosphere that is conducive to open, honest dialogue" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016, p. 178). In doing so I remained open to all responses and was aware of the type of probing questions I asked. To become more aware of participant reactivity, I chose to engage in personal reflection after each interview through journaling, revising both my interview approach and questioning techniques as I reviewed the transcripts. Finally, I obtained verification of transcripts from each participant to ensure accuracy.

Another limitation was reduced teacher participation in the study as the result of COVID-19. Data collection occurred from February to April 2021, marking the 1-year anniversary of the pandemic in March 2020. Teachers were tired and stressed throughout the pandemic because of many factors. One was the constant transition between various teaching platforms, from at-home, online teaching and learning to in-person throughout that year. Teachers saw themselves in multiple teaching scenarios, and these scenarios created challenges in lesson delivery, Google Classroom support, and support for struggling learners regardless of where the students were physically located and learning. Teachers who volunteered for the study were scattered throughout multiple subject areas.

A final limitation is the lack of generalizability and transferability of the findings to other settings. Transferability and subjectivity of the study may be limited because the study includes only the perceptions of one principal and the teachers under their leadership. It was important to make the findings descriptive and persuasive so that they would have meaning and resonate with other people, contexts, and settings (Miles et al., 2014). This study could be replicated in other high school settings to determine robustness.

Delimitations

Delimitations are in the researcher's control and are defined as the boundaries or the scope that meet the goals within research study's purpose, answer the research questions, and correspond with the theoretical framework. I chose four competencies that aligned to instructional leadership instead of all nine LQS competencies (Alberta Education, 2020b) based on the literature-informed connection to instructional leadership. To ensure adequate exposure to a variety of leadership practices, I established a delimiting level of 3 years' leadership experience for the high school principal and 2 years' teaching experience for subject-specific teachers. Other

delimitating factors included the limited time of the research duration, small participant size, and the study occurring in one Alberta high school of more than 500 students. In data collection, I could have included a survey to include more teachers and student perspectives. Although students' voices could have enriched the data, including them would have required additional ethics clearance. Classroom observations were another possibility, but with COVID-19, schools were not allowing parents, volunteers, or visitors into their school communities in order to mitigate the exposure of staff and students to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Summary

Chapter 3 provided the rationale for using a qualitative case study approach for conducting research within one high school setting focused on the principal as the leader and how their practices led to quality teaching. Resonating within this chapter was a constructivist approach to the research as the result of creating opportunities to interview the principal and teachers within their school context. Key factors that were important to me were the perception and interpretation of the principal's daily enactment of high-leverage instructional leadership practices and whether these practices positively influenced teachers' instructional practices. Being a single case study, the depth of research into one high school setting and the rich, thick narratives of how principals and teachers interpret and make meaning from their experiences has created a baseline for future research into this topic area.

Within the chapter was a detailed review of my research design, data analysis, and ethical considerations, issues of trustworthiness, and limitations and delimitations of the research methods. Alberta Education's Accountability Pillar tool was used to determine high-performing high schools in Alberta based on their trending data results within specific measures in a 3-year average. Purposeful sampling was used to help me choose participants. Keeping in mind that this

was a single case study, the sample size was smaller than I anticipated, but the participants were comfortable in their context. I studied them in depth to discover, understand, and gain insight as I explored principal leadership practices and the perceptions of teachers that these practices positively influenced their instructional practice.

Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter summarizes the findings of the study from an analysis of the documentation and interviews of key participants. The purpose of this exploratory single case study was to focus on a high school principal's enactment of high-leverage leadership practices that positively influenced teachers' instructional practices. Four competencies were examined: (a) embodying visionary leadership, (b) leading a learning community, (c) providing instructional leadership, (d) and developing leadership capacity in determining a shared instructional leadership approach. Teachers' perceptions of how these leadership practices positively influence their instructional practices in high school were also investigated. By completing this study, there could be an understanding that these leadership practices may transfer to school leaders in other high schools to create conditions that support quality teaching in a high school setting.

This chapter's information is organized by the research questions and the theoretical framework developed from the literature review. Created by Scott and Davis (2007), the systems thinking theory supports leaders in the alignment of organizational structures and processes toward school improvement. The semi-structured questions used in the interviews were informed by four of the nine competencies within the Alberta Education (2020b) LQS. These four competencies support a shared instructional leadership approach in the development of quality teaching and learning as well as provide assurance to the public that educators are striving to achieve optimum learning for all students.

Data from the interviews with participants are organized into sections identical to those used in the protocols as well as the theoretical framework. Participant quotes are included in the findings where appropriate to provide evidence to support the finding. In all cases, when participants used a gender-specific pronoun, I have replaced it with *they* or *their* to further

protect the principal's identity. The study centered on four research questions woven together throughout the findings:

1. How does a school principal perceive their leadership practices contribute to quality teaching in an Alberta high school?
2. What practices of the principal support teaching practice in an Alberta high school?
3. How have the four competencies—embodying visionary leadership, leading a learning community, providing instructional leadership, and developing leadership capacity—contributed to the overall shared leadership practices of the principal?
4. In the daily work of the principal, how are the competencies helpful?

Theme Development

Once the interview transcripts were analyzed, themes contributing to a shared instructional leadership approach in high schools emerged. Each of the themes is discussed and reviewed in detail in relation to systems thinking theory framework (Scott & Davis, 2007). In addition to the interview data, I reviewed artifacts and documents, including the school jurisdiction's assurance plans, annual education results reports, school improvement plans, and the principal's PGP, to gain a more complete understanding of a school leaders' practices as they enacted four leadership practice competencies as identified by Alberta Education.

The findings depict how the principal has enacted the four leadership competencies within the LQS (Alberta Education, 2020b) daily. Other participants, including vice principals, teachers, and a superintendent of the school jurisdiction, allowed me to understand whether they saw similar leadership practices that the principal had indicated. Table 5 illustrates the professional demographics of the participants. These data revealed the vast teaching experience within this high school, from 11 years to 33 years. In the demographic data, six participants held

a master's degree either in a subject discipline or leadership focus. In addition, five participants had taught for over 10 years at this high school.

Table 5

Participant Profiles

Participant role	Years in education	Subject area	Educational background	Years teaching (high school level)
Superintendent (S)	33	Math, Sciences	Masters	11
Principal (P)	21	English	Masters	21
Vice principal (VP1)	20	Social Studies	Masters	7
Vice principal (VP2)	15	English	Masters	4
Vice principal (VP3)	17	Social Studies	Masters	12
Teacher (T1)	26	Guidance Counselling, English as a Second Language	Bachelor of Education	3
Teacher (T2)	25	English	Masters	22
Teacher (T3)	17	Math	Bachelor of Education	17
Teacher (T4)	23	French Immersion, Religion	Masters	6
Teacher (T5)	11	Social, Aboriginal Studies	Bachelor of Education	11

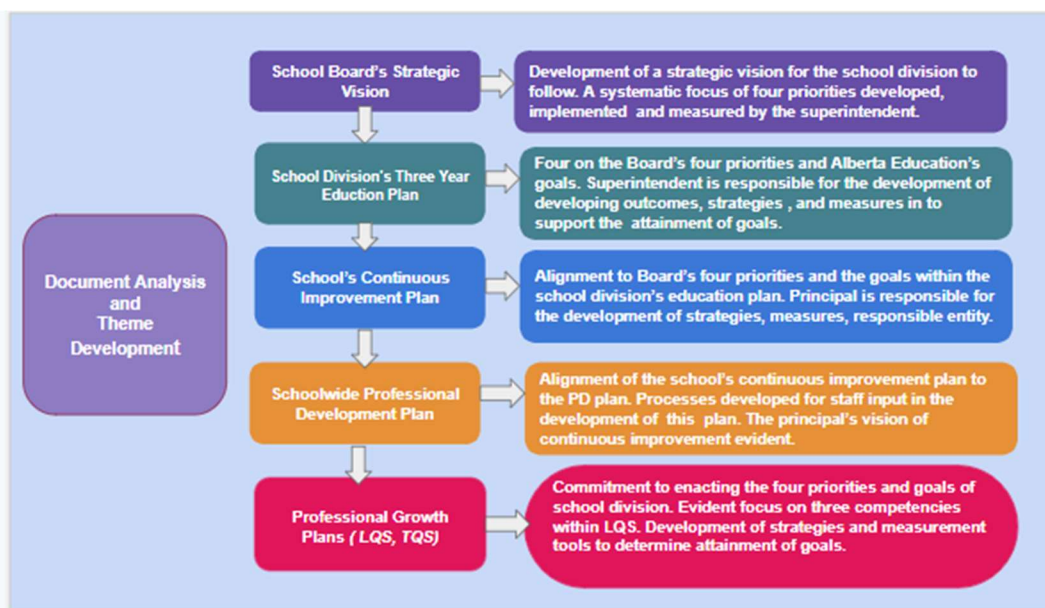
Note: Some information has been withheld to protect the respondents' identities. For the superintendent, the number of years teaching represents number of years as superintendent in the school jurisdiction.

Theoretical Framework: Systems Thinking Theory

The systems thinking theory (Scott & Davis, 2007) was the theoretical framework used in this single case study to understand the alignment of structures and processes that may have led to leadership practices that influence the quality of teaching within this high-performing high school. Within this theoretical framework, five key components create an open system view. These components are (a) input, (b) transformational process, (c) output, (d) feedback, and (e) environment. Shaw (2009) explained that before any system can be fully evaluated, these components must be planned and hoped for. The five components are identified in this section and tied to the research questions, with evidence showing that this high school as a whole system is characterized by the unique synergy of parts working together to create a shared responsibility for instruction.

Research Question 1: How does a school principal perceive their leadership practices contribute to quality teaching in an Alberta high school? The document analysis indicated two key findings to support the first research question. These findings included the principal's leader's practices of: (1) developing strategic alignment to goals and (2) providing assurance to stakeholders that the education system is meeting the needs of all students.

Finding 1: Developing Strategic Alignment. To begin answering the first research question, I analyzed five documents, which included the school board's strategic vision, the school jurisdiction's 3-year education plan, the school's CIP, the schools' PD plan, and the principal's PGP (see Figure 7).

Figure 7*Strategic Planning Document Analysis (Main Themes)*

The development of a main theme continually emerged, that being, the principal ensured strategic alignment was in place. Goals were first developed by the school board, and the alignment cascaded into the school system creating a cohesive, unified focus and a system of accountability within the school jurisdiction. The school jurisdiction's education plan provided guideposts and parameters for the principal of the broad jurisdiction strategies based on goals within Alberta Education's Business Plan. The principal then focused on aligning these goals within their school based CIP based on their ongoing analysis of their school's context, incoming data, and stakeholder input in the development of goals, strategies and performance measures to provide direction toward continuous improvement. For this principal, their perception of quality teaching was the importance of coherency and alignment which included their leadership practices.

Participants spoke about coherency and alignment as well as the development of a common understanding and common language around priorities. From the perspective of

teachers in this study, the principal is a systems leader, a master teacher, a natural leader, a big thinker, and a communicator who sets clear expectations and possesses boundless energy. One teacher's statement that was representative of many teachers' responses was the importance of the principal being a natural leader:

So having either a natural affinity to be a strong leader or a desire to develop those and learn from other strong leaders and make it part of who you are, is something that. . . if you're going to be a really good leader at a high-performing school, you better be doing that or just be that. (T3)

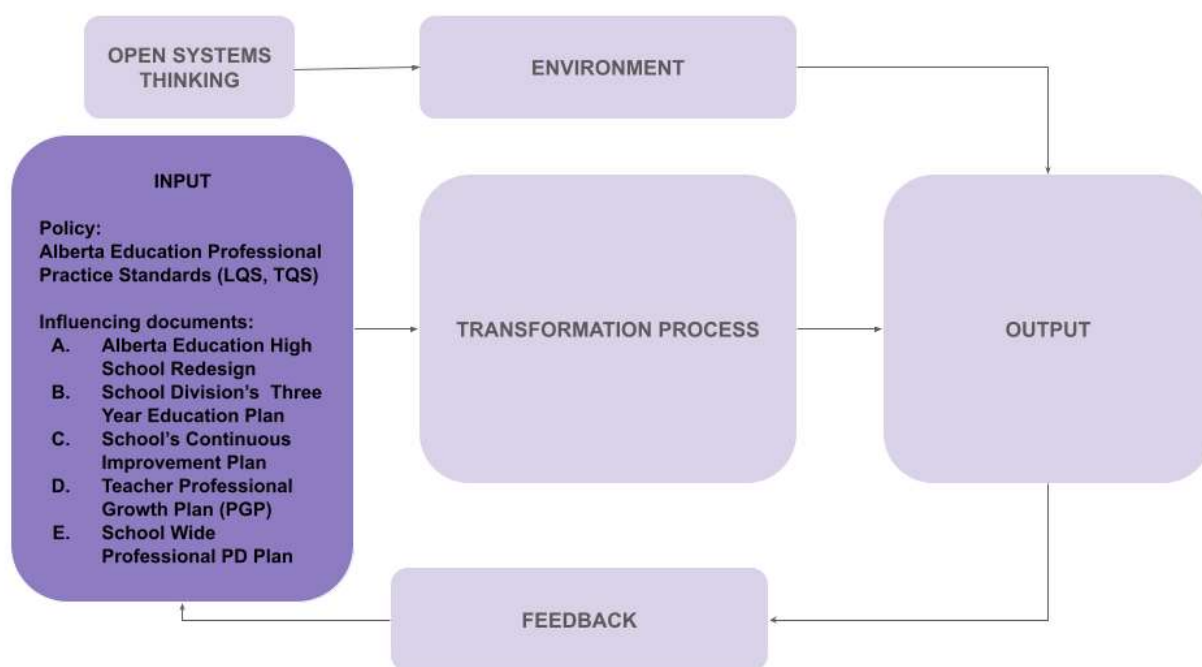
Participants agreed that the principal empowers others through valuing, developing, and challenging both students and staff to be the best version of themselves. The data from participants indicated that the principal is a systems thinker who understands how to break things down while aligning structures and processes.

Finding 2: Providing Assurance to Stakeholders. As reflected in Figure 8, policies such as the Alberta Education professional practice standards, namely the LQS and TQS (Alberta Education, 2020b, 2020d), as well as Alberta Education's (2012) *Moving Forward with High School Redesign* became pivotal resources for the high school principal to implement a student-centered approach toward achieving optimum student learning through teaching quality. Other policies and planning documents included the school jurisdiction's three-year education plan and CIP, and principal and teacher PGPs, which supported the development of a system of alignment and accountability within the school and school jurisdiction. The creation of yearly, collaborative PD plans supported the professional learning of teachers centered on the vision set forth by both the superintendent and school principal. Finally, the perspectives, knowledge, skills, and actions of the principal and teachers in the daily enactment of leadership and teaching practices were

considered inputs providing assurance within this open system approach as shown in Figure 8. The document analysis provided evidence of the findings that the leadership practices of (a) developing strategic alignment to goals and (b) providing assurance to stakeholders were two key inputs within the systems thinking theory (Scott & Davis, 2007). These two practices allowed the principal to build a vision and set the direction for the school toward a shared purpose of continuous improvement. In addition, these two leadership practices as perceived by participants moved them in the development of a more transparent, accountable and responsive approach toward improvement.

Figure 8

Input

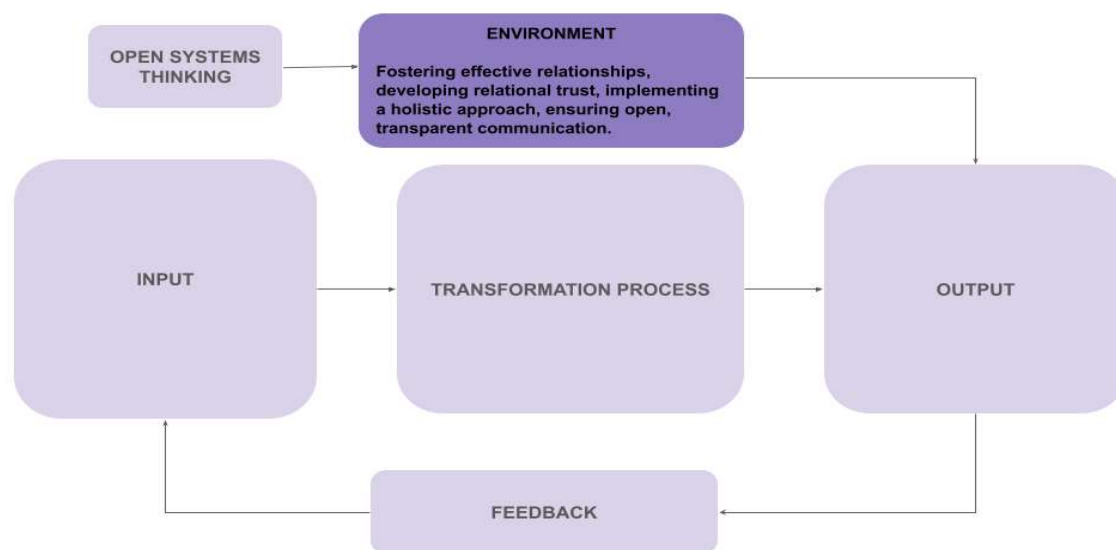


Research Question 2: What practices of the principal support teaching practice in an Alberta high school? The analysis of the interview data indicated three key findings in answering this research question. In the development a supportive school culture the principal focused on fostering of effective relationships and developing relational trust with all stakeholders through the leadership practices that included: (1) creating a progressive culture (2) developing a holistic approach, and (3) creating avenues of open, transparent communication.

The environment in which this study took place was a high-performing high school (consisting of students from Grades 10 to 12) rooted in established practices and traditions, with most teachers in this study as long-time instructors within this school community (see Figure 9). This longevity may be due to the size of the school jurisdiction and the number of schools, limiting the mobility of high school teachers. The low mobility could also be the result of participating teachers in the study having the desire to remain at the high school and continually improve their teaching craft.

Figure 9

Environment



Finding 1: Creating a Progressive Culture. As mentioned by a participating vice principal in analyzing the culture:

There's a tension between conservative and progressive. There's a lot of very forward-thinking people. There's a lot of forward momentum, I think, from us as an administrative team, while trying to respect the longevity and preestablished cultural roots that the school has. (VP1)

In reflective practice, the principal is constantly analyzing the culture of the school, ensuring it evolves and continually moves forward by posing questions to staff such as, "What are the hallmarks of our present culture? What would we like that culture to be? Where do we see areas of growth?" (P). As such, this same analytical process was used when examining instructional practices in the development of a student-centered approach, as noted by a vice principal in the study:

I think so much of what students are going to be learning is an extension of ultimately the vision and the mission that [the principal] signs off. So, I think, whether they realize it or not, what their teachers are engaging them in the classroom is a reflection of, obviously, what [the principal] wants implemented for the culture of the school and what the learning practices of the school are going to be all about. (VP3)

Based on participants' response, a resourceful, innovative culture with high degrees of relational trust has been developed with key focus areas on student engagement, knowing that the school runs a quarter system approach. One teacher in the study described the learning environment as both "high-quality culture and intra-entrepreneurial" (T3), stating: "Lots of teachers are self-motivated, show lots of initiative, start their own programs, come up with their own ideas; they innovate. So, it feels like you are in a group of professionals" (T3). Participants

in the study understand their essential learning outcomes and find ways to deliver content in a variety of ways knowing that they have 3-hour classes, 2.5 days per week, for 10 weeks.

The principal has established the instructional ethos of the school by setting the tone, being supportive, improving instruction, creating structures and processes for collaboration, and supporting a growth mindset (Dweck, 2016) in teachers in the study and students. Based on the analysis of the data from participants, they welcome different challenges, strategies, and approaches. As a member of the administration team in the study reiterated:

[We have] a high-performance oriented culture without increasing pressure. The higher standard, higher expectations have come from our uniqueness—dual track, quarter system, high school flexibility. We take it all in willingly and with rigour. It's part of our daily routine. (VP3)

The culture was described as highly mutually supportive, where teachers in this study believe they can always get help. This environment then leads to the feelings within the school community as relaxed, friendly, and helpful. The high level of trust developed in this high school has led to participants in the study knowing that they are accountable to the program of studies but can be innovative with the instructional design within their classroom. They are also aware of the necessity to follow the strategic plan within the jurisdiction and the school, leading to a tension between progressive approaches and conservative boundaries that ensures a student-centered approach.

Finding 2: Developing a Holistic Approach. A prevailing message from participants throughout the study was the deep sense of community that has been slowly, intentionally, and thoughtfully created through the principal's holistic approach focused on students and staff. Teachers in this study tend to care for one another and want to help provide the resources that are

required by students. Check-ins are frequent, and involvement within the school is high, leading to the development of a positive culture. Feedback from the superintendent was the pivotal actions of this principal in breaking down barriers, intentionally building relationships, and fostering purposeful connections with central office in the development of stronger support systems for participants in the study, which had not occurred in the past. Noted by the superintendent was what seemed to be an “us” versus “them” mentality. Under the principal’s leadership, the superintendent and jurisdiction leaders were contacted often to speak to staff in teams and individually to support participants’ work. The superintendent supported the administration team in learning about the importance of professional practices standards, quality walk-through processes, and effective questioning techniques:

In my thought process, if there was one thing that led to the ability to improve the culture was the really strong relationship that you develop with central office that broke down the barriers between the school and central office. And so, that’s how the culture really, really shifted under [the principal’s] leadership. (S)

Central office created another layer of support for teachers in the study and a strong sense of trusted relationships was formed. Trusted relationships were a goal for the superintendent in leading the school jurisdiction, which was mirrored by this principal’s leadership actions.

In the analysis of the documentation and participant interviews, the school’s conceptual framework was identified. Participants stated that the framework set high expectations for student learning while equipping teachers in the study with the beliefs, knowledge, and skills to achieve them. The conceptual framework was represented in a circular visual; one for staff and one for students. Alongside the conceptual framework were school values including rigour,

relevance, and relationships as key statements setting high expectations, stressing values within the school, and building solidarity within the culture.

Finding 3: Creating Avenues of Open, Transparent Communication. In fostering effective relationships within a trusted environment, communication continued to be a significant leadership practice of the principal. This was evident in the principal's expectations of the administrative team to have one-to-one check-ins with teachers in the study, connections with students and parents, high visibility in transition areas, classroom walk-through visits, and weekly communication updates. The principal shared weekly reflections that started with a key message:

Maybe a story that came to the forefront over the week. Maybe it was a conversation with a student. Maybe it was something that was just an amazing thing that I want to acknowledge. Sometimes it's a struggle. (P)

Participants in the study agreed that the principal authentically projected and demonstrated what it means to be a guiding light of hope and leader to participants and community members at large. Participants agreed that through transparency and vulnerability, this leader possessed an ability to articulate and deliver difficult news along with a sense of hope in challenging times, especially throughout the course of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Within the principal's 2020–2021 leadership PGP, communication was highlighted as evidence of building positive relationships within the school community. Based on the context of the principal's work in the high school, three indicators became focal areas: (a) promoting an inclusive school culture respecting and honouring diversity; (b) modelling and promoting open, inclusive dialogue; and (c) adhering to the professional codes of conduct. The evidence of the principal reaching this competency was the dissemination of important information to staff and

community as well as endeavouring to “walk” a lot of families through the navigation of stress and anxiety evident as a result of the pandemic. The principal spoke about the importance of critical conversations when issues and challenges arise. Most important for the principal was developing the skill set of understanding others’ perspectives by asking more questions about participant’s teaching practices in a nonjudgmental way.

Open, transparent communication informed teachers in the study of the principal’s weekly schedule whereby visibility and classroom visits were a high priority. The visits were not evaluative in nature. The conversations caused participants to be reflective while also building their efficacy because of the questions asked. As the result of training in cognitive coaching and critical conversations, the principal had the skill set to work with teachers, students, and parents in difficult situations. The superintendent in the study said that the principal had their “finger on the pulse” of the school and the principal built trust with all, was well known as a credible, knowledgeable professional and an empathetic and caring person. The superintendent reinforced this perspective regarding the principal and vice principals participating in the study:

And therefore, they knew what was going on in their school, they knew who was doing exceptional, and more importantly, they knew who wasn’t. And that’s the piece of trust that I really appreciated. When you tell me what’s not going good is when you know you’ve got their trust. (S)

Data from vice principals in this study provided evidence that the structures established within the administrative team to oversee key responsibilities in the areas of growth, supervision and evaluation led to building relationships, establishing expectations, and providing support to teachers. As open communication styles and expertise developed within the administration team, teachers in the study who might be experiencing challenges, issues, and/or problems with

teaching or within the classroom had a variety of touch points that they could access based on the administration team's strengths and subject area expertise. Participating vice principals noted that the establishment of a department structure led by lead teachers and the expectation that teachers had the responsibility and autonomy to address challenges first led to a supportive, professional culture.

Important to the vice principals in this study were the school values of relationship, rigour, and relevance. They were developed collaboratively with staff, which created a broad range of expectations for both staff and students. Participating vice principals hoped that teachers believed they had a relationship with the administration team and that teachers understood that they're both asked to teach rigour, but that we hold them to a certain level of rigour. And that we are trying always to invest in relevance, not just how they're delivering their program to kids, but that we want their professional learning and their understanding of their place in our school to be relevant. (VP1)

Research Question 3: How have the four competencies—embodying visionary leadership, leading a learning community, providing instructional leadership, and developing leadership capacity—contributed to the overall shared leadership practices of the principal? Based on participant interviews the following eleven key findings, inclusive within the four competencies, appear to have contributed to a shared focus on enhancing teaching quality within this high school. These key findings are (1) redesigning the organization; (2) cultivating strategic alignment to the vision; (3) facilitating shared responsibility; (4) promoting and participating in learning and development; (5) developing a robust mentorship program; (6) managing the instructional program; (7) fostering student-centered instructional practices; (8)

improving visibility and accessibility; (9) being data informed; (10) establishing a distributed leadership structure; and (11) identifying, empowering, and recognizing staff.

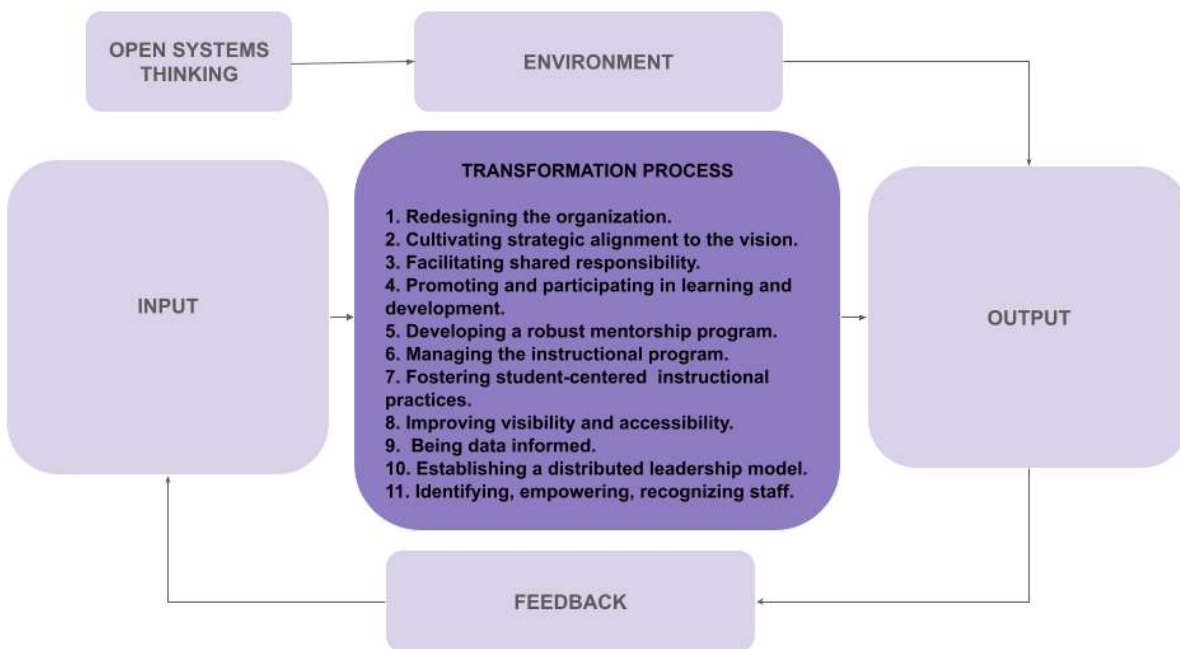
Table 6 illustrates the four leadership competencies and the eleven findings based on data analysis of participant interviews. Each subtheme will be explained within the competency from the perspective of the participants. Challenges of each competency will also be explored later in this chapter.

Table 6

Competency Development and Emerging Subthemes

Competency	Findings
Embodying visionary leadership	Redesigning the organization Cultivating strategic alignment to the vision Facilitating shared responsibility
Leading a learning community	Promoting and participating in learning and development Developing a robust mentorship program
Providing instructional leadership	Managing the instructional program Fostering student-centered instructional practices Improving visibility and accessibility Being data informed
Developing leadership capacity	Establishing a distributed leadership structure Identifying, empowering, and recognizing staff

The transformation process, shown in Figure 10, is the operating mechanism of the system by which activity results in transformation of inputs and outputs; energy is applied toward transforming inputs into outputs. Through the lens of the four leadership competencies, the intentional and unintentional practices of the principal, and collaborative work of the team led to a shared instructional leadership approach.

Figure 10*Transformation Process*

Embodying Visionary Leadership. A leader who collaborates with the school community to create and implement a shared vision for student success, engagement, learning, and well-being is meeting the competency of embodying visionary leadership. Three findings within the competency emerged from the data: (1) redesigning the organization, (2) cultivating strategic alignment to the vision, and (3) facilitating shared responsibility.

Finding 1: Redesigning the Organization. Notably, the principal followed in the footsteps of well-respected leaders. Although already credible with staff as both a master teacher and vice principal in prior roles, the principal needed to become established in the position of principal. Based on pivotal conversations with the superintendent about the need for continuous improvement, development of innovative practices, and making learning better for high school students, the principal stated that the superintendent gave them the following advice after the

position had been accepted: “You have to consider if people are happy because you are status quo, or if they’re happy because they know that you can take them to the next level. Which one is it going to be?” (P) The principal elaborated on their response to this counsel:

I’m like, “Oh.” I never thought about why people would be happy, right? So that really stuck with me, because I just felt I really needed to carve out who I am and how I lead, but to respect the legacy that has lasted in this building and has been a success in the building. How do I maintain those things, but then how do I take us to the next level? (P)

Based on the principal interview, this statement changed the trajectory of the principal’s leadership practices with a focus on redesigning the organization. As a result, the principal developed the mindset of intentionality in their actions toward the redesign. The conversations with the superintendent motivated the administration team to start analyzing their systems, structures, processes, and approaches while learning about innovative teaching methods from other high-performing high schools throughout the province.

These actions, in the view of the superintendent, started the innovation, which was furthered by selecting a new administration team for support. The superintendent stated that “the most important position in the school district is your principal,” (S) thus spending more time with principals and school leaders than anyone else. This administration team began monthly training alongside the superintendent learning about continuous improvement, alignment of goals, and analyzing what student success looked like. Questions included the following:

How do you know? How do you know that you’re doing a good job? And then they started having those same conversations with their teachers. So, you say that the kids are learning, how do you know? And I never said you had to use the results from the diploma exams, but how do you know? (S)

The superintendent changed the conversations then with “What do we know?” Cultures of transparency and learning were being developed as the result of the superintendent modelling to principals and, in turn, the principal modelling to the teachers represented in this study.

Evident throughout all participant interviews was the establishment of clear, consistent standards with high expectations for all. The principal developed and communicated to teachers in this study a sense of purpose: “You’re all in, you’re for the kids, every day bringing your best version of yourself” (P). Participants indicated that professional autonomy and trust were key factors in this high school and the principal stated that there was a fine line between autonomy and what teachers were expected to achieve as a collective group. The principal communicated the importance of professional autonomy while challenging teachers by stating, “This is your job. What will be your legacy?” (P).

Evident throughout participant interviews was the sharing of a new conceptual framework envisioned by the principal that placed teachers at the center, messaging to participants in the study their importance within the organization. The framework, created collaboratively with staff, illustrated the key concepts of imagination, creativity, and curiosity. Within this framework, participants challenged each other to develop a growth mindset (Dweck, 2016) and together created the guiding principles to “learn something every day, make failure your friend, be comfortable with being uncomfortable, keep asking questions, share your knowledge, and have a beginner’s mindset.” By placing teachers at the center of the work, participants in the study noted that the principal was fostering effective relationships, developing relational trust, and promoting collegiality, cooperation, and collaboration. As noted by the principal when asked about one of their essential leadership practices: “Building relationships. It’s taking time to do that... Instead of the students at the center, I put our staff at the center” (P).

Finding 2: Cultivating Strategic Alignment to the Vision. Strategic alignment was another key transformational process that came from the superintendent and was adopted by the principal in this study. The superintendent embraced the Alberta Education (2020b, 2020c, 2020d) professional practices standards, leading the school jurisdiction on a unique approach to understanding and implementing the standards. As a result, the school jurisdiction implemented the LQS and TQS (Alberta Education, 2020b, 2020d) to a high degree, making the professional practice standards goals within their jurisdiction's and schools' CIPs. Training was provided to principals from central office on the standards, and then implementation began in the schools.

As noted previously on the principal's perception of their leadership practices, for example, the importance of coherence and alignment, inevitably strategic alignment of systems was evident in the school jurisdiction's 3-year education plan, the school's CIP, high school teachers' PGPs, and the school's yearly PD plan. Through this alignment, the participants in this study understood the direction and developed common language of the shared vision. As a result, the administrators and teachers in this study were continually learning together about varied approaches for student engagement. While the principal was beginning to understand the importance of developing processes for change implementation that was evident in the school's 3-year CIP, input was sought often from teachers in the study through a variety of feedback loops. At times, as indicated by teachers in this study, the pace was too quick and laden with unexpected initiatives, usually brought on by central office. Although participating teachers valued the input process, they knew that the overarching person behind driving the CIP was the principal, "but it's subtle. It's not in your face" (T1). The principal had specific ideas about what they wanted teachers to do. Sometimes, as indicated by participants, the clarity, focus, and implementation plans needed to be communicated at a slower pace by the principal.

The principal knew that communicating a philosophy of education that is student-centered and based on sound principles of effective teaching and learning was pivotal in their visioning process. The principal was direct with teachers in the study indicating that setting the direction of the school needed to be linked to the school jurisdiction's 's four main goals and the school's CIP. These goals would then feed into both the instructional goals of teachers through their PGPs and PD at the school level as a whole. The principal believed that alignment of goals was essential for the development of teaching quality leading to improved student learning. In addition, the principal believed that this strategic alignment could best be accomplished through a collaborative process while also being realistic about how much teachers could absorb while ensuring that learning fits their context:

But sometimes you feel as a principal that there's so much information out there, and there's so many initiatives, and there are so many priorities. Division has priority. Alberta Education has a priority, and you've got TQS and all these competencies that teachers need to consider. So, I feel like sometimes my job is, how do you take all of that holistically and say, "How can we work towards something slowly over three years," because you're not going to see change in a year. Let's give us some time to breathe with this, really sink into it, go out and try it, and come back and assess and talk to see that. So, I always commit to three, even five, like our next one is looking like it's going to become a 5-year type of a journey for us. And I start really early, and I try to lay the next steps and the next steps. (P)

The principal indicated that they were beginning to understand the importance of pace to develop awareness, understanding, and implementation in goal setting experiences towards sustainability.

The focus on alignment led to a pivotal process developed by the principal that provided attention, depth, and detail to teachers' PGPs. Understandably, most school leaders meet in consultation with their teachers about PGPs, but this principal gave PGPs utmost importance and priority, which led to substantial benefits for teachers in the study. The principal challenged teachers to align their growth plan goals with the school's CIP and the TQS competencies (Alberta Education, 2020d); goals then becoming a purposeful connection to the vision and "powerful motivators to align with the standard" (S). This process provided teachers in the study with the opportunity to create and share professional goals with their principal through one-on-one meetings. These meetings, held at the beginning of the year, allowed the principal to understand the learning goals that each teacher wanted to engage in for the year. As a result, teachers in this study felt valued, heard, and respected. The principal would then support the teacher and was continually looking for possible resources to support the achievement of goals. Near the end of the year, teachers in the study were expected to critically reflect on their learning to determine if they had met their goals. A final meeting was hosted by the principal with each individual teacher. "The teacher suddenly started to begin to understand, this work is actually the work we're doing for the school and for the division. And maybe some of them didn't fully appreciate it [at first], but they got it" (S).

Based on participant interviews, the TQS (Alberta Education, 2020d) became a foundational document in this high school, holding teachers in the study accountable for their decisions about which pedagogical knowledge and abilities to apply. Participants stated that the TQS became part of all conversations about teaching. Through this process, the principal revealed that they were modelling a commitment to professional learning by identifying opportunities for improving teaching and learning, but also was able to build personal and

collective professional capacities and expertise of teachers in this study. The superintendent used the following analogy with school leaders,

You're going to have lots of dots wherever you are in your school. And what a really good leader does is to help people connect the dots. And so that is what shared vision is. The best thing high schools can do is connect the dots. A good leader needs to understand the shared vision approach. (S)

The superintendent stated that this high school had a good leader who understood how to connect the dots and, as a result, teachers in this study became forward thinking, involved, and progressive. When discussing this approach with the principal, it was evident that they placed these meetings as priority, knowing the reciprocal impact:

I read them all and I respond to them all. And I have one-to-one check-ins over the year. It's tough, but you've got to make time for those things. You know what you're doing, and your goals, and you're supported and you're feeling loved, and you're all those things. Then I do think that then ricochets out, I really do. (P)

Vice principals in this study witnessed the framework established for the teachers' PGPs, challenging staff to bring into line the school vision and competencies within the TQS. This process created so-called *nonnegotiables*—expectations not open to debate or modification—and, in turn, opportunities for collaboration and conversation among staff on specific goals as they engaged in peer-to-peer mentorship. Vice principals in the study expressed that a supportive network for risk-taking and innovation emerged: “It’s a growth aspect. It’s okay, so we didn’t get it all. Where didn’t we go right? Is there something you are going to continue to pursue? Or is it a change in direction because something else changed” (VP3). Teachers in this study came to know that they would be supported in their chosen PD with the expectation that they would

return from PD and give back to staff. One vice principal in the study coined this process as “the anchor,” or total transparency in the expectations surrounding PD. The participating vice principal stated that if participants in the study need something, they develop the plan or explanation, and the principal finds the resources to support them.

From the viewpoint of the teachers in this study, the PGPs became an opportunity for the principal to encourage them to see the process, structure, and alignment of visioning school goals to fruition in its fullest capacity. These teachers spoke about the sense of value, empowerment, respect, and professionalism because of the PGP process. The principal expressed that they did not want this document to become an exercise in compliance, but rather one that allowed for infusion of the shared vision into everyday teaching practice while developing professional autonomy. Participants spoke about the intentionality of the principal, which was key to this process. The principal prioritized meetings two times per year with teachers as well as completed check-ins through conversations and emails. The group of teachers in the study had never experienced this before. As a vice principal in the study stated: “I have never had a principal I’ve ever worked for who’s ever taken the time to read, respond and put the emphasis that [the principal does] on growth plans” (VP2).

Finding 3: Facilitating Shared Responsibility. As an experienced leader, the principal knew that the vision for continuous improvement needed to be a collaborative, shared process for both the individual and collective work of the staff to be realized. In this high school, the principal knew that a process to develop a CIP collaboratively would be new learning for staff. Based on interview data, with previous principals, staff had not engaged in input processes. Traditionally, the CIP had always been the sole responsibility of the principal, as shown in this statement which teachers in the study heard often: “Here’s Alberta Education, here is our

jurisdiction priorities. So, it just makes sense that school priorities are these, and then it's shared with staff' (P). Not having been involved in the CIP process as a former teacher and vice principal, the principal chose to make a pivotal change and took steps toward a shared responsibility approach. The principal defined the process in this fashion:

I flipped it. And I basically said to them [teachers] that they are going to write the CIP with me. That was an interesting thing because you would just assume that everyone was invested as I was. And a lot of them went, "What is a CIP?" And so, I had to walk it back and go, "Wait a minute. I wonder how many of you actually have read a CIP, our own CIPs before." That the former principal with blood, sweat, and tears, would write this thing. It would be phenomenal. I don't think anyone read them. (P)

As a result of participating teachers' lack of understanding about continuous improvement, the principal reminded them first of their responsibility as a professional to grow both individually and collectively then placed the ownership of the CIP into teachers' hands, stating:

Growth only comes if you establish goals to work towards. It is our professional obligation to be invested in the progress of this school. And it is your professional obligation to submit to me a working growth plan that echoes some of these outcomes, some of these things that we've established. I think they understand that every single one of them is a contributing member to the bigger picture. (P)

Support from the administration team was evident throughout this new approach as indicated by participating vice principals in the study. Adult learning strategies were utilized, and teachers in the study had the opportunity to provide their input collaboratively through low-risk and high-risk processes.

Participating vice principals agreed that the structures and frameworks established by the principal and administration team provided the impetus for creating and implementing a shared vision. They stated that high school departments are many but led by reputable lead teachers, which helped acculturate staff to the vision. As one vice principal in the study noted when asked about the visioning process with staff,

I would like to think that we have a good balance of the push, pull. Of pulling people towards the things that we want to see, but allowing people to be part of the impetus, part of the momentum to get there. (VP1)

From the perspective of two vice principals in the study, the vision of the school seems to be broad enough that there is room for the administration team to lead the vision while providing space for participants' diverse perspectives and interpretations, and flexibility to enact the vision within their classrooms. As a participating vice principal noted:

But I do think that there's an intentionality of aligning the vision that we have informally or formally created among the administrative group as a manifestation of the priorities that the board has as we express it through our planning. But then we allow that entry point for teachers to become the vehicle of how that is delivered or how that's interpreted. So I think people align with that vision, but we give them the flexibility of how they're going to align with that vision. (VP1)

There was an agreement with all three vice principals in the study that the PGP process has moved teachers toward understanding the broader goals as the result of alignment. They stated that teachers now naturally nest their professional goals underneath the four larger goals. In this school, participants in the study noted that they are provided with autonomy, flexibility, and trust to deliver the curriculum knowing there are also highly professional expectations. In

addition, participating vice principals have witnessed importance, intentionality, and degree of diligence of the principal around plans ensuring that teachers are stretching themselves, aligning with the vision, and understanding the importance of accountability for growth. This process set a bar of standards expected and communicated by the principal. As indicated by a participating vice principal: “I think that it’s just kind of become the standard that we’re able to call upon staff, and students, and in our community in general to make high performance, high expectations and standards, the sort of expectation” (VP3).

The analysis of the interview data showed agreement of the importance of the CIP collaboratively developed first by the administration team as they mapped out a 3-year cycle of priorities. Vice principals in the study indicated that in supporting the philosophy of dispersing leadership roles, the PD committee would develop the PD plan for the year after the initial work from the administration team. A key feature of this PD plan was its development as a collaborative process. One vice principal in the study provided an example of this process in the development of an interdisciplinary approach to teaching that the principal had witnessed success from another high school, and thus wanted to implement the concept. The principal needed to demonstrate the rationale of this approach; therefore, they took the lead at the beginning of the process to explain the significance of the concept to student learning. Otherwise, they stated, leading learning was shared with formal and informal leaders.

Vice principals in the study spoke about the importance of input and feedback from staff as ideas and concepts were shared. The administration team spends time with different departments, engaging in conversations, finding out how the approach would fit into teachers’ context, clarifying expectations, and developing support to guide the next steps. In agreement with the principal, vice principals in the study supported teacher autonomy and witnessed

alignment of teacher growth plans with the vision of the school. One participating vice principal called this “liberating constraints” when defining teacher PD:

We want to free people up to have conversations and free people up to pursue the areas they think are important, but it’s got to still be inside the structure of what we identify the need of the school to be, right? So, you as an individual have an individual professional need or interest that you want to grow, but we also have a responsibly and vision for the school’s professional development and where we want the staff development to move.

(VP1)

Stating that their principal is a “big picture thinker,” when teachers in this study were asked if they were part of creating and implementing a shared vision for the school, unequivocally they all agreed they were building the future together. The structures and processes developed by the administration team ensured participating teachers’ voices were listened to and valued; they felt respected. As one teacher in the study passionately said when asked if they had a say in the vision of the school: “I know I do. I also know that what I’m doing is respected here. I know that. I am listened to, and I know that through practice, and they also tell me” (T3).

In reviewing past practices, one teacher stated that “the progressive movement has created a positive environment in which to work” (T3). They enjoyed using adult learning techniques such as brainstorming, gallery walks, and collaborative conversations to set the tone and keep the interest in the visioning process. This participating teacher said that expectations were set immediately by the principal, and open communication allowed teachers in the study to develop a CIP that aligned with their subject area or specialty.

The teachers here experienced the vision of the school completed together in a “lateral, horizontal type of learning” (T4). Then they saw this vision unfold throughout the year, which they said continually influenced their teaching and, in turn, student learning. In key meetings with teachers in the study and the administration team, progress was reported on the four key goals within the CIP and their influence on student achievement. Information was disseminated from teachers in the study to department meetings to ensure alignment to the set goals. Throughout the year in PD, exam breaks, and semester meetings, data were dissected both informally and formally to ensure goals were being met and teachers in the study could pivot as needed to meet student needs. Important to note that in a very difficult year, participants knew that the principal had one expectation within the vision: “keeping students and staff safe throughout the entire time during the pandemic” (T1). This “one thing” allowed teachers in the study to focus on their teaching and students to focus on their learning.

Leading a Learning Community. To meet the competency of leading a learning community, a leader nurtures and sustains a culture that supports evidence-informed teaching and learning. Two findings emerged from the data surrounding this competency, including (4) promoting and participating in learning and development, (5) developing a robust mentorship program.

Finding 4: Promoting and Participating in Learning and Development. Based on the interview data, the principal is first and foremost an expert teacher who exhibits traits of a lifelong learner, being well read and aware of the most current educational trends and research. The principal remains on the leading edge of effective PD strategies, offering book studies, developing partnerships with universities, and providing resources that support teachers with effective instructional and assessment strategies within a high school setting. This was evident

throughout participant interviews, first in the importance the principal placed on the TQS (Alberta Education, 2020d) and second in the alignment of PGPs, the CIPs, and the school-wide PD plan, as previously discussed.

Maintaining the philosophy of teacher autonomy coinciding with high expectations and adhering to professional obligations, the principal reiterated the importance of learning together. They made statements to teachers in the study such as “I’m going to walk alongside you and learn with you” (P) and positively affirmed participants while continually promoting and participating in learning. Participants stated that the principal shaped the conditions for all to learn and needed teachers in the study to know that their PD was not “admin or principal led” (P), but theirs to design and implement. Participants would own the direction of PD over the next 3 years in a supportive and trusting environment and were challenged to think ahead and stretch themselves as professionals:

So we start with where are we now. Those critical thinking routines. What do I know now, and what do I want to know, and how do I get there? So those sorts of things. And really empowering our staff to feel like they do bring expertise to the table. We are the experts, right? (P)

Teachers in the study knew that they were respected as professionals and could make decisions that were best for their students and fit the context of their classrooms.

The analysis of the interview data revealed that mastery learning is a key leadership practice for the principal. Knowing that the principal is a master teacher and had completed a master’s degree with a multiliteracy and global literacy approach, the principal chose to focus continuous improvement on literacy, numeracy, and interdisciplinary approaches within the high school experience. The principal created pivotal partnerships with university professors who

worked with the teachers in this study in the first year of PD establishing working definitions for literacy and numeracy within a high school context:

And so then what we did over the next three years was really take a look at what we're doing, what we're saying, how we're instructing on those two concepts. We even used quite a lot of the approach, not approaches, but the outcomes on the literacy, numeracy, progressions, and really looking at what that meant in a person's context. So even if I teach music, how am I a literacy teacher? How am I numeracy teacher? If I teach art, how is that working? Our third year was interdisciplinary projects. (P)

The superintendent stated that students see that their administrators and teachers in the study continually invested in improving themselves and providing role modelling to students for learning.

Finding 5: Developing a Robust Mentorship Program. Mentorship was a key leadership practice of the principal. For example, the principal spoke about the influence of their immigrant parents as their strongest inspiration throughout life, cultivating ideas such as continual learning, goal setting, and commitment. A common message in the principal's family was "challenges provide growth," as both immigrant parents were extremely hard workers. The principal also spoke about the influence of mentors from university professors to past principals, to superintendents. The principal revealed that mentors modelled the importance of setting expectations and high standards for them, building strong foundations, and the importance of taking risks in learning.

Teachers in the study stated that in this school community they had a mentor, whether they were beginning in their career or well established in the profession. Mentorship was established based on goals set from the PGP meetings with the principal. The process included

matching the participating teacher's focus areas, common goals, and strategies for the year with that of another teacher. Beginning and intern teachers were the focus of mentorship for the administration team, where coteaching became a pivotal strategy of instructional support. For these beginning teachers, the principal reiterated the importance of communicating the high standards expected at the school while modelling strong instructional practices and providing a network of support. The administration team in the study ensured they spent time with the beginning teachers because they recruited them as interns (student teachers) from the university. They instilled a sense of belonging, set expectations, provided support, and offered gentle guidance in retaining their beginning teachers.

Reiterated often in the teacher data within the study was the fact that the principal was on the leading edge of new concepts in education; they were well researched and knowledgeable, while continually seeking out resources and teaching strategies. In essence, the principal “exemplifies what they hope we can do” (T4). Teachers in the study discussed the many conversations with the principal about professional growth and the ability of the principal to ask questions that “nudged” them into thinking differently, taking risks, and believing in their ability: “And it’s scary, but yet now I am so excited because I had it in me, the principal just saw it” (T5). Participants agreed that open communication, leading by example, and supporting teachers in the study in their development as professionals were key leadership practices of their principal.

Participants spoke about the strength of the principal to develop an administration team, exemplifying high trust with abilities to enact the vision. Phases such as “united front,” “work in team,” “the best functioning leadership team I’ve ever had in any organization ever,” and “high

energy, smart, sense of humour,” to name a few, spoke to the credibility, trust, and respect teachers in the study had of their administration team.

Knowing the diversity within the school population, participating teachers spoke about the pivotal approach of the principal to support the permeation of the LQS competency, “Supporting the application of foundational knowledge about First Nations, Métis and Inuit” (Alberta Education, 2020b, p. 4) into both leadership and teaching practices. Teachers in this study highlighted the importance of acquiring foundational knowledge through PD sessions and resource sharing. More important, though, was the collaborative visioning process whereby the First Nations medicine wheel was integrated into the conceptual frameworks for both students and staff. The frameworks were created in a circular fashion matching the colours within the medicine wheel.

Knowing the importance of the framework to their work, teachers in this study began to become more aware of the historical, social, economic, and political implications of First Nation treaties and agreements, Métis legislation, and residential schools and their legacy. Together they started to align resources and build their capacity to support First Nations, Métis, and Inuit student achievement with a deeper understanding and cultural awareness. One teacher within the study gave an example of the use of Indigenous resources in an English class. This teacher chose to use the novel *Someday*, by Drew Hayden Taylor (1993), which would connect students to real, tangible Indigenous literature. In addition, the principal supported the teacher in the development of a unit about a woman in the Sixties Scoop alongside a First Nations expert, knowing that some of the students’ families may have experienced this trauma.

In speaking about these teaching approaches, the participating teacher said:

Boy, the kids react well to that kind of thing. That's one of the things I love doing. I think that's important, and then I see that all over the school. It's amazing how you can have it in every classroom, but it does require teachers, then, to take it on. (T2)

Teachers in this study agree that work is continual in this area. In the explicit practices of participating teachers to embed foundational knowledge into teaching practices, the entire school team was working towards creating an inclusive learning community in which diversity was embraced while developing a shared responsibility for success for all students. "We really try to focus on how each kid can succeed to the best of their abilities, and it's interesting; that doesn't fit a cookie cutter mold" (T3). As the data indicate, if a program is not available to meet student needs, then the principal encourages teachers in the study to become creative and make the program. "Every group gets for what they can achieve, and some groups need a little bit of boosting up. . . just kind of make sure that they reach their potential, they're not lost, which is really good" (T2).

Providing Instructional Leadership. Based on the LQS (Alberta Education, 2020b), providing instructional leadership is defined as a leader ensuring that every student has access to quality teaching and optimum learning experiences. Findings identified within this competency were: (6) managing the instructional program, (7) fostering student-centered instructional approaches, (8) improving visibility and accessibility, and (9) being data informed.

Finding 6: Managing the Instructional Program. Evident in the data was the principal's focus on goal setting, development of strategies, and alignment of achievement measures within the CIP. The principal ensured that student learning, achievement, and well-being remained as key focal points within this high-performing high school. Once the direction of the school was collaboratively set, the PD plan supported the CIP. Based on the interview data, participants in

the study stated that the principal was a key member of the school PD team providing the rationale for new learning, reminding them of the alignment to the vision, and supporting them with implementing the strategies to meet the goals. Data-informed collaborative meetings with administrators, department heads, and teachers in the study helped determine if progress was being met on the goals.

Based on the school jurisdiction's 2019–2020 Annual Education Results Report, the superintendent stated that this high school “focused on the use of instructional strategies. Teachers are using multiple strategies to incorporate all pathways for learning, to use collaborative learning strategies, to encourage student engagement and responsibility for learning, and to share innovative practices” (S). The principal ensured that there was a strong focus on pedagogy, undertaking new teaching techniques and critical thinking routines, reevaluating instructional and assessment practices, and being models of learning as key strategies to high performance in the classroom. In the document review, the focus within the CIP for the 2019–2020 school year was based on the Alberta Education's High School Redesign foundational principles, including educator roles and PD, rigorous and relevant curriculum, and assessment.

A conceptual framework establishes the expectations for teachers in the study ensuring they foster student learning, student success, and student innovation supporting teaching strategies. Participating teachers are to employ these strategies to ensure students are at the center of their work and are afforded “equal opportunities for success” (P). This framework is continually used with teachers in the study, students, and parents to communicate who they are, what they do, and what they are all about within this school community. As the principal stated,

Everyone should know what your school prioritizes. And so, I do think that's where maybe my first strategy is, is that the emphasis on growth plans and goal setting. And then in that, in the LQS for me, that fostering effective relationships. I can't say enough how key that is. The way that I put things to teachers are it's my primary job to take care of you so that you can in turn take care of our kids. (P)

The superintendent encouraged a safe and supportive culture where teachers could take risks and innovation encouraged through the mantra: "Fail forward" (S). The principal challenged teachers in this study to be as diverse as possible and encouraged change in teaching assignments often. The administration team had teaching assignments, cotaught alongside beginning teachers, rearranged teaching schedules, and were the first to cover classes when needed.

Important to the principal was the yearly reminder to teachers in the study of their learning journey progress. Based on a document review of the New Teacher Orientation created by the principal, Year 1 was to remember and understand that teachers are finding opportunities for growth in their practice, recognizing the larger context with numeracy and literacy and supporting inclusivity. In Year 2, teachers then had to apply and put into action their learning. They developed strategies, applied and used knowledge gained, and supported and advocated for one another. Year 3 focused on reflecting, nurturing, and developing both individually and collaboratively. Teachers continued to develop strategies, built toolboxes of pedagogical practices, and reviewed data to inform instructional design. Year 4 centered on reflecting, focusing, evaluating, assessing, and creating thinking cultures. Data were utilized to inform these practices and respond to students' learning needs. As part of the school's main goals within the

2019–2020 CIP, teachers in the study focused on using data to improve pedagogical practice and instructional design.

Finding 7: Fostering Student-Centered Instructional Approaches. In developing the school’s 3-year CIP, the principal ensured that the administration team and teachers in the study continued to be part of the Alberta Education’s Moving Forward with High School Redesign project. This high-performing high school was one of the initial 16 high schools selected in the project. The principal indicated that High School Redesign became a pivotal resource to support the visioning and planning process toward the further implementation of a student-centered approach. Based on the experience with High School Redesign and the shared practices of other high school administrators, the principal continued to develop ideas about innovative approaches for student engagement, student achievement, and well-being. The principal attended sharing sessions for project participants hosted by Alberta Education, visited school sites, and collaborated with other high school leaders and superintendents on best practices for student learning in a high school setting.

Based on interview data when a concept intrigued the principal (for example, interdisciplinary disciplines), the principal would then choose a group of key leaders or “first followers” to visit the school site implementing the concept. This group would then return to speak of the innovative approach through department meetings, seeking input and answering questions in order to gain the staff view through this low-risk approach. In addition, in a collegial fashion, every spring the principal would take the administration team on a retreat to begin the 3-year visioning process based on their involvement with High School Redesign, school visits, research, and conversations with staff. They would establish the initial vision together and then engage in preplanning in anticipation of how these ideas would be received by staff. The

administration team would develop pathways to introduce new concepts to staff knowing that if staff input differed, then they could pivot in a different direction. Eloquently said by the principal,

That's always the vision I have, is working towards something that people can see, that people can touch, that people can be proud of. Whether that's something that stays in the building or stays in their minds or hearts. That's what I endeavour to do. (P)

Based on the success within the school, teachers in the study were open to innovative approaches because they saw alignment in the CIP and their own growth as professionals, but also, they saw the bigger picture within their school-wide endeavour for rigour, relevance, and relationship because they built it together.

Finding 8: Improving Visibility and Accessibility. Visibility is a key leadership practice of the principal and the administrative team. Daily walk-through practices occur whereby administration engages in conversations with both teachers in the study and students in the classroom setting. Throughout COVID-19, the principal continued to prioritize visits through a scheduled approach, one-to-one check-ins with staff, and an open-door policy:

It is so easy to get tied up in the paperwork. But those sorts of things are so important because I think even in our one-to-one check-ins, when I do a walk-through, I will ensure that I look back on that walk-through and say, "All right. How did that go today?" Or "How are things?" (P)

Although the principal has tried to minimize micromanagement, accountability is intentionally built into the walk-through process. The principal noted a fine line between autonomy and what teachers are expected to do each day in the classroom. The principal encourages teacher growth, supervises effective teaching, and evaluates strategies through a

holistic, proactive approach that supports student learning. The principal reminds teachers that part of the administrator's responsibility is growth and supervision and the rationale provided: "That's part of our job, to not monitor, but to do the walk-through for teacher growth, to be there for you" (P).

Finding 9: Being Data Informed. Important to participating administrators and teachers in the study was student success. Data measuring this success included high school completion rates, dropout rates, diploma marks, and participation in cocurricular and extracurricular activities. Important to this participants was knowing their students' achievements; thus, a data-informed culture was key to understanding and responding to student learning needs. Systems included attendance contracts and midterm check for students at risk, student learning contracts, credit recovery programming, and implementation of a testing centre, as well as lead teacher, guidance counsellor, grad coach, and educational assistant support. Although initially it was the teachers' responsibility to connect with students and families about student concerns, teachers in the study knew that the administration team would step in if needed as an additional layer of support for students and teachers.

Regarding knowing student achievement and success, the principal had the philosophy of being data informed not data driven. The Alberta Education Accountability Pillar results, OurSchool survey (The Learning Bar, n.d.), classroom check-ins, start-stop-continue processes with staff, student round table discussions, and focus groups created both formal and informal data-gathering processes. The principal took time to create open-ended questions and analyze the results, which were shared with the school community. Listening to students has become a critical process for the principal in order to get the feedback needed to inform school practice and enable student success and well-being.

The principal exhibited the traits of a data-informed leader who collaboratively reviewed results and generated evidence of student learning to help inform teaching practices. The superintendent indicated that the principal knew how to ask good questions to teachers about student learning and what strategies they were employing that influenced this learning. An example given by the superintendent was the concern with graduation rates and streaming of students from Grade 9 to Grade 10. Delving deep into the learning results of the school's diverse population and research on inclusive practices, the principal chose to move away from the historical special education structure and made the school far more inclusive by redesigning the structure into an inclusive education approach. As the superintendent explained,

And that was a big thing because in high school, the kids that don't get it, either you put them down one level, or just move them into Special Ed. Where [P] said to teachers, "Well actually, no, they're in your class. What are the things you are doing differently to make sure they can be successful?" That's a real shift in the conversation. (S)

Ensuring that learning outcomes were met, the principal developed a process that teacher had to follow when students were not passing a course at 50% a third of the way into the quarter. At first, teachers in the study indicated that they took ownership of the process and were responsible for connecting with the student and parents/guardians. Then, in providing feedback to the administration team, these teachers gave progress reports on what they had done differently to support the student. Relying on the conceptual framework, "the principal puts learning front and center ... and is always talking about that instructional practice. . . the continuous improvement piece and looking for how to get to greatness. . . It's around learning" (S).

Analysis of the data gleaned from vice principals in the study indicate that they defined student success relative to the student as well as high expectations of learning for all. Teachers in the study understood the diversity of student learning in their school community and knew how to meet students where they were at on their learning journey.

Culturally, linguistically, neurotypically, we have a variety of different sorts of learners and success is relative to the student, but we have a common expectation at the same time that we have a higher standard, is usually the term that we try to use with students and staff, that there's a higher standard here for how are you going to comport yourself, how are you going to engage in your classwork, how are you going to treat people? All those aspects are kind of nonnegotiable things. So, I think there's a culture of a high standard of what we expect students to do, meshing with understanding that we're not going to have that disproportionate to where the student's coming from when it's appropriate to mitigate it. (VP1)

Participating vice principals agreed that to stay connected to the high school classroom, to remember the challenges that teachers and students face each day, and to understand the diversity within the classroom, the principal and administration team should teach. As a result of having a teaching principal, administrators in the study continued to be invested in the classroom and understand what teaching and learning looks like. Consensus surrounding the challenges within the principalship was evident in the data, but agreement from participating vice principals as to what was most important: keeping the focus of teachers, always, on learning and setting expectations for strong pedagogy.

Vice principals in the study indicated that the priority of the principal on structuring the timetable to (a) ensure students were accessing support, (b) teachers were in front of students,

and (c) administrators were visible in classrooms were three key factors contributing to student learning. As well, that the mass of teachers was moving forward with strong instructional and assessment practices, analyzing data, posting learning outcomes in the classroom, sequencing learning, and being intentional about the alignment to the CIP all contributed to strong high performance within this high school.

And we've tried very much in our lifetime here in those 4 years to be about breaking down silos of subject areas and look at interdisciplinary work and some of those harmonizing things across disciplines. Because if we can be talking a common language and have some common pedagogical aspects of things that we think are really important for all students regardless of subject area, then that will enable some of those other transfer pieces to fall into line better. (VP1)

When asked to define student success, participating vice principals discussed the conceptual framework that illustrates the expectations for teachers to ensure they foster student learning, student success, and student innovation, and to employ teaching strategies to ensure students are at the centre of their work; the student is embedded in teacher. Regarding the principal being involved in the learning of students, vice principals in the study explained that so much of what students are learning is an extension of the vision and mission of the school. Vice principals stated that teachers ensuring that instruction addresses learning outcomes and student engagement reflects what the principal wants implemented within the learning environment. The principal, and all administrators in the study, are visible, active participants not only in the daily operation of the school, but within the classroom.

Teachers see that the principal allows them to focus on their specific jobs which is to teach kids, which means the principal is that filter, the ozone layer for staff and allows

them to focus on the students they have at hand and not be pulled astray from what their calling is on a daily basis. (VP3)

Data from teachers in the study denoted that the principal is “an expert teacher; a master at their craft” (T2). As a result, the principal has huge credibility among participating teachers in terms of understanding the classroom and how to support them and students with tangible, one-on-one support. Teachers in the study saw the principal’s vision as being focused and being accomplished throughout the year through the structures of PD, communication, coteaching, walk-throughs, high visibility, and mentorship. As one teacher stated: “Having laid out all the professional development planning, all the encouragements, all the department meetings, develop the culture in the school, the principal then says, ‘Okay, now you go do your job’” (T3). These teachers in the study agreed that the principal does not micromanage their work but rather looks at the structure of learning from a macro level and provides support and guidance to participating teachers and students, which positively influences daily teaching and learning. Teachers in the study continually expressed that they are trusted, respected as professionals, and expected to do their jobs. As one teacher said, “It’s interesting: you have someone who embodies all the things you want a really good teacher to be. Well, those teachers I do believe rise up to it, and I think that’s a gift; the ability to do that” (T2). Evident was the perception of participating teachers that the principal’s instructional practices were appropriate to facilitate their development.

Students know their principal well, as was commented upon often by teachers in the study. Their principal is invested in what they are doing daily and very present in the school as the result of the principal’s involvement in both cocurricular and extracurricular activities. The principal continually communicates with students the learning expectations, meets with students

who are at risk of failure, and develops action plans in team to help students succeed. As stated by a teacher: “And I think that’s important for our kids to see that the principal values them and wants to make sure that they are supported in every aspect” (T5). As noted by teachers, the principal illustrated respect, genuine concern, and empathy for all students.

Developing Leadership Capacity. When a leader provides opportunities for members of the school community to develop leadership capacity and supports others in fulfilling their education roles, the competency of developing leadership is being met. Findings that emerged within this competency were: (10) establishing a distributed leadership structure and, (11) identifying, empowering, and recognizing staff.

Finding 10: Establishing a Distributed Leadership Structure. Evident throughout the data was the principal’s vision and implementation of a distributed leadership model to develop leadership capacity and support teachers in the study within and outside the classroom. Building people and building support, as well as key teachers, leadership learning, and community feel were prevalent concepts expressed by participants throughout this study, illustrating a supportive culture for leadership development. In a document review of PD sessions that the principal delivered to other school jurisdictions, four areas of importance were presented for formalizing distributed leadership: “Establish governance structures that allow for teacher involvement in decisions and policies for the school; elect lead teachers for each department; allocate staff to key leadership positions—curricular and cocurricular; and formalize mentorship of new staff” (P). The principal felt the distributed leadership approach developed respect for leaders in the school: “People who are invested, engaged, and committed then invest in lifelong learning” (P). There was a shared belief from participants in the study that teachers can enhance the effectiveness of an organization and become a purposeful community through cooperative efforts.

Participating vice principals viewed support to staff from a macro perspective in terms of approach to situations, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Expertise and leadership capacity of people inherently occurred as a result. This was evident in the leadership development, peer coaching, and use of expertise of the technology lead teacher when the school moved to Google Classroom and online learning. This capacity building was viewed by one vice principal in the study from the analogy of a slinky toy:

But then put the person with the most knowledge in front of the people who needed access to that knowledge, or if they were along that continuum. And then because we have people on that continuum, people would then help each other to move the whole group forward. So, it's kind of like the way a slinky would move. If we're pulling the slinky forward here, and we've got the right person here, it's going to help the spring to move forward and then make the next flip over, so we can see the next trend that's coming while people are set up well in the moment that they need. (VP1)

Based on the analysis of the data, vice principals saw many opportunities for people informally and formally to be involved in leadership. Vice principals in the study expressed that the key responsibility of leaders was to develop the next leaders to sustain, promote, and move the culture forward while acculturating new staff and developing collaborative efficacy.

Teachers in the study discussed the variety of different levels of leadership in the school and their comfort level to get involved. Participants felt proud and respected when they were tapped on the shoulder or engaged in conversations with the principal about leadership opportunities. They were confident to share their expertise and became more involved in the school as a result. The principal built in consultative and collaborative decision-making processes; therefore, the teachers in the study knew that they were all running the school together

because of opportunities for open dialogue and the sharing of multiple perspectives. “But the big thing is, is that, really trying to encourage us to do our best, to find our niche, go from there” (T5). Participants felt the school was filled with highly educated, highly skilled people. The administration team continued to hire strong beginning teachers and develop them. One might think a competitive culture may emerge as the result, but teachers in the study reported “not a sense of competition. Everybody’s very supportive in what we decide to do” (T4). There was a true sense of empowerment felt by teachers in the study while building leadership capacity and quality teaching. Participating teachers appreciated open communication as well as the principal leading by example and supporting them as individuals and within their department teams whenever they were in the development of a new strategy or goal.

The principal communicated at the beginning of every year the expectations that staff were going to do something for the school. All participants spoke about this expectation and the positive culture of building relationships with students. As a result, students knew their teachers both inside and outside the classroom because of their involvement. Data from the principal showed that 90% of staff were involved in some type of curricular, cocurricular or extracurricular activity. Involvement included the mentorship program, academic counselling, lead teachers in each subject department, English as a Second Language, and technology. As well, committees such as inclusive education, PD, and First Nations, Métis, and Inuit support added to the list of leadership opportunities. In addition, extracurricular activities included coaching, fine arts clubs, and language programs, to name a few. The principal set high expectations for involvement for everyone to “get to know the kids BEYOND the walls of the classroom. This helps with relationship building, which helps with discipline, which impacts

classroom management. It gives you an opportunity to build relationships with colleagues and become PART of something” (New Teacher Orientation slideshow, June 16, 2020).

Participants in the study stated that the establishment of a distributed leadership structure allowed for their involvement in decision-making while allocating them to formal and informal leadership positions. In addition, the structure allowed the principal and the administration team to be instructional leaders by delegating tasks to teachers in the study and not becoming burdened with managerial tasks typically assigned by central office. “It is just so important for today’s leader, today’s principal, to be collaborative in nature and to offer distributed leadership because they can’t do it all” (S). As a result of building a network of leaders, participants agreed that a collaborative atmosphere was formed where work was shared and leadership potential was developed.

Finding 11: Identifying, Empowering, and Recognizing Staff. When a new focus area was being considered by the principal as a potential goal within the CIP, the principal involved a group of key teachers, those core trusted people or “first followers,” to ensure the approach would be relevant to the teachers’ context and produced rigour in both teachers’ instructional and assessment strategies. These key leaders included all the core curriculum areas as well as religion and fine arts. The group travelled together to model schools that were successfully implementing the approach. They developed questions before, during, and after the school tour as well as possible approaches for school-wide PD. Then the principal gave the responsibility of leading the learning to this group of teachers, after working through a visioning process with them for four months, saying, in preparation for August start-up:

“Okay guys, this is yours now. So, help me help you to help your peers or your colleagues.” So that’s how that rolled out. And it was really neat because I didn’t have to

stand there. And I basically had each of them speak. This group would build the momentum towards change: It is so important because you need those people to lean on and you need to lean into them. (P)

The analysis of interview data also showed the principal beginning to develop leadership capacity within the Student Council team in the creation of a survey and analyses of results focused on student wellness, belonging, and inclusivity. Students wanted to take ownership of these results and implement a plan of action which empowered a group of youth leaders. Student voice was important to the principal in the continuation of creating opportunities for student leadership and decision-making.

Participants stated that the principal found unique and innovative ways to tap teachers in the study for leadership opportunities and to provide timely thanks and celebrate success. The principal had the ability to read people very well and learned what drives people, what motivates them to look for opportunities to draw them into leadership:

One of the things that we have to recognize is that everyone has strengths and weaknesses, but it is our job to see the gift and the strengths and pull them out of that person. You can't wish or pray to God that you have someone else, because that doesn't do you any good. How do you tap into the strengths of the people around you and play to those strengths? (P)

Teachers in this study spoke about the principal's gifts of recognizing others and celebrating success. This would occur through shout-outs during PD and staff meetings, via email that included the superintendent, through weekly updates, and social media. They knew the principal was proud of students, staff, and the school community. The principal would also respond to participants in personal ways with cards, emails, or visits to their classrooms.

Agreement among the teachers in the study was that the principal “has our backs” and acts as a buffer for them to focus on their students and teaching. Evident throughout every interview was the high level of trust established by the principal and reciprocated by participants in the study.

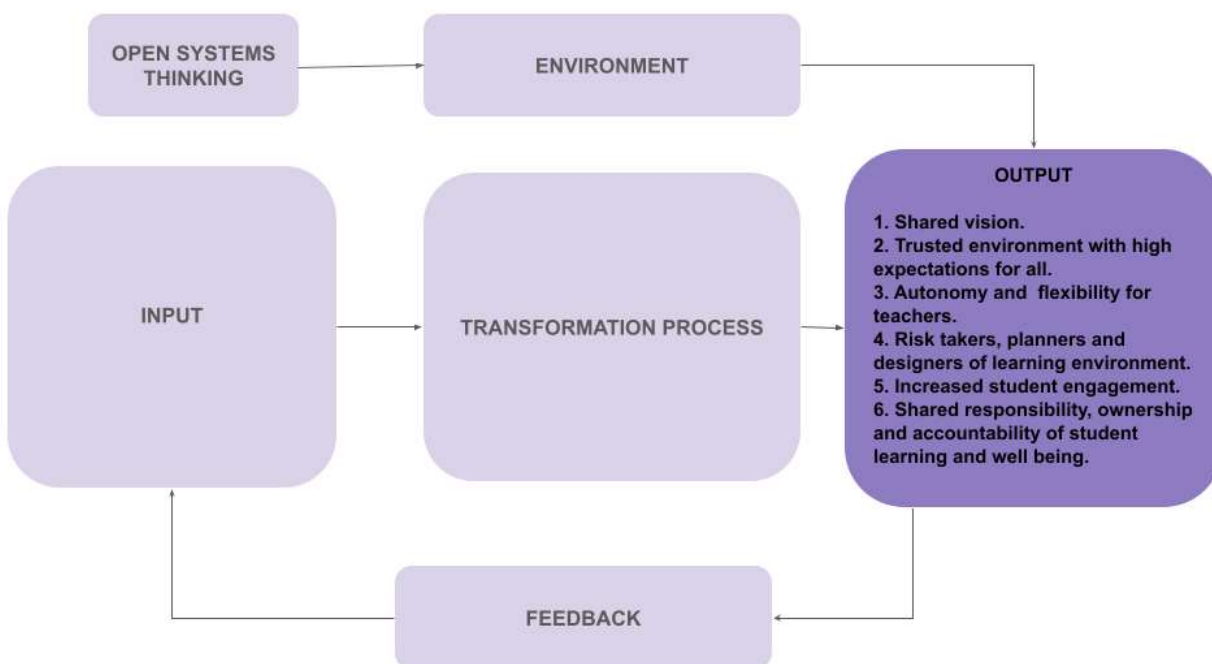
Research Question 4: In the daily work of the principal, how are the competencies helpful?

The key finding from the analysis of the interview data indicated that teachers in this study began **developing innovative teaching strategies**. As illustrated in Figure 11, participants became more comfortable taking risks with their instructional strategies and became innovated supporting the vision of student engagement. Knowing that a quarter system was being implemented into the timetable as well as the school’s involvement in High School Redesign and the development of the two conceptual frameworks, teachers in the study focused on developing growth mindsets (Dweck, 2016), innovative teaching practices and student engagement. Based on participant interviews and a document analysis of OurSchool (The Learning Bar, n.d.) student surveys, participating teachers’ knowledge, skills, and confidence led to increased student engagement in the quarter system structure. The superintendent watched teachers “step out of their comfort zones. Even though they were very good teachers in many cases, they started to look at different things and different ways of doing things” (S). With innovation comes risk-taking, which the superintendent supported in the school jurisdiction. Teachers in the study knew they did not have to be perfect at their craft, that they could try new things, stumble, and fall, while always being helped up with support from central office and their principal to continue to move forward. “What a great role model this is for kids to show that you’re doing the learning too. That’s the most instrumental piece of change in that culture” (S). Participating teachers became planners and designers of their learning environment through the school’s three-year

interdisciplinary focus as well as former literacy and numeracy focuses. Teachers in the study grew stronger in their pedagogical knowledge as they learned how to be teachers of literacy and numeracy, continued to focus on the foundational elements of Alberta Education’s High School Redesign, and opened their classrooms and school community to the many visits from other school jurisdictions in the sharing of their instructional strategies.

Figure 11

Output

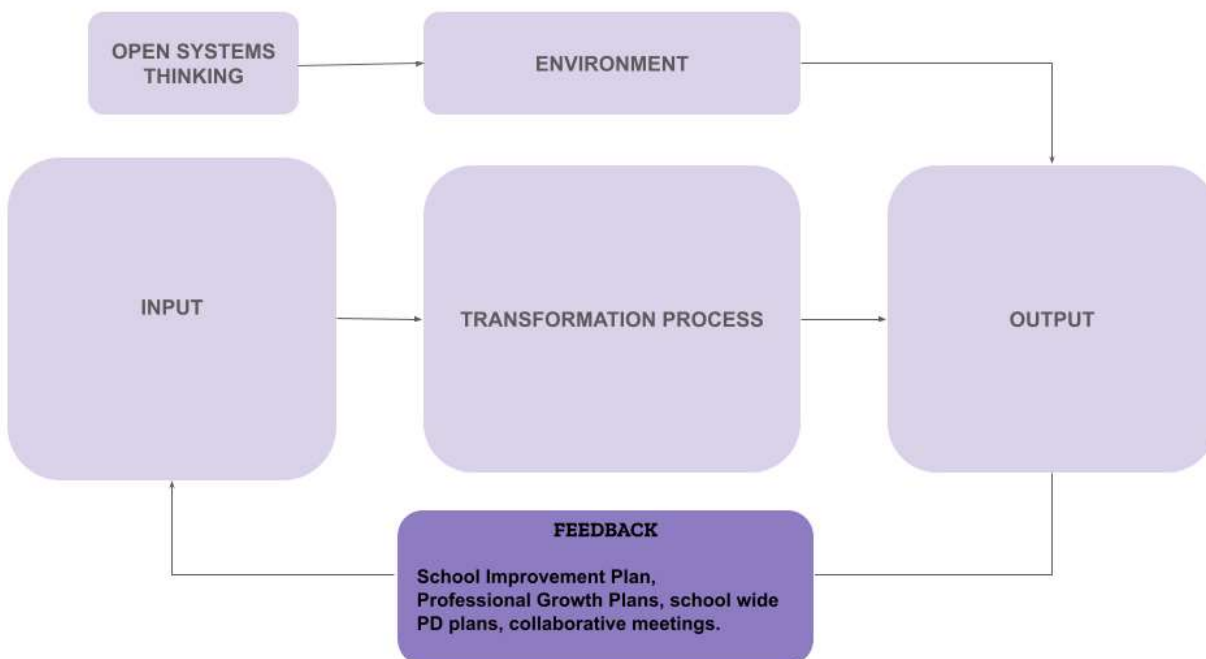


The TQS (Alberta Education, 2020d) was a foundational source document within this learning culture. What seemed to be critical to the school vision was the importance of permeation of foundational knowledge about First Nations, Métis, and Inuit. The principal and teachers in the study provided examples of permeation into subject areas and the importance of

this competency within the school. The relationship with the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit community was strong within this school jurisdiction.

Participating teachers appreciated the autonomy and flexibility, knowing that as professionals, they were increasing student learning based on rigour, relevance, and relationships; a shared vision created by staff. Teachers in the study focused on a holistic approach that mirrored the principal's leadership, ensuring high expectations for all. "Student success is a reflection of our work, so celebrating student success, that makes us very proud, as teachers, to know that we've empowered students to go out and take risks" (T4). Evident from study participants within this diverse high school were the themes of shared responsibility, shared ownership, and shared accountability of student learning.

The final finding in relation to **Research Question 4: In the daily work of the principal, how are the competencies helpful**, and, in alignment within the systems thinking theory was the principal's leadership practice of **seeking feedback**. This practice was essential in continuous improvement and the development of mechanisms for the principal to monitor and correct deviations within the system toward the achievement of goals. Feedback provided information to the principal as to how well the processes and structures were meeting their desired results (see Figure 12).

Figure 12*Feedback*

The principal within this high school system utilized the CIP, teacher PGPs, and school-wide PD plan as formal mechanisms for a broader perspective on the achievement of goals. Additionally, Alberta Education's Accountability Pillar that encompassed Grade 10 student, parent, and staff feedback results in 15 measurement categories were analyzed yearly. Measures included high school completion, Rutherford Scholarship eligibility, and dropout rates, along with diploma exams in the acceptable and excellence ranges, parent involvement, education quality, and school improvement, to name a few. The principal also had teachers focus on analyzing the differentiation between diploma marks and school-awarded marks.

Feedback was provided through the principal's practices of fostering effective relationships within the school community, but relationships were also created with other stakeholders as well. The principal placed importance on relationships with other kindergarten to

Grade 9 schools within the school jurisdiction. This was a change in practice from the past: the high school had been perceived as exclusive, whereas this principal promoted an inclusive community for all: “So it just makes sense that understanding what’s happening in their schools and the type of kids they’re working with, because they’re going to be ours” (P). In addition, establishing relationships with Indigenous parents/guardians, Elders, and knowledge keepers was important to the principal because of the school’s diverse student population. Student feedback surveys also indicated a need to continue to build a sense of belonging, and a welcoming, safe place for all.

The high school participated in OurSchool student surveys that provided students with a platform to provide feedback. Informal feedback mechanisms were also created by the administration team in the form of surveys and open-ended questions. Conversations naturally provided feedback as well as structured collaborative meetings every term with lead teachers representing subject departments.

The principal also followed the example of the superintendent in using the platform ThoughtExchange (<https://www.thoughtexchange.com/>), a discussion-based program, which helped gather feedback, create themes, and generate priorities into actionable plans. Although all schools within the jurisdiction had the opportunity to utilize this platform, the superintendent said that “this principal did more work with ThoughtExchange than most principals and really tried to dig into the results. And that data was really instrumental in us being able to hear from parents, that quality education was occurring” (S). Not only did the superintendent encourage principals to use formal surveys, but they were also coached to always think about assurance and to tell stakeholders their stories of student success. These stories of success were also shared at

CIP meetings hosted three times per year with the superintendent team and the school administration team in this study.

Feedback provided a mechanism for the principal to adjust processes and structures as needed to meet the vision of student learning. Continual focus was placed on gathering feedback from the parent community as a valuable partner in education. Community stakeholder feedback did not seem to be a priority for the principal at the time of the study, although the principal had good relationships within the community.

In summary, Table 7 provides an outline overview of the four research questions and 18 findings that were described in the front section of this chapter as the result of analyzing documents and participant interviews. After this, the challenges of leadership practices for a high school principal from the purview of the four competencies are outlined.

Table 7

Summary of Research Questions and Findings

<p>Research Question 1: How does a school principal perceive their leadership practices contribute to quality teaching in an Alberta high school?</p> <p>Finding 1: Developing Strategic Alignment Finding 2: Providing Assurance to Stakeholders</p>
<p>Research Question 2: What actions/practices of the principal support teaching practice in an Alberta high school?</p> <p>Finding 1: Creating a Progressive Culture Finding 2: Developing a Holistic Approach Finding 3: Creating Avenues of Open, Transparent Communication</p>
<p>Research Question 3: How have the four competencies—embodying visionary leadership, leading a learning community, providing instructional leadership, and developing leadership capacity—contributed to the overall shared leadership practices of the principal?</p> <p>Finding 1: Redesigning the Organization Finding 2: Cultivating Strategic Alignment to the Vision</p>

Finding 3: Facilitating Shared Responsibility
 Finding 4: Promoting and Participating in Learning and Development
 Finding 5: Developing a Robust Mentorship Program
 Finding 6: Managing the Instructional Program
 Finding 7: Fostering Student-Centered Instructional Practices
 Finding 8: Improving Visibility and Accessibility
 Finding 9: Being Data-Informed
 Finding 10: Establishing a Distributed Leadership Structure
 Finding 11: Identifying, Empowering, and Recognizing Staff

Research Question 4: In the daily work of the principal, how are the competencies helpful?

Finding 1: Developing innovative teaching strategies
 Finding 2: Seeking feedback

Challenges With Creating a High-Leverage, Shared Instructional Leadership Approach

Within each competency, the participants in this study highlighted challenges that influenced the principal’s leadership practices toward fulfillment of meeting the competency. This section describes the challenges described by all the participants identified within the four LQS competencies (Alberta Education, 2020b), with an initial focus on fostering relationships.

Challenges to Fostering Relationships in an Ever-Evolving High School Environment

A challenge or growth area for the principal when developing relationships in this high school was establishing connections to the parent community as partners in education in the hope that parents take a more active role in their children’s education:

If there was a wish that I had, is there an area that we definitely need to grow, and is that kind of parents, guardians, that community to be able to know and feel exactly what we do in this building, right? It’s hard right now in this pandemic, for sure. And there’s a couple of parents that don’t even know if they can still come into the school, and I’m like, “No, no, you’re still welcome to come into the school.” I need them. They need to understand that they are key to helping us with these kids. (P)

Another challenge for this high school principal is maintaining balance while focusing continually on sustaining a positive school climate aimed at student achievement and well-being. The principal noted that, in their opinion, not everyone works as hard as the principal, and this difference became frustrating. In self-reflection, the principal questioned how they could be there for staff, but also care for themselves as well? Balance was very challenging. The principal recognized that their priorities needed to be reexamined. In this case, the principal strove to place family ahead of work. As a result, parameters for weekly and weekend communication were set, diversified support came from the vice principals in the study, and workload was examined and redistributed. But as the principal said: “Work is still about relationships. It’s not working in the sense that it was before. It’s all relationship-driven” (P).

In the principal’s PGP, areas of growth to enhance relationships included being available to staff but not fixing concerns. Rather, the aim was to ask and listen in order to develop a mindset of teacher ownership. Approaching situations from a cognitive coaching perspective while being purposeful and intentional with these skills when in conversations with staff was key to the principal’s continued development. The principal wanted to address issues immediately, even if this meant having hard professional conversations with staff. Finally, the principal wanted to be as clear and transparent as possible about COVID-19 reentry plans regarding expectations, protocols, and standards as they navigated the current realities together. Another challenge noted by the principal was being totally transparent because there are just some things a leader cannot share. In addition, the principal indicated that they often feel a need to protect their staff and become the buffer between everything to minimize distractions, allowing teachers to focus on teaching and learning.

From the perspective of participants in the study, time was the largest challenge or concern they had for the principal. The teachers' PGP structure, for example, was daunting for the principal in terms of the initial meetings, the check-ins throughout the year, and then the final meeting to reflect together. It was an extremely powerful process for all, and the principal ensured this process was a priority, but understandably it took a lot of time.

Challenges to Embodying Visionary Leadership

A challenge the principal faced when developing a vision for the school was separating legacy from “this is what we’ve always done” (P) toward implementation of a new approach. As indicated, the principal needed to purposefully show teachers a leadership style that was different from the preceding two principals while ensuring the strong culture remained. The principal had to provide validation for teacher involvement in the CIP and build processes for teacher input, as this had not been a past practice. Continual focus was key, as indicated by the principal—providing rationale to the vision and aligning the vision to the teachers’ context and student learning. Finally, the principal had to ensure that teachers owned the vision in hopes that this influenced the quality of teaching and learning within classrooms and in the school. The principal continued to set high expectations, ensure accountability with purpose, and develop nonnegotiables which were continually communicated by the principal to ensure teachers knew their professional obligations in balancing autonomy and accountability. As noted by the data, “There is the push, pull factor, allowing for different perspectives and diverse perspectives within the rational constraint and keeping people harnessed and energy moving in the right direction” (VP1).

The concern expressed among vice principals in the study was the pace and speed that staff operate at, which can sometimes create fatigue. A solution suggested was to take more time

and engage in more discussions by adding the human touch through conversations. Participating vice principals were concerned that mass communication through emails and larger staff meetings can lead to misunderstandings that could be avoided with a more personal style of conversation. Vice principals in the study felt that their administration team needed to be continually aware of the challenge of the implementation dip within new approaches. Noted was the excitement at the beginning of implementation, but also the importance of monitoring the change process toward sustainability without losing the interest of the masses.

According to teachers in this study, the delicate balance of autonomy and accountability was the challenge the principal faced when colleagues did not share the vision of the school. They felt that the principal walks a fine line: the push–pull of trying to keep a comprehensive, coherent plan moving forward while valuing teachers as professionals. In alignment with this was the 80–20 rule indicated by three teachers. Teachers in the study were aware that most teachers buy into the vision and a minority do not. Reasons provided for the latter were fear of change, complacency, valid ability to participate, wide range of choice, and fatigue from initiatives.

Challenges to Leading a Learning Community

Although the principal was the first to speak at all PD days, the principal had to be cognizant that their voice was not the only one heard during PD. It was essential that the principal developed an open space for teachers to lead goals and implement strategies within the CIP as a collective group. At first, leading learning occurred through a core group of teachers and the principal's administration team. As the principal gained support for the approach, more teachers became involved in leading PD. Challenging for the principal was the hesitance of teachers to adopt new approaches from different voices with varied expertise.

Within the principal's PGP a key word identified was *intentional*: to be intentional in their growth as a leader and, in turn, to allow others to grow while trusting the strengths of the administration team: "Less managing and more exploring together as a team of equals" (P). The principal indicated the importance of encouraging and cultivating a culture that valued growth by providing opportunities for staff to engage in conversations about their growth plans, action items, and progress.

A challenge identified by participating vice principals was moving the school in the right direction knowing that in a larger school, more people may be resistant. The challenge was being present to those teachers who were innovative, creative, and wanted to move forward while pushing and pulling the others along. Vice principals in the study indicated that they needed to find ways to gather more evidence that people were moving along the pathway that has been set.

Challenges identified by teachers in the study mirrored those mentioned above as well as that of comparing practices of the present principal to those of past principals. One teacher stated that the principal "wanted to make it their own. But they were very good at realizing that it takes time for that to happen and for them to be able to make it their own" (T1). The principal was cognizant of the time needed to slow down learning, although new initiatives from the school jurisdiction sometimes impeded this process.

Challenges to Providing Instructional Leadership

I asked the question, "Do principals need to have taught high school courses to lead a high school community, and influence the quality of teaching?" The principal spoke about the credibility of teaching in a high school and being a principal:

Credibility comes with this. People don't just think you're making it up, right, that you know what you're talking about. And, then when you supplement it with sharing with

them what your research looks like, what you're studying, what you are looking into. I really think that that just adds to the trust that high school teachers would have in you as an instructional leader. I do think that knowing, and not just curriculum, but knowing how a teenage brain ticks and working with the people who hold space for these guys. I think that that is so important. (P)

As a teaching principal within the high school, the principal understands and anticipates challenges teachers might have in the classroom because the principal has also experienced these challenges. Understanding the curriculum helps in the development of PD, high school diploma requirements, credit recovery, and the creation of different career pathways, as well as providing the appropriate supports for students. Thus, there are many advantages for principals with high school teaching experience.

Diversity creates challenges for the principal, not necessarily in instruction, but also in timely and targeted support. Vice principals in the study agreed that "it is very difficult to implement blanket macro-level instructional support at our school. The principal's ability or the need to support students and teachers and their instruction has to become, at times, very granular, as nuanced to individual teachers" (VP3).

Participating vice principals expressed through the interview data that the principal wears many hats; thus, supporting teachers in the instructional realm is very difficult. They stated that the principal's ability to attend to public pressures, perceptions, responsibilities, and paperwork while trying to keep a focus on teaching and learning is challenging. The vice principals in the study tried to be a filter for the principal:

Our job is to allow the principal to help by keeping stuff that doesn't need to get to the principal off, but also trying to distill the stuff that we can take from here down to the teachers to help keep the focus on instruction. (VP1)

A challenge for teachers in the study is that the administration team possesses knowledge of a range of subjects at the high school level. Knowing the complexity of high school with the multitude of subject areas and diversity of students, participating teachers expressed the need for a deeper understanding of administrators of the high school context. "That would be the challenge, when you can't fully comprehend because you haven't lived it" (T3).

Challenges of Developing Leadership Capacity

Data indicate increasing workload and demands on the principal and the administrative team. The principal felt that balance could not necessarily be met unless there was an intentional focus on setting boundaries and relying on other teachers to support the work. The principal stated that developing leadership capacity provides teachers with a view of leadership, keeping in mind discernment in the decision to enter leadership:

Am I called to this? Yes. I mean, it allows teachers to understand, too, that even if they're considering administration, that their jump from a teacher to administration has its different expectations. I mean, they're similar but different, and I do think that a person who steps into leadership should be called to it. I don't actually think that it's just a logical stepping-stone. I think that you need to really take a look at the LQS and go, "Am I called to this?" (P)

A key challenge identified by participating vice principals was that of informal and formal leadership roles and responsibilities. They stated that teachers in informal leadership positions did not have authority and needed to remember the code of professional conduct as

they dealt colleague to colleague. Vice principals in the study believed that structures and direction must be in place to support informal leaders in leading and in decision-making processes. Another challenge identified by both vice principals and teachers in the study was the importance of balance, time, and compensation as a possible deterrence to teachers becoming involved in leadership opportunities:

Looking at what leadership is in the present day and wondering about whether that work-life balance, so to speak, is a healthy one or worth investing in, or whether it's more worth investing in just being a really good teacher or being a really good coach. It's that if a position of formal leadership is actually worth it, so to speak, in the broader context of life. (VP1)

In addition, one vice principal in the study and the superintendent indicated that a challenge of developing leaders was the unreachable expectations that "we hold leaders to be all to all. And we expect them to, we hold them to a higher standard, which I'm not saying they shouldn't be, but we have to make sure that standard is attainable" (VP2).

Teachers in the study agreed with this statement. Participating teachers understood that leaders contribute positively to the school culture. They questioned why they need to be considered a leader and if, at times, they could step back and just be a teacher. Clear in these discussions of leadership and involvement in the school was that of nonjudgment: if a teacher in the study needed to step away, they did so without judgement from other staff members. When they were ready to step forward, support and mentorship were readily available to them.

A continual challenge for the principal was engaging the parent community within the high school environment toward active, constructive involvement. The school council had 10 parent members. The principal practiced strong communication techniques via social media, the

school website, and letters home, but expressed frustration with low parent involvement. In yearly data, parent involvement was the school's lowest percentage. The principal continued to make this a goal and work with the school council and staff to develop strategies for increased involvement.

Verification of the Main Themes and Codes

Initially, I employed an inductive-analysis approach using open coding to analyze data from interviews and documents. Manual coding occurred after each interview. Key concepts and themes were recorded using a rubric created from the literature review capturing key leadership practices and actions (see Appendix E). Participant transcripts were categorized into four groups: principal, vice principals, teachers, and superintendent in the utilization of a constant comparison method noting similarities and differences in the text (see Appendix E).

I then verified the qualitative findings outlined throughout the study using Leximancer software. As mentioned previously, Leximancer is a text analytics tool that analyzes words, phrases, or collections of words that frequently appear in the text and then extracts key concepts. Leximancer “provides word frequency counts and co-occurrence counts of concepts present in the transcripts” and “creates a thesaurus of words that are associated with that concept” (Ward et al., 2014, p. 119). Themes are ranked according to the presence and frequency of concepts. Using this tool, I could store, manage, and explore the main themes within the text throughout the data analysis process. Leximancer software provided the validation of codes and themes initially found during the manual analysis to ensure trustworthiness, credibility, and dependability within the study. To analyze the data, I uploaded the interview transcripts and documentation, already transcribed manually, into Leximancer to recode and analyze themes.

The text data used for concept analysis were all the documents and interview transcripts with superintendent, principal, vice principals, and teachers. From the concept analysis, six key themes surfaced, and they were: teachers, staff, school, time, things, and leadership. The key themes and key concepts generated from Leximancer were compared with the themes found in my qualitative content analysis and they confirmed the themes (see Appendix F).

Based on frequency, six key themes—school, time, staff, things, year, and leadership—aligned with the research questions and findings. Drawing from the themes of school, time, and staff derived from Leximancer, more specificity and alignment then emerged from the content analysis of participant interviews. Within these first three themes, the importance of a shared vision appeared to be evident. The leadership practices of aligning planning documents, establishing processes, and supporting teachers through both PD and mentorship which were enacted through the visioning process led to the establishment of a culture of shared responsibility for teaching and learning. Additionally, throughout the concept analysis, the importance of community and culture developed, both evident in the Leximancer verification. The data analysis indicated an alignment of teachers in the study valued as professionals and experts in their subject areas, who were continually supported through professional learning opportunities.

The theme of leadership emerged through the Leximancer concept analysis. Key concepts such as plan, professional, growth, quality, community, and department appeared through the verification process. In alignment with the participant interview analysis were the themes of rigour, relevance, and relationships as key concepts identified. Finally, from the interviews, participants spoke about the structures and processes established by the principal which aligned with the concepts of things, year, and leadership from the Leximancer verification.

Summary

Based on the analysis of the data and verifying themes, 18 findings focused on principal leadership practices influencing quality teaching from four competencies within the LQS (Alberta Education, 2020b), which include embodying visionary leadership, leading learning, providing instructional leadership, and developing leadership capacity. Eleven findings within the four competencies emerged from the data. The watershed moment was the principal's decision to redesign the organization, resulting in an innovative culture supporting risk-taking in teaching approaches and increasing student engagement for teachers in the study. Setting the direction of the school through a shared, collaborative visioning process was another key theme. The principal's leadership actions led to alignment of the system wherein teachers in the study became risk takers within their classrooms. Another theme that emerged from all participants was the principal's ability to lead by example and engage teachers in the study in their development as professionals. As one teacher stated, "[The principal] is exactly what we need right now. . . a natural leader who is studying how to become better" (T3). Leadership challenges identified by participants, including work–life balance, time, competing initiatives, subject area specialty, and buy-in, were prevalent themes affecting the principal's influence on instructional leadership supporting quality teaching in the high school.

In Chapter 5, four main themes will be discussed, these being establishing a culture of learning, setting the direction, leading learning, and developing people as key leadership practices in developing an overall shared instructional leadership approach in a high school setting.

Chapter 5: Discussion of the Findings

This study is conclusive that the leadership practices of a high school principal play a critical role in influencing teaching and learning in a high school setting. To reiterate, the broad purpose of this single case study was to explore the perceptions of one high school principal and how they enacted the four leadership competencies: (a) embodying visionary leadership, (b) leading a learning community, (c) providing instructional leadership, and (d) developing leadership capacity within their daily work. This study focused on the leadership practices of one high school principal who understood the complexities of the high school system as well as the role of the high school principal as an instructional leader.

Notably high schools are one of the most complex systems in kindergarten to Grade 12 in Alberta. High school consists of the need to understand adolescent learning development, the importance of creating many and varied pathways of learning toward future careers in a knowledge-based society, varied and diverse subject matters with deeply embedded content, and the isolation of teachers specializing in specific subject areas whereby alignment of learning objectives and opportunities to collaborate may be undervalued. Furthermore, the sheer complexity of the management of the high school system including student and parent concerns, timetabling and budgeting, and preparing reports has high school principals indicating that they do not have enough time in their day to complete all their responsibilities hence instructional leadership is not a priority (Wahlstrom, 2012). In addition to this, the principal's limited knowledge of high school subject content could also be a contributing factor influencing teachers' perception of credibility and support from the principal to be an effective instructional leader to them. Along with this is the research from Stein and Nelson (2003) stating that instructional leadership for high school classrooms requires a strong understanding of effective

pedagogy and curriculum, and knowledge of multiple disciplines. These researchers agreed that most high school leaders are not deeply knowledgeable in every discipline and there is variability in leaders' professional background. Principals may also have a lack of both understanding and implementation of leadership practices needed to be effective instructional leaders at this level. Therefore, one of the goals of the study was to understand the ways in which a higher performance high school principal's approaches leadership in a complex high school system. The study is based on four research questions:

1. How does a school principal perceive their leadership practices contribute to quality teaching in an Alberta high school?
2. What practices of the principal support teaching practice in an Alberta high school?

Supplementary questions were as follows:

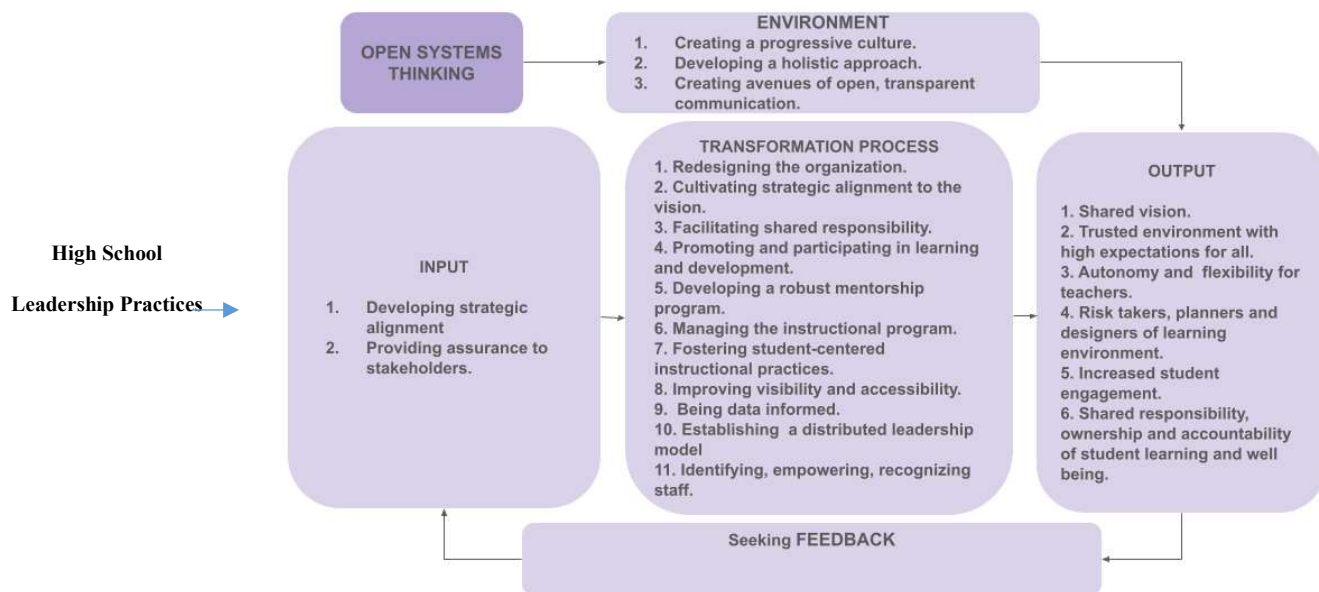
3. How have the four competencies—embodying visionary leadership, leading a learning community, providing instructional leadership, and developing leadership capacity—contributed to the overall shared leadership practices of the principal?
4. In the daily work of the principal, how are the competencies helpful?

The theoretical framework for this study, systems thinking, was organized through the examination of the structures and processes employed by the principal ensuring that the interconnectedness of parts created action and synergy toward overall system alignment (Figure 13). Undoubtedly, the enactment or application of principal's leadership practices in the ongoing analysis of the high school context also led to quality teaching and learning within this high school. As summarized in chapter 4, there were 18 findings organized by the four research questions. Based on these 18 findings, four key themes will be discussed in this chapter: **establishing a culture of learning, setting the direction, leading learning, and developing**

people.

Figure 13

Modified Systems Thinking



Theme 1: Establishing a Culture of Learning

As the leadership practices were unfolding through participant interviews, it became evident that the principal established an environment orientated towards learning for all. This theme is derived from three findings: creating a progressive culture, developing a holistic approach, and creating avenues of open, transparent communication. Based on the data analysis, the principal set the tone of high expectations, embraced collaborative decision making, and developed an atmosphere of care and trust. Emerging from the findings was the principal's focus on creating a culture of learning both for student and teacher performance. Teachers in the study felt valued, motivated, and engaged in this positive, professional community because their input was garnered, and they were supported on their learning journey. Findings showed all participants speaking confidently about the goal of the principal to keep them focused on teaching and to ensure the administrative team buffered them from distractions to their work with

students; teaching and learning were the priorities of the principal (Leithwood et al., 2010).

As mentioned by participants, this high performing high school had a long history of success with “pre-established cultural roots” (VP1) which the principal contributed to both as a former teacher and vice principal. In the role of principal, and as they began redesigning the organization, the principal was cognizant of respecting the pre-established culture while creating a more robust learning environment. Based on the findings, factors that may have contributed to the success of the redesign in the principal’s establishment of a culture of learning were: forward thinking staff, involvement in High School Redesign project, research based and evidence based rationale, credibility of the principal as both a master teacher, systems thinker, and placing staff at the center of their new conceptual framework, along with respect for teachers as professionals.

Interesting to note was the evidence of tension between a conservative and progressive culture (VP1); that of being grounded and rooted alongside innovation and openness. Teachers in the study appreciated that the principal respected their autonomy as professionals to apply research-based strategies into their classroom. They knew their subject content well; the majority of teachers interviewed had been long standing teachers at this high school. The redesigning of the organization, led by the principal, opened avenues of discussion about rigorous and relevant curriculum, meaningful relationships, and student engagement garnering feedback from teachers in the study about their vision of a student-centered learning community. The findings indicated that discussion and feedback processes led to a more progressive culture of risk taking with instructional practices and continuous, targeted support to teachers in the study from fellow teachers, mentors, lead teachers, department heads, and administrators.

Participants also knew that they needed to align their instruction to the CIP which led to a conservative tension within the culture. Evident were the structures the principal put in place

within this high school in the creation and implementation of a shared vision. The establishment of a distributed leadership model including department heads and lead teachers could support, distribute, and diffuse the shared vision ~~with staff~~. The framework was in place, the rationale and importance of the vision had been shared, common understandings and expectations had been developed. Teachers in the study knew they needed to follow the TQS as well as develop PGP's to ensure alignment with the shared vision. Although a variety of perspectives were voiced and diversity welcomed, in the end there needed to be an intentionality of teachers in the study to align with the shared vision to ensure priorities of the overall system were met. Within the findings, one participating vice principal highlighted their professional learning approach by saying,

We want to free people up to have conversations and free people up to pursue the areas that they think are important, but it's got to still be inside the structure of what we identify the need of the school to be.... We have a responsibility and vision for the school's professional development and where we want the staff development to move.

(VP 1)

As noted by a vice principal in the study, high schools with many and varied subjects may not possibly meet the individual professional learning needs of all teachers. A challenge expressed by Stein and Nelson (2003) was that of complex structures within the high school and competing expectations. Numerous departments and grade levels could lead to implementation challenges of the principal's focus on a shared vision and school-wide professional learning as expressed in the findings,

The direction that we set is specific, but general enough that people can find something to get invested in and a way that they can see themselves ... You want staff to see

themselves in the goals that you have and the vision that you have, but also to see a way that they can have an entry point into it. (VP1)

Within the findings, challenges of trying to ensure that both the vision and PD met the needs of every teacher within a large high school setting as well as staff buy-in to the vision and new learning were revealed.

Hence the principal's focus on key goals and strategies, such as literacy, numeracy, and interdisciplinary approaches, as a collaborative focus to enhance the capacity of teachers in the study to teach effectively while also developing a focused approach to their work together. Evident in the findings was the principal's high expectations whereby as professionals, teachers' jobs were to establish a learning culture in their classrooms through the creation and delivery of quality lessons and assessment to students. Knowing that a key responsibility of the principal is to oversee the effective instruction and evaluation of the approved and authorized program of studies (Education Act, 2021, Section 197), the findings indicated that the principal reminded teachers in the study of the balance between accountability and autonomy with their responsibility to improve student learning.

In the findings a common expression from participants was, "We hold everyone to a higher standard here" (T4). In defining quality teaching, participants agreed that actions such as being highly visible, establishing walk-through goals, visiting "100 classrooms in 100 days" (VP2), developing practices such as posting and discussing learning outcomes, setting focused goals for increasing student engagement, and trusting teachers as professionals without micromanaging led to high expectations for teaching quality. When asked how school leadership was ensuring that learning outcomes were being met, a vice principal in the study stated,

Where the kids are engaged and kids are coming out with the outcomes that the curriculum intended. . . one where kids feel safe and kids feel heard, and kids feel like their well-being is being met. There is a synchronicity between teacher and student, a connection between that teacher and those kids. (VP2)

As indicated by teachers in this study, this high performing high school was rooted in traditions and established practices. Respect for the longevity and pre-existing cultural roots was apparent in the findings when participants were asked about the culture of the school. The past traditions were crucial building blocks to respect and, in turn, build from. Knowing this, participants stated that the principal harnessed forward thinking qualities by building momentum. Teachers in the study revealed that first and foremost was setting a new direction through engagement and the development of the strategic alignment to the broader goals while respecting the past.

Theme 2: Setting the Direction

Based on the findings, setting the direction was a key leadership practice of the principal and seemingly the most influential within this high school system. This theme draws upon four findings: developing strategic alignment, providing assurance to stakeholders, cultivating strategic alignment to the vision, and facilitating shared responsibility. Actions such as developing professional learning aligning to the vision, implementing professional growth plan processes, scheduling instructional walk throughs, creating mentorship opportunities, and developing collaborative structures demonstrated the vision in action and continued to set the tone of high expectations while developing a culture of high standards for quality instruction. The leadership practice of setting the direction aligns with the LQS competency of embodying visionary leadership. Based on Leithwood's (2012) research, "setting the direction encompasses four specific practices: building a shared vision, fostering the acceptance of group goals, creating

high performance expectations, and communicating the direction” (p. 59). As noted, high schools are complex systems and therefore principals play a key role in setting the direction for the school in order to foster improvement and promote success (Day & Sammons, 2014). The principals’ engagement with teachers in the study ensured the vision of high-quality instruction and learning could be realized through the action of setting the direction for the school. This important work always took into consideration the diverse context of this school community. Throughout the findings there was evidence that the principal had a personal vision of success for all students, and they were acutely aware of teaching and learning within their school.

Although a shared vision of learning can appear to be thoughtful, well-articulated, and creates consensus around purpose, an essential leadership practice is the enactment of that vision. Principals are expected to set the tone, pace, and expectations for all members of the school community to improve student learning and well-being. Important to note is that specific practices in setting the direction do not occur in silos; they occur concurrently, intersect, and weave through one another. Coupled with the principal’s lived experience, which likely served to develop a deeper level of staff trust, participants in the study said that the practices worked in unison to create an environment that enhanced staff willingness to work together. Specifically noted in the findings was the principal’s courage to take risks, question practices, challenge the status quo, and authentically involve staff in visioning process. Likely the principal’s actions of asking questions, exploring other perspectives, and valuing voice led to the deeper work needed in the strategic alignment process ensuring the purpose to the work.

The importance of alignment. Key to the principal’s work of setting the direction was the leadership from the jurisdiction level, both from the school board and superintendent, in creating and communicating their strategic vision, which then filtered into the high school

system. The findings demonstrated the importance of strategic alignment, which was evident in the school jurisdiction's 3-year education plan, the school's CIP, high school teachers' PGPs, and the school's yearly PD plan. Noticeable through data analysis was the ability to operationalize these plans as a collaborative team since this principal had provided sound rationale and processes for staff involvement into the purposeful work of strategically aligning to the system within the CIP. Vice principals in the study noted that through this structure, the principal was able to build professional capacities and expertise of teachers while showing the alignment to the school vision. Teachers in the study saw this vision unfold throughout the year in collaboration meetings, PD sessions, and their own personal PD, supported by the principal, all of which continually influenced their teaching and, in turn, student learning. As indicated by a participating vice principal,

We definitely take a lot of time during professional development days to work through the CIP so that it's a living document that all of them understand and all of them have a piece of. We try not to make unilateral decisions on what goes into the CIP so that the leadership that we're embodying is one that is universal. We try really hard to make sure that teachers feel that they have a say in what we're doing. (VP2)

Robinson (2011) stated that as schools become more complex organizations, the establishment of clear goals and expectations creates common direction, sets clear expectations, provides a sense of purpose, and establishes priorities in an effort to reduce confusion of creating the path forward toward quality teaching and learning.

As indicated from the findings, strategic alignment towards common visioning, consensus, and acceptance of the plan was difficult work for the principal and the administrative team. As the participating vice principals noted, there was a push-pull factor, and teachers in the

study expressed the 80–20 rule as a factor to consider. As “No two visions are really alike” (VP2), and some teachers in the study thought the process was more authoritarian than democratic, naturally not all participating teachers may have enjoyed this process, saw a need for involvement, or found it beneficial to their work. This was the difficult balance for the principal, and that is, to drive the vision forward in a democratic process while knowing in the end the decision-making is the ultimate responsibility of the principal. The continual factors faced by the principal were (a) necessitating the importance of providing space for teachers’ diverse perspectives and interpretations of teaching, and (b) providing the flexibility to enact a shared responsibility both within their classrooms and the school community. To address these challenges, practices employed by the principal included the continual development and implementation of a shared strategic alignment process.

The findings indicated that this school community needed a strong leader who could set the direction and valued the intellectual capacity of staff to develop and implement this vision alongside the principal toward student engagement and well-being. This is also articulated by Leithwood (2012) who stated that it is not enough to create a vision for instructional improvement; rather, principals need to engage in targeted actions to improve student learning. These actions need to be linked to the instructional goals of teachers in the study through professional learning.

Theme 3: Leading Learning

The theme of leading learning is derived from three findings which include promoting and participating in learning and development, developing a robust mentorship program, and fostering student centered instructional practices which strongly indicated a learner-centered culture. The theme aligns with the LQS competency, leading a learning community. Contributing

to the learner-centered culture the findings revealed the principal's practices of modelling a high level of professional practice, engaging in on-going dialogue about teaching and learning, providing professional learning around research-based practices, and finally, actively providing direct instructional support and resources to teachers in the study within the improvement of the instructional program.

The findings provided evidence that this high school principal, an expert teacher and lifelong learner, was always on the cutting edge of new concepts in education, was well researched, and very knowledgeable about high school education. The principal was open-minded and ready to learn from others. Participants spoke about the principal being ever-present as a learner and positively affirmed the promotion and participation in learning and development by saying often, "I'm going to walk alongside you and learn with you" (P). The leadership practices of the principal as the lead learner within the high school context first included modelling to teachers in the study a commitment to professional development as they engaged in ongoing professional learning and personal reflection. Second, through experience in teaching content areas within the high school setting towards mastery teaching, the principal had developed credibility and trust among participants as an instructional leader. Third, through strategic alignment of the CIPs, PGPs, mentorship, and the involvement of staff in visioning and decision-making the principal created a learner-centered culture for teachers in the study which was equally as important as their student-centered focus.

The principal led through the lens of evidence-informed teaching and learning encouraging mentorship and collaboration among teachers in the study. Here, the principal provided time for them to discuss and reflect upon the evidence that had been gathered. Then the principal supported them in the learning process of interpreting and translating this evidence into

effective instructional actions. Reid (2013) described this leadership practice as “the promotion of environments that encourage data analyses, dialogue, trust, reflection, and adult learning” (p. 332). Both structures, mentorship and collaboration, were essential to the learner-centered culture because the principal within this large high school could not possibly influence each individual teacher. Direct and frequent involvement with teachers in the study providing them with specific, formative feedback of teaching and learning was difficult to achieve. Department heads, lead teachers, administrative team assignments, and the PD team also supported the principal in leading learning. Such practices are supported by DuFour and Marzano (2009) who asserted that, “Time devoted to building the capacity of teachers to work in teams is far better spent than time devoted to observing individual teachers” (p. 67). Based on the structure created by the principal to support teachers in the study, the principal had more time to connect with various teams to better support and monitor their work. Although Robinson (2011) and Wahlstrom’s (2012) research on high performing schools stated that principals should be accessible to teachers’ inquiries about instruction and knowledgeable about instructional techniques, this is not the case within complex high schools.

Distributed leadership structures through department heads and teacher leaders needed to be developed to meet the many and diverse needs of teachers in the study to improve their teaching practices. In meeting the competency of developing leadership capacity, the principal’s leadership approach was more distributed, involving a sharing of work toward instructional leadership and capacity building within the system. “It is just so important for today’s leader, today’s principal, to be collaborative in nature and to offer distributed leadership because they can’t do it all” (S). Wahlstrom (2012) posits many principals provide instructional leadership through a structural framework of teacher leaders, wherein responsibility is delegated to

department heads. Evident in a high school setting is the importance of developing leaders who will support instructional leadership whereby they seek out and provide differentiated opportunities for teachers to learn and grow. Both formal and informal leaders needed professional learning to develop their understanding of instructional leadership as a support to the principal, and more importantly, to continue the forward progression of continuous improvement within the school community.

Reid (2014) emphasized the important role of teacher leaders in sharing knowledge and new ideas with teacher teams to support the creation and mobilization of knowledge in the actualization of implementing effective instructional strategies and fostering student achievement. Collaborative work sessions investigating new instructional strategies or analyzing data, student support meetings, co-planning lessons, and observing lessons were structures identified by participants where teacher leaders could positively influence the quality of teaching and student learning.

Furthermore, the findings identified the importance of developing roles and responsibilities for department heads and teacher leaders as well as “specific professional learning on pedagogy, content knowledge, data analysis and leadership development” (Reid, 2014, p. 350). Communication of roles and responsibilities to teachers would support the work of informal leaders. Although the distributed leadership model is common in high school settings as support to the principal and teachers, I recommend that more research focused on the direct influence of distributed leadership specifically the department head structure on instructional leadership. Knowing that these are informal roles whereby teachers must adhere to their professional code of conduct, as well as act as mentors, advisors, and supporters, is this model improving the quality of teaching to support learning in the classroom?

Theme 4: Developing People

The leadership practice of developing people was clear throughout the 18 findings within this study. The finding of developing people aligns with the LQS competency of developing leadership capacity. Participants expressed the principal's ability and interpersonal skill set of empowering and recognizing teachers. As a result, teachers in the study felt valued, inspired, motivated, and engaged in the culture of learning within the school. Murphy and Seashore Louis (2018) stressed that "authentic, relationship-based leadership promotes employee trust, a sense of organizational justice, and a willingness to contribute voice to promoting the collective good" (p. 37).

From developing a collaborative, shared vision to encouraging a holistic approach to teaching, creating avenues of open, transparent communication to being visible and accessible, through the use of research based instructional strategies to analyzing data for informing practices, the principal ensured that teachers in the study were involved, and their voices were heard. Tschannen-Moran and Gareis' (2015) study on principals, trust, and cultivating vibrant schools supported the implications of trust as a "mediating variable of school leadership and student achievement" (p. 268). The findings indicated that participants trusted the principal who acted with fairness, respect, and integrity while demonstrating genuine concern and empathy for others. As a result, a learner-centered culture was cultivated.

Transformational Leadership. Knowing that the high school is a larger, more complex system, the principal chose to lead and manage the instructional program from a transformational leadership approach with a primary focus on teachers first. Transformational leadership focuses on how leaders exercise influence over their colleagues and on the nature of leadership relations... by communicating a compelling vision, conveying high

performance expectations, projecting self-confidence, modeling appropriate roles, expressing confidence in followers' ability to achieve goals, and emphasizing collective purpose. (Leithwood & Seashore Louis, 2012, p. 5)

The principal stated, "When I stepped in [to the principal position], I put our teachers at the center, I put our staff at the center. . . . And so began the journey of reflection and focus on the teachers" (P). This emphasis is illustrated in the conceptual framework which highlights staff in the center. This model was created collaboratively by staff to build the professional learning culture for the adults within this school community as they moved toward a growth mindset (Dweck, 2016) approach. Ambitious learning goals included engaging in professional learning, risk-taking, developing growth mindsets (Dweck, 2016), and sharing knowledge. These goals were set alongside the values of creativity, curiosity, and imagination. A climate of high expectations was established as staff contributed to and agreed to implement this framework within their professional learning, in collaborative meetings, and in mentorship alongside their peers.

Throughout the findings, participants unequivocally stated that the principal not only identified, empowered, and recognized upcoming leaders, but also had exemplary practices in the recognition and celebration of staff and student successes. Evidence indicated that the principal was a leader who supported staff and students equally. Murphy and Seashore Louis (2018) focused their research on positive school leadership, outlining the importance of leaders to show genuine recognition and interest for others' career growth and development while encouraging self-confidence in risk-taking. As one teacher noted,

But at the same time, [the principal is able] to hold space for us to develop and just to not be afraid to fall forward, so not to be afraid to make mistakes, as long as you are

continuing to move forward, you're learning and you're developing and you're growing.
(T4)

Participants revealed the many practices the principal employed to share the credit for school improvement. The principal created an affirmative orientation in their school; they expected the best and personalized recognition (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). Participants in the study knew that they have contributed to the success of the school and wanted to commit their time in continuing this success with their involvement in programs both inside and outside the classroom. Hence there was an expectation of teachers in the study to be involved in the wider community outside their classroom. Findings showed that this involvement impacted both teachers in the study and students in a positive way while adding to the holistic approach within the culture of the school.

Based on the Leithwood's (2012) research on four core leadership practices, the primary goal of developing people is capacity building "which is understood to include not only the knowledge and skills that staff members need to accomplish organization goals, but also the disposition that staff members need to persist in applying such knowledge and skills" (p. 60). Knowing that this high school encompassed the department head and teacher leader structure, capacity was being built through the allocation of professional learning and resources, such as workshops, book studies, in-service training, peer observation, coteaching and partnering with universities.

Conclusion

The discussion of the findings guided by the LQS competencies and theoretical framework provide insight into the ways this study supports, extends, and contributes to the research into the perceptions of one high school principal and how they enacted the four

leadership competencies. As well, teachers' perceptions who were involved in the study as to how these leadership practices influenced their instruction provided insight into a shared instructional leadership approach to improve teaching and learning. Four themes derived from 18 findings were discussed namely establishing a culture of learning, the importance of setting the direction, leading learning and developing people as four core leadership practices that could support teachers within a high school setting. The importance of establishing a culture of learning, high expectations, and trust as well as strategic alignment and distributed leadership were also discussed as supports for the principal within the complexity of the high school setting.

Noteworthy in the findings and my reflections is the interconnectedness of the four LQS competencies. Based on the findings, it became evident that **setting the direction** was a key leadership practice. The principal needed to have the knowledge, skills and capabilities of visioning, goal setting, and strategically aligning goals to support the development of a shared vision for teaching and learning. This leadership practice encompassed the importance of setting a clear, purposeful vision based on their ongoing analysis of the context of the school. Although the principal solicited and encouraged support from teachers, in the end, a key responsibility of the principal was enacting the vision daily toward continuous improvement. The principal continually encouraged teachers in the study to see the vision as a guidepost to improvement for their professional practice and toward optimal student learning. Therefore, in order to move forward as a system, in order to best support teacher practice, principals need to set direction to facilitate learning and development within the school's context.

Woven into and through the finding of setting the direction was **leading learning**. Once the vision was established, professional learning could be developed in alignment with the goals, strategies, and measurements within the continuous improvement plan. Structures such as

mentorship and collaboration supported the implementation of the vision as well as processes such as adult based learning techniques and resource allocation. Finally, **developing people** whereby teachers in the study felt empowered to articulate and implement the vision of learning into their classrooms, learn with and alongside their colleagues, and possess the autonomy to take risks in their teaching craft was developed within a supportive culture of trust with a proactive mindset and high expectations.

Although this study focused on the influence of principal practices on teaching, instructional leadership and quality of teaching are linked to student achievement (Mora-Ruano et al., 2021). The goal was the development of effective practices in both principal and teachers that would lead to increased student learning. In this study, student achievement was linked to teacher capacity shown through the principal's redesign of the organization toward a teacher centeredness approach aligned with the established student focus (Day and Sammons, 2014). The principal ensured that developing teachers' knowledge, skills, capacities, practices, and confidence through a teacher centered approach led to increased student engagement in a quarter system structure. This teacher centered approach was fostered through a shared vision, professional learning aligned to the vision, and a distributed leadership model developed in order to manage the intricate, complex high school instructional core. As noted in Day and Sammons' (2014) study, "it is increasingly recognized that the distribution of school leadership more widely within schools is important and can promote improvement (p. 9). In high schools, teacher improvement is connected to both instructional leadership and distributed leadership to support teaching quality, for example, a robust mentorship program as an exemplar in this study.

Contributions to Research and Practice in the High School Context

This study reveals an important contribution for both research and practice in the high

school context, as it demonstrates the complexity of leading high schools. While the study focused on one specific school, its findings indicate that the success of the school largely depends on leaders being cognizant of the interconnectedness within the entire system and developing the essential structures and processes to meet the main elements within the system. The system is stronger when the many parts are continually weaving within and through each other, for example strategic alignment, professional learning and distributed leadership structures and processes.

To move forward as a system to best support teacher practice, leaders need to set direction to facilitate learning and development with school context. When leaders set high expectations and engage their staff in building a shared vision, motivation and commitment is fostered along with clarity of purpose toward a common understanding of what quality teaching looks in support of optimal learning for students. Another impactful practice for leaders is that of lead learner. Leaders make learning a priority hence teachers may be motivated to do the same. Notably, leaders who participate alongside teachers in professional learning and development foster a sense of collective, shared purpose while engaging in professional dialogue and developing an understanding of the challenges learning presents within student-centered and learner-centered cultures.

Lastly, high school principals take an instructional leadership approach that is supported by distributed and transformational leadership styles. Department heads and lead teachers are common leadership structures offering a more diversified support system for teachers within the high school setting allowing the principal time to connect with teacher teams. Leaders encourage, build, and strengthen their informal leadership teams through professional learning opportunities and mentoring of effective instructional leadership approaches in order to model

impactful instructional approaches.

Although most of the findings in this study have been discussed in pertinent literature, it showed how leadership practices were operationalized in a high performing high school and how leadership practices play a critical part in a system. Firstly, this study could benefit policy makers with investigating the influence of the LQS as implemented by a high school principal knowing that this professional practice standard is new to leaders. Secondly, the study could be beneficial to system leaders with the understanding and implementing of the four leadership competencies within the broader scope of instructional leadership. Thirdly, school principals could reflect on their current leadership practices in comparison to those practices shared in this study toward improved instructional leadership.

Research Assumptions Revisited

It is useful to revisit the five assumptions I stated in Chapter 1. These assumptions are derived from my experience teaching in and leading within the Alberta Kindergarten to Grade 12 education system for the past 35 years.

My first assumption was that learning systems need to have high expectations for all learners. This assumption was confirmed within the research study focused on high school education. Expectations for learning were created by and continually communicated to students and teachers in the study. The development of two conceptual frameworks, one focused on staff and the other on students, created a climate of high expectations for learning and behaviour.

My second assumption was that learning systems require a comprehensive understanding of curriculum, strong pedagogical practices, and assessment. Based on the findings within this study, high school teachers in the study understood their curriculum. A number of teachers in this study were moving toward stronger instructional practices because of the quarter system

structure along with the school's focus on student engagement. Assessment was not mentioned by the participant therefore my findings could not prove or refute this assumption.

The third assumption was the role of a high school principal is complex, involving both managerial responsibilities and instructional leadership practices. Based on the findings this assumption was confirmed by all participants. High schools are complex. The principal in this study developed structures and processes to meet the many demands of a high school principal while ensuring focus remained on instructional leadership through establishing a culture of learning, setting the direction, leading learning, and developing people.

The fourth assumption was that system improvement requires a collaborative inquiry approach focused on student learning at all levels of the learning system through shared leadership and collective responsibility. Evident in this study was that of a shared vision for student learning. Collaborative inquiry or collective responsibility were not evident in the findings.

The fifth assumption was that learning systems need a systematic approach to change. Based on the findings all participants referred to the principal as a big picture thinker who used a systems approach developing structures and processes to support a vision of teaching and learning toward awareness and implementation.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations

As this case study concluded, I continued to reflect on the purpose of this study: to explore the perceptions of one high school principal and how they enacted the four leadership competencies: (a) embodying visionary leadership, (b) leading a learning community, (c) providing instructional leadership, and (d) developing leadership capacity within their daily work. In addition, the exploration continued in determining if the perception of the principal matched that of the vice principals, teachers, and a long-serving superintendent in the study in terms of the support teachers needed from their principal to improve their teaching quality.

When I retrace my steps along the path of this research study, I realize I now have a deeper understanding of the importance of Alberta Education's policy on professional practice standards, and specifically the LQS (Alberta Education, 2020b). This standard, along with the SLQS and TQS (Alberta Education, 2020c, 2020d), provide parents and the public with the assurance that providing quality education to all students is the focus of every school leader and teacher in the province of Alberta. The LQS framework of leadership competency focuses on improving quality teaching and learning with indicators as benchmarks for performance.

A major conclusion of this study were the 18 findings within the systems thinking approach (Scott & Davis, 2007). Evident was the interconnectedness of these findings as they wove through the four instructional leadership competencies. Key to these findings was the importance of the principal's ability to set the direction for the school and to embody the skill set of visionary leader. Once the direction had been established, then the other three competencies could easily flow in the development of a shared approach to instructional leadership for all. Overall, this study contributes to the knowledge of how the four competencies can influence a

shared instructional leadership approach, and more specifically, it describes the leadership practices of the principal in the development of this approach.

In this chapter, conclusions are drawn in relation to the four themes that emerged from the preceding chapter. Next, I examine the implications of the main study findings. I propose recommendations for jurisdiction leadership and principals to cultivate more opportunities to focus on the enactment of the four LQS competencies as well as suggestions for further research. Last, I outline the successes and challenges of the study.

Conclusions

Four key conclusions can be drawn from the findings of this research: (a) the importance of leadership, (b) the importance of internal systems, (c) the importance of external systems, and (d) the importance of policy being aligned and clear. In this section I discuss each in turn.

The Importance of Leadership

High school is a critical component within the educational system with the final preparation of students transitioning to postsecondary, polytechnical schools, and the workforce. Students need school leaders at this level with leadership practices who understand the high school context, as well as teachers who enact quality teaching practices to prepare students for a knowledge-based society. Innovation, creativity, and the management of knowledge are skills that high school students need as they leave the kindergarten to Grade 12 school system and enter society as adults. Students need school leaders who understand how to develop systems and processes that support more innovative, digital, and collaborative practices and have the courage to forgo traditional models of teaching concepts and methods.

Research has shown that principals do have a positive influence on teaching and learning (Fullan, 2014; Leithwood et al., 2004, 2008, 2012; Robinson, 2011). Elected officials in Alberta

believe that school leadership policies are key to improving teaching and learning. The Ministry of Education has provided assurance to the public through policy that the successful implementation of the competencies within the LQS will develop school leadership knowledge, skills, and attributes to support quality teaching and optimal learning for students (Alberta Education, 2020b). Therefore, it is important to understand the practices the principal in this study took to become an effective instructional leader, thus answering the first research question.

The complexity of the high school principalship and managerial distractions that shift attention away from the important goal of student-centered learning and well-being are important challenges to remember. Referring often to CIPs, leading learning alongside teachers, scheduling effective growth, providing supervision and evaluation opportunities, having reflective, impactful professional conversations with educators, and developing leaders within the school are not always priorities for high school principals. Consequently, it is essential for school jurisdictions to develop a clear vision of leadership capabilities that “explicitly informs leaders what they need to know, do and be in order to have a positive impact on teaching and learning” (Breakspear et al., 2017, Executive Summary). If the leadership focus is not coming from the jurisdiction level, then the principal needs to develop the leadership knowledge, skills, and capabilities individually and in team within their school in order to positively influence teaching and learning.

The Importance of Systems Structure—Inside the School

Within this high school system, strategic alignment was evident as the result of the principal implementing strong structures and processes in the development of common expectations, language, and understanding for all around teaching and learning. Not only was there an understanding of classroom practices, but the principal was also aware of what was

occurring within the larger organizational system. The principal continued to pay attention to the larger context of the-school jurisdiction. By developing the essential skill set of embodying visionary leadership, the principal was aware of honouring the strong legacy of the school while providing rationale to teachers in the study for new structures and processes. Building a culture of high expectations, fostering accountability with purpose, and establishing nonnegotiables resulted in the already mentioned push–pull factor. Fostering different perspectives and supporting teacher autonomy within rational constraints was expected for continuous improvement.

Conclusions drawn from the study include the importance of principals to focus on building the skill set for setting the direction of the school while also being aware of the challenges of visioning and developing new initiatives. Pace, variety, fatigue, and effective communication techniques were mentioned. These challenges could cause longer intervals between implementation and sustainability. In addition, fear of change, complacency, and a wide range of choice within professional learning to meet the diversity of teachers' learning needs did not always align with the principal's vision. Vice principals in the study were aware of resisters to the vision and the importance of finding evidence that the strategies developed in the CIP were truly advancing their vision of student learning and well-being. Therefore, principals need to be cognizant of the many voices within the system to ensure that the collective group is developing, and all voices are encouraged in cultivating a culture that values growth and continuous improvement.

The role the principal is to ensure that all aspects of schooling align with the goal of improving instruction in order that all students succeed. A key challenge for this high school principal was taking on multiple roles, and diversity of responsibilities, as well as managing

complex problems. These distractions diverted attention from the long-term vision of fostering high-quality instruction and student learning. Participating vice principals agreed that the principal had a variety of responsibilities; thus, supporting instructional leadership was difficult, although it remained the top priority. A conclusion that could be made is that it was important for the high school principal to have an understanding of high school curriculum in order to implement effective direction setting, align PD, and develop distributed leadership. The majority of teachers interviewed expressed the importance of the administrative team possessing a wide range of subject knowledge expertise and understanding of the high school context while knowing how to support students with high school requirements. Moreover, within this high school, the challenge of many and varied student needs demanded diverse, timely, and targeted approaches. Therefore, a reliance on a macro-level system of support could not occur.

The Importance of Systems Structure—Outside the School

For jurisdictions to continue the focus of developing quality teaching towards optimal student learning, jurisdiction leaders need to clearly identify the research-based knowledge, skills, and capabilities of leadership practices that are most impactful and in alignment with the LQS (Alberta Education, 2020b). The legislated LQS has provided jurisdiction leaders an opportunity to dive deeply into their school jurisdiction's current leadership practices, administrator PGP development, beginning administrator evaluations, and assessment tools used to evaluate leadership knowledge and skills towards a redesign and alignment of leadership development.

With the Alberta government's approval of the professional practice standards and the superintendent's vision of the importance of leadership development, the entire school jurisdiction was in alignment in developing leadership knowledge and skills that influence

quality teaching. Research into the current state of educational leadership has indicated that many school systems are struggling with a shortage of school leadership, have young and inexperienced leaders, and/or have current leaders who need to develop as more effective leaders (Breakspear et al., 2017; Fullan & Rincón-Gallardo, 2017). Traditional administrative development programs do not attract quality candidates, working conditions are not appealing, and, once in the position of leadership, leaders are not prepared or properly supported to develop the skills and meet the demands of this challenging work. Programs that are sporadic, short term, and detached do not create sustainability for leadership capacity development. Programs lacking strong mentorship components, allowing potential leaders to learn the complexity of the role and leadership styles alongside an effective leader, do not provide the foundational support to develop leadership confidence and efficacy.

Often missing from programs is the link between theory and practice. Programs that are out of touch with real-life complexities and the demands of school leadership do not create a strong foundation for leadership development. School leaders need to determine which leadership style fits the situation and the context they are working in, but if leaders do not have a solid understanding of leadership theories, they will not have the knowledge base to support their actions. This perspective was shared by vice principals in the study in the discussion of formal and informal leadership roles. A challenge was the lead teachers' lack of knowledge as well as authority to impact change and improvement at a deeper level with other teachers. Other challenges in developing leadership capacity cited by participants were increased workloads, unreachable expectations, and unreasonable demands on the principal and administrative team. Balance, time, and compensation were additional factors deterring teachers from stepping into leadership roles. The principal expressed that they needed to set boundaries to ensure a more

balanced approach to work life and home life, as well as rely on staff to take more responsibility for tasks. Advice from the principal to potential leaders was the importance of discernment when considering formal leadership roles and reflecting deeply on the LQS (Alberta Education, 2020b) to understand both the complexities and rewards of leadership.

Within this school jurisdiction, coherent, ~~and~~ purposeful, and collaborative approaches for developing leadership capacities were apparent from superintendent to, and principals, and teachers with a focus on quality teaching that impacts student learning. As researchers have noted, if jurisdictions are focused on improving student outcomes, then they need to systematically develop the expertise of their school leaders (Breakspear et al., 2017; Leithwood & Seashore Louis, 2012; Robinson, 2011).

The Importance of Policy to Be Aligned and Clear

The LQS was designed to ensure a clear, purposeful approach across the whole educational system supporting the development of teacher practice, organizational culture, and team development with goal of improved student learning (Alberta Education, 2020b). The Alberta government acted as a platform for this learning to help jurisdiction leaders coordinate professional learning within the context of their school jurisdiction. The understanding and implementation of the LQS, then, was only as good as the leadership development plan implemented at the jurisdiction level. In the school jurisdiction in which this study was conducted, a leadership development model was evident. It is up to school jurisdictions to develop well-designed programs to support the learning of leaders. Evidence shows that high-quality leadership preparation and development are critical to high-quality practice, which in turn optimizes the capacity of schools to support student engagement, student learning, and other important school outcomes (Winn et al., 2016, p. 33).

The superintendent believed that “the most important position in the school district is your principal”; thus, school systems should be spending more time offering professional learning to principals and their administrative teams alongside jurisdiction leaders. The high school administrative team examined in this study began monthly training with the superintendent, learning about continuous improvement, awareness, implementation of the LQS (Alberta Education, 2020b) and TQS (Alberta Education, 2020d), alignment of goals, and analyzing what student success looked like. Challenges facing the superintendent were supporting the understanding and purpose of the LQS within the daily work of school leaders while gathering evidence to ensure that there was an impact on teaching and student learning and not merely compliance to the standards. As well, the superintendent needed to intentionally focus on supporting the development of leadership capabilities across a broader range of people in a collaborative effort to support school leaders, such as an Aspiring Leaders program.

School jurisdictions that focus on learning and development of high impact knowledge and skills through policies, practice, supports, and direction create sustainable learning environments. Relational trust was built within this jurisdiction whereby leaders became vulnerable to take risks to enhance authentic learning. This is the ultimate learner-centered approach.

Implications of Study Findings

This study has several implications for leadership development at both the jurisdiction and school level as well as policy implementation and shared instructional leadership approaches. The principal within this study approached teaching and learning from a holistic lens; the focus was on the whole child. The system was designed from a holistic lens with high expectations for all to succeed. Evident was the principal’s belief in an inclusive approach to

teaching and learning and a belief that all students can learn. This study demonstrates that principals adopting leadership practices from the lens of the whole child allows schools to focus on student learning and well-being within a shared instructional leadership approach.

Although the provincial government can mandate standards to ensure the development of leadership expertise, school jurisdictions need to take on the heavy lifting of this work, focusing on the context in which they live and work. In turn, the context needs to be fully understood by leadership teams ensuring ongoing analysis and assessment to apply purposeful leadership capabilities. Fullan and Rincón-Gallardo (2017) believed leaders need to “analyze their own systems and develop lines of action for definable improvement in their own settings” (Preface section, para. 5). Within this school jurisdiction, the superintendent chose to be deeply involved in the process of understanding the LQS (Alberta Education, 2020b) and the implication of this work alongside school leaders. System leaders should be lead learners visible in the learning process and participating collectively in the alignment of research to practice while teaching about and then assessing the impact on the system’s culture. The leadership by the superintendent was then modelled by the principal within the school setting. This collaboration creates a two-way partnership developing a continuum of trust and engagement. People begin to imagine themselves in leadership positions and learning becomes more valued, which in essence moves to improvement of teaching practices and deeper leadership within the school system (Former superintendent, personal communication, June 26, 2018).

Principals need to continually focus on creating a working systemic structure within the school to support the important work of teachers in creating engaging learning environments. From the aspects of timetabling to communication, CIPs to PD plans, walk-throughs to

evaluation, and leading learning to developing leaders, these considerations ensure the key priorities for all are on teaching and learning.

Recommendations

In this section I present recommendations stemming from the findings and implications. They fall under three broad categories: (a) leadership, system structure, and policy implementation in schools; (b) the practice of inquiry-based teaching; and (c) the practice of collaborative leadership approaches. I also offer some suggestions for further research.

Recommendations for Leadership, System Structure, and Policy Implementation in Schools

Instructional leadership is an extremely broad concept for school leaders to understand and implement. The following recommendations pertain to superintendents, jurisdiction leaders, and principals. It is recommended that superintendents and jurisdiction level teams do the following:

1. Translate the LQS (Alberta Education, 2020b) into actions with a specific focus on the importance of the competencies that lead to teaching and learning. Begin a long-term investment in developing instructional leadership capacity at the jurisdiction and school levels. Provide clear direction to schools through standards and curriculum. Communicate a strong belief in the capacity of teachers and school leaders to improve the quality of teaching and learning.
2. Consider building leadership capacity through experiential learning as school leaders' vision, plan, implement, and assess CIPs or goals within their school communities. Leaders need to be flexible, adaptable, and agile as they design, integrate, and refine school practices while being responsive to problems or opportunities within the school context.

3. Ensure programs are owned, led, and upheld by the members of the profession emphasizing reflective practice. Programs should provide opportunities for peers to discuss and solve problems of practice and develop support systems through coaching and mentoring.
4. Investigate additional ways to ensure that leaders own and steer ongoing leadership development. Seeking feedback from leaders, cocreating leadership program designs in partnership with the profession and universities, and refining PD are some examples. Programs should create collaborative groupings or opportunities for sharing leadership development work and best practices with others to develop a desire in leaders to learn from others versus competing for students and/or compliance to the government standards.
5. Encourage school leaders to develop strong working relationships with parents and the community.
6. Insist on data-based decision-making and helping schools interpret and use data to improve instruction.

Recommendation for Practice: School Leaders and Teachers: Inquiry-Based Teaching

As the complexity of leadership increases when dealing with complex change related to teacher development to support positive student learning, having the whole system learn together is essential. Recommendations for school leaders and teachers include developing awareness and implementing any of the following frameworks:

1. The TQS (Alberta Education, 2020d), to support teachers' ongoing analysis of the context and decisions about which pedagogical knowledge and abilities to apply, resulting in optimum learning for all students.

2. Timperley's (2008) research on cycles of professional inquiry and knowledge building, as a model for school jurisdictions to utilize within their professional learning approach. Each cycle would allow the instructional strategy to be understood, developed, and extended to show evidence of student learning.
3. Breakspear et al.'s (2017) learning sprints model, based on an evidence-based action research approach with attention to rapid, precise, intentional cycles of work towards student learning improvement based on six key elements.
4. Friesen's (2009) framework for effective teacher practices, focused on teaching and learning in today's complex classrooms, which identifies five core principles as a foundational framework for effective teaching practices.

Whether inquiry-based or iterative cycles are chosen to implement change, leaders cannot and should not do this important work alone. Thus, a collaborative team approach is essential and shows increased student achievement and well-being as a result.

Recommendation for Practice: Collaborative Leadership Approaches

To develop the full capacity of teaching and learning, “more people need to have the knowledge, judgement, and skills required to shape and guide the learning” (Breakspear et al., 2017, p. 37). Teachers and school leaders build the capability of relational trust when working together in professional teams, engaging in complex decision-making with a focus on benefitting the learning and well-being of students. School leaders who tend to micromanage all aspects of the educational process do not allow for capacity building of stakeholders or the time and space needed for focused, purposeful, and collaborative work in solving complex problems. School leadership is a delicate balancing act, and therefore, “leaders who strike a proper balance between stability and change emphasize two priorities: they work to develop and support people

to do their best, and they work to redesign their organizations to improve effectiveness” (Wahlstrom et al. 2010, p. 7).

Recommendations for Further Research

Given that the principal’s leadership practices are critical to quality teaching and optimum student learning, more research is required into instructional leadership from the high school perspective. This was an area in which I identified gaps in the research literature.

Second, the limited scope of this study should be expanded. Knowing that this was an exploratory single case study, it would be important to replicate this study in comparison to other high schools, to pilot to other schools, or to work with low-performing high schools to discover the systematic approach the principal took to develop a shared approach to instructional leadership using the four LQS competencies (Alberta Education, 2020b) identified within this study. In addition, it is vital to understand the required elements of the internal structure of the school to know what is needed in order that the LQS can be put into practices and actions.

Third, the LQS (Alberta Education, 2020b) is a relatively new policy as a school leadership measure. Further research is needed on implementation of the standard and measurement of success to determine if school jurisdictions comply with a standard and if there is evidence of authentic development of leaders and change occurring as a result. Thus, “we need to develop leaders with large repertoires of practices and the capacity to choose from those repertoires as needed, not leaders trained in the delivery of one ‘ideal’ set of practices” (Hattie, 2015, p. 10). Therefore, more research is needed in flexibility within leadership styles in order to find the style and structure most suited to leaders’ local situation.

Researcher Reflections on Successes and Challenges

Throughout my experiences in this research study, I have grown both personally and professionally through personal reflection, rigorous reading, and implementation of the various stages of research design. This enhanced learning has supported the development of my understanding of the field of research and the application of effective research to support the improvement of the principalship on quality teaching. As a result of my work and keen interest in leadership, the focus throughout this doctoral journey has involved critical reading, inquiry, and reflection that has led to a deeper understanding of school leadership practices towards quality teaching.

This journey has allowed me to research a school community wherein the principal understood the importance of developing a systems thinking approach and engaged staff in complex change processes focused on a holistic approach to student learning and well-being. The principal was a master teacher and possessed the knowledge, skills, and capabilities highlighted throughout the study in understanding the complexity of the high school structure. Knowing that the complex role of principals continually takes them away from the important work of supporting teachers within the instructional core toward optimal student learning, this principal recognized that system alignment would be key to their approach. Instructional leadership continued to be a priority for this principal even with all the complexities that come along with leading a high school.

Within my research on school leadership, I engaged in meaningful conversations with research participants and then, through reflection on leadership, was provided more insight and understanding into the necessary leadership practices that support high school leaders and teachers. I recognized that we have shared experiences as leaders and teachers. Through

generative dialogue and meaningful engagement with staff, the principal was able to develop an understanding and implementation of a shared instructional leadership approach within the school community and, in turn, enhance quality teaching in classrooms.

Throughout this study I learned more about systems thinking and capacity building within an education context. I focused on coherence within the focus on leadership practices and quality teaching. Marion and Uhl-Bien (2001) posited that there needs to be a reconsideration of traditional approaches to leadership, generating an alternative focus on leadership where leaders enable others' abilities for the people in the organization to remain engaged and connected. One of the largest challenges facing leaders today is the need to position and enable organizations and people for adaptability in the face of increasingly dynamic and demanding environments. This has been evident in the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic and the need for leaders to adapt and modify to support their people and organizations as situations change instantaneously. Through a systems thinking approach, the principal was setting up the system to adjust, modify, and adapt with the changing learning environments while recognizing the culture and context of the school community.

In a systems thinking approach, successful educational reform needs to be more context specific, integrated within and outside both the school system and schools in an attempt toward successful implementation of capacity-building strategies. The principal took opportunities to develop a stronger network of people working together in order to lay a true foundation of innovative change. Understanding the importance of creating innovative environments through trust and collaboration while enabling others to take the lead was important to the principal. As well, developing strong networks within and outside the system for support toward sustainability

was difficult, but was recognized as an important next step to open new avenues for implementing inspiring, innovative practices for system change.

Moving forward, I plan to continue examining leadership practices that support school leaders as they develop and support teachers in their collective goal to create organizations that show evidence of quality teaching. Sustained focus on the four competencies will continue to be key to moving forward. I believe that I answered the research questions and throughout this study, I have gained knowledge and insight into the importance of leadership practices that support quality teaching. In addition, the research study aligned with the four competencies, developing a shared instructional leadership approach toward shared responsibility, ownership, and accountability for student learning and well-being.

Conclusion

Education provides a foundation of stability for society. A large part of this stability is the result of strong principals committed to developing, engaging, and empowering school communities toward quality teaching and improving student learning outcomes. Principals are second to teachers in influencing student achievement. Knowing this fact is of vital importance. Increased understanding of the essential knowledge, skills, and capabilities that principals need to possess will positively influence the quality of teaching and optimum student learning. Students will be more prepared with the competencies and knowledge base they need to live and succeed in the rapidly changing globalized world because of strong leadership and quality teaching.

With the implementation of the LQS (Alberta Education, 2020b), there is an interconnectedness and alignment of government, school jurisdictions, and schools working collaboratively on this standard in providing opportunities and new ways of thinking about

leadership. Impactful leadership practices will allow school leaders to be agile, adaptive, and flexible as they learn the complexity and challenges of their leadership role towards a focused vision of sustained, positive impacts on teachers and students. All systems working collectively together could change the way education does business as they explicitly move forward, designing systems to generate more and better leaders over time. This direction, in turn, provides assurance to parents and stakeholders that the education system is monitoring, maintaining, and enhancing the quality of teaching and student learning.

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Appendix A: Invitation Emails

Email Invitation to Superintendents

Dear [Superintendent's Name],

I am currently in my doctoral studies with the U of C and the focus of my research is on the principal and his/her leadership practices that positively influence teachers' instructional practices. I am looking at four LQS competencies; namely, embodying visionary leadership, leading a learning community, providing instructional leadership, and developing leadership capacity as four core competencies that influence quality teaching in a school. This is a single case study. Therefore, the high-performing high school is a key component, and the principal is the main focus area. I will interview the principal as well as 6–8 teachers who volunteer. I will also look at school improvement plans and PD plans.

I am looking at your jurisdiction [targets] and from what I saw you are doing very well. Congratulations! In spending time on [school name] site, it seems that they are truly high performing under [principal's name] leadership.

Do you feel [principal's name] would engage with me in this research study? Would you like to connect about this and discuss my focus area more?

Thanks for considering this request. I understand how busy you and your principals are and appreciate the consideration.

Kathleen Finnigan

Doctor of Education Candidate

Letter of Information for Superintendent

[Date; Address Block]

Re: University research study focused on the implementation of four leadership competencies within an Alberta high school

Dear [Name]:

Thank you for your consideration of providing me access to one of your high-performing high schools in order to explore the perceptions of one high school principal and how they enact the four leadership competencies within the Alberta Education Leadership Quality Standard (LQS); namely, (a) embodying visionary leadership, (b) leading a learning community, (c) providing instructional leadership, and (d) developing leadership capacity within his/her daily work. In addition, I would like to interview eight to ten teachers in this high school to gain their perceptions of how these leadership actions positively influence their instructional practices in high school. The intent of this research is to document leadership knowledge, skills, and capabilities that may contribute to quality teaching in a high-performing Alberta high school while maintaining alignment to a provincially mandated leadership quality standard.

The school will be selected because it is a high-performing school based on trending data within the three-year average on the Alberta Education Accountability Pillar's overall summary. Three areas will guide the selection of the chosen high school: 1) student learning opportunities, including data on safe and caring learning environments, the program-of-studies, education quality, high school completion, and dropout rates; (2) student learning achievement (Grades 10 to 12), including diploma acceptable and excellence data; and (3) continuous improvement, which focuses on school improvement in the past three years.

Working under the supervision of Dr. Catherine Chua, the collection and analysis of data will assist me in the fulfillment of degree requirements for a Doctorate in Education: Senior Leadership: K–12. My rationale for this research inquiry is to provide practical information to school principals how leadership actions positively influence teachers' instructional practices in high school with a focus on four LQS competencies. In addition, this study may be informative to educators, practitioners, and policymakers as the findings may add to the research literature that relates to the shared overall instructional leadership practices, the implementation of the LQS, and competency-based leadership, with particular focus on the context of high schools.

Participants will be invited to volunteer to participate in the study. Participant involvement will include one 60- to 90-minute interview via Zoom or phone. The interviews will be scheduled at a mutually agreed upon time. This research process intends minimal disturbance to ongoing instructional activities as it will not require access to students or parents within the school environment. Interviews will occur outside of instructional time.

Interview questions will be emailed to participants in advance. Additional questions may be asked during the interview for clarification and understanding. During the interviews, an audio recording as well as detailed notes will be taken. I will transcribe the interviews, and the participant will be provided with a copy of the transcript to review, revise, and clarify information within one week of receiving the transcript. Revised transcripts will be sent to me by email at [email address].

Every measure will be taken to ensure protection of all participants in this study. Pseudonyms will be used for participants, school name, and location. All participant information, such as individual interview recordings and transcripts, will be encrypted and computer password protected. Research-related records and data will be stored in my home office, in Red

Deer, Alberta, in a locked cabinet in a secure location. My supervisor will have access to my raw data, but participant identities will remain confidential. Only I and my supervisor will have access to interview notes, recordings, and transcripts.

Please note that as a researcher, I will not be judging the principal or teacher or evaluating their responses, but merely collecting data to gain a better understanding of the topic. Principal and teacher participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Participants will be aware that the interview is not evaluative, but an opportunity to discuss leadership practices that support teaching. All selected voluntary participants will be provided an informed consent form for one-on-one interviews. They may decline to answer any of the interview questions or be audiotaped, and they have a right to withdraw from the study at any time prior to data analysis in its entirety, three weeks after the interview. If a participant chooses to withdraw, their contributions will be removed and destroyed to protect the participant's privacy.

This research study has been approved by the Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board of the University of Calgary. If you have any questions regarding the process or research study, please contact me at [telephone number] or [email address]. Alternatively, please contact Dr. Chua at [telephone number] or [email address]. Once the research study has been concluded, a final copy of the dissertation will be provided to you upon request. Please note all data collected from this study will be destroyed after five years.

Thank you for your consideration in allowing me access to one of your high schools in your school jurisdiction, the principal, and teachers in to gain a better understanding of how leadership actions of a principal positively influence teachers' instructional practices.

Sincerely, Kathleen Finnigan, Doctor of Education Candidate

Email Invitation to High School Principal

Good day,

As principal of a high performing high school, I would like to thank you for considering participation in this university research study. Your school was selected because it is a high-performing school based the Alberta Education Accountability Pillar's overall summary.

The research is focused on one high-performing high school in order to explore the perceptions of a high school principal and how they enact the four leadership competencies within the Alberta Education Leadership Quality Standard (LQS); namely, (a) embodying visionary leadership, (b) leading a learning community, (c) providing instructional leadership, and (d) developing leadership capacity within his/her daily work. I would like to interview you, the principal, of this high-performing high school. In addition, I would like to interview eight to ten teachers in your school to gain their perceptions of how these leadership actions positively influence their instructional practices. The intent of this research is to document leadership knowledge, skills, and capabilities that may contribute to quality teaching in a high performing Alberta high school while maintaining alignment to a provincially mandated leadership quality standard.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and participants can withdraw at any time prior to data analysis in its entirety, three weeks after the interview. If you would like to participate, please review the attached letter of information for participants as well as the attached consent form. Please complete and sign the consent form at your earliest convenience to [email address] from your personal email account.

Thank you for your consideration of participation in order to gain a better understanding of how leadership actions of a principal positively influence teachers' instructional practices.

Sincerely,

Kathleen Finnigan

Doctor of Education Candidate

[Signature block]

Email Invitation to Teachers and Vice Principals

Good day,

As a [teacher or vice principal] of a high performing high school I would like to thank you for considering participation in this university research study. Your school was selected because it is a high-performing school based the Alberta Education Accountability Pillar's overall summary.

The research is focused on one high-performing high school in order to explore the perceptions of a high school principal and how they enact the four leadership competencies within the Alberta Education Leadership Quality Standard (LQS); namely, (a) embodying visionary leadership, (b) leading a learning community, (c) providing instructional leadership, and (d) developing leadership capacity within his/her daily work. I would like to interview you, and eight to ten of your colleagues within this high performing high school, to gain your perceptions of how these leadership actions positively influence your instructional practices. The intent of this research is to document leadership knowledge, skills, and capabilities that may contribute to quality teaching in a high-performing Alberta high school while maintaining alignment to a provincially mandated leadership quality standard.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and participants can withdraw at any time prior to data analysis in its entirety, three weeks after the interview. If you would like to participate, please review the attached letter of information for participants as well as the

attached consent form. Please complete and sign the consent form at your earliest convenience to [email address] from your personal email account.

Thank you for your consideration of participation in order to gain a better understanding of how leadership actions of a principal positively influence teachers' instructional practices.

Sincerely,

Kathleen Finnigan

Doctor of Education Candidate

[Signature block]

Interview Preamble (Sent to All Participants)

To explore the four leadership competencies and the influence of these leadership actions on teaching practice, the following research questions will be addressed:

1. How does a school principal perceive his/her leadership practices contribute to quality teaching in an Alberta high school?
2. What actions/practices of the principal support teaching practice in an Alberta high school?

Supplementary questions include:

3. How have the four competencies—embodying visionary leadership, leading a learning community, providing instructional leadership, and developing leadership capacity—contributed to the overall shared leadership practices of the principal?
4. In the daily work of the principal how are the competencies helpful?

Key Terminology

Instructional Leadership: A set of practices and beliefs resulting in a focus on instructional improvement that are intended to achieve increased learning for students (Leithwood, 2012).

Competency: An interrelated set of knowledge, skills, and attitudes developed over time and drawn upon and applied to a particular leadership context in order to support quality leadership, teaching, and optimum learning as required by the Leadership Quality Standard.

Quality Teaching: Occurs when the teacher's ongoing analysis of the context, and the teacher's decisions about which pedagogical knowledge and abilities to apply, result in optimum learning for all students.

Appendix B: Consent Form



Researcher: Kathleen Finnigan, Faculty of
Graduate Studies, Education,
[telephone number]
[email address]

Supervisor: Dr. Catherine Chua, Faculty of
Education

Title of Project: Implementation of Four Leadership Competencies within an Alberta High School

**WERKLAND SCHOOL OF
EDUCATION**

Graduate Division of Educational
Research
2500 University Drive NW
Calgary, AB, Canada T2N 1N4
ucalgary.ca

This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you, is only part of the process of informed consent. If you want more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this research study (REB20-2153).

Participation is completely voluntary and confidential. You are free to discontinue participation at any time during this study.

Purpose of the Study

This study focuses on the implementation of the Leadership Quality Standard (LQS); one of three professional practice standards legislated by the Alberta Government on September 1, 2019, to investigate the role of a principal's daily enactment of high-leverage instructional leadership practices, that positively influence teachers' instructional practices. This single case study involves one high-performing high school and focuses on the leadership practices of one high school principal on teaching practice. Four competencies within the LQS will be examined: embodying visionary leadership, leading a learning community, providing instructional leadership, and developing leadership capacity

What Will I Be Asked To Do?

The researcher would like to engage you in one in-depth interview via Zoom or phone for approximately 60 to 90 minutes. An audio recording device will be used, and written notes taken during the interview to ensure accuracy of responses in collecting data for the study.

Scheduled interviews after school hours will be arranged after volunteer agreement to participate. All recorded interviews will be transcribed verbatim by a qualified transcriber who has signed a confidentiality agreement. Participants will be provided with a copy of the transcript to review and revise. Please note that during the interview you are free to ask questions at any time.

Only the investigator, Kathleen Finnigan, and the project supervisor, Dr. Catherine Chau, will have access to interview notes and recordings. The information will be kept anonymous. Participant will be provided a copy of the interview transcripts and interpretations to check them for accuracy and edits and to provide feedback. This study is not considered “high-risk” and so there is no anticipated harm or predictable risks associated with your participation. You are under no obligation to participate and, if you do consent to participate, you may, and without consequence, decide not to continue your involvement or to refuse to answer any questions. If you decide to withdraw your participation after the interview, any data collected from you will be withdrawn from the study. A complete list of the question that will be asked in the interview is provided at the end of this consent form, however, they may differ depending upon your responses.

What Type of Personal Information Will Be Collected?

If you agree to participate in this study, your name and contact information as well as educational and professional background will be required along with your academic major and/or the subject areas you teach. No personal identifying information will be collected in this study, and all participants shall remain anonymous.

Interviews will occur via Zoom software and audio recording which will only be available to the researcher. Recordings will not be shared or published in any form.

Participants will be asked to select a pseudonym for the research to use during this study with will be kept confidential.

Please see the options below in regard to your choice of participation in this research study. You may choose all options, some, or none of them. Please review each of these options and select Yes or No:

I grant permission to be audio-recorded: Yes: ___ No: ___

I wish to remain anonymous, but you may refer to me by a pseudonym: Yes: ___ No: ___

The pseudonym I choose for myself is (or no preference): _____

A sample of research questions for the interviews is attached to this consent form.

Are There Risks or Benefits if I Participate?

There are no anticipated risks or predicable harm associated with participating in this study. Confidentiality and anonymity will be assured. Taking part in this research study will provide a better understanding of the principal's daily enactment of high-leverage instructional leadership practices, which positively influence teachers' instructional practices.

What Happens to the Information I Provide?

Upon your permission to audio record the interview, only the researcher, Kathleen Finnigan, and her principal investigator, Dr. Catherine Chua, will have access to the interview recordings, notes, and transcripts.

All participant information, such as individual interview recordings and transcripts, will be kept in strict confidence. Pseudonyms will be used for participants, school name and location. All electronic data will be encrypted, and password protected. The anonymous data will be stored for five years on a computer disk, at which time, it will be permanently erased.

Would you like to receive a summary of the study's results? Yes: ___ No: ___

Signatures

Your signature on this form indicates that 1) you understand to your satisfaction the information provided to you about your participation in this research project, and 2) you agree to participate in the research project.

In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from this research project at any time. You should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Participant's Name: (please print) _____

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's Name: (please print) _____

Researcher's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Questions/Concerns

If you have any further questions or want clarification regarding this research and/or your participation, please contact:

Mrs. Kathleen Finnigan

Doctoral Student, Werklund School of Education

Senior Leadership: K-12

University of Calgary

[telephone number]

[email address]

Dr. Catherine Chua

Faculty of Graduate Studies, Education

Werklund School of Education

University of Calgary

[telephone number]

[email address]

If you have any concerns about the way you've been treated as a participant, please contact the Research Ethics Analyst, Research Services Office, University of Calgary at 403.220.6289 or 403.220.8640; email cfreb@ucalgary.ca. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference. The investigator has kept a copy of the consent form.

Appendix C: Interview Questions

Interview Questions for Principal

(February 7, 2021)

Professional Background Information

1. Tell me about your professional background (career roles, years of experience, credentials).
2. Tell me about your principal experience in this school jurisdiction and the number of years.
3. How many years have you been the principal of this high school?
4. How have you prepared and developed your instructional leadership practices?

Key Question A

How does a school principal perceive his/her leadership practices contribute to quality teaching in an Alberta high school? Your school has been chosen for this study because it is a high-performing high school in Alberta.

1. What strategies have you implemented as the principal that have contributed to this high performance?
2. Describe which leadership practice(s) has had the greatest influence on moving your educational community forward.
3. What evidence do you have to support this?
4. In your opinion, do you feel quality teaching is aligned to high performance in a high school?
5. What leadership practices as principal have contributed to quality teaching within this school?

6. What are your challenges as a leader in this area?

Supplementary Question A

How have the four competencies—embodying visionary leadership, leading a learning community, providing instructional leadership, and developing leadership capacity—contributed to the overall shared leadership practices of the principal?

Competency: Embodying Visionary Leadership

A leader collaborates with the school community to create and implement a shared vision for student success, engagement, learning and well-being.

1. What contributes to developing a vision for your school community?
2. Please outline your goal setting process.
3. How has setting the direction for your school led to high performance?
4. How do you know that the school’s vision is making a difference to the quality of teaching in your school?
5. Probing Questions:
 - a. How do you share your vision with your staff?
 - b. How do ensure your teachers’ goals and the vision are aligned?
 - c. What are the most important goals and outcomes for your school?

Competency: Providing Instructional Leadership

A leader ensures that every student has access to quality teaching and optimum learning experiences.

1. What role do you play as an instructional leader?
2. Can you provide some specific examples of what you do as an instructional leader in your school?

3. What has made you the instructional leader you are now?
4. Describe your approach to supporting teachers in improving their practice.
5. How do the expectations of the school board impact how you work? How does the superintendent help you as a principal?
6. As a principal, what do you hope to achieve as a leader in your school?
7. How do you think your staff would describe you?
8. What is your leadership style?
9. How do you motivate your teachers?
10. What are some of the strategies and systematic structures you have used to improve teaching and learning in your school?
11. How do you maintain relationship with external stakeholders?
12. What is your community like? Are parents very involved in your school? How?
13. To what extent do you feel you are working successfully with you staff, parents, and community?
14. What actions do you need to know and do in order to support high school teachers in their instructional practices?
15. What are the challenges? What do you do to solve these challenges?
16. Talk about a typical day in your school. What are the most important things that your principal does that has impacted your teaching?
17. How do you or your principal ensure the learning outcomes are met?
18. What practices or actions do high school principals need to know and do in order to support high school teachers in their instructional practices?

19. In your opinion is it important for high school principals to have taught high school in order to support teachers with their teaching? Why? Why not?

Competency: Developing Leadership Capacity

A leader provides opportunities for members of the school community to develop leadership capacity and to support others in fulfilling their educational roles.

1. What are the various leadership roles in your school?
2. What have you done to develop leadership capacity in your school?
3. How many people in your school are engaged in leadership responsibilities? What are their roles?
4. What is the benefit to you and the school community to developing leadership capacity among staff?
5. What are the challenges?
6. What does developing leaders have on the quality of teaching in your school?

Competency: Leading a Learning Community

A leader nurtures and sustains a culture that supports evidence-informed teaching and learning.

1. When you hear the term “leading learner” what does that mean to you?
2. What are some specific examples of how you as the principal lead learning?
3. What challenges to you have in leading learning?
4. Who are the other leaders of learning in the school?

Supplementary Question B

In the daily work of the principal how are the competencies helpful? How has your leadership changed/adapted as the result of COVID-19?

Final Question

Are there any documents that you would like to share that would assist me in gaining a deeper understanding of how your leadership practices contribute to quality teaching in a high performing high school?

Interview Questions for Vice Principals

(March 23, 2021)

Professional Background Information

1. Briefly tell me about your professional background.
2. Please tell me about your administrative and teaching experience in this school jurisdiction and the number of years.
3. How many years have you been at teacher at this high school?
4. How do you describe the culture of your school?
5. How does your school define student success?

Section A: Competency: Embodying Visionary Leadership

A leader collaborates with the school community to create and implement a shared vision for student success, engagement, learning and well-being.

1. How is the vision for student success, engagement, learning, and well-being shared with staff? How are teachers' part of creating and implementing a shared vision?
2. How are teacher's goals aligned to this vision? Is this making a difference in the quality of teaching and learning? If so, how?
3. What are the challenges in creating and implementing the vision in this school?

Competency: Providing Instructional Leadership

A leader ensures that every student has access to quality teaching and optimum learning experiences.

1. Please provide some examples of support that the principal has given teachers in the area of teaching.
2. If teachers have a challenge/issue/problem in their teaching and/ or classroom, what are the supports and/or resources they are provided with?
3. What are some of the structures and resources the principal has used to help build teachers' capacity?
4. How does your principal encourage teachers to get the training that you need?
5. How does your principal recognize teachers' good performance?
6. Describe how your principal is involved in the learning of the students.
7. Talk about a typical day in your school. What are the most important things that your principal does that has impacted teachers?
8. How do you or your principal ensure the learning outcomes are met?
9. How would the principal define quality teaching and optimum learning to you?
10. In your opinion is it important for high school principals to have taught high school in order to support teachers with their teaching? Why? Why not?
11. What are some of the challenges of a high school principal as an instructional support to you?

Competency: Developing Leadership Capacity

A leader provides opportunities for members of the school community to develop leadership capacity and to support others in fulfilling their educational roles.

1. What are the various leadership roles in your school?
2. What is the benefit to you and the school community in developing leadership capacity among staff?
3. What are the challenges of developing leaders?
4. How does your principal provide opportunities and support for the teachers to develop their leadership capacity? How does your principal discuss your individual leadership development plan?

Competency: Leading a Learning Community

A leader nurtures and sustains a culture that supports evidence-informed teaching and learning.

1. Who develops the professional development plan in your school?
2. What are some specific examples of how your principal leads learning in your school?
3. What challenges does a principal have in leading learning?

Who are the other leaders of learning in the school? How do they work with the principal and teachers?

Section B

What actions/practices of the principal support teaching practice in an Alberta high school?

1. Describe the strategies or actions of the principal and teachers that have had the greatest influence on moving your school community forward.
2. In your opinion what are the successful leadership practices or actions of your principal that have contributed to quality teaching in this school?

3. In your opinion, what are the benefits of these leadership practices to you as a teacher?
4. What challenges does a high school principal face in developing and supporting quality teaching in a high school?

Interview Questions for Teachers

(April 18, 2021)

Professional Background Information

1. Briefly tell me about your professional background.
2. Please tell me about your teaching experience in this school jurisdiction and the number of years.
3. How many years have you been at teacher at this high school?
4. How do you describe the culture of your school?
5. How does your school define student success?

Section A: Competency: Embodying Visionary Leadership

A leader collaborates with the school community to create and implement a shared vision for student success, engagement, learning and well-being.

1. How is the vision for student success, engagement, learning, and well-being shared with staff? How are teachers' part of creating and implementing a shared vision?
2. How are teacher's goals aligned to this vision? Is this making a difference in the quality of teaching and learning? If so, how?
3. What are the challenges in creating and implementing the vision in this school?

Competency: Providing Instructional Leadership

A leader ensures that every student has access to quality teaching and optimum learning experiences.

1. Please provide some examples of support that the principal has given teachers in the area of teaching.
2. If teachers have a challenge/issue/problem in their teaching and/ or classroom, what are the supports and/or resources they are provided with?
3. What are some of the structures and resources the principal has used to help build teachers' capacity?
4. How does your principal encourage teachers to get the training that you need?
5. How does your principal recognize teachers' good performance?
6. Describe how your principal is involved in the learning of the students.
7. Talk about a typical day in your school. What are the most important things that your principal does that has impacted teachers?
8. How do you or your principal ensure the learning outcomes are met?
9. How would the principal define quality teaching and optimum learning to you?
10. In your opinion is it important for high school principals to have taught high school in order to support teachers with their teaching? Why? Why not?
11. What are some of the challenges of a high school principal as an instructional support to you?

Competency: Developing Leadership Capacity

A leader provides opportunities for members of the school community to develop leadership capacity and to support others in fulfilling their educational roles.

1. What are the various leadership roles in your school?
2. What is the benefit to you and the school community in developing leadership capacity among staff?

3. What are the challenges of developing leaders?
4. How does your principal provide opportunities and support for the teachers to develop their leadership capacity? How does your principal discuss your individual leadership development plan?

Competency: Leading a Learning Community

A leader nurtures and sustains a culture that supports evidence-informed teaching and learning.

1. Who develops the professional development plan in your school?
2. What are some specific examples of how your principal leads learning in your school?
3. What challenges does a principal have in leading learning?
4. Who are the other leaders of learning in the school? How do they work with the principal and teachers?

Section B

What actions/practices of the principal support teaching practice in an Alberta high school?

1. Describe the strategies or actions of the principal and teachers that have had the greatest influence on moving your school community forward.
2. In your opinion what are the successful leadership practices or actions of your principal that have contributed to quality teaching in this school?
3. In your opinion, what are the benefits of these leadership practices to you as a teacher?

4. What challenges does a high school principal face in developing and supporting quality teaching in a high school?

Interview Questions for Superintendent

(April 21, 2021)

Professional Background Information

1. How many years were you a superintendent in this school jurisdiction n?
2. How many years did you work with the principal of this high school?
3. As superintendent how did your school jurisdiction define student success? Quality teaching?
4. Describe the culture of the school jurisdiction.
5. How would you describe the culture of the high school?

Section A: Competency: Embodying Visionary Leadership

A leader collaborates with the school community to create and implement a shared vision for student success, engagement, learning and well-being.

1. How did you prepare principals to develop a vision for student success, engagement, learning and well-being for their schools?
2. Are teachers' part of creating and implementing a shared vision in their school? If so, how?
3. How are teacher's goals aligned to this vision? Do you feel alignment is this making a difference in the quality of teaching and learning? If so, how?
4. What are the challenges in creating and implementing a shared vision in this high school?

Competency: Providing Instructional Leadership

A leader ensures that every student has access to quality teaching and optimum learning experiences.

1. At the jurisdiction level what are some of the structures and resources the principal has learned to help build teachers' capacity?
2. How has the principal been encouraged to get training that he/she needs to effectively lead a school?
3. How does the principal recognize teachers' good performance?
4. Describe how the principal is involved in the learning of the students.
5. What are the most important things that your principal does that has impacted teachers?
6. How does the principal ensure the learning outcomes are met?
7. In your opinion is it important for high school principals to have taught high school in order to support teachers with their teaching? Why? Why not?
8. What are some of the challenges of a high school principal as an instructional support to teachers?

Competency: Developing Leadership Capacity

A leader provides opportunities for members of the school community to develop leadership capacity and to support others in fulfilling their educational roles.

1. What is the benefit to the school community in developing leadership capacity among staff?
2. What are the challenges of developing leaders?

Competency: Leading a Learning Community

A leader nurtures and sustains a culture that supports evidence-informed teaching and learning.

1. How does this principal lead learning in the school?
2. What challenges does a principal have in leading learning?
3. Who are the other leaders of learning in the school? How do they work with the principal and teachers?

Section B

What actions/practices of the principal support teaching practice in an Alberta high school?

1. Describe the strategies or actions of the principal and teachers that have had the greatest influence on moving this school community forward.
2. In your opinion what are the successful leadership practices or actions of this principal that have contributed to quality teaching in this school?
3. In your opinion, what are the benefits of these leadership practices to teachers?
4. What challenges does a high school principal face in developing and supporting quality teaching in a high school?

Appendix D: Artifacts and Documents Collected

Table D1

Details of Documents Collected for Document Review

Document type	Details
Visioning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Four Pillar Vision—Staff • Four Pillar Vision—Student • Balance Visual
School improvement planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CIP: 2020–2021, 2019–2020, 2017–2018 • Adjusted CIP—School Interventions with Benchmarks
PGPs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Principal Professional Development Plan: Leadership Quality Standard Professional Profile: 2020–2021
Professional development presentations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distributed Leadership • Quarter System—You’ve Started, Now What? • Professional Development Presentation for September 21, 2018 • Floor to Ceiling: Visioning Process with Staff
Staff meeting presentations: Opening staff meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • August 2017–2018 • August 28, 2018 • August 29, 2019 • August 25, 2020
Intern and beginning teachers’ orientations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Teacher Orientation—June 2020 • Intern Presentation: How Does a Teacher Maximize Learning in a Classroom?
Administration planning retreat documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2019–2020—Year Three

Appendix E: Data Analysis Competency Factors and Challenges

Table E1

Principal Competency Factors and Challenges

Competency	Perspective	Challenges
Visionary	Clarity, laser focused, creating a sense of purpose, manageable chunks, holistic approach, change management—engagement, investment, involvement; goal setting; growth plans; created new conceptual framework centered on staff; legacy important; school priorities known by all; PGP’s; mentorship; alignment of all plans with 4 main goals—jurisdiction education plan, CIP, PGP’s, school PD plan; collaborative, shared responsibility; 3–5 year vision; pacing; adult learning processes; feedback loops—reflect, try, didn’t work, pivot; uses formula—clear vision, skills, honing PD, incentives, relationship building, tapping people, conversations, love language, providing resources, time, time, time; action plan is clear, concise; collaboration.	Separating vision with legacy; rationale, validation for change; managerial tasks; setting boundaries.
Leading learning	Shapes conditions for learning; Masters’ degree in multi-literacies, models learning; credibility, trust; promotion of learning through PGP; sharing resources, mentorship program; developed partnerships with university; TQS as pivotal focus; alignment of plans; walk alongside teacher and learn with you; PD was teacher led; teachers are experts; collaborative efficacy; coteaching structure; high visibility, walk-throughs, staff bring expertise to the table; collective knowledge, wisdom.	Cognizant of voice on PD days as to not own all goals; create opportunities for others to lead; gaining support for new goals, initiatives; less managing; more listening; critical conversations are important but difficult; need to be in conversation more often.

Competency	Perspective	Challenges
Instructional leadership	Building a strong climate of instruction—shared values, common focus, collective responsibility, sense of purpose; coordinating curriculum and learning goals, seeking evidence in action, involving teachers, professional inquiry, P engages in targeted actions to improve student learning, TQS, High School Redesign foundational pillars, students at centre; holistic approach; conceptual framework; fostering innovative approaches, literacy, numeracy, interdisciplinary approaches; CIP included goals, strategies, measures; development of PD plan; collaborative meetings with data; instructional strategies; pathways to learning; collaborative learning strategies, sharing innovative strategies; strong focus on pedagogy, new teaching techniques, critical thinking, reevaluating instructional and assessment strategies; risk-taking; coteaching; learning journey shared, data showing student success, midterm checks, data informed, visibility, walk-throughs, supervision responsibilities, feedback processes through surveys, open-ended questions, classroom walk-throughs.	Teaching principal—adds credibility, trust, but concerned with diversity of subject areas.
Leadership capacity	Distributed leadership approach, building people, building support, building team, key leaders, leadership learning, community feel; leadership development, mentorship for all; invested, engaged, committed; collaborative efficacy; 90% involved in curricular or extracurricular activities; lead teachers, grad coach, FNMI support, ESL; key leaders, first followers, Student Council development, recognition through tapping, conversations, gifts, talents, core team surrounding P.	Increasing workload and demands on P and admin team; need to set boundaries, rely on staff for support, discernment of teachers re leadership; developing students and parent community leadership.
Culture	Trust; building relationships; traditions important; clear; consistent standards and high expectations; risk-taking; collaborative; alignment; connections within city block and jurisdiction schools, Indigenous community; beginning and intern teachers supported; sense of belonging fostered; ensuring culture moves forward while respecting what is in place.	Connecting with parent community; did not speak about other stakeholders.

Competency	Perspective	Challenges
Values	Personality traits of a hard worker, goal setter; growth mindset; empathetic, intentional; respect for all; professional autonomy; critical reflection; transparent communication (WAG); prioritizing; critical conversations; nonjudgement; listening; cognitive coaching, critical conversations.	Total transparency is difficult; ATA, personal issues with staff; discipline issues; buffer distractions from staff; self-care.

Table E2*Vice Principal 1: Competency Factors and Challenges*

Competency	Perspective	Challenges
Visionary	Umbrella of shared vision—structure to distribute/diffuse responsibility; admin have a manifestation of priorities; entry and access points for staff; staff ask rationale for change—overtly; school values of rigour, relevance, relationships; structures, frameworks; alignment of PGP—nest under main goals; treat them as masterly professional, autonomy with rationale constraint.	Tension of push, pull factors; harnessing energy, moving people forward, different perspectives, determination of big rocks, dipstick—are people actually invested? Misinterpretation, misreading things. Trying to be forward thinking and proactive.
Leading learning	3-year planning process important; PD support, mentorship, macro—big picture, PGP's, communicative, intentional, high standards for students, set the bar, P connected to classroom, focus on learning at all times; find out what teachers need to teach better; find a critical mass; flows back and forth between P and teachers—people need to see P's level of investment.	Keeping boat afloat. Larger school to move in the right direction; more resistance; push-pull factor; lack of evidence of growth; different leveling of formal and informal authority and relationships; sometimes you just need to push ahead; informal conversations need to head off misunderstandings.

Competency	Perspective	Challenges
Instructional leadership	<p>Bar of expectation; culture of high standards, nonnegotiables; department structure with lead teachers; teacher responsibility to address issues first; growth, supervision, and evaluation process; student success aligned with high expectations and diverse pathways for individual students; PD framework; mentorship for beginning teachers, acculturation, mentorship; rigour, relevance and relationships, admin has teaching assignment; focus for teachers on strong pedagogy and high expectations, timetable structure important; posting learning outcomes, alignment, interdisciplinary, four pillar visual, principal as filter so teachers can focus on teaching and learning; student learning is extension of P's vision; teacher responsibility to address things; critical mass moving towards good instructional practice, finger on the pulse—what's happening in different classrooms, with different kids; analysis of data—pedagogical, cycles of professional growth, intentional alignment to learning outcomes, responsive to needs of students, maintaining high academic standards, but flexible to respond to contextual variables.</p>	<p>Difficult to implement a broad approach to instructional support in a high school; multitasking of P; P wears many hats—navigating important things, distractions, filter.</p>
Leadership capacity	<p>Macro-perspective approach: leadership development, peer teaching, use of expertise; lead teachers as department heads; dispersing leadership important through PD committee; collaborative process to PD development; interdisciplinary approach; P needed to provide rationale to vision; leading learning shared among informal and formal leaders; input from staff—spent time doing this; alignment of vision; liberating constraints; TQS and nonnegotiables, mentorship, environment of risk-taking, innovation; growth mindset; anchor—total transparency, support for PD and resources, informal and formal leadership opportunities, develop next group of leaders, acculturating staff, collaborative efficacy; develop the next set of leaders, hierarchy flattens.</p>	<p>Dial people back or reign people in—colleague to colleague. Disperse decision-making; Roles and responsibilities of informal and formal leaders; Code of Conduct; people not in authority to give direction; decision-making structures need to be in place; balance, time.</p>

Competency	Perspective	Challenges
Culture	Relationship with teachers, varied communication among admin team; push-pull factor; broad vision—variety of perspectives, flexibility, autonomy; entry points, access points; alignment, nesting PGPs under broader school goals; stretching skill sets, accountability for growth; tension between progressive and conservative culture; forward thinking; respect culture in place; sense of well-being, people looking out for one another to help with student learning; values of rigour, relevance, and relationship.	
Values	Recognition is both formal and informal—learn what people like as all are motivated differently.	Balance, priorities reexamined.

Table E3*Vice Principal 2: Competency Factors and Challenges*

Competency	Perspective	Challenges
Visionary	Shared vision of continuous improvement; focus on literacy, numeracy, FNMI; start year with learning activities to determine how to achieve goals; time taken in PD; teachers challenged to make learning evident in classrooms; CIP is a living document; aligns naturally with PGP; CIP brings awareness; I have never had principal read all PGPs.	Weighs on the P; hard to be driving the ship and make things a democratic process where there has to be decision-making in the end; 80-10-10 rule.
Leading learning	Supports interns and beginning teachers; models good teaching; runs PD days; visibility in classrooms; adept at PD practices; keen to let teachers explore the PD practices they find interesting; forwarding information, empowering teachers; celebrates small wins.	P leads the PD committee. P is deciding factor on the committee. All have a role to play and opinions are welcome, but ultimately it is P's decision. 90% of PD days run by P. Need more of a shared leadership approach.

Competency	Perspective	Challenges
Instructional leadership	Student achievement—important; student well-being and safety too. All the ACOL measures matter not just academics; 100 days in classrooms as walk-through process, nonevaluative; visibility is a key structure to building teacher capacity. Student achievement results. Midterm check-ins, admin meetings, weekly, monthly, quarterly meetings—check-in points for students.	At first, teachers thought classroom visits were evaluative. Celebrate success and support as needed. Culture has changed and now T welcome admin. Busyness of the building.
Leadership capacity	Lead teachers paired with beginning teachers.	Lack of understanding of how people are chosen for positions. Favouritism? Understanding why someone wants to be in leadership. Challenge of hiring people for leadership positions. Unreachable expectation of excellence, which is held for leaders. And what we expect them to, we hold them at a higher standard which should be attainable.
Culture	Known as an outsider; a very strong inside culture. Don't trust outsiders. Once people come into culture they never leave.; strong culture; tough staff; once you crack them, you're good. Family—don't want to see any other member of the family fall behind. Work together to ensure student success comes holistically. Teachers feel heard and feel good about what they are doing. Teachers do the same and make students accountable for their learning.	
Values	Very communicative. Open, keeping teachers informed and involved, included, and connected. Values connections between teacher and students. Students feels safe, heard, and well-being met. Synchronicity between teacher and student. Good learning is happening, almost intangible. P is loyal and hard-working.	

Table 8*Vice Principal 3: Competency Factors and Challenges*

Competency	Perspective	Challenges
Visionary	Admin retreat—Set framework for the next year or set of years. Cross-curricular approach as an example. Bring ideas back to staff to pilot. Disseminating. Consultation. Nonnegotiables determined. PGPs challenged teachers to align with goals and TQS competencies. Peer mentors created a lot of conversation and collaboration on goals. Purposeful alignment. Mentorship. Accountability.	Pace, speed of change, creates fatigue; mass communication instead of conversations; implementation dip, building sustainability; needs a more personal touch instead of mass communication. Could alleviate resistance or uncertainty. One-to-one conversation needed more for different perspectives to be heard. Slowing down the pace as well. Implementation dip and trying to keep energy up toward sustainability.
Leading learning	Team teaching supports teachers. Peer observation, Professional observation. What students learn is an extension of P's vision. Active participants in daily operations, but in day-to-day classroom operations. P is extremely visible. S know that principal is very invested in what they are doing on a daily basis. Grade-level meetings. Students understand that their learning is not only in the classroom, but it's the entire community. Teaching administrators.	Crafting the vision of what PD is going to look like. Will not get a unanimous response about it. Need to listen to staff carefully. Use data tools when you get a sense of where your staff wants to go. We need to respond and adapt the PD plan and overarching vision, i.e., FNMI in TQS. Staff needed support. Balance of what people are after, and then how to build that vision almost in a general consensus kind of way. How do we build a plan that engages people where they are at? How do I get them on board? What's the hook?

Competency	Perspective	Challenges
Instructional leadership	<p>Conceptual framework—foster student learning, student success, student motivation, what teachers employ to get is there. At the centre is students and that’s embedded in teacher practice. P has tried to embed new practices. Supports T in their learning as long as they have a plan. Accountability to bring back learning to staff—anchor—total transparency of expectations around PD. T establish personal connections with students and parents. Their responsibility first to communicate problems. Support always there from admin. Team teaching supports teachers. Peer observation, Professional observation. P filters things so teachers can focus on classroom—ozone layer.</p>	<p>Size of school and trying to get into all classrooms. Diversity of high school and the support needed. Trying to provide people with what they need. Hard to implement a macro blanket approach to support. Needs to be granular, more nuanced to individual teachers.</p>
Leadership capacity	<p>Delegation to admin team so teachers can do their jobs of teaching kids. Unofficial leadership roles. Their area of focus is well communicated to staff. Leads to peer coaching. Empowers staff to get better at developing their craft and become stronger. P flatters people, honored to be recognized as leaders.</p>	<p>Sometimes people do not want to progress to the next level of leadership; They are master teachers, who are experts in their craft. Perception of what’s in it for me? Compensation and balance.</p>
Culture	<p>High performance culture without pressure; dual standard, quarter system, high school flexibility, willingness, rigour, mutually supportive, relaxed, friendly, supportive, community; high expectations, standards, set the bar high; state of high performance.</p>	
Values	<p>Quick to compliment. Private aspect. Everyone likes to know they are part of something. They are all valuable.</p>	

Table 9*Teacher 1: Competency Factors and Challenges*

Competency	Perspective	Challenges
Visionary	Goal setting; vision shared on PD, collaborative; create own goals through PGP process—P actually reads my plan so will put more effort into it, leads to conversations and mentorship, structure, alignment—if we are doing it as a school it seems logical to implement for yourself as a teacher; 3 year plan—first year reading the book, second year discuss concepts in departments, how we can apply what we learned, third year we will do interdepartmental meetings to see how we as a school can place these critical thinking strategies; vision was to keep students and staff safe through pandemic.	Time, especially if you have a new course; buy-in, experience—high school is different work; beginning teachers are just focused on planning that they do not buy in to the idea of whole school.
Leading learning	Admin support specifically where their majors lie; very good at helping themselves or finding someone to help you; nonjudgemental; caring and want to help; mentor teacher; expectation that seasoned teachers help others who are struggling; building capacity through seasoned teachers; P is expert, PD master teacher, well read; book studies; PD process established; P encouraging us to take professional learning opportunities—side conversations; P still teaches, pop into classrooms regularly; super engaged with kids; P is an excellent teacher; doesn't think P needs to be high school trained to lead school—leadership qualities are more important than having taught at the high school; P leads learning in conjunction with admin team—they work together as a unit, they present as a united front; variety of voices at PD—P is the overarching person behind it—not done, subtle, not in your face; P picks specific people to do certain things; PD is really important to P.	Personality conflicts with P and other teachers; Comparing present principal to former principals; time to implement new ideas, approaches—P really wanted to make it their own, but aware that it takes time for that to happen.

Competency	Perspective	Challenges
Instructional leadership	<p>Holistic—physical, mental, spiritual approach. The whole aspects of the child, student engagement, quarter system—literally sprint for 10 weeks, interesting projects, discussions, higher level thinking activities, PGPs align with these; check-ins with teachers, T write learning outcomes on board; define quality teaching and optimum learning = students are engaged, a really good vibe in school; all admin pop into classrooms.</p>	<p>Diversifying support when P doesn't know subject area to support—physics teacher example, P connects them with someone who knows subject specialty.</p>
Leadership capacity	<p>Department heads for each department, they choose their own department head; they meet with admin at the end of each quarter; analyze diplomas in department teams; involvement in extracurricular, ESL lead, FNMI grad coach; developing leadership makes people proud and willing to do more—you do your job better, years of service are respected; you can use your natural leaders to work with people who do not buy-in or are negative.</p>	<p>Staff do not buy-in; lazy, negative teachers.</p>
Culture	<p>Comfortable, nonjudgemental, recognition of others—shout-outs, emails, personal calls, or cards; everyone is moving together; positive work ethic, wanting to succeed, holistic approach.</p>	<p>Time to have PD is biggest challenge in moving school forward with developing quality teaching.</p>
Values	<p>Has our backs, trust, speaking out about staff at staff meetings, grateful, and thanks staff for their work, weekly updates sent, shout-outs in this update, good positive reinforcement to staff; check-ins with staff; respect; takes over issues; treats us as professionals; doesn't need to micromanage; big picture thinker; we are trusted and expected to do our jobs.</p>	

Table 10*Teacher 2: Competency Factors and Challenges*

Competency	Perspective	Challenges
Visionary	Process of visioning—all in one room; very purposeful alignment through PGP—connecting back to goals guidelines; nonnegotiables; noncompliance, mentorship.	Too much choice in PD—need to narrow it down or teachers will burn out; goals, strategies, fatigue from initiatives and only halfway done instead of being successful with all of them.
Leading learning	TQS implementation, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit foundational knowledge permeation; support for Indigenous students is very important; aligning resources to this competency; lots of support for PD; Mentorship program very important which is aligned to PGPs and school vision; tangible, one-on-one support, PD committee providing a variety of voices; P is good at keeping tabs, knowing everyone's PGP, who has different abilities, learning something new and sharing with staff; really good at getting teachers involved that have success in different teaching practices.	Staff who have a very different philosophy of teaching; continual raising of the bar and some teachers quite happy with the same plans they have taught for all the other years.
Instructional leadership	Leads by example, coteaches, expert teacher, master at craft; credibility, one-on-one support, PD structure; vision; coteaching; visibility; mentorship; principal's instructional practices help teachers develop; student success is individual—focus on how each kid can succeed to the best of their abilities—doesn't fit the cookie cutter mould. Thriving Inclusive Ed department; online courses—every group gets what they can achieve, and some need more boosting up; mentorship, drawing people in, tapping people to support other teachers; everyone involved in CIP then P really brings it together, data informed; mentorship, scaffolding between admin and teachers; teachers have voice to change PD focus based on what is happening in classrooms and school; PD monies, tangible support; PD is very focused and aligned to vision	P expected to do and be everything without support—coming from the whole system right now; time—what does P let go of? P giving up themselves and cup is already empty.

	<p>of the school; greeting students and staff every morning at front door; in and out of classrooms, summary communication of the week, meeting with parent and community groups, out and about always, walking the talk, embodies all the things you want a good teacher to be; staff has a shared responsibility to all students, not a cookie cutter mould; each student seen as unique, high school principal should have taught high school, P teaches; helps with visioning; really is able to connect learning outcomes from curriculum.</p>	
Leadership capacity	<p>Admin is first go-to for staff; ATA reps, department heads, coteaching partner, coaches; department heads are go-between admin and their department—this works as a system and breaks down barrier between admin and teachers, allows for effective communication; taps people for leadership with private conversations; P is connected to teachers and pulls them in; formalized leadership program at CO.</p>	<p>Central office providing direction that may not be popular with teachers—P needs to deal with this as supporting CO and staff; balance, time, compensation (not supported for what they are expected to do), stepping back from leadership opportunities to only focus on teaching.</p>
Culture	<p>Family, holistic approach; "A" game; child centric; past principals set high expectations as well—left legacy.</p>	
Values	<p>Voices valued; not admin driven; lead by example; engaging staff in the vision, empathy—giving people grace.</p>	

Table 11*Teacher 3: Competency Factors and Challenges*

Competency	Perspective	Challenges
Visionary	Involvement in CIP has been a culture that has developed; P is natural leader; progressive movement with P—communicated and developed was through literal means, staff meetings, PD days, hiring the right people, personal conversations and then it was adhered to; learns from other leaders; P is big picture thinker; building future together; communicator, possesses high energy; they have a great vision and used their structure and if we get three quarters through this vision then we have made a big step forward; extrapolating what the jurisdiction plan means for the school context; vision has impact on classrooms; intentionality, natural leader, hard worker, intelligent, P has our backs; adult learning processes.	Balance between autonomy and accountability; being able to keep a coherent plan when some staff not sharing vision; 80–20 rule.
Leading learning	Mentorship assistance from fellow senior teachers; assistance from admin immediate and supportive; school directed PD are the most productive, P is a big reader, on leading edge of interesting concepts in education; bring forward inspiration for something we can talk about in PD; support with resources, PD, collaborative meetings and PD with department is most valuable; the P lays out the PD planning, all the encouragements, all the department meeting, develops the culture of the school and then says go do your job. Not micromanaging, it's at a macro level that they are providing assistance; gives teachers space to do their jobs; clear about school routines, but not hovering over staff; expectations for both T and S; admin available to solve problems; structure of PD from central office, to school then to departments and cross disciplinary; P leads the PD committee; leads PD, buy shares with staff when it is their strength and area of expertise.	Central office pulling P away from school, but communicates this to staff in advance.

Competency	Perspective	Challenges
Instructional leadership	Testing Centre created which solved 90% of teacher's problems; EA support, time during exam breaks that is not burdened with make work projects; we're trusted to do what we need to do; analyze ACOL, diploma results, structure for students who at midterm are at risk to fail, teachers send in a report and follow-up occurs; credit recovery; admin is proactive—follow up on problems with teaching; holistic supervision of staff—looking at learning in its entirety; strength in P if taught in high school and important that they know a subject discipline or be really good listeners to understand problems with teaching.	Diversity of subjects and knowledge only in a particular subject area; knowing complexity of high school within subject areas and students; understanding high school context; be good listeners if they do not have the diversity of subject knowledge; difficult if you do not know high school context.
Leadership capacity	Encouragement and expectation that everyone is involved in at least one committee and/or extracurricular, done at beginning of the year; we're all running school together; expectation that you are going to do something for the school; benefit is building a culture where students know you, teachers giving of themselves to run basketball, volleyball, etc.; expectations to do your job—match teaching assignment to extracurricular so preps occur during coaching season—timetabling is key.	People are allowed to step back from committees and extracurricular with no judgement; why do we have to be leaders when we are doing a great job teaching—the expectations of leadership.
Culture	Positive environment; teachers are self-motivated, show initiatives, start programs, intrapreneurial, homogeneous, non-clicky, very friendly, relaxed; innovate; in a group of professionals; holistic; shout-outs to recognize staff—not gratuitous or over the top, communication through WAAG; best functioning leadership team I have ever worked with in any organization, high energy, really smart, good sense of humour—they came together at really good energy levels in their career.	

Competency	Perspective	Challenges
Values	High level of trust; has your back, not a manager, inspiring, P is a high-performing teacher, feels valued, respected, listened to; positive, shares success of all; responds in very personal ways; I know that what I am doing is respected here, I am listened to, they seek my counsel frequently; input is taken, anybody is welcome, open-door policy, what we want to do is available to us; autonomy given to us and not interfered with as long as you are successful; clear expectations on quality students and teachers, not micromanaging, encouraged to try different teaching methods, progressive; P is exactly what we need right now; naturally a good leader, but studying it too; P has given us the correct balance.	Challenge is when people do not step up, they exist; helicopter parents, jurisdiction make work projects, top-down management from CO.

Table 12*Teacher 4: Competency Factors and Challenges*

Competency	Perspective	Challenges
Visionary	P is masterful at relaying board expectations and goals; vision discussed and mission of rigour, relevance, and relationships; provides opportunities to collaborate with departments and outside of departments in cross-curricular focus; not a top-down approach but lateral, horizontal type of learning, where we all have input in how we want our department to develop and progress.	Everyone paddling in the same direction; not necessarily at the same force but paddling in same direction.
Leading learning	P on leading edge of education; well researched, knowledgeable example of focus on Indigenous ways of thinking and permeation approach; P mirrors what others are doing thus brings value to T work; celebrates the success and boosts them up with encouragement; important that P has taught in high school to support T.	Keep all the pulse points of school.

Competency	Perspective	Challenges
Instructional leadership	<p>Student success—high expectations for academics, high number of Rutherford scholarships, Rhodes scholarship; high involvement for staff and students in cocurricular and extracurricular, moral education, community service also important; encourage to create locally developed courses; ADLC example; provides tools, for example, webcam—whatever we need, happens; P allows T to dream big and then decide for ourselves as professionals what we need, never asks questions—I trust you!; PGP alignment is important; PD is a key structure and taken seriously; P puts systems in place—is a system thinker and breaks down the bigger parts for teachers; P still teaches; pops into classes, student assemblies to hold S to communicate high standards; S are boosted up; P is very, very positive; outcomes on board to provide S with targets; focus on TQS to determine if learning outcomes are met, T go through curriculum objectives together and figure out main objectives; rigour, relevance, relationships as mission; collaboration occurs.</p>	<p>Students at risk and catching them up, we need to be on top of this because P is get S to school, keep them engaged, keep getting them to get credits; connections with parents and community is key to building relationships to help S succeed; P is spinning many plates as a result; time.</p>
Leadership capacity	<p>Delegating very, very well; department heads very helpful; shot outs all the time—include everyone; student success is a reflection of T works, so celebrates student success, makes us proud, empowerment for all to take risks both T and S; department heads and three VPs; confidence instilled in developing leaders; relationship with university and T are seconded to share expertise—reciprocal when then return with new knowledge; P builds our capacity, confidence, allowing us to expand our experiences.</p>	
Culture	<p>Hold everyone to a higher standard; afforded a certain amount of grace without fearing failure when we try innovative strategies; professional freedom; celebrating when things go well and recognizing when they do not with reflection and support; open door; highly educated, highly skilled T—no sense of competition as everyone is supportive; people value what you say when you are on committees.</p>	

Competency	Perspective	Challenges
Values	In difficult conversations P is very gracious when talking to S, how can they fix together; rigour and relevance is key to everyday life in school; does not micromanage; makes lists, schedules appointment and never misses; P is an enigma keeping everything together and not missing a beat; values staff; very professional feel; autonomy but not isolated—come together and collaborate; listen openly, be open to new ideas, listen carefully, be firm when needed, maintain nonnegotiables, be good at explaining rationale, hold space for T to develop and not be afraid to fail forward.	Sometimes as an admin it is hard to hear things because of the impression of how people are receiving what you are sending out; P is gracious with that and firm in beliefs—ego does not overshadow P's work—listens with an open heard and believes what staff is saying is important to P.

Table 13*Teacher 5: Competency Factors and Challenges*

Competency	Perspective	Challenges
Visionary	System thinker—breaks things down; students leave legacy; we are involved in the future, development of three year plans, aligning competencies; process of visioning can be used in classroom as well—gallery walks, brainstorming, sets the tone for what our future is going to be; admin team builds opportunities for collaboration, collaboration has been key and P supports this with bringing in subs; looking at Cultures of Thinking next; expectations and open communication for all to be involved in visioning with context of school and classroom; builds a collaborative unit around visioning; alignment and how it looks for us; mentorship program is important to us.	80–20 rule; fear of change, complacency, valid ability to participate.
Leading Learning	P nudged them to share gifts and talents, to think differently; open communication, leading by example, support in development; admin team is unified; PD committee and autonomy to develop PD plan, encouragement for all to grow in their craft.	80–20 rule, move from compliance for PGP to purposeful documentation for growth, check-ins are a challenge.

Competency	Perspective	Challenges
Instructional Leadership	<p>Rigour, relevance, relationships as our model—conceptual framework, doing our best to make sure students reach high levels whether academics, athletics, fine arts, etc.; all on the same page; supporting all departments, because all are equally important; uses different types strategies which are shared with staff; always looking for effective strategies, i.e., Google slides; willing to share resources, excellent teacher who has never lost where P comes from; walk-through process; check-ins; not watching T, but S; sets tone of expectations through walk-throughs, P is a presence in classrooms, strong communicator with all; expectation that T are communicating with S if they are at risk before they fail; implemented student contracts, attendance contracts, P wants S to succeed and they see this in P; P values S and makes sure S are supported in every aspect; P talks to kids, talks to T about learning outcomes; looks at diploma results; important to have high school teaching experience as S have their own needs; Students know P well—invested daily; P is very present in school. Coaches, on cocurricular teams; communicates expectations to students.</p>	<p>Time: how P keeps it all together.</p>
Leadership Capacity	<p>Proud when tapped for leadership opportunities; willing to share expertise; running the school together; sense of empowerment, expectations for involvement, building relationships with kids; Teachers comfort zone re leadership involvement; P knows what T are capable of, and nudges them, do not let them float along, and this is important—the ripple effect; empowerment; very strong extracurricular program; expectation to be involved, creates relationships with S; mentorship program; autonomy for departments to grow together, grad coach, postsecondary counsellor, FNMI counsellor; encouraging us to find our niche and go from there—empowerment.</p>	<p>Time to mentor others; 80–20 rule; everyone has a valid ability to participate; staff overwhelmed with new initiatives.</p>
Culture	<p>Students at different levels of ability, needs, identity, and we really care about kids; same expectations for staff and students; adult learning processes, set tone; vision seen through innovative teaching styles, student engagement; open-door support from admin team, strong communicators; defined by the team you have under you, and allow them to trust you as well, P doesn't like surprises; when needed P supports T and S.</p>	

Competency	Perspective	Challenges
Values	Expectations and open communication; recognizes staff through emails, phone calls, WAAG, always first to tell you what P sees in us; involved with coaching; very visible, make connections face to face, there in morning to greet S, speaks on PA and provides direction, expectations; everyone knows who P is; open door—we can just pop in; totally focused on our school; gets calls from administrators throughout province to see what P is implementing; shares openly with others; excited about new approaches and shares excitement with staff; open communication, leading by example, supporting T wherever they are in their development as T.	

Table 14

Long-serving superintendent: Competency Factors and Challenges

Competency	Perspective	Challenges
Visionary	Broke down barriers to central office; built team and trust; redesigned organization from complacency to innovation; openness to learning; visited other high schools; alignment of all plans which teachers started to understand; developed understanding and implementation of TQS; P used LQS to develop professionally; used ThoughtExchange better than other Ps to gather feedback; brand new team, young, energetic—trusted CO and worked with CO; most important position in school jurisdiction is principal; S worked with P and admin teams every month on what student success looks like; modelled transparency, collaboration; cognitive coaching, critical conversations, walk-through practices; S led SLQS, LQS, TSQ which became foundational standards implemented in the jurisdiction; practice profiles for teachers' PGPs; set goals, feedback of process was important; fail forward—it's okay to try new things and if they don't work out, learn from them and go forward—this is how students learn new things.	In elementary and middle school T teach kids, in high school T teach content; departmentalization of high school; keeping legacy of school and moving forward with innovation; P is good at balancing this.

Competency	Perspective	Challenges
Leading Learning	Spent time with P and admin teams monthly to teach them about strong instructional leadership practices; implemented cognitive coaching, critical conversations training; professional practice standard were pivotal goals in jurisdiction; shared vision; teachers stepped out of their comfort zone and tried new strategies; mantra of "fail forward"; department meetings for updates and continue focus on goals; easy for P if they are high school trained, but not necessary; learning is front and centre; P always talking about instructional practice, get out of your office; have conversations about learning; P has cocreated admin team.	Natural enemy of greatness is goodness; good isn't good enough; need to have continuous improvement; how do we get greater; complacency is the concern; try to build a culture where T step out of their comfort zone, move into discomfort to learn; P needs to be good at one conversation at a time.
Instructional Leadership	P and admin team visible every day in classrooms—knew teachers who needed support and asked central office for help. Built trust because of transparency and vulnerability. Data informed. P could ask good questions about student learning. Concern with graduation rates. Solution developed to move away from Spec Ed into Inclusive Ed approach; students at risk—another structure developed to support students through teacher responsibility; Continue with the shared vision approach. Hard for leaders. Wanted leaders to be able to tell a story about student learning without other means beside diplomas, used ACOL, graduation rates, transition rates, differences between diplomas and school-awarded marks. Student engagement was a big one. Used ThoughtExchange as feedback mechanism—assurance, evidence of learning; interdisciplinary approach; cognitive coaching, walk-throughs, visibility, using the language of the TQS as much as P can; not evaluatory but growth perspective; data driven or data informed; redesigned Special Ed to Inclusive Ed; student at risk process to support students; changed streaming process; visible; asks great questions to T; trusted P when spoke to S about teacher issues.	Busy with management side that P cannot spend enough time on instructional side.

Competency	Perspective	Challenges
Leadership Capacity	Recognition of staff was key; distributed leadership is important to today's leader; met with CO team three times per year; bigger school is, the more leaders you need; not paying you to be a manager; still need to build a network and succession planning; T need to be on the right bus to seek leadership; additional pressure with leadership, status no longer there; need to develop leaders even for the little things.	
Culture	Continuous improvement culture; T want to be treated like professionals, then they need to act like a professional and that means seeking ways to continually improve; P was very visible as modelled from S; built strong trust relationship; us vs them until this P redesigned organization, difficult conversations with former admin team about innovation; P very affirming; cc'd S on celebratory emails to staff; formalized process to support students at risk of failure; system, process, priorities were key to P; culture shifted when P opened the door to CO—we are now part of a bigger team—strong relationships with CA; trusting relationship led to innovative culture.	
Values	P is a great learner, made learning about leadership a priority; modelled learning to T and then T modelled to S.	

Appendix F: Key Themes and Concepts

Concept Analysis		Qualitative Content Analysis	
Key themes and Leximancer frequency count	Key Concepts	Data Analysis Competency Factors	Alignment to findings
School: 953	School, teacher(s), teaching, vision, different, student, community, culture, jurisdiction principal, having, quality, schools, support, important, leadership, learning, doing, teaching, classroom, lead, professional, staff, work, students, year, time, people, things, need	Relational trust, safe, caring, shape conditions for learning for all, strong climate of instruction, responsive, culture of high expectations, shared, walk-throughs, community/family feel, legacy, transparency of expectations, diverse population, involvement in cocurricular and extracurricular	Creating a progressive culture, developing a holistic approach, creating avenues of open, transparent communication, cultivating strategic alignment to the vision, seeking feedback
Time: 616	Need, take, look, feel, sure, down, quarter, things, people, work, principal, school, student(s), staff, year, teachers	Building people, support, team, rigour, relevance, relationships (mission), synchronicity between teacher and student, consultative approaches	Developing innovative teaching strategies, creating a progressive culture, improving visibility and accessibility, open, transparent communication
Staff: 595	Staff, principal, important, support, admin, team, PD, students, vision, professional, need, learning, leadership, different, take, people, teaching, year, things, school, time, teachers	Shared vision, alignment of plans, change management, holistic, PD, relationships, teachers are experts/professionals, autonomy, collaborative, collective knowledge, empowered, accountable, student engagement, mentorship, conceptual framework, innovative,	Cultivating strategic alignment to the vision, promoting and participating in learning and development, identifying, empowering and recognizing staff, establishing a

		leadership development (formal/informal), distributed, critical mass, data informed	distributed leadership structure
Things: 488	Things, work, kids, day, down, doing, important, look, take, need, different, time, people, teachers, staff, teaching, learning, school, principal, saying, try	Building people, support, team, rigour, relevance, relationships (mission), synchronicity between teacher and student, consultative approaches	Redesigning the organization, improving visibility and accessibility, facilitating a shared responsibility
Year: 439	Year, students, doing, classroom, teacher(s), work, staff, school, time	Structures, frameworks, subject departments, team teaching, peer observation, high school flexibility foundational elements, dual track, quarter system, 10-week sprints, timetabling is key, flex blocks, dual-credit opportunities	Creating a progressive culture, managing the instructional program, fostering student-centered instructional practices, being data driven
Leadership: 264	Leadership, plan, professional, growth, people, staff, teaching, school, principal, teachers, quality, community, building, jurisdiction, department	Building people, support, team, rigour, relevance, relationships (mission), synchronicity between teacher and student, consultative approaches	Establishing distributed leadership structure, cultivating strategic alignment to vision, redesigning the organization