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Leading Through a School Closure: Principals' Insights

by

Leta M. Youck-McGowan

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Abstract

School principals lead a variety of changes on a daily basis. This descriptive study focuses on a complex, unique, and challenging change for principals: leading through a school closure process. The qualitative study utilizes the grounded theory methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 2008; Strauss & Corbin, 1990), specifically the constructivist approach to grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) to explore the question: What insights into leadership do principals gain from leading a school community through a closure process? The data were derived from analysis of interviews conducted with 12 principals who had led through school closures in the past five years in two urban school districts in Alberta. A theory was developed using grounded theory analysis guidelines—coding, concept grouping, and characteristic development. A school closure creates rapid, dramatic change for a community and presents a unique challenge for principals. The theory from this study identifies leadership characteristics that enhance principals' ability to lead through the unique context of a school closure process. These characteristics include the principal as clarifier of role and responsibilities; emotional barometer; intentional communicator; and navigator through the tensions and paradoxes of leading change. In short, the theory from this study suggests that the context of a school closure creates a unique form of change for principals to lead through. Thus, principals should apply certain leadership characteristics that may enhance their ability to lead effectively through a school closure. This study aims to deepen the knowledge and understanding of principals who are about to lead a school community through a process of school closure. Areas for future research include studying the experiences of rural principals, using a different research methodology, and studying the integration of students from closed schools. *Key words:* school closure, change, communication, emotions, grounded theory, leadership, resistance, principal

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Dedication

This study is dedicated to my unwavering supporters. To my son, Shackleton, who is creative, energetic, and always willing to try new things. Thank you for your patience Shack: I will now have more time to play with you. To my husband, Clive, I appreciate your willingness to go on adventures with me (academic and otherwise). Your love and support have helped me to continue to grow and learn. To my parents, Ted and Bernice, your wisdom about leadership and life and incredible love mean the world to me. To my sisters and amazing friends, Gaylene and Malinda, you both are incredible women and the best cheerleaders. To my Grandma, Anna, you model what a strong work ethic and a compassion for others can achieve even at 99 years of age. To my Uncle Albert and Auntie Pauline, your kindness and generosity continue to inspire me to serve others.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

A school principal encounters many leadership challenges on a daily basis, for example, implementing new policies, addressing teacher practice, and attending to student behaviour. All of these challenges involve the ability to lead an individual or a group through the process of change. Some principals face a significant challenge leading a community through a school closure. This is a complex process layered with emotions, history, political sensitivities, detailed planning, and strategic communication. This study examines 12 principals' insights on leadership that emerged from leading a school community through a closure process. The principals were interviewed and their leadership insights were explored using the grounded theory method. The focus of this study was to develop a theory about leading complex change in a school closure context.

The ability to lead change is the cornerstone of the leadership role (Fullan, 2001; Heifetz & Linsky, 2002; Kotter & Rathgeber, 2005). For a principal, leading through a school closure is different than leading instructional change. As a principal who has led through a school closure, I am aware of the differences in leading instructional change and the complexity of leading through a school closure. Instructional change can be thoughtfully planned over a longer period of time (Burke, 2008). There might be some resistance to adopting new practices, yet the emotional component is manageable. In contrast, leading a community through a school closure process is an emotionally laden, complex change. It has layers of uncertainty and grief. The process of school closure is a rapid change that may take less than ten months. The focus of this study is to examine principals' experiences of and insights into leading the complex change of the school closures process.

Three experiences helped to narrow the focus of this study and assisted in the development of the research question. The first experience occurred when I was asked to present my insights on leadership that developed from the school closure process to my fellow principals. Given the positive feedback on my presentation, there seemed to be a desire from other principals to understand leading the complex change process of school closure. The second experience was noticing the lack of literature for leading through a school closure. I was only able to find literature to guide leading instructional change and research about the policy and procedure for school closure (Morikis, 2010; Morton, 2009; Schiffhauer, 1998). This lack of information led to the third experience, which was to speak with two fellow principals whose schools had just been closed and ask, “The final decision about my school closing is tonight—what do I need to know about tomorrow?” They shared their insights on the procedural aspects that I might encounter, such as dealing with the media, keeping a record of communication, and the importance of staying “in front” of rumours. They also gave me advice about being empathetic towards people experiencing grief while still moving the community forward. Whether or not their recollections and advice were totally accurate, the conversation helped me to prepare for the days ahead. The knowledge developed from these three experiences showed that there was an interest from my peers, that there was a lack of information about leading through a school closure, and that briefly talking with principals enhanced my own leadership practice.

The struggle to find literature or research that focused on the leaders’ perspective was also identified by Hoyle (2009). Describing closing MacIntosh College, Hoyle stated, “...without many case studies or established protocols, I found myself forging my own path” (p. 60). Hoyle identified leadership experiences and shared the lessons learned: “frame the message

early and often, add humor...be everyone's chief motivator, realize that you are no longer in control of your fate, remember that students will watch and learn, and unplug every now and then" (p. 60). Hoyle confirmed the sparseness of literature and research focusing on leading through a closure process. The lessons shared showed insights on leadership and gave advice to other leaders who might be leading through a closure process; a leader needs the ability to laugh, motivate, adapt, and model to the change. Hoyle's understanding, though insightful, did not address a school principal's perspective for leading through a school closure.

Schiffhaur (1998) examined leaders' perspectives on school closure, specifically focusing on the superintendent's view of the school district and community interactions as well as on policy of school closures. This study expands the understanding of policy and district leadership standpoint about the school closure process; however, it did not examine the front-line principal's perspective. A critical finding was his description of the complexity of this type of change for a leader:

Reactions to school closure and/or the process used to make the decision are often expressed by the community in overt negative gestures such as local media editorial disapproval, citizen attendance and commentary at public meetings, and the formation of "citizen-action" groups that have as the mission saving the school. School closure controversy can also be directly linked to chief administrators losing their positions and to the turnover of school board members. (p. 2)

Schiffhaur identified issues that superintendents might encounter leading through the school closure process. The overt negative gestures cause disruption to the regular operation of a school and school district. The fallout of a school closure process could be the loss of employment or maybe demotion.

The results of a keyword abstract search for “school closure” using the ProQuest search engine on July 3, 2013, yielded 55 dissertations and theses since 1977. These studies are grouped by area of focus below and show the number of studies in brackets for each group: procedures, guidelines, and policies studies (20); student focus studies—achievement and transitions (9); rural schools (9); impact studies—staff, community, socio-economic, charter schools (7); politics of school closures (6); and repurposing of closed schools (4). These numbers reveal that the tendency of researchers in the area of school closure is to focus on policy and procedures. Principals were only one of the categories of participants in these studies. Furthermore, in the majority of these studies principals were not consulted about leading the change of closure, supporting Hoyle’s (2009) experience that there is a dearth of literature and research in this area.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this descriptive study was to explore school principals’ understandings about leadership after recently leading a community through a school closure. Engaging in a series of interviews and a questionnaire, 12 principals reflected upon their experiences of leading through a school closure. In particular, their leadership insights that developed from these experiences were explored. Grounded theory was used to identify categories and commonalities that emerged during the research process.

Research Questions

The key research question that guided this study was What insights into leadership do principals gain from leading a school community through a closure process?

This research question was explored through the following sub-questions: What were their successes and challenges in leading through a school closure? How did they address the

challenges? What communication and emotional support strategies were effective during their school closure process?

Statement of Problem

Although there is extensive literature on leadership and change, there seems to be a gap in the context of leading a school community through a closure change process (Hoyle, 2009). As stated earlier, there are studies on closure and effective policies and procedures that a leader or school system can use (Morikis, 2010; Rowley, 1984; Schiffhauer, 1998); however, little attention is given to the study of principals' insights on leadership that developed from leading through a school closure experience. Knowledge of these insights may help other principals to effectively lead through future school closures.

Potential Significance

The knowledge gained by the understanding of principals' school closure leadership experiences and insights may provide important information for other principals, school system administrators, and governmental policy makers. Leading difficult change is challenging. As Heifetz and Linsky (2002) explained, "...when you lead people through difficult change, you challenge what people hold dear—their daily habits, tools, loyalties, and ways of thinking—with nothing more to offer perhaps than a possibility" (p. 2). Thus, the potential significance of this research is to arrive at a better understanding of how principals lead this unique change that challenges school communities' habits and ways of thinking. Principal participants had the opportunity to reflect and share their challenges and successes as well as, how leading a community through a school closure process may have influenced their current leadership practices. This reflection process helped the participants to make meaning of their own leadership experience from a school closure.

The school closure process has not been fully explored from the principal's leadership perspective. The grounded theory that arises from the analysis of the data will inform the understanding of other principals who may be about to lead through a school closure. It may also suggest to school district administrators ways to support their principals during a school closure. Importantly, this study will give voice to the principals as the frontline leaders in schools; sharing their knowledge may help other principals leading the school closure process.

Relevant Background for the Study

This section will examine the school closures in Canada and Alberta with a focus on the leadership role of principals. Some of the challenges principals face during a school closure process include strong emotions, lay-off notices for staff, public meetings, questions and concerns from the community, interruption to student learning, and budget shortfalls (Jones, 2010). These are the challenges that make leading through a school closure a unique form of change that principals might not experience in their regular leadership roles. In Canada, over the last decade, there has been an overall decrease in student population:

Just over 5.1 million students were enrolled in publicly funded elementary and secondary schools in Canada during the academic year 2007/2008; down 0.9% from the previous year...Enrolment peaked at nearly 5.4 million students in 2001/2002. Since then, it has declined in every year, as larger cohorts of graduating students were replaced by smaller cohorts of grade 1 students. (Statistics Canada, 2010, par. 1)

These statistics are seen through the response of school boards across Canada which are closing schools and combining programs. For example, the Hastings and Prince Edward School District (Intelligencer News, 2010), Regina (Canadian Broadcast Corporation News, 2007), and Vancouver (Bacchus, 2010) have closed 53 schools. The identified reasons for these school

closures included declining enrolment, budget shortfalls, and merging programs. The Teachers Federation of British Columbia raised concerns that 170 public schools have been closed since 2001 (Canadian Broadcast Corporation News, 2010). Numerous school leaders across Canada face the challenge of leading the school closure due to changes in student enrolment.

The relevance of school closures for the province of Alberta was addressed by the Minister of Education, Dave Hancock (2010), who posted the following blog message, *School Closures: An Open and Shut Discussion?*

Several school boards around Alberta are presently considering closing schools. As Minister of Education, I have been asked by several parties to place a moratorium on school closures... While I fully appreciate these concerns, I will not be placing a moratorium on school closures. Under Alberta's School Act, these deliberations are quite properly the responsibility of local school boards, which are elected specifically to ensure that local needs and interests are addressed when educational decisions are made. It makes no sense to empower local boards with this authority, and then to second guess them each time they make a difficult decision. (par. 1)

As expressed by Minister Hancock, the elected officials (Board of Trustees) are responsible to ensure focus is on local needs and interests when making decisions about education. At the same time, they are accountable to the government and constituents to ensure proper utilization of funding. Trustees have the authority and responsibility to close schools that are underutilized when enrolment and funding decrease. School closures are relevant to all levels of elected governments, from the provincial level to the school board level. The recognition of the political aspect of school closures is an important consideration for principals.

Several communities in Alberta have experienced the school closure process, as identified by Minister Hancock, and each one of these schools had a principal leading this challenging change. A persistent theme throughout the literature about school closure is that the decision to close schools is not an easy one; it involves a great deal of emotional angst and disruption to a community. The aim of this research is to enhance the knowledge and understanding of the challenges and emotional stress principals may experience in a school closure and to identify critical insights about leadership.

Assumptions

Neuman (1997) suggested that assumptions are “statements about the nature of things that are not observable or testable” (p. 41). Assumptions are the foundation for understanding concepts and building theories; by making explicit assumptions of a study a researcher may expand his or her understanding of a context or concept (Neuman). The following are the four assumptions for this research:

1. Principals are leaders within their schools and school systems. Typically, they have been chosen by school district administration based on their knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values to lead schools;
2. Principals have experience leading change—policy, curriculum, and improvement to instructional practice;
3. Grounded theory methodology for this study would yield a theory for leading through a school closure based on principals experiences’ and insights through the analysis of personal narrative, interviews with principals, and documents; and
4. Participants would share their experiences and insights honestly, genuinely, and perceptively.

Definition of Terms

Change means “to make or become different” (Oxford, 2005). In a sense, to make different than the current situation or if left alone. Change can simultaneously raise the emotions of “*fear, anxiety, loss, danger, panic*; on the other, *exhilaration, risk-taking, excitement, improvement, energizing*” (Fullan, 2001, p. 1)

Community or *school community* includes all of the stakeholders for a particular school, such as, students, parents, guardians, teachers, support staff, business members, residents, school partners, support agencies that are connected to the school. These people have a shared understanding in the context of school closure.

Complexity “means change, but specifically it means rapidly occurring, unpredictable, nonlinear change” (Fullan, 2001, p. ix).

Context refers to “a set of *conditions* under which [people] operate” (Fullan, 2003, p.27). The context of a closure implies the conditions that are created by the school closure process.

Insights are the knowledge gained from experiences and reflections on a particular situation or phenomenon.

Leader is a person who influences, guides, and oversees others.

Leadership is the ability and desire to lead others through the process of change. Fullan (2001) describes leadership as “....not mobilizing others to solve problems we already know how to solve, but to help them confront problems that have never been successfully addressed” (p. 3).

Principals are school-based leaders who have managerial, administrative, and leadership responsibilities for both the school community and the school district. They are the frontline leaders for the school district and directly interact with the school community members.

School Closure Process refers to the governmentally regulated process to inform and engage the school community in the data collection for the trustees' decision to close the school and includes the complete transitioning of all students, teachers, and resources to new school sites.

Teacher refers to the numerous people who work with children in a school context; certificated staff, such as classroom instructors and psychologists and non-certificated staff such as teaching assistants, library technicians, and shop instructors.

Delimitations

Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) identified delimitations as a set of “boundaries” for a study, such as “time and location of the study, sample selected” (p. 114). Several delimitations are associated with this study. This study does not cover the analysis of governmental and system regulations and process for school closures. It does not examine the formal policy and protocols for community engagement or the regulatory process for school closure. This study focuses on the perceptions and insights of 12 school principals concerning leadership after they have led through a school closure process. The participants are from two large urban school districts in Alberta. The interviews were conducted from December 2011 to April 2012. No interviews were conducted with students, staff, or community members.

My perspective having led through a school closure process is a delimitation of this study. My insights and interpretations of the data could be different than a researcher who has not experienced a school closure. My hope is that my insight enhances my analysis and does not detract from its trustworthiness. To monitor my own thoughts, beliefs, and experiences, I kept a reflection journal throughout the research process.

Limitations

Marshall and Rossman (2006) described limitations as “...what the study is and is not—its boundaries—and how its results can and cannot contribute to understanding” (p. 42). A limitation of this study is that generalization is not possible. If each context, school, and community is unique and the leaders themselves are unique with their own set of skills and experiences to draw upon; thus, overall generalization is not possible. However, there might be transferable knowledge determined by the reader to their own particular context. The data collected is only as accurate as the awareness and willingness of the individual sharing the information. A school closure is usually a challenging event for all involved. Due to the emotional impact of grief, selective memory could block out events for participants. Some principals “just lead” and are not even aware of the skills, knowledge, and values that they draw upon.

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into six chapters. Chapter 1: Introduction lays the foundation for the study identifying critical components: the purpose of the study, potential significance, relevant background for the study, assumptions, delimitations, limitation, and terminology. This chapter is designed to introduce the reader to the concepts of leadership and complex change in relation to school closure. Chapter 2: Literature Review positions this study in relation to other research in the area of leadership and school closures. This chapter explores the uniqueness of the school closure change context; summarizes and identifies the current research focused on school closures. The lack of the principals’ perspective in the school closure research is identified. Critical leadership concepts are also examined. Chapter 3: Research Methodology and Design identifies the underpinnings of grounded theory as a methodology and

how it is applied to the method design. Chapter 4: Moving Towards a Theory builds foundational knowledge around the context of school closure. By way of sharing my own personal experiences and the experiences of the participants, an understanding of the challenges of leading through a school closure are identified. Chapter 5: Theory, Findings, and Analysis identifies the theory that developed from the analysis of the data of this study. Chapter 6: Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations positions the theory developed in this grounded theory study to leadership literature and school closure research.

Summary

This study examined the leadership insights of 12 principals who led a community through a school closure process. The aim of this study was to fill the gap in the research by focusing on principals' perspectives and experiences. With changing demographics, schools boards across Alberta have already and will continue to examine the best use of facility resources. Using grounded theory principals' perspectives were explored and analysed to develop a theory of leading through a school closure.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

School closure is a complex process for leaders. As Weatherly, Narver, and Elmore (1983) pointed out, a “school closure is not simply a problem of redrawing attendance zones and reallocating staff” (p. 11). The purpose of this chapter is to bring about understanding of the challenges and complexities of the school closure process through the examination of the literature and research that informs this study. The review begins by examining uniqueness of the change of the school closure process for principals through exploring Burke’s (2008) organizational change approach. The importance and the interconnectedness of communication, relationships, and trust are later explored and followed by the examination of contributing factors to the emotional climate during a school closure. The final section of this literature review looks at Deal and Peterson’s (1994) leadership paradox theory, which addresses the tensions encountered in the principal’s role. In each of these sections, salient points are highlighted in the research and literature, which inform the understanding about the context of change for the school closure process.

School Closure a Unique Change Context

An abundance of literature focuses on leading instructional change to improve schools (Barth, 1990; Davies, 2005; Fullan, 2001; Kotter & Rathgeber, 2005; Stoll & Fink, 1996); however, the literature does not address leading change in the context of school closure. This section focuses on the uniqueness and complexity of the context of school closure by examining the organizational change approach of Burke (2008) revolutionary versus evolutionary change.

Organizations, including school districts, are in a constant state of change. These changes can be small or large scale, gradual or rapid, planned or unplanned, and systemic or individual. It is important to realize that change in an organization could be a combination of many forms of

changes. Pardo del Val and Martinez Fuentes (2003) argued that "...real changes are not a pure type but a mixture" (p. 148). Even though change is considered to be multifaceted, Burke (2008) proposed two main categories of organizational change. The first, evolutionary change has small, gradual, and incremental changes which are well prepared and strategically planned. An example of evolutionary change in education is the implementation of a new curriculum. This form of change has high teacher involvement and occurs gradually with advanced warning. Evolutionary change is predictable and regularly occurs in a school community. Burke suggests that 95% change in an organization is considered evolutionary (p. 69). Thus, it is less common to lead revolutionary change.

Burke's (2008) explains that revolutionary change was considered a sudden, rapid, and dramatic change and "as a result, nothing will ever be the same again" (p. 68). The profound changes lead the organization to be completely different with new values, vision, and mission. For a school community, a school closure could be considered a revolutionary change. This change is rapid with a few months between when the community learns their school is recommended for consideration of closure to potentially the actual closing of the school. The Alberta School Act (2010) states that after a community is notified of possible school closure, there needs to be advertising for "a period of at least 14 days before the date of the public meeting" (p. 4) and that "a board shall not make a final decision on the proposed closure until at least 3 weeks have passed since the date of the public meeting...." (p. 5). For a school community, the rapid change of their school being closed and the dramatic change of removing all students and resources from a school make school closure a revolutionary change. School closure is a unique change context for principals. The rarity of school closures and the dramatic nature of the change can elicit a strong emotional response of the community. This is unfamiliar

form of change for principals and contributes to the uniqueness of the theory that develops from this grounded theory study.

School Closures Research

The following section examines and summarizes the research focused on school closures that informs this study. To begin to understand the context of a school closure as a change process, it is important to build background knowledge about the reasons for a school to close and the stages of the school closure process based on research. The complexity of the change begins to be developed through examining the emotional impact the closure has on a community. Lastly, the political consequences and challenges for a leader to face during the school closure process are examined.

The policies and procedures that address school closure have been examined extensively (Basu, 2002; Pappas, 2013; Reiter-Cook, 2010; Rowely, 1984; Schiffhauer, 1998). Specifically, Schiffhauer examined the superintendents' perspective of the interaction between school district and community during the closure of elementary schools. This study provided information to district administration for developing a policy and process. Schiffhauer identified the following as possible reasons for potential school closures: low student enrolment; the condition of the school district; merging of schools or programs; and decreased funding. The two most common reasons for a district to consider a school for closure are lower student enrolment and decreased funding (Morikis, 2010; Morton, 2009; Weatherly et al., 1983). Fewer students results in potentially decreased funding; therefore, these two reasons might be interconnected. A principal leading through a school closure will need to understand the different reasons the school is being considered for closure. The reasons for a school closure may appear clear and straight forward when in actuality they might be more complicated. For example, with a clear decrease in student

enrolment over time, there could still be complicating political, cultural, or ethical factors which may impact the community. School districts can lower enrolment by changing the school designation boundary for students. Moving programs, for example, Spanish or French immersion, to attract more students to certain schools may cause students to leave their community schools to attend these specialized programs. The opportunity to select specialized programs could explain the lower student enrolment at the community school; however, this knowledge does not necessarily assist principals in understanding how to lead through a school closure process.

To further develop the understanding of the school closure context, an awareness of the various stages of the school closure process is important. Schiffhauer (1998) identified the five stages of the school closure process: “preliminary consideration to close the school, events prior to the school closure decision, official school board proceedings to close the building, actions required post decision to close the school, and technical closing of the school” (p. 2). Schiffhauer’s study examined the policy and procedures to develop the identified stages. During a school closure, the principal is not responsible for developing policy and procedures, but rather principals’ responsibilities are to be the frontline leaders of the closure and leadership is not a set of stages. Understanding Schiffhauer’s stages may not inform principals about how to lead through a school closure process; however, it may assist principals to anticipate potential issues with the school community. It is important to note that school closure is not a single change event; it is a series of changes at the district, school, and personal levels. Even though there are predictable stages, what occurs at each stage and its impact may not be predictable for leaders.

The emotional impact of school closures on its community was examined by Bushrod (1999) who found that in a community, a school was the centre for social gatherings. The school

closure had a negative impact on the community's self-concept and educational expectations. As well, the opportunities for social interaction decreased. Community members could no longer attend athletic activities. For principals leading through a school closure, understanding the negative impact on a community may give enhanced understanding of the community's perspective. As well, there may be a greater tension in the principal's role as a leader for the school district and a leader in the school community.

The impact of a school closure as experienced by teachers has been a focus for research (Gardner, 1982; Long, 1992; Morton, 2009). Morton (2009) identified three themes of which principals need to be aware as they lead through a school closure process. First, teachers stressed that communication was critical to how the school closure process impacted them. Clear communication from the principal and school district administration lowered the stress and anxiety experienced by the teachers. A second theme was that there needed to be strategic and intentional planning for the school closure process with attention given to detailed planning throughout. It helped the teachers to anticipate what was going to happen. The third theme proposed showed that teachers wanted emotional support to address their feelings of loss and grief. It was important for principals to provide this guidance so that teachers could address their emotions. Even though Morton's study was comprehensive, it did not directly address the leadership experience and insights of a principal. For principals leading through the school closure process these themes became recommendations from the teachers' perspective, not from the perspective of a principal.

The research on impact of school closures on student focused primarily on academic achievement (Jacobsen, 2000; Silander, 2012) and on emotional experiences (Serenka, 2010). Jacobsen (2000) found that there was academic difference between the students transferred from

the closed school and non-transferred students in the areas of reading and mathematics. The emotional experiences were detailed by Serenka (2010), who found high school students expressed the emotions of anger, confusion, uncertainty, isolation, and fear. The media and public meetings caused students to have "...concerns about being viewed not only as bad students, but as bad people...they simply wanted to have the chance for a good education" (p. 116). Students wanted to feel valued and respected; instead, students became victims of the adults fighting for the school to remain open. Their dignity and worth were lowered: "It did not make us feel good or wanted by anyone" (Serenka, p. 116). Principals have the challenge of helping students to see the separation of the school closure process and their self-worth. This study gave insight into the fragile nature of students' emotions during the school closure process; yet, it also focused on how students were overall resilient. The insight for principals could be the human consequences if the students are not supported through the process of school closure.

There are other consequences that principals need to be aware of. Morikis (2010) studied the financial and political consequences experienced by school districts when closing or consolidating schools. Morikis examined the superintendents' perspective and discovered "...that the *political* consequences associated with declining enrolment, closure, and consolidation were far reaching and...caused discomfort..." for school district administration and board members (p. 49). Morikis found that the source of the political tension came from teachers communicating with community members and sharing information that undermined the board decisions. This undermining put the school boards and superintendents in a defensive position when dealing with the community members. Morikis reported, "superintendents felt that this was a betrayal by staff and were very frustrated because they never felt they could get in front of a situation..." (p. 49). Even though this study focused on the superintendents' perspective and

not principals, it detailed the challenges that leaders experienced through the school closure process. It highlighted the importance of trust and communication with the superintendents' experiences of leading through a school closure process.

The principals' perspective was examined by Alton (1983), Averill (1981), Palmer (2010), and Slade (2012). Each of these studies focused on a component of leading through a school closure, none gave a comprehensive picture of the experience or included leadership insights of principals. Alton (1983) researched threat of school closure on the roles and relationships among principals, supervisory officers, and trustees. The key finding that informed this study was that principals identified a tension with conflicting loyalties to their school community and the school district. In comparison, Averill (1981) conducted theoretical research on human motivation and applied the theories to the context of school closure. Even though no interviews or conversations with principals took place in this study, it was proposed that the context of declining enrolment could create opportunities to motivate teachers for principals. Palmer (2010) interviewed three principals about the district communication, transition plans, and celebrations for their school closure. This study focused on the community's reactions to these areas, which led to different outcomes for each school. Slade (2012) examined seven principals' perspective in relation to the micropolitics for school consolidation. This study looked at power and policies within their schools as a merger occurred. The focus of this study was not on school closure; however, it did examine the principals' experiences with resistance and conflict due to the re-configuring within their schools.

Another approach to the political tensions during the school process was studied by Lavner (2007). This study focused on the influence of the community on the trustee's decision to close a school. Lavner determined that the more credible the members of the community were

perceived to be, the greater their power to influence the school board processes and decisions. The credibility was influenced by an individual's education level and their ability to effectively communicate. This study raised the awareness that the school closure process can be influenced by a community's affluence and education. In contrast, if a school is situated in a low-income community with parents who are not able to articulate their concerns, a principal may have questions such as, does this community have the ability to organize and influence the decision of school closure? how do I ensure all voices in the community are empowered? When leaders begin to question the intent of the rules and regulations, they are looking at the inequities for the individuals and the ability to be heard. This begins to uncover the foundations that trust and communication are integral to leading through change. These concepts are examined in the next section of this literature review.

Communication, Relationships, and Trust

The process of school closure tests the leader's ability to build relationships and trust, and to effectively communicate through the change process. People have strong emotional responses to change, which can impact the trust and relationships that they have developed with the leader. Kotter and Cohen (2002) asserted that "in successful change efforts, a guiding team doesn't argue with this reality, declaring it unfair or illogical" (p. 84). Instead, Kotter and Cohen suggested leaders need to determine ways to address change and more importantly to communicate to relieve anxiety, create a place for anger, and build trust in the vision.

The importance of communication for a leader is approached in multiple ways in the literature. Bender (1997) viewed communication as "the exchange of information and feeling that leads to mutual understanding" (p. 155). Bender proposed that there are two sides to communication: "one half of communication is expression: speaking, writing, acting or

performing, art. The other half is the receiving side: listening, reading, observing. Both bring ideas, feelings, and experience” (p. 165). The interaction between these two sides has the potential to develop mutual understanding. For leaders it is important to ensure that they are accurate in the expression of their information. At the same time they need to be listening and observing. According to Covey (1989) “only 10 percent of our communication is represented by the words we say. Another 30 percent is represented by our sounds, and 60 percent by our body language” (p. 241). The importance of body language suggests a leader communicating change needs to pay attention to the message in his or her actions and not just the strategic wording. If a leader attempts to develop mutual understanding, then words, tone, and action must align in order to convey a clear message. Kotter (1996) claimed that “communication comes in both words and deeds. The latter is generally the most powerful form. Nothing undermines change more than behavior by important individuals that is inconsistent with the verbal communication” (p. 10). This is important for principals to consider while leading through a school closure. Attention may be given to the strategic wording for a speech or email; however, the principal’s actions prior and after may have the greatest impact. An inconsistent message given by a leader has the potential to erode trust. For instance, if the principal informs teachers their role is to be professional and neutral, and then principal participates in a protest to save the school, the principal sends a conflicting message. Teachers may not trust the principal’s words because the words do not match the actions. According to Covey and Kotter the principal’s actions of protesting will speak louder than his or her words to teachers.

Another approach to communication for leaders is to focus on the balance between speaking and listening. Glover (2007) explored the power of dialogue, which included the conversational practices: “deep listening, respecting others, suspending assumptions, and voicing

personal truths” (p. 61). Glover suggested that leaders need to be open to listening to people’s perspectives and that communication needs to challenge the leader, before it becomes a challenge for others. Covey (1989) described empathetic listening as seeking first to understand “listening gets inside another person’s frame of reference” before trying to be understood (p. 240). This involves seeking clarification of the other person’s thoughts. During a school closure process, the focus is largely on the messages or talking points for the community and empathetic listening is overshadowed. A leader needs to listen for meaning and feeling shared by the words and actions of others (Covey, 1989; Glover, 2007). There may be times when people’s behaviours might be overt such as protesting and yelling, which could lead to miscommunication. According to Covey, this is the time when a leader needs to listen to both behaviour and words to truly understand the message being given.

Similarly, Rooney (2009) proposed that conversation “requires deep listening, a willingness to trust, and an ability to have a high regard for one another” (p. 88). Again, trust is linked to the ability to demonstrate listening and respect. Demonstrating listening is challenging for a leader during a school closure process due to the pervasiveness of negative emotions (Bushrod, 1999; Morton, 2009; Serenka, 2010). An individual may not feel respected or that the principal is listening because the principal will not fight to keep the school open. When opinions strongly differ, it is difficult to communicate listening and a high regard for one another.

Heyman (1994) cautioned that “poor listening can happen because people block out what they don’t want to hear, they are distracted, they talk rather than listen, and they’re not aware of good communication skills” (p. 35). This is a salient point for principals leading through a school closure process. The leader may need to model good listening in order for genuine communication to occur. Similarly, Eldridge and Mason (2010) emphasized that

Ineffective communication might be most harmful of all because it can lead to rumors, misinformation, and second-guessing, and it can force the expenditure of time and energy on putting out fires rather than on tackling the real issues at hand. (p. 43)

They suggested strong communication plans with “strategic messages minimize the risk of collateral damage from tough decisions” (p. 43). Ineffective communication during a school closure process can lead to rumors and protests; it damages the relationship between the school board and the community members. Long term damage can affect the trust people have with the school district. Eldridge and Mason identified three critical questions to plan strategic communication: “how we got here,” “what we are doing,” and “where we are headed” (p. 44). These questions are important to answer for a school closure: what has led to the potential school closure?; what is the accommodation plan for students for new schools?; and what are the benefits to students at their new schools? Communication is about both strategic messages and strategic listening.

Another approach to communication is that talking and listening may be considered an interaction that develops into a relationship. Bender (1997) stressed that a relationship develops due to communication. Scott (2002) expanded the concept of personal interaction and conversation by acknowledging that “conversation is the relationship” (p. 6); the two cannot be separated. In contrast, Joyce (2007) described a teeter-totter communication model: “all communication is a balance between relationship and information” (p. 97). Joyce explained that when too much energy is given to the relationship and little information is shared, little is accomplished. Likewise, with vital or sensitive information, a leader tends to focus on the message, and the relationship is not considered. Joyce noted that, “the balance between information and relationship becomes even more important when the information has the

potential for damaging the relationship between the people communicating” (p. 99). This could be the situation when a principal informs a community that their school is considered for closure and it might be closed.

Scott (2002) suggested that generally “most people want to hear the truth, even if it is unpalatable” (p. 18). Another aspect of the message a leader might consider is truth and honesty about facts and circumstances regarding change. Scott believed that “while no single conversation is guaranteed to change the trajectory of a business, a career, a marriage, or a life, any single conversation can” and it is each conversation that leads to change (p. 1). A school principal may have numerous individual conversations to support people as they address their emotions about the school closure process. The leader’s ability to have honest and truthful conversations with each person is what begins to build trust.

Hargreaves and Fink (2006) determined that “effective organizations depend and thrive on trust” (p. 212). This trust permeates the relationships in the organization. It reinforces the predictability of support and the assurance of shared understanding. For a leader, trust is foundational to the ability to lead. Hargreaves and Fink described “trust as a resource. It creates and consolidates energy, commitment, and relationships” (p. 213). Trust could be described as the force that drives an organization. People may not be able to support the organization’s vision unless they trust and believe in it. Trust may be considered the cornerstone of leading an organization. A school closure process may challenge principals to maintain trust and show emotional support for individuals (Morton, 2009). A lack of trust might have people question the principal and the school district.

If strong leadership begins with thoughts and actions, then reflecting on one’s beliefs is important for a leader. Lane and Down (2010) noted “how leaders contend with...uncertainty in

the external world is partly a function of how they deal with uncertainty within themselves. Anxiety and fear can lead to retrenchment; conversely, confidence and courage can lead to new opportunities” (p. 513). Leading change may require confidence and courage to address uncertainty. Before attempting to understand the emotional climate of the organization, a leader may need to reflect and acknowledge his or her personal emotions relating to change. A school closure process presents the possibility of great change and uncertainty for a community. Thus, it may be important for a principal who is about to lead a community through a school closure to address his or her own personal feelings, values, and opinions about the school closure before attempting to lead a community through the process.

The importance of the leader’s communication in building and sustaining relationships with people is integral to leadership through the change process, especially if the change has the potential to bring forth strong emotional response from individuals. The school closure process is an emotionally charged change that has individuals demonstrating resistance and sadness, which will be examined in the next section.

Emotional Climate, Grief, and Resistance

Emotional responses to change can be as varied as change itself. Geddes (1992) stated that “[c]hange is a part of life; it cannot be avoided” (p. 2). There are many forms of changes in life, some perceived as positive (marriage, promotion, a new home) and some perceived as negative (divorce, firing, loss of a home). A perceived negative change could be considered positive, for example, divorcing an abusive spouse. As well as a perceived positive change such as a promotion could lead to less time for family, which may have negative consequences. Perception and perspective regarding change impacts how people respond to change; change creates a difference. It is how people respond to the difference change brings that can create

challenges for leaders. This section examines the impact of emotions on cultural climate during periods of change, as well as two strong emotional responses: grief and resistance.

Blackmore (2004) studied teachers' emotional responses to educational reform. This study proposed that individuals' emotional response to change were influenced by the culture of the workplace and in turn the workplace culture was produced by personal and collective emotional responses. A critical finding of Blackmore's study was that externally imposed change created the greatest emotional response in the form of resistance among teachers. Their resistance was expressed by feelings of frustration as well as "anger and guilt in the sense that they were unable to do what they felt was educationally best for their students" (p. 446). These emotional responses may be similar to teachers who are experiencing a school closure. The closure process is externally imposed by district administration. If the teachers believe closing a school is not in the best interest of the students, then they may have strong feelings of resistance that could be expressed as anger or guilt.

Anger and guilt may be only part of the emotional climate that is experienced by principals during a school closure process. Cline (1998) studied the emotional response to the closing of a nursing unit in a hospital. The following emotions were identified and associated with the change of the unit closure: "anxiety, feelings of powerlessness, loss of control, a sense of unpredictability, an urge to cry, confusion, anger, depression, defensiveness, abnormal thinking, and extreme dependency" (p. 5). A hospital nursing unit closing is similar to a school closure in that staff is moved to new locations and the resources are distributed to other units. Cline's study found nurses exhibited the following: "confusion, bargaining, fear, loss of direction, desire for symbolism of old to be retained, resistance, surface of unresolved issues, and rumors" (p. 6). These attributes are also expressed by students, teachers, and parents during a

school closure process (Bushrod, 1999; Morton, 2009; Serenka, 2010; Smith, 1984), especially the sense of loss and confusion.

Change is often associated with loss (Bathgate, 2007; Bender, 1997; Cline, 1998; Friedman & James, 2008; Fullan, 2001). Heifetz and Linsky (2002) proposed that “people do not resist change, per se. People resist loss” (p. 11). The process of grief is a way for people to address loss. Kubler-Ross (2003) identified five stages of dying through her study of terminally ill patients. These stages of dying have evolved into the commonly shared stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. It is important to realize that these stages are not meant to be sequential and there are multiple entry points. In a school closure process, there may be people in various stages for various lengths of time.

Smith (1984) compared the experience of a school closure process to Kubler-Ross’s (2003) *Stages of Grief*. Smith described in the denial stage people’s first response to hearing the closure was “no not our school!” (p. 31). There was disbelief or refusal to hear information about the closure. People acted stunned and hid their emotions. In the anger stage, Smith insisted people were now asking “why our school?—often coupled with resentment” (p. 31). Even though people had begun to process the information, they felt frustrated and showed anger. Bathgate (2007) argued that “anger will quite often be irrational and unpredictable” (p. 23) as people respond to a school closure process. Bathgate found as people processed information about the closure, they questioned the accuracy of the data, and the need to close the school. According to Smith (1984), this questioning led to the bargaining stage; people asked “have you considered this alternative?” (p. 31). During this stage, optimism and hope occurred, a possibility that a solution would be found to postpone or prevent the school closure. Smith reported that emotions changed and the depression stage occurred. In this stage people expressed feelings of

hopelessness and sadness. Friedman and James (2008) outlined the symptoms of clinical depression as the inability to concentrate, sleep interruptions and tiredness, varied eating habits, and strong emotional response.

In the final stage acceptance, Smith (1984) noticed that people began to recognize that the school was closing. However, Smith noted that “no happiness accompanies the reaction”; rather, “a reluctant acceptance” was observed (p. 31). Understanding how the grief process and school closure process are interconnected may help guide principals to more effectively to lead through a closure process.

An insight on leading people through grief and change was identified by Kubler-Ross (2003) who connected how information is communicated with the ability people had for processing their emotions. Kubler-Ross identified that “[t]hose patients who were told of their fatal diagnosis without chance, without a sense of hope, reacted the worst and never quite reconciled themselves with the person who presented the news to them in this cruel manner” (p. 264). Kubler-Ross’s study highlighted the importance of sharing bad news with an aspect of hope. For instance, how the message of school closure is presented may impact the grief process for the community and may affect the ability of the principal to lead. During times of change and stress, “staff members, students, and parents all look to the principal for guidance on what to do and reassurance that they will be okay” (Paine, 2009, p. 13). For a school community, reassurance and guidance may be factors that contribute to the hope that is needed through a closure process. Even with the message about potential school closure being presented with reassurance and hope, individuals may show a varied response hearing the message; from immediate acceptance to complete resistance.

Williamson and Blackburn (2010) proposed that individuals resist change because “they don’t see the value of the change or they are not sure that they will be successful with the change” (p. 73). This could be applied to a school closure in that the community might not see the need for the school to close or they do not believe they will be successful in new schools. Williamson and Blackburn asserted that leaders need develop a vision in which people can see themselves. People are primarily concerned about their own well-being—“it starts and ends with me” (p. 75). Thus, a leader then should focus on ensuring that people see the value in a school closure and that they can see them-selves in the new vision.

Pardo del Val and Martinez Fuentes (2003) studied resistance as a “phenomenon” that influences progress change. They found that resistance impacted the commencement and execution of change. They theorized that resistance may be exhibited in action to avoid and evade change in order to maintain the known and recognizable. Pardo del Val and Martinez Fuentes examined theoretical sources of resistance to determine whether they are observable in empirical research and whether the type of change, evolutionary or revolutionary, affects the level of resistance. Their study suggested that “the more radical and transformational change is, the more powerful the resistance to change is” (p. 152). This study supports the thought that if a school closure is a revolutionary change to the local school community, then greater resistance will result.

Another finding in Pardo del Val and Martinez Fuente’s (2003) study was that greatest sources of resistance occurred for individuals in relation to “deeply rooted values” (p. 151). Their study connected resistance to people’s core values. In education, most teachers have strong values to make positive differences in children’s lives. As Sergiovanni (2000) proposed:

To teach is to profess something, and professing requires standing for certain virtues that include making a public commitment to serve ideas and people. Caring is the cornerstone of this commitment... This idea equates teaching with caring and caring with teaching as one and the same activity. (p. 35)

Teachers have strong sense of caring and purpose, which develops into shared values. Personal purpose may become deepened by relationships with other staff and students. Sergiovanni described these relationships as follows:

As a school becomes a community of relationships, connections among people are close and informal, individual circumstances count, acceptance is unconditional, emotions are legitimated, sacrificing one's self-interest for the good of the community is common, relationships are intrinsically valued, knowledge is valued and learned, and students are accepted and loved. (p. 66)

Sergiovanni's use of emotional words, such as accepted, loved, and valued, to describe the interactions within a school suggests that a school is a place for strong values and relationships. As Pardo del Val and Martinez Fuentes found, the existence of "deeply rooted" values resulted in the greatest resistance to change. It may be that the nature of a school community, its values, and its relationships that makes the resistance to the change inherently great. Closing a school might be completely different than closing a business due to the emotional nature of teaching and the deep values of staff.

When planning for change, a leader may also need to take into account the demographics of the teachers. Hargreaves (2005) studied resiliency of teachers with change and found that early-career teachers reported "energy" and "enthusiasm," as well as being more "adaptable" and "flexible" in the face of change. In comparison, late-career teachers reported "tiredness,"

“emotional distance,” “relief,” as well as “resistance” to change (p. 979). Thus, a principal looking to predict teachers’ reaction to a school closure might predict the younger, less experienced teachers could demonstrate less resistance. These teachers are more flexible and may not have strong connections within the school community.

In a school closure context, one might expect that the early career teachers might be less resistant to change than the late career teachers. However, in the contextual sensitivity section of Hargreaves’s study, early career teachers expressed “employment insecurity” and “occupational uncertainty” (p. 979) in relation to their work. An early career teacher may show stronger resistance to a school closure due to potential job loss compared to a late career teacher who has a higher level of job security. In contrast, the late career teachers reported the feelings of “impending retirement” and “unsinkability” (p. 979). Overall, it may be difficult for a principal to anticipate which staff might have a stronger resistance to a school closure. Other factors, such as family life, medical conditions, and level of stress could also influence an individual’s resistance.

Pardo del Val and Martinez Fuentes (2003) identified approaches managers could use to address resistance: managers “should consider how much organizational culture fits with change objectives and what could be done to improve such a fit before the change process starts” (p. 154). They also suggested that training programs for new skills and knowledge development as well as having a strong communication plan might decrease resistance to change. Through studying the principal’s insights on leadership developed from leading a school closure, strategies and approaches may be identified that principals can use to deal with resistance in their community.

It is important to acknowledge that not all resistance is negative, and that not all change is advantageous for an organization. Resistance from people toward change may be considered to have both favourable and unfavourable consequences for a leader. People's messages and actions can provide useful information; in this case, the resistance is seen "as a communicative act" (Abowitz, 2000, p. 878). Conversely, how resistance is communicated can make it difficult for a leader to hear the message. Cockburn's (2005) narrative on leading change at her university described the resistance she encountered as "people shout[ing] abuse at me" (p. 339). Even though she felt there was a lack of "genuine dialogue" during the moments people were sharing their thoughts, she explained that these expressions of resistance did relieve tensions, which allowed for the grieving process to occur. Cockburn described gaining an understanding of the individual's perspectives about the various changes.

Resistance to change appears to be as complex as change itself. The resistance to change can occur at any stage in the school closure process. It can occur within one individual or an entire group. As well, it can be varied in its intensity from passive aggressive to aggressive sabotage. Resistance has the potential to impact not only the leading change but also relationships during the process. School closure is a multifaceted form of change. As the limited closure research indicates, there may be straightforward reasons for school closure and clear stages in the process, yet the emotional impact and consequences to a community are complicated. The school closure process has aspects of both evolutionary and revolutionary change. For the individuals in the school community, the closure may be a revolutionary change. As Heifetz and Linsky (2002) noted, "the deeper the change and the greater the amount of learning required, the more resistance there will be...." (p. 14). The interconnectedness of

resistance, communication, relationships, emotions, and grief are another aspect to the intricacy of leading through a school closure process.

Leadership Tensions and Paradoxes

Every day principals face tensions within their work as school leaders. Edmunds, Mulford, Kendall, and Kendall (2008) studied the tensions and pressures leaders experienced, specifically “leadership versus management, development versus maintenance, and internal versus external change” (para. 5). They found that principals experienced challenges balancing internal school responsibilities with external district responsibilities. One finding was that principals “experienced tensions and dilemmas regarding loyalty to the expectations of their employer and the needs of their school” (para. 51). The needs of the school community might be in conflict with the expectations of the employer during a closure. The challenge for principals is to determine what the community desires, in order to lead them through the closure process. Adding to this tension a principal might feel challenged by the expectations of the school district. The principals are pulled between honouring the district’s closure processes and understanding the school community’s need to keep the school open for their children. Principals may question for whom they work—the school district or the school community. Principals are responsible to demonstrate to both parties that children are safe and engaged in meaningful learning. The district administration and school community could have different expectations of safety and meaningful learning in the context of school closure. The tension created for principals to meet the divergent expectation could be expressed as a leadership paradox.

One theory that examines the leadership tensions for principals is Deal and Peterson’s (1994) leadership paradox theory. They proposed that principals need to be able to be “...simultaneously efficient managers *and* effective leaders” (p. xii). Deal and Peterson do not

see technical competencies and symbolic leadership as separate competing entities, but instead as complementary. They use *and* not *versus* to demonstrate the interconnectedness of these two tensions. Deal and Peterson took the view that technical and symbolic competencies form the bifocal lenses through which principals view their practice. The paradox for principals is to have the ability to clearly see their roles as leaders and managers at the same time.

Technical competencies are described as being “clear, organized, and fair” and are foundational for the types of decisions that give structure and predictability to an organization (Deal & Peterson, 1994, p. 13). Deal and Peterson proposed eight functions of the technical leadership role: “planner,” “resource allocator,” “coordinator,” “supervisor,” “disseminator of information,” “jurist,” “gatekeeper,” and “analyst” (p. 19). According to Deal and Peterson, principals become planners when they assess situations, determine goals, develops a plan of action, and establish progress. As resource allocators, principals distribute the resources to ensure learning. As coordinators, principals determine responsibility and accountability. Principals are supervisors when they monitor teachers’ practice and guide them to move forward. In their role as disseminator of information, principals make certain that communication brings awareness and understanding of the information. As jurists, principals settle conflicts that might occur. Principals are gate keepers when they ensure the policies and staff are focused on the interests of the community. And lastly, in the analyst role, principals apply logical processes to address problems. Each of these roles or competencies contributes to the principal’s ability to be an efficient technical manager. Deal and Peterson’s technical competencies are applicable when leading through a school closure process. Specifically, communication, planning, conflict, and distribution of resources competencies of principals will be addressed further in Chapter 6.

Deal and Peterson's (1994) leadership paradox theory emphasizes the contrast between symbolic leader and the technical managerial roles. The eight symbolic leadership competencies include "historian," "anthropological detective," "visionary," "symbol," "potter," "poet," "actor," and "healer" (p. 28). Deal and Peterson defined the historian role for principals as understanding the past and current culture by asking the question "what is really going on?" (p. 29). As anthropological detectives, principals ascertain the foundational beliefs in school roles and routines. In the visionary role, principals focus the community on the mission and hope for the future. In the symbolic role, principals model their values through their actions. As potters, principals shape the culture through what is celebrated and acknowledged. Principals as poets use communication to inspire and promote the culture in a clear and continuous manner. Principals as actors use drama or crisis to strengthen purpose and values. And finally, as healers, principals focus on supporting people through the process of transition, while providing opportunity for celebration. Each of these roles or competencies contributes to successful and effective symbolic leadership on the part of the principal. In the context of school closure many of Deal and Peterson's symbolic competencies are demonstrated. Specific competencies, such as vision, role modeling, celebrating, and supporting others are described in detail in Chapter 6. Both the symbolic leadership and technical competencies are important during a school closure process. These competencies may help guide people forward through the change process. As determined by Deal and Peterson, leaders experience tensions and paradoxes as they lead people through the process of change. These tensions may be different or heightened during a school closure.

Summary

Chapter two explored the literature and research which informed this study. The first section examined explained why the context of the school closure was a unique change for principals by examining organizational change (Burke, 2008). The understanding that the school closure process could be considered a revolutionary change from the perspective school community emerged. The research that focused on school closures was examined and the gap of the principal's perspective and experiences was identified. The impact of communication, relationships, and trust on both leadership and in the context of a school closure was emphasized. As well, the interconnectedness of the emotional climate, grief, and resistance was established. The challenges of leading change and leading through a school closure were identified. These challenges, the resistance to change and the emotions of loss were highlighted. This literature review concluded by examining the paradox theory (Deal & Peterson, 1994). The tensions leaders may experience were summarized by the paradoxical roles within the symbolic leadership and technical management. As determined by this literature review, principals are responsible and accountable for leading change; however, leading change during the school closure process is complex and challenging.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

This research is an exploratory qualitative study of 12 principals' experiences and insights about leadership after leading through a school closure. This chapter has two main focuses: the methodology adopted and the research methods applied. In the Research Methodology section, the rationale for choosing qualitative research, specifically a constructivist approach to grounded theory is explained. I make explicit how my worldview influenced my decision to choose the Grounded Theory methodology to conduct this study.

The research method applied is described in the Research Design section, which demonstrates how the grounded theory methodology was utilized in this study. This section of this chapter addresses participant selection, ethical considerations, data collection, and data analysis. The data analysis discusses the process of coding, memo writing, constructing theory, and theoretical sampling used in this study. The final section addresses the trustworthiness of this research study.

Research Methodology

Qualitative research.

The brief examination of qualitative research in relation to this study is foundational for developing the understanding of the theoretical framework—Grounded Theory. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000), qualitative research is a set of “practices that make the world visible” (p. 3). Creswell (2009) argues that the purpose of qualitative research is to explore and develop an understanding of the meaning people associate with a “social or human problem” (p. 4). This study's purpose is to make leadership visible in the world of school closure. As well, this study examines the meaning of the perspective on leadership which evolved from 12 principals' experiences leading through the human problem of school closure. Creswell (2007) explains that

exploring the worldview of the researcher is important to the understanding the specific methodology selection in qualitative research. I make explicit the worldview or paradigm that informed my decision to use the grounded theory methodology in the next section.

Researcher's worldview.

Guba (1990) described a worldview as “a basic set of beliefs that guide action” (p. 17) of the researcher. According to Creswell (2007), the four main worldviews that influence qualitative research are: postpositivism, advocacy or participatory, pragmatism, and constructivism. The two that apply to this study are pragmatism, meaning the research is easily applied to the real world, and constructivism, meaning the significance of the knowledge is formed from the situation. My world view is located in the constructivist approach to research. This study utilizes the qualitative research methodology of grounded theory because it is consistent with this paradigm and with my research objectives. During the interviews, individuals shared their own account of the reality they experienced. These experiences were subjective to the individual, and the participants’ insights and understandings developed through the school closure.

In a constructivist worldview, the researcher’s view shapes the interpretation of the research (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2007, 2009; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). My professional experiences leading through a school closure and years as an educator were an important factor in this study. Creswell (2007) suggested that with a constructivist view, “researchers recognize their own background shapes their interpretation, and they ‘position themselves’ in the research to acknowledge how their interpretation flows from their own personal, cultural, and historical experiences” (p. 21). This study’s research design recognized the impact of my professional background while striving to ensure the participants’ experiences and thoughts were honoured and presented accurately. Through ongoing reflection during the research process, I made

clear and defined the boundaries within myself. Heikkinen, Huttunen, and Syrjala (2007) noted that “a good researcher is aware of his/her knowing: the principle of reflexivity” (p. 11). They found it was important to explore the relationship between the topic of study and the researcher’s personal experience and knowledge in the research area. The understanding of the researcher’s perspective is a lens for “making meaning” of the information collected in the study. Strauss and Corbin (1990) proposed that the researcher’s personal and professional experience might be a potential source for a research problem, yet they recognized that having a personal connection to the issue may be a benefit and should not prevent the researcher from endeavouring to explore a specific experience. It was important to select a methodology that would be aligned with my constructivist worldview, as well as supporting my professional experience of having led through a school closure. The constructivist approach to grounded theory incorporates my worldview and my professional experiences.

Grounded theory methodology.

The methodological foundation of grounded theory is to discover a “theory from the data” (Glaser & Strauss, 2008, p. 1). Strauss and Corbin (1990) presented grounded theory as “a qualitative research method that uses a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived....theory about a phenomenon” (p. 24). Sociologists Glaser and Strauss (2008) were the pioneers of the grounded theory approach to qualitative research. They detailed the systematic procedures for collecting, analyzing, and developing a theory within data.

At the time of Glaser and Strauss’s (2008) work, social researchers used a positivistic approach to research. The predominant thought was that “....scientific logic, a unitary method, objectivity and truth legitimized reducing qualities of the human experience to quantifiable variables” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 5). In positivistic research, the researcher’s role in the research is

to be neutral and unbiased. Thus, qualitative research was considered to be “impressionistic, anecdotal, unsystematic and biased” (p. 5). Importantly, researchers would apply an external theory to the research data or prove a current theory using the data. In contrast, grounded theory focused on developing a theory that evolved from analysis of the data through specific procedures.

Glaser and Strauss’s (2008) work was ground breaking in that they offered an approach to data in which it was “....*systematically obtained and analyzed in social research*...We believe the discovery of theory from data” that they identified as grounded theory (p. 1). They developed the methodology of grounded theory by identifying the philosophical beliefs, describing the procedures for researchers to follow, and amalgamating the two views of social research, positivist (Glaser) and pragmatic (Strauss). Their later work began to take grounded theory and the researchers into different directions. Glaser continued to use comparative analysis and refined the original underpinnings of grounded theory, whereas Strauss partnered with Corbin and focused on giving greater detail of the procedures of grounded theory for researchers to follow and de-emphasized comparative analysis. Strauss and Corbin (1990) explained the theory “....is discovered, developed, and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of the data pertaining to that phenomenon” (p. 23). They work to develop procedures to guide researchers.

Strauss and Corbin (1990) provided detailed guidelines for the collection and analysis of data that would result in a theory. They identified the following analysis procedures that the researcher should follow: coding, categorizing, and memo writing to construct a theory for the study. The focus is to use codes and categories that stay close to the data by using the participants’ own words. These procedures are explained in detail in the data analysis section of

this chapter where both the codes and quotations from the participants are identified in determining the theory.

Other researchers began to work with Glaser and Strauss's (2008) approach to move grounded theory in new directions. Charmaz (2006) moved grounded theory further away from its positivist and pragmatic roots by asserting a constructivist approach to grounded theory and proposing that the grounded theory guidelines must be flexible and instead referring to these as "principles" to guide the researcher. Charmaz concluded that "how researchers use these guidelines is not neutral; nor are the assumptions they bring to their research and enact during the process" (p. 9). Researchers bring unique perspectives in their approaches to grounded theory.

In comparison to the classic grounded theory of Glaser and Strauss (2008) that focused on a neutral researcher separate from data in which the theory emerges, Charmaz (2006) theorized that researchers "...are a part of the world we study and the data we collect" (p. 10). Critical to this belief about grounded theory is the understanding that researchers build "grounded theories through [their] past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives, and research practices" (Charmaz, p. 10). In the constructivist worldview, the researcher's perspective is an important aspect of the data analysis process.

In theoretical approaches to grounded theory, Glaser and Strauss (2008), Strauss and Corbin (1990), and Charmaz (2006) agreed with the assertion that a researcher does not start with a theory to prove. Instead, a researcher will start with an area of focus and from the relevant data a theory will emerge. The end result of the research process in a pragmatic worldview was to produce "research that would be of use to professional or lay audiences" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 25). An objective of this study was to develop a theory and generate knowledge about leading through a school closure that would be of use to educational leaders. The methodological approach of

grounded theory was intended to allow this study to contribute to both the theoretical understanding in the research community and to the professional knowledge of principals.

Theoretical sensitivity.

Fundamental to grounded theory methodology is theoretical sensitivity (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Charmaz, 2006; Holton, 2007; Kelle, 2007; Star, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Strauss and Corbin (1990) presented theoretical sensitivity of a researcher as "...having [the] insight, the ability to give meaning to data, the capacity to understand, and capability to separate the pertinent..." (p. 42). They explain that theoretical sensitivity may develop from the researcher's understanding of literature, professional experience, and personal experience. Thus, theoretical sensitivity might be innate within the researchers based on who they are, what they have read, and their experience with the phenomenon. In contrast, Charmaz (2006) proposed that theoretical sensitivity developed for researchers from theorizing: "...seeing possibilities, establishing connections, and asking questions" (p. 135). In this case, theoretical sensitivity can grow in the researchers as they analyze the data. The researcher is integral in constructing meaning from the analysis of the data.

Holton (2007) stressed that theoretical sensitivity impacts the ability of the researcher to conceptualize the data. Holton proposed that theoretical sensitivity requires the researcher to have "analytic temperament," which allowed "the researcher to maintain analytic distance from the data, tolerate regression and confusion, and facilitate trust in the power of preconscious processing for conceptual emergence" (p. 275). As well, researchers need to have "analytic competence [the ability] to develop theoretical insights and abstract conceptual ideas from various sources and types of data" (p. 275). With this description, the researcher experiencing the phenomenon could be at a disadvantage to maintain analytic distance. There might be a separation between a researcher having distance from the data and having distance from the phenomenon, yet the closeness to the

phenomenon might be able to assist with theoretical insights due to the deeper understanding the researcher would have. Strauss and Corbin (1990) recognized a tension in theoretical sensitivity that is the creative use of the researcher's knowledge and experience and the accurate representation of the data and phenomena. They suggest the researcher employ the following strategies: to regularly reflect on what is occurring within the data, to be realistic about what the data could mean, and to adhere to the guidelines of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin). The research procedures for grounded theory include coding of the data, memo writing, development of categories based on the data, and finally, the development of the theory in the research. The theory comes from the data in coding, memos, and categories within the study.

Research Design

Overview.

Grounded theory was used to explore the principal's experiences and insights about leadership in the context of school closure. The guidelines for the application of the theory are explained. The Research Design section is divided into participant selection, participant profile and context, ethical considerations, data collection, data analysis, and procedures to address data trustworthiness.

Participant selection.

Marshall and Rossman (2006) stressed "the need to retain flexibility" (p. 64) when developing the guidelines for sample selection. Flexibility assists with the ability to find "saturation"—no new information is revealed that assists understanding of a phenomenon, a participant's perspective, or category (Creswell, 2007). In this study, the length of interview time spent with the 12 principals allowed for saturation with each participant. The participants' responses to questions began to show repeating thoughts and ideas. As well, initially having a

range of 10 to 15 principals gave the flexibility to respond when saturation was achieved at the end of interviewing the twelfth participant. The last few interviews yielded new information about specific contexts; however, no new insights about leadership emerged as saturation was reached.

All participants were urban school principals in one of two school districts in Alberta. The benefits of having principals from two school districts participate in this study allowed for a greater population to draw upon, thus increasing the likelihood of reaching the goal of having 10 to 15 participants who experienced school closures. The two school districts had different preliminary public engagement processes; however, they both followed the same Alberta School Act guidelines for the school closure processes. The principals' individual experiences of closure may have been unique based on age of school and community demographic, yet commonalities existed in procedures due to the Alberta governmental regulated processes.

One criterion for the initial sampling was that principals had to have led a community through a school closure process between June of 2009 and June 2011. Having a more recent school closure experience was thought to help with a participant's ability to have accurate and detailed recollections. The potential sample size was smaller than anticipated during this time period, which led to a change in this criterion to have school closures from June 2006 to June 2011. This increased time frame gave the flexibility needed to meet the proposed 10 to 15 participants.

Another criterion that evolved during this study was that principals had to have closed an entire school, not just a program within a school. Two participants, who had closed a program not a school expressed interest; however, they did not participate in the study. This criterion became part of the purposeful sampling that guided participant selection. It was noted during the

first interview with a principal who had closed both a school and a program within a school that a school closure is a greater challenge because of the grief from the community for the loss of their school. It was an ending as well as a change.

Ethics approval from the University of Calgary and the requirement to conduct research within the two school districts was obtained prior to the recruitment of participants. The recruitment of participants occurred in one of three ways:

- 1) through working with the Research Coordinator in the two school districts. The coordinator identified potential participants and communicated the district's support for this study. Contact with potential participants was made from the contact information obtained on the school district's public website;
- 2) through professional relationships. I had personal knowledge of four principals who expressed interest in this study; and
- 3) through participant referrals during the research process. Some participants recommended other principals that I should try to contact. I noted all the names mentioned and obtained the contact information from the school districts website.

To maintain anonymity I did not confirm with the school districts or with participant who the participants were in this study. The participant selection continued with a letter of introduction (Appendix A) sent to the potential participants. This letter of introduction included contact information, a notice of interest, and a stamped addressed return envelope.

Participant profile and context.

The 12 participants were urban school principals—six participants from each of two urban school districts in Alberta. Five males and seven females participated. Three participants had no previous experience as a principal prior to leading through their school closure, while five

had one to four years experience, and four had greater than five years of experience. Nine principals had closed their schools less than 1.5 years before participating in this study. Three principals had closed their schools within two to five and a half years prior to their interview. Commonalities existed among the 12 principals' schools that were closed. All schools had experienced a decline in enrolment for a variety of reasons: aging community with fewer children, restructuring of a programs in the district, opening of a new school or program in another community, and/or students seeking programs of choice and not attending their designated school.

The characteristics of the closed schools are explained. Six of the 12 principals described their communities as “low socioeconomic.” Two principals expressed that their communities had a higher population of non-English speaking parents. There were eight elementary schools (kindergarten to grade 6), two middle schools (kindergarten to grade 9), and two junior high schools (grade 7 to 9). The number of students each school had at the time of closing was as follows: two schools had less than 100 students, five schools had 101 to 200 students, and five schools had 201 to 500 students. The data were summarized to ensure that the principals' identities remained protected. Protecting the confidentiality of the participants was one of the ethical considerations for this study.

Ethical considerations.

Marshall and Rossman (2006) identified two areas for ethical considerations. The first is “generic” considerations—the design of the study, completing informed consent forms, procedures to protect anonymity, and feasibility of the study. The second area goes beyond procedures; it is “situation specific” for the interaction of the researcher with the participant (p. 82). Issues regarding the ethics of interaction between a researcher and a participant include

emotionally engaging with the participants, using deception, or the participant sharing potentially detrimental information. The generic ethical considerations for the method design and the situation specific ethical considerations of the interaction between the 12 participants and the researcher are identified.

This study met the ethical guidelines of the University of Calgary and the two school districts in addressing the generic and situation-specific ethical considerations. Attention was given to protecting anonymity and confidentiality through all stages of this study. By having two school districts and not identifying the district to which each participant belonged, the potential for identifying specific participants decreased. The location and time of the interviews aimed to maintain anonymity and confidentiality as well as suit participant preference. All participants were assigned a code by the researcher; only the researcher and the participant knew which code was given to the particular participant. All data had the code instead of the participant's name attached to it. The list of participant names, consent forms, and codes were kept in a locked filing cabinet in a secure and separate location from the transcripts.

In relation to the ethics of interaction, no deception or coercion was used during the interview process. During the interviews, I was responsive to emotions expressed by the participants and would redirect questions when needed. Participants were given a copy of their own transcripts. They were given the opportunity to change or modify their answers and delete portions of their transcripts. Participants were able to withdraw from the study at any point during the data collection process; however, none of the participants chose to withdraw.

Data collection.

The process of data collection followed the principles of the constructivist approach to grounded theory. The data collection section is divided into my reflection process, the interview process, the process to ensure accuracy in the transcripts, and document data collection.

Self-reflection.

I examined my own experiences to develop a clear understanding of my personal history with school closure and leadership prior to beginning the formal research process and conducting interviews. My journal writings, personal notes, emails, memos and closure documents, as well as my own answers to the interview questions provided the data for initial codes. I developed preliminary questions to explore through the interview process. Further revisions to the interview questions developed from gaps found in the data. My guiding reflection question was “what more do I need to explore to achieve a better understanding of other principals’ experiences and leadership insights from leading through a school closure process?” Through this reflection, the considerations for purposeful sampling were determined, which became the foundation for theoretical sampling.

Throughout the research process, I kept notes on interviews, reflections, gaps in the data, memos, and potential theories. I regularly reviewed my journal, asking myself, “Why was that important to note?”; “Where is my reflection found in the data?”; “How is the participant’s experience and perspective different or similar to my own?”; and “What memory of my experience am I thinking about after each interview?” My reflections started immediately after each interview and continued long after all the interviews were concluded.

Interview process.

The interview process began with the initial contact with potential participants. This contact was the beginning of the relationship between the researcher and the participant. Nine participants replied to recruitment by returning their notice of interest in the provided stamped addressed return envelope; three emailed the notice, and two contacted me by telephone. Some participants replied in more than one format. I called the interested participants to express my appreciation, answer questions, and book their first interview. Interviews were booked based on the participant's schedule and location preference. After speaking with the participant, an email was sent to confirm the date and time of the booked interview and give an outline of interview topics. A copy of the consent form was attached to the email.

Originally three separate interviews, approximately 60 minutes in length, with each participant were planned; however, eight participants requested to have two longer interviews. This request was accommodated by dividing the questions appropriately into two longer interviews. The participant's energy level and desire to continue was monitored throughout the interview. Interviews ranged in length from 44 to 150 minutes. In total, 41.6 hours of interview conversations were transcribed. Additionally, approximately three to four hours of pre- and post-interview conversation were noted in my field notes, but most these conversations were not recorded.

A semi-structured interview approach was used with the participants with a list of questions that guided the interview process (Appendix B). Emergent questions that evolved from the participant's responses were also asked. The original semi-structured interview questions were developed using Seidman's (2006) approach to interviewing in qualitative research. Personal history was the focus for the initial questions, followed by questions about

the experience, ending with questions to guide reflection and make meaning. As well, Charmaz's (2006) sample questions were used as templates for developing "open-ended questions" (p. 30). During the first interview, the consent form was reviewed and the participants' questions were addressed about my study or the interview process. Protection of their anonymity was explained, and they were given the reflection questionnaire. At the beginning of the interview process, I shared a brief description of myself and how this topic evolved out of my personal experiences as a principal who has led through a school closure. Each interview was recorded with audio recorders. Notes were taken during the interview that focused on emergent questions, noting participant nonverbal responses, and identified areas to explore deeper. Toward the end of the interview I described some of the points that were identified and addressed missed questions. Interviews were concluded by outlining the topics for the next interview. The next interview began with a review of some of the salient points raised in the previous interview, along with the questions and thoughts that evolved out of my coding, reflecting, and memo writing, and followed by the semi-structure interview questions. At the end of the final interview, I repeated missed questions and gave the opportunity for participants to share extra information. I explained to the participants the process of transcribing and the opportunity to review his or her transcript was explained. Within two weeks of the final interview I sent a thank you letter to each participant (Appendix C).

Transcription process.

Glaser and Strauss (2008) suggested researchers "transcribe only as much as is needed" (p. 30). They argued that transcription of the entire recorded interview may not be necessary; instead, the researcher needs to be *selective* when choosing what information to transcribe. They do acknowledge that inexperienced researchers may need to transcribe all interviews to learn the

process of selecting appropriate material. Using their final advice of “better more than less” (p. 31), I chose to transcribe the entire interviews with all the participants. Recording began with the start of the semi-structured interview questions. Field notes were made on the preliminary introductions and get-acquainted conversations. All interviews were transcribed in their entirety by myself or a professional transcriptionist who had signed a confidentiality agreement. For the professionally transcribed interviews, I reviewed each transcript for accuracy by re-listening to the recording and reading the transcripts. Individual transcripts were sent to the corresponding participant by email. Each participant received his or her transcript within three weeks of the interview. Participants had the opportunity to check the accuracy and modify or delete any portions of their transcripts. Having participants review the transcripts decreased the possible variance between what was shared by the participants and what was reported by the researcher (Heikkinen et al., 2007). As well, giving the participants an opportunity to modify their transcripts supported the school district expectations of research. Participants could remove statement that they thought might be professionally damaging. Only three participants choose to modify their transcripts. Two participants made grammatical changes and one participant requested a portion of the transcript be removed. Being upfront about this opportunity may have also enabled participants to trust the research process and the researcher. To maintain anonymity for the participant, I limited identifying information reported, such as language, phrases, personal descriptors, and some details about the school context that might identify the particular principal. These details were modified or deleted to protect the identity of the participant or individuals, places, or events they refer to during the interview. Slight grammatical adjustments were made to the transcripts. Only the approved transcripts by the participants were used in the analysis portion of this study.

Document data collection.

The documents collected for analysis in this study included participant's reflection questionnaire, transcripts of interviews, my school closure artefacts (letters, notes, emails, and reports), my journal, memos, and personal notes. Six of the 12 participants completed the reflection questionnaire prior to their interview. Those who did not complete the questionnaire were asked the reflection questions during the final interview.

Data analysis.

Data analysis occurs throughout the research process with the grounded theory method. Analysis begins with coding of interviews and document data, followed by concept and category identification, leading to analysis of the relationship among the categories for the foundation of the theory in this study.

Coding of the data.

Coding was the first step in analysis for developing a theory in this study. The purpose of coding was to allow the separation and then the conceptualization of the data, which allowed the researcher to tie the data back together in a new manner to make themes or categories to be used to develop a theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Charmaz (2006) proposed that "coding means categorizing segments of data with a short name that simultaneously summarizes and accounts for each piece of data" (p. 43). The coding begins the analytic process by which codes are determined and grouped.

The literature identifies many approaches to coding (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 2008; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Glaser and Strauss (2008) proposed that researchers employ a procedure of comparative analysis with theoretical sampling. In this approach, the researcher uses comparative analysis to code the data throughout data collection. The coding informs the sampling and memos.

Glaser and Strauss identify details of how the coding could be conducted: “Coding need only to consist of noting categories on the margins, but can be done more elaborately (e.g., on cards)” (p. 106). They described coding incidents in a category and comparing it with incidents in another category. On the other hand, Charmaz (2006) took the view that in the coding process researchers need to “remain open, stay close to the data, keep codes simple and precise, construct short codes, preserve actions, compare data with data, and move quickly through the data.” (p. 49). Using these guidelines for coding, Charmaz developed specific coding practices. Some of Charmaz’s coding practices are used in this study specifically *line-by-line*, *incident-by-incident*, *in vivo*, and *focused* coding.

The coding process for this study began with the practice of line-by-line, which is the coding of each line of the data transcript. Codes used were kept close to the data and focused on showing actions, such as grieving, modelling for others, supporting, and resisting. This approach was used for the first four interviews, and I returned to this approach when important segments of data in the other interviews were encountered. Coding line-by-line enabled the openness to the possibility to see where the data might take the researcher and gave focus for future interviews (Charmaz, 2006). When connections between codes began to appear, time was taken to write brief memos and reflect on the potential interpretations and questions that emerged. As a deeper understanding of the data developed through the line-by-line coding, a shift to incident-by-incident coding occurred. Larger sections of data were summarized by a single code or phrase. Eventually coloured labels were used to address potential concepts and categories. The incident-by-incident coding was the foundation to the process of comparing incidents; Charmaz indicated “comparative methods help you to see and make sense of observations in new, analytic ways” (p. 53). The incident comparison occurred within a participant’s data and with other participants’ data.

When possible the participant's own words were used for codes, concept, and category identifiers; this was in vivo coding. As Charmaz (2006) asserted in vivo coding uses the participant's own language and words for codes. This coding allows for the participant's voice in the development of the theory. For instance the phrase "emotional barometer" was expressed by two participants and became title for a characteristic in the theory. Focused or selective coding begins to "synthesize and explain larger segments of data" (Charmaz, p. 57). The researcher uses "significant and frequent" codes to address larger sections of data. As the interviews progressed and my coding confidence grew, focused coding was used. It is considered to be more purposeful and specific than line-by-line coding.

It is important to realize the coding process used in this study is not sequential. When reviewing transcripts where line-by-line coding was used, I would recode data using focused coding. Concepts seemed to develop from the movement from line-by-line coding into more complex analytic coding, such as focused coding. Concepts are the "labels placed on discrete happening, events, and other instances of phenomenon" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 61). By comparing concepts to each other and grouping the similar ones together, categories emerged. According to Strauss and Corbin, categories have properties and dimensions through the relationships among the subcategories or concepts. The four characteristics that emerged from this study establish the theory for leading through a school closure. It was important to document my thought process for the development of codes, concepts, and characteristics, which was accomplished through diagrams and memos.

Memo writing.

Strauss and Corbin (1990) noted that "memos represent the written forms of our abstract thinking about the data" (p. 198). Originally, Glaser and Strauss (2008) asserted that memo writing

for analysis had two purposes providing “an immediate illustration for an idea” (p. 108) and to act as “a directive for further coding of the field notes” (p. 112). The process of reflecting and analyzing the data for this study was recorded in memos. The concept of memo writing, and the technical process, was expanded on by Strauss and Corbin (1990). They identified how memos and diagrams are used to show how the researcher is analyzing the data by focusing on the relationship among the codes, concepts, and categories. Memos and diagrams were used to determine the interconnections among codes and concept development. As well, memos and diagrams showed how the ideas were organized and identified gaps. The specific guidelines identified by Strauss and Corbin remind researchers to make headings, use direct quotes from the data, make comparisons, and focus on concept development.

Memos were not just about analysis of data; they also showed direction for further data collection. Charmaz (2006) asserted that “memos catch your thoughts, capture the comparison and connections you make, and crystallize questions and directions for you to pursue” (p. 73). Some of the questions I addressed in my memos and diagrams were: “What is the participant saying or not saying?”; “What don’t I understand?”; “Are my emergent questions guiding the participant to a deeper level and filling in the gaps in their answer?”; and “Are there connections with other participants?”. The focus is to use the data to develop comparisons in the areas of codes, incidents, and categories. By making comparisons, Charmaz indicated the researcher will refine and connect categories to develop the theory for the study.

Constructing theory.

The ultimate goal of grounded theory is to develop a theory that comes from the analysis of the data (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 2008). As seen in the previous sections, the process to develop a theory for a study involved the coding of the data, grouping codes into concepts, and

grouping concepts into characteristics. The guidelines for data analysis in grounded theory enable the researcher to develop a theory. Glaser and Strauss (2008) proposed that if a researcher follows the guidelines of grounded theory methodology, a theory would naturally evolve through the continual comparison of codes and concepts to determine the properties of each category (characteristic) and increase the probability the researcher will develop a theory. Developing a theory from the data is the ultimate goal for a researcher using the grounded theory methodology.

Charmaz (2006) made a separation between the objectivist grounded theory of Glaser and Strauss and the constructivist approach to grounded theory. Charmaz proposed that an objectivistic theory is rooted in a positivistic view that “seeks causes, favors deterministic explanations, and emphasizes generality and universality” (p. 126). The objectivist approach suggests that the theory develops from the data objectively in an unbiased manner. In contrast, Charmaz theorized that a constructivist approach to grounded theory puts importance on the theory evolving through the researcher’s analysis. The researcher’s views and perspectives shape the analysis and the theory development. The constructivist approach to grounded theory reinforces the importance of the interaction of the researcher and data.

Constructivist studies investigate “*how*—and sometimes *why*—participants construct meaning and actions in specific situations” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 130). Charmaz pointed out that the theory “depends” on the researcher’s perspective. In a constructivist approach to grounded theory, the researcher needs to be reflexive throughout the analysis process and in the development of the final theory because they are a part of it. Charmaz explained that “*what* we define as data and *how* we look at them matters because these acts shape what we *can* see and learn” (p. 132). The interpretation of the data is filtered through the researcher and is not separate and objective.

Having led through a school closure, my understanding and interpretation of the data might be different than a researcher who has not experienced leading through a school closure. To address transparency in the reporting of the data, it is important to have the participants' voice (direct quotes) where possible. Sharing my personal experiences and insights throughout the analysis section may also help to support transparency in the development of the theory from this study.

Theoretical sampling.

An important aspect of grounded theory methodology is the concept of theoretical sampling, which "is sampling on the basis of concepts that have proven theoretical relevance to the evolving theory" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 176). In comparison, Charmaz (2006) identified the purpose of theoretical sampling was to obtain data such as "...statements, events, or cases that will illuminate..." the categories (p. 103). The application of the concept of theoretical sampling can range from a rigid to a flexible application that is best suited to the individual study. Theoretical sampling in a constructivist approach to grounded theory is considered to be *emergent* (Charmaz, 2006, p. 104). There is not one particular approach a researcher uses. Once categories and potential theories begin to evolve out of the data, the researcher must ensure sampling continues to support the theory. As Charmaz pointed out,

Theoretical sampling is less of an explicit procedure than a *strategy* you invoke and fit to your specific study...Theoretical sampling can entail studying documents, conducting observations, or participating in new social worlds as well as interviewing or reinterviewing with a focus on your theoretical categories. (p. 107)

There appears to be flexibility for the researchers to be able to determine which processes for conducting a theoretical sample are suited best to their particular study. Thus, the overall purpose of theoretical sampling is to ensure that there is enough evidence to support the development of the

theory. In comparison, Strauss and Corbin (1990) put forward for researchers the process of discriminate sampling in relation to selective coding as the potential "...to maximize opportunities for verifying the story line and relationships between categories and filling in poorly developed categories" (p. 176). In essence discriminate sampling guides the researcher to fill in the gaps in the data.

In this study, the concept of theoretical and discriminate sampling occurred in multiple ways. The study initially used the process of selective sampling; choosing to interview principals who had led a school closure and not a program closure. Discriminate sampling was used after the first round of recruitment yielded nine principals to participate in interviews. I wrote memos and reflected on these questions: "Do I need to interview more participants?"; "Where are the gaps in my data?"; "Who else might have information that might be beneficial to my study?"; "What am I seeing in the concepts, categories, and potential theories?"; and "Have I reached saturation?". The need to add more participants to this study was determined that became the theoretical sample.

Through reflection, a potential gap in my participants was identified. One school had more than one principal during its closure process and only one of these principals was a participant in this study. I wondered what the other principal who shared the leadership during the school closure process could add to the data. What would their perspective on leadership entail? As well, an imbalance between the numbers of participants representing the two school districts was noted. The categories for the theory had begun to emerge and including more participants' might continue to support the theory that was forming from the data. Thus, a second participation request was initiated to invite five more participants, of whom three agreed to be part of this study. By having these additional principals participate in this study, the potential gap in the data was addressed. The preliminary concepts, categories, and thoughts about potential theories became saturated through the

inclusion of the three new participants. These participants reinforced the theory categories and confirmed that I had reached saturation.

This study reached saturation in two ways. The first occurred in the interviews with each participant. The 12 principals began repeating experiences and insights near the end of the interview process, at which point no new information was collected. The second way this study achieved saturation was that the three new participants added new information about their particular context; however, there was no new information about experiences and leadership insights. The three additional participants helped to achieve saturation for the data.

Trustworthiness of the research.

The issue of trustworthiness of qualitative research was described by Bloomberg and Volpe (2012). They asserted that trustworthiness of a study focuses on “...how well the researcher has provided evidence that her or his descriptions and analysis represent the reality of the situations and persons studied” (p. 112). It is the accurate descriptions reported that build the understanding of the experience to begin the analysis of the meaning. Thus, according to Bloomberg and Volpe, assessing the trustworthiness of a qualitative study must include addressing the “credibility,” “dependability,” and “transferability” of the research (p. 112). Charmaz (2006) presented a different approach to evaluating grounded theory research. The quality of the research was determined by the usefulness of the findings, which were determined to have evolved from the study design. Charmaz identified four similar criteria for assessing the usefulness of a grounded theory study: “credibility,” “originality,” “resonance,” and “usefulness” (p. 182). These criteria share similarities to those identified by Bloomberg and Volpe (2012). The details of the criteria for trustworthiness identified by Charmaz and

Bloomberg and Volpe, specifically credibility, transferability, resonance, usefulness, dependability, and originality, are examined and applied to this study.

Credibility was defined by Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) as the accurate representation of “what the participants think, feel, and do” (p. 112). They recommend the researcher clarifies his or her bias, addresses data triangulation, identifies contradictory data, has “member checks” by allowing participants to review transcripts, and “peer debriefing” by having a peer review notes and conclusions (p. 112). In contrast, Charmaz (2006) did not define credibility, but rather posed questions for the researcher to reflect upon that focused on the research achieving “intimate familiarity” with the topic and providing sufficient evidence for the reader to assess the findings and claims (p. 182). In this study credibility was addressed in multiple ways. Chapter 4 identifies my biases and makes transparent my own experiences and insights from leading through a school closure. Who I am as a researcher, a principal, and a person is discussed; both positive and negative experiences are shared. Other ways credibility was addressed is by the use of member checks. I audio taped and transcribed all the answers to the interview questions, then gave the transcripts to the participants to ensure accuracy of the data. Accuracy was assessed in terms of wording—“is this what was said?”—and intended meaning—“are these the words that convey the experience?” As well, this study used “peer briefing” through the sharing of my thoughts and notes with my supervisor and peers.

Another aspect of credibility raised by Charmaz (2006) was to achieve intimate familiarity with the phenomenon. For this study achieving intimate familiarity of leading through a school closure process was reached immediately. When I first expressed my interest in studying school closures to address the gap in the literature, a professor suggested a personal narrative study. Sharing my own experiences and insights gained from my school closure would

address the gap in the literature; however, I wanted to learn about other principals' experiences and leadership insights to build on my own understanding. The intimate familiarity was developed on two levels: my reflections on my experience and the understanding of my participants' experiences were enhanced. Participants seemed willing to share more intimate information about their experience because I was a fellow principal who understood the closure process experience. Principal 1 stated "well, you get it because you have been there."

Charmaz (2006) asserted credibility needs to provide the reader sufficient evidence to assess the findings and claims. It was a challenge to determine how many participants to include in this study in order to have adequate evidence to develop a theory. Using only one participant would give a limited picture, yet using a hundred participants seemed unachievable. The number of principals who have led through a school closure process is limited. My goal was to have a minimum of 10 and maximum of 15 participants. Having a range would allow flexibility to respond to both depth and saturation. During the last four interviews with the 12 participants, new information about the uniqueness of their school closures emerged; however, no new leadership insights emerged. Having the 12 participants ensured depth of data. Another factor that ensured the study reached the depth needed was the length of time spent with each participant. By the end of the final interview, I noted that participants repeated some of their thoughts about leadership. The range of questions, the length of time during the interviews, and the number of participants provided enough evidence for the development of the theory in this study.

Another criterion associated with trustworthiness by Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) was transferability. They described transferability as "...how well the study has made it possible for readers to decide whether similar processes will be at work in their own settings" (p. 113). Can

the research be applied to other contexts? Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) asserted transferability can be addressed by “the richness of the description” and “amount of detailed information” given by the researcher in the findings (p. 113). Charmaz (2006), on the other hand, did not use the term transferability, but rather identified the importance of resonance and usefulness.

Charmaz (2006) emphasized resonance needed to address the correlation of the categories to the experience and the depth of insight found within the theory with participants. On the other hand, usefulness was identified by Charmaz as the ability of the study to “contribute to knowledge” and make “the world better” (p. 182). In this study, transferability was addressed by giving a full description and detailed information by the participants. For instance, multiple quotes focused on one area (emotions) from the different participants demonstrated the detailed understanding of the experience. Principals 1, 5, and 9 reflected during the interviews that this study was not about leading a school closure; it was about leading complex change. If this is the case, there may be useable information for other leaders to look at how to lead various forms of change in their organizations. The findings in this study may be considered useful to address the gap in the literature around the principal’s perspective of leading through a school closure process. As well, the findings may be of use to principals who are entering the school closure process by enhancing their understanding of the leadership insights of the participants in this study. It might make the leadership world of these principals better by understanding the journeys of those who have successfully navigated through the challenges of the school closure process.

The final criteria for determining the trustworthiness of a qualitative study are “dependability” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012) and “originality” (Charmaz, 2006). According to Bloomberg and Volpe dependability is demonstrated by the reader’s ability to follow the process

of data collection to interpretation, referred to as an “audit trail” (p. 113). It is the detailed description of the research process, whereas Charmaz focused on the criterion of originality for determining the trustworthiness of research, such as new insights from the study, “social significance,” uniqueness of categories, and its position in literature (p. 182). In this study dependability was addressed by the attention given to sharing important details about the research process from the data collection and analysis in the findings. The detailed descriptions in the categories demonstrated the complexity of leading through a school closure process and contributed to the dependability and originality of the study. This study is unique as it focuses on the principal’s experiences and leadership insights develop from leading a complex change of school closure.

Various criteria are used to determine the trustworthiness of a qualitative study: credibility, transferability, resonance, usefulness, dependability, and originality. All of these criteria aim to assist in the determination of the trustworthiness of a study. There is an assumed level of trust in the participants’ openness in their answers to questions. Seidman (2006) suggested researchers noted that “internal consistency” of participants responses through the duration of the interview(s) can lead to trust (p. 25). Internal consistency was noted within each participant’s interviews. There was also consistency among the various principals’ experiences. Trustworthiness for the study develops from the researcher transparency in how the data are collected, analyzed and interpreted. It is also important to position the knowledge developed by the research in the academic and professional worlds.

Summary

This research methodology and design chapter has two main sections. The first section of this chapter examined the philosophical assumptions of grounded theory and showed how the

constructivist approach to grounded theory applied to this study. The second section describes how this study met the guidelines of design to be a legitimate grounded theory study. Detailed explanation for the method design based on the constructivist approach to grounded theory was demonstrated in the second section. The details of participant selection, ethical considerations, data collection, and data analysis were described. Alignment with the grounded theory guidelines for data analysis (coding, memos, and theory development) was established. As well, the trustworthiness of qualitative research was explored and will be addressed further in the Chapter 6. The foundation for understanding the context of school closure, my personal experience, and the experience of the participants is discussed in the next chapter. This understanding is considered to be the building block for the analysis of the findings and the development of the theory.

CHAPTER FOUR: MOVING TOWARDS A THEORY

Developing a theory in the context of a school closure was challenging. Even though the theory developed from the data, it is also developed through my own perceptions and experiences, which are the foundation of the constructivist approach to grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006). The purpose of this chapter is to build foundational knowledge about the context of the school closure process, through sharing my experiences and the experiences of the participants. This knowledge and clarification is necessary to understand of the theory that evolved out of this study. Chapter 4 sets out three main objectives, to build understanding of my story, to examine the experiences of principal, and to highlight the personal, and professional growth of principals that stems from leading through a school closure.

The first objective is to create a better understanding of me as researcher, leader, and person by examining my own experiences and the insights into leadership I developed while leading through a school closure process. The section My Story explores my background and experience of school closure in order to make transparent the lens that I use to derive meaning from the data. The second objective, set out in the section, A Complex Leadership Challenge, is to build foundational knowledge about the experience of the 12 principals leading through a school closure process. The principals described their emotional response and their experiences of leading through a school closure and how these made it a unique leadership challenge. They shared that a school closure is a significant change for a community that evokes strong emotions from community members. A challenge for leaders was to address their own emotions before they could help others. The fatigue from the enhanced workload compounded their frustrations and personal emotions and made leading others complicated. The third objective, set out in the section Growing from the Experience, is to realize the personal growth and benefit that the 12

principals saw to their leadership. Leading through a school closure was an emotional journey for the participants; however, the principals expressed that they found their experiences helped them gain skills and knowledge to become better leaders. This section examines the factors that contributed to principals overcoming the immense challenges to find positive rewards.

It is important to examine these three objectives: the lens of the researcher, the experience of the principal, and the growth of the leader from leading through a school closure. These objectives are crucial to understanding the context for the theory developed in this study. The next section explores the context of my own school closure process and the experiences that made leading through a school closure personally and professionally challenging for me.

My Story

Creswell (2009) proposed that the researcher's background may influence their analysis and interpretation of the data; thus, the researcher must be transparent in "...their biases, values, and personal background, such as gender history, culture, and socioeconomic status, that may shape their interpretations formed during the study" (p. 177). In what follows, I share my personal and professional history, as well as my experience of leading through a school closure. I address who I am as a researcher, which is part of my lens to view and interpret the data. By sharing the story of my experience, I will enhance reflexivity and transparency within this study and help build the foundational knowledge of the leadership experience.

My background as a researcher, principal, and person frames who I am. My most important role over my forty years is being the mother of an eight year old boy. I belong to a middle class family, who recognizes an importance of education; I try to look at problems as opportunities to grow and change. I have always enjoyed research; the first degree I earned was a Bachelor of Science. My passion for research has continued through my doctoral work. The

core of my leadership is supporting the learning and growth of others. Diverse is a word that describes my professional background. I have worked in rural and urban schools, both with students who are gifted and those who have severe behavioural and learning needs, in communities that are affluent as well as those afflicted with extreme poverty. I had three years of experience as a principal at a junior high school before applying to the senior high school that I led through the school closure process.

Some commonalities as well as some unique features exist between my school closure and those of the 12 participants. One of the commonalities is that the process of school closure was similar to the processes in other school districts. School districts adhere to the Alberta legislation for guidelines and regulations for school closures. Public meetings, the public engagement processes, and the role of the employees were similar in both school districts. It is important to understand that the school district administration makes a recommendation to the Board of Trustees for the consideration of a school closure. The Board of Trustees first votes to consider the school for a closure process and then regulated process of school closure begins. The Board of Trustees votes for a second time to decide if the school should close or not. The separation of the first vote to consider closure and the second vote to close the school is potentially confusing to parents and teachers.

According to my experience, four stages exist that encompass the school closure process. *Stage 1: School closure recommendation.* Informing and consulting with the public about the administrative recommendation to consider a school for closure is the first stage of the process. The school district shares why they are recommending the closure of the school and shares how the students will be accommodated in other schools. The focus is to share information and correct misinformation. The public is given an opportunity to give feedback to the

recommendation. For the school community, this is an uncertain time; no one knows whether the school will close or not. During this stage, I noticed considerable anxiety and disbelief from the school community members. My role was to be professional and neutral, and to support the process to engage the public by sharing information.

Stage 2: Consider the recommendation for school closure. The purpose of the first Board of Trustees vote is to consider and vote on the administrative recommendation to consider a school for closure. A vote in favour of the recommendation begins the Alberta Government regulated process in the provincial School Act. This legislation has strict guidelines to follow, which include regulating advertisement in the community, formal meetings, and public engagement about the potential school closure. I noticed anger, sadness, and confusion forming within the school community after the Trustees voted. The uncertainty and anxiety seemed to increase for people, because no one knows if the school will remain open or not. My role was to support the formal school closure process and share information. My mantra during this stage was “there is no decision yet.”

Stage 3: Vote for school closure. This stage begins the Board of Trustees vote in favour of the recommendation to close the school. The Trustees are given reports outlining the concerns of the community and the reasoning behind the administrative recommendation. At a public meeting, the Trustees take a final vote to close the school or not based on the evidence presented. During stage three, I worked to communicate the Trustees’ decision to the community and address grief that the community was expressing. I also focused the attention of the community on the next step—the beginning of the transition process. Even though the Trustees’ decision created certainty for the future of the school (it was closing), it also created a new uncertainty for

the individual (what will happen to me?). People began to process their emotions; anger gave way to grief and anxiety.

Stage 4: The closure process. The next step was to close the school and distribute the resources. Along with the certainty that the school was to be closed, there became a certainty for the amount of work that needed to be completed prior to the last day the school would be open. There were numerous meetings, recording inventory, packing, and transition planning. Teachers became anxious about where they would be teaching the following year. Students and parents were concerned about the new schools. There were feelings of uncertainty, sadness, and resolve. Along with the work of inventory and packing, we planned a celebration to honour the school community.

Even though there were commonalities with my school closure process and the other 12 participants' experiences, my school closure also had unique contextual characteristics. My school was a high school whereas the 12 other participants' schools were junior high or elementary. As well, my school had a student population described as "high needs," meaning approximately 80% of the students received special education funding and 35% were in non-traditional homes (foster care, living on the streets, or with friends).

Less than two months after beginning my new position as principal, I learned about the administrative recommendation for a consideration of closure of the school. Uncertainty existed over whether the Board of Trustees would even consider closing this school. However, it was certain that I was to be responsible to lead the school community through this process. I was shocked and stunned. Instantly, I felt tension between my two roles as a district and school leader.

I understood the perspective which had led to the school district's administrative recommendation. The school had a 28% enrolment rate; it had 250 students in a building that had a capacity for 900 students. The district was also planning to open a new high school close by in a few years. The strongest motivation behind the district's recommendation for school closure was the belief that all local high schools should meet the needs of all students, including accommodating complex learners—the value of inclusion and not segregation.

At the same time, I empathized with the perspective of the school community. The teachers often stated our school was a “safe place for students to learn.” Many of our students had struggled in other schools before they found success in a small, personalized high school environment. A majority of our students had severe learning and behavioural needs, which were being met through the school's courses and teaching philosophy. The school provided numerous opportunities for students: scholarships, career training, and extracurricular activities. These opportunities did not exist in the same manner for high needs students in regular high schools. More importantly, the students felt the school was their home and the staff their family; some would jokingly refer to me as “Mom.”

The roles of teachers and parents also contributed to the uniqueness of the context of my school closure. Our teachers cared deeply for our students, because the students had challenges in their home life. At times our teachers took on the role of parenting our students (feeding and nurturing). Thus, the teachers built strong relationships with our students and had an intense desire to ensure all were successful. On a daily basis, these teachers knew they were making a positive difference in a child's life and took great pride in this accomplishment. Our parents and guardians were grateful for the opportunities the school was providing their children; however, little parent involvement occurred in school activities. This might have been due to fewer

students living with their families, parents working more than one job, or that some students were adults living independently.

Leading through the school closure process was the most complex leadership challenge I have experienced. Being a reflective practitioner, I kept notes throughout the school closure process. My reflections showed a strong sense of responsibility to ensure that the community felt supported and cared about, that learning still occurred, and that I carried out my responsibilities to support the school district. There were times I was pulled in multiple directions. I would be dealing with a crying student upset with the school closure while at the same time I needed to be at a meeting to address the distribution of my school's resources. I reflected "Where am I needed more?" and more importantly "Who am I responsible to?"

There were also many unexpected situations during the school closure process. For instance, I attended a dinner meeting with the school's corporate partners, where I was explaining the administrative recommendation to consider our school for closure. As I shared the reasons, specifically those around low student enrolment and meeting the needs of all learners in their community schools, I was shocked when one of the business partners yelled "You hate kids, this is why you are closing the school!" and another said "You are kicking these kids to the curb." I thought business members understood downsizing and making efficient use of resources. I was wrong; their relationship of 18 years with our school outweighed the logic of using resources efficiently. I felt personally attacked. My core value of caring about children and always wanting to make a positive difference in their learning was being questioned. The business partners were angry and wanted me to know how they felt. I did not make the recommendation for closure, nor would I make the final decision, yet to these business partners, I

represented the school district and therefore I was the one who was responsible for the decision. To them, the decision was wrong and they were letting me know how they felt.

It was challenging to be a rational leader in an irrational situation. I compartmentalized my own feelings in order to help the business partners process the information. My mantra was “it is not about me, it is about helping others through this change.” It was hard to help people see the bigger picture because sometimes their anger prevented conversation. The more I listened, the better I could support parents and community members to see how the new reality might look. Even when emotions seemed stable and normal during the closure process, an underlying and unpredictable set of emotions would bubble up when least expected.

In my role as an instructional leader, it would have been easier to try to keep things calm and not to rock the boat, but that is not who I am. My focus continued to be on student learning. Conversations about new practices continued with teachers. Sometimes, they responded, “What is the point in doing something new? The school is closing. Why care?” It was challenging to help people to see the opportunity in their new reality.

Another unique attribute of my school closure process was that we had an extra year after the date that the school was formally closed. In most cases, the school district’s closure processes start and end in the same year. The process begins in October or November by informing the community of the administrative recommendation and the decision to close the school occurs in February to May. The school typically closes on the last day of that school year. Thus, the principal will lead the school for only two to four months after the decision to close. Due to the “high needs” of my students, Trustees gave an extra year of transition planning, and the school continued to operate for another full year after the decision to close the school was made. To be leading a closed school for one extra year is highly unusual.

I asked myself “How do we motivate and inspire people knowing that the school will close at the end of the year?” It is important to see new possibilities in change; thus, the leadership teams decided to have a theme for the year of “radiating possibility.” We guided teachers through identifying in their own lives people who radiated possibility and noting the qualities they possessed. We pointed out that this was a unique year, unlike any they might encounter again. We knew that in ten months, we would be in new schools with new students. This was an opportunity for a year of freedom to try new approaches in our practice. If it flopped, no one would remember. In addition, there seemed to be a sense of urgency to help our students to successfully pass their classes and make this year count. Teachers were interested in new ways to help students find success.

The closure decision seemed to impact the teachers’ views of their professional practice. Some stated that the school closure was a reflection on their ability to teach. They indicated that the decision to close the school made them feel that their instructional practice was not valued by the school district. They needed to feel that their knowledge was recognized and valued. To address this issue, we provided teachers with the opportunity to lead professional development sessions for others in the school district and at provincial conferences.

Teachers also shared feeling that no one would care about these kids the way they did. This was a core value for the teachers. They expressed the opinion that our students had not been successful at other schools because the other teachers and administration did not care about students with high needs the way they did. Having worked in many schools in the district, I knew this was not true, but simply telling the teachers that others care about children with high needs would not fix the problem. These teachers needed to discover this for themselves. Accordingly, we facilitated class visits and tours of the receiving schools. After the teachers

visited these sites, they commented, “Those teachers really care about kids”; “They have more kids with needs than us”; “Our kids will be okay.” Giving the teachers the opportunity to discover on their own that other schools did in fact care about students with high needs may have assisted them in trusting their students will be properly cared for in their new schools.

The experience of leading through a school closure was challenging and complex. I still had to be accountable for all my regular leadership responsibilities, such as writing reports, improving teacher practice, and ensuring that students had a safe learning environment. The closure felt like a separate job added to my already fulltime workload. One unexpected role I encountered was that of becoming the unofficial spokesperson for the school closure. For two years, all my conversations with friends, family, and colleagues continually evolved into issues regarding the school closure, even when I least expected it. There was no escaping it. My goal was to be clear and intentional in what I said and to whom I said it. Hidden political landmines were everywhere. Some exploded immediately on a misstep; others had a delayed explosion. My goal was to prevent these landmines from exploding. For example, I found casual conversations with our Trustees to be challenging. When I was asked about my opinion whether the school should close, I was careful to always support our school district’s administrative recommendation. I felt this was my professional responsibility. My feelings of responsibility outweighed any feelings of sadness about the impending closure of my school.

During the two years of leading through a closure process, aspects of my personal life may also have impacted my experience. I began my doctoral studies a few months prior to the beginning of the school closure process. I completed all my course work, research proposal, and candidacy exam within the two years of the school closure process. I also developed a medical issue that required attention. Near the end of the school closure process, I joked that every

aspect of my life had a layer of stress; I had no safe place to decompress. Yet, with all the stress I still consider those two years to be the most important personally and professionally. I learned how to address challenging conversations; my ability to assess problems and develop plans grew. I became a better instructional leader because I too had the freedom to try new approaches to help teachers improve their practice.

I came to understand that my role as principal was to lead through a school closure process, not to actually lead the school closure. This was critical to my ability to successfully lead my school community. My role was to support the process and the people through the change of school closure. It was challenging to lead the school community; they wanted leadership to prevent the school closure. This was not my role. Instead I led through the closure by focusing on the learning and supporting the process.

Leading through a school closure was an experience that has forever changed me as a leader, educator, and person. The next section explores the complex challenges and experiences the 12 participants underwent leading through their school closures. The unique contexts, workload and emotions of the leader are important for the development of the theory.

A Complex Leadership Challenge

In the interviews, the 12 principals shared a range of unique personal and professional contexts. These unique contexts may have impacted their experiences of leading through a school closure process. To maintain anonymity, their contexts are grouped and summarized. The unique personal contexts included having a family member pass away, having a strong family connection to the school, having marital problems, completing graduate work, and having a family member with a critical illness. It is easy to forget that leaders have lives outside of the

school. Their personal contexts, mapped on top of their professional contexts, may have contributed to the uniqueness of their experiences.

The unique professional contexts shared by principals during the school closure processes included having led more than one school closure, having the tires slashed on his or her vehicle, being nominated by the parents for an award, needing security to ensure the safe departure from meetings, and being new to the principal role. Even though uniqueness existed in each principal's context, emotional commonalities were found among the experiences of principals. One commonality was that leading through a school closure was extremely challenging on multiple levels. As described by Principal 5, "It was hellish. It was one of the hardest things I've ever done and it went on and on and on and on. It was the longest year ever." The words "hardest thing," show the level of difficulty expressed by this principal. A reason that it might be difficult is because it was added to an already challenging role, as Principal 12 asserted:

I found the school closure mapped on top of all that other stuff that doesn't go away sometimes you just feel like how much more can I address in one day...I felt really overwhelmed...it was another layer on top of what's already very busy.

As the 12 principals described it, this enhanced workload contributed to their feelings of being overwhelmed and may have contributed to their heightened emotional responses. They tried to address their personal feelings in order to successfully lead the community through the school closure process.

Each of the 12 principals recognized that the school closure process was having an impact on their own personal wellness. The sense of personal responsibility increased their stress levels. Principal 9 stated, "The despair comes from absolutely being overwhelmed by the

idea that you are in charge of everything from the paper clips to the children's emotional well-being, to the money, to all of those things." The weight of the workload seemed to impact the principals' experience. Principal 2 theorized that it is not just the weight of the responsibility that causes stress but that this responsibility itself contributed to the feelings of isolation: "You are ultimately responsible for everything and everyone...feeling isolated with all the responsibility." The feeling of isolation occurred even though the principals felt responsible to be connected with the people in their communities in order to help them to cope with the emotions.

It was my responsibility to help manage the emotions, it was even more important for me to maintain as much of a sense of calm that I could and not always mirror back sort of the anxiety or the frustration or the anger that other people were expressing, because it wasn't personal, it wasn't about me, but they just needed an outlet. (Principal 12)

Principal 12 understood she was an "outlet" through which others processed their emotions. She became a safe place for people to vent their feelings. Her responsibility was to not take it personally even when the attacks became personal. In contrast, Principal 7 expressed confusion as to where people's strong emotions were coming from and, more importantly, why these were directed towards her:

People coming and screaming at me, you just sit there, like "where did this come from, why are you yelling at me?" You know I constantly would tell them "you're not mad at me, you're mad at the decisions being made that you have no control over" and then they would yell back "yeah, you're the district though"...my boss would say "you were the face of the district" I would say "no I'm the punching bag of the district."

Principal 7 explained that there were times she just “took it” hoping that it would be over soon. By not swinging back or responding she became a “punching bag.” It is challenging for a leader to move people forward through the change if the people’s emotions block the way. To add to the complexity, the principals’ own emotions might prevent them from being able to lead people through the change of school closure.

Some principals internalized the emotions of others while trying to address their own emotions. It is difficult to know how to react when people are yelling and challenging a leader’s core beliefs. Principal 4 asserted,

Don’t make assumptions about how people are going to react, including yourself. For example—talking to staff about the fact that the closure was going to go ahead...That was emotional. I was more emotional than they probably were.

The 12 principals had their own emotions and feelings, but they were careful not to reveal their emotions to others. Principal 6 revealed that he was the duck on the water; calm on the surface and paddling like mad under the water. Principal 2 mentioned a situation where she had an epiphany about why she was dealing with such strong emotions. One of her students was concerned the school closure “was going to break-up his family.” The student and his mother had received assistance from the school. He felt trusted and supported. Principal 2 realized the student felt his life was over: “That hit me...It wasn’t the building; it was the people that he connected with.” School closure is not just about the distribution of resources: it is about the ending of relationships. Ending a relationship could be a more emotional experience than the change to a new school. Some teachers may have been at the school for 20 years and had formed strong relationships. Furthermore, generations of families might have attended the school and formed relationships with the teachers.

A challenge for the 12 principals was that their regular work was to foster strong relationships within their school community. Those strong relationships might become a disadvantage during a school closure. For instance, the stronger relationships teachers, students and parents had with each other, the more connected they might feel to the school. The strong emotional connections people had with each other and the school increased their resistance to the school closure. Thus, the stronger the relationships people have to the school, the greater the resistance they have to the closure, which may result in larger challenges for leaders.

Principal 10 connected her school closure to grief, reporting that her emotions during the process were similar to those she experienced when she lost her parents:

You live it in every cell, grief and sadness is not something that you just hold in your heart or keep it in your head and say “okay I’m going to go home now and I’ll come back to this tomorrow.” You go home and you feel it as you are with your family, walking your dog, you’re doing your whatever work you need to do and try to go to sleep and thinking about all of these things and worrying about it...that was really hard. Because you can’t escape it. It’s like when you go through a depression...you feel it and you live it. It’s hard to see hope when that happens, it really is.

The 12 principals’ inability to escape their own feelings added to the challenge of guiding other people through their own grief. The principals shared similar overwhelming feelings of loss, confusion, anger, frustration, and grief, which made it more challenging to lead. They addressed this challenge in two ways: first, the principals’ sense of duty and responsibility to lead outweighed their personal emotions; second, the importance of putting others first helped the principals to put their emotions aside. Surprisingly, all principals found ways to put aside their

emotions and personal thoughts about the school closure to experience personal and professional growth from leading this complex change.

Growing from the Experience

Given that the 12 principals' experiences during the school closure revealed a high level of stress, anxiety, and personal turmoil, it was surprising that overall they still took great pride in their work leading through a school closure. Not just surviving the experience but successfully leading through the school closure was considered to be a badge of honour. Principal 4 discovered that "as you experience these situations, you learn what your convictions are and you're able to speak about that readily, and as you do that, you become a more confident leader." His confidence grew from effectively fulfilling her leadership responsibilities during the school closure. Even though Principal 9 reported leading through a school closure was stressful, he insisted:

I take my responsibility quite seriously. I think most principals do. When you know you are...the gatekeeper, the holder of all the strings, it was pretty stressful. In a way, it was rewarding as well. Once you are able to do that sort of thing, you can look back and say, "yeah I did a good job of that" and I learned a lot.

Principal 9 seemed to have a sense of pride about successfully growing and leading through a challenging experience. The concept personal growth was verified by Principal 10: "I've certainly experienced growth, understanding, and skill development in...leading." The principals all shared the view that leading through a school closure was a great learning and growth experience, despite the challenges and complexities.

The principals were asked whether they would lead through another school closure process. There were a variety of responses from, "I will never do one again. I will quit" to "Yes,

there was an adrenaline rush” to doing this intense work. Principals 1 and 7 explained they would lead through a school closure again to prevent a new, inexperienced principal from having to do this work. Whether their answer was yes, no, or maybe, all the principals agreed that the experience made them better leaders. Understanding the personal and professional challenges of principals is foundational to understanding the context of leading through a school closure process and instrumental to the development of the theory.

Summary

Both the principals and I described leading through a school closure with such words as “challenging,” “difficult,” “hellish,” “exciting,” and “complex.” In this chapter, I shared my thoughts and experiences in order to build a foundation for understanding the context of leading through a school closure and to make my own experience and perspectives transparent. The unique personal and professional factors of the 12 participants’ contexts were examined. It was apparent that the principals found leading through a school closure challenging and complex. The closure process increased their workload and responsibilities and heightened their personal emotions. They were the targets of others’ anger and sadness, but they put aside their own emotions to help people through the closure process. The responsibility of leading a community through a school closure was a stressful experience for leaders. It was, however, their sense of duty to their responsibilities that enabled them to lead successfully. Overall, principals found that their experiences made them better leaders. This chapter has been foundational to developing an understanding why leading through a school closure process was complex for principals and to the context for the theory that has evolved from the findings and analysis of the data.

CHAPTER FIVE: THEORY, FINDINGS, AND ANALYSIS

Overview of the Theory

The process of data analysis is considered to be difficult and multifaceted (Creswell, 2007). The data were analyzed to formulate the theory of this study evolved from the analysis of the interviews with the 12 principals. The interviews yielded 41.6 hours of interview recordings and 264, 827 words in the transcripts. The data also included written documents such as the six reflection questionnaires, my journal writings, and my school closure documents. Grounded theory guidelines from Charmaz (2006) helped to develop a focused plan to code, conceptualize, and categorize the data. The analysis became the process of looking at the findings, determining codes, developing concepts, and synthesizing the categories into a theory.

School closure is a unique context for principals to lead change. Principals find themselves in a role that is different than the change they lead on a daily basis. For instance, compared to leading instructional change, leading through a school closure is uncommon and unfamiliar for principals. There are strong emotional responses not seen when leading instructional change, such as grief and resistance. A school closure is a rapid dramatic change for a community, in which the loss of the familiar (teachers and school) changes. Principals are usually advocates for their school with the district and community; however, during a school closure they become advocates for the school district with the community. There is also stress on the relationships principals build with the community during a school closure. All of these factors make leading through a school closure a unique form of change that is different than leading instructional change. Due to this radically different leadership context, the theory from this study identifies leadership characteristics that enhance the effectiveness of principals to lead through a school closure process. These characteristics include the principal as clarifier of role

and responsibilities; emotional barometer; intentional communicator; and navigator through the tensions and paradoxes of leading change. In short, the theory from this study suggests that the context of a school closure creates a unique form of change for principals to lead through; thus, principals should apply certain leadership characteristics that may enhance their ability to lead effectively through a school closure.

The four main characteristics of this theory are presented and analyzed in this chapter. Characteristic A: Principal as a Clarifier of Roles and Responsibilities is foundational to leading through a school closure. It examines how leaders made sense of their role in a complex situation and builds upon three concepts: develop self-knowledge and understand expectations; create and enact a vision; and it is a unique change. This characteristic examines how leaders made sense of their role in this complex situation.

In Characteristic B, Principal as an Emotional Barometer, three concepts emerged: foster relationships; sustain trust; and support people. A school closure process was an emotional experience for all those involved, including the leader. This characteristic explores the leader's work to help guide people through the emotional change.

Characteristic C: Principal as an Intentional Communicator was woven throughout the leaders' experience of school closure. There were a variety of situations, from preparing for formal large group presentations to the personal one-on-one conversations, in which principals had to be thoughtful and intentional in their communication. Planning what to say took on a new meaning. For leaders it was important that communication was intentionally planned, such as the oral and written messages, and even through their actions. The data revealed three concepts that focused on communication: empower with information; listen, question, and document; and distribute information with purpose and consistency.

Characteristic D: Principal as a Navigator through Tensions and Paradoxes, addressed the tensions and angst of navigating through a school closure. The first concept, resist and accept change, focuses on change and responses to change. It explores resistance to change, such as school closure, and makes visible the potential reasons for people's resistance to it. Four additional concepts were identified: maintain business as usual and recognize the magnitude of change; be an instructional leader and project manager; celebrate and grieve; and plan and prepare for the unexpected. In the next sections of this chapter, the four main characteristics are examined and the corresponding concepts that comprise the theory from this study are shared.

Characteristic A: Principal as a Clarifier of Roles and Responsibilities

The first clear characteristic to emerge from the data was foundational for all principals. Through the interview process, all 12 principals stated the importance of having a clear understanding of their role at the outset of the closure process. The codes that emerged from the data to identify this characteristic included: clarity, seeking answers, neutral observer, Trustee's decision, process, anxiety, normalizing, know your role, responsibility, vision, and challenging work. Nine of the 12 principals shared that clarity of role and responsibility was critically important to effectively leading through a school closure. The concept of self-knowledge and a clear understanding of the expectation for the principals emerged as an important concept in clarifying the leadership role. Another concept that guided the leader's practice was creating and enacting a vision. The final concept highlights that even with a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities and having a vision to guide them, the principals shared that leading through a school closure was an unique form of change.

Develop self-knowledge and understand expectations.

The principals stressed that the “most important advice” they could give is to know oneself as a leader and to understand one’s role during a school closure. The specific codes that formed this concept included the terms such as self-knowledge, core values, being grounded as a leader, doing what is best, on-site agent of the Board, leading people, and managing tasks. The specific quotations that support this concept are identified and analyzed below.

Principal 10 reported that a principal must “know what your beliefs are...and know what your role is in the school district.” Knowing one’s beliefs as leader will enable one to trust one’s judgment and have the confidence to lead through this challenging process. Principal 6 stressed that understanding a principal’s role is not just as a leader for a school district, but is also as a leader for a school is critical; “as principal you are the on-site agent of the board.” Accepting this could be a challenge for principals who are accustomed to working autonomously within the school district.

Before the school closure process, the 12 principals saw their role as advocates for their schools to the school district. However, during the school closure the principals also became advocates for the district to their school communities. These two distinct roles were presented by Principals 1 and 4 as wearing “two hats,”—the school district hat and the school leader hat. At times, they were leaders for the school district; other times they were leaders for the school community. Principal 1 concluded that the principal had to wear both hats at the same time: “you can’t remove one or the other.” This conflict between roles was expressed by the principals as they felt it was their responsibility to help the community and understand the school district’s perspective at the same time. Principal 6 concluded that his school closure was “what’s

ultimately best for students, staff, [and] families” and for the school district. The 12 principals kept this “big picture” or “district picture” in focus to guide their actions.

Principal 12 proposed that “It is really important to be ‘grounded into the why’ of why this decision was made.” A principal who clearly understands why a decision to close a school is in the best interests of students and the school district can better assist community members to see the necessity of the school closure decision. In contrast, Principal 10 identified the main role of the principal in the school closure process was “To manage the tasks and to facilitate the relationships to support the staff and the parents and the students.” To Principal 10, a distinction between managing tasks and leading people through the process relationships and support was formed. The duality of leading people and managing tasks is further explored in Characteristic D.

A leader needs to help others to understand what their roles are in the school closure process. Principal 11 maintained, “The trustees make the decision in the end, and they are going through a process to gather all the information.” A principal works with school community members to assist them to understand how to participate in the public engagement process, to ensure that they have a voice in the process. Principal 11 insisted that principals are to guide community members to have input into the trustee’s decision. In essence the principal’s role is to lead through a school closure process and not to actually lead the school closure. These principals understood that they were not making the decision to close or keep the school open. Their role was to help the community members to be able to inform the trustees’ decision. Once the trustees made a decision, the principals would then lead community members through the process of transitioning to new schools. Principal 1 supported this view and pointed out that the primary role of a principal during a school closure “is to honour the process; my role is to recognize it is a process between the Board and the parents. To honour it, not interfere with it.”

Instead, he suggested that principals must “facilitate communication, be neutral, role model for teachers, good mouth the organization.” It was clear to Principal 1 that he was not part the decision process; instead, he was responsible to help the community to provide as much information to the Trustees in order for them to make their decision. He had to continue to promote the school district by speaking positively about the closure process and the school district itself. His personal views did not matter. He explained that he not only had to appear neutral, but he also wanted to remain professional and model for others how to support the school closure process.

The 12 principals further explored the meaning of being professional and neutral by expressing a range of personal feelings about their school closure. The following are some of the personal statements they expressed about the decisions: “It should have been another school”; “The low student enrolment was orchestrated by the school district”; and “It was the right decision.” It did not matter whether the principals personally supported the closure. All principals expressed that they kept their personal feelings private; instead, they publicly showed support for the process. Not revealing their personal thoughts was important to allow themselves and others to see the bigger picture.

The challenge of helping teachers to understand their role and responsibility was identified by Principal 1. He asserted that it was important for teachers, just like principals, to understand their roles. Principal 1 explained:

Not that there is no role, but there is no safe role for a teacher in this. I think they saw that as things started to unfold, and were probably relieved that they did not have a role in it. That their job was to focus on the kids, keep things as normal as they can, and to respect the process.

He reminded teachers that the process is between the trustees and the community. Principal 1 insisted that “our position is decidedly neutral. We are employees of the board. We really don’t have an opinion and need to be careful not to express one.” The clarity of roles brings certainty and common understanding to a complex situation for teachers. The importance of teachers knowing their role during the school closure process was reinforced by Principals 2, 5, 7, 8, and 12. Principal 8 prepared his teachers for the challenge of their role and what might occur:

You work for the district...you’re a representative of the district, and we did some coaching the difficult questions that they would be getting from parents and suggested ways to navigate, not that we’re giving them a script but you need to understand that something you say could be perceived...in different ways, it could be spun.

Through his actions, Principal 8 was preparing his teachers for their new role and for difficult conversations that might occur. He also made teachers aware of the complexity of sharing their own opinions and how these could be misinterpreted. The principals demonstrated leadership by helping to guide teachers’ actions. This is part of the leadership role and responsibility during a school closure process.

Leading through their school closures challenged the 12 principals to develop a new understanding of themselves and the expectations of their leadership. The principals found that leading through a process of change required them to have clarity about who they were and what they believed. They also described the importance of guiding teachers to understand the new role they had in the closure process. To guide their own and teachers’ thoughts and actions, some of the principals shared that they developed a personal vision for the school closure. They reported that this vision helped them to understand and bring clarity to the roles and responsibilities.

Create and enact a vision.

A vision provides clarity for both the leader and followers in the change process. It is the compass that a leader will use for determining the direction in which to lead. Principal 2 asserted that vision is critical to a leader's ability to take thoughts and make them a reality: "Think it, say it, believe it—it becomes your reality." She explained that her thoughts guided what she said to people and in turn her spoken words guided her actions. The ability to act changes the reality for individuals. Each of the 12 principals was able to describe their visions for leading through the school closure. The visions were identified by the codes: focus on learning; doing what is in the best interest of students; maintain normalcy; and create hope. These visions became the principals' language of conversation and guided their decisions and actions.

Principals 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, and 9 identified a shared vision of "keeping the learning environment stable and normal for students." They talked about preventing the chaos and emotions of the school closure from impacting student learning. Students' well-being and learning was their priority, and they focused on doing what was best for the students each day. Principal 7 explained that she used a specific vocabulary to reinforce her vision so often it was "constantly lived, eaten, and breathed." Eventually this vocabulary became "embedded in people's mouths." Her vision was, "let's do what's best for kids." This vision became the daily focus, which guided teachers to do what was best for the students and their learning that day. Her vision not only guided her actions but the actions of her teachers.

A different view of what was best for students was described by Principal 10. Her vision for doing what was best for the students meant to take care of them by focusing on learning, and to believe in the resiliency of children facing change. She described the importance of compassion: "We will get through this together" and "Everybody will be taken care of, our

students will continue learning, our students...are resilient.” Likewise, Principal 1 revealed, “I was pretty convinced that we didn’t want to disrupt the kids’ learning environment.” He underscored the importance of ensuring that his students had a successful year of learning. In fact, he discovered that the context of the school closure unexpectedly enhanced student learning. His teachers and parents gave the students more field trips and guest speakers than the previous year. They had the freedom to spend money to enhance learning, because there was not going to be a next year.

Yet another approach to “What is best for students?” was described by Principal 9. He established an environment that supported student learning and, at the same time, worked intentionally with students to develop coping skills for addressing change. The coping skills his students learned helped them to build resiliency. Principal 9 shared that he also focused his work on transitioning students to new schools. He saw the transition process as a way to foster hope: “We made the transition of what was to what will be.” He helped people to see possibility in the new schools.

Hope and possibility were also identified as part of the 12 principals’ vision during the school closure process. Building a sense of hope became a focus for some of the 12. Hope helped guide everyone affected by the closure from their current realities into new possibilities. This may be the essence of leading through a school closure: making the transition from what was to what will be. The data code hope appeared beside numerous principal statements. Hope may help people to see new opportunity in a school closure. Principals 2, 3, 10, and 11 mentioned that their vision was to build a sense of hope for their school communities. Principal 3’s vision was “to build a culture that maintains hope when it feels hopeless.” She observed in her community that hopelessness brought about feelings of helplessness. In comparison,

Principal 2 saw hope as surviving the school closure: “There is life after [this school] and you will survive this.” The hope meant that the students and teachers would survive through the school closure process and thrive in their new schools. Principal 10 described hope as overcoming the challenge of school closure: “We would talk about rising above your challenges...that “we will rise above this.” The symbol of hope and rising above challenges was ingrained in the culture of Principal 10’s school community. Her vision of hope created a sense that students were strong and would rise above any challenge, not just the school closure. Her vision was connected to fostering resiliency in students.

Principal 11 articulated a different view of hope during the school closure process. She asserted that hope was developed within the process, not as an outcome of school closure; hope was “that intelligent decisions were being made, that all factors would be considered and it was.” Her vision of hope was belief in the process, that the decision would be based on all relevant information, and she felt the decision was informed.

During my closure, I also had a vision of hope, which developed from seeing new possibilities in change. As mentioned in Chapter Four, we used the language “radiating possibility” with the teachers. We worked to identify ways to radiate possibility for our students as they transitioned into their new schools. We helped students to see new opportunities for friends, courses, and extra-curricular activities. My core belief was that the greater the change, the greater the possibility of new opportunities. Since a school closure was a great change for students and teachers, there would be great possibilities and opportunities for them at their new schools.

Surprisingly, not one of the 12 principals had a vision “to keep the school open” or “for the school to close.” A reason for not having these visions was the principals clearly knew their

role was to support the process and to be neutral. These types of visions do not respect the process of school closure and are not neutral. Instead they had a vision of “doing what was best for the students,” “focused on learning,” “fostered hope,” and “saw possibility in change.” The principals constantly noted that the importance of a vision was to guide their thoughts, decisions, and actions. Principal 5 theorized that “...when we believe something and speak it that gives us the power to create that reality” through our actions. These principals were able to create a new reality for their communities through their leadership vision. A vision might be considered the “why” behind what they did to lead their communities through the change process.

The coding process for visions and actions was complicated. There were arrows drawn from vision codes to action codes. Connections developed in memos that focused on how the 12 principals enacted their vision in their leadership practice. An example of putting beliefs into actions was demonstrated by Principal 5. Her vision was to have “the best day ever” which grew to the “best year ever.” Her students ended the morning announcements by saying “this is going to be the best day ever” instead of saying “have a good day.” She led conversations with teachers focused on what they were going to do to make each day the best day ever for students. She noticed the teachers were willing to do extra work to make it “the best year ever,” such as making commemorative books for students. Principal 5’s vision not only guided her actions, the vision guided the actions of her teachers and students as well.

Similarly, Principal 3 identified as her vision quote, “Be the change that you wish to see in the world,” from Gandhi, “I lived that. I think that being a part of that change and being open and willing to have people walk with you in that change” (Principal 3) was important. She concluded that a critical point was for a leader to be a role model for others. For Principal 3, her

actions needed to communicate her message. Her actions demonstrated the change she wished to see in others.

For the 12 principals vision started with a thought of hope, possibility, responsibility, or normalcy. Next they shared their vision with others; their vision guided their words. Finally, the principals acted on their own thoughts. They made intentional decisions that met their responsibilities while supporting their vision. The clarity of their role and responsibilities was developed through their vision. However, even with this clarity principals stressed that the role was challenging and complex.

An unique change.

Leading through a school closure was described by the 12 principals as being more complex, unique, and different than any other leadership challenge they had encountered. Principal 8 revealed that leading through a school closure was different than his regular role as a school leader.

Well it's a unique leadership challenge is what it is. It's a challenge that almost runs opposite to what we are used to as leaders. Where we typically want to retain strong staff in our building, now we're trying to find other jobs for strong staff in our building. We are usually about acquiring resources, now we're about reallocating resources. We are usually about explaining to parents why we have a great school, now we are about explaining to parents why this other school will be better. It's doing the opposite...of what we've been trained and become really good at doing.

As Principal 8 pointed out during a school closure the principals were not able to use their skills and knowledge in familiar ways, thus contributing to the uniqueness of the leadership experience. It took leaders out of their leadership comfort zones, and pushed them in a direction

that was contradictory to their own thoughts and processes. Affirming the contradictory role for a principal during a school closure, Principal 10 acknowledged that the usual role of a principal was to meet the needs of the community within the school. However, during the school closure she had to put aside the belief that her school was the best place for the students and change to believe that the students' needs would be best served at another school.

In summary, this characteristic was based on the data where the principals stressed the critical importance of knowing their own role and their responsibilities and guiding the teachers to understand their own roles during the school closure process. They had clarity in knowing themselves as leaders, understanding expectations, creating and enacting a vision, and understanding that the school closure process is a unique form of change.

Characteristic B: Principal as an Emotional Barometer

One of the challenges the 12 principals noted was that the school closure process brought forth strong emotional responses from the leader and community. Four codes emerged throughout the data analysis process: emotions, trust, relationships, and support. At first, I thought these were distinct concepts; however, upon further analysis of the memo writing it became apparent that these codes were intertwined. For instance, the principals needed to be able to foster relationships to develop trust with people. People needed to trust the principals in order to share their emotions and feel supported. The relationships the principals had with community members allowed for an accurate interpretation of their emotions. A truthful understanding of people's emotion enabled the principals to provide appropriate support to help the community to work through the emotions associated with the change.

The concept of accurately interpreting people's emotions was articulated by Principals 1 and 5. They theorized that a principal should to be an "emotional barometer" while leading

through the school closure process. Just as meteorologists watch for changes in the atmospheric pressure to predict changes in weather; Principals 1 and 5 watched for changes in the pressure felt by students, teachers, and community members to predict the emotional climate. Through their understanding of the emotional climate these principals were able to provide the appropriate supports, which gave people the tools to survive the “elements” of the school closure process.

The factors the 12 principals used to accurately measure the emotional climate of the community were: foster relationships; sustain trust; and support people. These factors became the interconnected concepts for the principal as an emotional barometer. For instance, people need to have a relationship with the principal in order to trust them enough to share their feelings and concerns regarding the school closure. If people do not trust the principal and do not have a relationship with him or her, the principal is less able to be an accurate emotional barometer. This lack of trust could result in inaccurately predicting how to support people to prepare for the closure storm. An inaccurate reading of the emotional climate could result in greater emotional disturbance for people. Thus the foundation for a leader to be an emotional barometer begins with developing relationships with members of the school community.

Foster relationships.

All 12 principals emphasized the importance of intentionally building relationships. Typically the word *relationship* evokes images of intimacy or closeness; however, for this study relationship is the understanding of another person through an interaction. A relationship might become known with little interaction. For example, a principal may only be familiar with a teacher’s years of service and area of subject expertise; however, this brief interaction can yield an understanding of the teacher as a professional. A more accurate relationship may result from

increased interaction through conversation and observation to deepen the principal's knowledge of the teacher.

Principal 2 identified the importance of relationships for a leader: "if anything that has affected me as a leader...relationship is everything...relationship is key." This principal saw the relationship he had with people as key to understanding their needs and important to determining the best way to lead them through the school closure process. Principal 9 confirmed that "Relationship is everything...relationship between professionals and clients or students if you will. That is key...relationship, relationship, relationship." He attributed his ability to lead through a school closure to the relationships he developed over the years prior to the process. He drew upon the understanding of people that had developed through his relationships. Principal 10 emphasized the connection between leading people through change and the leader's relationship with people: "I feel that change is...relational, [change] doesn't happen independent of relationship and emotion." She connected relationship, emotions, and change together. Leaders may use their relationships to understand people's emotions. Principal 12 verified the importance of relationships to help guide people through the change of school closure: "I really believe that the most important thing in that whole closure was the relationships that had been developed with staff and with the community." She connected the resiliency of teachers to the relationship she had developed. She explained that only one teacher went out on medical leave, showing that she was able to read the needs of her teachers and offer supports. Due to Principal 10's efforts to foster relationships many teachers were able work through the school closure process with minimal interruptions to professional duties.

If relationships develop through interactions, then a challenge for leaders to overcome the perception that a school closure may be considered an awkward and difficult situation. Principal

4 noted that in a school closure “awkward situations promote awkward interactions.” The awkwardness may develop from the tension of wanting to trust the other person and yet not believing what is being heard. Principal 4 found that the awkwardness may also arise from heightened emotions. The ability to effectively address people who were experiencing extreme emotions required a balance of empathy and professionalism.

Principal 1 raised the concern that leading a school closure might be a greater challenge for a principal new to the position or a principal new to the closing school. He explained that a first time principal focuses on learning the role and the responsibilities. In the unusual setting of school closure, there were different roles and responsibilities to learn. As well, he expressed concern that a new principal might not have the time or ability to foster relationships or have a sense of the community culture, which was needed to lead through the school closure.

Principal 7 confirmed Principal 1’s concern she was a first year principal who had lead through a school closure process. Principal 7 explained, “I didn’t unpack my boxes. There was no point...I didn’t hang pictures (sic) on the wall kind of thing ‘cause I knew I was going to be closing the school.” She did not settle in and begin to form relationships, which resulted in her feeling disconnected from the community “I didn’t feel any connection to the school or the staff or the kids first off, ‘cause you’re new, and because you’ve been...brought in to do a job.” Not being able to connect with people through her interactions impeded her ability to understand the emotional climate and predict the changes in the community’s emotions. She expressed that she felt hated: “You just feel disconnected right, you’re not part of the community, you’re hated...by the parents, hated by the staff ‘cause they’re going to have to experience change.” Principal 7 could not build relationships through the hate she perceived. Instead, to preserve herself, she disconnected her emotions from her role. She made a separation between leading her school

versus managing the school closure: “It would have made a lot better sense to me to bring in a separate person to do that job and you run your school as a principal.” Being new to the school and to the role of principal, Principal 7 was at a disadvantage in her ability to develop relationships with her school community. As she reflected in our interview, it became clear that it was being new to the principal role and not to the school that contributed to the challenges she experienced. Principal 7 explained that she would “do things different” now that she has more experience as a leader. She noted that her second school closure experience was a different from her first year experience.

My situation supported Principal 7’s conclusion that the lack of experience, not being new to her school, increased her challenges. I had three years of experience as a principal and I understood the principal’s role and responsibilities prior to leading through a school closure process. Being new to my school, I intentionally built relationships to understand the people in my community. The need to build relationships intensified when I learned about the potential closure. I scheduled “chats with chocolate,” one-on-one conversations, with each staff member to understand their thoughts and experiences. Actively seeking out conversations with all individuals helped me to get a bigger picture of the strengths and gaps in my community. This knowledge helped me to be a more accurate emotional barometer, and thus I was better prepared for emotional conversations and I was able to determine their need for support.

There were situations where my barometric reading and predictions were inaccurate. An inaccurate prediction occurred when we first told the students about the recommendation to consider their school for closure. We wanted to personalize the message for each grade group and decided to have separate assemblies divided by grade concurrently. I predicted the grade 10 students would have the strongest reaction because they would not be able to graduate from the

school. Instead the grade 12 students gave the strongest emotional response of anger and sadness. The grade 12 students would still graduate from the school before it closed and I assumed the closure would have little impact on their high school careers, yet they were angry. I learned it was not about the impact of the school closure affecting their graduation, but rather the strong emotional connection they felt to the teachers that made them so emotional. In contrast, the grade 10 students had been at our school for only a few months and had not made strong connections to the teachers. A grade 12 student explained that the grade 10 students “do not understand what they are losing by not having these teachers.” I was challenged to repair and honour the relationships with the grade 12 students and the assistant principal, who I had asked to lead the assembly. Overall, my ability to engage with people helped me to repair damaged relationships and to better predict the emotional responses and react accordingly.

The importance of fostering relationships to accurately read the emotional climate of a community was also shared by Principal 6. He had been at his school for three years and intentionally developed relationships with his parents and the community:

I purposely tried to work with the group of parents...I made it a point of having lots of contact with the parents and bringing them in, and we did coffee mornings once a week and stuff like that. I think the parents got to trust me. (Principal 6)

It takes time and intention to build relationships with the school community. Proof that Principal 6 was able to accurately assess the emotional needs of his community was that his parents group nominated him for an award during the school closure process. Principal 6 worked intentionally to foster relationships. He made a connection between his relationships and the importance in building trust with his community. The next concept focuses on the analysis of the data that

principals shared about their experiences of developing and sustaining trust during the school closure process.

Sustain trust.

Sustaining trust during a school closure appeared to be a challenge for the 12 principals. These challenges were identified in the data and coded as trust, distrust, relational trust, and procedural mistrust. The school closure can raise people's suspicions, which could develop in mistrust the principal and the process of school closure. In this concept, the building of relational trust with people and procedural mistrust were identified as challenges for the principal's ability to lead through a school closure process.

Principal 3 proposed that the cornerstone of leadership "...that relational trust." She explained that the relationships she fostered with students, teachers, and parents helped her to build and sustain trust. She described that she built trust with her community by helping them to feel that they were cared about. Similarly, Principal 4 pointed out that his actions built trust: "When you're talking to them frankly and openly and honestly and having that transparent piece, they kind of respect that. They kind of trust you to take care of them." Principal 4 linked communication and trust together; by being open, honest, and transparent he was able to sustain trust with his school community. Principal 9, on the other hand, determined that the dependability of his actions contributed most significantly to his relational trust: "I had been there long enough that I built up my reputation or the person I was, and so I was trusted...to be making good decisions for everybody." His reputation was built by the person he was, his core values. By being trustworthy, he was allowed to make decisions to guide his community through the closure process.

A challenge the 12 principals faced was that although the students, parents, and teachers trusted them as leaders, they did not trust the school district or the closure process. At times, people's procedural mistrust of the school district had an impact on the relational trust built with principals. For example, teachers' mistrust of school districts' process to place teachers in new schools was observed by Principal 2. Likewise, the mistrust in human resources procedures was noted by Principal 9 and he revealed that the teacher's mistrust with the school district began to impact student learning:

A lot of talk "this isn't fair, this isn't right, they're going to screw us over," negative kind of talk. It did affect their actual ability to teach. They became less and less able to do the things we would want to see, differentiate their practice, and attend to others' needs, children's in particular. They were more focused inwardly on self.

Even though mistrust was directed at the school district and not the principal, the teacher's mistrust became the principal's concern because of how it impacted student learning. The challenge for the principals was to support student learning while addressing the negative emotions of teachers. Neglecting teachers' emotions could erode trust formed with the principal. To prevent the further erosion of the relational trust Principal 2 had built with her teachers, she had human resources personnel come to her school to address teachers' questions. The information provided to the teachers addressed their concerns and allowed Principal 2 to refocus her efforts to sustain the trust she had built.

Another source of procedural mistrust was the school districts' public engagement process. Principal 12 pointed out that the structure of the public engagement process fueled the mistrust of the community members:

There was also some distrust around the process. Especially from community members and as an employee I could see how people could feel that it's a very canned process.... every step of the way I could see how the people attending the meeting could think "it's a done decision, it's already been decided."

There was a tension for the principals between understanding the community's perception that a decision has already been made and supporting the school district's position of wanting a transparent process to engage the public. Mistrust around the school district's public engagement procedures during the school closure process was also described by Principal 1. He noticed community members saying the school district was "lying" and "hiding things." He explained that when there were situations of mistrust, emotions of anger and denial emerged. He asserted that "trust issues around the process were huge. People felt the board had a plan but did not let them know what the plan was." The frustration people felt was described by Principal 9. He reported hearing questions such as, "is there a hidden agenda?" These statements highlight the mistrust the community felt for the school district; the perceptions of hidden agendas and a predetermined decision made promoting the school district's process to the community challenging for the principals.

Another challenge for the 12 principals was to be transparent in their role in order to sustain trust with their community. Principal 4 presented a unique insight into sustaining trust with the community: "I had a relationship with them, they did trust me, but trusting [the] system is a different thing. But you see I am the system." He recognized that he was a part of the system and when he worked to build trust with his community he was also building trust for the school district. He was a leader for the school district within his school. These roles were not separate.

A final caution presented by Principal 6 was that leaders need to “be open and transparent, avoid the loss of trust, don’t be trying to hide things from people because that one comes back to bite you.” Transparency was an issue for the 12 principals. Some identified situations where they had to delay communication or felt they needed to filter information for their community. Principal 4 described the tension of knowing information and not being able to share it with his community because he needed to support the school district’s processes. I experienced a similar tension when I learned that our school was to be considered for school closure and could not share the information. During this short period of time, I had to keep my knowledge secret and respect the school district’s process for engaging the community. When the information was shared with the community members, some thought I was hiding this information from them and I had compromised their trust. I realized that having the information and not sharing it impacted my credibility with the school community members and their ability to trust me. It took an intentional focus on both transparency and rebuilding relationships to repair the damage to my credibility.

The 12 principals and I had to build and sustain trust even though people mistrusted the school closure process or even at times the principal. To sustain trust in an environment that promotes mistrust, the principals focused on supporting people through the school closure process. Their compassion and support had a positive impact on sustaining trust with students, teachers, parents, district administration, and trustees.

Support people.

The 12 principals expressed the importance of supporting all members of the school community through the closure process. For some, their vision was to ensure everyone felt supported: “People are humans, people have emotions, and they need support” (Principal 2). It

was apparent that experiencing a school closure process was an emotional journey for all involved. Adding to the stress of this situation was the enhanced workload for teachers. The codes for the emotional aspects of the school closure process included anxiety, grieving, disbelief, denial, stress, depression, physical aggression, anger, sadness, overwhelmed, acceptance, and joy.

The 12 principals agreed that addressing teacher's emotions was difficult and at times unpredictable. Principal 5 concluded,

It's going to be hard and be ready for that. Don't be surprised by that. For yourself and for the people, I would still say that it's better to face the emotion, create a place for it, ride the waves of it instead of trying to deny or squelch, or you know that's where it would go underground and people would go off on sick leave.

Principal 5 asserted the importance of a leader addressing the emotions that the teachers were experiencing. She developed strategies to address and support her staff to process their emotions. Her office was a safe place for them to vent their feelings. She accessed district resources to bring a consultant to her school. This consultant led a structured debriefing process with her teachers. Principal 5 worked to create a place to honour her teachers' emotions and prevented them from becoming ineffective in their work.

When addressing strong emotions such as anger, Principals 2, 6, and 7 recommended that leaders not take it personally. As Principal 2 noted, "It is not your fault." Principals shared that it was challenging when people needed to yell in order to process their emotions, especially when the yelling was directed at them. Principal 7 revealed, "Everybody will attack you and try to take advantage of you and every negative thought or negative in your life will be brought forward if you take anything personally." Principals may have become the target to receive

people's anger and frustration by creating a safe place for people to process their emotions.

Addressing others' emotions was difficult and emotional for the 12 principals.

The 12 principals identified a variety of emotions they felt during the closure process: sadness, anger, confusion, frustration, relief, apathy, and shock. Principal 4 warned, "Don't make assumptions about how people are going to react including yourself." It became apparent that the principals believed leaders needed to address their own emotions in order to help others. During the interviews with the principals, I asked the participants what self-care practices they used during the school closure process. Many leaders found it helpful personally and professionally to have a peer support network. Principals 2, 5, 6, 7, 10, and 11 stressed that having a safe place to process and plan was invaluable to their ability to lead and support others during the process. Principals 2, 5, and 11's support came from a trusted colleague. For Principals 6 and 10 it was a group of peers who they met with regularly. As well, there were a variety of personal self-care practices identified such as running, yoga, and massage. Each of these principals became more effective in supporting their community to move forward because of the support they received from their own network.

The 12 principals approached supporting people in a variety of ways. Principal 8 recommended helping people to focus on the new situation, "not just focus on the fact that this school is closing." Principal 2 kept reminding staff that moving to new schools was a new adventure and to keep the experience positive for students. Principal 5 tried to stay connected with students and teachers by having lunch with them. Personalizing of support was emphasized by Principal 1:

[People] are going to respond [to] stress in lots of different ways and they are going to need me to support them in lots of different ways. For some it will be to provide the

opportunity to vent. Others it will be to prop them up, spend more time in their class. To talk them down, talk them through, or pair them up with somebody who can support. Principal 1 insisted that leaders needed to “watch over people” and to provide “personalized recognition” for staff. He explained that personal recognition might be personal notes in their mailbox, cards of encouragement, food, a journal for writing in, or publicly thanking them for the hard work. The main question that Principal 1 recommended asking was, “What can I do to help you?” He was able to personalize the support he gave for each individual based on the responses. Similarly, I spent time talking with people to help them process the changes and to develop personal support plans. For instance, I focused on social gatherings such as special meals, small gifts and mementos, and extra support in the classroom. As well, I developed a workout program for teachers to release their stress and anxiety and to move them forward through the change.

In addition to personalized support, the 12 principals found they needed to address the teachers’ enhanced workload. Principals 1, 2, 5, 6, 10, 11, and 12 agreed teachers were overwhelmed by the amount of work. Principal 5 explained that she lightened the workload for teachers by cutting back on activities and supervision. Principal 1 recommended helping teachers to understand the work that needed to be completed and provided opportunities for teachers to lead and take ownership of the tasks. He pointed out that there are many rooms in a school that are not assigned to a particular person, such as a workroom, storage closets, and staffroom. When his teachers asked, “Who is responsible for inventorying and packing these rooms?” He responded, “We are.” He asked for volunteers and paired people up to share the workload. He worked alongside them to build up a sense of ownership. During my school closure, substitute teachers were brought in to allow the teachers time to inventory and pack

areas that did not directly impact the learning environment. This prevented teachers from working long hours after school.

Principal 3 explained that another area of focus for the leader was to monitor the personal lives of teachers. She noted teachers who might have personal problems outside of work such as illness or family concerns. She found people were able manage change when their mental and physical health was good, but if they became ill or had a personal problem, they were not as resilient. In support of Principal 3, I too found that people who appeared to be coping with personal problems needed extra support dealing with the school closure process. Taking note of the personal lives of teachers helped the principals to better understand emotional reactions.

Overall, in Characteristic B: Principal as an Emotional Barometer, the data revealed that the 12 principals had the ability to interpret the school community's emotional climate and had the skills to respond. It was noted that a more accurate understanding may have developed when the principals focused on fostering relationships, sustaining trust, and supporting people. According to Principal 1, a leader needs to “be the ‘emotional barometer’ for the school community—realize that [a] simple situation may have an underlying issue and be prepared for outbursts from students, staff, and parents.” The ability for principals to be accurate emotional barometers appeared to be dependent on their ability to develop relationships and trust with people. When supporting people to move forward through the change, the principals selected their words carefully to provide comfort while guiding action.

Characteristic C: Principal as an Intentional Communicator

The 12 principals stressed that how and what they communicated was an integral component of enacting their responsibilities, sharing their vision, supporting people's emotions, and addressing the tensions in leading through a school closure. Thus, communication was an

integral part of the other characteristics. Even though threads of communication exist in the other characteristics, the dominance of the codes and importance of communication to the principals determined the need for a separate characteristic. Characteristic C evolved from data codes which included active listening, clear information, questioning, document, write it down, sharing information, repetition, clear messages, and purposeful. The principals shared a variety of situations that could be considered critical moments of communication—from personal conversations that started with, “Do you have a minute to talk?” to formal presentations for the large community groups. Each of these situations was a window of opportunity for a principal to communicate his or her message and listen to the deeper meaning of people’s concerns. The data revealed three concepts that focus on communication: empower with information; listen, question, and document; and distribute information with purpose and consistency.

Empower with information.

Intentional communication begins with having information to be shared and the desire to share the information. Principal 11 noted that “information is power, knowledge is power,” and by sharing the information, the leader was sharing the power to build knowledge. The information provided empowered individuals to make informed decisions about how they felt about the school closure. Knowledge helped people to understand the school closure and visualize a future. Principal 9 asserted that information shared with people gives them the power to make “things much better.” Principal 11 emphasized that knowledge “helps alleviate some anxiety or fears.” When people had all the information to which they felt entitled, they were empowered to determine how they felt about the change. In contrast, if the information given was inaccurate or delayed, anger and mistrust developed in the community. Principal 1 was concerned about the emotional response in his parent community:

Lots of worry and concern from this particular group, since they were already unhappy, their concern move[d] to anger real quick. They were getting really pissed, really fast. I had to figure out a way really fast to slow them down. I had to do something. They were about to spiral.

He changed the way he shared information about the school closure. Principal 1 designed and delivered a weekly email to all his community members, which gave updates on transitioning students, packing resources, and timelines. He noted that the increased sharing of information through his weekly emails seemed to “settle the community down” and concluded that people felt empowered with the knowledge they received. Principal 1 recognized that his emails did not have all the answers people wanted; however, they were predictable, timely communications of the information he knew at the given moment.

The importance of sharing information for a leader was also underscored by Principal 4: “Communication, I always believed, [is] one of the indicators of how effective a school is working...you really need to think about how information is disseminated.” He revealed that communication planning needed to be intentional. A strong communication plan could determine whether a principal could effectively lead through a school closure process. During my school closure process, I used the following questions to guide my communication planning. What information needs to be shared and with whom? When and how does the information need to be shared? What might the response be to this information? How can I ensure the correct information is received? These questions guided my communication plan to ensure it was responsive to the needs of my school community.

The information the 12 principals shared with their school community had the power to inform and to empower people to develop understanding. As well, people’s responses gave

information back to the principals. The communication of information had the power to deepen both the school communities' and the principals' understanding. Critical for clear communication is the importance of understanding of the information to be shared and accurate perception of how the information is understood by listening to people's response.

Listen, question, and document.

According to the 12 principals, intentional communication required the leader to be skilled at listening, questioning, and documenting. As Principal 5 explained, "Communication was something I was very intentional about." Communication involved listening to people's concerns, asking strategic questions, and sharing information in written documents such as newsletters. It became apparent that the principals viewed the ability to listen to others as crucial to effective communication.

The foundation for strong communication is not just the ability to listen; it is also the ability to show you are listening. This communication skill was highlighted by Principal 3:

I listened a lot because [the closure was] real for people and I tried to paraphrase what they said and give it back to them, so that they knew they were being listened to. And when it was appropriate...I tried to give them more information because I think that a lot of that anger comes from a lack of information. What I didn't want to do [was] to listen to what they were saying and then say "but this and this" because that doesn't validate the emotions they were feeling. So time was an issue. People needed time to process.

From Principal 3's description, listening needed to be active, intentional, and responsive. She theorized that people need to know they were being listened to. She noted that it took time and energy to listen to an individual, accurately understand the message that they were trying to share, and determine the appropriate response. During my school closure process, the

community members complained that the district administration was not listening. Instead of arguing that the school district administration was listening, I asked the community members, “What is it you want them to hear?” I found that people wanted an opportunity to have someone listen to their concerns. This was important to help them process their feelings and understand the information; I found some people felt a responsibility to let the district administration know the concerns. They needed to share their concerns with me, and I would share the concerns with the administration. It was challenging to communicate that I was listening when I did not agree with their thoughts and positions. For some, being heard is associated with changing the other person’s mind. Principal 3 reported this concern as well and explained that she tried to validate their emotions while not agreeing with them, and moved people forward by giving information.

During the closure process, the school community can be confused and uncertain about the occurring events. Inaccurate perceptions may become facts in people’s minds. Principal 10 revealed that she addressed misinformation through a debriefing strategy: “providing the information, listening to people about their perspectives, trying to bring those perspectives together if you need to, or clarify any misinformation.” Another strategy identified to listen to people’s perspectives was through fireside chats, private one-to-one conversations. Principal 3 asserted that during her fireside chats, she tried

to support people as they came to terms with change and help[ed] instill that sense of hope and possibility—a door closing, but a window opening and I would say that being an empathetic listener to parents I think was really important during the process.

Being an empathetic listener is important for a leader; it helps people to move forward through their emotions to feel they are being heard but also to see the new possibility.

Creating silence in the conversation seemed to be a listening technique the 12 principals used to help people process information and emotions. Principal 8 argued that it was important for leaders to wait with their response:

It's hearing people out...letting people speak and maybe not responding to them right away but letting people have their say, acknowledging their emotions and...working with them to have a plan to move forward now. Okay, "so you have emotions around this but it's still happening, so what are our next steps now?"

Waiting to respond allowed Principal 8 to think and process during the conversation in order to be intentional with his response. He acknowledged people's emotions and worked with them to move forward. He used the language "our next steps," not "your next steps." This let people know they were not alone in the plan to move forward. Similarly, Principal 4 underscored the importance of silence:

Sometimes silence is equally as important. As you are talking to someone with questions that might be surprising...it's just about allowing a few seconds of silence for that to kind of sink in, in terms of people's understanding because...people come around on their own.

Creating silence in a conversation gave time for people and Principal 4 to process the information. The wait time could create the opportunity for new questions or information to be brought forward. Principal 4 created time and space for processing within his conversations. The silence also helped to make it clear that the principal was listening. While silence created a space for some people to process, for others it increased tension. For instance, the delay silence created might escalate a conversation. Some of the principals shared that emotional people usually wanted an immediate response and creating silence became challenging. The principals

needed to be intentional to determine a balance between listening, being silent, and moving people forward. As Principal 3 noted, listening took time and understanding took longer.

The act of listening may go beyond the moment of the conversation for a leader. Listening was reinforced by what the principal did with information once it was heard. Principal 3 demonstrated the importance of listening and following through: “I listened lots and just talked less...when people are in stressful times...they need to feel heard and then when you say you’re going to do something to actually follow through on that.” Active listening went beyond Principal 3 talking less and helping people to feel heard; she demonstrated listening by her actions after a conversation. During the transition planning for my students, I sought input from parents. I made sure that their suggestions were represented in our transition plan. If a suggestion could not be incorporated, there still needed to be follow through to explain why their suggestion was not included in the transition plan. I did not want parents to think that I asked for input, but did not listen.

Another action the 12 principals took to indicate that they were listening was to ask questions during conversations. A strategic question could yield crucial information. Principal 2 stated, “I learned to ask good questions.” Principal 12 also mentioned the importance of asking questions. She asserted that the more questions she asked, the greater her understanding became, and the better prepared she was to answer questions. I found asking good questions was essential for leading through my school closure. My technique for identifying good questions was to involve my leadership team in a brain storm activity. Each member had a different perspective, which yielded a greater range of questions that needed to be answered. Some of the open-ended questions we reflected upon included “What is it that we are not seeing or understanding?” “What are the real issues for...?” These kinds of questions would help us to

assess situations from different perspectives. An example of using open-ended questions and then listening occurred when a staff member came to talk with me about his anger towards our school closure. As we talked, I wondered what the real source of his anger was and listened to the meaning behind his words. This difficult conversation uncovered issues about family stress that he struggled to deal with and the true source of his emotions began to surface. We both concluded his family problems were being expressed as anger toward the closure. My questions and listening along with his willingness to share helped both of us to understand that his feelings of anger were not just about the school closure. Talking with him only about the school closure would not have helped him to move forward.

A few of the principals identified taking notes during conversations as another act that demonstrated listening. I also used this technique to capture the essence of the person's concern or point of view and then shared my notes with the person to ensure accuracy. At times, I asked to pass their comments on to the district administration. I found that putting thoughts into writing slowed down conversation, helped convey that I was listening, and provided a record for follow-up conversations. Note-taking is not just about demonstrating listening, it is also critical for fully documenting the closure process. Principals identified a variety of forms of written communication and documentation that they used during the school process including emails, formal letters, taking notes, weekly memos, district reports, handwritten notes, journal writing, notices, newsletters, and media messages. An advantage of written communication was that it could be thoughtfully crafted and became part of a permanent record, which could be referred to at a later date. That permanency caused Principal 4 angst as he wrote the letter to his community to inform them that their school was being considered for closure. He described the pressure he felt to get the message right. He noted it would have been nice to have letter templates to follow.

Instead, he vetted his letter through various district personnel, which was time consuming and stressful.

Principals 1, 2, and 5 stated that they produced weekly memos to share information about the school closure. Principal 1 sent his weekly email to staff, parents, and his supervisor. The principals shared that in addition to easing anxiety and tension for community members the weekly memos served as a record of communication that could be referred to when needed. Email was also used to document information presented at the numerous meetings with various district personnel. Principal 12 reported the information she received was vast, “sometimes you would get different information from different people. We found that it was really important to document who said what and then get further clarification.” The principals described the importance of writing a follow-up email after meetings to document decisions and plans.

The principals agreed that there were times when written communication alone was inadequate or inappropriate. I experienced this after the board meeting at which the trustees voted to close my school. The teachers had asked me to share the Trustees’ decision immediately by email. I was uncomfortable about sharing this important information by email alone and decided to call each teacher personally. Teachers seemed to appreciate the direct communication. An additional benefit of making these phone calls was that I was able to evaluate the emotional state of my staff before the next school day and answered questions they had about what they should say. My direct communication gave them clarity about their role and responsibility in the next day activities.

The ability to listen, question, and document are important skills for the role of the principal as an intentional communicator during a school closure process. Being able to

accurately assess the need for information, listen for understanding, question for clarification, and write to document information are all aspects of intentional communication.

Distribute information with purpose and consistency.

All of the principals revealed that they were addressing what seemed to be an overwhelming amount of information from legislation, school district documents, public engagement feedback, media requests, and archival materials. With the vast amount of information, determining who needed what information seemed daunting. Principal 6 used a metaphor to articulate his role: he saw himself as a master control switch at a railroad station. He described how the many railroad tracks (information) go through the one switch (the principal). Principal 6 explained that the information flowed through the principal and that the principal determined who was to receive what information. Principal 9, on the other hand, saw the principal as a filter: “We are the filter for just about everything...things do filter through us. From above to below, from below to above, and sometime[s] the tension within ourselves.” Principal 9 stressed that as a filter, he took the information and filtered it to the intended audiences, whether to the district or to his school community. Noting that a filter selectively blocks certain types of matter and allows others to pass through, Principal 9 allowed through certain information necessary for people to function. Too much information seemed to overwhelm people, which could result in loss of focus. Principal 9 made an important note that principals filter within themselves suggesting that personal filtering might be necessary to separate their own personal thoughts about the school closure from the school district’s messages to the school community.

Distributing information with purpose and consistency was important to the 12 principals. Principal 6 asserted that as he received information, he would “process it” and then “fired it out

to people.” He did not hold the information; instead, he described having short conversations in the hallways or the staffroom to share, “here is what I know.” He was consistent in providing information as quick as possible. As well, Principal 6 explained that other actions needed to model consistency, “I was always...at the school early and late...the expression ‘my door is always open’ I want them to see that it’s always open or that I am always available.” Principal 6 purposely ensured his availability for his community. His availability was consistent and predictable, thus he was available to receive information in order to filter and pass it along.

Principal 8 confirmed the need for purposeful communication to assist the school district’s understanding of the community’s needs. He became “a bit of a mediator between the planning department and really all of the parents.” He helped the school district to understand the needs of the day-care program in the community. Once the district understood the parents’ needs, they responded by changing the feeder school for the community. Principal 8 processed the information that the parents shared and was purposeful in how he presented the information to his school district in a manner they could understand. He was a consistent communication facilitator among all those involved in a school closure.

As a communication facilitator, I would channel the information to different stakeholders and present the information in a purposeful, understandable manner. I took into consideration the audience, type of language to be used, and ways to ensure understanding of the message. Principal 4 also saw himself as a communication facilitator. He described his intentional communication plan that he shared with his students about the potential closure of his school:

I had to go around to the classrooms and used an analogy of Goldilocks elementary, “what would happen boys and girls, if the population of Goldilocks elementary continued to go down? What would that look like in terms of students in classes?...we were going to

have really large classes with more than 2 grades in them, would that be good for your educational experience?” (Principal 4)

Although Principal 4 was intentional about how he presented the information to his students, by selecting an analogy elementary students might relate to, his students replied, “Does this have anything to do with the fire drill?” The students interpreted his message to be an evaluation of the previous day’s fire drill. Principal 4 explained that he had to continually revisit the information with students. He had to be purposeful in using words his students understood, consistently share a clear message, and not make assumptions that his message was understood. It did not matter if Principal 4 selected the best words for his message, it was important that the message was understood. Principal 4 continued to confirm that the message was received accurately.

I also encountered a problem with the assumptions the school community made interpreting the language used in communications. In the beginning of the public engagement process, the school district invited parents to an *accommodation* meeting. The school district’s definition of accommodation was in reference to accommodating the students’ move to a new school. Parents understood accommodation in reference to special needs accommodations within the classroom. They thought their children were misbehaving in the classroom and that they were invited to a meeting to discuss behavioural accommodations in the classroom. The different interpretations of one word created a moment of misunderstanding that needed to be addressed. Both the school district and parents had a correct interpretation for the word accommodation, yet the understanding of the purpose of accommodation meeting was inconsistent. It was my role to be the communication facilitator and create an intentional shared

understanding for the purpose of the meeting. It was challenging to predict situations that had the potential for the school district and the parents to misunderstand each other.

Some of the 12 principals identified dealing with the media as another situation in which their communication needed to be purposeful and consistent. The two school districts represented in this study had different approaches for principals to address the media. One school district had a media communications department. The principals of this school district were expected not to talk to the media, but instead to refer all inquiries to the communications department. The other school district held media training sessions for the principals to prepare them to address media questions. The principals of this school district found the training to be valuable. However, the media interviews put these principals in the public position of being the spokesperson for the school closure to a greater extent than the principals in the other school district.

The media training provided by the school district guided the principals to develop purposeful key messages to use consistently with the media and the community. Principal 7 shared how her key messages for the media became the common language for her teachers.

My pre-done answers [were] clear, concise, not wordy, not emotional. You know, you walk the talk. There's certain things that I wanted to put across, and so that's the same vocab that I would reiterate over and over and over and over again until it became embedded in everybody else's mouth.

Principal 7 was purposeful about using “clear” and “concise” language in her messages. Her goal was to repeat these messages frequently in order for others to adopt her same messages. For Principal 7 intentional communication went beyond modeling the intended behaviour: it was the consistent language and repetition that helped people adopt the messages. Principal 7

demonstrated purposeful and consistent communication by staying on message with the media. She explained that the questions a reporter asked are not aired, only the responses. She decided not to answer any of the reporter's questions, but rather consistently gave her own messages.

Another area the 12 principals identified where their messages were purposeful and consistent was when defining the teachers' roles during a school closure. The principals' message clearly defined what teachers could say to parents and students. Principals helped teachers gain the knowledge and confidence to handle challenging questions. Some principals gave their staff talking points or key messages, while other principals went through potential answers to questions during staff meetings. Principal 8 outlined the approach he used with his teachers to help guide them through the school closure. He told them "this is what you need to say" or "this is what you need to say if you are supporting the district on this." A challenge that Principal 8 revealed was that during the training process his teachers felt they were being silenced and that they could not share their opinion. His goal was to help them to develop the language and skills to handle difficult conversations they might encounter during the closure process; instead, the teachers felt they were being told what not to say or share their personal opinions. It was not that the teachers did not have a voice, but rather that their opinion needed to be shared in the proper channels. There was a difference between publicly criticizing the decision and raising concerns that needed to be addressed to the principal or to district administration. An analogy I used for teachers was an environmentalist working for an oil company. Could this employee publicly criticize the oil company for the environmental impact of drilling? What could happen to this employee? Eventually, teachers understood that they cannot criticize the school district; instead, they could work within the school district to ensure that the best practices were followed. A challenge for the principals was to find the middle

ground between what could be said publicly and the teachers' need to share their thoughts about the closure. The principals helped teachers to understand the impact of what they said publicly and the importance to be professional and honour the process of school closure.

In summary, Characteristic C: Principal as an Intentional Communicator began with the foundational understanding that information that is intentionally shared with others gives them the power to make an informed decision about emotions and actions. Listening was both a state and an action for intentional communication. It was important that the principals demonstrated they were listening by being silent and to show action with paraphrasing, writing, and following through. Asking good questions demonstrated the intentionality of the principal to find all the information people might need to know. Documenting helped provide clarity and became a formal record for communication. They acted with purpose and consistency to determine what information should be shared with whom. The principals wanted to be intentional communicators, yet it was demonstrated that even with insightful and purposeful communication, unintended messages could be received.

Characteristic D: Principal as a Navigator through Tensions and Paradoxes

Characteristic D evolved out of interconnected data. Data for this section was embedded in other characteristics and yet stood out as a separate characteristic. Thus, coding for this section was challenging. The first three characteristics are interconnected and foundational to the development of Characteristic D, which has aspects of knowing the principal's role, addressing people's emotions, and communication. This final characteristic of the theory brings forward the tensions of change and leadership associated with the school closure process.

There are five concepts in Characteristic D: resist and accept change; maintain business as usual and recognize the magnitude of change; be an instructional leader and project manager;

celebrate and grieve; and plan and prepare for the unexpected. The first concept, resist and accept change, established the tension of change that principals encountered through the people's resistance and emotions during the school closure process. This concept explores people's responses during the school closure process. Other tensions were identified within the leadership role for the principal during a school closure. The codes for the tensions identified by participants were: challenges, not straight forward, duality, paradox, and complex.

Resist and accept change.

Change is varied and complex, as are people's responses to it. The 12 principals noticed strong, loud, overt resistance from some school community members, while others showed quiet, subtle, acceptance. Leading change can be as varied as the people being led. Some of the codes used to identify this concept include: conflict, struggle, confrontation, resistance, and acceptance. This concept examines the tensions of people's resistance to and acceptance of change in the context of school closure.

The through line to this concept, develop self-knowledge and understand expectations, is evident in the 12 principals' response to change. It is important to understand how leaders perceive change in relation to leading it. The participants were asked, "What are your personal beliefs about change?" Eight of the 12 principals shared positive codes towards change: "I like change," "change can be exciting," and "change needs to happen." These principals reported that they viewed change not only as a positive but as a necessity for people and schools. However, negative codes were also associated with principal's descriptions of leading change, such as stressful, problematic, complex, hard, and difficult. As Principal 5 concluded, "change has to happen, but it's stressful." With change there appears to be a tension between the need for it to happen and that change itself is stressful for school communities.

The 12 principals shared their thoughts about what made the change of a school closure stressful and led to the resistance. Principal 11 pointed out that, “Change is hard for people...it’s a fear of the unknown. Not knowing what that’s going to look like...and leading through change is interesting.” During the change of a school closure process, people experienced a loss of the familiar, their school, as well as fear of the unknown, the new school. As a leader, the principal must help make the unknown become known. Principal 11 claimed leading change becomes interesting or challenging as the change begins to unfold. Principal 5 noted that resistance developed from stress people experienced during the change. She explained that “stress comes from the difference between...your expectation and the reality. If you can’t change the reality, adjust your expectation, and the level of stress might not be so high.” This belief was also mentioned by Principal 6: “Stress is the difference between what you expect and what you get.” Principals 5 and 6 led people in adjusting their expectations to decrease their stress and resistance to change. To help their school communities adjust their expectations, the principals may have empowered them with information (in Characteristic C). Similarly, I noticed students’ stress and resistance was high due to the perception their concerns were not being heard. They expressed the perception that the adults involved were not listening to them and that they did not have a voice in the closure process. The tension existed between supporting students’ needs and honouring the formal school closure process that typically does not involve students. To address this tension, I helped the district personnel to understand the importance of giving our students a voice in the closure process. Together we designed an engagement activity for the students, a focused group interview. All their thoughts and suggestions to the guiding questions were recorded. This formal engagement process helped the student to learn more information about the closure process to help the unknown become known. Fear of the unknown, loss of the

familiar, and concerns about being heard are all aspects that may contribute to a school community's resistance to a school closure process.

As the principals addressed the tension of moving people forward from resistance to acceptance, factors such as time and support were identified. Principal 9 raised an important consideration for supporting people through change: "Change takes time, change needs to be supported." The school closure process, from finding out about the potential school closure to the school actually closing, was eight to ten months in length—a short time for this level of change. Principal 9 concluded that the role of the principal was to support people through the change process (Characteristic B) "that everybody has a different capacity for change...understand people will be in different places [and] need different things." He asserted that the principal must address this tension to meet the needs of the individual, to personalize the supports, and address individual resistance.

The complexity of the school closure change brought forth a range of responses from the school communities. Principal 1 revealed that school closure is about more than just change: "When you close a school, it is an ending." He shared that people were both resistant to the loss and uncertain of the future. All the principals expressed they encountered some form of resistance during the school closure process. Principal 11 pointed out that, "People react differently and they react at different times." Some reacted with out-spoken anger, yelling, crying, and name calling. Principals also observed passive-aggressive reactions. For example, some teachers were not completing transition plans or refusing to clean out their rooms. Principal 9 made a critical observation that teachers' reactions ranged "from anger to apathy to fear and back again." The same person may continually cycle among different emotions. Similarly, I had a teacher tell me, "The school is never going to close. People have been talking

about this for the last 10 years. It will never happen.” This teacher eventually described the closure process as a “Columbine experience.” His mood would change almost daily and even within a conversation. At first, he showed strong denial, which grew into devastation and resistance. Eventually, as the school drew to a close, his demeanour became sad. He never reached acceptance of the school closure. There was a tension to address and support someone in crisis; at the same time I had other teachers who immediately accepted the school closure becoming frustrated with the “lengthy bureaucratic process” necessary to close a school.

Principals identified strategies in Characteristic B, supporting people, and Characteristic C, listening to address resistance. Principal 3 stated that “people who were most resistant need to have lots of opportunities to talk about it.” Other principals described creating a safe place for people involved to process and vent. Principal 3 identified a tension: “If you talk too much about something negative then you get kind of a negative climate.” Some needed the opportunity to be heard, “You just have to hear them out, let them give voice to their concerns...because what they’re doing is they’re airing out what this is going to mean to their life in terms of change” (Principal 12). During the processes of people venting to Principal 1, he discovered resistance was expressed as the stages of grief, “almost like the grieving steps—there is anger, denial, then questioning and questioning.” The questioning could be considered a way some processed the change. They might be trying to see themselves in the change. Through conversation circles, formal debriefing processes, and one-on-one conversations principals tried to guide people to become part of the change.

Helping the school community to make the unknown known and to see themselves as part of the change was important for the 12 principals. The leaders did experience tensions when addressing resistance. It was important that leaders had self-awareness to their own responses to

change in order to assist others to move forward. A challenge for the principals was to balance how to address resistance, creating safe places for people to vent, while moving them forward to acceptance of the change.

Maintain business as usual and recognize the magnitude of change.

Leadership tensions were found in many situations for the 12 principals. This concept further explores the tensions leaders experience when trying to maintain business as usual while a dramatic change is occurring. Many aspects of the school closure made the magnitude of the change significant for students, parents, and teachers. A tension that arose for the principals during the school closure process was to balance the school's stability while focusing on "business as usual" and recognizing the magnitude of the change for the community.

Four of the 12 principals used the expression, "business as usual" in their responses. Principal 11 identified that business as usual meant "...we're here for teaching and learning, we're here for the kids." Her perspective was that the business of a school was teaching and learning, which should be the teachers' focus. As mentioned in the Characteristic A's concept, create and enact a vision, some principals asserted that having a vision that focused on teaching and learning enabled them to create a sense of normalcy in a non-normal situation.

In contrast, Principal 5 pointed out it was not business as usual due to the magnitude of the change for her community, even though her school district kept this focus.

The district mantra was "business as usual"...but nothing quite prepared me for...the gossip, the image management, the emotional management, the lack of control...

somebody said "death by 1,000 cuts," and I thought "yeah, that's a good way to describe that one more piece of information made a cut."

Principal 5 compared leading during a regular school year to leading during the school closure process. To her, it was not business as usual. She asserted that the work of a principal was different due to the heightened emotions and unpredictability of her work during the school closure. She suggested the closure process felt like a form of torture for her as the school leader. The amount of new information and emotional management was not business as usual and made it challenging for her to lead.

Principal 12 brought together the perspective of Principal 11, business as usual, and Principal 5, the myth of business as usual. She suggested there were times when it was normal: “We had periods of time where we would carry on business as usual.” Teachers would carry on teaching the curriculum as normal on a daily basis. Then she identified times that the teachers’ focus was not on learning and business as usual could not happen. For example, “that period of time, that 24 or 48 hours where people got their placements—that was very emotionally charged” (Principal 12). The emotions associated with not knowing where they would be teaching and frustration about placement process was challenging for Principal 12 to keep the teachers focused on student learning.

Similarly Principal 1 found, “In some ways it is business as usual. Teachers and staff will focus on the next class the next week.” However, Principal 1 noticed that teachers were particularly sensitive to regular stressors and that more pronounced reactions impacted the usual operations of his school:

There is an overarching kind of feeling and increased level of anxiety associated, and it really affects everything. Sometimes it is not visible, but when things get challenging, when you run into hiccups, regular kinds of school stressors...I was finding stronger reactions. The resiliency of the staff would be lower than normal.

On the surface it appeared to be business as usual. Students were learning; however, as Principal 1 explained, the emotions would come out during inconsequential situations. For instance, when a teacher sent a student to the office for not having a pencil, Principal 1 had to determine whether it was about the pencil or was the teacher having issues coping. If he only addressed the pencil he might miss the bigger picture. The tension between accurately understanding what was truly happening and determining his response.

The tension of balancing the focus on the business of a school with recognizing the magnitude of the change occurred when addressing the anxiety associated with change. If the 12 principals focused too much on “business as usual” they might have been perceived as insensitive to the emotional needs of the students and teachers. If the principals focused too much on the emotions and anxiety of the school closure then teaching and learning could stop. People could become entrenched in their emotions and not be able to move forward to accept the change. To address this tension, concepts from the first three characteristics are utilized. It was important for teachers to understand their role to maintain a stable environment for students to learn (Characteristic A). Developing understanding utilized the concepts of listening and sharing information with purpose and consistency (Characteristic C). Recognizing the impact of a school closure on the emotional well-being (Characteristic B) of the school community was an important aspect of maintaining the balance between business as usual and the magnitude of the change (Characteristic D). The principals recognized that the school closure process made for an unusual year filled with emotions and heavy workloads that must at the same time be a usual year with regular curriculum being taught.

Be an instructional leader and a project manager.

The tensions existed for the 12 principals between being an instructional leader and a project manager during the school closure process. Tensions between spending time completing managerial tasks such as reports, emails, and budgeting and the instructional leadership practices such as literacy strategies, assessments, and technology to improve teaching practice intensified. This concept explores the challenges that that principals experienced as instructional leaders and project managers during the school closure process.

In a regular school year, a principal's focus is on teaching and learning; however, during a school closure year, the 12 principals reported that focusing on teaching and learning was increasingly difficult. The principals shared that in a regular school year they might get some resistance to new school district initiatives, but could still persuade teachers to buy-in. During the school closure process, these district initiatives did not stop for the principals. The challenge of leading school district initiatives during a school closure process was established by Principal 1. He found that "where I could see that stress level come out is when I tried to initiate the next or the latest board initiative...they would just lose their minds. 'Right, why on earth do we have to do this?'" (Principal 1). He explained that the teachers were focused on getting through the day and "now I am trying to shift and change to improve their instructional practice. They weren't buying that at all. It was just the wrong time." His teachers did not want one more responsibility; the enhanced work load of the closure was enough for them to try to accomplish.

According to Principal 1, leading instructional change during a school closure process was like "trying to convince the band on the deck of the Titanic to learn a new song." There is no sense in bothering to learn a new song people when people are focused on getting into lifeboats. He theorized that it was the "sinking ship mentality" that permeated his entire school

community. Students, teachers, and parents had a “why bother” attitude. They resisted new district initiatives as well as the initiatives he tried to lead to improve instructional practice:

[they] will start to bail on things “oh we don’t really have to do that, we are not here next year anyway” and when you try to implement instructional change that is a pretty big obstacle. And that is why I would get the push back from staff. “Why are we doing this? We are done here.”...that part was stressful. (Principal 1)

Addressing the push back and moving teacher’s instructional practice forward created tension. If he forced new initiatives, there would have been backlash. Teachers might think he was insensitive or did not understand the pressure and angst they were feeling. Not addressing initiatives could cause problems with district administration, and the students could be disadvantaged by not receiving the new initiatives.

The 12 principals addressed resistance and apathy to district initiatives and their own instructional initiatives in a variety of ways. Principals reported that they would “pick their battles” when it came to improving instructional practice. They would filter what was important and what was not, as Principal 1 suggested he tried “to pick [his] spots.” I too was selective in addressing new initiatives. In some cases, I told teachers that the district was taking on this initiative but that due to our enhanced workload, we would not be participating. This was important for teachers to hear because it reinforced that the district and I recognized the enhanced workload. I explained that other initiatives had to be implemented because we were part of the school district. Principal 5 emphasized that she “streamlined” teachers’ work because she had fewer teachers due to the lower number of students, so they had to work differently. She revised teacher’s supervision schedule and cancelled a winter carnival to lighten the teachers’ workload. The recognition of the heightened workload by the principals was an action to show

support for the teachers (emotional barometer). When the teachers felt supported the relationship with the principals was maintained and trust was sustained.

Another approach to instructional leadership during a school closure process was identified by Principals 1, 2, 5, and 10. They insisted that it was important to make the request to change instructional practice meaningful for the teachers. Principals 1 and 2 tried to make the change relevant by explaining to teachers that the initiative was what other teachers were doing in the district. The teachers were part of the school district and had a responsibility to ensure their students had a similar learning experience as other students in the school district. As well, the initiatives became relevant to teachers by pointing out potential new principals might ask in an interview how they have supported district initiatives. It became important for teachers to be able to explain how their teaching practice was supporting system initiatives. By helping the teachers to see purpose behind implementing the school district's initiatives, Principals 1 and 2 were enacting their role as an instructional leader.

Other principals approached instructional leadership as an opportunity to try new initiatives. Principal 9 stated that he felt the freedom to try something new. It did not matter because they would not have to continue with it the following year. He described a new approach to his grade 6 student configurations that had never been tried before at his school. By attempting this new configuration, Principal 9 was an instructional leader and modeled innovation to his teachers. Similar to that of Principal 9, my approach was to also encourage teachers to try new approaches in their instructional practice. I explained that it was a safe year to try something new. If they felt the new strategy was not successful they would not need to use it the following year. Through this encouragement, teachers tried critical inquiry in their lessons, took students on field trips to new places, applied for funding grants, and led professional

development sessions at other schools. Another way the school closure context opened the door to new practices was with our career portfolio initiative. For the past five years the previous school administration had tried to work with teachers and students to develop career portfolios, but no one saw the immediate relevance. With the closure, teachers saw the relevance and bought-in. I worked with teachers to develop their own portfolios for their teaching practice. The teachers then worked with the students to develop portfolios. The context of school closure at times enhanced my ability to be an instructional leader and at other times made moving teachers' instructional practice forward almost impossible.

Adding to the tension of the paradox between being an instructional leader and a project manager was that the principals' managerial load increased dramatically. It is important to note that a natural tension always exists for principals between being an instructional leader and a school manager. During the school closure, the managerial tasks grew as the project of emptying a school of its resources was carried out. The time dedicated to managing their schools increased, thus leaving less time for the principals to be instructional leaders. Some examples of the new managerial tasks included ensuring accurate inventorying of all resources, writing letters, reviewing resumes, finishing paperwork for teacher transfers, distributing layoff notices for support staff, budgeting, planning celebrations, attending numerous meetings, and completing reports. Principal 7 defined the school closure process as "one big giant project" that she had to manage while still living the role of the principal to be an instructional leader.

All of the principals agreed that managing the work of emptying an entire school of resources and overseeing the distribution was challenging. Through the years, schools accumulate considerable amounts of old and unused resources. Principal 3 explained,

Take this building and if you were to turn it upside down, anything that would fall down has to be taken care of, and so if you have a 50-year-old building, they have all these tunnels and crawlspaces and oh my God that stuff the teachers have left behind.

All items had to be sorted, discarded, inventoried, packed, labelled, assigned a new location, and prepared for shipping. Everything from paper clips to photocopiers needed to be inventoried and assigned a new school. This was a technical task that required strong communication to help organize people to understand their role in the distribution of resources (Characteristic C).

Tension occurred for the 12 principals while trying to maintain a stable learning environment when all the resources were leaving the school. The emptiness created anxiety for both students and teachers. Thus emptying a building of resources required strong organizational skills and the ability to measure the emotional climate of the community (Characteristic B). Adding to the emotional concern, Principals 1, 5, and 10 principals explained the difficulty teachers had with other district personnel treating their school as a garage sale. Items were labelled and removed which added to the sense of loss the community was feeling. To address this issue four of the principals used their summer to sort and pack materials allowing for the school to be operational and stable until the end of June. They determined that to maintain a stable learning environment for students they needed to move some of the managerial responsibilities to the summer months.

Another tension of the project manager's role identified by the 12 principals was that strategic planning became knowing when to push and support staff. Principal 1 pointed out that he could not wait until June 30th to start asking for resources to be packed up. He thought the stress of packing at the last minute might result in many teachers going on to stress leaves and run the risk of not having the building properly closed down. Principal 1 was balancing being an

effective emotional barometer and being an efficient manager communicating the tasks that need to be completed. In order to obtain buy-in from teachers, Principal 1 led by example, modeling for his teachers his willingness to sort and pack materials:

Stewardship...you have to get your nose dirty and hands wet. If you are going to send somebody into a 30-year-old book room, you had better go in and help them. I did as much cleaning, moving, and shifting as anybody else.

Emptying a school was a technical task that required keen project management skills of organization, timeline development, and prioritizing. Even though emptying a building was considered a managerial task, the principals demonstrated the leadership skills of supporting, motivating, and empowering people through this project. It was challenging for the principals to manage the project of school closure, while addressing the intense emotions expressed by teachers and students. For instance, I saw teachers crying as they packed up their classrooms. I had one teacher ask if they could have her desk sent to her new school. She had used it for twenty years and could not imagine marking at a different desk. It was difficult to balance responding to their emotions with trying to move them forward and get the work done.

Celebrate and grieve.

Addressing the emotions raises a further tension: honouring the grieving process while helping them to move forward through the sadness to get to the place of readiness to accept and celebrate as a community. The 12 principals identified the leadership tension of the grieving process and the enhanced workload of teachers with the need to celebrate and honour the school community. The role of the leader is crucial to guide people through the grief and celebration process. Principal 10 insisted, "Any time that people are grieving, there's a need to come together. There's a gathering that needs to happen." She stressed, "We were grieving. Don't

get me wrong...we were grieving deeply, deeply, but we made a decision to have a celebration what would be an almost 100 year anniversary.” Given the feeling that school closure was like a death of a school community, it made sense to Principal 10 to have a celebration of the life of the school. A leadership tension was that too much celebrating could be seen as not honouring their loss and grief, but focusing too much sadness might not move people forward.

The 12 principals approached celebrating and creating a legacy in a variety of ways, while maintaining the common purpose of helping people to develop a sense of closure. Principal 10 had a professional photographer take a photo of the school and she gave framed copies to teachers. Principal 12 celebrated with food, music, and small gifts (journals and mugs). She described her evening celebration for former teachers and community members: “The turnout was great and families came up to me [shared]...their memories of the school.” Principal 2 focused on celebration throughout the school closure process. Celebrating was not one activity; it was her approach to the entire year:

We laughed a lot, I treated them to treats a lot, I was feeding them a lot, little celebrations when something happened, we had a magical Christmas concert that filled the gym. We brought in residencies, every opportunity to show the parents that this is a really special school. That we are hardworking and we love your kids. (Principal 2)

Principal 2’s approach to celebration showed parents that their children were cared for even during the school closure process. She noted that the celebrations seemed to have had a positive impact on how people came to terms with the change of the school closure. Principal 9 viewed celebration as a way to “keep kids self-esteem intact.” Through showcasing his students’ talents and abilities to the community, he was building confidence and self-esteem in his students.

Principal 3 also focused on the students and their resiliency: “The kids were so resilient...we

were very intentional for the children...[they] would have things to take away.” They did memory scrolls and made ceramic boxes to put them in. The students released helium balloons with messages on the last day of school. Principal 4 emphasized that the celebration provided the opportunity to build a legacy for the school. His students worked with professional artists to make art work that was given as a gift to the receiving school, “so that our work would not cease to exist.” A tension arose that as the principals were showcasing students and creating legacy, they were also showing the community’s the incredible work being done at the school and by extension adding fuel to the community is reasons to keep the schools open.

Finding ways to honour the relationships the school community had with each other and to the school was layered with emotions. Principal 10 observed in her celebration evening:

It was a good feeling...a sad feeling but a good feeling cause it enabled us to look back on all of the years of the school...“we are who we are because of the relationships that we have with people, it’s not about the building, so the building will still be here, it will be turned into something else and we can retain the memories that we have from it” Yes, so that was positive.

Principal 10 noted that the celebration seemed to provide closure for people’s emotions in her community. I also had a similar evening celebration as Principal 10. I found our Open House celebration provided opportunities for people to connect and move forward through their grief. It was incredible to hear the impact our school had on the lives of the former students. People explained that they were better parents because our school helped train them for good paying jobs to provide for their families. There was a sense of sadness that future students would not get this opportunity. At the same time, I observed pride and happiness to have been a part of our school’s legacy. The celebration honoured the relationships people had with each other and gave

the opportunity to say good bye to our building. This evening took a large amount of planning and organizing. I worked hard to anticipate challenges such as running out of food or even angry people wanting to protest the closure. However, an unexpected moment occurred during the Open House Celebration when the some of the staff from the new school (the future tenants) showed up to look around. Even with my planning for the various possible scenarios for our celebration evening, it did not enter my mind that these teachers would show up thinking it was an open house for everyone and want to see their new classrooms. Throughout the closure process there were situations that I would say to myself, “I did not see that coming.” A tension was to be prepared for all situations, while anticipating the unexpected may still occur.

Plan and prepare for the unexpected.

Leading through a school closure process posed both predictable and unpredictable challenges for both me and the 12 participants. There were certain situations that were anticipated and expected, such as angry parents speaking at the public meeting, people needing to cry, and all the work it took to empty the building of resources. The codes surprised, not anticipated, curve ball, and shock emerged in the data. This led to the final concept in Characteristic D that focuses the tension of wanting to be prepared and realizing that surprises and the unexpected will still occur.

The tension that the 12 principals experienced when preparing and implementing communications plans arose in this study and was linked to Characteristic C: communication. Principal 5 mentioned that she was surprised by the amount of miscommunication she experienced with parents in her school community, even when thought and intention were given to develop the communication plan. The letters to parents were vetted through communication experts, but she found that parents still did not understand the school closure process. She had to

keep repeating the same messages and correcting misinformation. Principal 10 expressed surprise about the number of conversations she had: “The number of interactions that I had to have was absolutely overwhelming; whether it was talking with somebody downtown...continuously the phone was ringing...communication with the larger community.” She explained she was used to working with people as a principal, but she was surprised by all the new contacts that she was having. The increased number of meetings and conversations with school district personnel seemed to be one area of concern. She also received numerous calls from school community members and former students calling long distance to find out information about the closure process. I also found that the number of conversations was unexpected. Our school closure was reported in the local media, which increased the number of people who knew of the potential closure. The increase awareness meant I could be anywhere and find myself in a conversation about the school closure at social gatherings, vacationing, or running errands. I had to be prepared with professional and neutral answers because conversations would occur at unexpected times, in unexpected locations.

The 12 principals noticed that during the school closure process unexpected changes occurred in the students’ behaviour, which created tension. Some behaviour was expected, such as crying and swearing. Three principals noticed an unusually high occurrence of vandalism and aggressive behaviour. Principal 1 reported that the change in student behaviour surprised him; these were “not the type of kids we would have picked. It was the kids that did pretty well at school and involved in lots of teams and did not have a lot of other behaviour issues going on.” When asked why he thought these *good* students chose to vandalize the school, he replied, “It might have had something to do with their way of processing. Pushing the school away. Initiating a way to break contact” (Principal 1). He thought it was strange because the grade 9

students were moving on to high school, and the closure was not going to affect them the following year. Principal 1 identified another potential reason for students to vandalize the school: a colleague, who had gone through closure before, asked him, “Well, have the rats started eating the nest.” Principal 1 stated that rats under stress may start destroying their nests. He hypothesized that the students were stressed due to the school closure and that this was combined with the loss of ownership and connection. The usual sense of school pride was replaced with disengagement and disconnection from his students.

I also saw unexpected behaviour from my students that created tensions for leading. For instance, the students organized a protest outside our school district office. The student protest was not a surprise; it was surprising that they wanted to let me know about their plans. Knowing how to respond was challenging and created a tension. Citizenship was an important teaching focus for my school district and by organizing a protest the students were demonstrating they understood their democratic rights; however, I needed to be neutral. Thus, I reminded them about safety to stay off the streets and informed the school district administration. An unexpected event occurred during the student protest. When the board meeting was over, I went outside and told the students about the Trustee’s decision. Students told me they were giving interviews with the media and said, “Our principal is in the meeting fighting to keep our school open.” I was surprised by the students’ perception because I had explained to them my role in the meeting was to listen and take notes to communicate information back to our community. My intention was to be professional and neutral, yet they wanted to believe I was fighting for them. I did my best to be prepared for the ripple effect of the student protest but even so the unexpected occurred. The principals experienced both expected and unexpected behaviour from students: the expected behaviour sometimes had unexpected results.

Unexpected changes in the teachers' behaviour were noted by the 12 principals. They asserted that as the closure process continued the teachers' anxiety increased. Most agreed that there were particular times that the teachers' behaviour changed, such as the initial announcement of the school closure process. Principal 12 reported after the meeting where she told teachers the school might be closing, she found one of her staff members weeping in front of a mural they had just completed. The teacher asked her, "What will happen to the mural?" In this conversation, the teacher's concern for the mural might also be asking "What will happen to me?" How will the principal take care of the mural and the people? This tension underscored the importance of being an emotional barometer and reading the emotional climate of the individual and the situation. Principal 12 predicted that the closure would be emotional; however, the conversation with the crying teacher was unexpected.

During the school closure process, the 12 principals identified various leadership tensions that they needed to navigate. Tensions arose for the principals as they addressed resistance and tried to move people to acceptance in order to move forward. They felt the tension to keep normalcy in the school and to focus on business as usual, while recognizing that it was not a usual year and that the magnitude of change was challenging for the school community. The principals also experienced tension within their regular roles of instructional leader and school manager. Teachers were reluctant to incorporate new districts' initiatives into their practice due to an indifferent attitude and feeling overwhelmed by the enhanced workload. Principals found that they had less time to be instructional leaders because of the new responsibilities as project managers. Another tension identified by the principals was the balance of respecting people's grief and helping them to celebrate the school's legacy. The final tension identified by the principals was the tension between intentionally planning and being prepared and realizing the

unexpected would still occur. These leadership tensions challenged the principals to go beyond their regular roles as school leaders.

Summary

The uniqueness of the school closure context shaped the theory that emerged from this study. The theory identifies four main characteristics that principals must have in order to effectively lead through a school closure process: principal as a clarifier of roles and responsibilities; principal as an emotional barometer; principal as an intentional communicator; and principal as a navigator through leadership tensions and paradoxes. These characteristics were developed from the complex concepts. This study determined that concepts of self-knowledge, vision creation, and anticipation of the complexity of the school closure process contributed to the actions of the principals being clarifiers of roles and responsibilities. The ability to accurately read people's emotions and respond to emotional states as an emotional barometer developed from the concepts of fostering relationships, sustaining trust, and supporting people. The importance of being an intentional communicator was woven throughout this study; however, the concepts that emerged to make this a discrete characteristic were empowering with information, listening, questioning, documenting, and distributing information with purpose and consistency. The final characteristic demonstrated the complexity and challenges the principals experienced leading through a school closure, which required the ability to navigate through the leadership tensions they encountered.

Ultimately, the principals' role in leading through the school closure was fundamental to the experience for the entire school community. As Principal 4 asserted, "While we were going through this process, the person that was pivotal in terms of moving this work forward was me and was going to continue to be me and there was no one else that was going to be accountable."

The work the principals completed during the school closure was instrumental in moving the community and the school district forward through the process of change.

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This grounded theory study explores the experiences and leadership insights of principals who had led through a school closure. This chapter positions the theory, findings, and analysis within the literature of school closure and leading change. This chapter begins with the restatement of the problem and research question. The overview of the theory shows the interconnections among the characteristics. As well, the assumptions for this study, identified in the introduction, are revisited and assessed. One goal for this study is to be useful for educators; thus, recommendations are made for principals, school district administrators, and researchers. This chapter and dissertation concludes with the researcher's reflections.

Restatement of Problem and Research Question

There is a gap in the literature focused on school closure from the principals' perspective. School closure research can be grouped into two main characteristics: technical aspects of school closure and impact on people. The literature that focuses on the technical aspects of the school closure process includes policies and procedures (Basu, 2002; Reiter-Cook, 2010; Rowely, 1984; Schiffhauer, 1998); financial and political consequences (Lavner, 2007; Morikis, 2010); merging of schools (Palmer, 2010; Samson, 1997); and utilization of surplus space (Lewis, 1990). The literature on the impact on people focuses on the following groups: community (Bushrod, 1999; Yackel, 1997); teachers (Morton, 2009); and students (Serenka, 2010). While existing literature does address both the procedural aspects of school closure and the impact on people, there is a paucity of research around the principals' perspective of leading through the school closure process, specifically their insights on how they lead their community during this complex change. The experiences and leadership insights may help inform other principals who are leading through a school closure process.

Using the guiding principles of grounded theory research, this study examines the question: *what insights into leadership do principals gain from leading a school community through a closure process?* The interview process allowed the 12 principals in this study to share their leadership successes and challenges. As well, they gave advice for other principals who may experience leading through this type of change.

Theory Overview and Interconnections of the Characteristics

This section will review the theory that emerged from this study and demonstrate the interconnections within the characteristics. The theory from this study is that leading through a school closure is unique form of change; thus, principals should apply certain leadership characteristics that may enhance their ability to lead effectively through a school closure. These characteristics include the principal as clarifier of role and responsibilities; emotional barometer; intentional communicator; and navigator through the tensions and paradoxes of leading change. As seen in Figure 1 Leading through a School Closure Theory, on the next page, there are interconnections among Characteristics A, B, and C; these three characteristics together merge into D. To demonstrate the interconnections among the first three characteristics, and how these three characteristics inform Characteristic D, one concept—create and enact a vision—will be focused on. In Characteristic A, the 12 principals needed to clarify their roles and responsibilities during the school closure process. The process of clarification began with a self-reflection to determine who they were as leaders. Through the process, core values and beliefs came to the forefront for the principals. These values were integral to developing a personal and professional vision for the school closure process. It is important to note that the principals needed to select an appropriate vision that did not conflict with their responsibilities as leaders in their school districts. The concept of create and enact a vision guided the 12 principals' thoughts

and actions as they led through the school closure process. The vision also guided the actions for other school community members.

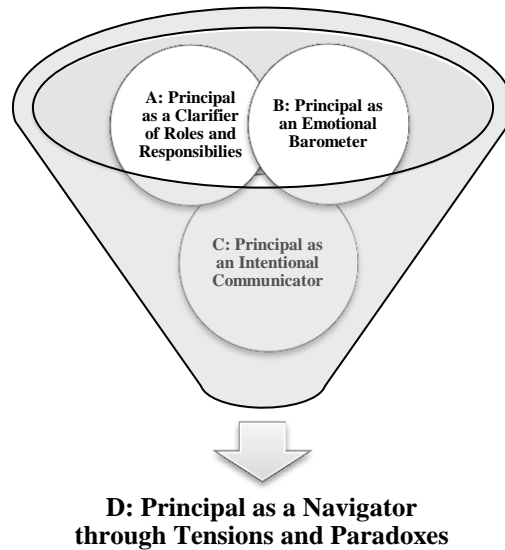


Figure 1 Leading through a School Closure Theory

Leading others to change their thoughts and actions was an integral part of Characteristic B in the role of emotional barometer. The 12 principals' vision needed to connect with people and gave a sense of purpose. As a result, the principals needed to have a strong relationship to determine what vision could be appropriate for the school community. For instance, with a community that has high anxiety, a vision of *we will get through this together* may fit. Or for a community with large amounts of fear, a vision of *hope* may be appropriate. Developing a relationship or relationships with the principals and with the vision forges trust and the sense of purpose. Critically important was the realization that the vision was for the community not a school district. Vision is a dialogue through relationships and trust, which is personalized to the community.

Vision needs to be communicated to the community, which is the interconnection to Characteristic C. The 12 principals intentionally communicated their vision through their words and actions. The vision of hope could empower people to move forward and accept the change that might lead to teachers and students seeing new opportunities at different schools. The principals connected with people and determined the emotional climate through questioning and listening. As well, by being purposeful and intentional with the message of the vision it became embedded in the language of the community. Communication, emotional trust, and vision are interconnected and flow into the concept tension of maintaining business as usual and recognize the magnitude of change.

Navigating the tensions and paradoxes of leading through a school closure process has components of the other three characteristics, the roles and responsibilities, emotional barometer, and communication. The first three Characteristics A, B, and C flow into Characteristic D and inform how the 12 principals navigated the tensions and paradoxes. The challenge of maintaining business as usual during the school closure process was difficult for the principals. Having a vision of normalcy or the best year ever helped to guide the principals and teachers to focus on student learning. Each of the principals who shared this vision found it became the foundation for navigating this tension. Communicating the sense of purpose through the vision helped the principals ensure students would not have gaps in their learning. It also created stability and focus for students as they prepared to move to new schools. A tension of focusing too much on learning and business as usual could result in a strong emotional response that this was not a usual year and people were grieving and needed emotional support. The challenge of focusing on learning and keeping the school climate stable while realizing the magnitude of the change is a concept in Characteristic D. As the principals navigated through tensions and

paradoxes, the concepts of knowing the role, reading the emotional climate and intentional communicating were guiding factors.

Discussion and Implications

The theory that emerged from this study enhances the understanding of the 12 principals' experiences and leadership insights drawn from leading through a revolutionary change (Burke, 2008). The revolutionary change of school closure was an abrupt, rapid, and powerful change for the school community. It brought forth strong emotions of grief and actions of resistance. The principals expressed the need to clearly understand their role in order to address peoples' emotions and to communicate effectively. During the process of school closure, the principals experienced leadership tensions around their role of being a school and district leader.

Characteristic A: Principal as a clarifier of roles and responsibilities.

Characteristic A in this theory is comprised of the three concepts: develop self-knowledge and understand expectations; create and enact a vision; and anticipate challenges and complexity. The first concept was stressed by principals in this study as being critical to leading through the school closure process (Principals 1, 6, 10, 11, and 12). Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2002) support this concept through their research on the wounded leader. They found that “[i]n times of crisis, questions of identity and role are usually heightened and move to the forefront” (p. 8). They explained that when leaders encounter situation of crisis and uncertainty, they must understand “what it means to be a leader” in the new context (p.11). A salient finding from Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski was that leaders' personalities influence how they are able to perform their leadership role: in essence, the importance of connecting the personal attributes of the leader to the role and responsibilities. In a school closure, the principals needed to understand two crucial aspects to lead. The first aspect was developing self-

knowledge (their strengths) and the second was the understanding of their role in the new context of the school closure process, (the on-site agent of the school board). These two understandings created clarity for the principals to enact their roles as leaders for their communities and school districts.

The tension of being a leader for the school district and for the school community emerged with the realization that they do not actually lead the school closure process. The process is a combination of the governmental regulations (Alberta School Act, 2010) and local school districts' public engagement processes and school closure policies (Basu, 2002; Reiter-Cook, 2010; Rowely, 1984; Schiffhauer, 1998). The principals do not make the decision to recommend that their school be considered by the Board of Trustees for closure. Nor do they make the decision to close the school; however, they have the responsibility to ensure the closure process is followed and that learning continues to occur.

The second concept that emerged from the study, create and enact a vision, is supported by the literature. Principals 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, and 11 developed a vision to help guide their own thoughts, words, and actions. In the literature, leaders develop a vision that is foundational to leading change (Bender, 1997; Fullan, 2008; Kotter, 1996; Kotter & Cohen, 2002).

Specifically, Kotter and Cohen (2002) stated, "A *vision* shows an end state where all the plans and strategies will eventually take you" (p. 68). Developing a vision assisted the principals in determining directions and actions. The predominant visions identified in this study were hope (Principals 2, 3, 10, and 11) and normalcy (Principals 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, and 9). Hope focused on the belief that everyone would be cared about and supported during the closure process. Kotter and Cohen (2002) proposed that leaders need to "...show people something that addresses their anxieties, that accepts their anger, that is credible in a very gut-level sense, and that evokes faith

in the vision” (p. 84). Hope can address anxiety and not challenge anger, but rather gives direction to focus faith. Normalcy manifested in the importance of maintaining a stable environment that was focused on learning and teaching, the usual business of the school. It is important to note that this is a regular vision of principals; it is not unique to the school closure process; however, maintaining this focus became more challenging for the principals because of the instability and uncertainty during the closure process.

It was important that the 12 principals communicated the vision in order to help people to follow the vision. The principals demonstrated that a strong vision needed to be clear and spoken often. For example, “the best year ever” (Principal 5), “focus on learning” (Principal 1), and “we are here for the kids” (Principal 7) as well as my own vision of “radiating possibility” were used in the school closure process. The principals’ visions became a reality through their actions and interaction with others. As Kotter and Cohen (2002) stated, leaders need to “[s]hape the vision; make it a reality” (p. 23). It was through the actions of the principals that made the vision a reality for the school community. It became the best year ever, teachers focused on learning, students felt supported, and people identified new possibility in change.

The final concept that emerged from Characteristic A was a unique change for some of the 12 principals and me, the school closure was an unpredictable change. Principal 8 had recent renovation to his school and thought it was safe from the possibility of closure. Principal 1 expressed that “the writing was on the wall.” He anticipated the closure, but he did not anticipate the difficulty of leading through it. For me, the change of the school closure was also unpredictable and unique.

In Characteristic A, principal as a clarifier of the roles and responsibilities, the 12 principals stressed the importance of clearly understanding their role in order to determine how

best lead the school community through the closure process. Deal and Peterson (1994) suggested that principals “create a personal idea of what their role means and what really matters” (p. 7). Determining what really matters could be seen in the principals’ visions, through the ways they helped their teachers understand their roles, and focused on what was best for the students.

Characteristic B: Principal as an emotional barometer.

The emotions associated with the school closure process were multifaceted and created challenges for the 12 principals. Characteristic B, principal as an emotional barometer, brings together the interconnected concepts of fostering relationships, sustaining trust, and supporting people. Kuczarski and Kuczarski (1995) proposed that fostering relationships requires three steps by the leader: the “desire to build a relationship with others”; “a willingness to spend the requisite time to do so”; and “undertaking a series of actions aimed at nurturing the relationship” (p. 191). As noted in this study, Principals 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 9, and 10 thought that their relationships with people were an important aspect of leading through a school closure. Principal 7 seemed to have a greater focus to the process of school closure than her desire to form relationships with the teachers and the community. In the second school closure she had already formed relationships and had spent time focused on taking people out for lunch and having conversations. There was less resistance from the teachers in her second closure process.

Fostering relationships was identified as crucial by the 12 principals and specific strategies they used to support people were identified throughout the interviews. Strategies included taking the time to have conversations, taking people to lunch, feeding people at meetings, providing fun treats, giving small gifts, leaving handwritten notes in people’s mailboxes, and making time to laugh together. These activities served a dual purpose: to support

people and to foster relationships during the challenges of school closure. Through these strategies people may have felt cared about. The actions the principals used helped both to build relationships and sustain trust with people during the emotional change of school closure.

Popper (2004) found that during a crisis people demonstrate “mass attachment behavior” toward a charismatic leader, in the hopes that the leader is “schooled in crisis, and hence capable of offering directional leadership, thereby reducing widespread uncertainty and fear” (p. 114). The 12 principals may not have seen themselves as charismatic leaders, yet in the context of school closure, people needed them to create certainty and alleviate fears. In a sense, the principals were focused on fostering relationship at the same time the community needed to attach and connect to the leader to reduce their uncertainty. There appears to be a mutual need to form relationships in times of crisis.

Another factor that impacted the willingness of people to form relationships with the 12 principals was the level of trust built with individuals. Principal 3 determined that trust was relational, not separate from the relationships and proposed that it was sustained by supporting people through the school closure process. Goleman (1998) defined trustworthiness as “maintaining integrity and taking responsibility for personal performance” (p. 89). Leaders are ethical, reliable, and admit to errors. Goleman suggested that the trustworthiness of leaders can increase when they “take tough, principled stands even if they are unpopular” (p. 90). During my school closure, I had tough conversations where my beliefs were challenged. For instance, I believed that our high needs students would be supported in regular high school. Initially, this belief was unpopular with my community and was challenged by teachers. I found that over time my strong unwavering belief was transferred to my community. People began to be open to

the possibility that our students could be supported and trusted that our students would be successful in their new schools.

According to Greenleaf (1977) trust is critically important to moving people forward; “trust is first. Nothing will move until trust is firm” (p. 88). A challenge for the principals was that they had built trust with their communities; however, there was mistrust with the school district and the school closure process (Principals 1 and 4). This tension of trying to build trust with the school district without damaging the trust the principals had built was challenging. One technique the principals used to build trust between the community and the school district administrations was to be transparent with information and facilitate direct communication. For example, when the teachers were upset and not trusting the teacher placement process, Principals 2, 5, and 11 had district personnel from Human Resources meet with the teachers directly. The meeting made communication transparent and direct.

Communication was also an important aspect for the concept of being an emotional barometer. Communication was used to support teachers to understand their role in the school closure process. At times, the 12 principals tried to support teachers by protecting them from making mistakes, such as from acting and speaking impulsively at inappropriate times. Principals 1, 2, 7, and 8 intentionally communicated and coached teachers about their role. They encouraged teachers to use appropriate communication channels to share any concerns they had about the school closure. By directing teachers’ to share their concerns appropriately, the principals were trying to protect them from receiving the consequences for unprofessional statements and actions. Scott (2009) stated that “A leader’s job is to engineer the types of conversations that produce epiphanies....Intelligent, spirited conversations that provide clarity and impetus for action, for change” (p. 16). These principals engineered challenging

conversations and framed the messages to create epiphanies for teachers about their new roles during the school closure process. The principals focus on supporting people through the school closure process, which they achieved through intentional communication.

Characteristic C: Principal as an intentional communicator.

Communication is critical to effective leadership (Bender, 1997; Glover, 2007; Kotter & Cohen, 2002; Scott, 2002). Communication is interconnected with other characteristics in the theory, for example, Bender (1997) stated that for a leader “communication starts with knowing yourself...” (p. 166). The importance of self-knowledge was suggested by Principals 1, 4, 10, and 12 was also foundational to clarity of the roles and responsibility in Characteristic A.

Bender suggested the foundation to clear communication is self-knowledge: “to be a clear communicator, you need to be clear about who you are and what matters to you” (p. 166). Self-knowledge helps leaders to understand their own strengths and to develop strategies to address areas of weakness in order to be stronger communicators. Principal 3 shared that she knew she liked to talk and give answers, but during the school closure, she intentionally talked less and listened more. She noted that by intentionally changing her natural approach to communication, she found people were able to develop their own solutions to problems.

Another interconnection of communication occurs with the process of listening. Scott (2002) connects listening as a relational activity between two people. This connection of communication to relationship shows the interconnection with the leader being an emotional barometer in Characteristic B. Scott noted that even with intense listening, the leader “may succeed in hearing every word, yet miss the message altogether” (p. 101). Listening goes beyond hearing the words; it is listening for the intention of the words. Covey (1989) stressed leaders need to demonstrate empathic listening: “...listen with your eyes and with your heart.

You listen for feeling, for meaning. You listen for behavior” (p. 241). Principals 3, 4, 5, 8, and 12 identified that they used body language, tone, and what was not being said when listening to people’s messages.

The majority of the principals implicitly stated that it was important to clearly understand the message being shared, and that it was equally important to be able to demonstrate that the message was heard. Heyman (1994) suggested using “formulations” to demonstrate listening. Formulations are meant to summarize the conversation by using such statements as “So what I hear you saying is...” (p. 38). During my school closure, this was a technique I used often in conversations and would try to model formulations for others. Sometimes to ensure my message was also received, I would guide the listener to also use formulations by asking, “So what have you heard me say?” These questions are crucial to ensure mutual understanding. Principals 1 and 8 identified watching teachers respond to communication as another method to determine whether their message was understood. For instance, they were intentional about communicating the role and responsibilities for teachers. Then they monitored teachers’ actions to determine if their message was understood.

Principals 2 and 12 identified the importance of asking good questions in relation to communicating intentionally. Hagstrom (1998) identified the importance of questions in moving people forward through change. Leaders need to change the mindset that they “know what is best for others”; instead, leaders guide people to determine the answers for themselves (p. 57). Hagstrom proposed that “good, honest, and direct questions” may guide people to perceive their circumstances differently (p. 57). Heyman (1994) noted that “Questions demand an answer. If we don’t hear that answer, we begin to make up reasons for its absence” (p. 42). It might be a natural response to always answer questions; thus, people might feel entitled to answers to their

questions. When principals do not have the answers to questions or they are not able to give answers, then school community members might determine they are hiding information or the information is inaccurate. As a result, the principals' lack of communication could impact the trust with the community. The times when principals give no answer might cause the community to change their thinking and become more resistant to the school closure.

Another important act of listening Principal 3 identified was that when the conversation ended, she continued to communicate by how she followed through. Scott (2002) proposed that "The conversation hasn't ended just because the conversation has ended" (p. 110) that it continues by the leaders actions. For a majority of the 12 principals, it was important to "walk the talk." They felt that matching their words and their actions was essential for maintaining trust with people. As the principals noted trust and relationships were interconnected. The principals' relationship to community members was strengthened by acknowledging people's emotions. Kotter and Cohen (2002) recommended that leaders need "...to understand what people are feeling" prior to trying to communicate (p. 101), thus reinforcing the interconnection of communication with emotions in a relationship. Scott (2002) viewed communication as the relationship between people. The relationship with people is strengthened when the leader has effective communication.

Finally, the 12 principals stressed the importance of communicating with purpose and consistency. Principals 2, 5, 7, and 10 agreed that having a single clear message that they repeated often was crucial, so that their message became the common language of the community. Kotter and Cohen (2002) suggested the importance of "keeping communication simple and heartfelt, not complex and technocratic" (p. 101). The principals ensured that their messages reinforced the purpose and vision they wanted others to follow. They were intentional

with their communication from personal conversations to writing messages to help the community to move forward.

Characteristic D: Principal as a navigator through tensions and paradoxes.

As seen in figure 1, the three characteristics of role clarity, emotional barometer, and intentional communication all flow into the fourth characteristic: principal as a navigator through tensions and paradoxes. Thus Characteristic D overlaps with some of the concepts in other characteristics. For instance, five of the 12 principals explained that they knew information and that they were not at liberty to share, which created tensions between wanting to be transparent and being required to withhold information. An example of knowing information and not being able to share it in my school closure process occurred when the school district personnel were holding meeting with the teachers and parents to inform them that our school would be recommended for closure. I knew what the information was going to be presented, but I was asked not to share this knowledge and honour the school district's processes. Fullan (1994) asserted that "[p]roductive educational change is full of paradoxes...these tensions must be reconciled into powerful new forces for growth and development" (p. 4). The 12 principals in this study experienced the leadership tensions associated with multiple paradoxes. Tensions were noted as the principals tried to help their communities to move from resisting to accepting the school closure. The tension existed between recognizing that a school closure is a significant change for a school community and trying to maintain the focus on teaching and learning, the normal business for a school. The principals discovered new issues as they tried to be instructional leaders while managing the project of the school closure. The process was laden with strong emotions, which created a tension for the principals between honouring peoples' place in the grieving process, while creating opportunity for celebrating and moving people

forward. A final tension that emerged in this study was the desire of the principals to plan and be prepared, while finding there were situations that were unexpected. The principals navigated through these tensions to guide themselves and others through the change of the school closure process.

The connection of the 12 principals navigating through the tension and paradoxes is addressed by Deal and Peterson (1994) leadership paradox theory. There are correlations between the leadership paradox theory and the theory developed through this study. The overall tension between the symbolic leadership and technical managerial roles that principals face on a daily basis are magnified during a school closure process. It is important to realize that Deal and Peterson did not take a dualistic polar approach to leadership and management; instead, they proposed that leadership and management are threads tied in a knot: “[t]his knot is interwoven with the need to manage people, time and instruction while at the same time infusing a school with passion, purpose, and meaning” (p. 41). The connections with Deal and Peterson’s technical leadership roles for principals are evident from the data in this study. The principals strategically planned, allocated resources, coordinated responsibilities, and supervised the teachers and distribution of the resources. They also addressed other technical responsibilities to resolve conflicts, analyzed complex problems to determine solutions, and ensured their community’s needs were met in the school district’s procedure for school closure. A critical technical leadership role identified by the principals was the need for intentional communication. Deal and Peterson explained that principals need to be “disseminators of information— encourages multiple channels for keeping everyone informed” (p. 21). Communication during the school closure process went beyond ensuring everyone had important information. Principal 6 pointed out that it was equally important to be available for communication and intentionally

listen for information being shared by people. Listening and questioning were just as crucial as developing clear, purposeful messages.

Deal and Peterson's (1994) symbolic leadership roles were also evident in this study. There were strong connections from this study to the principals' role as "visionary," "potter," "poet," "actor," and "healer" (p. 28). In Characteristic A, the concept of create and enact a vision emerged from the data. Principals 1, 3, 5, 9, and 11 stressed the importance that vision was a means to create a new reality. Vision guided the principals' thoughts, words, and actions. They noted that their visions guided the words and actions of their teachers. Deal and Peterson suggested that vision "identifies and communicates hopes and dreams for the future...continually refocuses the purpose and mission...." (p. 30). The principals identified that their vision helped to focus teachers on the purpose of their work. Principal 5 used the vision of the "best year ever" to help teachers find new purpose in their work. Another symbolic leadership role demonstrated by the principals was the potter, shaping culture through rituals and ceremonies. Principal 10 identified the importance of finding ways to celebrate the school's legacy for the community. Deal and Peterson proposed that school ceremonies "...intensify the social commitment to the organization and revitalize individuals for the challenges that lie ahead" (p. 34). School closure celebrations provided opportunities to honour peoples' connection to the school and their relationships with each other, which allowed them to move forward in their emotional journeys.

Communication, though identified as a technical skill by Deal and Peterson (1994) also has aspects of symbolic leadership. The 12 principals used metaphors, slogans, and historical stories as "poets" with their school communities. Principal 3 used a Gandhi quotation, Principal 10 used the phoenix, and Principal 12 had students release balloons to let go of their emotions. Communication was more than sharing information about the closure process; it reinforced

community's beliefs and values. Deal and Peterson suggested that "[c]ritical incidents provide the principal a significant opportunity to act in a social drama that can reaffirm or redirect cultural values and beliefs" (p. 36). A school closure was a significant change critical to a community; thus, it provided the principals with the opportunity to reinforce their values regarding learning and teaching. Some principals used the drama to leverage change in teaching practices. Principal 9 modeled new ways of approaching his grade configuration to show teachers that he was taking risks.

The final symbolic leadership role to show strong connections to Deal and Peterson's (1994) paradox theory was "the principal as healer" (p. 36). Characteristic B: principal as an emotional barometer is directly connected to this leadership role. Deal and Peterson determined that "unpredictable, calamitous events, like...a school closing...require recognition of deep pain, emotional comfort, and communication of hope" (p. 37). This attending to emotional need was clearly demonstrated by the 12 principals in this study who had a vision of hope, normalcy, and care for others in their communities. They reshaped culture from grief and loss to hope and possibility as they intentionally transitioned people into their new schools.

Deal and Peterson (1994) suggested that technical competencies give structure and predictability to an organization and that these are crucial when an organization is undergoing change such as school closure. The technical competencies demonstrated by principals in this study include: "planner," "resource allocator," "coordinator," "supervisor," "disseminator of information," "jurist," "gatekeeper," and "analyst" (p. 19). During a school closure principals identified that they needed to be strategic planners. Principal 1 explained he needed to accurately assess the amount of work required to empty his school of all its resources by the end of June (analyst). When teachers asked, "who is responsible for that?" he replied, "we are." He

also acted as a coordinator by determining responsibility and accountability. He set goals to determine when tasks needed to be accomplished. He explained that he was proud of his teachers when he toured district administration through his school and could see the teacher's hard work being recognized.

During a school closure the role of resource allocator changed for principals. As Principal 8 asserted, the role is opposite; instead of distributing resources within his school to ensure learning, he is distributing all his resources out to other schools in the district. During the distribution of resources, principals also acted as jurists settling conflict within their schools. For instance, they determined which teachers were able to take shared resources. As well, principals found themselves in the role of jurist to ensure resources were distributed fairly to other schools in the district.

A tension was expressed by principals in their role as supervisor as they monitored teachers' practice. Principal 1, 2, 5, 8, and 9 noted that teachers resisted the school district's new initiatives. The teachers felt overwhelmed by both the enhanced work load and the emotions they were experiencing. As Principal 1 noted earlier it was like "trying to convince the band on the deck of the Titanic to learn a new song." In comparison, some principals seized the opportunity of the school closure to foster a culture of trying new things. Principals even modeled within their own leadership practice their ability to take risks and try new things.

The roles of disseminator of information and gate keeper appeared to be interconnected. All the principals asserted that communication was crucial to people's ability to understand and process the school closure. Principals were intentional about how they shared information and, more importantly, how they listened. As Principal 3 noted, she demonstrated listening through paraphrasing information and being silent to allow the other person to move the conversation

forward. As gatekeepers, the principals communicated the importance of focusing on learning to ensure the interests of the students are not lost during the turmoil of school closure. Principals 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, and 9 stressed that they communicated the vision of “keeping the learning environment stable and normal” to ensure students continued to learn. Even though being a disseminator of information and a gatekeeper are considered by Deal and Peterson (1994) to be technical competencies, it is apparent that there are aspects of being a symbolic leader by disseminating a vision that focuses people on the interest of the community.

Deal and Peterson (1994) asserted that principals need to be strong symbolic leaders and technical managers to approach the paradoxes of the principalship. They described paradox as a paradoxical experience or perspective, which appears to be opposite to the expected while still appearing to be accurate. A paradox could be seen as a dilemma or tension that the principals encounter. Deal and Peterson identify six paradoxes in Bower’s (1998) work, which studied the reasons behind highly effective leaders. There are direct connections of their analysis to the principals’ experiences leading through the school closure process and the theory from this study. Specifically, “the paradox of role expectations,” “the paradox of concern,” and “the paradox of control” are paradoxes that appear to draw strong connections to this study (p. 44). In the first theory characteristic, the importance of having clarity of the roles and responsibilities seemed foundational to knowing how to lead through the school closure process. Deal and Peterson proposed that the paradox in the role expectations is the contrast between “[d]o what you are told; do what you are not told” (p. 45). They recommended the leaders need to create their own role expectations. The importance of clarity of the role was expressed by all of the 12 principals in this study. During the school closure process, some principals were directly told by the school district what their roles and responsibilities were, while others were not told and had

to determine what their role and responsibilities were on their own. A few principals admitted that they were only guided by the school district after they made mistakes and they determined their role by trial and error. Developing clarity in their role and responsibilities created a tension between being a leader for the school district and being a leader within their school community at the same time, especially, when there were times these two roles seemed to be in conflict with each other. The school communities wanted the principals to lead the fight to keep the school open and the school district wanted the principals to lead the closing of the school. Deal and Peterson proposed the importance of principals personally determining their own role and coming to terms with a new way of doing their work. A new way of seeing their role was expressed by the principals as “wearing two hats at the same time,” “being a communication conduit between the school district and community,” and “being an emotional barometer.” The emotional aspects of leading through the school closure process created a strong tension for principals.

In addressing the tension created by the emotional aspects of change, Deal and Peterson (1994) identified the paradox of concern, which they described as “[t]he leader is tender and cares for individuals. The leader is tough and cares about the organization” (p. 47). Though the leader cares about others, their actions may not always be perceived as caring. In support of this paradox between supporting the organization versus the individual, Blackmore (2004) proposed that principals “....are caught between expectations that they implement government policies unquestioningly and the inclination to resist them on the basis of their own professional judgement” (p. 453). There was tension between supporting the organization and doing what the principals felt was in the best interests of students and teachers. Principals 1, 4, and 8 shared a similar experience that supporting the organization by helping their teachers understand their role

in the school closure was perceived by teachers as not caring; however, the principals' actions demonstrated that they cared for their teachers and did not want them to be disciplined for not using the proper communication channels. Supporting people was a concept in Characteristic B. The principals identified the three critical areas were relationships, trust, and support were needed to demonstrate caring for individuals; however, at times they had to demonstrate toughness by holding people accountable for upholding the directives of the school district.

A final connection identified by Deal and Peterson (1994) is the paradox of control, as they contrast “[t]he leader is in control. The leader does not control” (p. 47). The leaders need to release control in order to remain in control. Fullan (2008) cautioned that “[p]robably the two greatest failures of leaders are indecisiveness in times of urgent need for action and dead certainty that they are right in times of complexity.” These two paradoxes are connected in that leaders feel they that must be certain and in control; however, if the situation is complex leaders need to recognize that uncertainty means they may never have control over all aspects of the change. Even though the 12 principals were not part of the decision to close their schools, they were ultimately responsible to help inform the decision and put the decision into action. The challenge for the principals was that in the end, they were accountable and responsible for how the process of school closure occurred. This high accountability may challenge principals to let go of control and shared the work. Principals 1, 2, 5, 9, 10, and 11 worked to empower people to be part of and to see themselves in the change to enable them to move forward. The principals needed to release and shared control. Another challenge for the principals was that they focused on planning and being prepared and yet the unexpected still occurred a concept in Characteristic D. The connection to self-knowledge during the unexpected times was evident in how the principals addressed these unexpected occurrences.

Deal and Peterson (1994) suggested that a school closure has both aspects of “function and ritual” (p. 82). It requires principals be both the technical managers and the symbolic leaders. Deal and Peterson noted that technical managers need to be efficient and effective in their planning to distribute teachers, students, and resources. At the same time, a school closing goes beyond the need for strong technical skills:

The closing of a school is also a powerful cultural experience. Moving to a new school is a wrenching cultural transition. Staff members need to deal with the grief and loss of the old school...Properly orchestrated, wakes, funerals, mourning periods, and memorials help people to let go and move on emotionally and spiritually, as well as physically.
(p. 83)

The tension of honouring the loss and grieving process with the need to move forward through celebrations was identified by the 12 principals in Characteristic D. Eleven of the 12 principals organized a formal celebration to help people through the grieving process. The one principal who did not organize a formal celebration found that the alumni of the school organized their own celebration after the school closed. The need to create celebration to allow people to reconnect and say goodbye to the school was powerful. The tension of knowing when and how to celebrate drew upon the principals’ ability to accurately read the emotional climate. To intentionally communicate the purpose for the celebration seemed critical for the principals. A facet to this paradox not identified by Deal and Peterson was that school closure creates an enhanced workload for teachers on top of their already stressful work. Planning celebrations takes time and effort. A tension expressed by the principals was the desire to have a celebration for the community to help them to move forward, but at the same time not wanting to add to increased teachers’ workload.

Navigating through these tensions and paradoxes required the 12 principals to have strong self-knowledge within the role, perception of the emotional climate of the community, and intentional communication skills. The tensions and paradoxes identified in this study are supported by Deal and Peterson's (1994) leadership paradox theory of the interwoven aspects of symbolic leaders and technical managers. It is important to examine the connections of the theory from this study with other theories in order to understand how this study is connected to the theoretical literature. The school closure process could be a revolutionary change for a school community (Burke, 2008). The heightened degree of change caused strong emotional responses and created uncertainty and mistrust that the principals needed to navigate through. The tensions that emerged throughout the school closure process as the principals tried to help move people from resistance to acceptance. The tension of being a symbolic leader and a technical manager was seen in the concept of instructional leadership and project manager. The connection of the theory that emerged from this study to existing literature demonstrates that the school closure process is a complex change for all community members and the leaders.

Revisiting Assumptions

It is important to readdress the four assumptions from Chapter 1 to verify whether they held true (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). The first assumption, that principals are leaders within their schools and school systems, held true. Each of the 12 principals recognized they occupied a leadership role within the school community and the school district. These two leadership roles created tensions for the principals between supporting the community and sustaining the school district's initiative to close the school.

The second assumption, that principals have experience leading change, held partially true. The 12 principals had a variety experience leading as a principal. Three participants were

new to the role of the principal and did not have time to lead change in this role prior to their school closure processes; however, they did have leadership experiences through their role as an assistant principal. Importantly, each participant mentioned ways they had improved instruction either during the school closure or outside of that year. The principals recognized that change regularly occurs in education, and overall, they had positive attitudes toward change.

The third assumption, that the grounded theory research method used for this study would lead to deeper understanding of leading through the school closure process, stood up as well. A theory for leading through a school closure was developed using the grounded theory method. The process of coding identified concepts and then connected them together to form characteristics. The four characteristics that evolved from this study revealed the principal to be a clarifier, an emotional barometer, an intentional communicator, and a navigator. These characteristics were developed from the participant's own words shared in the interviews. Numerous quotes were used to demonstrate the connectedness of the characteristics to the concepts, which were based on the participant perspective.

The final assumption, that participants would share their experiences and insights honestly, genuinely, and perceptively, appeared to hold true as well. To the person, the principals who chose to engage in this study were frank and open during the interviews. The participants shared their personal feelings and thoughts about how the school closure process impacted them personally and professionally.

Recommendations

Based on the data collected and analyzed in this study the following 12 recommendations for school principals, school district administration, and future study are made:

Recommendations for principals.

1. *Achieve clarity*—Principals should reflect on their areas of strengths and growth to develop self-knowledge as leaders. It is recommended that principals develop a personal vision to guide their actions to lead their community, which continues to focus on learning. They should develop ways for the community to celebrate;
2. *Become an emotional barometer*—Principals should model self-care, find a support network, and distribute the workload. The importance of fostering relationships within a school community and within the school district to sustain trust is essential to supporting people. It is recommended that principals develop a support plan for their community, which may include personal debriefing conversations, supplying food and tokens of appreciation, and easing workloads;
3. *Communicate intentionally*—Principals should listen to words and actions, repeat messages in a variety of mediums, and ask others to give feedback to ensure the message intended is the message received; and
4. *Strategically navigate through tensions and paradoxes*—Principals should use their self-knowledge and core values to navigate the tensions: guiding people through resistance to acceptance; maintaining business as usual during an enormous change of school closure; balancing being an instructional leader and a project manager; celebrating while grieving; and being prepared for the unexpected.

Recommendations for school district administration.

5. *Assist with creating clarity*—School districts should: develop and communicate clear expectations for principals; be transparent about the fact that principals work for the school district; and guide principals to understand their role and why this role is

important. It is key to create a space for questions and connect principals with mentors (other principals who have led through a school closure process);

6. *Support emotions*—School districts should help to create a legacy for the school in the school district. It is recommended that school districts listen to principals’ suggestions about the needs of the community, meeting times, and interpreters. It is important to recognize the extra time that principals give, by pay or lieu time for summer hours;
7. *Maintain communication*—School districts should ensure that communication from the district is timely and accurate, that there is a process to prepare principals for questions and emotions they may encounter, and that they offer communication training to assist with media and challenging conversations. It is recommended that school districts provide exemplars of letters and talking points to principals; and
8. *Assist with the navigation through tensions and paradoxes*—School districts should supply supports from human resources, distribution services, and finance department. It is recommended that there be flexibility for principals when it comes to implementing new district initiatives. It is important to learn from the front line leaders by debriefing principals who have completed a school closure process.

Recommendations for further study.

The following recommendations are for further study in the area of school closure and leadership. These recommendations are made to enhance understanding of leading change as well as addressing other gaps noticed in the literature focused on the school closure process.

9. To take up the limitations of this study and to address potential researcher biases, a similar study should be carried out to determine the degree to which the same or similar findings would be discovered;

10. This study focused on the perspectives and experiences of 12 principals from large urban school districts. An area for further study is to explore rural school principals' perspectives and experiences;
11. This study used the principles of the grounded theory methodology. A different methodology approach could be an area of focus for further study; and
12. A final area for further study could be to examine the leadership challenges of integrating students from the closed school. This study explored leading during the complex change of the school closure process. Future research could focus on exploring the impact of new students on the receiving schools and building culture to bring cohesiveness.

Researcher's Reflections

As this study draws to a close, I want to reflect on my journey through this research process. This descriptive study began with the hope of shedding light on leading through complex change, specifically, principals leading through the school closure process. My intention was to bring voice to other principals' experiences and analyze those experiences to uncover the insights about leadership that developed from leading through the school closure process. I am grateful to the 12 principals who so willingly gave their time to this study. With each interview, my reflection on my own experiences and the participant's experiences grew deeper. The wisdom and perceptiveness of these leaders has addressed the gap in the literature about the principals' experience of leading through the school closure process. Even though this study hopes to inform other principals who are about to or who are leading through a school closure process, it is important to recognize that "at the end of the day, every journey will be different" (Principal 9). However, exploring the 12 participant's different experiences provided the data necessary to develop a theory for leading through the school closure process. The value

of this study may not be the specific experiences of the 12 principals, but in its function as a catalyst for personal and profession reflection in principals facing the school closure process.

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APPENDIX A: LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

Date

Dear [Principal],

My name is Leta Youck-McGowan; I am a graduate student with the Faculty of Education at the University of Calgary. I am conducting research in the field of Educational Leadership under the supervision of Dr. xxxxx. This letter will describe my research project for you and invites you to consider participating. My project will explore the experiences of principals who have recently led a school community through a closure process. The title of the study is *Leading through a school closure: Principals' insights developed about leadership*.

Guiding a community through the school closure process is one of the most challenging leadership experiences for a school principal. I believe your insights on leadership and your experiences have the potential to help others understand and lead complex change.

Participant's anonymity and confidentiality of information is a priority for this research. Participation is voluntary and you can choose to withdraw anytime. Details about these procedures will be explained in the consent form. This study meets the ethical guidelines for both the University of Calgary and your school board.

Through a series of interviews and a short questionnaire, ten to fifteen principals from two to four urban school boards will be asked to reflect on their leadership experiences during a school closure. Should you choose to be a part of my study, the reflection and interview process may help to inform your own leadership practice and further the understanding of other school leaders.

If you wish to participate in this study, please return the attached sheet in the self addressed envelope or call me collect at (403) xxx-xxxx. Please call if you have any questions about this study. Thank you for taking the time to consider this request. I look forward to meeting you should you decide to participate in this study.

Sincerely,

Leta M. Youck-McGowan, Doctoral Student, University of Calgary
Phone number: (403) xxx-xxxx email: xxxxxxxxx

Contact information for: Dr. xxxxxx, Supervisor, University of Calgary
Phone number: (403) xxx-xxxx email: xxxxxxxxx

Please return this form to Leta Youck-McGowan by [date]

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

I wish to be contacted by: _____ phone
_____ email

_____ I would **like to be part** of your research study in the area of Educational Leadership.

_____ I would **like more information** on your research study in the area of Educational Leadership.

_____ I am **not able to participate** in your study in the area of Educational Leadership.

Please feel free to contact me at (403) xxx-xxxx or xxxxx if you have any questions. All contact information will be kept confidential.

APPENDIX B: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Leading through a school closure: Principals' insights developed about leadership

Location: _____ Identification Code: _____

Date: _____ Time start: _____ Time completed: _____

Professional Information

How long were you a principal before leading your school through a school closure?

How long were you a principal at the school which was going through the school closure?

Gender

Closed School Context

School level (grades)

Number of years the school had operated

Number of students

Number of staff

First Semi- Structured Interview (Context and Professional History)

1. Were there any unique attributes of your school community or school closure (ie. Parental involvement, socioeconomic factors, businesses)?
2. How did you become aware your school might be considered for closure?
3. What, within your history of experiences, do you believe was valuable to you for leading through a school closure?
4. Was there any literature or training that guided your leadership practice through the school closure?
5. What supports did you receive during the school closure process?
6. What support would have liked to receive or would have been helpful to you?
7. Explain Gross's (2008) Turbulence Degree Gage – light, moderate, severe, and extreme. Which degree of turbulence do you feel is experienced during a school closure? Why?
8. Can you explain the policies and laws as related to the school closure process?
9. Did you find that there were stages or phases to the school closure? If so what were these stages?

Second Semi- Structured Interview (The Details of the Experience)

1. What have you experienced in terms of leading through a school closure?
2. What contexts or situations may have influenced or affected your experiences during your school closure?

3. Please describe a situation you where you felt success as a leader during your school closure?
4. What you believe contributed to your these successes?
5. Describe a situation where you felt it was difficult a challenge for you to lead during your school closure?
6. How did you address these difficulties? Reflecting this difficulty is there things you would have done differently?
7. What communication strategies did you use during your school closure process?
8. What emotional support strategies did you use during your school closure process?
9. Did you encounter resistance? What did the resistance look like? Where did it come from? Why do you think occurred?
10. How did you address the resistance you encountered?

Third Semi- Structured Interview (Leadership Insights)

1. Are there any other leadership experiences that were unique to the school closure process that you did not anticipate “curve balls”?
2. Did you have a personal leadership goal/vision during your school closure, if so can you describe it?
3. What was leading through a school closure like for you?
4. What does it mean to you to be a leader now after leading through a school closure process?
5. Given some of the leadership difficulties challenges identified where there any ethical tensions you encountered? How did you resolve these tensions?
6. What are your personal beliefs about change? Did leading through a school closure impact your beliefs about change?
7. In your reflection questionnaire you identified the following advice.... Why did these points seem important to you? Or what advice would you give a principal who just found out his or her school community will be going through the closure process?
8. From your experience, what role does the school principal play in the school closure process?
9. If you were to paint a picture of a leading a school closure what would it be? Or is there an analogy or metaphor that that you would use to describe a school closure?
10. Are there questions that you would have liked to be asked?
11. How are you today?
12. What has this interview process been like for you?
13. Is there any other information you would like to share with me?

APPENDIX C: THANK YOU LETTER

Date

Dear [Principal],

Thank you for your participation in my educational leadership study. I appreciate your willingness to share your time and insights with me during your interviews. The purpose of my research is to explore the experiences and insights of principals who have led a school community through a closure process.

The data collected during your interviews and reflection questionnaire will contribute to a better understanding of the leadership experiences during a school closure. Your insights on leadership and your experiences have the potential to help others to understand and lead complex challenging change.

As mentioned in our initial meeting, any personal information pertaining to you will be kept confidential. After data collection and analysis, I may share the results with the research community through seminars, conferences, and journal articles. The results will also be published in my dissertation. My goal is to complete my study by September 2013. If you indicated your interest in receiving a brief summary of my study on your consent form, I will send you the summary after this time.

Should you have any questions, please contact me by the phone number or email listed at the bottom of the page. You may also contact my supervisor, Dr. xxxxx, to answer your questions.

Again, my sincere appreciation for the time and insights you shared through your participation in this educational leadership study.

Sincerely,

Leta M. Youck-McGowan, Doctoral Student, University of Calgary
Phone number: (403) xxx-xxxx email: xxxxx

Contact information for: Dr. xxxxxx, Supervisor, University of Calgary
Phone number: (403) xxx-xxxx email: xxxxx

