University of Alberta

A Case of Leadership Development

by

Donna Fay Mayer

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Dedication

To

My parents, Katherine and Nicholas Mayer.

Your life paths did not lead you through the halls of higher education, even though

you would have embraced such an opportunity. This degree is a testament to the

unwavering support you provided in all my endeavors.

My success is your success. Thank you Mom and Dad.

Abstract

The purpose of my doctoral research was to address the question, **"**How have school improvement strategies been instrumental in school and school system leadership development?" Several authors have indicated that the strength of school leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on student learning and achievement (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, &Wahlstrom, 2004; Levin, 2008; Pont, Nusche, & Moorman, 2009). However, also reported in the literature is the notion that education is faced with a situation where it may be increasingly difficult to find enough talented and qualified people to fill leadership vacancies (Alberta Education, 2010; Levin, 2008; OECD, 2008). My intention in conducting this research was to make an original contribution to the understanding of leadership development and hence the literature, through an investigation of the province-wide, government-funded *Alberta Initiative for School Improvent(AISI)* which had been in place since 1999 and received national and international attention as evidenced in the writing of scholars (Hargreaves, Crocker, Davis, Sahlberg, Sumara, & Shirley, 2009; Levin, 2010; Whelan, 2009).

Within the case-study methodology, and using purposeful sampling, 19 participants from across Alberta were interviewed over three months so as to explore multiple experiences and perspectives. These participants experienced leadership in a variety of ways that had not been available to them prior to the inception of *AISI*. Interview data were supported by document review for historical information as well as my researcher's journal that provided both chronological documentation and my personal reflections throughout the research.

Data analysis and interpretations of how *AISI* leaders believed various actions, events and experiences prepared them to fulfill formal leadership roles resulted in the construction of three

major themes: Developing Skills, Expanding Understanding of the Work Context, and Transitioning to Action. Based on research findings, this study concludes with implications and recommendations for theory along with policy and practice directed at institutions that develop teachers, at school systems and at schools, as well as possibilities for further research relative to school and school system leadership development.

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To the participants in my study who willingly and enthusiastically participated in my research. Sharing your experiences has enhanced the understanding of leadership development that occurred through the *Alberta Initiative for School Improvement* and contributed to its legacy.

To my family, friends and colleagues who cheered me on and listened to my woes. I could never have achieved my goal without you!

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INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Leadership is often held up as a critical component for student success (Pont, Nusche, & Moorman, 2008; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). Several authors have indicated that school leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on student learning and achievement (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Levin, 2008; Ponte, Nusche, and Moorman, 2009). As a result of their research, Scott and Webber (2008) concluded that the most important purpose of leadership is to facilitate high-quality teaching and learning. Elmore (2008) boldly stated that leadership *is* the practice of improvement. Pointed out by Hall and Hord (2011) the search for understanding leadership has been vast in "a never-ending quest to answer the age-old question of how leaders make a difference." (p. 117) All of these statements about leadership emphasize its importance for student achievement. It is my contention that this conundrum between theory and practice makes the study of leadership a worthwhile activity. Furthermore, Alberta is an ideal context because the *Alberta Initiative for School Improvement* (*AISI*) created opportunities for numerous teachers to experience leadership in a variety of ways that were not previously available to them.

Purpose of the Study

During my experience working for the School Research and Improvement Branch in the Ministry of Education (2003-2010), I noted that over time, many teachers and leaders who had involvement within *AISI* often accepted more formal leadership roles. The trend intrigued me and led me to my central research question, "How have school improvement strategies been instrumental in school and school system leadership development?" I questioned and wondered,

what were the experiences of educators involved in *AISI* relative to leadership? This led me to the first sub-question that my study explored. What were the actions, events, and experiences of participating educators during their time as leaders in *AISI* that led them to more formal leadership roles? The second sub-question: In what ways did these informal *AISI* leaders believe that their experiences in *AISI* leadership prepared them to fulfill their more formalized leadership role?

Utilizing a qualitative case study methodology (Yin, 2009), these research questions were examined through an investigation of the province-wide, government-funded *AISI* which had been in place since 1999. This initiative received national and international attention as evidenced in the writing of scholars who indicated that *AISI* is an important world-class strategy that deserves attention for what it can teach others about large-scale school improvement (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; Levin, 2010; Whelan, 2009).

To date, one multiple perspectives review of *AISI* has been conducted, involving external experts from Canadian contexts outside of Alberta as well as internationally. The authors of the review, *The Learning Mosaic: Multiple Perspectives Review of AISI* (Hargreaves, Crocker, Davis, Sahlberg, Sumara, & Shirley, 2009) concluded:

> *AISI* constitutes a world-class and world-leading example of a system-wide educational strategy. This strategy, designed by Alberta Education and its partners, inspires teachers and administrators. It enhances their professional growth and enthusiasm. (p. 91)

My study investigated *AISI* leadership experiences across Alberta from the perspective of 19 participants who were individually interviewed. There is an extensive body of evidence reported in the literature regarding the importance of leadership for student success, along with the current interest in the study of leadership and its effects on student achievement. I believe that

findings from this study are timely, important and make a positive contribution to the understanding of leadership development and to the literature.

Definition of Terms

Imperative to the understanding of the research questions and this study is the definition of several key terms that I will use throughout my dissertation. The specific terms are school improvement, school improvement strategy, school system, leadership, instructional leadership *AISI* leader, principal and leadership development. These definitions are provided in order to clarify and establish parameters and limitations of my study.

School Improvement

Hopkins (2001), arguably one of the original proponents of school improvement, outlined two aspects of the phenomenon. He said that school improvement aims to enhance student outcomes and also strengthen the school's capacity for managing change and improvement. As well, he indicated that school improvement is concerned with raising student achievement through focusing on teaching-learning processes and the conditions that support them.

School Improvement Strategy

As defined above, school improvement pays attention to the conditions necessary for improvement at both the classroom and institutional level. The *AISI* Framework (1999) stated that school improvement is not a "quick fix" activity, but rather an ongoing process in an attempt to promote long-term efficiency and effectiveness, not short-term changes. In understanding how to define a school improvement strategy, I found to be useful the definition from *IT Strategy* (2007*)* retrieved from http://it.toolbox.com/wiki/index.php/Definition_IT_Strategy Adapting this definition, school improvement strategy in the context of my study will mean a longer term set of

activities (three to five years) that are described in a framework that outlines what a province, state or country would like to attain within a particular time frame regarding their public education system.

School System

In the Province of Alberta *School Act*, *Revised Statutes of Alberta 2000, Chapter S–3,* the terms division, district or system are all used. Taken from the Alberta Education *Guide to Education* (2010-2011):

> The term "school system" includes school jurisdictions, accredited-funded private schools and private early childhood services (ECS) operators. "School jurisdiction" refers to an Alberta public or separate school district, school division, regional division, Francophone Regional system, or charter school. (p. iv)

These definitions are very specific to the Alberta context. Throughout this dissertation I will use the term *school system* to mean an Alberta public or separate school district, school division, regional division, Francophone Regional system, charter school, accredited-funded private school and private early childhood services (ECS) operators. It is my perception that within the literature, *school system* was used predominantly and I believe is a term that will be more universally understood by readers both within and beyond Alberta.

Leadership

Levin (2008) indicated the ambiguity of leadership when he said that leadership is one of those things that we know is vitally important, yet it is very hard to describe in such a way that actually helps people to know how to do it in particular circumstances (p.171). Citing Yukl (1998), leadership has been defined in terms of traits, behaviour, influence, interaction patterns,

role relationships, and occupation of an administrative position. Yukl (2002) provided a definition that was useful to me as I planned and conducted my study: "Leadership involves a process whereby intentional influence is exerted by one person over other people to guide, structure and facilitate the activities and relationships in a group or organization." (p. 3) Spillane (2005) added that leadership is the activities tied to the core work of the organization that are designed by organizational members to influence the motivation, knowledge, affect, and practices of other organizational members. Most of the variations between models of leadership relate to who exerts the influence, how the influence is exerted, and the purpose for the exercise of influence (Yukl, 2002).

In the *AISI Handbook for Cycle 4* (2008) these notes are provided regarding leadership: "Leadership occurs at all levels and should be shared. Building a common vision, and a committed team, establishing partnerships, creating high-achieving learning environments, and leading and managing change are all aspects of successful leadership." (p. 8) Leithwood (2010), a noted Canadian scholar in the field, discussed two core functions of educational leadership: (a) providing direction, and (b) exercising influence. Taking the features from the definitions of these various scholars, when I use the term leadership I will be referring to a process of providing direction to individuals and exercising influence on others in order to achieve the core work of schools and school systems.

Instructional Leadership

For my research I chose to further define instructional leadership as a more focused area within the broader category of leadership. Reflecting current thinking in the Alberta context the *Principal Quality Practice Guideline (2009)* is a framework for school leadership that includes seven dimensions of principal quality practice. As stated in this document, "The principal is an

accomplished teacher who practices quality leadership in the provision of opportunities for optimum learning and development of all students in the school." (*Principal Quality Practice Guideline*, 2009, p. 4) "The instructional leader makes instructional quality the top priority of the school and everything else revolves around enhancement of learning." (Phillips, 2010, p. 2) Thus, for purposes of this study, instructional leadership will be referring to a process of providing direction and exercising influence on the actions of others in order to achieve the desired outcome of enhanced student learning.

AISI Leader

As a result of *AISI* a number of teachers in Alberta moved from classroom teaching into leadership roles. These roles had not previously existed in the usual structure of school systems in Alberta. The infusion by the Alberta Government of additional funds for school improvement led to the creation of positions that provided leadership for various aspects of *AISI* projects. I examined the clearinghouse of project proposals and annuals reports which have been archived since the inception of *AISI* and are publicly available on the *AISI* website. I noted that the duties of these leaders included such activities as management, planning and delivering professional development, as well as collecting evidence of success related to *AISI* projects. In these reports written by school system personnel many different titles were given to these *AISI* leaders. However throughout this study I use "*AISI* leader" to mean any teacher who had as part of their work assignment, dedicated time outside of classroom teaching duties, to work specifically in the area of school improvement within *AISI*.

Principal

In the Province of Alberta *School Act, Revised Statutes of Alberta 2000, Chapter S–3*

"principal" means a teacher designated as a principal or acting principal under this Act (p. 13).

Section 20 of this *School Act* outlines the requirements and obligations for a principal by stating

that a principal of a school must:

    (a) provide instructional leadership in the school;

    (b) ensure that the instruction provided by the teachers employed in the school is
          i. consistent with the courses of study and education programs prescribed, approved or
         ii. authorized pursuant to this Act;

    (c) evaluate or provide for the evaluation of programs offered in the school;

    (d) ensure that students in the school have the opportunity to meet the standards of

        education set by the Minister;

    (e) direct the management of the school;

    (f) maintain order and discipline in the school and on the school grounds and during

        activities sponsored or approved by the board;

    (g) promote co-operation between the school and the community that it serves;

    (h) supervise the evaluation and advancement of students;

    (i) evaluate the teachers employed in the school;

    (j) subject to any applicable collective agreement and principal's contract of employment,

       carry out those duties that are assigned to the principal by the board in accordance

       with the regulations and the requirements of the school council and the board.

In my study I will use the term principal to specify anyone who is formally designated as

principal with accompanying responsibilities and duties. I will use the term principal to also

include all formal school leaders including acting principal, associate principal, assistant principal, vice principal or other similar titles.

Leadership Development

For the purpose of my study, leadership development means both formal and informal processes that build and strengthen individual knowledge, skills, and abilities that will contribute to improving learning outcomes for students and are associated with formal leadership roles such as the principal. Although the literature discusses leadership development as a continuum from initial training to induction to inservice programs (Burngardt, 1996; Bush, 2009), my study will focus on development prior to designation as a formal leader.

Positioning the Researcher

In a qualitative study the researcher is the instrument for data collection and is central to the research process as she listens to the stories that people tell and pays attention to and reflects on her own perceptions (Mertens, 2010). By providing a brief synopsis of my experience in the field of education and my background relative to the research study the reader will have some understanding of my closeness to the topic along with the assumptions and potential biases that I bring to the study.

In my career as an educator I have had a variety of experiences and roles that took me into large city, small city and rural locations. I have been a teacher at the primary through to high school levels in regular classrooms and for special education programming that operated within an inclusive education philosophy. In addition I had the opportunity to serve as a school-based administrator in both elementary (K-6) and junior high (7-9) schools where I was responsible for over-seeing the programming for special needs students, among other duties. Perhaps these

personal experiences were an underlying reason for my passion for the improvement of learning for all students and my intrigue with the leadership phenomenon that I felt was apparent in *AISI*.

My experience with education was further enhanced through my work as a school trustee, elected as a representative on a local school board in a school system in rural Alberta. The School Act legislated in Alberta delegates the responsibility for a system of governance to locally elected school boards that have certain obligations to perform and certain powers to carry out their tasks. The Alberta School Boards Association (2010) describes school boards and trusteeship in this way:

> The philosophy of school board governance is that government is most effective when it is
>
> close to the people being governed. Historically, community residents have elected
>
> trustees to boards to act for the legislature in their local schools. (p. 19)

During my experience as a trustee I was actively engaged in the policy side of education and believe that it expanded my own understanding of the larger context of education in Alberta.

The final piece in my formal career to date has been my involvement with *AISI* both within my local school system and provincially. When this initiative was announced in late winter of 1999, I was excited by the opportunity to extend my own philosophical stance regarding school improvement through participation in this initiative. At the outset, I was involved in the planning process for my school system. Working along-side teacher colleagues, researching both prevalent school improvement notions and specific strategies for incorporation into school improvement projects, I planned and wrote one project proposal which was approved by Alberta Education for implementation and is available at

https://phoenix.edc.gov.ab.ca/login/*AISI*/Forms/*AISI*Project_PublicPrintout.cfm Subsequently I was appointed by my school system as project leader for this literacy project and thus became an

AISI leader. Seconded by the Alberta Ministry of Education to work within the School Research and Improvement Branch from 2003-2010, I engaged in a provincial leadership role of coaching, mentoring and monitoring in order to support *AISI*.

I believe that being associated with this large-scale school improvement initiative and the variety of personal experiences as a teacher, school-based administrator, school board trustee and School Improvement Manager ideally position me to explore how *AISI*, one large scale improvement strategy, has contributed to leadership development. Describing key aspects in my background will enable the reader to understand the values that I hold as both an educator and a researcher. I began my study with the following assumptions about leadership and its development.

Assumptions

- Leadership is important for student learning.
- The experiences of *AISI* leaders influenced their transition from the *AISI* leadership role into formal leadership positions.
- *AISI,* one school improvement strategy, which was originally designed to increase student outcomes and performance, contributed to leadership development.
- *AISI* leaders that participated in the research were involved in influencing change and as such were change leaders.

Setting the Study Context

I concur with the view of Harris and Young (2000) that school improvement programs are a product of the ideology of the time. Situated within a market driven economy in Alberta in 1999, the vision for Alberta Education was to have the best learning system in the world (Alberta

Education Business Plan 1999-2002). In support of this vision, *AISI* was announced in late winter of 1999.

The implementation and evolution of *AISI* formed a part of the educational landscape in Alberta for more than 12 years. Stated in the 1999 *Framework for AISI*, "targeted funding for *AISI* is provided to school systems on a per pupil basis for the purpose of improving student learning and performance by encouraging teachers, parents and the community to work collaboratively to introduce innovative and creative initiatives." (p. i)

Over $700 million dollars were allocated to *AISI* from its inception in 2000 to its conclusion April 1, 2013. This funding came in addition to yearly base funding and could only be used for three-year, school improvement projects that were required to receive Alberta Education approval before implementation at the local level. In meeting local needs and circumstances, each school system decided which areas of student learning and performance were priorities, how to go about improving these areas (new teaching strategies, student support, etc.), and how to provide evidence that improvement has taken place for student learning and performance (Alberta Education, 2011).

Alberta Education established a partnership consisting of six key educational stakeholder organizations that were tasked with the design, development, implementation, administration and evaluation phases and processes throughout the duration of *AISI* (Alberta Education, 1999). Alberta Education, the Alberta School Boards Association, the College of Alberta School Superintendents, the Alberta School Councils Association, the Association of School Business Officials of Alberta, and the Alberta Teachers Association comprised the original partnership. In 2000 the partnership was expanded to include as the seventh partner the three major Alberta universities: the University of Alberta, the University of Calgary and the University of

Lethbridge. This group of seven stakeholder organizations is referred to as the Education Partners

Steering Committee (EPSC). Each of these partner organizations represents distinct beliefs,

values and assumptions about education, along with corresponding agendas for action.

A key role for EPSC was the joint development of a guiding framework (1999) that became the

policy document for *AISI*. The complete Framework is available at:

http://education.alberta.ca/media/821126/*AISI*%20framework%20final%20paper-dec%201999%20.pdf

The overarching goal for *AISI*, developed by the *AISI* Education Partners in 1999 and

revised in the *AISI Handbook for Cycle 4* was, "to improve student learning through initiatives

that enhance student engagement and performance and reflect the unique needs and circumstances

of each school system." (Alberta Education, 2008, p. 2) In order to access funding, The

Framework document (Alberta Education, 1999) required that project proposals reflect dominant

thinking in the research and literature on improvement. Over 2000 improvement projects were

approved and implemented in Alberta school systems with some of the more prevalent project

themes including literacy, numeracy, student assessment, personalized learning and differentiated

instruction, critical thinking and problem solving, along with student engagement.

School systems were required to submit annual reports indicating successes and

challenges in the school improvement work within their projects. By mining the data in both the

project proposals and the *AISI* Project Annual Reports (APARs) Alberta Education staff identified

trends that have emerged for education and learning in Alberta. In the most recent report for *AISI*,

Improving Student Learning: Provincial Report for Cycle 3 (2006-2009) key findings are

summarized in this way:

> Of all the changes *AISI* has brought about, culture is the one most often cited by its
>
> participants. *AISI* has provided the means, the impetus, and the opportunities for

educators to become partners in their work. Funding provides the resources to make

change possible. Annual workshops and conferences create opportunities for cross-district

collaboration among coordinators, lead teachers, administrators, and others involved in

changing education to improve teaching and learning. *AISI* reports document the

knowledge gained through trying new approaches to teaching and learning, measuring the

intended outcomes, reflecting on affective and behavioural dimensions of change, and

adopting what works. (p. 100)

AISI provides a practical, field-based context for my study that is intended to go beyond

leadership theory into the particular processes and activities that were responsible for change and

improved student outcomes.

Methodology Overview

My aim in conducting this study was to explore how school improvement strategies have

been instrumental in school and school system leadership development during the government

funded *AISI*. Insights and understanding were gained through my examination of the experiences

and perspectives of educators in Alberta who were in an *AISI* leadership role. To use a rather

simplistic notion of qualitative research as presented by Mertens (2010) I wanted to co-create a

holistic picture of leadership development in the Alberta context using words rather than

quantifiable measures. As such, the constructivist paradigm aligns well with my personal

research objectives and assumptions previously outlined.

Bassey (2007) indicated that the research paradigm sets the context for the investigator's

study and underpins the research actions. Combining ideas from Mertens (2005) and Bassey

(2007) I have come to understand a paradigm as the overarching view about the world, including

philosophical assumptions about the nature and truth of knowledge which underpins the

researcher's thinking and actions. Basic assumptions guiding the constructivist paradigm are that knowledge is socially constructed through interactions between the researcher and participants rather than discovered as an objective truth, and that researchers should attempt to understand the complex world of lived experience from the perspectives of those who lived it (Mertens, 2005). My interest in this paradigm was furthered by Mertens' (2005) notion that the researcher's goal is to understand the multiple constructions of meaning and knowledge. I will further justify the selection of this paradigm in Chapter Three, Research Design

Consistent with these philosophical assumptions of the constructivist paradigm, I selected the case study methodology and was primarily guided by Yin (2009) for the design of my research into school and school system leadership development. I believe that the constructivist paradigm and the case study approach supported my aim to examine the actions, events, beliefs and experiences of *AISI* leaders from their perspectives in order to contribute to the understanding of leadership development.

The methods employed to address the research questions were in-depth, semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Public policy documents through Alberta Education, The Alberta Teachers Association, the College of Alberta School Superintendents and the three major universities in Alberta were examined to chronicle historical events of *AISI*. Detailed information and documentation relative to *AISI*, archived from 1999, is available at

http://education.alberta.ca/admin/*AISI*.aspx

As part of the design of my study, I conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews. The approach to semi-structured interviewing is conversational rather than structured (Yin, 2009). Yin (2009) indicated that interviews enable the researcher to ask participants for facts of the matter under study as well as their opinions. I was particularly drawn to Yin's idea that an

interview is a discussion of participants' personal leadership experiences and data gathered allowed for co-construction of their reality. I believe that semi-structured, in-depth interviews and document review provided me with rich data for this doctoral study. Chapter Three provides more extensive detail on the study design.

Delimitations of the Study

Delimitations refer to the boundaries that serve to limit the scope of the study. The following points outline the delimitations of the study and were determined prior to the research being conducted.

1. The first delimitation is the choice of the research question which was based on a hunch that *AISI* developed leadership capacity. Other research questions could arise from the study of *AISI* but I chose to focus on the question of leadership development.

2. The research study is specific to Alberta as the province where *AISI* was conducted. I leave it to the individual reader to determine whether findings are generalizable to their own context.

3. The research was delimited to the study of four school systems. Comparison between these systems was not undertaken. Delimiting the number of school systems kept the data collected manageable while still allowing for a multiplicity of perspectives.

4. The study attempted to include multiple and diverse perspectives. However for practical reasons, the *AISI* leaders were delimited to those either in a principalship or aspiring to such a role. *AISI* leaders outside of the criteria might have differing perspectives. As such, this is both a delimitation but also a limitation of the study.

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Limitations of the Study

Although the research was thoughtfully prepared and I have illuminated ways that one particular school improvement strategy was instrumental in school and school system leadership development I am aware that limitations have occurred. I attempted to ensure credibility of the study and have addressed this aspect in the *Trustworthiness* section of Chapter Three. Here I discuss three limitations that pertain to the study recognizing that there may be others.

Data were gathered and bounded by a specific time period. Findings represent the perceptions of participants at that particular time and may not be applicable to other time periods. The study was conducted during Cycle Four of *AISI*. Would perceptions have been the same if interviews had occurred in one of the previous cycles of *AISI*? If the research had been conducted following the announcement that the funding for *AISI* Cycle Five would be reduced by 50%, would responses have been different?

Local context may play a key role in the perceptions of the respondents since *AISI* was established to meet local needs and circumstances. Local policies, practices and procedures differ quite considerably, therefore findings may not be generalizable or transferable to other sites outside the four school systems that comprised this study.

The third limitation is a methodological constraint, since each of the data collection instruments presents its own set of limitations. The wording used by the interviewer during the interview process can bias the responses of the participants. Inaccuracies may occur due to poor recall of interviewees. Participants might not provide carefully thought-out feedback to interview questions and prompts. Because participants were aware of my previous involvement with *AISI,* it is possible that the interviewees stated what they perceived the interviewer wanted to hear. Documentation utilized was publicly and readily available through an on-line data base of archived

information from the inception of *AISI* in 1999. I believe this served to reduce bias that might have occurred because of incompleteness or difficulty in retrieving information. It is possible that researcher bias might have ensued due to the particular documents chosen for perusal and inclusion as well as those that were excluded.

Significance of the Study

An examination of the experiences of those leaders actively involved in *AISI* provides a new perspective to the knowledge and literature relative to leadership development. I believe that there will be wide-spread interest in the results of this study of leadership development from educators, policy makers and researchers with particular relevance to those in the Alberta context. Further, my study has potential to be useful in providing information leading to the development of deliberate and intentional programs of support for current and future school or school system leaders that will interest educators and researchers globally. I anticipate this study will add to the literature on the topic of leadership development with implications beyond the context of *AISI*. A more detailed perspective regarding the implications drawn from the study is included in the discussion that forms part of the final chapter.

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into six chapters. Chapter one serves as an introduction to the dissertation by outlining the research question, the context for the study, the paradigmatic assumptions and methodological choice, the significance of the study and definition of terms. Because the research questions were examined through an investigation of school and school system leadership development within *AISI,* the *AISI* context is described in this paper as a critical component in understanding the relevance and importance of my study.

Chapter Two provides a comprehensive review of the current relevant literature that assisted me the development of my research questions and research design. The review of the literature addressed five areas: leadership for student learning, teacher leadership, leadership development, challenges facing leadership, and an historical perspective on the school effectiveness and school improvement movements.

In Chapter Three a detailed account of the research design and methodology is provided. The measures taken to demonstrate that the research was credible and trustworthy are outlined. Ethical considerations are addressed.

Findings of the study are described in Chapter Four which is organized according to the themes and subcategories that emerged through data analysis. In many instances the words of participants are presented. Embedded in this chapter are references to the literature.

Chapter Five presents my interpretations of the findings and is organized around the three major themes. This chapter attempts create meaning regarding the leadership development of AISI leaders as related by the participants.

The final chapter is a discussion. Implications for theory as well as for policy and practice are presented. Suggestions for further research are included. Appendices and References follow this final chapter.

CHAPTER TWO - LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to draw upon and to provide an overview of the literature that currently exists and is relevant to my study about school and school system leadership development. Mertens (2010) indicated that the researcher's original conceptual framework influences the planning and conducting of the literature review but as the researcher explores the existing literature, the information gathered often reciprocally influences the researcher to modify the initial conceptual model.

The literature review can be a chicken and the egg situation (Stake, 2010, p. 105). Do you start with the literature review and then formulate the research question or do you start with the research question and then conduct the review of the literature? As a result of over thirty years in various capacities within public education in Alberta as previously outlined in Chapter One, I had an intuitive sense that leadership is important. I began my search of the literature with a research topic that I already had an interest in examining and have explored five topics in the literature that I believe provided background and support. This chapter is organized around those five areas.

The first topic I was interested in pursuing in the literature was that of leadership and its importance for student learning. Included in this topic is a look at instructional leadership as well as change leadership. The second portion of this chapter reviews the literature surrounding teacher leadership which seemed appropriate since my research question was rooted in one school improvement strategy with teachers taking on leadership roles. The third topic examines leadership development which is a key component of my study. The fourth topic explores the challenges related to attraction and retention of school and school system leaders and why this theme is particularly important at this time in Alberta and elsewhere. The final piece that I reviewed in the literature provides an historical perspective on school effectiveness and school

improvement, including a critique of these movements. I have learned much through the search

for relevant and appropriate reading, through examination of my selections, and through

synthesizing the relevant literature in order to make sense and meaning for myself.

Leadership for Student Learning

Throughout my reading of the literature there were numerous times I found the claim that,

"school leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on student learning and

achievement." (Barber, Felan & Clark, 2010; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004;

Ponte et al., 2008; Levin, 2008; Robinson, Lloyd and Rowe, 2008) Realizing that the discourse is

expansive and that it has continued over a span of many years, demonstrated to me the complexity

and difficulty of pinpointing the exact nature of leadership that is successful for student learning.

Some scholars have argued that the positive effects of leadership on student learning are indirect

and result from the influence on the conditions and climate in which teaching and learning occur

(Leithwood, Harris & Hopkins, 2008; Leithwood, Patten, & Jantzi, 2010). After conducting a

review of the research regarding principal effectiveness, Hallinger and Heck (1996) reported that

the extent to which principals set goals and sustain a school-wide focus on student learning is

consistently and positively associated with stronger academic outcomes. Through empirical

study, some researchers have found that leaders influence the way that teachers organize and

conduct their instruction, teacher educational interactions with students, and the challenges and

expectations that teachers place on their pupils (Mulford, 2004; Pont, Nusche, & Moorman,

2008). Leithwood (2010) made the claim that one quarter of effects on student learning, are

attributable to leadership.

Although much of the literature I reviewed surrounded the importance of principal

leadership for student success, there is also an important role for superintendents as system

leaders. The Hechinger Report (2011) asserted that while principals create conditions that encourage great teaching, it is the superintendent who lays the groundwork by setting a clear direction and tone, investing in professional development, stressing the importance of achievement and giving principals the structures to make key decisions regarding operation of the school. Thus, superintendents play an important role by providing system leadership for student learning and supporting principals in their leadership endeavors vis-à-vis student learning.

Because of my interest in leadership and in view of claims such as these, it seemed important to take a closer look at the impact of leadership on student learning as it was discussed in the literature. I found a plethora of information concerning school leadership. Themes included distributed leadership, instructional leadership, teacher leadership, situational leadership, transformational leadership, change leadership and more. Stodgill (1974) commented that leadership has been defined in terms of traits, behaviour, influence, interaction patterns, role relationships and occupation of an administrative position. The work of Yukl (1994) is particularly helpful in clarifying that leadership influences:

> the interpretation of events for followers, the choice of objectives for the group or organization, the organization of work activities to accomplish objectives, the motivation of followers to achieve the objectives, the maintenance of cooperative relationships and teamwork and the enlistment of support and cooperation from people outside the group or organization. (p. 3)

Throughout the time of my research exploring leadership development, I was cognizant of the leadership influence that was described by the participants.

During my study of the literature I found multiple references to the importance of leadership relative to student learning. Specifically, Millward and Timperley (2009) identified

the issue of leadership as central to organizational change, particularly leadership that creates change that positively impacts student learning outcomes. Leithwood (2004), in his review of the research, concluded that there are virtually no documented instances of schools in difficulty being changed without the intervention and influence of a leader. Robinson et al. (2008) stated that the more principals focused their relationships, their work, and their learning on the core business of teaching and learning, the greater the likelihood they would have a positive impact on students' learning outcomes. Findings such as these served to further emphasize for me the importance of leadership for student learning.

Based on their review and analysis of 27 studies Robinson and her colleagues (2008) outlined five sets of leadership practices or dimensions that they believed can positively impact student outcomes. They emphatically stated that relationship skills are embedded in every dimension because effective leaders cannot first work on getting the relationships right and then tackle the educational issues. They claimed that both the task and the relationship aspects of leadership are intertwined in the problem solving. By way of example they indicated that effective leadership practice would involve determining the goal (task focus) but doing it in such a way that enables staff to understand and become committed to that goal (relationship focus).

The first dimension of leadership identified by Robinson et al. (2008) that can have an impact on student outcomes was *establishing goals and expectations*. Students were positively impacted when goals were developed according to student needs with attention and effort focused on those needs. The second dimension was *resourcing strategically*. Alignment of resources with instructional goals and school wide purposes was deemed critical. Third was *planning, coordinating and evaluating teaching and the curriculum*. It seemed important that the leader work directly in curriculum coordination across the school and also provide formative support and

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summative evaluation of teaching so that results could be used to improve teaching and learning. Fourth was *promoting and participating in teacher learning and development*. To be effective in this dimension, principals as leaders must not only promote professional learning, but must actively participate along with teachers in their growth endeavours. The final leadership practice alluded to by these authors was *ensuring an orderly and supportive environment* where time for teaching and learning was protected by reducing external pressures and interruptions. Based on empirical evidence from 12 studies, these researchers concluded that the most powerful of the variables was number four, *promoting and participating in teacher learning and development* which provided double the impact of any of the other variables.

In a report to the Wallace Foundation, Leithwood, Louis, Anderson and Seashore (2004) outlined three broad ways that high-quality leaders achieved impact on student learning. These impacts were taken from a number of sources, including a review of the current policies and practices from high-performing school districts, from large-scale quantitative studies about leadership effects, and from quantitative data regarding specific leadership strategies. Although the relationship between principal leadership and student learning is considered mostly indirect due to the fact that principals work mainly outside of classrooms, this report suggested that 25% of the impact of a school on student learning is attributable to principal leadership. Supporting this notion of principal impact, Bush (2009) added that empirical evidence from the United Kingdom demonstrated, "there would be a 10% increase in pupil test scores arising from an average headteacher improving their demonstrated abilities across 21 responsibilities." (p. 375) My experiences in education as a teacher and leader led me to the assumption that leadership was important for student learning. These scholars have provided evidence to support my assumption.

The three impacts of principal leadership identified in the report to the Wallace Foundation were: (a) direction setting entailing such actions as charting a clear course that everyone understands, establishing high expectations and using data to track progress and performance, (b) providing teachers and others in the school system with the necessary support and training to succeed, and (c) ensuring that the entire range of conditions and incentives in the school fully supports rather than inhibits teaching and learning. Called into play were the importance of context and the corresponding situations and people, leading me to the idea that there is not a "one-size-fits-all" strategy that constitutes effective leadership.

Yet another perspective on how leadership influences student learning was provided by Leithwood, Anderson, Mascall and Strauss (2011). Their contention was that principal leadership influences four distinct paths in order to improve student learning: the rational path, the emotional path, the organizational path and the family path. Further, as the principal intentionally attends to and aligns these fours paths classroom experiences for students are enriched, resulting in greater student learning.

Variables that these scholars placed on the rational path included the knowledge and skills that teachers have about curriculum, teaching and learning. The principal has influence through the rational path on both classroom and school-level variables such as instructional time, school culture and demonstration of high expectations for learning. The emotional path can impact teacher engagement in the school, classroom practice and ultimately student learning. Some of the suggested variables that principals should be aware of in order to influence the emotional path are individual and collective teacher efficacy, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, morale, stress/burnout, along with professional and teacher trust. Leadership qualities of

transparency, competence, benevolence and reliability contribute to the emotional path (Leithwood et al., 2011).

In the organizational path the authors included the context in which teachers' work, the school's infrastructure, and teachers' working conditions. Through the organizational path the leader has influence on the teachers' workload, structures to support collaboration and development of professional networks. The effective leader following the family path understands that student learning is "co-produced" by families and schools. These authors pointed to seven factors in the family path that can influence student learning and success in school: family work habits, academic guidance and support provided to children, stimulation to think about issues in the larger environment, provision of adequate health and nutritional conditions and physical settings in the home conducive to academic work and most significantly the academic and occupational aspirations and expectations for children of parents and other family members. The authors cautioned that not all of the variables in the family path can be influenced from the school but that effective leaders have awareness and work with staff to develop their understanding of these. The authors concluded that even though the literature provided the assumption that the effects of the principal on student learning are indirect, there are a number of leadership variables which do have a direct influence on what students learn and achieve.

In Alberta which provides the context for my study, Alberta Education (2009) recognized the changing nature and challenges of school leadership and the "complex and multi-faceted roles of principals." (The *Principal Quality Practice Guideline*, p. 2) The document adds that key competencies required in their daily practice have significantly increased to include school mission and goal development, issue identification, priority-setting, school improvement

planning, financial and human resource management and development, information gathering and data-based decision-making, public and community relations and educational accountability and reporting system requirements.

To address the complexity of the role of the principal, The *Principal Quality Practice Guideline* (Alberta Education, 2009) identified seven dimensions of effective principal leadership:

1. Fostering effective relationships. The principal builds trust and fosters positive working relationships, on the basis of appropriate values and ethical foundations, within the school community - students, teachers, and other staff, parents, school council and others who have an interest in the school.

2. Embodying visionary leadership. The principal collaboratively involves the school community in creating and sustaining shared school values, vision, mission and goals.

3. Leading a learning community. The principal nurtures and sustains a school culture that values and supports learning.

4. Providing instructional leadership. The principal ensures that all students have ongoing access to quality teaching and learning opportunities to meet the provincial goals of education.

5. Developing and facilitating leadership. The principal promotes the development of leadership capacity within the school community - students, teachers and other staff, parents, school council for the overall benefit of the school community and education system.

6. Managing school operations and resources. The principal manages school operations and resources to ensure a safe and caring, and effective learning environment.

7. Understanding and responding to the larger societal context. The principal understands and responds appropriately to the political, social, economic, legal and cultural contexts impacting the school.

The *Principal Quality Practice Guidelines* along with more extensive descriptors is available at http://education.alberta.ca/media/949129/principal-quality-practice-guideline-english-12feb09.pdf At the time of the writing of my dissertation, these guidelines were not mandated by provincial legislation but in the document it is suggested that "all school leaders are expected to commit to fulfilling the leadership dimensions throughout their careers." (p. 4) I interpreted the development of these leadership dimensions as recognition of the importance that principal leadership plays in "providing all students with the best possible opportunities to learn" (p. 3) and believe that leadership development, not only for those who are principals but for those who aspire to become principals, is a very important part of meeting the educational needs of students.

Instructional Leadership

The literature supported the notion that principal leadership contributes to student learning. Robinson and her colleagues (2008) made the claim that instructional leadership had its origin in the 1970s. Coldren and Spillane (2007) viewed instructional leadership as a key piece of school improvement and defined it broadly as the practice of making and sustaining connections to the instructional unit (i.e. the interaction of teacher, students, and material) thus enabling instructional improvement and enhanced student understanding. In a similar vein Spillane, Hallett, and Diamond (2003) suggested that instructional leadership is fundamental in creating the conditions to support instructional change and ensuring that all students have access to high-quality opportunities to learn which includes a particular focus on those students who are on the

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margins. Blase and Blase (2000) identified two major themes that comprised instructional

leadership: talking with teachers to facilitate reflection and promoting their professional growth

(p. 132). According to Phillips (2010) instructional leadership involves setting clear goals,

allocating resources to instruction, managing the curriculum, monitoring lesson plans and

evaluating teachers. Further, Phillips identified skills that an instructional leader must possess in

order to achieve this: interpersonal skills, planning skills, instructional observation skills and

skills in research and evaluation. Hallinger (2003) suggested three dimensions of instructional

leadership, with additional specific leadership functions for each dimension: defining the school's

mission, managing the instructional program and promoting a positive school-learning climate.

The practice of instructional leadership, as reported in the literature, can involve a variety

of activities that make the principal's role central to defining an instructional vision or mission,

setting clear goals, allocating resources to instruction, promoting a productive learning

environment and managing the instructional program through teacher supervision, curriculum

planning, program coordination, and monitoring student learning (Phillips, 2010; Spillane,

Hallett, & Diamond, 2003). According to research by Leithwood and Jantzi (2000), the specific

leadership practices that have been associated with instructional leadership involve the principal:

- working directly with teachers to improve effectiveness in the classroom,

- providing resources and professional development to improve instruction,

- regular monitoring of teaching and student progress,

- participating in discussions on educational issues, and

- promoting parental and community involvement in the school.

Hallinger (2003) presented three dimensions of instructional leadership where once again

the principal is central: defining the school's mission, managing the instructional program and

promoting a positive school-learning climate. Included in defining the school's mission were sub-themes of framing clear school goals and communicating these goals. In managing the instructional program the principal as instructional leader would be supervising and evaluating teachers' instruction, coordinating curriculum and monitoring student progress. Maintaining a positive school-learning climate involved protecting instructional time, promoting professional development, maintaining high visibility, providing incentives for teachers and providing incentives for student learning. Phillips (2010) summarized that a principal who is an effective instructional leader makes instructional "quality" the top priority of the school and everything else revolves around enhancement of student learning.

According to Phillips (2010) interpersonal skills, planning skills, instructional observation skills and skills in research and evaluation are skills that a principal who aspires to be an instructional leader must possess in order to succeed in the role of an instructional leader. Glickman, Gordon and Ross-Gordon (2009) indicated that to facilitate instructional improvement principals must have three prerequisite competencies. They must have a knowledge base of understanding about adult and teacher development. Second, as instructional leaders principals must know how their interpersonal behaviors affect individual teachers as well as groups of teachers and develop skill in promoting positive change-oriented relationships. Third, instructional leadership requires that the principal have technical skills in observing, assessing and facilitating instructional improvement. Both knowledge and skill were deemed important for principals in the instructional leadership role.

Similarly, Barth (2006) honed in on the notion of relationships and how interpersonal behaviours impact professional practice. Barth maintained that the kind of relationships among the adults within a school was the single most influential component on the character and quality

of that school and hence on student achievement. Further, a precondition for any change in

teacher practice is the existence of collegiality among educators where discussion about practice

and sharing of craft knowledge occurs. Barth suggested, "Without these in place no meaningful

improvement--no staff or curriculum development, no teacher leadership, no student appraisal, no

team teaching, no parent involvement and no sustained improvement is possible." (p. 13) If one is

to explore the connection of principal leadership to learning, then it appears from the literature

that relationships among educators are an important component for positive student experiences

and achievement.

One way that school principals can engage in instructional leadership is through

supervision of teachers (Coldren & Spillane, 2007; Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 2009).

These authors suggested that by observing teacher instruction, providing feedback and talking

with teachers about instructional improvement, leaders can positively influence the instruction

that teachers provide to students. In order to accomplish this aspect of instructional leadership

Leithwood and Louis (2012) suggested that principals must have the time, the knowledge, and the

consultative skills needed to provide teachers in all the grade levels and all the subject areas with

appropriate curricular and pedagogical advice about their instructional practices. Specifically,

their words seem to infer that instructional leadership for a principal is a daunting task.

Leadership, where the principal understands and applies the characteristics of instructional

effectiveness in managing the instructional program is one of the correlates of effective schools

(Lezotte, 2001). Based on my observations as an educator and my personal experiences in

leadership roles, I agree with Lezotte that schools are complex organizations that require strong

principal leadership.

Change Leadership

The context for my doctoral study was *AISI*, one large-scale school improvement initiative that involved making change to achieve the goal of improved student learning and performance. Kelley and Peterson (2007) stated that research points to the importance of strong leadership to effectively manage complex systems and lead instructional improvement. The authors added that it is difficult to find an effective school that does not also have an effective principal to keep the organization improving continuously. Continuous improvement necessitates change. Millward and Timperley (2009) said the issue of leadership is central to organizational change, "particularly leadership that creates change that has an impact on student learning outcomes." (p. 154) It was my assumption as I planned and conducted my study that *AISI* leaders were all involved in influencing change and as such were change leaders.

Hall and Hord (2011) broached change leadership through the notion of particular styles. They defined style as the pattern of behaviours that produces an overall tone and in support of this contention outlined three change styles: (a) the initiator, (b) the manager, and (c) the responder. Initiators focus on a long-term vision of what is best for the students and the school. This type of leader tends to have strong ideas about what good schools and good teaching look like and has high expectations. As a result they work passionately to ensure that their leadership moves people in what they perceive as the right direction, even if followers are not in agreement. Managers on the other hand generally achieve some success in change implementation because they are organized and efficient. They comply with the requirements but frequently only minimal effort is put forth into the actual process of change and the achievement of outcomes for student learning. The final group, according to Hall and Hord (2011) are the responders who keep checking with people to determine their concerns and feeling about the changes. They have a

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strong desire to please and avoid confrontation. According to these authors, responders focus on the present with little consideration for future needs, often don't believe that major changes are necessary and seldom make a concerted effort to move forward to resolve concerns and issues in their school.

The work of Hall and Hord (2011), based on over 40 years studying organizational change, cited several studies regarding leadership style and concluded that initiators have the vision, the passion and the drive that leads to the greatest success in making change happen. Initiators not only engage in the day-to-day activities but are strategic by thinking ahead and anticipating what might be encountered as they attempt to make change. Following the historical review of large-scale education reforms from the early 1990s to 2009, Fullan (2009) concluded that to achieve deep and lasting change requires a leader to "listen to others including those with whom you disagree, respecting and reconciling differences, unifying opposition, identifying win-win scenarios, being hopeful and humbly confident no matter what." (p. 109) Change entails both the setting of longer term direction and goals as well as skill to influence the daily work of teaching and learning.

Summary: Leadership for Student Learning

Although each of the researchers discussed in this section of the literature review have approached the notion of leadership practices from different perspectives, there seemed to be instances of agreement on the dominant factors. It was evident that leadership in a school is perceived to have indirect influence upon student learning because leaders generally work outside of the classroom rather than directly with students in teaching and learning. However, in the literature particular activities and strategies were suggested to have potential for enhancing the impact of principal leadership upon learning for students. I have categorized these as task

orientation and relationship development. The setting of direction and goals was a common theme, along with a focus on high expectations for student learning through enriched classroom experiences. Establishment of structures and procedures to create an environment conducive to teaching and learning, as well as managing and monitoring these processes were all indicated as valuable practices. Understanding the affective domain of staff along with teacher development also ranked highly as leadership strategies. There seemed to be agreement that when principals focused on curriculum as well as teaching and learning, that netted the largest effect upon student learning. This role was identified in the literature as instructional leadership.

Instructional leadership implies a shift away from administrative duties associated with schools toward the active promotion of student learning and much of the literature discussed the role of the principal in this regard. That is to say, instructional leadership emphasized the management of the conditions to create high quality learning for students rather than administrative duties. Defining the school's mission and goals was a common theme, as was maintaining a positive learning environment and teacher supervision. Identified in the literature surrounding instructional leadership, were a number of activities that principals might engage in but there was a lack of information about how to effectively conduct these activities.

Change leadership entails both the setting of longer term direction and goals as well as skill to influence the daily work of teaching and learning. Instructional leadership and change leadership utilize the concept of influence as a tool in providing leadership for learning and both were presented as important aspects of the role of the principal.

Teacher Leadership

After reviewing findings from two decades of scholarship York-Barr and Duke (2004) indicated that the interest in the concept of teacher leadership is gaining momentum. In contrast

to the single leader perspective that is sometime touted for leadership at the school level, teacher leaders can also provide leadership that is essential to change and school improvement. Barth (2001) surmised that students become the beneficiaries because their teachers are more centrally involved in making decisions about teaching and learning and school life in general. Northhouse (2010) suggested that thinking of leadership as a *process* rather than a trait or characteristic opens leadership to everyone and is not restricted to the formally designated leader. According to Lambert (2002) it is no longer sufficient to utilize the model of one-person leadership because such a model does not support sustainable improvement in education. Many authors have provided definitions for teacher leadership, but as indicated in the literature, there is little consensus on precisely what it means. These notions set the foundation for my critical exploration of the literature surrounding the role of teacher leaders relative to school improvement and this section examines scholarly views on the topic.

The infusion by the Alberta Government of additional funds intended specifically for school improvement through *AISI*, led to formation of teacher leadership positions that had not existed prior to the initiative. The initial *Framework for AISI* (1999) had student learning and performance as its focus with no reference made to leadership. Nine years into the initiative, it was stipulated in the *Handbook for AISI Cycle 4 Projects 2009-2012* that there was a new leadership focus, "leadership occurs at all levels and should be shared. Building a common vision, and a committed team, establishing partnerships, creating high-achieving learning environments, and leading and managing change are all aspects of successful leadership." (p. 8) Through document review, I found in the guiding document, *Handbook for AISI Cycle 5 Projects 2012-2015*, that *AISI* leadership was characterized as, "a complex blend of formal and informal leadership in schools, school systems and school communities. This blend of leadership

empowers participation, ownership and a shared vision of the transformation of education for powerful student learning." (p. 6) Although the term teacher leadership was not used, shared leadership was one of eleven characteristics of *AISI* specified at that time. The review of documents housed in the on-line data base has provided a chronology of how the importance placed upon leadership in *AISI* evolved over time.

From the view of Harris (2005) teacher leaders are chiefly concerned with enhanced instructional outcomes and creating the enabling conditions for others to learn. Glickman, Gordon, and Ross-Gordon (2009) indicated that teacher leaders not only assist other teachers but also experience professional growth themselves as a result of being involved in leadership activities. Stoll (2009) underscored that building leadership capacity is necessary if school improvement is to be more than a temporary phenomenon where programs diminish or end when the formal leader leaves. Because *AISI* was the context for my research, this connection of capacity building to school improvement piqued my interest to further pursue the topic of teacher leadership in the literature.

York-Barr and Duke (2004) provided an historical perspective about teacher leadership which they referred to as three waves evolving over time.

1. In the first wave teachers served in formal roles such as department heads and essentially operated as managers in order to further the efficiency and effectiveness of current school operations. This first wave role was not intended to change practice.

2. The second wave capitalized on the instructional expertise of teachers by appointing teachers to roles such as curriculum leaders, staff developers and mentors for new teachers.

3. The third wave which the authors considered to still be emerging recognized that instructional improvement requires an organizational culture that supports collaboration and continuous learning. Teachers in this period were considered as contributors to "reculturation" and provided leadership both within and outside their classrooms.

Before studying the leadership development that occurred through the school improvement strategy in Alberta, I sought a clear and precise definition of teacher leadership. However, I found inconsistency amongst the various authors I consulted. Following a scholarly examination of the literature, Murphy (2005) indicated that he discovered 13 different definitions of teacher leaders. York-Barr and Duke (2004) concluded that the lack of clarity may be due to "the expansive territory encompassed under the umbrella term teacher leadership." (p. 260) I found that this apparent difficulty in pinpointing exactly what is meant by teacher leadership was reinforced by Muijs and Harris (2003), who reported that an overview of the literature indicated a conceptual confusion about the term due to overlapping and competing definitions.

Danielson (2006) stated that teacher leaders are more than teachers, yet different from administrators. Some authors connected the term teacher leadership to distributed leadership where the practice of leadership is spread and shared amongst individuals and groups (Harris, 2005; Spillane, 2005). Parallel leadership was also found in the literature, which Crowther (2009) defined as a process where teacher leaders and principals work together to collectively take action in building school capacity. Stoelinga and Mangin (2010) further adding to the complexity and ambiguity, discussed instructional teacher leadership that has as its focus the behaviors of teachers engaged in improving student growth. These scholars claimed that *true* teacher leadership is spontaneous, is not conferred by role and may be taken on by any teacher in the

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school. Reflecting on my observations from the perspective of both a teacher and a principal, a wide range of opportunities exists for teachers to take on a leadership role even though there is a lack of agreement on what precisely teacher leadership means.

In an attempt to define what teacher leadership is Lieberman and Miller (2004) described three distinct roles: researcher, scholar and mentor. According to these authors, the role of researcher leads teachers to engage in reflective practice or action research. Teachers operating in the role of scholar study their own work, putting it out for public critique by colleagues and sharing it with others who may add to the efficacy of their own work. Further, when teacher leaders act as mentors, they work with beginning teachers and those teachers who have the desire to improve their practice in a particular area. From the perspective of Lieberman and Miller this type of teacher leadership is taken on by full time practicing teachers who complement their classroom practice with an additional, informal and largely self-appointed role.

Prevalent in the literature for her perspectives on leadership for capacity building Lambert provided another definition of *teacher leadership* as an organizational concept meaning broad-based, skillful participation in the work of leadership that leads to lasting school improvement. (1998, p. 38) My understanding was enhanced through Lambert's (2005) explanation of two key concepts in this definition:

1. **Broad-based participation** refers to the patterns of participation. It means whose voices are heard and who is involved in decision making; what teams, cadres, learning communities, or study groups form the pattern of participation in leadership. In these settings people deepen relationships, alter their beliefs and become more skillful in the work of leadership. New structures must be created to enable broad-based participation to occur.

2. **Skillful participation** means the understanding, knowledge and skills that participants either bring to the learning setting or purposefully develop through participation in the process in order to enhance effectiveness. Leadership requires development of skills in the areas of dialogue, inquiry, reflection, collaboration, facilitation and conflict resolution. (p. 12)

Lambert's (2003) contention was that educators must take collective responsibility for learning and pay attention not only to students' learning but also to their own and that of the adults around them. This, she said, is the role of a teacher leader.

After reviewing the literature I have concluded that the understanding of teacher leadership provided by Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009) summarizes the many differing representations:

Teacher leaders lead within and beyond the classroom; identify with and contribute to a community of teacher learners and leaders; influence others toward improved educational practice; and accept responsibility for achieving the outcomes of their leadership. (p.6)

This definition was developed after their review of the educational literature as well as consideration of their own experiences and conversations with teachers and principals.

Yet another aspect of teacher leadership was provided by Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009) who shared their experiences and insights from over two decades of studying and observing the work of teacher leaders. These authors submitted that teacher leadership occurs when other teachers perceive a colleague as competent in the classroom and worthy of following. They suggested that the extent to which teacher leaders can lead beyond the classroom is dependent upon each school system and school context.

Leading beyond the classroom entails involvement in professional learning communities or communities of practice where teacher leaders worked in partnership with the principal to extend professional learning to all teachers in the school (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009). Given this role, teacher leaders often provide continuity to school reform when the principal leaves. Professional learning communities according to Leithwood and Louis (2012) tend to go beyond professional learning to include shared values, common focus and collective responsibility for student learning, with reflective dialogue about improvement and purposeful sharing of practices. Teacher leaders build alliances and networks in order to accomplish this professional work and often reach beyond the school to a wider professional community as they seek to improve their practice.

According to Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009) teacher leaders provide influence, motivating colleagues toward improved practice, based on positive relationships. They hastened to add that relationship building is a "constant challenge for teacher leaders who want to influence others to work together toward the goal of improved practice." (p. 10) While operating within such networks, the learning and work of teacher leaders are also influenced by the teachers they work with.

The final component described by these authors was accepting responsibility for achieving outcomes. They indicated this was a relatively new aspect to their definition. Teachers who choose to lead often have a passion for finding solutions, but can become discouraged and drop the initiative. Thus the acceptance of accountability is necessary so as to result in follow-through and commitment to achieving outcomes. Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009) highlighted:

> An effective teacher leader sets the resolution of a pressing concern as a goal, gathers data
> to support the need for change, engages like-minded colleagues, and secures resources to

make change. Teacher leaders move beyond vision, take action and are responsible for

the outcomes. Persistence is the key to their success. (p. 34)

I was drawn to these aspects of teacher leadership and curious whether any of these insights might

be evidenced in the work of the *AISI* leaders as they relayed their experiences.

In an effort to explain teacher leadership, some scholars described the various activities

and tasks that teacher leaders perform. It was evident in the literature that how teacher leaders

enacted their role was viewed as different and distinct from the role of the principal. From their

research which spanned two decades, York-Barr and Duke (2004) provided six dimensions of

practice relative to the activities of teacher leaders. The Teacher Leadership Exploratory

Consortium (2010) listed seven domains that comprised what teacher leaders do. These domains

influenced both teacher colleagues and student learning. Danielson (2006) described the skills

that she believed comprised what teacher leaders demonstrated in their work. Further, Danielson

indicated that through such activities teacher leaders can have enormous influence on students.

Table 1 summarizes various perspectives on what teacher leaders "do" in their leadership

role and is an adaptation of work from York-Barr and Duke (2004), Teacher Leadership

Exploratory Consortium (2010), and Danielson (2006). The table makes a rather comprehensive

list of the activities attributed to what teacher leaders do in practice. This list is not exhaustive but

does provide a cross-section of the wide range of activities suggested in the literature that teachers

undertake as they do the work of leadership in their schools. Providing a list of the things that

teacher leaders do in conducting their day-to-day work is one method that authors used in

defining teacher leadership. I have listed the different aspects provided by each author with no

attempt to discover the common elements across each list.

Table 1. What Teacher Leaders Do in Practice

York-Barr and Duke	Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium	Danielson
Coordination and management	Foster a collaborative culture to support educator development and student learning	Using evidence and data in decision making
School/district curriculum work	Access and use research to improve practice and student learning	Recognizing an opportunity and taking initiative
Professional development of colleagues	Promote professional learning for continuous improvement	Mobilizing people around a common purpose
Participation in school change/improvement	Facilitate improvements in instruction and student learning	Marshaling resources and taking action
Parent and community involvement	promote the use of assessment and data for school and district improvement	Monitoring progress and adjusting the approach as conditions change
Preservice teacher education	Improve outreach and collaboration with families and community	Contributing to a learning organization
	Advocate for student learning and the profession	

Going beyond describing what teacher leaders do, Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009)
outlined how they perceived that teacher leadership benefitted students, parents, the school,
colleagues and the teacher leaders themselves (pp. 31- 34).

- Linking teacher leadership to efficacy in their classrooms can help teachers
  understand how they can touch the lives of more students.

- Teacher leadership opportunities can promote teaching as a more desirable career.

- If teachers know another teacher has had success with a new approach, and the
  approach matches their own beliefs about what is best for students, they are more
  likely to adopt the innovation.

- Teachers can discover ways to advance their careers horizontally rather than move into administration.

- In a leadership role, teachers can improve their own instructional skills by helping other practitioners.

- Capable teacher leaders can mentor teachers, assist in improving instructional practice, and help to develop the capacity of others.

- The ultimate value of teacher leadership is improved practice and increased student performance.

- Teacher leaders contribute to sustainability when there is a new principal in a school.

The importance of teacher leadership is underscored because the collegial model has been shown to contribute to the quality of relationships and teaching within the school and has the potential to influence school effectiveness, improvement and development (Muijs & Harris, 2003, p. 445). Although these authors indicated that more empirical evidence is necessary to establish a clear link between teacher leadership and student learning, they expressed their perspective that teacher leadership is a rich resource for school improvement. It is my hope that this study will provide insight into teacher leadership as *AISI* leaders who are participants in my research discuss their experiences.

Formal and Informal Teacher Leadership

In the literature there was description about both formal and informal teacher leadership (Danielson, 2006; Gunter, 2005; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009; Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium, 2010; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Thus, as suggested in the literature, formal teacher leadership is operational, designed to keep the school organized and moving toward its goals.

Teachers in this role have a title and a job description. Northouse (2010) used the term *assigned leadership* to indicate a role that is based on a title or position in an organization. In contrast, informal teacher leadership entails voluntarily sharing expertise and working closely with teachers to provide support to colleagues who wish to improve their instruction. Northouse (2010) referred to informal leadership as *emergent leadership* resulting from the process of garnering support from colleagues. Regardless of the name given, the intent is to facilitate change in teaching practice in order to improve student achievement.

Combining the notions of these scholars, formal teacher leadership roles are most often created with the intention of distributing the work of running a school so that others in addition to the principal are enlisted in this work. Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009) suggested that formal teacher leadership roles are defined by a job description, sanctioned by a school district and school site administration and built into the organizational structure of the school.

Specifically, formal teacher leadership roles have designated responsibilities that often involve decision making about the manner in which the school is operated. Muijs and Harris (2003) suggested that these teacher leaders provide leadership for organizational tasks and are often regarded as an extension of administration. On the other hand, Stoelinga and Mangin (2010) discussed formal teacher leadership in terms of building the instructional capacity of teachers, deemed to be important in an era of accountability. Instructional teacher leaders provide high-quality professional development for teachers they said. The authors suggested that by embedding learning opportunities within the context of the school, the new instructional strategies are more likely to be relevant to the teachers and more readily implemented.

In contrast to the role of the formal teacher leader already discussed, scholars described teacher leaders differently (Danielson, 2006; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009; Lambert, 1998;

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Lieberman & Miller, 2004). These authors maintained that teacher leaders emerge spontaneously

from the teacher ranks based on teacher interest and the needs of the school. Instead of being

officially selected, they take the initiative to address a problem or institute a new program. No

one appoints these informal teacher leaders to a role. They have no positional authority. Their

influence stems from the respect they have earned with their colleagues because of their expertise

and practice, by being approachable and by using skills and influence to improve the educational

practice of their peers. Figure 1 represents my conceptualization of formal and informal

leadership, synthesized from the literature.

Figure 1. **Formal versus Informal Leadership**
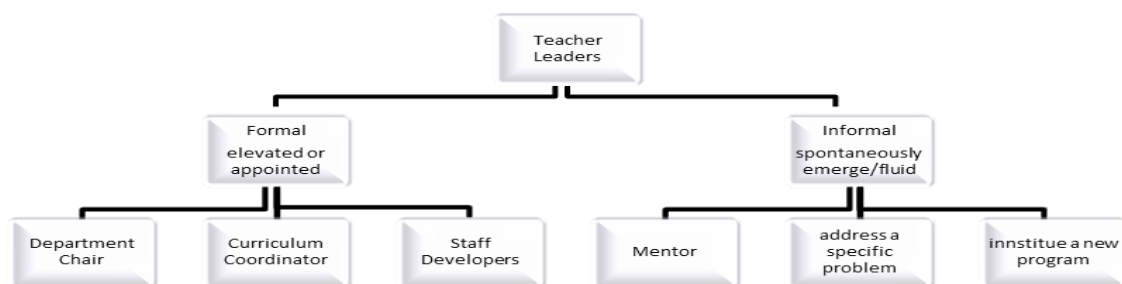
Lieberman and Miller (2004) added that when teachers lead they help to develop an

environment for learning, often involving the entire school community. Informal teacher leaders,

they suggested, share the knowledge they have gained as a result of their own experience through

activities such as casual conversations, sharing of materials, facilitating professional development

activities or extending invitations for colleagues to visit their classrooms. Further, informal

teacher leaders can influence the teaching and learning process by providing support in these

ways to beginning teachers, to veteran teachers who are new to teaching a subject area or new to a

school, as well as any teachers who are interested in improving their practice.

Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009) believed that both formal and informal teacher leadership are important to a well-functioning school. These authors added that when there is accountability for student learning attached to teacher leadership, when the teacher leadership efforts are supported by concrete evidence of school improvement and positive impact on student outcomes, teacher leadership becomes meaningful and important. Arguably, teacher leadership is one aspect of leadership development where attention should be paid.

Summary: Teacher Leadership

It was difficult to find within the literature a consensus on the definition of teacher leadership. Summarizing the various aspects presented, an apt definition for purposes of this dissertation would include the notion that teacher leaders can demonstrate leadership both within their classrooms and beyond in their attempt to influence others for improved educational practice. Positive relationships and collegiality were seen as important in the work of teacher leaders if they were to influence colleagues to change their practice. In a number of instances the literature described the kinds of activities that teacher leaders became involved in as a way of defining the concept. Both formal and informal teacher leadership were presented in the literature. Formal teacher leaders have an assigned title or position with designated duties and often are viewed as an extension of administration because they contribute to the organizational structure and goals. On the other hand informal teacher leaders have neither a title nor a job description but emerge voluntarily in an effort to improve student achievement. They share expertise they have garnered through their own experience and support colleagues who wish to improve their teaching practice.

Leadership Development

My research explored how *AISI* contributed to school and school system leadership development in the province of Alberta. I believe leadership development is important due to the connection between student learning and leadership as well as the challenges facing leadership in the current climate of education. Bush (2009, 2012) indicated that there is wide-spread acknowledgement of the need for specialised training for principals and that specific preparation makes a difference to the quality of school leadership.

A review of the literature regarding this continuum revealed three aspects: leadership development, leadership education and leadership training (Burngardt, 1996). Distinguishable from leadership development, leadership education as described by Burngardt (1996) is a formalized intervention intended to purposefully teach a particular aspect of leadership. As such, it constitutes one component of the more broadly defined leadership development. Leadership training refers to activities intended as preparation for a specific leadership role or job and is directed at helping the individual being trained to transition into a new position. Bush (2012) labeled this process of leadership training as leadership preparation which he described as a pro-active stance prior to appointment and essential because good teaching abilities do not necessarily translate into effective leadership. This idea of leadership training that was presented by Bush intrigued me because my assumption at the outset of the research was that the *AISI* experience acted as a training ground for the principalship.

Because of the expanded role of the school principal in the twenty-first century, the increasing complexity of school contexts and the recognition that effective leadership preparation and development make a difference to student learning, Bush (2009) suggested that both effective preparation for leadership roles and on-going leadership development are required. According to

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Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, and Meyerson (2005) the expanded role of school leaders ranges from educational visionaries and change agents to instructional leaders, curriculum and assessment experts, budget analysts, facility managers, special program administrators, and community builders. It follows then, that leadership development activities should focus on helping leaders acquire the leadership knowledge, understanding and skills to deal with the complexities of educational leadership (Bush, 2012, p. 667).

Bush (2009) advocated a personalised learning approach to leadership development encompassing activities such as facilitation by others who have deep understanding of the particular context, mentoring by more experienced leaders and coaching for enhanced skill development. Just as with students, leaders have different developmental needs and learn in a variety of ways. In spite of the emphasis on personalised learning, Bush (2009) cautioned that it is difficult to organize programs for leadership development with this focus.

The National College on School Leadership in the United Kingdom described five stages of leadership development in the *Developmental Framework*:

- **Emergent leadership** when a teacher is beginning to take on management and leadership responsibilities and perhaps begins to form an aspiration to become a head teacher.

- **Established leadership** when assistant and deputy heads are experienced leaders who have chosen not to pursue headship.

- **Entry to headship** is the time when an experienced leader prepares for and is inducted into headship in a school.

- **Advanced leadership** is the stage at which school leaders mature in their role, look to widen their experience, refresh themselves and update their skills.

- **Consultant leadership** is the point at which an able and experienced leader is ready to put something back into the profession by taking on training, mentoring or other responsibilities.

These stages were pertinent and specific to the education system in the United Kingdom, but I believe there is relevance for others who would be designing and implementing leadership development programs in any country.

Because my study centred on leadership development within one particular school improvement strategy the notion that leadership education has become the educational reform strategy of the twenty-first century strongly interested me (Orr, 2006). Eight exemplary pre-service and in-service principal development programs were examined by LaPointe, Darling-Hammond and Meyerson (2007) and suggestions were made regarding policy and practice. They stated, "Increasingly, school districts focus on leadership and its development as part of comprehensive school improvement strategies." (p. 46) Inherent in these statements was the assumption that improved leadership preparation and development results in better leadership, management, and organizational practices which in turn, will improve teaching, student learning and performance (Orr, 2006). Supporting this idea, Bush (2009) emphatically stated that the development of effective leaders should not be left to chance but should be deliberately designed to produce the best possible leadership for schools and consequently student learning. My experience prompts me to concur with this scholar that principal leadership is quite a different role from teaching and "requires separate and specialised preparation." (p. 386)

In addressing principal leadership preparation, Bush (2012) provided a summary of leadership development programs in nine countries, including Austria, Canada, Finland, France, Norway, Singapore, South Africa, Taiwan and the United States. He reported five areas

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commonly occurring in the leadership programs that were examined: (a) instructional leadership, (b) law, (c) finance, (d) managing people, and (e) administration. Following their study conducted in 10 Commonwealth countries, Moorosi and Bush (2011) reported the main leadership development topics as: (a) leadership for learning, (b) team leadership, (c) managing people, (d) financial management, and (e) educational policy. However, Bush (2012) suggested that the emphasis in the twenty-first century has shifted from the *content* of leadership development programs to the *process* of leadership development. Rather than planning for 'what' is included in leadership development programs, the focus has become 'how' the programs are designed and delivered. Bush, (2009) outlined dimensions to consider in the process of designing and implementing programs that focus on process.

1. A learning environment that bridges the work situation and the learning situation. Opportunity for leaders to reflect on their own practice, and to share their reflection with others.

2. Successful adult learning grows when leaders build on their existing knowledge and experience. A personalised learning approach is utilized. There are numerous forms of learning that can develop leadership. Bush cautioned against a total focus on individual needs to the exclusion of the broader school and system needs.

3. Active learning combined with theory.

4. Learning support through collaborative relationships such as cohort groups, mentoring and coaching.

In summary, Bush (2009) stated that the case for systematic and specialised training for principals is persuasive but there is considerable debate on what aspects and processes should be included in these programs for development.

In order to illustrate these different perspectives for leadership development programs, I have included the dimensions outlined by the National Staff Development Council (Sparks & Hirsch, 2000) suggesting that when designing leadership development programs, outcomes should assist principals to:

- learn strategies that can be used to foster continuous school improvement,

- understand how to build supportive school cultures that promote and support both adult and

- student learning,

- develop knowledge about individual and organizational change processes,

- develop knowledge of effective staff development strategies,

- understand important sources of data about their schools and students and how to use data,

- to guide instructional improvement efforts, and

- learn public engagement strategies, including interpersonal relationship skills.

Combining the design and implementation activities (Bush, 2009) with the leadership outcomes to be achieved (Sparks & Hirsch, 2000) principal leadership development programs would take into consideration the needs of principals as well as aspects of effective adult learning.

Darling-Hammond (2007) conducted a study for the Wallace Foundation in the United States of exemplary leadership development programs. Programs were deemed exemplary if they visibly demonstrated evidence of impact on principals' knowledge, skills, and practices, as well as success in their leadership roles. The study examined programs that addressed both preservice and inservice leadership development. The first aspect they reported was that of recruitment of potential leaders. None of the eight programs was open for general enrollment to anyone with

interest in leadership; the exemplary programs recruited leadership candidates that were perceived to have talent as potential principals. Districts played a major role in identifying and recommending experienced teachers with strong teaching and leadership skills who were committed to educational change.

The rigor in the process of recruitment utilized by one exemplary program was of particular interest to me. Potential leaders applied for the privilege of participation with three letters of reference from their principal and teaching colleagues regarding both their teaching and leadership abilities. The application also included an autobiographical essay reflecting the candidate's commitment to education. Several raters evaluated this pool and those applicants who made the first cut were invited to participate in a group interview. Candidates then work with five to six others to collaboratively solve a specified problem based on a real challenge in the field. Applicants were observed and rated for their abilities to discuss appropriate content, to communicate ideas clearly, to work cooperatively, to influence group opinion and facilitate task completion. This process was filmed to enable the superintendent to later view each candidate in action before making the final decision on who is selected for leadership development.

A second feature that distinguished these programs according to Darling-Hammond (2007) was the tight focus on developing abilities for building a shared vision for instructional improvement and leading a team to implement that vision, both by supporting teachers individually and by developing a more productive organization. Furthermore, the programs aimed to develop leaders who work to improve the school as an organization by developing norms and structures that support high quality teaching and learning, that enhance the capacity of teachers to meet the needs of students, and that implement reform strategies that will improve student outcomes.

The third aspect to these programs was that they offered ways for applying the new knowledge in practical settings and linking theory to practice. Internships were one of the practical experiences. "This is not surprising, as research suggests most adults learn best when exposed to situations requiring the application of acquired skills, knowledge, and problem-solving strategies within authentic settings." (Darling-Hammond, 2007, p.72) The internships that were most highly rated by graduates were the full-time, year-long, paid internship. In this instance, candidates experience internship in contexts that include an elementary school, a middle school, and a high school, and also spend two weeks working in a district office. In each location, the interns are mentored by a full-time, certified administrator. During the internship, candidates were required to observe lessons, conference with teachers, and facilitate professional development activities geared toward improving instructional practice. Although formal teacher evaluations are the domain of the principal, interns are able to observe the process.

Exemplary programs for leadership development also addressed on the job learning with supports for both veteran and novice principals. Three aspects of these approaches are noted. First, they enabled principals to develop their instructional leadership abilities *in* practice, by connecting new knowledge to their specific, concrete practices. Second, leadership development was presented as a continuum extending from pre-service through induction, ongoing support, and engagement of expert and retired principals in mentoring. Third, they conceptualized leadership as a collaborative activity around practice, rather than as a solitary activity. Collegial learning networks, such as principals' networks, study groups, and mentoring or peer coaching, offered communities of practice and support for problem-solving. Findings reported in the Executive Summary, *Preparing Leaders for a Changing World* (Darling-Hammond, 2007)

indicated that compared to a national random sample of principals, graduates of these programs, on average:

- felt significantly better prepared for virtually every aspect of principal practice, ranging from leading instruction and organizational learning to developing a school vision and engaging parents and the community;
- had more positive attitudes about the principalship and are more likely to plan to stay in the job, despite working in more challenging urban environments.

Utilizing lessons for leadership development from this purposeful approach and the exemplary programs presented to the Wallace Foundation (2007) might serve to reduce some of the perceived challenges to leadership recruitment and retention from around the world that was reported in literature. I believe that if potential candidates feel well prepared for a role as principal they are more apt to apply; if principals have a positive attitude about their leadership, resulting job satisfaction will play a part in principal retention.

Summary: Leadership Development

The literature tended to treat principal leadership as different from teaching, thus requiring different and more specialized preparation. Leadership development was presented as a continuum from initial training to induction and on-going inservice. Rather than leaving good leadership to chance, the intent of development is better leadership, management, and organizational practices which in turn will improve teaching, student learning and performance. Synthesizing the literature, leadership development can be described as the expansion of the capacity of organizational members to engage effectively in various leadership roles and processes. Leadership development occurs on a continuum that includes initial leadership training, induction programmes and in-service activities where the emphasis is on development of

knowledge, skills, and practices for leadership. Such programs combine theory or content with

active learning as a continuous process and include both formal and informal activities that

promote and enhance leadership potential. My study will present participants perspectives on

how their leadership was developed through their work as *AISI* leaders.

Challenges Facing Leadership

"Legislators, employers, parents and others call for higher academic standards and greater

accountability for academic success. The conflict between the rapidly expanding job demands

and a shrinking pool of qualified candidates portends a catastrophe." (Institute for Educational

Leadership, 2000, p. 3) Although suggestion of an impending catastrophe might be overstated,

my review of the literature has led me to believe that there are challenges in principal recruitment

and retention that bear further examination.

In a report to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)

regarding leadership, Pont, Nusche and Moorman (2008) stated that education leadership is a

policy priority around the world stemming from the perceived need to align leadership practice

with current educational trends as well as an ageing work force that will mean large numbers of

retirements in the next several years. Further, they said that potential candidates are hesitant to

apply due to factors such as heavy workloads, overburdened roles, insufficient preparation and

training, limited career prospects and inadequate support and rewards (OECD, 2008, p. 2).

The perspective from the Institute for Educational Leadership (2000) articulated the

extensive expectations that educational leaders face:

the effective public school administrator is expected to be a visionary, communicator,

facility manager, team-builder, disciplinarian, supervisor, problem-solver, legal expert,

fiscal administrator, politician, fund-raiser, in addition to being a school instructional

leader, and is held accountable for the effective execution of each distinct aspect of the

job. (Beaudin, Thompson & Jacobson, 2002, p. 7)

A study that was conducted by Barber, Whelan and Clark (2010) compared school

leadership across a range of high-performing education systems around the world. The study

consisted of a literature review, interviews with approximately 70 policy makers as well as a

survey with 1,850 leaders in six countries and two Canadian provinces. The authors concluded

that the skills and knowledge required by students in the new century are becoming more complex

and the range of issues that schools must deal with is expanding. In this instance the authors were

referring to the role of both the principal, as the leader at the school level and the superintendent,

as the system leader.

Several authors addressed the challenge of recruiting candidates to leadership roles. Levin

(2008) wrote that we frequently hear that we will not be able to find enough talented and qualified

people to fill school and school system leadership positions because those roles are becoming too

difficult. According to Tooms, Barnett, and Shoho (2010), evidence increasingly suggests that

school districts are experiencing difficulty finding qualified school principals for administrative

positions. Beaudin, Thompson and Jacobson (2002) stated that, without effective school and

district level leadership, public schools will not be able to advance educational reform initiatives.

Given that leadership is deemed to make a positive impact on successful student learning,

statements such as these demonstrate that the study of leadership development is essential.

Consistent with the OECD expression of a policy priority, the Ministry of Education in *the

Alberta School Leadership Framework: Promoting Growth, Development and Accountability*

(Alberta Education, 2010) identified leadership as an area of urgency due to two main reasons: (a)

the changing school leadership role and (b) school leadership workforce challenges. Stated in this

leadership framework, Alberta's education stakeholders found that the changing school leadership role included these key points.

1. Today's leadership responsibilities require competencies that are much different than those deemed important a generation ago.

2. Workloads require increased managerial responsibilities related to school-based budgeting and greater accountability for results.

3. Managerial responsibilities often overshadow the time and effort required for instructional leadership.

4. Leaders must acquire the knowledge, skills, confidence and credibility to carry out instructional leadership.

5. Transformational and distributed leadership models need to be developed for the Alberta context.

Alberta Education has gathered and analyzed 2008-2009 data that indicated a number of school leadership workforce challenges. Regarding the supply and demand for school leaders Alberta Education outlined and discussed two important areas of concern: (a) demographics and (b) the number and quality of applicants (Alberta School Leadership Framework, 2010). As of 2008 the data in Alberta collected showed:

1. The average age of school leaders (i.e., principals and assistant, associate and vice principals) in Alberta was 48.3 years; 49% were over the age of 50 years.

2. The average age of retirement of school leaders was 57 years, lower than in previous years.

3. 28% of new school leaders had less than 8 years of teaching experience and 48% had less than 7 years of leadership experience.

4. 32% of new school leaders relinquished the role within three years.

5. 44% of assistant, associate and vice principals had less than 4 years of leadership experience.

Within these data collected by Alberta Education (2009) school systems reported that the number and quality of applicants for school leadership is dropping and although no specific examples were provided, it was reported that school leadership positions remain unfilled in some remote areas (Alberta School Leadership Framework, 2010, p.6).

Summary: Challenges Facing Leadership

Based on the literature I concluded that leadership challenges are considerable and of concern globally. Notably, the OECD study (Pont, Nusche & Moorman, 2008) which represents 30 countries including Australia, England, Finland, New Zealand, and the United States, has deemed leadership a policy priority. Student needs are becoming more complex but at the same time there are greater demands for accountability regarding student success. The range of issues that schools must deal with is expanding. The demographics of current leaders are such that many will be retiring, leading to an increased number of vacancies to be filled. Many prospective leaders are hesitant to apply, leading to a shrinking pool of applicants for these roles to the point where it is becoming increasingly difficult to find qualified and interested candidates. As well, those who are currently principals often lack both leadership as well as teaching experience. Examining participant beliefs about their leadership development through *AISI* has the potential to contribute to the body of knowledge that addresses some of these concerns.

The School Effectiveness and School Improvement Movements

Because my study is the investigation of a large-scale school improvement strategy, I wanted to get a sense of the history of the school improvement movement. In the literature the topics of school effectiveness and school improvement were written about extensively. However, the terms were not used interchangeably; they are not synonymous. Reynolds, Hopkins and Stoll (1993) argued that the two paradigms are very different and that there are wide divergences in the orientation, methodology and theoretical approaches between the effective schools movement and school improvement practice. According to these authors, effective schools focus on the quantitative aspect of easily measurable outcomes for student academic success and the generation of lists for achieving effectiveness. On the other hand, Reynolds, Hopkins and Stoll (1993) indicated that school improvement has a qualitative focus based on developing strategies that strengthen the school as an organization. School improvement tended to be a 'bottom up' approach that encouraged debate and discussion about the process of change rather than acceptance of external wisdom. This section of the literature review will provide key aspects of both paradigms, tracking historical roots and features.

Teddlie and Stringfield (2007) in reviewing the history of school effectiveness and school improvement referred to an eight-year study that began in 1930 as the first large-scale, cross-state study in the United States. However, the literature generally suggested that school effectiveness became a focus in the 1970s, perhaps precipitated by the findings of Coleman (1966) that it was the ability and family background of students that determined achievement and that schools and teachers made no difference to student outcomes.

In an attempt to show that schools do matter and do make a difference to student achievement, effective schools research took hold. The strengths of both effective schools

research and the school improvement field were summarized by Reynolds (2010) and an

adaptation of the ideas is presented in Table 2.

Table 2**. Strengths of Effective Schools and School Improvement Movements**

Effective Schools	School Improvement
The check lists about school process characteristics of effective schools	It's clear understanding of the importance of school culture
The beneficial educational effects I persuading teachers that they can make a difference	Its emphasis on the importance of Heads, teachers and pupils needing to accept and embrace (to own) the reforms
Its emphasis on measuring pupil progress by 'value added' i.e. a measure of the extra pupil attainment attributed to good schools	Its focus on the professional 'deep cultures' of values, beliefs and socialisation can affect the ability and/or willingness of teachers to change in the way that researchers and policy makers might want them to

Wimmpelberg, Teddlie, and Stringfield (1989) indicated that the aim of school

effectiveness researchers was, "to discover whether differences in processes, organizational

arrangements, and resources impact pupil outcomes and how." (p. 168) According to Townsend,

the primary aim of school effectiveness was results in student achievement on standardized

examinations (p. 3). Citing Reynolds et al. (1993) the school effectiveness movement was

quantitative in orientation and focused on easily measurable outcomes.

The literature divided the effective schools movement into various stages. Glickman,

Gordon and Ross-Gordon (2009) suggested two waves. Sackney (2007) and Reynolds (2010)

both divided the movement into three eras. Teddlie and Stringfield (2007) discussed five stages

which they indicated were somewhat overlapping. For purposes of this review, I have divided the

movement into three key stages that I believe capture the historical features and contributed to my

understanding. The first stage began in the 1970s with the identification of currently effective

schools that were successful in educating all students regardless of their socioeconomic status or family background (Lezotte, 2001). As suggested earlier this aspect of effective schools was intended to counter the criticism of schools contained in the Coleman Report (1966) which suggested that teachers and schools made little difference in student achievement.

The second wave of effective schools research began in the 1980s when researchers attempted to isolate the characteristics that differentiated these more effective schools from less effective schools; what philosophies, policies and practices did these school have in common? These more effective schools were referred to by Sackney (2007) as outlier schools, meaning those that stood out because of excessively high or excessively low achievement scores. Essentially researchers were interested at this point in the reasons for such outcomes and in identifying what effective schools looked like.

In the literature Edmonds was considered to be a key researcher in the area of school effectiveness. Edmonds (1979) provided the following list of five traits or correlates for effective schools (p. 24) that was often referred to in the literature as the best-known list. Details of each (Lezotte, 1991) added to my understanding of these traits, or correlates as Lezotte referred to them (pp. 1-6):

- **Strong instructional leadership.** The principal acts as an instructional leader by applying the characteristics of instructional effectiveness in the management of the instructional program. The principal effectively and persistently communicates the mission of the school to staff, parents and students.

- **High expectations for all students.** The staff believes and demonstrates that all students can attain mastery of the essential school skills. Teachers believe that they have the capability to help all students to achieve mastery.

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- **An orderly, work-oriented climate.** There is an orderly purposeful, businesslike atmosphere free from the threat of physical harm. The school climate is not oppressive and is conducive to teaching and learning.

- **Priority focus on instruction.** Teachers allocate a significant amount of classroom time to instruction in the essential skills. For a high percentage of time students are engaged in planned learning activities.

- **Frequent monitoring of student achievement**. Student academic progress is measured frequently through a variety of assessment procedures and the results used to improve individual student performance and to improve the instructional program.

As more research was conducted, more extensive correlates for effective schools began to surface. Austin and Reynolds (1990) extended the number of correlates to include eleven characteristics of effective schools: site management, leadership, staff stability, curriculum and instructional articulation and organization, staff development, maximized learning time, widespread recognition of academic success, collaborative planning and collegial relationships, sense of community, clear goals and expectations commonly shared, order and discipline. Other scholars provided their own lists, but the key aspect for consideration is that the lists grew to encompass more and more characteristics.

Sackney (2007), in his review of school improvement in Canada, suggested that in the early to mid-1980s these lists of effective school correlates began to be viewed as the recipe for school improvement. However, a criticism in the literature of these lists of isolated factors for effective schools was the lack of provision for the corresponding practical processes necessary for achieving successful implementation. The authors frequently presented theory but did not include the practical aspects that could be carried out in the field. It is a goal of mine to be able to

demonstrate the practice of leadership development through my research and hence contribute to filling this gap regarding effective schools and school improvement.

The third stage in the effective schools movement that I noted was the linking of effective schools knowledge with school improvement practice (Reynolds, Hopkins, & Stoll, 1993). As such, this phase constituted a blend of these two paradigms. While student academic achievement was the primary aim of the school effectiveness research, the school improvement literature highlighted the implementation and institutionalization of change (Sackney, 2007). In contrast to the effective schools research, the main focus of school improvement research was on *how* schools improve over time (Glickman et al., 2009).

By way of an example of this third stage, Reynolds, Hopkins, and Stoll (1993) presented Improving the Quality of Education for All (IQEA) as a blend between the two approaches and methods. IQEA was student outcomes oriented and involved measurement of their success or failure which was more closely aligned with the effective schools movement. At the same time IQEA also was concerned with the study of school improvement processes such as change strategies, along with professional collaboration, reflection and development. If improving learning for students is the goal, there is strength in blending the two approaches where attention is paid to both of these aspects.

Having examined details of the effective schools movement, I now present information about school improvement. Providing a definition of school improvement Sackney (2007) indicated that it was an approach to educational change that aimed to enhance both student outcomes as well as strengthening the school's capacity for managing change. Hopkins (2001) expanded on this notion of school improvement, suggesting that the school must change its aims, expectations, organization, way of learning, methods of teaching, and organizational culture.

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Smylie (2010) implied that improvement is something more than just change which is simply the process of adjusting and adapting to external demands which might only serve to reinforce the status quo or perhaps even represent a move in an unproductive direction. To overcome the pitfall of change for the sake of change, Smylie (2010) suggested that school improvement was directed toward a particular valued objective or outcome. According to Reynolds, Hopkins, and Stoll (1993) the two paradigms are intellectually, methodologically and theoretically very different. Table 3 provides a brief overview of the characteristics or traditions of the school effectiveness and the school improvement movements. The table serves to illustrate the contrasts between the two paradigms and is based on the work of Reynolds, Hopkins and Stoll (1993).

Table 3. Separate Traditions of Effective Schools and School Improvement

Effective Schools	School Improvement
Focus on schools	Focus on individual teachers or groups of teachers
Focus on school organization	Focus on school processes
Data driven, with emphasis on outcomes	Rare empirical evaluation of effects of changes
Quantitative in orientation	Qualitative in orientation
Lack of knowledge about how to implement change	Concerned with change in schools exclusively
Concerned with change in pupil outcomes	Concerned with journey of improvement rather than its destination
More concerned with schools at a particular point in time	More concerned with schools as changing organizations
Based on research knowledge	Focus on practitioner knowledge

The table summarizes how the effective schools and school improvement movements differ from each other. As described by these scholars, the two movements do not share any commonalities. Reynolds, Hopkins, and Stoll (1993) advocated that what might be most effective

in improving schooling for students would be to create one single approach based on the strengths of both paradigms of school effectiveness and school improvement.

Because *AISI* is being utilized as the context to study my research question, I did a comparison of stated characteristics of *AISI* and the traditions of school effectiveness and school improvement as indicated in Table 3 of this dissertation. The *AISI Handbook for Cycle 4* (2008) stated that *AISI* is a catalyst for change. Further, the Handbook says that the common goal, targeted funding, partnership, positive climate, and supportive infrastructure act in concert to achieve significant change in teaching and learning which corresponds with the school improvement tradition of schools as changing organizations. Another *AISI* characteristic is the culture of continuous improvement that has a focus on school improvement goals and classroom practices (p. 5) which aligns with the school improvement tradition of a journey of improvement rather than a destination. These examples illustrate how *AISI* demonstrates elements of school improvement traditions that I found to be reported in the literature.

As I reviewed the literature I noted that the school improvement focus began in the late 1970s with the desire for unusually high student achievement gains. I found reference in the literature to programs of school improvement in many countries including Canada, the United Kingdom, Singapore, Finland, the United States and Australia. Within Canada, I discovered information about school improvement initiatives in the provinces of Manitoba, Ontario and British Columbia.

In attempting to understand what school improvement was and how it was different from effective schools research, the definition provided by Hopkins (1990) was most helpful:

> School improvement is more than just classroom change; it also presupposes attention to other 'related internal conditions' such as the curriculum, the school organisational

structure, local policy, school climate, relations with parents and so on. If change is only

aimed at the improvement of 'learning conditions' (i.e. the immediate activities students

experience) in a particular classroom, it is not included in this definition. But when a

school pays attention to the conditions necessary for improvement on both classroom and

institutional levels, that is school improvement. (p 182)

In this definition the key elements of *change, other related internal conditions* and *classroom and

institutional levels* seemed to set school improvement apart from what I understand about

effective schools research which tended to focus on easily measureable outcomes.

The International School Improvement Project (ISIP) is one of many programs established

under the banner of school improvement. This project was sponsored by the OECD in 14

countries and defined in Reynolds, Hopkins and Stoll (1993) as, "A systematic, sustained effort

aimed at change in learning conditions and other related internal conditions in one or more

schools, with the ultimate aim of accomplishing educational goals more effectively." (p. 41)

By examining the assumptions ISIP embodied it is evident that this approach had moved from a

list of characteristics prevalent in the effective schools movement.

Although only one of several school improvement approaches, by examining ISIP I was

able to realize the general shift from effective schools to that of school improvement. I have

adapted the stated assumptions from Reynolds, Hopkins and Stoll (1993) about ISIP and believe

they serve to illustrate the more substantial understanding of what it might take to improve

schools:

- The school is the centre of change where reforms need to be sensitive to the context of

  individual schools rather than assuming that all schools are the same.

- School improvement is a systematic approach to change that is a carefully planned and managed process that takes place over a period of years.

- A key focus of change is the internal conditions of schools, including the teaching and learning activities used in the school as well as the school procedures that support the teaching-learning process.

- A broader definition of outcomes that includes more than just student scores on achievement tests.

- Although the school is the centre of change it must work collaboratively with all partners in education.

- Both a top-down orientation which provides policy aims, an overall strategy and operations plan along with a bottom-up orientation involving needs assessment, priority goal setting and implementation is important.

- Implementation alone is not enough. For change to be successful there must be a drive towards institutionalization where the focus of change becomes part of the natural behaviour of all those in the school.

In tracking the history of the school improvement movement, Hopkins and Reynolds (2001) outlined three school improvement phases. These authors suggested that the first phase did not represent a systematic coherent approach to school improvement and initiatives such as organisational change, school self-evaluation and the ownership of change by individual schools and teachers were only loosely connected to student learning outcomes and generally lacked impact on classroom practice. The second phase as presented by these authors began in the early 1990s and was the result of interaction between the school effectiveness and the school improvement communities. School effectiveness brought the methodology for judging school

effectiveness and 'what works' at the school level to improve student outcomes and the school improvement movement brought guidelines and strategies for implementation, approaches to staff development and designs for planning that focused upon learning outcomes (p. 460).

The third phase which began in the mid to late 1990s was attributed to the notion that the evidence stemming from numerous educational reforms in a variety of countries (United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Netherlands to name but a few) indicated that the efforts were not particularly successful. In this phase it was deemed important that teachers were knowledgeable about the good practices that had been discovered for teaching and learning while at the same time encouraging teachers to generate new knowledge about teaching practice. Hopkins and Reynolds (2001) provided 10 aspects of philosophy and practice that characterized this third phase:

- The focus on enhancing what affects student learning and achievement outcomes.
- Providing those involved in the change process with the skills of 'change agency' that will raise levels of performance throughout the school community.
- Bringing strategies and programmes that have a research base of proven effectiveness.
- Building an audit of and paying attention to the particular features of the individual school when selecting strategies.
- Aiming to build capacity in the organisation and build a culture that will support continuous improvement.
- Providing data as high quality feedback in school improvement efforts.
- Focussing on the quality of classroom practice and student learning.
- Creating and facilitating networks that disseminate and sustain good practice.
- Providing consistency in the experiences that children receive within a school.

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- Accepting the reality of a centralised policy context, but also realising the need to

    exploit the creativity and synergies that already exist.

Critique of the Two Movements

Not all of the literature that I reviewed portrayed a positive picture of either the effective

schools or the school improvement movement. Reynolds (2010) in *Failure Free Education* posed

the conundrum of why such hostility was evoked by something so apparently useful as the school

effectiveness and school improvement movements (SESI) which embodied the desire to find out

what makes a 'good' school and thus help all schools become good.

A variety of authors have provided a critique of the school effectiveness and the school

improvement movements but presented differing perspectives. Visscher and Witzier (2005)

conducted a review of the literature of criticism about school effectiveness research from the

1990s to 2005 and consolidated the criticism, into three elements as: (a) the political-ideological,

(b) objectivity, and (c) a narrow view of teaching and learning. Critics of the political-ideological

nature of the effective schools movement indicated that the close ties between researchers and

policy-makers reflected governmental concerns instead of student learning. Weiner (2002), in

supporting this idea, suggested that school effectiveness researchers were much too willing to

provide simple solutions to complex policy issues. Slee and Weiner (2003) discussed the lack of

success of the education system in the United Kingdom where it was used in the "allocation of

success and failure in life." (p. 3) Schooling, they said, acted as the turnstile for higher education

and the skilled and profession-based workforce. Political support for the effective schools

movement was garnered by the emphasis on accountability through utilization of checklists of

benchmarks to label schools as effective or ineffective. The school effectiveness research

proffered that adopting the characteristics of so called successful schools would lead to wide

spread effective schools. Weiner (2002) argued that school effectiveness research oversimplified educational issues but politicians and policy-makers were keen to embrace the idea of identifiable effective cures for these issues.

Objectivity was a second area that was also critiqued. Researchers tended to assume that research would generate accurate knowledge, "through the application of rigorous quantitative methodologies." (Luyten, Visscher & Witzier, 2005, p. 251) Their contention was that all research is "contaminated" by the personal, political and ideological views of the researcher. Weiner suggested that the school effectiveness research had its origin in opposition to the Coleman Report (1966) and the attempt to establish that schools matter and that they do make a difference to student learning.

The third area for concern according to the critics was the view adopted by school effectiveness researchers was the quality of the teaching-learning process should be judged according to outcomes or results. Slee and Weiner (2003) suggested that effective schools research made a set of assumptions about the purpose of schooling and focused narrowly on discrete fragments of academic knowledge that can be assessed easily. By focusing on test scores, school effectiveness research did not take into account the social, moral and esthetic dimensions of teaching and learning that provided preparation for adulthood, parenthood, citizenship or the world of work. Slee (2003) stated much more vehemently, "School effectiveness focuses exclusively on the processes and internal constructs of schooling, apparently disconnected from education's social end—adulthood." (p. 5) Critics have suggested that judging the quality of education based on outcomes does not take into account external factors and what can realistically be achieved through schooling.

Slee and Weiner (2003) stated that school effectiveness models favour the privileged and those students that are marginalized are not well served by the accountability and objectivity of the movement. In the United Kingdom, Weiner (2002) indicated that the largest number of failing schools is still in the poorest areas in spite of effective schools research. Thrupp and Lupton (2006) urged researchers in the effective schools and school improvement movements to pay stricter attention to the role of the social, economic and cultural context of schools. How did these various models relate to the diversity of schools such as those for the middle-class and those for the working class, schools for white children and schools for minorities and so on?

Reynolds (2010) indicating that there are now an extensive number of publications on research conducted which have attracted considerable criticism and controversy, summarized his perspective on the significant weaknesses of the effective schools research and the school improvement field. Table 4 is an adaptation of the work of Reynolds and I believe captures and summarizes much of the criticism that I found in the literature regarding both the effective schools and the school improvement movements.

Table 4. Weaknesses of Effective Schools and School Improvement Movements

Effective Schools Movement	School Improvement Field
Its predominant focus upon effectiveness of academic achievement, rather than embracing broader educational goals, e.g. vocational skills and attitudes towards learning	It's one size fits all solution to educational issues
Its lack of much information about the characteristics of effective teaching and learning in classrooms	Lack of evidence about the effect of the interventions
Its inability so far to successfully transfer its insights to 'practitioners'	Noticeable absence of any focus upon the process of teaching
Its one size fits all orientations and focus on the disadvantaged schools in high poverty communities, fails to take into account different school contexts and neighbourhoods	
Its focus upon schools that became effective rather than longitudinal studies	

Despite the criticisms of these movements I concur with Reynolds (2010) that in the 21st century there remains a need to continue to explore the possibilities for effective schools and school improvement. Reynolds advocated taking a problem solving approach, trying out solutions to problems and measuring the effects of these solutions. He proposed "cutting edge" areas for the future of this discipline which included paying attention to relationships and context variables within and across schools, the study of the additive nature of school and family, school failure and dysfunctionality, as well as issues to do with curriculum and assessment. Schools can always improve how they deliver education for students. Once a goal is reached then new goals are formulated in the constant quest for improvement. Levin (2008) said,

> Improvement is and will continue to be hard and demanding work. There are few things
> more worth our struggle, our time, energy, our sweat and tears than being able to see
> young people become something more than they, or we, thought possible (p. 232).

My personal experience as an educator and with educators leads me to the same conclusion that seeing students reach their potential is worth all the hard work and that makes school improvement endeavors important, in spite of the shortcomings that might ensue.

Summary: The Effective Schools and School Improvement Movements

The effective schools and school improvement research evolved over time, beginning as early as the 1930s. The effective schools movement can be summarized with three important features: (a) equity for students that included gender issues, ethnicity, disabilities and family structure, (b) the school was considered the unit of change, and (c) basic curriculum was measured (Lezotte, 2001). Lists of effective school correlates were produced, identifying the characteristics of highly effective schools. Although several lists were produced by different people, the Edmonds (1979) list illustrates the kind of characteristics deemed essential: (a) strong

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instructional leadership, (b) high expectations for all students, (c) an orderly, work-oriented environment, (d) priority focus on instruction, and (e) frequent monitoring. Teddlie and Stringfield (2007) indicated that by the late 1980s the effective school movement had become marginalized in both Britain and North America. However, according to Murphy (1992) even though the effective schools movement had a narrow focus the importance of the movement is the legacy of two principles that *all students can learn* and *the focus on student outcomes* that remains. I suggest that these principles are still important in the 21st Century.

Taking into account the various aspects of school improvement that I found in the literature, I believe it can be summarized as an approach to educational change whose aim was to enhance student outcomes through a focus on the teaching and learning processes and conditions that provide support these, such as organisational structure, local policy, school culture and climate. Teddlie and Stringfield (2007) provided themes that permeated school improvement research: (a) interventions must be clearly defined rather than vague philosophical ideals, (b) the importance of context since schools and districts vary considerably, (c) the most successful interventions involved local educators in adapting external research to work in the local context, and (d) the focus on the process of improvement as well as the outcomes.

Often, authors critiqued the school effectiveness and school improvement movements together as one larger movement. Criticisms regarding both movements cluster around three main ideas. The political-ideological critique was that politicians and policy-makers were keen to embrace the idea of identifiable effective cures for educational issues that reflected governmental concerns rather than student learning. The second was the view that quantitative research would generate accurate knowledge and thus be objective. The third criticism was the narrow view of teaching and learning that focused on test scores and did not take into account the social, moral

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and esthetic dimensions of teaching and learning that provided preparation for adulthood, parenthood, citizenship or the world of work.

Synthesizing the Literature

Within Chapter Two, The Literature Review, I explored five themes: Leadership for Student Learning, Teacher Leadership, Leadership Development, Challenges Facing Leadership, the School Effectiveness and School Improvement Movements. This process did serve to provide background information for conducting my study.

In designing my study, I had an intuitive understanding that leadership was important for student learning and this notion was supported in the literature. School leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on student learning and achievement" (Barber, Felan & Clark, 2010; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Ponte et al., 2008; Levin, 2008; Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe, 2008). The effects of leadership on student learning are indirect and result from the influence on the school culture in which teaching and learning occur (Leithwood, Harris & Hopkins, 2008; Leithwood, Patten, & Jantzi, 2010).

Knowing the importance of leadership does not necessarily help us know how to do it ourselves or create the conditions that foster and support its existence (Levin, 2008). It is important to go beyond theory and study the particular processes and tasks that are responsible for leadership development (Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe, 2008).

Analysis of the literature led to my understanding that effective leadership practices can be identified, and leaders who put their energies into these practices are likely to achieve greater impact on learning. Information surrounding this topic focused on the knowledge, skills and competencies that effective leaders possess. I did not find agreement on the exact nature of these but it seems that good leadership is teachable and results from experience and support (Barber,

2010; Scott & Webber, 2008). Several scholars pointed to relationships among the adults in a school as the single factor common to sustainable school improvement and have a greater influence on student achievement than anything else (Barth, 2006; Fullan, 2002; Harris, 2005).

Since an important aspect of this study was that many teachers in Alberta moved into leadership roles that were newly created, I examined the concept of teacher leadership. There was disagreement among scholars on what teacher leadership actually encompassed (Murphy, 2005; Muijis & Harris, 2003; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Indicated in the literature, there is movement away from the one-person model of leadership to include teacher leadership where teachers are more involved in decisions about teaching and learning (Lambert, 2002, Northouse, 2010; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). I found support for the notion that teacher leadership is gaining momentum as schools attempt to change and improve. Generally teacher leaders come into leadership positions with an impressive array of skills as teachers. However they have much to learn in these new roles which were much different than working with students and what had worked in the narrow classroom environment would not necessarily work in the broader environment (Danielson, 2007; Katzenmeyer & Moller ,2009; Lieberman, Saxl & Miles, 2007). Summarizing the various aspects presented in the literature and for purposes of this study I defined teacher leaders as those who intentionally attempt to influence others for improved educational practice both within their classrooms and beyond.

Educational leadership in the 21st Century has a wide range of demands and is increasingly more complex. Hence, leadership development has become an important focus within school improvement strategies (Bush, 2009; Bush, 2012; Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005). Improved leadership development will result in better leadership, management, and organizational practices (Bush, 2009; LaPointe, Darling-Hammond &

Meyerson, 2007; Orr, 2006). There is debate in the literature on what aspects and processes should form part of a leadership development program (Bush, 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2007) Moorosi & Bush, 2011; Sparks & Hirsch, 2000). Synthesizing the literature, leadership development can be described as the expansion of the capacity of organizational members to engage effectively in various leadership roles and processes and is a continuum from initial training to induction and on-going inservice.

There were numerous references to the challenges facing leadership at the present time which are of concern globally (Barber, Whelan & Clark, 2010; Pont, Nusche & Moorman, 2008). One challenge included rapidly increasing demands on leaders (Beaudin, Thompson & Jacobson, 2002; Barber, Whelan &Clark, 2010; Institute for Educational Leadership, 2000; Pont, Nusche & Moorman, 2008). A second challenge was a shrinking pool of candidates due to issues such as retirements, and perceived demands for leaders (Alberta Education, 2010; Beaudin, Thompson & Jacobson 2002; Levin, 2008; Tooms, Barnett, & Shoho, 2010). Leadership development can be instrumental in dealing with these challenges.

Because this study was situated in the context of one school improvement strategy, *AISI,* I investigated the historical perspective of the school effectiveness and school improvement movements. Beginning as early as the 1930s, the effective schools and school improvement research evolved over time. The literature divided the effective schools movement into various stages (Glickman, Gordon & Ross-Gordon, 2009; Reynolds, 2010; Sackney, 2007; Teddlie & Stringfield, 2007) but the important features of the movement were: (a) equity for students that included gender issues, ethnicity, disabilities and family structure, (b) the school as the unit of change, and (c) the measurement of basic curriculum (Lezotte, 2001). In the literature Edmonds was considered to be a key researcher in the area of school effectiveness and known for this list of

the kind of characteristics deemed essential for effective schools: (a) strong instructional leadership, (b) high expectations for all students, (c) an orderly, work-oriented environment, (d) priority focus on instruction, and (e) frequent monitoring. In contrast to the effective schools movement, which tended to focus on easily measureable outcomes, school improvement paid attention to the conditions necessary for improvement on both classroom and institutional levels. A number of authors critiqued the school effectiveness and the school improvement movements (Luyten, Visscher & Witzier, 2005; Slee, 2003; Slee & Weiner, 2003; Visscher & Witzier, 2005, Weiner, 2002). The criticism revolved around three elements as: (a) the political-ideological, (b) objectivity, and (c) a narrow view of teaching and learning.

With the reality that educational leadership in the 21st Century has a wide range of demands and is increasingly more complex, leadership development has become an important focus as an important aspect of school improvement strategies (Bush, 2009; Bush, 2012; Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, and Meyerson, 2005). Improved leadership development will result in better leadership, management, and organizational practices (Bush, 2009; LaPointe, Darling-Hammond & Meyerson, 2007; Orr, 2006). There is debate in the literature on what aspects and processes should form part of a leadership development program (Bush, 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2007) Moorosi &Bush, 2011; Sparks & Hirsch, 2000). Synthesizing the literature, leadership development can be described as the expansion of the capacity of organizational members to engage effectively in various leadership roles and processes and is a continuum from initial training to induction and on-going inservice.

This literature review began with the notion that *AISI*, one school improvement strategy, had contributed to school and school system leadership development. Mertens (2005) suggested that a researcher's original framework influences the planning and conducting of the literature

review. When I began designing my doctoral research, I had a simplistic conceptualization that leadership development was a result of the actions, events, and beliefs of *AISI* leaders along with their leadership experiences. Figure 2 is a visual representation of my intuitive conceptualization at the outset of the study.

Figure 2. Initial Conceptualization Guiding the Research

The purpose of the qualitative framework, according to Mertens (2005) is to focus the inquiry and to give it boundaries. Mertens indicated that the conceptual framework is not intended to establish categories for data collection and analysis but does serve as a foundation for the research questions that will be asked (see appendices F and G).

Chapter Summary

The literature review was an ongoing process throughout my study. A portion of what I learned in my review of the literature is more appropriately discussed in Chapter Three relative to the research methodology, methods, data collection and analysis. However Chapter Two, which explored five themes, served to provide a context for conducting my study. In organizing a framework for my study, I was greatly influenced by the work of Mertens (2010) who outlined the basic beliefs of constructivism which provided the underlying assumptions for conducting my research

The initial review of the literature assisted me in focussing my doctoral study on school and school system leadership development and I believe that the case-study approach, consistent

with the constructivist paradigm supported my research. Assumed in this framework and based on my findings in the literature, leadership plays an important role in student learning and achievement

The next chapter provides a description of the design for my study. I have included scholarly references from the literature that guided me in planning and conducting various aspects of the research. The methodology and methods that I used to address the research questions are presented.

CHAPTER THREE – RESEARCH DESIGN

The purpose of this chapter is to outline and provide a description of the research design

for my study. Influenced by the constructivist paradigm the case study methodology (Yin, 2009)

was utilized to explore how school improvement strategies have contributed to school and school

system leadership development. Included in this chapter is an explanation of my philosophical

stance and rationale for selection of the research paradigm. An overview of the case study

methodology is provided along with the specific way that case study was employed for my

doctoral study. Data sources, participant selection, and data collection procedures are outlined

and a detailed look at how I conducted the analysis of data is provided. The chapter concludes by

indicating the steps that were taken in the study in order to support trustworthiness.

Philosophical Paradigmatic Stance

As I began to pursue my interest in educational leadership development and school

improvement, it was important to first examine my own beliefs, and epistemological assumptions

relative to conducting research. I knew that I wanted to examine and reflect the experiences and

perspectives of educators when they assumed informal leadership roles within the *Alberta*

Initiative for School Improvement (AISI). Embarking on a review of the literature related to

research methodology, I noted the different research paradigms and that each one guides and

directs a study in a slightly different fashion. Bassey (2007) indicated that the research paradigm

sets the context for the investigator's study and defined a paradigm as, "a network of coherent

ideas about the nature of the world and the function of researchers, which patterns the thinking of

the research and underpins the research actions." (p. 19)

According to Mertens (2010) the basic assumptions of the constructivist paradigm are that knowledge is co-constructed by people active in the research process, and researchers attempt to understand peoples' experience from the point of view of those who lived it. The constructivist researcher does not look for reality 'out there' as facts to be uncovered, but understands that there are multiple realities as people make sense of any situation in different ways (Mertens, 2005). To a constructivist, knowledge is not universal, objective or fixed but is co-constructed as a result of interaction in a social context (Glickman et al., 2009). The constructivist paradigm suggests that research cannot be independent of the researchers' values. This overview of the basic research paradigms assisted me to determine which best suited my personal style and what I wanted to achieve with my research.

As I prepared for this study I was drawn to the constructivist paradigm, because I wanted to understand from individuals, their perspectives about how their experiences as *AISI* leaders influenced their own development as a leader. Lincoln and Guba's (1986) notion of reciprocal learning between the researcher and the participants was particularly appealing. For me, the words of Stake (2010) most aptly summarized constructivism:

> Many of us take a constructivist view that there is no true meaning of an event; there is only the event as experienced or interpreted by people. People will interpret the event differently and often multiple interpretations provide a depth of understanding that the most authoritative or popular interpretation does not. (p. 66)

I liked the notion that utilizing the constructivist paradigm as my framework, new understanding could be created as a result of the interaction of existing knowledge and beliefs, with new ideas or experiences as related by the research participants.

In the literature I found that the constructivist paradigm is also referred to as the interpretivist paradigm or the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm. For purposes of my study, I have primarily used the term "constructivist" except where making reference specifically to the work of certain researchers and authors. In these instances I will honour the work of the researcher by using the term utilized by each respective author.

Having initially determined that constructivism was most suited to the study I wanted to conduct, I set out to examine the paradigm in more depth. Table 5 that follows provides my view of the features of the constructivist research paradigm and is a combination and adaptation of tables provided by Gephart (1999) and Mertens (2010). Developing the figure served to consolidate my understanding of the constructivist research paradigm.

Table 5. Constructivist Research Paradigm

Goal of the Paradigm	Describe meanings, understand members' definitions of the situation; examine how objective realities are produced.
Ontology (nature of reality)	Intersubjective; multiple realities that are socially constructed; understanding members' own meanings and theories of the world; rejects objective reality.
Key Focus	Research *with* people; insights into experience; ways of understanding participants' own meanings of the world; search for patterns of meaning.
Epistemology (nature of knowledge)	Definitions of situations produced in natural contexts; interactive link between researcher and participants; co-construction of findings; knowledge is the result of the perspective of the participants.
Methodology/ Methods	Qualitative primarily; hermeneutical; ethnography; participant observation; interviews; conversational analysis; grounded theory development; case studies; textual analysis, document reviews.
Axiology (nature of ethical behaviour)	Balanced representation of views; raise participants awareness; trustworthiness; authenticity.

Critical to my understanding of the ideas in Table 5 regarding the constructivist research paradigm was the definitions of some of the key terminology. First, intersubjectivity is the way

that we come to know the thinking of multiple others through discourse and discussions (Gephart, 1999). Second, social constructions refer to interactions between the researcher and the participant as they co-construct reality from the perspective of the participant (Mertens, 2010). Third, the notion of trustworthiness relates to the extent to which the evidence is plausible (Fogelman and Comber, p. 125). According to Mertens (2010) trustworthiness is increased when there exists a balanced presentation of the views of all participants.

Since my aim was to deeply understand the experiences from the point of view of educators who had held both formal and informal leadership roles within *AISI*, the constructivist paradigm seemed highly appropriate for this endeavour. In this regard, I particularly liked how Yanow (2000) stated, "Interpretive analysis…..seeks to understand the intentions underlying actors' reasoning in a particular situation. What are *their* conceptual boxes (not the analysts)? How did *they* make sense of the situation?" (pp. 22-23) My own experience as an educator led me to support the belief that different people can understand and interpret the social reality in any given context in quite different, but equally valid ways and my research interest was in constructing knowledge together with the *AISI* leaders regarding how they understood their leadership experiences.

Before establishing that I would use constructivism for my study, I examined the critique of this paradigm that I found in the literature so as to decide if another paradigm might be more appropriate. Helpful in this deliberation was Briggs and Coleman (2007) identification of three major areas of concern to consider before attempting research from the constructivist stance. The first concern focused on whether 'lay' accounts could ever be considered representative of reality. The second was that it is unusual for human beings to 'reflect' upon their behaviour so the data collected is only a re-creation of reality. The third was that the accounts provided are incomplete, as these

accounts do not take into consideration the broader issues that underpin the actions of the participants (p. 26). In spite of these stated drawbacks, I continued to be drawn to the constructivist paradigm in order to explore and co-construct the leadership experiences from "the standpoint of the voices from the field" (Mills and Gale, 2007, p. 439)

Data Sources and Collection Procedures

Both Mertens (2010) and Yin (2009) suggested documentation review and the interview as data sources for the case study. Table 6 outlines the strengths and challenges inherent in these two methods for data collection as presented by these authors.

Table 6. Strengths and Weaknesses of Data Sources

Data Source	Strengths	Challenges
Documentation Review	Information already exists Stable - Can be reviewed repeatedly Comprehensive and historical information Broad coverage - long span of time, many events, and many settings Unobtrusive – doesn't interrupt program or routine of participants Exact - contains exact names, references, and details of an event Few biases about information	Information can be difficult to find Access may be deliberately withheld Information may be incomplete Reporting bias—reflects (unknown) bias of the author Time consuming Documents should not be considered literal recordings of events
Interviews	Targeted - focus directly on the study topic Allow for flexibility in the process Insightful - provides perceived causal inferences and explanations Get a full range and depth of information Develop a relationship with the participant	Time consuming Can be hard to analyze and compare Interviewer can bias participant responses Bias due to poorly constructed questions Inaccuracies due to poor recall of the participant Reflexivity - interviewee gives what interviewer wants to hear

Methodology

If the paradigm guides the researcher in philosophical assumptions about the research, methodology then provides a rationale for the ways in which the researcher will conduct the specific research activities. The methodology provides the underlying reasons for selection of methods, tools and techniques (Briggs & Coleman, 2007). After examination of a variety of research methodologies, and consistent with the constructivist paradigm, I came to believe that the case study methodology was appropriate for addressing my research questions.

Reading and reflecting on the literature that surrounds this methodology (Mertens, 2010; Stake 1995; Yin, 2009) I established a basic understanding of the case study as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in a real life context. As such, cases are bounded both by a specific context and by time. The researcher collects detailed information in order to explore the phenomenon in depth but has little or no control over the events comprising the phenomenon. I chose to use the writing of Yin (2009) as the primary source to guide me. As a beginning researcher I found his work to be very helpful throughout my study.

While developing my study, I was cognizant of Yin's (2009) advice against rigid adherence to a case study pre-designed protocol because flexibility to change the protocol as preliminary findings emerge is one of the advantages of the case study method which was supported by Bassey (2007) who cautioned that research rarely follows a neatly prescribed pattern. Yin (2009) outlined the critical features of a case study and his conceptualization of a case study was helpful to me as I planned and conducted my research.

Case Study

Yin (2009) suggested that case study research is, "an all-encompassing method-- covering

the logic of design, data collection techniques and specific approaches to data analysis." (p. 18) In addition, the case study is particularly appropriate for addressing a "how" question. Since my research question was a "how" question, this supported my selection of the case study methodology as appropriate for conducting the study.

The case study methodology has come under criticism. Yin (2009) indicated that perhaps the greatest concern in conducting case study research has been over the lack of rigor. He strongly stated that it is the responsibility of the case study researcher to work hard at presenting the information fairly. A second concern according to Yin (2009) was whether the information from a single case study could be generalizable. Countering that concern he suggested that a single experiment also might not be generalizable. I found that this information provided by Yin (2009) assisted me in realizing some of the perceived shortcomings relative to the case study and then developing a comfort level for my choice of the case study as the methodology for my research.

Mertens (2010) contended that the overall purpose of a case study is to conduct a comprehensive examination in order to fully understand or depict experiences. Turning to Yin (2009) he suggested that the case study has a distinct advantage over other methodology when the research question seeks to explain a contemporary event over which the researcher has limited control, and the research question requires an in-depth description of a social phenomenon (p. 13). Hence the case study methodology seemed highly suitable for conducting my study where my aim was to use *AISI,* a contemporary educational circumstance in Alberta that existed for more than a decade, in order to examine in depth the experiences of *AISI* leaders. As I defined my study the case was leadership development; the context was the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement within the province of Alberta. In order to gain a depth of understanding of the

extent to which individual experiences might have prepared these *AISI* leaders and contributed to school or school system leadership development the research design became a multiple-site case study across four school systems.

Documentation Review

Guided by Yin (2009) who suggested that documentary information is likely to be relevant to every case study topic (p. 101), documents were used to provide historical background and information pertinent to leadership through *AISI*. Although information for documentation review can sometime be difficult to locate and access those were not hurdles for this study. Alberta Education has maintained an extensive electronic archive of documents about *AISI* since its inception and is available to the public on the Alberta Education web site at http://education.alberta.ca/teachers/*AISI*.aspx I found this a valuable resource. As background to my study an examination of the public policy documents housed in this on-line data base helped me to chronicle historical events of *AISI*. Reading the documents that were produced by members of the *AISI* community not only provided comprehensive historical information, it provided me with insights into the activities, beliefs and perceptions of various groups and individuals regarding their part in this school improvement initiative. Documents that I examined were created by Alberta Education as well as the Partner Steering Committee, university scholars within Alberta and outside of the province, and *AISI* coordinators. The variety of documents posted on-line that I reviewed and found most useful included both current and archived materials spanning a range of topics and document types:

- The framework document for *AISI* and the Administrator Handbooks that provided me with the rationale and requirements for each of the five cycles,

- Project proposals and corresponding annual progress reports, where I found project information specific to the four school systems that were part of my study as well as from other school systems,

- Provincial reports for three completed cycles (the fourth was unavailable at the time of writing), that provided overall summaries of the success and challenges of *AISI* along with guidance for future directions,

- External review, *The Learning Mosaic,* that provided a perspective about *AISI* of scholars beyond the borders of Alberta, who had knowledge of school improvement endeavors nationally and internationally,

- University Research Reviews, conducted by university scholars in Alberta that highlighted how innovations were implemented and sustained within Alberta classrooms, schools and school systems. In particular, *Leading and Sustaining School Improvement Initiatives* that examined how educational leadership in *AISI* enhanced and supported student learning and performance, and

- The January 2013 issue of the *The Scoop,* a newsletter that featured perspectives of educators in the field relative to leadership in *AISI.*

Yin (2009) suggested that the most useful aspect of using documents is to corroborate and augment evidence from other sources. Although I had familiarity and extensive background from my previous experiences, I consulted numerous documents from the on-line data base and was able to review reports and research reviews that covered many topics. Being able to access this data base at any time and to repeatedly refer to the documents as often as necessary enhanced my data collection. More importantly, I believe my examination of these documents has led me to knowledge and understanding of the prevalent thinking about *AISI* from 1999 to 2013.

Prior to interviews with participants, I found it informative to review the project proposals for the four cycles of *AISI* as well as the annual reports from each of the four selected school systems. A template with requirements for project development and subsequent approval had been provided to school systems and the annual reports reflect how each school system met the requirements for their *AISI* project(s) in that specific year. Cycle four projects were being implemented at the time of the interviews, and examination of the project proposal template provided more specific information on the level of detail expected in each of these areas. Project proposals, written by school systems and submitted to Alberta Education for approval must fulfill specific criteria in order to receive project funding. I noted that the proposal and reporting requirements changed over time, typically at the outset of each of the cycles.

Related Pilot Study

My journey through the research process and the writing of the dissertation has been a vast learning experience. At the outset and while I was still in the planning stages, I intended to do a pilot study that would enable me to refine the research procedures I was proposing as well as the research instruments. Citing Mertens (2005) an important reason to conduct a pilot study is the training experience prior to the actual study being conducted (p. 250). I believed that such a study would enrich my understanding as a researcher, provide me with practical experience in the field and assist me with refinement of processes for this doctoral study. I view conducting research for the first time in much the same way as driving a car; in spite of reading a great deal about the "how to" no one is an expert the first time he or she gets behind the wheel. I had a great deal to learn as a novice researcher and a pilot study provided the means for me to gain experience, refine my techniques and develop understanding of my role as the researcher.

Because of the experience with the pilot study, I have adjusted the focus of my research question and the methodology that I used. Through planning for a pilot study, the process informed my thinking and development of the design for my doctoral research. The original research design was supported by the mixed-methods approach and included the use of a questionnaire as well as interviews. Resulting from this related study, the research question and design have shifted. Comber (2007) suggested that careful and appropriate piloting of research instruments will highlight design problems by weeding out inappropriate, poorly worded or irrelevant items. Expanding on this idea Brunton and Coll (2005) said that piloting the interview questions can lead to clarification of the intent of the questions, justification for the inclusion of certain questions, elimination of ambiguity, ensuring that there are no offensive or sensitive questions and designing the questions so that they are easy for participants to understand. My experience supports these notions. The pilot provided a valuable opportunity to hone my skills as an interviewer. What I learned from piloting the original plan supported the way that I designed and conducted my doctoral research and I believe that the study was more effective as a result.

Ethics

The plan for this study was reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board (Appendix A). Participation in my study was voluntary, beginning with each superintendent providing signed consent indicating agreement for the involvement of their school system in my study. Assurance was given by the researcher that withdrawal from the study could occur at any time until final data analysis began. Upon receipt of the signed superintendent consent form, I contacted prospective participants to obtain their individual written consent to participate. Provisions for confidentiality and anonymity were described on the consent form. I referred to Mertens (2010) and Berg (2009) in defining these two

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terms and they provided clarity for me. Within my study, confidentiality means that the privacy of individuals was protected by actively attempting to remove from the research records any elements that might identify participants. Anonymity means that both individuals and school systems have either remained nameless or pseudonyms were given. All consent forms were signed by both the participant and me as the researcher and are maintained in a locking cabinet.

Participant Selection

Following ethics approval (Appendix A), the next step in my research was to select which school systems to approach for inclusion in my study. When using the constructivist paradigm, the researcher typically utilizes purposeful sampling (sometime referred to in the literature as purposive sampling) to select sites and participants with the goal of identifying information-rich cases that will best assist in understanding the research question and lead to an in-depth study (Creswell, 1995; Mertens, 2010). Careful consideration was given to the selection of school systems since I was seeking the most in-depth information possible. The final choice was based on my own knowledge acquired through my recent work across Alberta in *AISI* as well as examination of school system project proposals and reports to discover the level of detail provided. The following section provides information regarding the selected school systems in order to enhance the readers' understanding of the context for my study of leadership development.

Participating School Systems

Consistent with the constructivist paradigm and the case study method I sought multiple perspectives by conducting the study in four different school systems. Keeping in mind the geographic diversity across the province, I selected school systems that were located in the north,

central and southern parts of the province. As well, selected systems were both rural and urban in nature and the urban school systems reflected both small and larger urban populations. In an attempt to protect possible identity of school systems general information is provided. Even so, this provides the reader insight into the nature of participating school systems selected for my study.

I have provided a brief sketch of some of the distinguishing features of each school system that participated in my study. One school system that participated in my study is rural in nature with a student population of less than 5,000 students, and approximately 20 schools. The second school system is also considered rural but has quite a different composition with well over 5,000 students and about 30 schools. Nearly two thirds of the students in this rural system are bussed to school. Programming for Hutterite children, for special need students, French Immersion and Native Education as well as outreach schools are part of the service that this school system provides to students. The third school system is located in a small city and serves just less than 10,000 students in 20 schools with separate outreach programming. This school system configures the schools in elementary (K-5), middle (6-8) and high school (9-12) and includes Montessori, Christian education, special education, French Immersion and instruction in several other languages as part of their service to students. The fourth is one of the larger school systems in Alberta, with well over 10,000 students. Numerous programs including academic, Aboriginal, sports, arts, languages, and faith based are available for students. The information provided demonstrates that the four school systems are quite different in nature and complexity.

Individual Participants

Purposeful sampling was initially utilized to select individual participants. Mertens (2010) indicated that in the constructivist paradigm the goal is to select participants that the

researcher believes will provide rich data that are both detailed and relevant to the research question (p. 320). Further a set of specified criteria was used in sampling. In each selected school system, interview participants were: (a) the superintendent, (b) the current *AISI* coordinator at the time of data collection, and (c) up to three additional educators that had at least one year in a role as an informal *AISI* leader which I have previously defined to mean any teacher who had as part of their work assignment, dedicated time outside of classroom teaching duties, to work specifically in the area of school improvement within *AISI*. Additionally these *AISI* leaders must have either moved into or aspired to the role of a principal or a leadership role such as coordinator at the school system level.

The selection of participants was achieved in a number of ways. In some instances the selection was based on my own knowledge about these educators. A disadvantage in this type of selection process is the potential bias in the researcher's decision making. However, consistent with the constructivist stance, my personal experience with these educators led me to expect the provision of detailed and rich information during their individual interviews. Where names were suggested by the superintendent I asked for more names than necessary. This helped to maintain anonymity, ensuring that only I knew for certain who participated in my study. For example, one school system provided a list of 15 names from which I selected only three. Snowball sampling also occurred. Mertens (2010) indicated that in this form of purposeful sampling the researcher begins with a short list of potential participants and the list grows like a snowball (p. 322). Utilizing snowball sampling in my research, participants who were interviewed were sometime asked to suggest names of additional people who potentially could be interviewed and in other instances, participants volunteered names of people they believed should know a lot about the

research questions. Thus, my assumption was that snowball sampling contributed to my goal to gather the richest information with the greatest depth possible.

Permission to interview and tape record was granted in writing by 19 individuals who were subsequently interviewed over the space of approximately three months. Information about each of the participants is contained within the text of the Interpretations Chapter Four. However, for easy referral and complete details about individual participants the reader may also consult Appendix H. Figure 10 provides demographics of the participants, whose names have been changed in order to protect their identity and maintain confidentiality and anonymity according to ethical considerations. Although as a researcher it can be a challenge to avoid personal bias creeping into the sampling procedure, I feel confident that the participants selected did indeed provide data that was information-rich.

Access and Entry Procedures

When ethics approval was granted, the next step in my research was to contact superintendents for their consent. For three of the school systems, initial contact was a request via email that included a letter of invitation to participate in my research (Appendix B) as well as the consent form to conduct research in their school system (Appendix C) for the superintendent's signature. In the fourth instance, I first was required to complete and submit the Cooperative Activities Program (CAP) research project application to the Associate Dean of Research at the University of Alberta who, upon approval forwarded the request to that particular school system. Subsequently I received written permission to conduct my study in all four of the school systems that I initially contacted. The next step was to contact the current *AISI* coordinator in each of these school systems with an information letter (Appendix D) and consent form (Appendix E). Participation was voluntary and all four coordinators provided signed consent to

participate and be interviewed. Once consent was received, a copy of the interview questions (Appendices F and G) was forwarded to each participant and a date that was mutually acceptable was established for the interview.

In-Depth, Semi-Structured Interviews

Yin (2009) asserted that one of the most important sources of data when conducting a case study is the interview and he suggested that the interview is really a guided conversation rather than a structured inquiry. As the researcher I facilitated the discussion, using the research questions as guides but the process was fluid. Commenting on the in-depth interview Yin (2009) suggested that the researcher can ask participants about the "facts of the matter as well as their opinions of events" (p. 107). I believe that the in-depth, semi-structured interview was appropriate for my research because I was attempting to gather deep, rich information about a multiplicity of participant experiences and perceptions.

Interviews were conducted one-on-one with participants and the conversational nature of the semi-structured format provided each person interviewed with an opportunity to reflect upon and provide their own insights and special stories. I developed a set of interview questions that were used as a guide to my study (Appendix F and Appendix G). However, I kept in mind that how each interview would proceed was dependent upon participant answers to each question. Although most of the questions I had prepared were eventually answered through the course of each interview, I sometime digressed from the interview protocol to enable a more natural conversational tone. Semi-structured interviews allowed me to modify the questions in light of participant responses and gave me the opportunity to probe new areas which arose within the interview process. For example, when a participant mentioned that *AISI* had increased his understanding of how research and literature can guide his practice, I asked for more detail on his

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perceptions. Discovering a similar thread repeated in subsequent interviews, I again sought more depth by probing. When a number of participants made reference to the value of research, this ultimately resulted in a sub-category of findings. My role as the interviewer was primarily as a listener but prompts were helpful in probing information provided by participants. Not all questions were asked in exactly the same way. The flexibility of semi-structured interviewing afforded me the opportunity to seek clarification of information provided by participants that at face value might appear quite obvious, but ultimately led to an enriched understanding of their specific thoughts and feelings about experiences.

Interviews were scheduled in such a way that they were staggered across all four school systems. That is to say, I did not complete the interview process in one school system before conducting interviews in another system. Interviews lasted for approximately one hour and were tape recorded. I subsequently transcribed each of the interviews myself, attempting to do so very shortly after the actual interview was concluded. Following transcription, the opportunity was provided to each participant for member checking the interview transcript for augmentation, modification or extension. Member checking is one way to increase credibility of the data as presented, by seeking verification from the participants (Mertens, 2010). Although member checking cannot ensure correctness or completeness, some participants did choose to modify the transcript and I believe that helped to present individual perspectives in the most accurate way possible at the time.

Researcher's Journal

In my reading of the literature I found the terms log, journal and diary all used to indicate the keeping of records during the data gathering process. Yin (2009) referred to the importance of maintaining a "chain of evidence" (p. 122) as a means of quality control or reliability in the

research. I was particularly struck by Yin's analogy to a forensic investigation where it is critical that the evidence reported is the same evidence that was collected and that none of the original evidence is lost. His words served to highlight for me the importance of the researcher's journal. I kept a detailed chronological record of the events that comprised my research process including information such as contact information, written consent, tracking of member checks and emails or phone calls.

Throughout the data gathering process as well as the analysis phase of the study, and as Mertens (2010) indicated, journaling served to make visible my thought processes, my personal musings, insights, hunches and questions as I endeavored to analyze and interpret my research and as such, formed an audit trail that documented the progression of the study. The journal comprised an important piece of data that recorded my reflections as I worked my way through the interview process, the analysis phase of the study and ultimately the interpretations I made.

Data Analysis Procedures

According to Yin (2009) data analysis consists of, "examining, categorizing, tabulating, testing or otherwise recombining evidence to draw empirically based conclusions." (p. 126) I reviewed the work of numerous authors prior to determining my specific approach to data analysis for this research but was primarily guided by Mertens (2010) as well as Miles and Huberman (1994). These scholars provided helpful strategies for me throughout this process.

Given that data analysis is on-going throughout the research (Mertens, 2010), I began analysis during early stages by reviewing and reflecting on the data as it was collected. Soon after each interview I completed a verbatim transcription and during that process I started to realize topics that surfaced in several of the interviews as well as some anomalies and unexpected ideas. This constant comparative method (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Mertens, 2010) was utilized

with each new interview as I sought verification for my initial hunches by comparing each

successive interview with previous ones and noting my reflections in my researcher's journal.

From the beginning the researcher is deciding what things mean; the regularities, patterns,

explanations, possible configurations, causal flows and propositions are somewhat vague at first

and then become increasingly explicit (Miles & Huberman, 1994). For example, noting

participant reference to the "value of research" the first time and then discovering it in several

more interviews. Although I was beginning to note trends and interesting aspects that were

arising from the research, my overall impressions and conclusions were not formulated until all

the data were collected.

Upon completion of the data collection and transcription phase, I began deductive analysis

by reading and re-reading the transcripts and reflecting on the data. As Mertens (2010) indicated,

this process assisted me to connect with and gain an overall sense of what participants had said.

The following summary regarding the value of constant comparisons (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, pp.

77-78) guided me throughout my analysis phase:

- Helps analysts obtain a grasp on the meaning of events that might otherwise seem
  obscure,

- Helps sensitize researchers to possible properties and dimensions that are in the data
  but remain obscure due to a lack of sensitivity on the part of the researcher,

- Helps analysts move more quickly from the level of description to one of abstraction,

- Counters the tendency to focus on a single case by immediately bringing analysis up
  to a more abstract level,

- Forces researchers to examine their own basic assumptions, their biases, perspectives,
  and those of participants,

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- Forces examination of findings, sometimes resulting in the qualification or altering of the initial interpretations,

- Makes it more likely that analyst will discover variation as well as general patterns,

- Ensures likelihood of a more fluid and creative stance toward data analysis, and

- Facilitates the linking and densification of categories.

In making constant comparisons I examined the data for similarities and differences and subsequently grouped similar ideas together to create a theme, uncovering new aspects of the theme or constructing new categories, leading to greater levels of sophistication and abstraction (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

I furthered this exploration phase by memoing in the transcript margins and making notations in my researcher's journal with ideas, questions and possible connections of ideas. Both of these analysis activities proved to be useful as I constructed the conceptual framework of themes that emerged from the research data. Although at this point I was beginning to see clusters of ideas, an overall impression was not completed until all the data was collected.

So as to decrease the very large volume of information to a more manageable size, I began data reduction by chunking ideas in the text into words, phrases and sentences. According to Miles and Huberman (1994) chunking is a form of analysis that "sharpens, sorts, focuses, discards, and organizes data in such a way that conclusions can be drawn and verified." (p. 11) Because I have a personal preference for visual representation, I constructed large webs of information that I garnered during this chunking process. Miles and Huberman (1994) called these visual representations data displays and indicated that they are "designed to assemble organized information into an immediately accessible, compact form so that the analyst can see

what is happening and either draw justifiable conclusions or move on to the next step of analysis." (p. 11)

As I constructed these webs, I was coding or assigning labels to chunks of data as a means of organizing information for future retrieval and for categorizing into themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Trends and patterns began to emerge through this process of reading, reduction, and coding. I looked for both commonality and nuances, for convergence and divergence in the data. I moved back and forth from the whole data set to discrete parts and back to the whole as I sought clarification and greater understanding. I was cognizant during this process of analysis that it was the collected data that was the focus as the reductions led me, the researcher, toward the essence of the data and away from my own assumptions (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Utilizing the information on these webs that I had constructed, I formed another visual with ideas from the data. Examining each of the 19 interviews I determined if a particular idea was represented in that interview and recorded the findings on a matrix. After completion of this matrix I was able at a glance to see where ideas were clustering. Conversely I was able to see that some of my initial impressions did not have strong support in the data and I made adaptations. For example, I initially had "being coached" as one of the categories but this proved to be less evident in the data than I first thought. That category went through various iterations from "analyzing leadership" to "observing leadership styles until I eventually settled on the title "observing and reflecting on leadership styles." Reshaping my thinking as I continued to read and analyze the data was an important aspect of my analyses and interpretations.

Grouping and regrouping the emergent sub-categories I began to cluster the ideas, and after much deliberation determined that the data revealed three large overarching ideas or themes:

(a) Developing Skills, (b) Expanding Understanding of the Work Context, and (c) Transitioning

to Action. In identifying the themes and the sub-categories I chose to label them using verbs thus

indicating the action of leadership development. I discovered that the ideas had the possibility of

fitting into more than one theme and more than one sub-category. The understanding that these

ideas did not fit discretely into individual categories contributed to my conceptualization of the

data as interconnected. Details for the themes that were constructed are provided in Chapter Four,

Interpretations along with a visual representation of the conceptualization.

Trustworthiness

Researchers who utilize qualitative research practices must take measures to demonstrate

that their research is credible and thus persuade the reader that the findings of the study are worth

paying attention to and not simply their own personal view (Schwandt, 2007; Givens, 2008). This

is referred to as trustworthiness. An excellent question to ask in judging the quality of the research,

"Are the findings sufficiently authentic that I may trust myself in acting on their implication?"

(Guba & Lincoln, 2009, p. 271). Both Yin (2009) and Mertens (2010) discussed quality indicators

for research. In judging the quality of constructivist research and hence the case study, there are

four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Mertens, 2010). By

addressing these four criteria as indicated in the following sections, I submit that steps have been

taken in order to achieve quality research.

Credibility

Credibility evaluates whether or not the research findings represent a "credible"

interpretation of the data. Credibility is analogous to the term internal validity which is generally

used for quantitative research. All parts of the research study should align. A number of

activities that were conducted over the course of the study have assisted in establishing

credibility. I believe that interviewing multiple participants from four school systems and three

categories (superintendent, *AISI* coordinator and other *AISI* leaders) provided different

perspectives and viewpoints, leading to credibility of the research. Audio recording each

interview and subsequent verbatim transcription maximized the accuracy of the data collected.

Accuracy was further enhanced by member checking that provided the opportunity to each

participant for augmentation, modification or extension of the data. Another type of member

check was soliciting feedback from some participants regarding my initial framework of

interpretations. Debriefing with my supervisor contributed to the credibility of the study. She

acted as a critical friend, who was able to point out what may not be apparent to me as the

researcher, facilitate deeper reflection on issues, ask questions, probe for both justification and

evidence to support perceptions and also help reformulate interpretations. This was achieved

through regular meetings and extensive discussions regarding processes, findings, analysis and

conclusions. The researcher's journal that was both chronological and reflexive provided an audit

trail of documentation regarding all aspects of the research process.

Transferability

This aspect of trustworthiness is the degree to which the findings can be transferred,

generalized or applied beyond the boundaries of a particular study to another situation. Lincoln

and Guba (1986) likened transferability to the term external validity. Jensen (2008) suggested

two considerations for transferability: (a) how closely the participants are linked to the context

being studied, and (b) how completely an understanding of the context being studied was created.

Keeping this in mind, I utilized purposeful sampling to select participants that I felt could provide

rich information regarding the research question and by providing thick description of the context, the participants and the research design. The burden of transferability, however, is on the reader to determine the degree of similarity between the study and their own context while it is the researcher's responsibility to provide enough detail to enable the reader to make such a judgement (Mertens, 2010). I have endeavored to provide thick descriptions of the research process and context to enable the reader to compare what is described here with his or her own situation and therefore conclude whether the context is similar in nature and has applicability or can be transferred.

Dependability

Dependability in qualitative research refers to the appropriateness and quality of the research study such that others could replicate the study. Dependability in research is achieved through quality processes in each step of the research and the researcher is required to supply adequate methodological information to enable replication of the study. According to Guba and Lincoln (1986) the term dependability is analogous to reliability used in quantitative studies. In this regard, Yin (2003) suggested maintaining a detailed and traceable protocol of the processes that indicates that the study was conducted with due care. The case record that I maintained contains the research questions, documents used for access to the field, signed consent forms, interview transcripts and member checks, school system and participant profiles and journal records that provide a means of tracking the steps taken from the overarching research question to analysis, interpretation and conclusion. I believe that I have conducted a quality, rigorous study that achieves dependability.

Confirmability

Confirmability is considered to be parallel to the term objectivity in quantitative research. Mertens (2010) said that confirmability ensures that conclusions reached are supported by the data. Jensen (2008) indicated that confirmability is concerned with providing evidence that the researcher's interpretations about how participants reconstructed their experiences can be verified in the data. Confirmability is a judgement about the quality of the inter-related processes of data collection, data analysis, interpretations and conclusions.

Given that the process of data collection and analysis occurred over an extended period of time of approximately one year and during that time member checks were conducted, I believe that enhances confirmability for this study. Coding and the use of the matrix provided a visual representation with persistent evidence of how the data clustered together to create themes and sub-categories. The researcher's journal provided an audit trail that is useful in providing the trustworthiness components of both dependability and confirmability.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has been dedicated to outlining the underpinning assumptions that I have made and the specific research design for my doctoral study. The constructivist paradigm supporting my philosophical stance was outlined and then I described the case study method, suggesting why I believed that it was an appropriate technique for my research. Data collection through semi-structured interviews, document analysis and the researcher's journal was described so as to provide the reader with a detailed understanding of the process. I have tried to provide a balanced approach to the strengths and weaknesses of the various aspects of the research design.

Analysis of the data followed a constructivist grounded theory approach as described by Charmaz (2011) by emphasizing multiple realities, standpoints or positions so as to create an interpretive understanding that was mutually constructed by the researcher and the participants. The quality of the study was outlined in terms of trustworthiness and the strategies used to achieve credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. While the results of the study are not necessarily transferable to all school systems in relation to their experiences about the leadership development of *AISI* leaders or to school and school system leadership development in general, the perspectives of the participants can inform policy and practice.

CHAPTER FOUR – FINDINGS

In this research study my purpose was to explore how leadership was developed through one school improvement strategy within the Alberta context. As part of my own experience as an educator, I performed a leadership role within the *Alberta Initiative for School Improvement* (*AISI*) for a decade from the outset of the initiative in 2000 until 2010. From my observations while working for Alberta Education between 2003 and 2010 coaching, mentoring and monitoring in order to support school systems, I noted that teachers who became *AISI* leaders often transitioned to more formal leadership roles. Throughout this chapter on study findings, I use "*AISI* leader" to mean any teacher who had dedicated time outside of classroom teaching duties, to work specifically in the area of school improvement within *AISI*. I made the assumption that *AISI*, originally designed to improve student outcomes and performance, had an unexpected impact on leadership development. Further I assumed that the experiences of these educators through *AISI* were influential in their transitioning from the *AISI* leadership role into more formal leadership positions. Intrigued by this observation I formulated my research question: How have school improvement strategies been instrumental in school and school system leadership development?

Guided by the constructivist paradigm (Mertens, 2010) I utilized a case study methodology (Yin, 2009) to explore my over-arching research question and an individual semi-structured interview process. The sub questions that were used to guide my data gathering and subsequent interpretations were:

1. What were the actions, events, beliefs and experiences of participating educators during their time as *AISI leader*s that led them to more formal leadership roles?

2. In what ways did these leaders believe that their experience in an *AISI leader*ship role

    prepared them to fulfill their current more formal leadership role?

I sought multiple perspectives by conducting the study in four different school systems. Careful consideration was given to the selection of school systems. Purposeful sampling (sometime referred to in the literature as purposive sampling) was utilized to select school systems. Determination of these was based on my own knowledge because of my recent work in *AISI* across Alberta, on perusal of public on-line documents about *AISI* including annual and final reports, as well as on the recommendations of Alberta Education *AISI* Improvement Managers because of their direct liaison with Alberta school systems. Selected school systems included large urban, small urban, rural and geographically included northern, central and southern locations. The reader may wish to refer to Chapter Three where I have provided background information about each school system that participated in my study.

Organization of the Chapter

In writing about the findings of this study I have organized this chapter into four sections. The first provides thumbnail sketches of each of the 19 participants. Mertens (2010) stated, "The strategy for selecting your sample influences the quality of your data and the inferences that you can make from it."(p. 309) Thus, providing background serves to inform the reader of the variety of perspectives that participants brought to the study. The next three sections of this chapter report on the findings according to the themes that I believe data analysis revealed. Where I chose to use direct quotes, I felt that the words of the participants emphasised a particular idea in a powerful way. When paraphrasing I have enclosed certain words in quotation marks. In these instances the words are those of the participants that I believe reflect the popular language of educators or what might be considered educational jargon or are value laden. I have done this so

as to assist the reader in distinguishing where I have included the specific words of participants as separate from any interpretation that I have made.

The three themes: Developing Skills, Expanding Understanding of the Work Context, and Transitioning to Action are further divided into sub-categories which serve to illustrate the complexity of leadership development as it became clear to me through my research. The themes and sub-categories are arranged below in a linear fashion much like a table of contents.

Theme One: Developing Skills

    Managing relationships

    Dealing with difficult situations

    Leading learning

    Increasing Confidence

Theme Two: Expanding Understanding of the Work Context

    Participating in professional development

    Learning from research and the literature

    Seeing the bigger picture

    Observing and reflecting on leadership practices

Theme Three: Transitioning to Action

    Evaluating impact of personal experience

    Formulating values, beliefs and assumptions

    Reacting to critical incidents

    Influencing learning

However, as Figure 2 (p. 181) suggests, I have actually conceptualized them as interconnected and circular. In this chapter I will expand upon each of these.

Introducing Study Participants

Conducting research in four different school systems served to provide differing views. Further enhancing the multiple perspectives, I interviewed 19 participants in three categories of educators: (a) the superintendent, (b) *AISI* coordinators current at the time of data collection, and

(c)12 other participants who met the purposeful sampling criteria of having been an *AISI* leader

for at least one year and currently a school-based leader or aspiring to become a school-based

leader. Participants were selected that I felt could provide the most in-depth and thorough

information regarding the research question and sub-questions. It is my intention to provide a

sense of the individuals that were interviewed. Referring to these thumbnail sketches and the

table of demographic information might be helpful to the reader in understanding the data and my

interpretations.

Table 7 outlines demographic information. Names have been changed in order to protect

study participants according to University of Alberta ethical considerations.

Table 7. Demographics of Individual Participants

Participant	Gender	Years of Experience	Position	Type of School System	Geographic Location in Alberta
Joan	F	13	*AISI* Leader	Small city	South
Susan	F	19	*AISI* Leader	Small city	South
Deborah	F	26	*AISI* Leader	Small city	South
John	M	14	*AISI* Leader	Rural	Central
Peter	M	20	*AISI* Leader	Rural	Central
Rose	F	23	*AISI* Leader	Rural	Central
Audrey	F	18	*AISI* Leader	Large city	Central
David	M	11	*AISI* Leader	Large city	Central
Maria	F	23	*AISI* Leader	Large city	Central
Frances	F	33	*AISI* Leader	Rural	North
Pamela	F	22	*AISI* Leader	Rural	North
Sally	F	6	*AISI* Leader	Rural	North
Michael	M	21	Superintendent	Small city	South
Paul	F	22	Superintendent	Large city	Central
Catherine	F	26	Superintendent	Rural	North
Elaine	M	34	Superintendent	Small city	South
Mark	M	25	*AISI* Coordinator	Rural	Central
Sara	F	26	*AISI* Coordinator	Large city	Central
Colleen	F	14	*AISI* Coordinator	Rural	North

Joan

   Joan has 13 years of experience as an educator. Although she had obtained a bachelor of education degree she never really planned to be a teacher.   The degree was a stepping stone to another related field and just a fall-back position. In order to earn money to return to university for further study she worked in another industry. Moving to Northern Canada with her husband, she decided to give teaching a try and began her career at the middle school level where she remained for three years. Joan moved back to Alberta and has been an educator in one urban centre for 10 years. Joan said that she became active in a number of committees because she liked to be in the centre of making things happen. She became an assistant principal in this urban setting. In cycle 2 of *AISI* she became the school system *AISI* coordinator. While working in that experience she attained a master's degree in education. Joan has been a principal in the same school system for seven years. At the time of the interview Joan was working as a principal at the high school level where she has been for 3 years.

Susan

   Susan has 19 years of experience as an educator in an urban school system. Her first teaching position was in special education in a segregated setting for severely handicapped students. She changed positions and began teaching music as well as upper elementary social studies and language arts. Based on her experience in special education where she supervised a number of teaching assistants and feeling a sense of restlessness that prompted her to apply for the position of assistant principal. She achieved one at a middle school, remained in that role for six years and then moved schools to become an assistant principal at the elementary school level. The next step in Susan's career was to become the *AISI* coordinator for the school system for one year. Following that experience, she became a principal at an elementary school where has been

for the last 3 years. Susan stated that she has been involved with *AISI* in all of the years that she was a school based administrator.

Deborah

Deborah has 26 years as an educator, all in an urban school system. As a young woman she was involved in another industry but decided after 10 years to return to university to become a teacher. At one point, Deborah did a presentation for colleagues on curriculum mapping. She knew it had gone really, really well and afterward people came up to her and told her she should be in administration. It was one of those positive situations that started her thinking about school administration as a possibility for her. She became an assistant principal at the elementary level. Deborah was in an *AISI* leadership role for five years both at the school level and at the school system level. She is currently the principal of a large elementary school.

John.

John has 14 years of experience as an educator.   He began teaching in another province and taught for two years in a Kindergarten to grade 12 school. The rest of his career has been in one rural Alberta school system. He was one of several people in the school system that participated in a leadership development cohort where they received over several sessions, exposure to the kinds of things a leader might do. What led him to the principalship was a little nudge from his principal at the time suggesting he would be a good fit for administration. John told me that when he began teaching he never at all had as a goal for himself to ultimately be a principal. John was the *AISI* lead in his school for about a year and a half. John's first administrative role was as the acting assistant principal while he also continued to hold the *AISI* lead role in his school. Currently he is in the fourth year as principal of a Kindergarten to grade 9 school. John is working on a Master's degree in education.

Peter

Peter has 20 years of experience as an educator. He spent three years in a remote community in his first teaching position then he spent two years in a small school where there were approximately 40 students. The remaining 15 years of his career has been spent in one school system in rural Alberta. Peter was asked to fill in as acting principal for one year. At the end of that year (cycle 3 of *AISI*) Peter took on the role of *AISI* leader for his school. During this time he was also working on his Master's degree and Peter indicated to me that he was able to use a lot of what he was doing with *AISI* for his Master's work. After the year as *AISI* leader he once again became the assistant principal and is currently in the fifth year in the role at a grade 7 to 9 school of approximately 500 students.

Rose

Rose is an educator in a rural school system and has a total of 23 years of full time experience. She began her career outside of Alberta where she taught in the primary level for two years. While raising a family she was a substitute teacher for six years, which enabled her to get experience from Kindergarten to grade 12. The remaining 21 years were in the same school system. Rose indicated that she was approached to take on the lead role in her school for cycle 3 because of her Master's work in action research. This quasi-leadership role comprised about half time, while the remaining half time she was teaching primary students. During cycle 3 she was considered part of the school administration team, participating in weekly team meetings and acting administrator at times. At the completion of cycle 3 she became assistant principal for 1 year at a larger elementary school. Currently she is the principal at the same elementary school which encompasses Kindergarten to grade five.

Audrey

Audrey is elementary trained and started her teaching career in elementary school. However, she wanted to coach extra-curricular activities and moved to a small junior high school teaching students with complex needs. She was one of two teachers who taught all of the subjects to these students. Audrey moved to another junior high and eventually became a social studies department head at that school. This work led her to a position in central office as a consultant in the social studies curriculum development. Audrey became a lead teacher on the Instructional Leadership Team which led the *AISI* project in her school. Audrey was assistant principal in two different schools and now a principal.

David

David worked at the post-secondary level for 11 years but is currently in year 11 in an urban school system. Although elementary trained he began teaching at a junior high school in special needs. David started his involvement with *AISI* as his school representative that attended sessions and brought information to share at his school. He then became a member on the *AISI* Leadership Team for three years during cycle 3 of *AISI*. As a result of *AISI* he worked more closely with consultants and other schools and this led him to become involved in the school system leadership development program. The last three years he has been a consultant at central office.

Maria

Maria has 25 years of experience as an educator in Kindergarten to grade 9 with some special education experience working with handicapped children as well as students with mental health issues. She has worked for ten years in inner city schools. Maria indicated that she is the kind of person who relished additional duties and often worked over the summer creating curriculum units or exemplars. Every year she said that she worked on something different

because it was interesting work. She brings to her work training and experience with graduate work abroad. As *AISI* cycle 2 was being planned, she volunteered for the school system *AISI* Project Leadership team and was a member for two years. In year three she became a math consultant at central office, connecting her expertise in math to the *AISI* project. For the last three years, Maria has been an assistant principal at an elementary school in an urban centre.

Frances

Frances has been an educator for 33 years in rural Alberta. She started teaching in a small school that contained grades seven to twelve. Her first teaching experience was as a social studies teacher. She also taught math (gr. 7-12) for a lot of years, was the school counsellor and for the last two years at the school she was the vice principal. In 2001 she was approached by central office to apply for the one year position as interim principal, covering off for a leave. At the end of that year she stayed on at this high school for four additional years as a teacher and counsellor. Frances acted as the school system assessment specialist as well. For the *AISI* cycle 3 project she applied for and became one of three project coordinators. During the last four years she has been the school system *AISI* coordinator.

Pamela

Pamela has been an educator for 22 years; 16 years as a teacher and six years as an *AISI* leader. At the time of the interview she was a learning coach for the school system *AISI* project. She aspires to be a school based administrator and thinks perhaps after cycle 5 of *AISI* some opportunities might surface. Her teaching career began at primary level in a very small town outside of Alberta. Following that experience she substitute taught for one year in a rural Alberta school system which she indicated gave her an opportunity to see how things worked in several different schools and grades. Then for one year she team taught grade seven with another teacher,

providing a transition year from grade six for these students. The next year she took on a special education position at the same school. She found that this position, although a teaching position, required supervising teaching assistants and essentially she was in charge of a whole department of people. Pamela spent most of her career in this one secondary school, until the *AISI* role at the school system level. In this *AISI* capacity she now officially serves eight schools which range from a one room school to high school and all kinds of formations.

Sally

Sally has only six years of teaching experience, all in grades 5 and 6 and all in a rural school system. For two years she participated in a pilot project in technology showing teachers how to use and instruct with technology. Sally was in a lead role with *AISI* for only one year. Funding cuts by the provincial government necessitated her return to the classroom. She would like to move into *AISI* leadership again for the upcoming cycle 5. She aspires to eventually become a school based administrator but not until her children are older.

Michael

Michael has 34 years in education, in a variety of roles and school systems. Michael taught for seven years before becoming the vice principal at a junior-senior high school, grades seven to twelve, in a rural school system. Michael changed school systems to become principal at the high school level in a small urban centre where he remained for four and a half years. He moved to another school system and took on the role of vice principal at a high school in a larger urban centre. He remained in this position for five and a half years before becoming the principal at the same school for a further four years before becoming the Deputy Superintendent. At the time of the interview Michael was the superintendent in an urban school system, completing his sixth year there.

Paul

Paul's career as an educator spans 25 years and began in a rural school system where he taught at the high school level. After about five years as a teacher he moved to a Kindergarten to grade nine school as an administrator and a grade 3 math teacher. Paul has been involved with *AISI* over all 12 years of the initiative. As planning began for cycle 1 in 2000 he was the principal in a small school but he wrote a project proposal for an *AISI* project aimed at improving math at the middle school. He indicated that he had no intention of being a part of it; he just wanted to remain as the principal of his school. After much persuasion he did become the *AISI* project leader for this middle school math project but chose to be seconded from his principalship. It was his intention to return to being a principal at his Kindergarten to grade 9 school. While he was in this role coordinating the math project he was invited to make presentation to math teachers in several neighbouring school systems. In cycle 2 the projects in his school system became more systemic and he was persuaded to take on the role of *AISI* coordinator for the school system. Currently he is a member of the superintendency team at central office and was designated by the superintendent to participate in my research on behalf of the superintendent.

Catherine

Catherine has 26 years of experience all in one urban school system. She began her career as a Kindergarten teacher but has also taught other primary grades. After 8 years of teaching she took a year off and completed a Master's degree. When she returned to the school system she stepped into the role of curriculum coordinator at central office. Catherine has been both an assistant principal and principal. As well, she was a member of the Student Achievement Team in central office as a consultant. Currently she is a superintendent.

Elaine

Elaine has 27 years of experience, much of it in Northern Alberta. Elaine has been 3 years in the rural school system she currently serves. She has taught a variety of subjects and grades from grade one through twelve. As well she has been a school based administrator and provided leadership in curriculum and instruction as a Pedagogical Supervisor. Elaine has completed a Master's degree in administration. She is a member of the superintendency team and was designated by the superintendent to represent the school system for the interview.

Mark

Mark has 21 years of experience in education all in the same urban school system. He started his career at a junior high school where he remained for five years. Then he transferred to a high school setting for another five years. Mark has been involved in an *AISI* leadership role for 11 of the 12 years of *AISI*. His first experience was as the *AISI* school coordinator during year 2 of *AISI* cycle 1 for a technology project between two schools. He also had classroom teaching duties at that time. In cycle 3 Mark moved to a middle school, again as *AISI* school leader which involved more intense professional development in the area of assessment for learning. Over these most recent 3 years, during cycle 4 he held the position of full time school system *AISI* coordinator and is also a member of the school system professional development committee. Mark has a master's degree. He expressed a strong interest in adult learning and development. He believes that he will assume the role of school based administrator at some point in his career and aspires to eventually move back to central office.

Sara

Sara worked in a different field prior to her career in education. However, she has been in the profession for 22 years with experience in an urban setting. Sara began teaching in

elementary school where she taught grades three and four for five years and then moved to junior high where she spent most of her teaching years. The first connection she had with *AISI* was in cycle 2 where she had point 2 of her time designated to provide leadership and work with colleagues at the school for innovative practices to help students a boost. She had some time in her schedule to meet with other teachers to talk about innovative things that could be tried to move students forward in their learning. There was no title or formal designation at that time. Sara moved to a new junior high school where she was the counsellor and curriculum coordinator and was on a school instructional leadership team with the principal. During the interview she expressed that she felt fortunate to have worked in a number of different schools. Sara considered that her first formal leadership experience was where she was connected to the *AISI* project which was instructional focus. Eight years ago she went to central office as a consultant in junior high language arts and Social Studies but maintained the connection to *AISI* as a result of the work she did on the presentation team. She became *AISI* coordinator for one school system project and now is the *AISI* coordinator for the school system.

Colleen

Colleen has been an educator for 26 years in a rural school system. She taught 20 years in the classroom, teaching grade 2 for a number of years. Colleen was a lead teacher for five years in the *Telus Learning Connection*, assisting colleagues with technology. Previous to her work in *AISI*, she had been an assistant principal at elementary level for two years. Colleen became an *AISI* facilitator in cycle 1. Now in cycle 4, she is the School System *AISI* coordinator and also one of three learning coaches for the initiative.

Theme One: Developing Skills

The first theme that emerged that I felt was important in this study is skill development, as teachers moved from their classrooms into a variety of *AISI* leadership roles. Generally, those who were interviewed indicated that their role as an *AISI* leader had an impact on their development of skills necessary or helpful for school or school system leadership. Throughout the interviews participants referred to the skills that they felt had been developed while working in their respective *AISI* leadership roles. Data analysis showed that nearly all of the participants discussed in a variety of ways and to varying degrees, the skill development that they believed was one result of their work in *AISI*.

So as to provide clarity for the reader, I am providing a definition of **skill** as I have used it in reporting my findings. I adapted the definitions provided by the Webster Dictionary on line. Therefore a key factor in reporting my findings is that I have defined a skill as, the learned or developed ability to use one's knowledge effectively and readily in competent execution or performance (http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/skill) Here I present what participants indicated about the leadership skills that were developed through the *AISI* experience.

One participant said, "I would have had a much less successful year my first year as a principal if I had not had some of those leadership lessons in that *AISI* role." Michael, a superintendent, indicated he believed that in addition to learning to be an instructional leader *AISI* leaders learned collaborative and decision making skills, the ability to resolve conflict, financial knowledge, and to be a "quasi-supervisor." He added, "These are skills that a school administrator would need." I was surprised at Michael's use of the term "quasi-supervisor" because although *AISI* leaders might have influence in this role, they do not hold positional authority or power.

Participants voiced the idea that the skill set required for this new *AISI* leadership role was not necessarily the same as that used in the day to day work as a teacher in the classroom. As superintendent Catherine suggested, "Just because you can manage a classroom doesn't mean you can manage a staff." Catherine had 26 years of experience all in one urban school system. She began her career as a Kindergarten teacher but had also taught other primary grades. After 8 years of teaching she took a year off and completed a Master's degree. When she returned to the school system she stepped into the role of curriculum coordinator at central office. Catherine had been both an assistant principal and principal. As well, she had been a member of the Student Achievement Team in central office as a consultant. At the time of the interview Catherine was a superintendent. She recognized what Lieberman et al. (2007) described as paradoxical that although teachers spend much of their time facilitating student learning, it is most often "on-the-job learning" as far as facilitating the learning of colleagues.

Catherine talked as a superintendent about the *AISI* leaders and the intentional way that her school system approached the skill development for their leadership roles in *AISI*. She elaborated the specific plan in her school system for creating instructional leaders who knew the importance of being in classrooms and had some skill in coaching teachers. The goal was to build skill that would enable these *AISI* leaders to observe the pedagogy in a classroom and follow through to access, develop, or create professional learning opportunities for teachers that would fill the identified gap. She said, "We have to first teach these *AISI* leaders to understand what they were seeing in a classroom." She went on to indicate that the next step was teaching them how to use language and manage the conversations with teacher colleagues without being evaluative. She added that in this large urban school system, they intentionally taught the *AISI* leaders how to have difficult conversations with colleagues. The Ontario Leadership Framework

(2010) described these as "courageous conversations" which challenge current practices and foster improvement and growth through listening and providing feedback that will lead to improvements in student achievement and well-being. Catherine suggested, "We were intentionally trying to build people who knew the importance of being in classrooms and had some skill in coaching teachers." Further, she indicated that these experiences built a "tool kit" of skills and thus *AISI* leaders were better prepared to walk into a school leadership position as a result of the abilities they had developed.

Joan, a principal at the time of the interview, emphasized how she valued the *AISI* leadership in her own development as a school based leader. Joan had 13 years of experience as an educator. Although she had obtained a bachelor of education degree she never really planned to be a teacher. The education degree was a stepping stone to another career in a related field and just a fall-back position. In order to earn money to return to university for further study she worked in another industry. Moving to northern Canada with her husband, she decided to give teaching a try and began her career at the middle school level where she remained for three years. Joan moved back to Alberta and has been an educator in one urban centre for 10 years. She became an assistant principal in this urban setting. In Cycle 2 of *AISI* (2003-2006) she became the school system *AISI* coordinator. While working in that experience she attained a master's degree in education. Joan has been a principal for seven years in the same school system. At the time of the interview Joan was working as a principal at the high school level where she has been for 3 years.

Joan suggested that what made the greatest impact was a structured and purposeful strategy using that district *AISI* leader position as an avenue to expose her to all kinds of administrative and instructional leadership skills. She spoke of developing through this role her

own skillset, " to engage staff in talking about teaching and learning by whittling away everything and taking it down to the core thinking that everyone can relate to." Joan summarized the benefit to her of the *AISI* leadership role by saying, "It has certainly set me up for more success than I think I would have had if I came into a principalship without it." One of those skills Joan specifically mentioned was insight into dealing with parents and students and staff; in other words, skill in how to manage relationships.

Managing Relationships

Throughout the interviews, the matter of relationships was frequently mentioned. In regards to this theme, over two thirds of the participants maintained that relationships were important and that their work as *AISI* leaders provided the opportunity to develop skills for managing relationships.

Colleen had been an educator for 26 years in a rural school system. When I spoke with her, she had taught 20 years in the classroom, teaching grade 2 for a number of years. Previous to her work in *AISI*, she had been an assistant principal at elementary level for two years. Colleen became an *AISI* facilitator in Cycle 1. In Cycle 4, she was the School System *AISI* Coordinator and also one of three learning coaches for the initiative. As well, Colleen's experience as an educator included being a lead teacher for five years in the *TELUS Learning Connection*, assisting colleagues with technology. Colleen firmly stated that, "Building a relationship is the most important. You can teach participants the pedagogy and the other skills but if you don't have that relationship building ability you might as well not even be there." She went on to explain that when you build relationships with teachers they often get comfortable enough to explore some different pedagogy and some different ways of presenting lessons. I understood this to indicate

that relationship building was connected to building trust. The value of relationship building as a skill was echoed by others.

Sally, who aspires to become a school based administrator, indicated that the relationship skills needed for leadership of teachers and colleagues are different than those she had used in the classroom with her students. Sally has only six years of teaching experience, all in grades 5 and 6 and all in a rural school system. For two years she participated in a pilot project in technology showing teachers how to use and instruct with technology. Sally was in a lead role with *AISI* for only one year. Funding cuts by the provincial government necessitated her return to the classroom. She would like to move into *AISI* leadership again and she plans to eventually become a school based administrator but not until her children are older. For Sally, commitments outside of her work as an educator appeared to be relevant to the way that Sally might pursue future leadership roles.

Sally said her experience as an *AISI* leader helped her learn skills about dealing with her colleagues. She explained that she learned from her supervisor, who in this instance was the school system *AISI* Coordinator, about ways to talk to teachers she worked with, how to get colleagues to collaborate with her and how to facilitate the changes in practice that she was hoping for. She concluded, "I guess I didn't realize how important that was because building relationships with students is a little different than building relationships with your peers." Sally's words imply that as she moved from teaching in a classroom to leading adults, the development of a new skill set was required in order to conduct the work as an *AISI* leader.

This notion of a difference from classroom leadership to the *AISI* leadership role relative to managing relationships was supported by Superintendent Michael who indicated that *AISI* certainly helped prepare the *AISI* leaders in his school system for managing relationships.

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Michael had 34 years in education, in a variety of roles and school systems. Michael taught for seven years before becoming the vice principal at a junior-senior high school, grades seven to twelve, in a rural school system. He changed school systems to become principal at the high school level in a small urban centre where he remained for four and a half years. He then moved to another school system and took on the role of vice principal at a high school in a larger urban centre. He remained in this position for five and a half years before becoming the principal at the same school for a further four years before becoming the Deputy Superintendent. Michael is currently the superintendent in an urban school system, completing his sixth year there. He spoke about "knocking down the walls between classrooms" that encouraged collaborating and working together. Michael went on to say that the *AISI* leaders often had demonstrated a propensity for change and fulfilled a role of instructional leadership at the school. "It has created a different awareness in our district about what is the role of the principal." Because of his emphasis previously in the interview, I interpreted this to indicate a shift from managerial roles to greater involvement and commitment to the role of instructional leadership.

In the interview data from this study participants referenced relationships with both principals and peers. One participant said that as an *AISI* leader she had to interact with some teachers that might not be as enthusiastic as others so she worked at finding a way to connect with them; she worked on building a positive relationship by trying to clue in to something that was unique in the school they were at or of particular interest to them. This notion was echoed by Peter who had 20 years of experience as an educator. He spent three years in a remote community in his first teaching position then he spent two years in a small school where there were approximately 40 students. The remaining 15 years of his career were spent in one school system in rural Alberta. Peter was asked to fill in as acting principal for one year. At the end of

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that year (Cycle 3 of *AISI*) Peter took on the role of *AISI* leader for his school. During this time

he was also working on his Master's degree and Peter indicated to me that he was able to use a lot

of what he was doing with *AISI* for his Master's work. After the year as *AISI* leader he once again

became the assistant principal and is currently in the fifth year in the role at a grade 7 to 9 school

of approximately 500 students. As a result of encountering teachers who were resistant to

changes he was attempting to incorporate, he indicated that he started to develop relationship

building skills; how to listen to participants but still get them to accept some of the new ideas for

their teaching practice. He stated that it was necessary to, "Get people first of all out of their

comfort zones of being in isolated classrooms and having to collaborate and share some of their

understanding and maybe reveal some of their weaknesses." This skill of developing "high levels

of comfort and trust" when dealing with difficult situations is one he values in his current formal

leadership role.

Dealing with Difficult Situations

Keeping in mind that *skill* in the context of this paper has been defined as the learned or

developed ability to use one's knowledge effectively and readily in competent execution or

performance, when teachers moved from the classroom and into *AISI* leadership roles they were

often called to use a different skill set. Analysis of the data revealed that over half of the

participants who indicated that through the *AISI* experience they had developed skills for dealing

with difficult situations. Among the specific skill areas mentioned were conflict resolution,

communication, problem solving and diplomacy. *AISI* leaders provided information about how

they learned to navigate the difficulties associated with their role.

Frances, spoke from her perspective as an *AISI c*oordinator and articulated that there

definitely are challenges and *AISI* leaders try to overcome them in many ways. Frances had been

an educator for 33 years in rural Alberta. She started teaching in a small school that contained grades seven to twelve. Her first teaching experience was as a social studies teacher. She also taught math at the secondary level for a lot of years, was the school counsellor and for the last two years at the school she was the vice principal. In 2001 she was approached by central office to apply for the one year position as interim principal, covering off for a leave. At the end of that year she stayed on at this high school for four additional years as a teacher and counsellor. Frances acted as the school system assessment specialist as well. As *AISI* Cycle 3 was being planned, she applied for and became one of three project coordinators. For the last four years she was the school system *AISI* coordinator. As to what specifically she felt these *AISI* leaders in her school system gained she maintained, "They have learned how to identify obstacles and design strategies for dealing with those obstacles." Further, she articulated her belief that those skills would come in very handy as an administrator in a school.

Participants indicated that *AISI* leadership required good communications skills and several aspects of skill development related to communication were conveyed throughout the interviews. A number of participants mentioned the idea of communication but approached it from different stances. Two participants referred to the learning through professional development activities in how to engage in genuine dialogue and what it means to be an active listener. They suggested that they developed skills in knowing how to come into a conversation and give participants the opportunity and the space to be able to share their thinking around a specific problem or issue that was being dealt with and being completely attentive to what the speaker is saying. Maria and Susan, both principals at the time of the interview, spoke about the importance of communication skills.

Maria said that she really honed her skills for listening during her time as an *AISI* leader. As a result of professional development for herself, she received training on how to listen to someone without bringing her own story into the conversation. Barth (2003) stressed that listening builds confidence and trust—the cornerstones of working relationships. Maria articulated that in her current role as principal that skill in listening served her well particularly when dealing with difficult situations and seeking solutions. Through this attentive listening she felt that it honored and valued what someone else was saying and she was able to gain understanding of the thoughts and feeling of others.

Susan, another principal, was the participant that spoke at most length about aspects of communication. Susan had 19 years of experience as an educator in an urban school system. Her first teaching position was in special education in a segregated setting for severely handicapped students. During her experience in special education she supervised a number of teaching assistants. She changed positions and began teaching music as well as upper elementary social studies and language arts. Feeling a sense of restlessness, Susan applied for the position of assistant principal. She attained one at a middle school, remained in that role for six years and then moved schools to become an assistant principal at the elementary school level. The next step in Susan's career was becoming the *AISI* coordinator for the school system for one year. Following that experience, she moved into the principalship at an elementary school where she has been for 3 years.

Susan stated that she had been involved with *AISI* in all of the years that she was a school based administrator. She talked about the need in her current role for "tough conversations" with parents, with staff and students and with volunteers. A specific example that Susan provided was "having tough conversations with people whom she perceived were not measuring up in terms of

their instructional pedagogy and how can I support them in that and help them to learn and grow." She expressed the view that when she was an *AISI* leader, having those "tough conversations" with principals was a "huge" learning curve. In that informal leadership role she knew that she didn't have authority over them so she engaged them in dialogue. Susan noted that sometime principals responded really well; sometime they were very defensive. She felt that *AISI* had afforded her the opportunity to glean some of that experience and knowledge in how to approach those conversations appropriately prior to becoming a principal. As a result of her work in this change initiative she had become aware of the manner in which she presents something new to staff and she sees that as very important in her current role as principal. "Whenever something is coming from outside the building," Susan indicated that her conversation with staff was important. "It is so pivotal, that first conversation, that first introductory piece because it will frame the rest of our conversation." As the principal, Susan consciously makes an attempt to introduce the new ideas in such a way that the staff will see that this is going to be great first of all for students but also supportive for them as professionals.

Audrey suggested her experiences had taught her that if a principal sets the tone of the school then one of the key components of that practice is to be "optimistic and positive." Audrey was elementary trained and started her teaching career in elementary school. However, she wanted to coach extra-curricular activities and moved to a small junior high school where she taught students with complex needs. She was one of two teachers who taught all of the subjects to these students. Audrey moved to another junior high and eventually became a social studies department head at that school. This work led her to become a central office consultant in social studies curriculum development and then she became a lead teacher on the Instructional Leadership Team which led the *AISI* project in her school. Audrey had been an assistant principal

in two different schools and at the time of the interview was a principal. Speaking about the synergy that comes from talking and figuring things out together as a staff was something Audrey felt she brought into her practice as a principal. This strategy resulted from some of the things that she had seen principals model when she visited as the *AISI* coordinator. Audrey stated, "That was the biggest learning for me was models. It helped me by watching other people and seeing what other people do and listening to other people." She indicated that to her this skill she had learned through *AISI* of facilitating conversations was crucial in any leadership position.

Various aspects of communication that were conveyed through the interviews attest to the importance that participants placed on the development of these skills. My analysis of the data from the interviews showed that participants related diplomacy to effective communication. Audrey maintained that as an *AISI* leader she did not have the position of power because her rank in the organizational structure was the same as those she was attempting to influence. Audrey acknowledged that what she had learned about diplomacy as a result of her *AISI* leadership experience was very important to her. In her words, "You learn some really good skills of diplomacy because you don't have the position of power so you have to do it with dignity, with a lot of respect." She said that it's a different relationship because they are your colleagues. Audrey verbalized that the skills she had learned around diplomacy were really important because it is still the way she does things as a principal. In the *AISI* leaders' work with adults, participants talked about learning how to listen, how to ask questions, and how to be precise in articulating what was trying to be accomplished.

One area that received mention a number of times throughout the interviews was the difficulty of making change along with the various surrounding issues when introducing something new. The view was expressed by John that participants want change but they don't

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necessarily want to do the "work" involved to see the change come to fruition. John had 14 years of experience as an educator. He began teaching in another province and taught for two years in school encompassing Kindergarten to grade 12. The rest of his career had been in one rural Alberta school system. He was one of several people in the school system that participated in a leadership development cohort where they received over several sessions, exposure to the kinds of things a leader might do. What led him to a formal leadership position was a little nudge from his principal at the time suggesting he would be a good fit for administration. John told me, "That was never, never, ever even in my mind when I began teaching." John was the *AISI* lead in his school for about a year and a half. His first administrative role was as the acting assistant principal while he also continued to hold the *AISI* lead role in his school. When I interviewed John, he was in the fourth year as principal of a school with a Kindergarten to grade nine configurations.

Drawing on his experience as an *AISI* leader he indicated his feeling that sometime people think you are moving too fast when you are leading change. He saw change as hard work that takes desire and often causes stress. In speaking about the Master's program he was in, John stated, "It is a purposeful program where I can utilize exactly what I am learning right here and now." He added that stress happens with most things and he likened it to sports where it is not as simple as stepping onto a court and becoming winners. Because I knew that John was involved extensively with coaching sports, I understood that his analogy indicated he could provide the leadership but that alone does not guarantee reaching the goal.

A rural *AISI* coordinator, Colleen, also spoke about change and how empathy and learning about the change process were skills she hadn't had prior to her *AISI* leadership experience. Through this experience she came to realize that when trying to make change, you can't

necessarily "put the hammer down." I believe that what Colleen was making reference to is the notion found in the literature of pressure and support (Fullan, 2002; Harris 2005; Moffett, 2005). Colleen also added that you really need to be able to read staff and to know the culture of the school. Then a leader is better able to, "figure out where you can move, where you can push, and where you need to back off a little bit." In connecting her work as an *AISI* leader to a formal leadership role Colleen concluded, "I think that's one of the things I have learned that would be really useful as a school administrator."

The experiences of *AISI* leaders were not always positive. Susan articulated that there isn't a course that teaches how to deal with difficult situations and at teachers' conventions and at professional development activities the topic of dealing with difficult situations is often avoided. She presented her view that, "People are so afraid to step on somebody's toes." As they navigated through these difficulties *AISI* leaders learned valuable skills for coping in their role and often found these skills valuable as they moved to more formal roles in leadership.

Leading Learning

When school systems created these *AISI* leadership roles, their focus was on improving students' learning and performance by way of improved teacher practice. Analysis of the interview data indicated that many participants suggested that leading instruction for colleagues through *AISI* resulted in their personal leadership development. Although some of the participants in my study were responsible for leading adult learning for improved teacher practice within the school where they also taught, others provided leadership in learning across multiple schools within one school system and as such did not have classroom teaching duties. The superintendent in the one large urban centre indicated that it was the intentional plan developed by central office leaders that provision would be made to assist *AISI* leaders in developing

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facilitation skills so that they could more effectively lead the learning for their colleagues. Facilitation skills were helpful when they became formal leaders. David spoke about the opportunity to share new ideas with other participants and facilitate their moving forward in their teaching practice as an aspect of leading learning and being an instructional leader. Each school system had developed an *AISI* project plan with clearly outlined goals and measures for success as part of the requirements to receive funding for school improvement. The role of the *AISI* leader was to assist teachers to develop capacity in the area outlined in the project plan. As such, it was the expectation that teachers would be encouraged to gain these new skills consistent with the goals of the project. In this regard David stated, "We provided sessions for schools around engagement and other topics and then basically provided school leaders with the tools and the information that they needed to go back and lead it within their schools." It was the role of the *AISI* leader to facilitate the learning for the adults.

Peter indicated that one of the main components of being an instructional leader is to become a coach. He recognized that an effective coach, "must have a strong, trusting relationship" with the person being coached who often is moving out of his or her comfort zone. He acknowledged that coaching takes a considerable amount of time and frequently participants prefer to just be given a solution rather than work through a process. He suggested the prevailing attitude was, "Just fix it. Tell me what you want me to do or make this problem go away." Peter indicated his strong feeling that he not only needed to experiment with the different techniques himself, but needed to have good skills for coaching colleagues to enable them to experiment as well. Peter demonstrated the experimentation in his own teaching practice by video-taping some of his lessons. This was followed by reflection about how the lesson went and what needed to change. He felt that through this activity he provided a role model for other adults and that made

him more credible as someone who could be an instructional leader and coach colleagues in order bring about change in their practice.

Superintendent Catherine spoke about some of the skills that were developed intentionally as part of a plan of support for *AISI* leaders. These skills were important in the work of leading the learning of colleagues in the change process. Catherine also spoke of skills that these *AISI* leaders acquired as a result of the activities they participated in. Catherine stated, "Certainly that group of *AISI* leaders would have had exposure to multiple, multiple processes. They would learn how to do a world café and a think-pair-share." World café is a conversational process organized in a round table format where people explore multiple ideas about a chosen topic. The think-pair-share strategy is a partnered activity that increases the possibility of internalizing and retaining new ideas. *AISI* leaders learned how to manage a meeting and get everybody's input, how to maintain focus and utilize the synergy of a team for collaboration. Assessing needs and recognizing what was the next step in making change in teacher practice was viewed as important in leading the learning of other adults and entailed how to scaffold teacher colleagues in learning for school improvement. Supporting this notion, one *AISI* coordinator said, "I have gained skills in how to move people and how to scaffold so it's not so scary." Development of a variety of skills for leading learning of colleagues was part of the leadership development experienced by these *AISI* leaders.

In leading the learning of adults in professional growth and practice, Rose spoke about the necessity of putting the focus on those who are willing to move ahead, to change and to make a difference. She had come to believe that she should not devote all of her energies to the small group that seemed resistant because she might never change their minds. She spoke of "providing support but a little bit of pressure as well" as she led the learning process for adults. There were

opportunities to do analysis of data like provincial achievement test results looking for trends to see what can be learned from this and how student learning and teaching practice might be improved. She indicated that *AISI* leadership was more a role in monitoring student progress, but indicated that she was mentoring and coaching teachers as well. "I'd invite them into my classroom to observe instructional practices." Then, she said, "There followed opportunities to have professional conversations." She felt that as an *AISI* leader she participated and learned strategies for being an instructional leader as well as how to conduct formal supervision and evaluation which are necessary in her current role as a principal.

Leading learning for colleagues took a variety of forms. The experience of working with adults was somewhat different than teaching students. When working with teachers it was evident that they don't all think and act in the same way and that one must be cognizant of the different personalities and the different ways to assist them with their learning. The view was expressed that they didn't have to all agree because respectful dissonance was good. New skills were learned in how to lead learning with adults; these skills proved useful to many *AISI* leaders as they transitioned into more formal roles of leadership.

Increasing Confidence

The data analysis revealed that confidence building occurred for several of these leaders as a result of roles within *AISI*. Nearly half of the participants who were interviewed mentioned this aspect of their experience as a positive part of leadership development. It was suggested by one superintendent and a principal who both had previous experience as an *AISI* leader that the role often brought forth inherent skills that *AISI* leaders didn't even know they had when they were given opportunities to intentionally utilize those skills so they could help other colleagues. In the words of Paul, the superintendent, "They had to revisit a lot of their own inherent skills and

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stretch them out and quantify them so they could help someone else. In doing that they got better

at doing the things they were already doing." The *AISI* leadership role also caused them to grow

in areas where they were not as strong such as understanding about change theory and

organizational management, instructional design and assessment as well as strategies for helping

teachers to learn the skills to improve practice. One superintendent said, "We have pushed at

them the equivalent of master degree program." Although system leaders helped with the

development of skills and provided resources the *AISI* leaders ultimately had to go back to their

schools and determine their own way of conducting the change process. Because every school is

different with unique needs, central leadership advised the *AISI* leaders to sit down with the

administration teams and teachers and figure out what might work best. These *AISI* leaders had

the skills and the resources but were required to create the picture for the school they were

working in. *AISI* leaders suggested that the opportunity to manage the change process in their

own way was confidence building and affirming.

An *AISI* leader who has returned to the classroom but aspires to a formal leadership role

expressed these thoughts about building self-confidence. The role required that she go into

classrooms to coach and mentor teachers. She indicated that at times she felt there was "a fair bit

of resistance but she learned not to take it personally; it was the role." Sally indicated that

although she was not there to tell teachers what to do, as an *AISI* leader she was expected to

facilitate change and for some people that caused anxiety. She also suggested that it was self-

confidence building to realize that not everybody had to agree with her and when they didn't

agree she could still have a conversation with them. Sally came to the conclusion that you don't

have to be friends with participants you work with; you just have to have respect for one another.

Working as an *AISI* leader she concluded, "I think that I learned that I could do more than I

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anticipated that I could." Sally verbalized that she had developed a thick skin but felt better equipped to deal with adversity in any situation.

One principal, Audrey, who had experienced an *AISI* leadership role talked about how she felt that building her confidence was an important first step to becoming a principal. She didn't believe that at the outset of this role she had made a conscious choice to move into the principalship but that eventually became a stage she wanted in her career. Audrey participated in monthly meetings where discussions occurred regarding the "big ideas" about leadership. She spoke about creating a vision and a plan of action; she stressed the discussions about instructional leadership. She realized, "I can sit at the table with these leaders from different places outside of my little insular school and I can hold my own and participants respect my ideas." One idea she specifically recounted was her notion that the principal sets the tone in a school and therefore a critical component of the principal's style is to "maintain a positive persona of optimism." She suggested that what came first though was the building of her confidence and to realize that she possessed leadership skills.

Maria discussed how her confidence grew as a result of being selected to sit on a district-wide committee composed of what she thought of as some really powerful participants such as the superintendent and the principal of the largest high school. They often used acronyms that she didn't know and had to ask what they were talking about. Although she felt insecure when she first joined the committee she soon discovered that if she said something the group listened. She began to note that what she said seemed to be valued and viewed as important by these formal leaders on the committee. Maria has 25 years of experience as an educator in Kindergarten to grade 9 with some special education experience working with handicapped children as well as students with mental health issues. She has worked for ten years in inner city schools. Maria

indicated that she is the kind of person who relished additional duties and often did additional work at central office over the summer creating curriculum units or exemplars to be used across the school system. Every year she said that she worked on something different because it was interesting work. She brings to her work training and experience with graduate work abroad. As *AISI* cycle 2 was being planned, she volunteered for the school system *AISI* Project Leadership team and was a member for two years. In year three she became a math consultant at central office, connecting her expertise in math to the *AISI* project. For the last three years, Maria has been an assistant principal at an elementary school in an urban centre.

Maria spoke about how she was provided with opportunities that caused her confidence to grow further. First, she was invited to make a 10 minute presentation about what she had done with *AISI* in the previous year. Later she was asked to go to Dallas, Texas to speak at an international conference along with two directors from the school system. Here is what Maria said about her growth through this experience:

> By them inviting me to be a part of this presentation I had to plan with them and do practice sessions with them. That changes who you think you are. Given those opportunities you have no choice but to expand your skills. It just continues to develop you.

At the conclusion of the interview Maria suggested that for her *AISI* was an incredible growth experience that she never would have had if she had remained in the classroom.

Nearly half of those interviewed mentioned that increasing their confidence was instrumental, at least in part, in their decision to move to more formal leadership roles. Harris (2005) stated that the literature consistently supports the notion that teacher leadership has a positive effect on the self-esteem of the leaders themselves. The perspective presented from a

superintendent provides the system view. The coordinator perspective is represented, again providing a bigger picture notion. This section has provided examples of how participants who were *AISI* leaders and now are in school and school system roles perceived how personal experiences impacted their leadership development.

Summary: Developing Skills

In this section of the chapter I focused on what participants shared about *skill development* as it related to school and school system leadership development. In some cases they talked about their own development as a result of an *AISI* leadership role. In other instances superintendents expressed what they had observed relative to these leaders in the *AISI* role. There were four areas within this theme that were discussed, each in detail: (a) managing relationships, (b) dealing with difficult situations, (c) leading learning, and (d) increasing confidence. Although it might appear that each category within this theme stands alone, they are interconnected each one to the other three categories.

Skills that were learned as a result of involvement as leaders in *AISI* were seen to be useful and relevant to those more *formal leader*ship roles at the school or system level. The skills needed in these roles were viewed by the *AISI* leaders, coordinators and superintendents as different from those required in the classroom with students. Change and resistance to change were situations that posed challenges. Challenging situations required that skills be developed in order to successfully navigate through the issues. It was not just a matter of identifying the obstacles but also finding solutions. The ability to have meaningful conversations with diplomacy and to actively listen to colleagues was highlighted. These experiences, although not always positive, led to confidence building which was viewed as very important both in their role as *AISI* leaders and in their current pursuits.

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Theme Two: Expanding Understanding of the Work Context

The many experiences of *AISI* leaders often led to an expanded understanding of the work context and this is the second theme that emerged. The majority of participants in my study mentioned this in a variety of ways. Three of the four superintendents noted the phenomenon in the discussion. One superintendent mentioned that the first thing that happened to these *AISI* leaders was they broke out of the "tunnel vision" that teachers get and they learned to "see things through different eyes." He added that through their leadership work "they came to understand what our organizational vision is and how that translates into a mission and the mission into goals and how all of those things can be quantified and cascaded down." The superintendent of the large urban school system conveyed that these *AISI* leaders had the opportunity to lead something "bigger than themselves, bigger than their classrooms, bigger than their schools." Hence they started to understand the complexity of a school district. Elaine, superintendent of a rural school system concurred with her superintendent colleagues. In the interview she stated, "I think one of the things that they've learned through this position has been to have a better understanding of the context within which they work. One of the biggest challenges of school leadership is knowing your whole context." *AISI* leaders did learn the larger context and began to see the bigger picture of leading a learning organization.

David who is now at district office and works with teams of administrators and teachers indicated that he valued the opportunities he had through *AISI* that expanded his understanding of the school system environment. He stated, "I think all the way through my career with this district AISI has had pretty significant impact on me and my development of leadership skills." From his perspective in his current role he felt that for the most part one is fairly isolated in the classroom. He suggested, "You don't see that bigger picture from a school. I don't think you are

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even aware at the school level." He added his view that, "To jump from a classroom to big picture district would have been too much of a jump. It would be kind of like moving from a village to a city. Too much information too fast." However, as a result of the work he had done with *AISI* he felt better prepared to understand the district vision and goals and to successfully work in his current role as a leader at the school system level.

One *AISI* coordinator indicated, "If I do wind up back at school as an administrator it will give me a way better perspective of what actually goes on at district level and even the provincial level as well." He further added, "Coming from a school based professional developer I know the role that a school can make and now it has helped me understand a lot better how the district can play an important role in the school and with teachers." In support of that notion, Pamela contributed that she understood a lot more about the bigger picture at the system level. She indicated, "I learned a lot about things I didn't know on the teaching side. I had been teaching for 22 years. I learned a lot more about the bigger picture that they see than the little picture that I saw inside my classroom." She added that some of the decisions that she had questioned actually made a lot of sense in this new light.

Participating in Professional Development Activities

In all four school systems that were part of my study, these *AISI* leaders were able to attend professional learning sessions that covered a wide range of opportunities. Sixteen participants specifically mentioned the importance of such activities to their leadership development. Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009) specified that the work of teacher leaders promotes their own learning while impacting the learning of others (p. 46). In some cases there was a purposeful approach taken at the school system level and orchestrated by central office

personnel for professional development specifically for teacher leaders. In other school systems the professional development for *AISI* leaders took on a variety of different forms.

Paul, the superintendent in one school system, talked about the approach that was taken for professional development of these *AISI* leaders. He said that they started working with this team of *AISI* leaders to provide them with information. He further explained, "We talked to them about change theory and about organizational development and how educators will either resist or augment change depending on the lens they are looking through." In addition this team of *AISI* leaders was given power points and handouts needed to start working with staffs. As Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009) commented, these school system leaders recognized and acted on their responsibility to provide leadership development for the *AISI* leaders rather than assuming they could take on the new role without leadership development opportunities. The learning for the *AISI* leaders was intentionally orchestrated by these school system leaders.

However, as these leaders gained in skill and confidence, other forms of professional development were utilized such as book studies where discussion and debate about the various ideas contributed to consolidation of personal leadership values. Selected participants went to certain conferences and then come back and shared what they had learned with the group. Others went to different conferences and in this way the capacity of the group learning was extended.

Rose, who had been one of the *AISI* leaders in her school system but was a principal at the time of the interview, commented on the professional development she had received in this same rural school system. She reflected, "That was probably the highlight of AISI. Three years of professional development and then taking that back into the school, applying it, learning again, and working with colleagues. That was the highlight of my career, that professional growth opportunity." The *AISI* leaders in the school system where she worked would meet on a regular

basis. Rose said, "Every *AISI* meeting that we went to was a great PD session. When you got all those AISI facilitators together monthly, the collaboration, the team building, what a great professional learning community." She worked and learned with colleagues. She gave credit to the central office leaders for being strategic in how they provided opportunities through professional development for expanding the understanding for her and other *AISI* leaders.

In some cases *AISI* leaders talked about the opportunity to work over an extended period of time with scholars in the field of education that were notable in the literature for their work regarding topics such as school improvement, change and effective professional development. Some of the names mentioned included Marzano, Stiggins, Guskey, and Sparks. Maria spoke about working with Dennis Sparks from her perspective as a principal who had been an *AISI* leader. She indicated, "I was provided with a whole bunch of professional development so that I could learn how to do this work better. Working with Dennis Sparks opened my eyes to how do we effectively lead. That was huge." Mark, an *AISI* coordinator, spoke about reading some of the literature which led him to greater understanding of the change process. He expressed the idea that this form of professional development through *AISI*:

> has helped out lots in terms of not introducing but bringing authors in and making the
> literature real instead of just reading it. Having access to contemporary authors like Fullan
> and Levin has helped out quite a bit. My role is to make the theory real. That whole role
> of praxis. We know that we should base it on research but it doesn't just happen."

Mark felt that the opportunity to work with scholars made him a more effective instructional leader.

Sally had experience in a school system initiative for professional growth that enabled *AISI* leaders to receive university credit for graduate level courses. To date two courses have

been offered: Leadership and Instructional Coaching. "It's quality PD. Having people talk and think about what is going on in education right now is really beneficial." She expressed her view that in addition to the learning through the course material she had excellent exposure to educators outside of her school system and was able to learn from their experiences as well. Some of the informal learning through discussions at these courses was deemed to be very valuable to her in gaining practical knowledge from those who were actively in formal leadership roles. Sally said, "It is really nice to have this opportunity to talk to other people. It's not necessarily about your own school. It's the bigger picture and I think that is really important." She valued the professional learning and collegiality with these leaders who served as role models for her.

The professional learning experiences were viewed as positive by participants and served to expand understanding of the work context. At times the learning was related to knowledge of the curriculum and the practice of teaching. It was believed by most of the *AISI* leaders that professional experiences enabled them to be more effective instructional leaders. It is my feeling that the definition of instructional leadership provided by Spillane, Hallett and Diamond (2003) is suitable for the goals of *AISI* and hence relevant to my study. They defined instructional leadership as, "an influence relationship that motivates, enables, and supports teachers' efforts to learn about and change their instructional practices." (p. 1) Other professional learning that participants mentioned was more specifically related to the change process and how organizations work. Throughout the interview process I did not hear any negative references to the experiences related to professional learning. The professional learning experiences for *AISI* leaders provided them with new abilities to assist teacher colleagues, thus expanding understanding of the work

context and "enriching their own professional lives" (Sparks, 2007, p. 126). Reflecting on this I made the assumption that these experiences were both personally and professionally satisfying.

Learning from Research and the Literature

Over half of the participants indicated that resulting from exposure to the literature as part of their *AISI* work they had developed an appetite for professional reading, for examining the research and for understanding how to improve practice. David conveyed his belief that teachers in the classroom don't have the "luxury of time" to go through the research and literature to discover current educational thought and how to implement new strategies. Participants indicated that in the *AISI* leadership role they did have the time to delve into the research which helped them to see a bigger picture beyond their personal experiences and to discover strategies for implementing new ideas in a school. Danielson (2006) suggested that teacher leaders strive to mobilize people around a common purpose but not before they have done extensive reading and thinking about a new approach. Knowledge mobilization which entailed the sharing of learning that was a result of reading the research and literature was seen by participants as an important part of expanding their own understanding. As was often indicated by participants, these activities enabled *AISI* leaders to become instructional leaders by ensuring they were current in what the research was saying and then demonstrating to teachers the benefits of changing teaching practices.

This valuing of the research and literature was surprising to me and quite unexpected. It was not one of the assumptions that I had made. Mark spoke about the change in his reading habits throughout the ten years he held a variety of *AISI* roles. He told me, "I don't read much fiction any more but I read lots. Very voracious reading. Lots of educational research and also more of the social psychology. Some of the pop psychology books. Like Malcolm Gladwell and

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those sorts of books." Having the opportunity to read professionally caused Mark, "to understand things a little bit more completely and holistically." He indicated that this experience had actually changed his career path.

Colleen stated that time to do research and professional reading was one of the great pleasures of the *AISI* job. Further, she felt that this professional reading and research was one of the things she would utilize in a formal leadership role. "I don't want to say I never saw value in it. I did. But not having the time to do it." She said that taking time to step back and look at the research and do professional reading and have discussions with teachers about what aspects of the literature would be a good fit for their school was, "one of the things I would take back to administration." As such I believe that what Colleen was enacting in her leadership was the problematization of the research to determine the usefulness of pedagogical strategies for the specific context she was in.

I felt that the views of one coordinator served to illustrate the inherent value in this learning from research and the literature. She suggested that as a result of introducing research and literature about the change process, more participants understood and it increased the leadership capacity in districts. This perspective was supported by Paul, one superintendent in a rural school system, who suggested that as a result of learning from the research and literature the system is much more capable of responding to change than it used to be. He expressed his view that the leaders in the school system were able to analyze and understand the goals and then look for what they needed to do in order to attain them. He said, "Instructional leadership is all about helping teachers do that exact process to move from one spot to another spot to learn the skills you need to get to the next step." Further he indicated that the answers for assisting the instructional leaders to help teachers take the next step in their practice were often found in the

research and literature. Paul believed that this capacity building through *AISI* was an outcome that led to understanding the broader educational context or the "big picture."

Seeing the Bigger Picture

Although none of the participants used the term *systems thinking*, I have interpreted the idea of "bigger picture" as closely aligned to systems thinking. As I have come to understand it, *systems thinking* is a consideration of the system as a whole, taking into account various aspects of the system and corresponding patterns and interrelationships. Modifying one part of the system can have influence on other parts and the entire system (Hall & Hord, 2011; Senge, 1990). Since this study is contextually situated in Alberta where *AISI* was intended to foster sustainable change, I believe that systems thinking or "the bigger picture" is relevant to the development of future leaders in this province.

During the course of the interviews, almost half of the participants mentioned the notion of the bigger picture and how understanding that bigger picture was valuable in their leadership development. One principal in a large urban school system explained, "I think that AISI work was really important for me because I learned to develop my sense of identity as a district person rather than a person in a specific school." She told me that she started to see that there were connections beyond her own classroom and beyond her own school. She realized that she could learn from the successes of other teachers and other schools and in doing so transfer that learning to the context she worked in.

Paul was in the role of superintendent at the time of the interview but in the early days of *AISI* he had himself been in an *AISI* leadership role. He spoke quite eloquently about his perspective relative to expanding understanding of the work context.

It was an interesting time for those of us working in larger scale projects. It gave us the

opportunity to see outside of our little box. I think that is the first tenet of leadership,

starting to get a picture to realize that everything is not the same as it is in your backyard.

AISI leaders gained a broader perspective beyond their own classrooms. Paul likened it to,

"throwing a handful of rocks into a pool. The ripples start rippling off of the ripples and the

picture continues to change." *AISI* leaders gained broader knowledge about improvements that

are needed at a particular school and how to address them.

Joan who had the opportunity to be an *AISI* coordinator at the school system level

suggested that one can get too introspective in their "own world" and not realize all the incredible

things happening in other schools and other school systems that she could learn from. In her

words, "One of the greatest gifts I got was seeing every school and understanding that there are

strengths everywhere." I interpreted this to mean that seeing the strengths in other schools and

school systems caused Joan to expand her thinking and knowledge about teaching and learning.

She stated that she supported secondment into a leadership type of role as a leadership

development strategy. Joan indicated that she perceived her personal experience had been a

"grooming ground" and when she became the principal of a school she felt that she had a lot of

advantages and insight because of that *AISI* leadership role. Joan added that she felt everybody

should be given that opportunity to grow professionally and to develop leadership capabilities.

Audrey who had been an *AISI* leader at the system level in a large, urban school system

was the principal of a school at the time of the interview. She said, "I started to see leadership in

a bigger picture so that leadership wasn't just what you did in your classroom or in your school.

You had more positive impact when leadership was looked at in a bigger picture way." Over the

four, three-year cycles of *AISI* and in the school system where Audrey worked, they moved from

numerous projects to doing one project. Audrey was able to observe the leadership that was

necessary to unify an entire group of participants across the school system, going beyond one

school. She said:

> That was a very eye opening and pivotal piece and that is what I think informs my
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> consciousness in ensuring that I have open conversations with my staff. I want them to
>
> understand the big picture. I don't want them to just have a narrow view of what we are
>
> doing but to understand the big picture as a professional in order to impact students.

Audrey suggested that being part of change and observing how others approached the process was

one of the learnings she had gleaned from her year as an *AISI* leader.

Elaine, superintendent in a rural school system, spoke specifically about instructional

leadership and the value of understanding the larger picture relative to pedagogy. She suggested

that an instructional leader must have an understanding about the curriculum, what the key

student learning requirements are and how teachers can deliver the curriculum. From Elaine's

perspective an important component for instructional leadership would be ensuring that

assessment and evaluation practices are fair, appropriate and balanced. "They don't have to know

everything about curriculum; they just need to have a fair understanding of what it looks like or

translates into pedagogy." She expressed her view that the *AISI* leaders are better prepared than

anyone to provide instructional leadership in the school because of their sound understanding of

the Alberta curriculum and pedagogy. *AISI* leaders gained the bigger picture as a result of

providing leadership across multiple grade levels. For example they might work with a grade two

teacher on math instruction and the next day they might be facilitating math in a grade seven

classroom. Elaine felt that *AISI* leaders had those broad understandings about curriculum and

pedagogy that were critical for moving into the principalship.

Pamela suggested that it was a natural progression from a classroom to the *AISI* leadership role. She reflected that her understanding of the bigger picture in terms of how to assist teachers to improve their practice was learned from her *AISI* leadership role. She stated that she felt she had "taken a master's degree within the first six months of *AISI*" because there was so much to learn. Pamela thought she had learned more about the practice of teaching as well as about how organizations work. Experiences that came out of the *AISI* project led to understanding an organization and how it grows and scatters and reconnects as a stronger unit; these were notions Pamela said that she would never have grappled with these in her classroom where she was focussed on her students. I interpreted her statements to mean that these experiences contributed to her leadership knowledge and development.

Pamela had been an educator for 22 years; 16 years as a teacher and six years as an *AISI* leader. At the time of the interview she was a learning coach for the school system *AISI* project. She aspires to be a school based administrator and thinks perhaps after cycle 5 of *AISI* some opportunities might surface. Her teaching began at primary level in a very small town outside of Alberta. Following that experience she substitute taught for one year in a rural Alberta school system which she indicated gave her an opportunity to see how things worked in several different schools and grades. Then for one year she team taught grade seven with another teacher, providing a transition year from grade six for these students. The next year she took on a special education position at the same school. She found that this position, although a teaching position, required supervising teaching assistants and essentially she was in charge of an entire department of people. Pamela spent most of her career in this one secondary school, until the *AISI* role at the school system level. In this *AISI* capacity she officially serves eight schools which range from a one room school to high school and all kinds of formations.

Going from a single classroom that can be isolating to a school or system level of leadership was essentially an experience that expanded the thinking of these *AISI* leaders. The exposure to different activities and experiences opened up a new perspective and led to a more complete understanding of decisions that had not seemed reasonable before. Working alongside other leaders provided time to discuss leadership issues and learn about effective practices from the experience of those in formal leadership roles. Since *AISI* is a school improvement initiative, learning from models seemed important in anticipating what might be helpful in the change process and managing the balance between the autonomy desired by individuals with the direction that the school system or the province was going.

Observing and Reflecting on Leadership Practices

During their time in AISI these leaders often worked in a number of schools. Of those interviewed, several reported that they began to observe the leadership style of the leaders in those particular schools. As the *AISI* leaders reflected on what contributed to an effective teaching and learning environment, these principals became role models. One participant, who now was a principal, indicated that to be able to observe and work with different school administration teams gave her insight because it was so different from one school to the next. Some *AISI* leaders specifically mentioned participation in *walkthroughs* as part of their role. *Walkthroughs* are short visits to classrooms for the purpose of data gathering about what is working or not working according to the school improvement plan (Protherone, 2009). Protherone suggested that the data collected are used to prompt dialogue between school leaders and teachers in a collaborative effort to improve teaching and learning. The words of one *AISI* coordinator suggest the importance of these walk-through experiences for leadership development. She said, "I have had the opportunity to learn from so many amazing leaders and to

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see how they walk the talk…they are just some phenomenal instructional leaders." *AISI* leaders

were able to gain skill in data collection and the process of conducting collaborative

conversations. It is my understanding that participants viewed relationship building and trust as

instrumental in the success of the walkthrough strategy. Audrey reflected that the biggest learning

about leadership for her was provided by role models and the *AISI* work opened up a whole

number of roles models that she wouldn't have known if she had remained in a classroom.

Regarding leadership development, she indicated:

> You sure develop it by role models. People like me as a learner and want to learn and are
>
> perceptive enough to watch and see what other people do that was the biggest learning for
>
> me was models and that AISI work opened up a whole bunch of roles models that I
>
> wouldn't have known. You can pick and choose your style. You can say I really like how
>
> that person does that.

This notion of role models was supported by Susan, now a principal.

> When I spoke to Susan, she was noticeably excited about the idea of observing the

leadership styles of others and learning from them. As part of her role she discussed the *AISI*

project with principals in all the schools in the school system where she observed these leader

models. She emphasized that she found that particular experience fascinating and one of the best

things about the *AISI* leadership job. Susan said:

> I know definitely there were attitudes that I wanted to emulate. And I am sure there were
>
> strategies like especially the schools that really focused on empowering teachers with
>
> AISI dollars for professional learning. That is something that I really valued and
>
> something that I have carried on into my practice as a leader.

She said that she would meet with principals and was very aware of the tone they would take or the responses that they would make and wondered if that attitude permeated through lots of different things in the school. She felt she had been fortunate because she went into 20 different schools and maintained that she had a vibe as soon as she walked into a school. "I couldn't say scientifically what it was but there was a feeling or a vibe that either great things are going on here, people are excited to be here or boy this is just a job." Levin (2008) presented his view that it is often easy to get a sense of an organization's climate or culture just by spending a short time there. He suggested that by asking questions such as, "Is there a sense of purpose, energy and accomplishment?" or "Do people seem to enjoy being here?" can provide the observer with that sense of climate in a school. Susan felt strongly that these "vibes stem in a powerful way from the role that the principal takes on in a school" and that she is cognizant of that now that she is a principal.

Deborah, a principal at the time of the interview indicated that during her time as an *AISI* leader she went out to fifteen schools and talked with administrators about their *AISI* projects. Deborah had 26 years as an educator, all in an urban school system. As a young woman she was involved in another industry but decided after 10 years to return to university to become a teacher. At one point, Deborah did a presentation for colleagues on curriculum mapping. She knew it had gone really, really well and afterward people came up to her and told her she should be in administration. It was one of those positive situations that started her thinking about school administration as a possibility in her own career. She became an assistant principal at the elementary level. Deborah was in an *AISI* leadership role for five years both at the school level and at the school system level. She is currently the principal of a large elementary school.

Sara who is an *AISI* coordinator said that she found her own leadership voice by watching other educators and listening to them articulate their values and beliefs. Here I use her words, "I had the opportunity to learn from so many amazing leaders and to see how they walk the talk. They are phenomenal instructional leaders." Because of these experiences with formal leaders she maintained that she learned to be precise and more articulate about her own beliefs regarding leadership. She specifically mentioned that she had come to view herself as a leader who was not all knowing but one who "learns their way into the future." She talked about the leadership style that facilitated the learning of teachers thus enabling them to more effectively carry out their teaching practice. "Reflection" Sara indicated, "Is such a huge piece of what we did within *AISI*….thinking about our own practice and talking to others about their practice and trying new things." She added that listening to what other people said that informed their practice contributed to her personal growth as a leader.

Joan spoke about observing how different school leaders engaged their staff in the work of school improvement. Joan had been a system *AISI* coordinator which enabled her to observe leaders in many schools. She talked about how that experience had influenced her as a principal so that she now tries to strike a balance between empowering teachers and encouraging them to pursue opportunities outside of the school yet being sure that she provides enough support that she is never heaping too much on any one person. "Balance is huge," she said and added that was an insight that she gained by being able to observe and work with different school administrators.

Learning from different models was indicated as a strong influence in understanding the work of leadership. The exposure to a wide range of leader from diverse backgrounds expanded the understanding of leadership in a way that participants indicated would not have been possible if they had remained in the classroom. It was going beyond the borders of their school that was

most effective learning from other leaders. Because of these opportunities, *AISI* leaders were able to reflect on various leadership styles and decide which aspects they would like to emulate in their own practice. Participants also spoke of some of the leadership examples they observed that they did not feel matched their own personal style. These instances caused them to reflect and thus helped them to develop as a leader as well.

Summary: Expanding Understanding of the Work Context

This section of Chapter Four has as its focus *expanding understanding of the work context.* Participants shared their experiences and perspectives about their *AISI* leadership role and in this theme the data clustered around four subcategories: (a) participating in professional development, (b) learning from research and the literature, (c) seeing the bigger picture, and (d) observing and reflecting on role models.

Numerous professional development opportunities were available to these *AISI* leaders over and above what a classroom teacher would be able to take part in. On-going development seemed to be a common strategy across the four school systems. In some cases that involved scholars prevalent in the literature where their expertise was utilized to help these *AISI* leaders more effectively carry out the job of school improvement. Book studies fell into this category. Participants in three of the school systems spoke about how their professional development was intentionally directed from the system level. The collaborative approach that involved the notion of communities of practice supporting growth and development of colleagues was yet another way that professional growth ensued. Some participants mentioned how going outside of the school system to attend sessions elsewhere also exposed them to new ideas and new ways of thinking.

Participants spoke about expanding their understanding and learning from the research. In most instances it seemed they were speaking about what they found through reading books and periodicals. Such perusal of the literature led to knowledge about current thinking regarding teaching and learning and best practices. Since *AISI* had as its impetus the improvement of student learning and performance, learning about new and innovative practices was an expectation of the work. However, the high value placed on the research was quite surprising to me and was not one of the assumptions I had made when I set out to study my research question.

AISI provided funding for school systems which enabled these *AISI* leaders to go beyond their borders. Moving beyond their classrooms and out of their school led to observing and hearing about education being carried out in a variety of ways. These experiences, they said, expanded their understanding of the bigger educational context. Interviewees mentioned the smaller scope of understanding when teaching in a classroom. Through their role *AISI* leaders learned about strategies that were successfully being implemented in other areas.

Theme Three: Transitioning to Action

Analysis of the data led me to instances where participants talked about the *AISI* leadership experience and the movement to more formal leadership roles at the school or school system level. Paul, one of the superintendents, suggested, "I don't think there's a tipping point. I don't think there would be one reason for the AISI leaders deciding to move into leadership." He felt that educators worked on something for a while they got fairly good at it and then wanted to challenge themselves and work on something else. As Danielson (2006) indicated some teachers become skilled in their work to the point where it isn't challenging anymore and these individuals seek further opportunities to extend their work.

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As principal in one of the rural school systems, Rose explained that the administration team all had experience as *AISI* leaders. She elaborated:

> Our school team between principal, assistant principal, *AISI* facilitator and our special education facilitator, we all started year one in 2006 with AISI Three. We were all *AISI* facilitators. All in different schools. There would be some other places where that would be the case as well.

By this I concluded that the *AISI* experience where they had gained confidence through the extension of their work with colleagues was beneficial in the leadership development of these educators.

Colleen expressed her feeling that a lot of people end up in administration before they are ready. However, "*AISI* leaders," she said, "had the opportunity to explore the leadership quality in themselves and not necessarily to have to jump in with both feet into being a principal right away. " Her perspective as an *AISI* coordinator provides one possible explanation for the occurrence of the transitions.

Michael, a superintendent, indicated that as administrative positions came up in the school system he envisioned that some of the many participants who had been involved as *AISI* leaders would take those opportunities. He added, "One of the ironies in education is that you have outstanding educators and how would they be seen as leaders and get out of the day to day education and move into the formal administrator role." Further, he indicated that in many school systems across Alberta the only way to extend influence as an educator is to become an administrator. I suggest from analysis of the data that leadership through *AISI* acted in some instances and for some participants as a transition event to formal leadership where they might exercise greater responsibility and have greater influence on student learning outcomes.

A superintendent from the large urban centre supported the idea that *AISI* experiences often led to transitioning to more formal leadership roles. Catherine elaborated by estimating that in her school system, many of the educators who became principals in the last four or five years were either part of the presentation team or part of those *AISI* leadership teams. From Catherine's perspective it was important that prospective leaders "got a taste of how complex our district is." Hall and Hord (2011) suggested that when attempting to make change, a system leader achieves success by paying attention to all parts of the system. Catherine indicated that for some *AISI* leaders the enticement of, "having that opportunity to lead something bigger than themselves, something bigger than their school, something bigger than their classroom" became so compelling that they looked toward formal leadership roles.

In one rural school system a participant pointed out that, of the 35 original *AISI* leaders 13 are currently principals or assistant principals in the system. This superintendent said,:

> It's not like we are looking at it as a leadership pool. We are not. We hold open interviews. We do exactly what we do for every other position. These guys are just so strong because of the things that they are learning in AISI.

He further suggested:

> We are giving them every opportunity to grow and develop. We have pushed at them the equivalent of a master degree program in terms of strategies and theory, background, understanding on assessment, instructional design, change theory, organizational management.

He also indicated, "So when they come to the interviews they are the best candidate. They understand what we are looking for.   It's an interesting self-fulfilling phenomenon." From the words of this superintendent I inferred that the *AISI* leaders understood the culture of the school

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system and had proven ability to mobilize colleagues' commitment for change. It was this that made them the best candidate to continue developing the vision and the goals of the school system.

Of the *AISI* coordinators from each of the school systems, all four of them indicated that they had intended to be teachers and prior to the *AISI* lead role had not considered leadership as part of their career plan. Mark, a system *AISI* coordinator stated, "I had always thought that I would be a classroom teacher. That was where my interests and thoughts were." He said, "Having the opportunity in *AISI* to see things a little bit differently, a little more holistically, it changed my career path." Colleen who had previous school based leadership experience prior to her *AISI* lead role stated that she had never envisioned herself as an administrator. She added, "I don't know who would want to be a school administrator. It is so all-consuming." Paul, now a superintendent had, in Cycle One, reluctantly moved from being principal in a small school to being an *AISI* leader for one project. He said that at the time he had fully intended to return to his school leadership role but, "it didn't turn out that way."

Turning to those participants who had *AISI* leadership experience but did not fall into the category of superintendent or coordinator, only four of the 11 indicated that they had some notion that they would eventually move into a formal leadership position. One of those four participants was Maria. She suggested that becoming a principal was not on her mind as she entered teaching but she had natural leadership abilities that became evident even in her first year of teaching and she felt eventually that would form part of her career. Pamela told me:

> I think most of the time while I was teaching…in the back of my mind was a
> principalship. I am one of those people who want to shoot for bigger things and try for
> challenges. I think I was always thinking leadership down the road.

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Peter on the other hand said, "Leadership was never something I thought of. It wasn't until I was asked if I would like to fill in as assistant principal that I started to think maybe that would be something I would be interested in." At the end of that initial experience he enrolled in a master's program, successfully moved into the *AISI* role in his school and is now a principal. He suggested, "Working with *AISI* kind of forced me to re-evaluate where I was going and what I was doing and how much I did enjoy learning." These educators, having experienced a leadership role as a result of their work with *AISI* made the decision that they did want to alter their career path and become a leader in a more formal role at the school or system level.

Much of what I heard relative to leadership development centred on how it might have prepared educators for more formal leadership positions. Although participants reported that in many cases *AISI* leaders did make a transition to roles such as principals, assistant principals, or to system leadership roles that was not always the case. Three superintendents spoke about instances where some preferred not to transition into these more formal leadership positions. One superintendent revealed, "Out of the 35 original some it wasn't right for. They just found it too much pressure put on them to make change." The superintendent from the large urban school system pointed out, "Some people moved on and some didn't. Some said I just love being in the classroom. I will lead from the classroom." From this I understood that they could play an informal leadership role and influence staff toward improved practice. These *AISI* leaders desired the instructional leadership role but didn't want the other administrative parts of a formal leadership role or positional power. Michael, another superintendent specified, "What *AISI* has done for many people….there are people who are leaders, who exude confidence, have something to share with colleagues but may not necessarily want a leadership title such as the principal or an assistant principal." He told me he thought that *AISI* had provided the opportunity to have the

leadership position whether a learning coach or a lead teacher within the school without having to leave the part they liked which was the contact with students.

As was clear throughout the interviews there were a number of things that led *AISI* leaders to move from *AISI* leadership to more formal leadership roles. It would not be possible to point to any one single element. Although a number of participants moved into formal leadership roles, this was not always the case. There were instances where *AISI* leaders chose to return to the classroom or remain in the *AISI* leadership role. The words of Harris (2005) might provide a possible explanation of why this would happen. For these teachers they were "chiefly concerned with securing enhanced instructional outcomes and creating enabling conditions for others to learn." (p. 204) Effective succession of leaders is crucial to sustained school improvement and that organizations must nurture and cultivate leaders that can fulfill this role (Fullan, 2002). I believe that participants in my study demonstrated ways in which *AISI* nurtured and cultivated leaders, whether they became formal leaders or chose other ways to exercise leadership.

Evaluating Impact of Personal Practice

Participants talked about how they perceived that the *AISI* leadership role had prepared them to fulfill a more formal leadership role. Because of the unique situation of each participant a variety of perspectives was presented. In some cases the discussion focused on the interviewee's current more formal role. In other cases the perspective came from a superintendent who spoke of what was observed. Although only one person who was interviewed returned to the classroom to teach after her *AISI* leadership experience, she spoke about her development as one who aspires to one day move into a formal leadership role.

One of the assumptions I had made at the outset for this study was that the *AISI* experience had influenced the decision of several *AISI* leaders to move into more formal roles. Over one

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third of those interviewed commented on this aspect of leadership development. One *AISI* coordinator explained:

> Without the AISI opportunity I wouldn't be where I am today and I think my other two learning coaches would probably say the same thing. It has given us an opportunity to explore that leadership quality in us and not necessarily to have to jump in with both feet into being a principal or VP right away. That is very scary to me. I see a lot of stress in administration.

A similar notion was expressed by one superintendent who indicated that they began to look at those teachers who had expressed an interest in leadership but not sure if they wanted to leave the classroom just yet. The AISI leadership role gave these educators the opportunity to try their hand at leadership.

Elaine who is a superintendent in a rural school system noted that the *AISI* leaders were better prepared than anyone to provide instructional leadership in the school. She said, "I believe that they are better prepared than anyone to provide instructional leadership in the school." She expressed the view that school improvement is concerned with instructional leadership and that *AISI* really highlighted the need for the leader in a school to be concerned with curriculum and instruction. "They need to have a fair understanding of what it looks like or translates into pedagogy. In that respect they really go into the school with a greater knowledge than most of the staff." She observed that in terms of relationship building and learning communities and carrying out the vision of the school system *AISI* leaders are well prepared. They can now go into a school with expanded knowledge in terms of pedagogy and the whole education picture. Elaine indicated:

These *AISI* leaders also developed management skills that go well above and beyond the classroom experience. They learned how to schedule themselves in the best way to maximize the service they could provide. They have risen to the challenge and learned how to juggle budget, juggle time and juggle participants. These are all important in a formal leadership role.

However Elaine added that the *AISI* experience did not in her view touch on every component of school or school system leadership. "Where I don't think *AISI* prepares them is that dealing with the larger community such as parents or agencies." This she said was not unusual as the mandate of *AISI* was working with teachers to change practice for improved student learning.

After three years as an *AISI* leader for the school system *AISI* project, Pamela was at a crossroad and was required to make a decision whether she was going back to the classroom or going to reapply for the *AISI* leader position. She said, "The day I reapplied I knew I had developed leadership abilities that I did not have when I left the classroom." Coaching, as part of her role as an *AISI* leader, involved working directly with teachers in schools and classrooms and assisting them to learn and apply knowledge and practice with the goal of improving student learning and performance. She expressed her thoughts that the role of *AISI* leader had been a straight up learning curve in learning how to "ply her practice" as a facilitator and she felt she had taken a masters' degree within the first six months of *AISI* because there was so much to learn. Pamela indicated that she had come to understand a great deal about the theory of the practice of teaching and how organizations work, which contributed positively to her instructional leadership role. Pamela recognized, "We made ourselves into our own little version of a school, of a learning community and we took with us everybody else along the way. I felt at that point, I could do that with my own school too." I understood this to mean that it was this point she began

to look towards formal leadership. Having had experience as an *AISI* leader, Pamela indicated, "I suspect that if you had asked me if I could have gone from teaching right into a VP or principalship I would have probably said I feel a little unprepared for that." She concluded that she would have no qualms now because of what she learned through *AISI*.

Susan offered her insights about the impact that the *AISI* leadership role had on her practice now that she is a principal. She suggested that one of the things she had gleaned was the practical piece about budgeting and leadership required in the budgeting process at a school. "The leader has to set the tone," Susan said. She had come to realize that the process should be transparent and involve staff discussions. In her role as principal, Susan indicated that she puts the dollar figure on the table and facilitates staff discussion for utilizing the money to meet the needs of the students and at the same time meeting the teacher needs in achieving those goals. With that instructional leadership there is a responsibility to make sure that you are up on what the research is saying and what best practices actually are." Susan had been able to participate in such discussions at the district level during her *AISI* leadership experience and brought that aspect into her current leadership practice at the school.

John reflected on his leadership development and suggested that through his involvement with *AISI* he began to realize that the formal leadership piece was coming for him and he recognized that ultimately that was the direction that he would be headed down. He told me that when the *AISI* leadership role came to an end it would have been easy to go back to the classroom and continue the teaching that he loved. However, he felt ready for change in his career path at that particular point. He concluded, "Being groomed to have the confidence to do the formal leadership I knew that I could, so why not?" My interpretation of John's statement would be that

he was experiencing what Danielson (2007) referred to as "professional restlessness" and had the confidence to take on further challenges.

Audrey, who is now a principal, articulated that she was always looked to as a leader but was reluctant doing it. She referred to the difference between "public" leadership and "private" leadership which I felt were aligned with "formal" versus "informal" leadership. In her school system she told me, "I was considered to be a master teacher." She thought perhaps she was turned to as an informal or private leader because she has a lot of passion for teaching and learning. "We had to do public presentations and you have a whole room full of school leaders and principals and staff and you stand up there and present on making change." Through this process she said she received lots of feedback and she was constantly learning about herself. "The more you take on responsibility, the more you get pushed and you become a little more enlightened. You have to see things in a different way and that was how I wanted to grow personally." She indicated however, that there wasn't really a conscious choice for her to move into formal kinds of leadership.

Frances spoke about experience coaching administrators in new initiatives for the school system. This process was intended to provide school based administrators with the tools and the information that they needed to go back to their schools and lead specific change in their school. She mentioned that the process was utilized for areas such as the new math curriculum, inclusive education, a mentorship program and new *AISI* projects. Frances was part of the *AISI* leadership team that assisted administrators in developing the key understandings they would need to be confident instructional leaders in their schools. They led the administrators through a facilitated process to determine, "What it was going to look like and sound like in classrooms." Also, discussion ensued about the barriers to implementation and possible strategies for working with

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staff when they are not necessarily aligning with the change. Frances believed that the whole

focus should be how this is going to affect student learning. She indicated, "I think that is the

mainstay of an instructional leader. Looking for ways to promote student learning and how you

are going to improve the instructional quality." She added, "Instructional leaders are to be in

classrooms observing the lessons, observing the teaching practices and guiding and promoting

best practice." She iterated that these *AISI* leaders, having had the experience of coaching

administrators, would be well positioned to initiate change and be a strong instructional leader if

they chose to be a principal. The *AISI* leadership experience resulted in exposure to instructional

ideas and practices that were having an impact in classrooms and on student learning and

performance. An administrator needs to find a balance between the instructional leadership role

and all the other things that are part of the formal leadership role.

Formulating Values, Beliefs and Assumptions

When teachers assumed the role of *AISI* leader, there were numerous experiences and

events that they participated in that would not have been available to them had they remained as

full time teachers in a classroom situation. These activities contributed to expanding their

understanding of the work environment and provided differing perspectives that were influential

in leadership development. During the course of the data gathering, a number of participants

alluded to consolidating values, beliefs and assumptions as a result of the *AISI* leadership role or

formulating new ones. This section reports on how participants thought the *AISI* leadership role

influenced leadership development in this regard.

One superintendent, Paul, who has also had experience as a classroom teacher, a school

administrator, and an *AISI* coordinator spoke about the notion that the school improvement

initiative was new to educators and suggested that it was, "easier and harder than anybody

expected." He referred to an aspect of leadership that he had learned as a result of his own leadership role in *AISI* that he thought of as "inciting a vision in participants." Paul indicated, "You have to understand what are the outcomes you want. Before you can lead, before you can teach before you can do instructional leadership you have to know what you want to see." He suggested that if you want participants to be different you have to give them permission to be different. "You need to give them hope and then get out of their way and let them go." He concluded that as a result of *AISI,* these leaders realized that they could make things happen and shape the destiny of education as a profession.

Joan who was a principal at the time of the interview suggested, "That's the thing I like about *AISI* because it puts our priorities right on the table and we set our goals together as a team and then we assess them along the way." Joan went on to say that she operates in a similar fashion with her staff at the school. They set out goals as a team. This year the staff set the school goal to make sure that the instructional objective is always clear to the students in every lesson. She said that she facilitated a discussion where everyone talked about why it should be that particular goal and how students benefit when they know what they are intended to learn. They gathered data as a staff and discussed the results and what they might change in order to improve. Joan said, "We are breaking down our practice to make sure it fits with the needs of our students." She summarized that this process which she initially was exposed to as an *AISI* leader exceeded her expectations as a principal because all the staff can see the impact of this process for student achievement.

Peter spoke of the difficulty associated with making change. He was exposed to that reality through his *AISI* leadership role at the school. Peter indicated, "There are always people who are resistant to change." He said through his work with *AISI* he began to develop skills to

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deal with situations where there was "push back to change." He specifically mentioned that he started to develop skills for, "listening to people but still getting them to see some of the ideas that you are trying to bring across and accept them into their teaching style." As principal of a school he still was involved with the change process and often utilized the strategies he had learned as an *AISI* leader. In this regard Peter felt, "You need to have the understanding about when to introduce new ideas. Right before report cards and parent teacher interviews is probably not the time to introduce a new concept for experimenting with in the classroom." He indicated he had been aware of this notion as a classroom teacher but it was not until he had been directly involved with making change through *AISI* that he began to see the problems that can arise. He spoke about the high level of trust that is essential when making change. In making change he said, "People are moving from their comfort zones in their classroom and having to collaborate with other people in a group and then starting to share some of their understandings and maybe reveal some of their weaknesses in job." Peter viewed the work of a formal leader the same as in *AISI* as far as change process was concerned.

Frances, an *AISI* coordinator in a rural school system talked about instructional leadership and how *AISI* had contributed to these leaders. She indicated that through *AISI* the whole focus was on promoting student learning and improving instructional quality and envisioned that the *AISI* leaders would carry these values into their work as a principal. The team would set goals that were aligned with both the school system goals and provincial goals and that would serve them well for what would be required in a school. Frances suggested that through their work, *AISI* leaders, "have a whole basketful of strategies and ways of motivating people and working as a team." so as principals they definitely would be." From her perspective as coordinator she felt that as a result of their *AISI* roles they had learned ways to support all levels of abilities.

David who is now a consultant in a large urban school system indicated that there was one aspect of his *AISI* experience that really stands out. He said, "I think you should always change things when needed and not when it's convenient or wait to see what happens." He went on to suggest that as long as you have a clear vision and clear direction where you are going that the change meets less resistance. He felt that when things aren't clear that was when change was resisted.

The idea of formulating values, beliefs and assumptions has been presented from various perspectives. Each participant spoke of how their experience contributed to their understanding of leadership. This *AISI* leadership experience provided opportunities for them to try a variety of strategies and actively note the results. They also consolidated their leadership thinking as a result of exposure to numerous leadership styles. The result was development of their own set of values, beliefs and assumptions which they could utilize in a formal leadership role. Because of their leadership experience and reflection they came to the realization of what they held dear and gained understanding about their own philosophy of leadership and learning.

Reacting to Critical Incidents

In addressing the research question this section discusses the events and experiences of *AISI* leaders that they believed impacted their leadership development and influenced the move into more formal leadership roles. Deborah suggested that the actual move into a formal leadership role is often about timing and the *AISI* leadership role allowed participants to realize some of their potential just by the situations they found themselves in. Paul, a superintendent, observed that some *AISI* leaders felt they had tackled a new role, achieved success and began to feel that maybe they could do something different for student learning if they were the leader of

the school. As participants expressed, transition from the classroom to formal leadership roles seemed to be a gradual process.

During the interview John recalled how the *AISI* leadership role impacted his decision to become a principal. He indicated that he had never had the goal to be a principal but it was urging from others that led him to apply for leadership positions. The first step away from the classroom and teaching was becoming an *AISI* leader. John told me that while he was in this *AISI* leadership role the principal and assistant principal at the school included him as part of the school administration team. He felt empowered to share his expertise with the rest of the staff within his school as well as parents and the school council. He planned staff professional development and facilitated various activities. John stated that in this capacity as an *AISI* leader he had these and other opportunities that as a regular classroom teacher he would never have experienced. His principal indicated to John that he saw potential in him and thought he would be a good fit for administration. Thus, for John the transition happened gradually as a result of opportunities for professional growth and urging from others. John expressed that the *AISI* leadership role was eye-opening and he came to realize that he wanted a role that was challenging and where "every day is different."

Rose mentioned the leadership skills that she believed she had developed through obtaining a master's degree as well as the role through *AISI*. She stated her belief that as a result of this work colleagues and formal leaders at the school and at the system level began to recognize her abilities and encouraged her to follow through into more formal roles. Rose was an educator in a rural school system and had a total of 23 years of full time experience. She began her career outside of Alberta where she taught in the primary level for two years. While raising a family she was a substitute teacher for six years, which enabled her to get experience from

Kindergarten to grade 12. The remaining 21 years were in the same school system. Rose was approached to take on the lead role in her school for *AISI* Cycle 3 because of her Master's work in action research. This role comprised half of her work load, while the remaining half time she taught primary students. During Cycle 3 she was considered part of the school administration team, participating in weekly team meetings and functioning as acting administrator at times. At the completion of Cycle 3 she became assistant principal for one year at a larger elementary school. Currently she is the principal at the same elementary school which encompasses Kindergarten to grade five. The extensive opportunities for professional development and being a leader at seminars for colleagues contributed to her thoughts of transitioning to formal leadership as well. She expressed her view that it was a combination of all of these things that led her to eventually have the confidence to seek leadership positions. Rose suggested that it was a gradual process over several years and a multitude of experiences; there wasn't a line where she decided to transition into formal leadership.

One superintendent elaborated about the transition of these *AISI* leaders into leadership positions in his school system. He spoke about the purposeful way the school system had gone about providing opportunities that led to new perspectives and growth for these educators. He explained that a lot of time and energy and money were devoted to professional development. They did book studies together and studied the research of popular writers like Michael Fullan, Rick Stiggins, Tom Guskey and Robert Marzano. "Because they were so reflective from the skills they already had they were able to grab onto the new ideas and continue to weave it into their fabric." He indicated when these participants decide they are going to be an administrator it's a choice and an opportunity to do new things.

David emphasized that *AISI* had a pretty significant impact on the development of his leadership skills. Initially he wanted to be in a classroom and be self-sufficient and responsible for just the students in his class. However, as opportunities arose such as the *AISI* role he indicated that he had capitalized on them. Prior to the *AISI* leadership he attended professional learning sessions that expanded his knowledge and understanding about school improvement. During Cycle 3 of the initiative he became a member on the system-wide *AISI* Leadership Team for three years. Working more closely with other schools and with consultants prompted David's enrollment in the leadership educational development program offered by the school system. In this course he was able to further develop his leadership skills. In his role as a consultant David sees himself as an instructional leader within the district where he shares ideas in order to move participants forward in their practice.

Unlike some of the other participants who had moved into formal leadership roles, it appeared that David's experience and observations as an *AISI* leader have caused him to move away from the possibility of leadership at the school level at least at this time in his career. He stated, "Principalship. I don't see it as appealing for me right now. From what I see it is a very difficult job." David said, "I certainly didn't get into teaching initially to move into administration but I do think of myself as an instructional leader because of some of the roles I have within my *AISI* position." Although a principalship was not appealing at this time, David indicated that he would consider becoming a curriculum coordinator or a department head.

A number of participants in my study emphasized that at the outset to their careers, they had not envisioned that they would become administrators. This section has synthesized the various incidents reported by participants that influenced their transition to more formal

leadership roles and that might have led them on a career path that they might not otherwise have followed.

Influencing Learning

The category of influencing learning was mentioned by only four participants who talked about their transition to a formal leadership role having been precipitated by their desire to have greater impact on student learning. Danielson (2006) spoke of teachers who experience professional restlessness or the desire to reach beyond their classroom. She explained that these teachers wanted to extend their reach in order to influence more students and the traditional route was to become an administrator. Participants in this study expressed this desire to have a greater influence on student learning and this yearning caused them to transition into more formal leadership roles. I was surprised by this particular idea because the notion presented by *AISI* leaders of a conscious decision made in order to have greater influence on learning was not something that I had anticipated.

Throughout the interviews, the main focus of participants was about their role in relation to other adults. Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009) discussed the influence that teacher leaders have upon their own practice and that of other colleagues. These writers also mentioned the influence on other aspects of schooling such as policy decisions, procuring and allocating resources and working with parents. On the other hand, Howley, Andrianaivo and Perry (2005) found in their study that "prospective school administrators most often wanted to enter the principalship in order to make a difference for kids and to influence the direction their schools were taking." (p. 761) Participants in my study who spoke of influence, suggested that their motivation to seek formal leadership roles was to have greater influence on student learning. This sub-category was particularly interesting to me because it was one of the infrequent references that participants

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made to student learning. I believe that the focus of educational leadership should be students, and even more particularly in this context since *AISI* has as its goal to improve student learning and performance.

One superintendent presented that she thought of herself as a fairly successful teacher but she realized that the only way to influence more students was to move into a leadership role. Catherine thought of herself as a fairly successful teacher, and as part of her career path she became involved as an *AISI* leader. Regarding this idea she suggested:

The only way to influence more kids was to move up to leadership. I became a principal.

Then I realized that I could only influence 200 kids so I came down town so I could

influence principals. I never thought I would be a principal let alone a superintendent.

She wanted to influence the learning of more students which led to her role as a principal and eventually the superintendency.

Instructional leadership was mentioned in several of the interviews although the specifics about what constituted an instructional leader varied from participant to participant. Rose, indicated that as an administrator you have the opportunity to improve the teaching and learning for a large number of students. She said that as an instructional leader she works with the community, the parents, student and staff in trying to make sure that everybody involved has quality learning experiences. She spoke of "leading the learning community." As an instructional leader in a formal leadership role, she got the opportunity for a wide sphere of influence, not just the few students she had in her classroom as a teacher.

Susan's path to the principalship was somewhat different. She said, "I was getting restless. I was starting to recognize that I had ability to effect change and positively impact the environment of the people that I was working with or the people I was working for….namely my

students." Susan said she felt that her niche was more in leadership. It was at that point she became the *AISI* coordinator at the school system level. At the time of the interview she was a principal and told me, "Prior to AISI there was definitely something about leadership and having an impact on a larger group of students and the overall bigger picture of the culture of the school that was in my mind and in my heart." She successfully achieved the role of assistant principal but her ultimate goal is to someday be a principal.

The superintendent in the school system where Susan worked suggested that it wasn't that unusual that those operating as the school system *AISI* leaders earned a principalship since those participants selected were already up and coming administrators in the system. Although Susan had been a school leader she indicated that the year as the *AISI* coordinator was a pivotal year in terms of developing her understanding of leadership. Susan indicated that having had a taste of leadership at the school system level, she aspires to return to that bigger picture role.

Only a small number of participants indicated that the desire to influence the learning for more students than they could as an *AISI* leader had prompted them to move into formal leadership. However, I felt that it merited mentioning as an outcome of the study. At the outset to my study I was not expecting that the desire for greater influence would be instrumental in the transition to formal leadership roles.

Summary: Transitioning to Action

The final section of this chapter dealt with the theme of *transitioning to action.* I explored the actions, events and beliefs that might have tipped the scale and prompted *AISI* leaders to make the move into more formal leadership positions. The data within this theme clustered into four areas: (a) evaluating impact on personal practice, (b) formulating values, beliefs and assumptions, (c) reacting to critical incidents, and (d) influencing decisions. As a result of the expanded

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understanding of the education context and the opportunities provided to actively engage in leadership new values, beliefs and assumptions were established or in some cases previous notions became more firmly fixed. These *AISI* leaders spoke about the particular incidents that they determined were key factors in their preparation to alter their career path to include formal leadership roles. A surprising notion to me that surfaced was that transitioning at times was prompted by the possibility of having greater impact on student learning if they took on the role of a school based or system leader.

Chapter Summary

"Spotlighting leadership education presumes that improved leadership preparation and development will yield better leadership, management, and organizational practices which, in turn, will improve teaching, student learning and student performance in schools and districts."(Orr, 2006) In this chapter, I reported on how participants believed that their experience as an *AISI* leader developed their leadership capabilities and prepared them to fulfill more formal leadership roles. In some cases participants spoke to this because they currently held a formal leadership position. In other instances superintendents spoke about their observations and beliefs and in yet other cases participants spoke from the position of an educator aspiring to move into a more formal leadership role in the future. Some of the data presented examples that were contrary to what was typically reported and these instances enriched my understanding. After presenting what participants told me, I have summarized my findings for each of the themes that data analysis revealed.

CHAPTER FIVE - INTERPREATIONS

In the literature leadership development is expressed as a continuum that begins with recruitment and continues for the length of the leadership career. It also entails preservice and inservice programs of development. This study reports on participant experiences and perceptions about leadership development as a result of *AISI*, one school improvement strategy. My analysis of the data from this study revealed three themes: Developing Skills, Expanding Understanding of the Work Context, and Transitioning to Action. My interpretations of the data are presented in this chapter according to these themes that emerged. Here I have attempted to make a connection to the overarching research question as well as the two sub-questions posed at the outset of the study:

1. What were the actions, events, and experiences of participating educators during their time as leaders in *AISI* that led them to more formal leadership roles?

2. In what ways did these informal *AISI* leaders believe that their experiences in *AISI* leadership prepared them to fulfill their more formalized leadership role?

Developing Skills

The data showed almost unanimous agreement amongst participants that, resulting from their *AISI* leadership role, they had developed leadership skills that they believed were either necessary or helpful as they moved into school or school system leadership. In education, leaders typically rise from within the ranks of teaching. However, drawing from both the literature and data analysis for this study, I have concluded that the skills necessary for leadership are not necessarily the same as those that made for success in the classroom environment. *AISI*

leadership brought forth inherent skills that they often didn't recognize they had but they also grew in areas they weren't as strong in.

Instructional leadership was deemed to be important. However, it was my perception that there was not a clearly defined notion of just what the term "instructional leadership" implied in terms of practice. One participant articulated the belief that instructional leadership meant being in the classroom all day working with students. A superintendent described instructional leadership as the skill to observe pedagogy in the classroom and follow through to access, develop or create professional learning opportunities for teachers that would fill the identified gap; instructional leaders knew how to coach teachers.

The opportunity to experience leadership through *AISI* led to the creation of a "tool kit" of skills which participants believed help to prepare them for greater success in their first formal leadership role. Specifically, I came to the conclusion that the skills participants believed were most relevant clustered into four sub-categories: managing relationships, dealing with difficult situations, leading learning and increasing confidence.

Managing relationships with adults was viewed by participants as different from the classroom experience of managing relationships with students. The *AISI* role enabled practical leadership experience "on the job" in relationship management with their peers. Development of skills, according to Brungardt (1996) occurs from the people you work with as well as the specific tasks. Over two thirds of the participants indicated that this practical experience assisted in developing skills in the area of relationship management often through a trial and error approach but this led them to discover strategies that were useful and those that exacerbated situations. Mentoring provided by supervisors proved to be very helpful when they were navigating through the various issues they confronted, as did meetings of *AISI* leaders for the purpose of

collaborative problem solving. Diplomacy and building trust were believed to be important skills they learned in managing relationships because they could not come from a position of power in order to make change.

Various methods were used in these four school systems to enable reflective practice and learning from colleagues. Development is enhanced when leaders take the time to think deeply about their successful and unsuccessful actions (Brungardt, 1996). Sometime the *AISI* coordinator took on the role of mentor and became a sounding board. In other cases regularly scheduled meetings of *AISI* leaders provided that opportunity. This was a time when *AISI* leaders could share strategies that were effective and things that they found challenging. It was a time when discussions could ensue with a team of leaders to capitalize on the collective wisdom of the group in problem solving and solution finding. When these meetings occurred they were viewed as professional learning communities because teaching and learning dominated the discussions. Now in formal leadership roles, participants felt that knowledge they had gained through practical experiences placed them in a position to nurture positive relationships not only with staff but with the entire school community, parents and community members. Relationships embodied trust and, as expressed by participants, were at the core of their school improvement work.

Study findings suggested that the work of school improvement and change required *AISI* leaders to learn how to identify obstacles as they conducted their work and to design strategies to overcome these. Communication skills were articulated as essential in this regard. Several participants mentioned the idea of learning how to have conversations; they needed skills for tough conversations with parents, with staff and students and with volunteers. Participants said they learned how to skillfully provide candid feedback and give unpopular messages. Once

again, *AISI* had afforded an "on the job" opportunity to gain experience and knowledge about how to approach those conversations with diplomacy.

School improvement and change go hand in hand and often require dealing with difficult situations. The idea of how to work with staff in order to introduce and implement new strategies was a skill that these leaders mentioned they had learned. This required analyzing what the needs for improvement are and how to move people to the next step in attaining those goals. *AISI* leaders believed that introduction of new ideas had to be carefully thought out and presented to staff in a clear and transparent way. Their work led them to realize the importance of planning and facilitating these discussions so that people leave feeling respected. They had observed first-hand the power of collaboration in talking through change with staff and incorporated that into their leadership approach as they endeavored to find the best solutions.

Teachers who became *AISI* leaders had considerable experience leading learning for their students but leading the learning of adults required a different skill set they said. The goal of learning to lead must be about ensuring that schools are improving because of effective leadership (National College for School Leadership). In leading learning, they developed the skills for how to listen, how to ask questions, and how to be precise in articulating what was trying to be accomplished. In their current roles these proved to be useful skills as instructional leaders and when conducting formal supervision and evaluation.

Standing up in front of adults and making presentations was daunting at first for these *AISI* leaders, even though being in front of a group of students had been an everyday occurrence. However, that experience was viewed as valuable preparation to be an effective formal leader where they were required to speak publicly not only to teachers but to parents and other members of the school community. Superintendents indicated an intentional plan to assist *AISI* leaders in

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developing facilitation skills so that they could more effectively lead the learning for their colleagues. Consistent with Danielson (2006) a critical skill for a leader is the ability to facilitate dialogue in order to mobilize others for common understanding and for change. Participants suggested that they learned how to manage a meeting and get everybody's input, how to maintain focus and utilize the synergy of a team for collaboration.

Coaching of colleagues was another aspect that participants believed was important in leading learning. In order to coach, participants indicated they must be current in curriculum, assessment, instructional design, and change theory all of which are important components of their current role as an instructional leader. They became cognizant that because teachers think and act in different ways that necessitated leading learning in multiple forms. *AISI* leaders expressed the view that they became more credible as they used new-found skills to lead learning.

Confidence was built through developing skills, dealing with difficult situations and leading learning and illustrates the interconnectivity of these categories. Confidence to deal with adversity was developed. When making change *AISI* leaders met with resistance as colleagues were challenged to try new ideas. Confidence was built through the realization that a leader needs to have respect for everyone, but a leader does not have to be friends with everyone. Respectful dissonance came to be viewed as contributing to the healthy exchange of ideas, and knowing this led to confidence.

Some of the participants talked about rehearsing for presentations or for difficult conversations they knew they needed to have. In some cases these were scripted ahead of time so that many anticipated challenges were considered and planned for, thus increasing the probability of success. While this rehearsal was deemed to be necessary early in the leadership experience, the more they became involved in such activities the more their confidence grew and the rehearsal

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became less important. *AISI* leaders did discuss the value of reflective practice and although

formal rehearsal might not have been required, there was often prior mental rehearsal.

Participants felt that going from the classroom into a leadership role without the *AISI* experience

would have been too great a leap.

Key Understandings

1. *AISI* leaders believed they had developed leadership skills that were either necessary
   or helpful as they moved into school or school system leadership.
2. The skills necessary for leadership are not necessarily the same as those that made for
   success in the classroom environment.
3. Confidence was built through developing skills, dealing with difficult situations and
   leading learning.
4. *AISI* leadership brought forth inherent skills and also caused growth in areas they
   weren't as strong in.

Expanding Understanding of the Work Context

AISI leaders mentioned a variety of ways in which this notion of expanding their

understanding of the work context was realized. Superintendents also noted the phenomenon in

their discussion. Experiences and activities enabling engagement in leadership led to

establishment of new values, beliefs and assumptions or in some cases previous notions became

more firmly fixed. These leaders learned to "see through different eyes" because the *AISI*

leadership experience provided insights into dealing with a variety of situations, some of them

difficult. Superintendents expressed the view that these *AISI* leaders often became preferred

candidates for formal leadership positions because they understood the culture of the school

system, they knew about policies and had proven their ability in orchestrating change. Because of these experiences *AISI* leaders knew how to take the school system mission and translate that into measurable goals, creating alignment. This expanded understanding led them to have knowledge of the rationale and a greater appreciation for the reasons school and system decisions were made.

Professional learning played a pivotal role for these *AISI* leaders and participation in professional activities promoted developing and consolidating their own knowledge and understanding regarding leadership. Activities ranged from those purposefully organized by the school system to on-going sessions provided by educators who often were prevalent in the popular literature. Learning from an "expert" how to be an effective cognitive coach was one of the professional experiences specifically mentioned and highly valued by *AISI* leaders.

Study participants across all four school systems reported that they were able to work with these notable educators over an extended period of time in a systematic approach so that their learning was in-depth and on-going rather than consisting of one-shot presentations. The on-going nature was viewed to be important so that they learned, had the time to reflect on the new knowledge and apply the new ideas in their practice, then reconvene to learn again. Time between sessions enabled reflection and experimentation with these new ideas. A foundation of basic knowledge and skills was created, followed by more learning that built on previous knowledge and experiences.

Participants talked about their involvement in "unpacking" curriculum outcomes and found this activity to be a valuable professional learning experience. Because most of the *AISI* leaders had previous teaching experience in only a limited number of grade levels, this activity expanded their understanding of curriculum across multiple grade levels and in some cases spanned all of the grades. There was considerable agreement that knowing the curriculum

outcomes contributed to their ability to become effective instructional leaders in the formal leadership role.

Leadership development should be grounded in principles of adult learning theory (Scott & Webber, (2008). Part of the role of an *AISI* leader was to provide professional learning opportunities for staff and the model for their own growth could be emulated. Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009) indicated, planning and delivering professional development activities promotes learning for the leader in both knowledge and skill. *AISI* leaders gained knowledge in areas like curriculum, pedagogy and how to make change.

From what participants shared it was an expectation of them as an *AISI* leader that they be current with the popular literature regarding topics like school improvement and effective teaching strategies. Both individual reading of the literature and book studies were mentioned as important endeavors. The *AISI* leadership role afforded the time to analyze the issues at the school level and to delve into the current discourse where they discovered strategies that might be useful. Reflecting on how it might be implemented in a school contributed to their development as an instructional leader. As Danielson (2006) suggested they attempted to make change but not before they had done extensive reading and thinking about a new approach. Now that they were in a formal leadership position they maintained the responsibility for regular perusal of the literature and research and to have discussions with staff about what aspects would be a good fit for their school.

AISI leaders had the opportunity to network and share with fellow educators across Alberta, learning from one another and capitalizing on the knowledge of successful endeavors experienced elsewhere. Establishing these wider connections and having professional conversations with educators outside their own school system contributed to an expanded

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understanding that educational leadership and teaching could be conducted in many different ways. As they gained knowledge through an enlarged sphere of contact, they began to more clearly understand the systems perspective and the importance of the superintendent's leadership in creating a vision and then pulling everybody in the same direction on behalf of the students. They said that as teachers they were quite isolated in their classrooms and had not taken the time to reflect on that connection.

Walkthroughs were mentioned as one specific activity that was eye opening and helped them to see beyond the walls of their classroom. Walkthroughs are short visits to classrooms for the purpose of data gathering about what is working or not working according to the school improvement plan (Protherone, 2009). This involved numerous classrooms and grade levels so they could observe a broad spectrum of teaching and effective practices as well as how leaders in the school and school system operated in the instructional leadership role. They also were privy to discussion about strategizing next steps for student improvement based on the data that was collected during these walkthroughs. Once they moved into a formal leadership role the experience of gathering and utilizing data proved beneficial in their role of instructional leader.

The *AISI* experience gave participants a taste of leadership. In many cases this led them to enrol in Masters level programs or system leadership development programs to expand their own knowledge through formal education.

The *AISI* leadership experience provided the opportunity to observe styles of those already in formal leadership roles. As the *AISI* leaders reflected on what contributed to an effective teaching and learning environment, these principals became instructional leader role models. *AISI* leaders were able to listen to principals articulate their values and beliefs and to observe how

they enacted these in their work. Reflecting on what they observed, *AISI* leaders evaluated their own ideas and became more precise in what their own beliefs were.

Some of the *AISI* leaders were invited to join the school administration team for weekly discussions. Being able to observe and participate in these meetings helped translate theory and research into practice. The opportunity to go beyond the borders of their school and learn from practicing leaders was found to be highly effective. Because of these opportunities, *AISI* leaders were able to reflect on various leadership styles and decide which aspects they would like to emulate in their own practice.

AISI leaders indicted that had they remained in their classroom they would not have had exposure to the wide range of leaders from diverse backgrounds. Participants found these experiences valuable in finding their own voice and realizing their own leadership style. That is, they developed their understanding of what leadership meant to them and how they might enact their personal leadership philosophy in a formal leadership role.

Key Understandings

1. Experiences and activities enabling engagement in leadership led to establishment of new values, beliefs and assumptions or in some cases previous notions became more firmly fixed.

2. *AISI* led to expanded understanding of the school system context, the Alberta context and the broader education context.

3. Opportunity to observe formal leaders in action was deemed to be a very worthwhile activity in leadership development.

Transitioning to Action

One of the assumptions for this study was that the *AISI* experience prompted many of these leaders to move into formal leadership roles. For some participants they felt restlessness and wanted a new experience. *AISI* provided opportunities to classroom teachers for greater responsibility and more significant challenges. Many of those interviewed stated that they believed they were better prepared for a formal leadership role because of their experiences through *AISI*. Perhaps they would not fall into the category of those who "relinquish the role within three years." (Alberta Education, 2010)

There was a gradual progression for *AISI* leaders from the classroom to formal leadership. They had an opportunity to try out leadership and explore the leadership qualities they possessed. These opportunities often gave them the confidence to apply for formal leadership positions. Not all *AISI* leaders who participated in this study moved into formal roles; some chose to remain as *AISI* leaders and some chose to return to the classroom. Each had their own reasons for whatever decision was made.

Prior to *AISI* there was little opportunity for teachers to try a leadership role before becoming a principal or moving into a district position. *AISI* leadership experiences gave educators an opportunity to explore the leadership qualities and capabilities in themselves and to try an informal leadership role if they weren't sure they wanted to leave the classroom to take on a formal role. *AISI* was not intended to be a leadership pool. However, superintendents articulated that the experiences of *AISI* leaders made them excellent candidates for formal leadership positions. They had already honed and expanded their leadership skills and understood what was required to be a leader in the school system.

AISI provided the opportunity for many teachers to try their hand at leadership. Numerous different experiences and events contributed to their growth and often led them to apply for and eventually procure a formal leadership role. Participants believed they had come to understand a great deal about the practice of teaching and how organizations work, which they perceived contributed positively to their ability to be successful as formal leaders. *AISI* leaders believed that their leadership role had been a steep learning curve because they had been pushed to take on new challenges. There was so much to learn and the skills required were quite different from the expertise they had as a classroom teacher. However, they believed that the *AISI* experience had provided an opportunity to explore that leadership quality within themselves without having to move straight into a formal leadership role along with the accompanying responsibilities and demands.

Participants indicated that the *AISI* leadership role required them to take on more responsibility. They felt pushed into greater risk taking but also believed they had extensive feedback to reflect on, which caused them to grow as leaders. They had come to understand a great deal about the practice of teaching and how organizations work, which contributed positively to the formal leadership role they were in. The *AISI* leadership experience had given a skill set that was useful, even though the formal role had greater expectations. Several stated that they didn't feel they could have successfully gone directly from a classroom into a formal leadership role.

Reflecting on their observations, participants felt that the leader sets the tone in a school. Some wondered why leaders they had observed appeared not too enthusiastic about their role and their observations led them to believe that lack of enthusiasm was transferred to the entire school. They mentioned that they could sense a certain tone when they walked into a school and began to

realize that as a formal leader they had a tremendous responsibility to establish a positive environment.

While conducting the work as an *AISI* leader many recognized that they could replicate some of these same activities and utilize their new found skills if they had their own school to lead. They believed that *AISI* had been a grooming ground and provided them with the tools and the information that they needed to go back to their schools and lead specific change. They now had the confidence to take on further challenges. As a result *AISI* leaders realized that they could influence what happened at a school and perhaps to even shape the destiny of education as a profession.

Conversations revealed *AISI* leaders had developed and were able to articulate their values, beliefs and assumptions. Participation in a range of experiences and events that would not have been available to them had they remained full time in a classroom contributed to expanding their understanding of the work environment and provided differing perspectives. Reflecting on these activities, events and experience led to greater understanding and a value system emerged to guide their own leadership. One specific activity was meeting and working with principals. As mentioned earlier, *AISI* leaders observed attitudes in leaders that they believed would be effective in their own practice and those that they felt were not a good fit with their burgeoning values and beliefs.

Through experience these *AISI* leaders had been part of a total focus on promoting student learning and improving instructional quality. They indicated that was a value they had carried into their formal leadership role. Through the *AISI* leadership experience, they had come to understand the value of establishing goals for student learning that were aligned with those of both the division and the province. The process of gathering data and breaking down teacher

practice to make sure it fit with the needs of students was an activity they had initially been

exposed to as *AISI* leaders and continued to value. Participants also stressed that they had come

to recognize the importance of staff involvement in decision making.

AISI is a school improvement initiative that involves making change. Through the *AISI*

leadership role they were often confronted with participants who were resistant to change. The

assumption was made that when you have a clear vision and clear direction the change meets less

resistance. Participants expressed the belief that change should be made as needed and a leader

should not wait until what seemed to be a more convenient time. They began to realize the high

level of trust that is essential when teachers are asked to make change. Participants believed that

they had developed an extensive basket of strategies to motivate participants and work as a team

so they felt well positioned to be supportive in their current role as a formal leader.

Leadership capacity is built by enabling potential school leaders to learn about leadership

in context or on the job (Fullan, 2004). Through *AISI,* numerous teachers across Alberta have

been able to experience leadership in a variety of ways that were not previously available to them.

These experiences allowed for participants to realize some of their leadership potential. They had

tackled a new role, began to achieve success and felt that maybe they could contribute more to

student learning if they moved into a formal leadership role. The multiple experiences provided a

much broader perspective than they had while a teacher in a classroom. The actions, events and

experiences of *AISI* leaders focused on improvements in pedagogy without having to deal with

the management side of formal leadership. Often *AISI* leaders were inspired to become formal

leaders.

It seemed that this transition was a gradual process and that most had not aspired to a

formal leadership role when they began as an *AISI* leader. Having noticed their propensity for a

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learning orientation and the development of leadership knowledge, skills and attitudes, school

leaders often encouraged *AISI* leaders to apply for formal leadership positions.

Participants expressed the view that the *AISI* leadership experience led them to realize that

they could have greater influence in shaping what happened for students. They were accustomed

to having influence in their own classrooms. For some there was an increased appetite for taking

what they had learned as *AISI* leaders and exerting this influence at a school or system level.

They often felt that they had done much of the background work and laying the foundation for

changes but because the *AISI* role was not a position of authority someone else made the

decisions. For some participants they had a desire to be able to make these decisions. They

expressed the belief that since the formal leadership role was a position of authority they could

have a wider sphere of influence. This yearning led them to seek a formal leadership opportunity.

Key Understandings

1. Prior to *AISI* there was little opportunity for teachers to try a leadership role before
   becoming a principal or moving into a district position.

2. Superintendents expressed the view that the experiences of *AISI* leaders made them
   excellent candidates for formal leadership positions.

3. Many of those interviewed stated that they believed they were better prepared for a
   formal leadership role because they had come to understand a great deal about the
   practice of teaching and how organizations work.

4. The yearning for a wider sphere of influence led some to seek a formal leadership
   opportunity.

Chapter Summary

In Chapter Five, I have presented my interpretations of the data gathered from 19 participants who presented their understandings through semi-structured interviews based on their personal experiences. The data was analyzed and then categorized into three broad themes: Developing Skills, Expanding Understanding of the Work Context and Transitioning to Action. In turn, each theme consisted of four sub-categories that explored actions, events, beliefs and experiences of participating educators during their time as *AISI* leaders that might have led them to more formal leadership roles. The information gathered provides multiple perspectives about leadership development as it unfolded in the Alberta context and resulting from one school improvement strategy, *AISI*.

For this study and in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of leadership development, I interviewed *AISI* leaders, *AISI* coordinators and superintendents. However, the information that I have presented in this chapter is a synthesis of data collected from participants across these various roles and in four different school systems rather than a report of each sub group as separate and different from each other. Identification of the particular role that each of the participants played may help the reader to determine the applicability to their own context.

In Chapter Six, I will discuss conclusions drawn from this research. A revised conceptual framework is presented that illustrates how the data clustered together into themes. The chapter will conclude with implications and recommendations for theory, for policy development and practice as well as considerations regarding further research in the area of leadership development.

CHAPTER SIX – DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

My doctoral research was motivated by observations made while working in the *Alberta Initiative for School Improvement* (*AISI)* and by my interest in leadership. Guided by the constructivist paradigm, I attempted to co-construct knowledge from the experiences and perspectives of educators in the province of Alberta. The overall purpose of my study was to investigate how leadership was developed at the school and system level as a result of *AISI,* one school improvement strategy.

Chapter six has three main purposes. The first purpose is to discuss the implications for theory that arose from this study. The second is to present implications for policy and practice. The third is to outline recommendations for further research resulting from gaps and questions that were uncovered in my study. This chapter concludes with a coda to *AISI*, which served as the context for this study.

As I began to write this final chapter I once again drew upon the literature for guidance. Merriam (2009) stated, "In its broadest sense research is a systematic process by which we know more about something than before we engaged." (p. 4) Stake (2010) suggested that research involves both analysis (taking things apart) and synthesis (putting things together) often in different ways than before, thus creating new meaning. Berg (2009) indicated that after completing the study the researcher realizes both greater knowledge and insight into the phenomenon studied (p. 393). He likened the discussion section to a canvas on which the researcher paints his or her insights. This proved to be a helpful metaphor for me as I sought to present my research.

The end product of a case study is a rich, "thick" description of the phenomenon that was studied (Merriam, 2009, p. 43). In defining this notion of thick description, Pontreotto (2006)

said that it refers to both accurate description as well as interpretation of the thoughts and feelings of participants within a particular context. Further, thick description merges the participants' lived experiences with the researchers' interpretations of these experiences, leading to thick meaning of the research findings for the researcher, the participants and for other readers.

The implications and recommendations contained in this chapter are supported by data analysis and interpretations reported in previous chapters of the dissertation. These theoretical propositions were not stated at the outset of this study but rather emerged from the data collected as I endeavored to understand the perceptions of participants about their own leadership development through their *AISI* experience.

A Review of the Methodology

This study was conducted using a multiple-site case study approach in order to provide an in-depth description and analysis of leadership development in Alberta that occurred through *AISI*. Utilizing a process of semi-structured interviews, I explored a multiplicity of experiences and perceptions from those educators in the field who had *AISI* leadership experiences. My research addressed the overarching question, "*How have school improvement strategies been instrumental in school and school system leadership development?*" Documentation review and my researcher's journal supported the interview data. Purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2009; Jupp, 2006) was utilized to select 19 participants from four school systems across Alberta. Analysis was conducted during and following data collection, consistent with the suggestion that data analysis should be an on-going process throughout the research (Creswell, 2009; Mertens, 2010). As a result of the process of reading and re-reading, data reduction and coding, three themes emerged. I endeavored to take measures to establish trustworthiness and demonstrate that the

research was credible and truthful (Schwandt, 2007; Givens, 2008). For greater details regarding the specific design and methodology of the study the reader is referred to Chapter Three.

Discussion and Recommendations

The research and literature support the idea that strong leadership is important for student learning and achievement and is considered by some to account for about one quarter of total direct and indirect effects on student learning, second only to classroom instruction (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004). There is a recognition that effective leadership development leads to strong leaders, which in turn make a difference to student learning (Bush, 2013). Weiss (2008) discussed leadership capacity as the extent to which organizations can optimize their current and future leadership to drive results and successfully meet the challenges and opportunities of an ever-changing environment. The 21st century reality of increasing demands on leaders and the complexity of the educational environment make it imperative that we continue to seek out effective strategies for leadership development. This debate continues.

When I began, the research questions led me to a very simple conceptualization for guiding my approach to the study. Figure 2 discussed in Chapter Two (page 80) served to present my initial conceptualization of leadership development for purposes of this study. The figure illustrated that leadership development was a result of the actions, events, and beliefs of *AISI* leaders along with their leadership experiences. The information collected as a result of the study fits into this preliminary framework of my original conceptualization. However, analysis and interpretation of the research data as reported, led to the development of a more comprehensive framework.

A new conceptualization was developed, including the three emergent themes: Developing Skills, Expanding Understanding of the Work Context, and Transitioning to Action. Four

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subcategories cluster around each of the three themes and provide support for each of these bigger

topics. Figure 3 illustrates this deeper, richer understanding of leadership development that the

research illuminated.

Figure 3. Conceptualization of Emergent Themes from Analysis of the Data
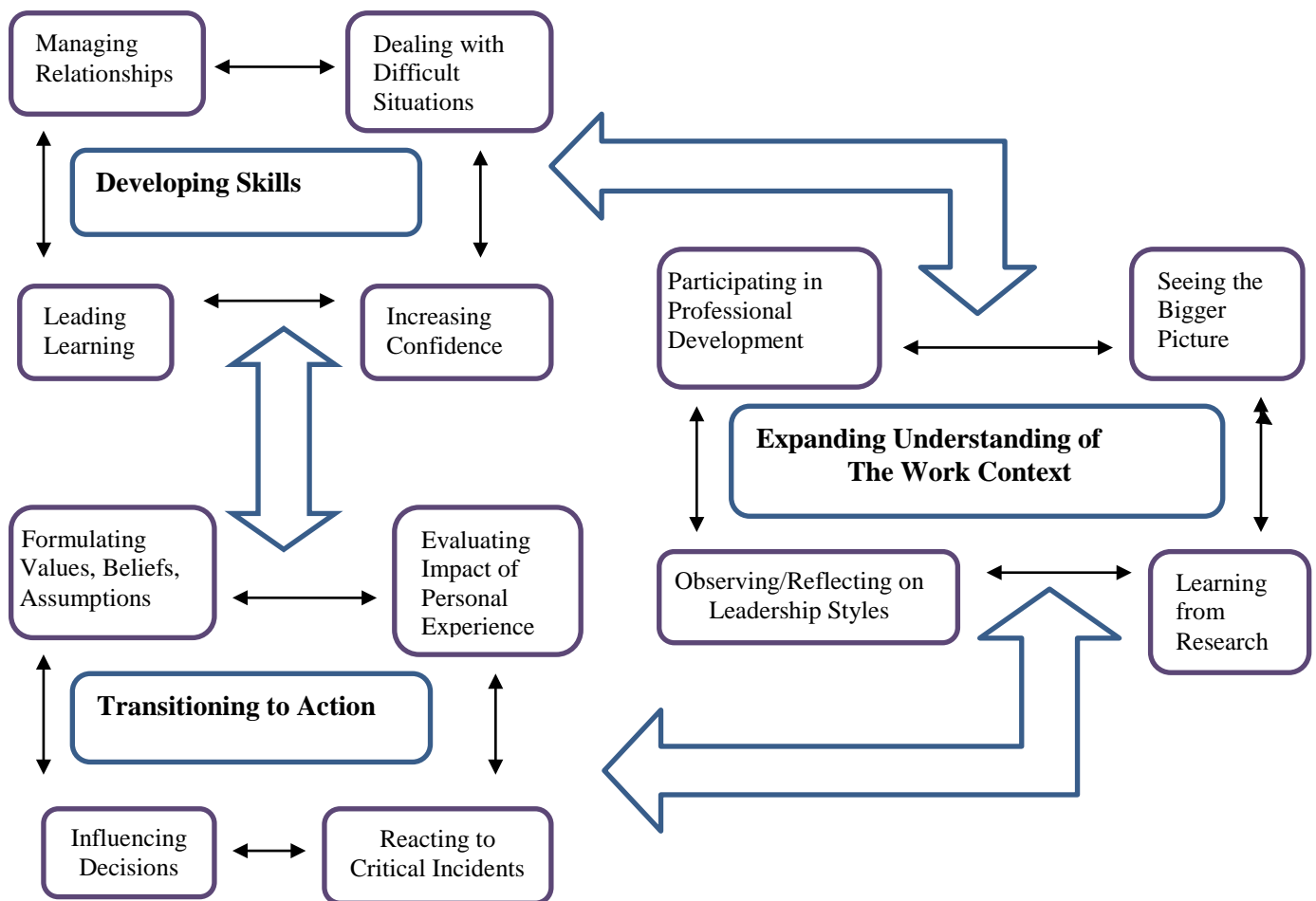
Because I believe that my interpretations do not necessarily fit discretely into separate

themes, the large arrows indicate the frequent interconnectivity of one theme with the others. In

fact, there often was movement back and forth between each of the three themes. For example,

Transitioning to Action might occur due to either new skills being developed or a greater

understanding of the work context. Conversely, greater understanding of the work context might

have prompted an *AISI* leader to take action for developing new skills. As well I believe that the ideas that clustered together to form subcategories within each of the themes also have interconnectivity and rarely stand alone as unique and separate from each of the others. The smaller arrows in the figure illustrate a similar interconnectivity between these subcategories. Here is one example of how the data is interconnected. Although *increasing confidence* is a discrete subcategory this confidence might at the same time be influenced by learning new skills in managing relationships, by dealing with difficult situations or by leading learning.

This study leads me to conclude that one of the key components of school improvement efforts is leadership development. As such the research contributes new understanding to theory as well as policy and practice.

Implications

The research focused on leadership development based on the experiences of research participants. Taking into consideration all of the information that resulted from this study, implications will be discussed in three categories. I begin with a discussion of the implications for theory relative to leadership development. Secondly, it explores the implications for policy and practice. Finally, it suggests directions for further research in the area of leadership development.

Implications for Theory

This study explored how one school improvement strategy developed school and school system leadership. Lieberman, Saxl and Miles (2007) noted that in spite of teacher leaders coming to the position with an impressive array of skills they had much to learn when coping with the new role and what had worked in the narrow classroom environment would not necessarily work in the pursuit of a larger vision. Exploration of the research question enabled development

of a conceptual framework that reveals the actions, events, and experiences through *AISI* that led

to the leadership development of participants. This framework makes an original contribution to

the literature, particularly since leadership development through *AISI* has never been studied.

In reviewing the literature there seemed to be a consensus that educational leadership is

facing challenges and soon there may not be enough qualified people to fill school and school

system leadership positions (Alberta Education, 2008; Barber, 2010; Levin, 2008; OECD, 2008;

Pont et al., 2008; Tooms, Barnett, & Shoho, 2010). Potential candidates are often hesitant to

apply for these roles due to factors such as heavy workloads, overburdened roles, insufficient

preparation and training, limited career prospects and inadequate support and rewards (OECD,

2008). My research illuminates insights through *Transitioning to Action* that fills a gap in the

literature regarding specific ways that leadership development contributed to the pool of qualified

and interested candidates for educational leadership roles. Generally, participants in this study

did not take on the leadership role in *AISI* because of career aspirations but often later transitioned

to formal leadership roles.

A concern for school leaders is fostering positive working relationships (Harris, 2005;

Alberta Education, 2009; Katzenmeyer and Moller, 2009). Relationships among the adults in a

school is the single factor common to successful educational change and have a greater influence

on student achievement than anything else (Barth, 2006; Fullan, 2002). Fullan (2009) claimed

that when relationships improved, schools got better and added that when leaders are aware of

their own emotional makeup they can then be sensitive and inspiring to others. Consistent with

the literature, it is evident that participants in this study viewed relationships as an important

aspect of their *AISI* leadership work. The particular experiences of *AISI* leaders make a

contribution to the understanding of potential frustrations when working with colleagues and illustrate how these were dealt with.

The research also responds to the caution by Leithwood (2008), reporting to the College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS), about the usefulness of information emerging from distinctly different contexts. This study will provide contextual information and fill the gap apparent in the literature relative to leadership development in both the province of Alberta and in Canada.

Another study in the Alberta context explored participants' leadership experiences through 2Learn, an initiative that introduced innovative technology infusion in K-12 curricula (Newton & Riveros, 2012). Participants in both studies indicated the importance of professional development and the resulting increased skill and confidence in their leadership capabilities and self-efficacy. Danielson (2006) indicated that confidence of the teacher leader contributes to courage and risk taking. Consistent with Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009) participants in my study indicated that with a heightened awareness of their personal strengths they gained the confidence to influence learning. A broader perspective and expanding understanding of the work context led participants in many cases to realize that they could have influence at the system or provincial level. Because there were many similarities in the findings between the two studies both sets of research are strengthened.

Scott and Webber (2008) in the 4L model of leadership development indicated that good leadership is teachable. Leaders are grown through experience and support; actively cultivating them can increase the leadership capacity of the system (Barber, 2010). There is potential that the knowledge gained through this research can be useful for policy and practice in developing and

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nurturing future leaders for schools. This study makes a contribution by providing specific details on how new leaders developed knowledge, skills and attitudes.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Over the years there has been extensive research about leadership and considerable information reported in the literature. However, much can still be learned. The topic is of particular concern at this time due to challenges such as the increasingly complex demands of education and impending shortages of competent leaders. Stated earlier in the dissertation, the study potentially will be of interest to various stakeholders in the education community. Barber et al. (2011) after conducting an *International Review of School Leadership* within six countries and two Canadian provinces concluded that system policies and practices make a difference to leadership capacity (p. 5). McLaughlin (2000) defined policy as "a detailed prescription for action aimed at either the preservation or the alteration of educational institutions or practices." (p. 442) Within this section I provide possibilities for consideration regarding policy and practice for leadership development.

Danielson (2006) stated that teacher preparation programs provide skills necessary for teaching but not for exercising leadership in a school. If leadership development is a continuum, I encourage those institutions who prepare teachers to begin as early as the undergraduate years to build into teacher training not only pedagogical expertise but also entry level leadership skills. As these novice teachers enter the classroom, the mindset for leadership as a professional expectation will already have been introduced to them. This is not to suggest that all teachers would take on a formal leadership role at this early stage. Rather, having a mindset that leadership is part of the role of a teacher might encourage early participation in activities such as heading a committee,

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facilitating a learning community or initiating a particular professional activity. Leadership development can occur through almost any activity that promotes and encourages leadership potential (Brungardt, 1996) and informal leadership roles are learning experiences where skills and new knowledge can be developed.

I concur with the findings of Whitney (2013) that if university faculty utilize teaching practices that foster collaborative decision making and inquiry, this process can cultivate capabilities and provide a model for students when they undertake leadership roles. Data from my study suggested certain skills that participants believed were of value to them as they moved from *AISI* leadership to formal leadership roles. These included managing relationships, dealing with difficult situations, and leading learning. Some or all of these skills could form the basis for early leadership development and indeed be incorporated into a teaching model of inquiry during undergraduate teacher programs.

Darling-Hammond and her colleagues (2007) stressed the value of strong partnerships between teacher preparation institutions, government departments of education, and school systems regarding leadership development. The teacher professional organization should also be included as a partner in this regard. These authors believed that strong links between stakeholders contribute to retention over time of learned leadership knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours. This occurs because professional guidelines, theory and practice are aligned and complementary. As a result there is greater likelihood that leadership development will be tailored to meet the needs of local schools and systems. I urge the cementing of these partnerships as a contributing factor and an integral part of leadership development.

If one quarter of effects on student learning, are attributable to leadership (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom, 2004) then strong, competent leadership should be considered a

priority for high performing schools. The design and quality of leadership development programs

can be significantly shaped by purposeful policies that "legitimize infrastructure changes and

innovative practices and encourage continued use of the innovation." (Hall & Hord, 2011, p.14)

An important first step for school systems is to ensure that a current leadership policy is

established that clearly defines leadership development in each respective system. The policy

should address what skills, knowledge and attitudes are viewed as important for leaders in order

to have the most positive impact on student learning. Evidence presented in this study will be of

interest to individual school systems, to both trustees and superintendents along with their

stakeholder organizations as leadership policy for the school system is refined or developed.

Since each school system is different, with a unique set of circumstances it is unlikely that a

universal policy would address all of the needs. However, leaving leadership development to

chance does not seem acceptable if schools and systems are to have quality leadership and address

the current challenges.

In Alberta, leadership development policy at the school system level should address the

provincial professional guidelines for leadership. Stated in the *Alberta School Leadership*

Framework (2010), "school leaders have significant responsibilities for ensuring quality student

learning and teacher practice efficacy and for promoting an effective learning culture in the

school community." (p. 7) Accompanying the Framework document is the *Principal Quality*

Practice Guideline (2009) which outlines seven leadership dimensions, along with supporting

descriptors that competent leaders would exhibit. The provincial Ministry of Education involved

stakeholders (Alberta Teachers' Association, universities, College of Alberta School

Superintendents, Council on Alberta Teaching Standards, Alberta School Boards Association and

the Association of Home and School Councils of Alberta) in establishing these guidelines. I

believe that partners in the field can significantly enrich the guidelines and are encouraged to continue this practice of collaboration. It is important that school systems ensure alignment of local policy with these provincial leadership dimensions.

The Darling-Hammond et al. (2007) findings suggested that a critical feature of exemplary leadership development programs was the continuum of opportunities from pre-service, through induction, and ongoing throughout careers. Although the *Alberta School Leadership Framework* (2010) addresses the preservice, induction and inservice components of leadership development, it makes no mention of recruitment and selection of leadership candidates. Darling-Hammond et al. (2007) concluded that exemplary leadership development programs must be more purposeful in seeking out recruits rather than reliance on self-selection for leadership candidates and as such builds a pool of candidates with leadership knowledge and skills. I encourage local school systems to include in policy the process of careful selection of suitable candidates so as to proactively recruit expert teachers with potential for leadership.

Many participants in my study indicated that they had not aspired to a formal leadership role. However, because of on the job experience as a result of *AISI,* they had chosen to make that transition. Local policy did not support *AISI* as a leadership development pool in the four districts that formed this study. However, superintendents expressed their belief that *AISI* leaders made excellent candidates for roles such as the principalship due to the leadership development that had already occurred. Because of this, I urge school systems to take a pro-active stance and purposefully incorporate into policy, activities that develop leadership capabilities.

The *AISI* leaders who participated in this study pointed to a combination of on the job learning for leadership combined with structured professional development opportunities. The most successful learning experiences occur when there is a bridge between the work situation and

the learning situation (National College for School Leadership, 2007). That is to say, they could

take the theory and put it into practice; conversely practice made it easier to understand the

connection to theory. Newton (2004) wrote that the ability to improvise provides the leader with

opportunities to apply knowledge in new settings. However, this ability is based on

comprehensive preparation that attempts to predict and interpret the variety of situations that

might arise. It was the combination of theory and practice along with reflection that proved to be

powerful for these *AISI* leaders. Based on this study, the implication is that when designing

programs for leadership development, whether for preparation or inservice, both theory and

practice need to be integral components and intentionally incorporated.

A key component of the leadership experience studied was it enabled *AISI* leaders to

actively provide instructional leadership without the burden of many of the more administrative

tasks that formal leaders must address in their daily work. The *AISI* leaders could deal with the

important rather than the urgent (Levin, 2009). Learning from the experiences of these *AISI*

leaders, school systems are encouraged to develop policy that purposefully builds in opportunities

prior to assuming the formal leadership role that would develop the instructional leadership skills.

There is also a need for leadership development at the school level. If school systems

develop policy then it is incumbent upon school based leaders to develop plans for leadership

development in their individual schools. Participants mentioned areas that they believed had

contributed to their own leadership development. These areas included participating in

professional development, learning from the research and observing leaders in action. They

suggested that these activities led to understanding the larger educational context beyond the

walls of their school. Therefore, I encourage leaders at the school level to include these activities

in a school plan for leadership development.

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Creating opportunities for effective leadership development as well as creating a climate where risk taking is encouraged were found to be important, leading to increased confidence of *AISI* leaders. There was recognition expressed by participants in my study that mistakes would be made by teacher leaders but the school leader needs to provide a climate that encourages risk taking, then stand back, coach from the sidelines and let these teacher leaders learn from their experiences. The principal has an important role to play and is encouraged to create an intentional plan of action in this regard.

Danielson (2006) indicated that teacher leaders gain confidence in their skill as teachers, in their skill in thinking through a new approach, and in their skill in persuading colleagues to join them in pursuing new strategies. Supporting leadership development at the school should be part of a purposeful plan of succession and not left to chance. The school based leader is encouraged to provide teachers both practical leadership opportunities that meet needs of the school as well as leadership development activities for gaining theoretical knowledge. My study revealed that prospective leaders are helped when they have wide exposure to different grades and subject orientations. Study participants indicted the value of networks that extended beyond the school as well as the school system for expanding their understanding of the work context. Hence, strong professional networks should be encouraged by school and school system leaders alike, as part of leadership development.

When planning leadership development, a variety of stakeholders should be involved in the process. This would include the Ministry of Education, teacher preparation institutions, superintendents and their organization, trustees and their organization, teachers and their organization, principals and other formal leaders at the system level. *AISI* points to a number of implications for policy and practice. Leadership development is an unintended outcome of *AISI*

as it was not initially part of the school improvement initiative. Incorporating some of these

implications that the study revealed in an intentional and planned way may help to meet some of

the challenges for leadership that have been outlined.

Implications for Further Research

While it is clear that participants believed they had developed as leaders through their *AISI*

experiences, every study leads to further questions. There are four implications for further

research that I would like to recommend as possibilities.

1. What plans are in place across Alberta to support leadership development beginning

   with recruitment and including pre-service and inservice programs? How are current

   leaders being supported and developed in school systems in Alberta? What programs

   are in place across Alberta for leadership preparation at the institutions for teacher

   preparation? The importance of this is twofold. In exploring what programs for

   leadership development currently exist, school systems can learn from promising

   practices of others. Gaps in leadership development programs can be uncovered and

   attempts made to fill the gaps. The overarching question is what can we learn about

   policies and practices that could inform and enhance the provision of high-quality

   leadership development opportunities?

2. While it was evident in this research study that instructional leadership was deemed

   important, a common understanding of what constituted instructional leadership was

   not forthcoming from study participants. Implications for further research are to

   determine how principals, superintendents and other central office personnel describe

   the ways that they fulfill the role of instructional leader. What are their experiences in

this regard? What practices do they perceive as being the most effective in enacting instructional leadership? Studying the instructional leadership experiences has the potential to develop a set of strategies and inform future policy and practice.

3. A survey completed by Alberta Education (2008) provided data indicating that 32% of principals relinquish the role within 3 years. I recommend that research be conducted in order to follow the career path of school leaders who had previous experience as an *AISI* leader. Specifically what percentage of formal leaders who had *AISI* leadership experience relinquish their role compared to others who did not have this previous leadership opportunity? Three years after embarking on a formal leadership role, how do these leaders perceive that the *AISI* leadership experience prepared them for this role?

4. The conceptualization constructed from my research has the potential to inform policy and practice. I recommend further research with others who experienced a leadership role through *AISI* in order to strengthen the conclusions.

Final Thoughts

This study was designed to explore leadership development in order to add to the body of knowledge that already exists. It is hoped that co-constructing the perspectives of participants has made such a contribution and fills a gap relative to understand leadership development through one school improvement initiative. These findings are bounded by a particular point in time and a particular context. Therefore it is up to individual readers to determine if these findings have relevance and are transferrable to their own unique context.

Although during my time as a teacher I did not view myself as an informal teacher leader, through this study and my review of the literature I have come to realize that I did in fact operate in that role as early as my first year of teaching and throughout much of my career. As a special education teacher I initiated and led numerous change strategies as we moved toward a philosophy of inclusion. This pattern of change leadership was not a formal requirement of my job, nor were structures in place at the school to enable this role. As Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009) indicated, informal leadership emerges based on the teacher's interest and the perceived needs of the school. I believe that I was fortunate in that first year of my career to have the support of the school administration to perform this informal leadership role. This early experience partially explains my ongoing interest in leadership development. The variety of other leadership experiences over the course of my career including trustee, school based leader, school system *AISI* leader and a provincial leadership role have all made their contribution as well.

In conducting this study, the most recent experience in my career as an educator, I have, as Corbin (2008) stated, been shaped by my research and have emerged with new knowledge, beliefs and assumptions. Journeying through my doctoral studies and the research process which are a combination of the theoretical and the practical, have caused me to grow extensively. I strengthened my skills as an interviewer and I have an enhanced appreciation for the value of detailed journaling throughout the process. Working through the analysis of my data was often frustrating but honed my analytical skills. My own understanding of the research process has been exponentially expanded in a similar fashion that the *AISI* leadership role expanded understanding relative to the broader context of education for the participants.

As stated earlier, I began my research with an intuitive sense of the importance of leadership for student learning. Both reviewing the literature and conducting the research served

to confirm this belief. Through my research I was able to uncover the perspectives of *AISI* leaders who experienced leadership development and I have far greater knowledge of successful aspects for development programs. I believe that my research has successfully answered the question posed and demonstrates possibilities for leadership development programs in Alberta and beyond.

Coda

During the ten years prior to returning to academia I was closely involved and actively worked with *AISI*. First, I was in the role as an *AISI* project leader in my home school system, where I provided leadership in the area of literacy for grades four to nine. Then I had the opportunity for expanded influence on school improvement and moved into a provincial leadership role as school improvement manager within the Ministry of Alberta Education. In this role I supported school systems across the province in their improvement and change efforts on behalf of student learning and performance. Hargreaves et al. (2009) in a multiple perspectives review summarized the *AISI* as, "an impressive change strategy that is perhaps without parallel in the world today." (p. 121) *AISI* was part of the Alberta education scene for over 12 years.

On Alberta Budget Day 2013, it was announced that funding would be cut to *AISI*. By way of further explanation, Alberta Education (2013) stated, "Funding to the *AISI* will be eliminated effective April 1, 2013 in order to examine ways to align *AISI* with the vision of Inspiring Education" http://education.alberta.ca/department/budget/funding.aspx *Inspiring Education* (2010) presents a vision for education that encompasses a 20 year span, in order to achieve "a preferred future for education in Alberta up to 2030. It sets high-level direction, but it does not lay out the processes for implementation." (p. 5)

The announcement personally saddened me because of my own involvement with *AISI*, but also because I believe that students of Alberta were the benefactors. A great deal of energy by dedicated teachers, leaders and education stakeholders as a result of *AISI* has transformed education for students in Alberta (Hargreaves et al., 2009). As stated earlier the group of seven stakeholder organizations referred to as the Education Partners Steering Committee (EPSC) each represented distinct beliefs, values and assumptions about education, along with corresponding agendas for action. In spite of these differences, the partners shared a commitment to improving education for students, and I believe that contributed to long-term benefits for students in Alberta.

Reynolds (2010) concluded that the only model that is appropriate for the 21st Century is the empirical-rational problem solving one where professionals take an enquiry orientation, try out solutions to problems and measure the effects, changing as necessary (p. 222). It is my contention that *AISI* would fit into this mold. In *The Fourth Way*, Hargreaves and Shirley (2010) suggested that, *AISI* has a distinct change architecture. Further they stated:

> *AISI* is not about implementing or delivering centrally determined mandates, on short timescales, in a small number of core and basic learning areas that are linked to a few areas of tested achievement. It is about innovation *with* improvement, about engagement *with* achievement, about professional inquiry *with* integrity. (p. 103)

These words demonstrate a powerful legacy that *AISI* has left behind. I am hopeful that the incredible amount of learning that has transpired over the past 12 years and the foundation for change and improvement that has been built through *AISI* will continue to influence the fabric of education in Alberta for many years.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A Notification of Approval

Date: December 5, 2011

Study ID: Pro00025125

Principal
Investigator: Donna Pechanec

Study
Supervisor: Rosemary Foster

Study Title: **School Improvement Strategies and Leadership Development:** Experiences of *AISI* Leade**rs**

Approval
Expiry Date: December 3, 2012

	Approval Date	Approved Document
Approved	12/5/2011	Participant Consent
Consent Form:	12/5/2011	Superintendent Consent

Thank you for submitting the above study to the Research Ethics Board 1. Your application has been reviewed and approved on behalf of the committee.

A renewal report must be submitted next year prior to the expiry of this approval if your study still requires ethics approval. If you do not renew on or before the renewal expiry date, you will have to re-submit an ethics application.

Approval by the Research Ethics Board does not encompass authorization to access the staff, students, facilities or resources of local institutions for the purposes of the research.

Sincerely,

Dr. William Dunn
Chair, Research Ethics Board 1

Appendix B Letter of Invitation

Dear (superintendent name)

My name is Donna Pechanec and I am conducting a study entitled, **School Improvement Strategies and Leadership Development: Experiences of *AISI* Leaders**, as part of the requirement to attain a Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Administration and Leadership at the University of Alberta. The purpose of my study is to examine the extent to which large-scale school improvement strategies have been instrumental in school and school system leadership development. Leadership development will be examined through the province-wide, government-funded school improvement initiative, *AISI (AISI)*. Results of this study will be used for my doctoral dissertation and also be used for presentations at conferences and publication in scholarly journals. I would like to ask your permission to recruit participants from your school jurisdiction to participate and to also extend an invitation to you to participate in this timely study. A form is provided for you to give consent for the participation of your school jurisdiction in this study and to provide consent for your own participation. Your participation and the participation of any members of your school jurisdiction are entirely voluntary. Participants from your school jurisdiction will be fully informed of the details of the study and be asked to provide consent for their participation.

The College of Alberta School Superintendents commissioned Dr. Kenneth Leithwood, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, to conduct (2008) an international literature review of empirical studies related to high performing school jurisdictions. He found very

few in the Canadian context and urged superintendents to support research in Alberta that investigates potential links between high performing school jurisdictions and leadership development. To further complicate this lack of empirical research, Alberta Education has gathered and analyzed current data regarding the supply and demand for school leaders in Alberta. The Alberta School Leadership Framework: Promoting Growth, Development and Accountability (2010) emphasized these school leadership workforce challenges:

1. As of 2008, the average age of school leaders (i.e., principals and assistant, associate and vice principals) in Alberta was 48.3 years; 49% were over the age of 50 years, and 32% of new school leaders relinquished the role within three years.
2. In 2009, Alberta school systems reported that the number and quality of applicants for school leadership are dropping, with some remote jurisdictions reporting unfilled school leadership positions (p.6).

Methodology for this study was informed by a review of literature surrounding school improvement, leadership, and research methods. A multiple-site case study methodology involving four school systems will be employed. Data will be collected through

1. a semi-structured interview of approximately one hour in length conducted with the jurisdiction superintendent or designate if she/he is willing
2. a semi-structured interview of approximately one hour in length conducted with the *AISI* coordinator if she/he is willing, and a semi-structured interview of approximately one hour in length conducted with 2-3 additional staff who have at least one year in a leadership role within *AISI*.

These interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed. Document analysis of publicly available documents, including *AISI* Project Annual Reports has been conducted to assist in the selection of study sites.

Research gathered through this study will be kept in strict confidence and securely stored. In addition to the participants, only my supervisor and I will have access to the audio-recordings and the

transcripts. Prior to analysis and use, information gathered through interviews will be returned to participants for verification of accuracy. Participants may choose to withdraw the information provided up until 4 weeks following their review of and written approval of the transcript. In order to withdraw from the study, I ask participants to indicate in writing to myself, the researcher, in the event that they wish to withdraw.

No names of individuals or school jurisdictions will be used. The names of individuals from your jurisdiction who agree to participate will be kept confidential. You may choose to withdraw your school jurisdiction from the study at any time prior to the final analysis. All information will be kept in a secure place for a minimum of five years following completion of the research and then appropriately destroyed so as to ensure privacy and confidentiality.

For concerns or complaints regarding this research you may contact:

Donna Pechanec, graduate researcher	Dr. Rosemary Foster, supervisor
University of Alberta	Professor, University of Alberta
(780) 732-7881	(780) 492-0760

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board 1. Questions about your rights as a research participant may be directed to the University of Alberta Research Ethics Office at telephone number (780) 492-2615.

I will follow up with a phone call to you to discuss this further and answer any questions you may have regarding this research study. You may receive a copy of the final research report by contacting me.

I am providing two copies of the invitation letter and consent form, one copy can be kept for your records and one to be signed and returned to me, the researcher.

Yours truly,

Donna F. Pechanec

Doctoral Candidate

University of Alberta

Appendix C Superintendent's Consent to Participate in Research

Research Question: To what extent have school improvement strategies been instrumental in school and school system leadership development?

I_____, superintendent of schools for _____ jurisdiction in the province of Alberta, hereby give consent for research entitled **School Improvement Strategies and Leadership Development: Experiences of *AISI* Leaders**, by Donna Pechanec as outlined in the accompanying letter to be conducted in this jurisdiction. I may withdraw participation by this school jurisdiction from the study at any time up until final analysis has begun. I understand that contact will be made with me by the researcher prior to the final analysis to verify continued approval.

Superintendent signature   Date

By signing below I also agree to participate as an individual in the study.

I understand that:

- Participation in this study is entirely voluntary.
- I will be asked to participate in an interview of approximately one hour in length and that this interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed

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- I may stop the interview at any time and choose not to answer any questions. I may withdraw the information I provide at any time up to four weeks following my review and written approval of the interview transcript, in which case I have been asked to indicate in writing to the researcher my wish to withdraw.
- All information gathered will be kept confidential and securely stored. The audio-recordings and transcripts will only be seen by the researcher and the researcher's supervisor
- This jurisdiction will not be identified in any document resulting from this research
- I will not be identified in any document resulting from this research, nor will any member of the staff of this school system. Names of staff members who participate will be kept confidential from me.
- Written voluntary consent will be individually obtained from other staff of this school system participating in this research. If I suggest a designate to interview in my place, that individual is also free to participate or not without penalty.
- The results of this research will be used for the research dissertation, presentations at conferences or publication in scholarly documents
- All information will be kept in a secure place for a minimum of five years following completion of the research and then appropriately destroyed so as to ensure privacy and confidentiality.
- I can receive a copy of the final report by contacting the researcher.
- I have received two copies of this consent form – one to return to the researcher and one to keep for my files

For concerns or complaints regarding this research you may contact:

Donna Pechanec, researcher	Dr. Rosemary Foster, supervisor
PhD candidate	Professor
University of Alberta	University of Alberta
dpechane@ualberta.ca	ryfoster@ualberta.ca
780) 732-7881	(780) 492-0760

Print Name   Signature   Date

Researcher Name   Signature   Date

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by Research Ethics Board 1 at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Research Ethics Office at (780) 492-2615.

Dear _____ (participant) _____;

My name is Donna Pechanec and I am conducting a study entitled, **School Improvement Strategies and Leadership Development: Experiences of *AISI* Leaders**, as part of the requirement to attain a Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Administration and Leadership at the University of Alberta. The purpose of my study is to examine the extent to which large-scale school improvement strategies have been instrumental in school and school system leadership development. Leadership development will be examined through the province-wide, government-funded school improvement initiative, *AISI (AISI)*. Results of this study will be used for my doctoral dissertation and also be used for presentations at conferences and publication in scholarly journals. A form is provided for you to give consent for your participation in this study. Your participation is entirely voluntary.

The College of Alberta School Superintendents commissioned Dr. Kenneth Leithwood, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, to conduct (2008) an international literature review of empirical studies related to high performing school jurisdictions. He found very few in the Canadian context and urged superintendents to support research in Alberta that investigates potential links between high performing school jurisdictions and leadership development. To further complicate this lack of empirical research, Alberta Education has gathered and analyzed current data regarding the supply and demand for school leaders in Alberta. The Alberta School Leadership

Framework: Promoting Growth, Development and Accountability (2010) emphasized these school

leadership workforce challenges:

3. As of 2008, the average age of school leaders (i.e., principals and assistant, associate and vice principals) in Alberta was 48.3 years; 49% were over the age of 50 years, and 32% of new school leaders relinquished the role within three years.
4. In 2009, Alberta school systems reported that the number and quality of applicants for school leadership are dropping, with some remote jurisdictions reporting unfilled school leadership positions (p.6).

Methodology for this study was informed by a review of literature surrounding school

improvement, leadership, and research methods. A multiple-site case study methodology involving

four school systems was employed. Data was collected through a semi-structured interview of

approximately one hour in length conducted with the jurisdiction superintendent,

These interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed. Document analysis of publicly

available documents, including *AISI* Project Annual Reports has been conducted to assist in the

selection of study sites.

Research gathered through this study will be kept in strict confidence and securely stored. In

addition to the participants, only my supervisor and I will have access to the audio-recordings and the

transcripts. Prior to analysis and use, information gathered through interviews will be returned to

participants for verification of accuracy. Participants may choose to withdraw the information

provided up until 4 weeks following their review of and written approval of the transcript. I ask

participants to indicate in writing to myself, the researcher, in the event that they wish to withdraw.

No names of individuals or school jurisdictions will be used. The names of individuals who agree to participate will be kept confidential. All information will be kept in a secure place for a minimum of five years following completion of the research and then appropriately destroyed so as to ensure privacy and confidentiality.

For concerns or complaints regarding this research you may contact:

Donna Pechanec, graduate researcher	Dr. Rosemary Foster, supervisor
University of Alberta	Professor, University of Alberta
(780) 732-7881	(780) 492-0760

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board 1. Questions about your rights as a research participant may be directed to the University of Alberta Research Ethics Office at telephone number (780) 492-2615.

I will follow up with a phone call to you to discuss this further and answer any questions you may have regarding this research study. You may receive a copy of the final research report by contacting me.

I am providing two copies of the invitation letter and consent form, one copy can be kept for your records and one to be signed and returned to me, the researcher.

Yours truly,

Donna F. Pechanec
Doctoral Candidate
University of Alberta

Appendix E Individual Consent to Participate in Research

Research Question: To what extent have school improvement strategies been instrumental in school and school system leadership development?

I_____, in _____ jurisdiction in the province of Alberta, consent to participate in the interview that will form part of the research entitled **School Improvement Strategies and Leadership Development: Experiences of *AISI* Leaders** conducted by Donna Pechanec as outlined in the accompanying letter that has received approval by my superintendent to be conducted in this school system.

I understand that:

- My participation in this study is entirely voluntary
- I will be asked to participate in an interview of approximately one hour in length and that this interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed
- I may stop the interview at any time and choose not to answer any questions. I may withdraw the information I provide at any time up to four weeks following my review and written approval of the interview transcript, in which case I have been asked to indicate in writing to the researcher my wish to withdraw.
- All information gathered will be kept confidential and securely stored. The audio-recordings and transcripts will only be seen by the researcher and the researcher's supervisor
- This jurisdiction will not be identified in any document resulting from this research
- I will not be identified in any document resulting from this research. My decision to participate in the study or not will be kept confidential from my superintendent and other staff.
- The results of this research will be used for the research dissertation, presentations at conferences or publication in scholarly documents
- All information will be kept in a secure place for a minimum of five years following completion of the research and then appropriately destroyed so as to ensure privacy and confidentiality.

- I can receive a copy of the final report by contacting the researcher.
- I have received two copies of this consent form – one to return to the researcher and one to keep for my files

    For concerns or complaints regarding this research you may contact:

Donna Pechanec, researcher	Dr. Rosemary Foster, supervisor
PhD candidate	Professor
University of Alberta	University of Alberta
dpechane@ualberta.ca	ryfoster@ualberta.ca
(780) 732-7881	(780) 492-0760

By signing this consent form I agree to participate in an individual semi-structured interview that will be tape recorded. A copy of the transcript from the recording will be sent to me for my review and approval of accuracy.

Print Name   Signature   Date

Researcher Name   Signature   Date

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by Research Ethics Board 1 at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Research Ethics Office at (780) 492-2615.

Appendix F Interview Questions for Superintendent/Designate

Background information:

1. Describe your school district.
2. Is there anything that makes this District unique?
3. What are the educational priorities in this District at this time?
4. How were these priorities determined?
5. What leadership roles have you held during your career?
6. Do your *AISI* projects address any of these priorities?

Core Questions:

7. Do you think that the experiences of those who have been in an *AISI* leadership role prepared them for more formalized leadership? Describe.

8. How would you define instructional leadership? How do you believe that experience in *AISI* developed instructional leadership skills?

9. How do you believe that experience in *AISI* developed management skills?

10. Do you think that the experiences of those who have been in an *AISI* leadership role prepared them for more formalized leadership? Describe.

11. In what ways do you think that *AISI* leadership experiences might change the career path of these educators?

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by the

University of Alberta Research Ethics Board 1. Questions about your rights as a research participant may be directed

to the University of Alberta Research Ethics Office at telephone number (780) 492-2615.

Appendix G Interview Questions for *AISI* leaders

Interviews will be guided by these questions but consistent with the semi-structured approach the

interview may diverge from these.

Background information

1. How long have you been an educator?
2. What other positions have you held as an educator in this district or another one?
3. How did you come to be in the role as a quasi leader?
4. Did you aspire to a role as a school-based leader prior to your experience as a quasi leader?
5. How do you feel the role you played as an instructional leader will be helpful as a school-based administrator?

Core Question

What did you do in your job with *AISI?*

Principal Leadership Development

1. How did your role build trust and foster positive working relationships
2. How did your role prepare you to involve the school community in the shared values, vision and mission and goals
3. How did your role prepare you to nurture the culture of a school that values and supports learning
4. How did your role prepare you to ensure that students have ongoing access to quality teaching and learning opportunities
5. How did your role prepare you to promote the development of leadership capacity within the school community
6. How did your role prepare you to manage school operations and resources to ensure an effective learning environment
7. How did your role prepare you to understand and respond to the political, social, economic, legal and cultural contexts that impact the school