

**EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCE OF DISCERNMENT OF ALBERTA
TEACHERS IN LEADERSHIP ROLES WHEN THEY FACE DIFFICULT
SITUATIONS IN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM**

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Abstract

This study explored the experience of discernment of Alberta teachers in leadership roles when they face difficult situations in the education system. The author of this research interviewed two participants in in-depth interviews. The purpose of this research was to gain an understanding of administrators and individuals in leadership roles and how they navigate and make decisions in their roles. From this research, it was identified that administrators can take a religious or non-religious lens when facing difficult situations. Some administrators employed a religious lens when facing difficult situations, where teachings of the Catholic Church are looked at and spiritual practices are involved. The findings suggest that common concepts were used, regardless of religious views. These concepts included gathering information, clarifying the situation, rallying community resources for help, and ultimately making a decision.

Keywords: discernment, administrators, education, leadership roles, difficult situations

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A special thank you to my participants for opening their homes and schedules to conduct interviews. I would like to thank my husband for believing in me and being my rock during these twenty-two months. My mom, brothers and sister for their never ending support and love. I dedicate this paper in memory of my father, who strongly believed in finding what you are passionate about, making it your living and to always to refine, learn and grow your passion. To the future learners that inspire me to strive to be my best as a teacher, my nieces and nephews (Mia, Matteo, Mark and Sophia) may they always have a love of life- long learning.

Research Context

Teachers may face many discernment decisions in schools. Their discernment may be needed as teachers face complex social and educational problems in their workplace (Collay, 2006). Today's principals and teachers face demanding workplace issues and are called to a discernment process to help understand how they perceive their work so that they can make bold leadership decisions (Collay, 2006).

As a teacher for the past 15 years, I have witnessed and lived-through many difficult situations in my workplace. I am also a devoutly religious member of the Catholic Church and I count on my religion and spirituality to help me navigate turbulent situations. To me, discernment is defined as a higher level of thinking, reflecting and desiring God's ultimate will in situations. In particular, I have seen how important it is for teachers to have the support of their administrators as they face difficult situations. The importance of this support has led me to seek out how administrators and those in leadership roles, in particular, understand and navigate discernment as they face difficult situations.

Research Aims and Objectives

In this research, discernment refers to the experience of this process in the lives and work of educational leaders in Alberta. The purpose of this study was to explore how Alberta teachers in leadership roles (e.g., Principal, Vice/Assistant Principal, School Chaplain, Religious Education Coordinator, etc.) experience discernment when they face difficult situations. The research aims to help educational leaders better understand the

practice of discernment in the most difficult situations. In the literature, there was some research on discernment, but not extensively related to Alberta teachers in leadership roles. The objectives of the study were to:

- develop a greater understanding of the experience of the participant related to: (a) how they perceive/view discernment and (b) how they practice and apply discernment in the situations they face within their role.

Research Question

The research question for this study was: What is the experience of discernment of Alberta teachers in leadership roles when they face difficult situations in the education system?

Related Literature

The search of the literature looked at scholarly articles, books and online sources. Key search terms were: discernment, education, leadership, decision-making, difficult situations, and leadership roles. The search terms were used in various combinations. I used Google Scholar, EBSCOhost, and Google. I found a limited amount of scholarly articles in engine searches. However, the books found related to discernment were predominantly religious based. Also, most articles related to discernment were found on religious websites.

In the literature, there are many definitions of what discernment means, and they are listed in the table below.

Definitions of Discernment

<u>Source</u>	<u>Definition</u>
(Discern, n.d.a; Stevenson, 2010)	Discernment refers to the mental process and capacity to recognize, to identify, to make distinctions, and, most crucially, to make judgements
(Discern, n.d.b)	the ability to judge well or (in Christian contexts) perception in the absence of judgment with a view to obtaining spiritual guidance and understanding.
(Liebert, 2008)	Process in which individuals and communities intentionally reflect becoming aware of God's presence and calling to respond to greater faithfulness
(Mooney, n.d.)	Articulates discernment from the lens of St. Ignatius Loyola, where it is placing the relationship with God and the common good at the forefront, while being faced with making choices between several possibilities

Discernment as a Secular or Religious Understanding

The definition in Merriam-Webster's dictionary does not include a religious element to it; however, the definition in the LEXICO dictionary offers two choices: one with a secular meaning and another specific in a Christian context. As well, many scholars have defined the word in a religious context.

Collay (2006) found that discernment is more than a secular definition of .keenness of insight and judgment”. She stated that discernment is associated with vocation and calling, both of which seem to be commonly identifiable by teachers and principals.

In her book, Liebert (2008) also described and defined discernment with a personal spiritual lens. She discussed that discernment is a process in which choices are made, always keeping the lens of “faith” in mind. In many cases, those who discussed discernment in the literature refer to it as a sort of morality calling. Liebert (2015) described discernment as choosing the “better” option, when faced with multiple choices; and, in fact, Liebert noted that one should not consider any choices that are “clearly morally evil” (p. 20). Liebert went on to explain that discernment helps one to navigate the day to day life decisions in one’s own personal life, and also for the navigation for institutions, like schools.

History on Discernment

Although no one source could definitively say how discernment originated, there were many opinions on the early foundations of how discernment came to be. Sazama (n.d.) stated that discerning God’s will goes back to the Hebrew scriptures and is later found in the Christian scriptures and further defined and expanded in various schools of spirituality from Benedictine and Franciscan influences. Liebert (2015) acknowledged that, although discernment is briefly noted in the New Testament, she also referred to discernment seen in examples of common life experiences recorded in the Old

Testament. Both Sazama (n.d.) and Liebert (2015) referenced St. Ignatius of Loyola as an influential person in the Catholic Church. His inspirational work in discernment offered retreatants a practical guide to discernment. He specifically taught that discernment is a relationship between God and the retreatant (Liebert, 2015). St. Ignatius of Loyola spoke heavily on the process of discernment through “spiritual exercises” (Liebert, 2015; Sazama, n.d.; Society of Saint Pius X, n.d.).

Discernment as a Process and Action

Spiritual exercises are a process in which individuals grow in union with God and discern His will (Society of Saint Pius X, n.d.). Spiritual exercises were developed by St. Ignatius Loyola and include meditation, prayer and contemplation (Society of Saint Pius X, n.d.). These practices would historically take place for long periods of time, sometimes 30 days or more in solitude and silence (Society of Saint Pius X, n.d.); hence, he called it the relationship with God and the retreatant.

Collay (2006) advised that, by using a thorough and “careful discernment process, [school leaders] can fully embrace the deep, personal values that underlie each leadership act” (p. 132). Therefore, this process will allow individuals to act boldly when making leadership decisions.

Liebert (2015) presented the discernment process through her Social Discernment Cycle. She modified Holland and Henriot's Pastoral Circle to include language that is applicable and relevant to any individual(s) who are not pastors. Although Liebert (2015) did not identify a starting point in her cycle, she began describing the process with the

element “noticing and describing”, which prompts the discerner to take a look at the contextual situation. She guided this by posing the question: “What is going on at present, to whom, by whom?” (p. 6). From here, the discerners are to delve deeper into the understanding of the causes, consequences and history of the issue at hand. This element in the cycle is called “social analysis”. Social analysis requires checking assumptions and “[trying] to uncover... what counts as useful information” related to this process (p. 6).

Next in the cycle is “theological reflection and prayer” in which discerners take the present situation and lay it out before God. Liebert pointed out that prayer and reflection is what makes the distinction between problem-solving and discernment. In a similar manner, Sazama (n.d.) asked discerners to also reflect and pray and to notice the layer of the faithful experience in the decision-making process.

Next in Liebert’s cycle is “decision and confirmation” where there is concrete identification of what actions should be, how one should proceed, and who will be taking action. The next logical part of the cycle is “implementation and evaluation” where actions are finally taken and an assessment of the outcomes of the decisions feed back into the “noticing and describing” part of the cyclical process.

Research Strategies or Methods

The research strategies and methods conducted were to understand the experience of discernment in Alberta education leaders as they face difficult situations in their work.

Participants

The research population was administrators in education in Alberta. The research focused on interviews of three to four administrators who currently work in an administration or a leadership education roles. It has been noted that the research found in the literature leaned towards a religious and spiritual side of the spectrum. Therefore, it was my hope to interview at least one participant who did not have a religious background, because it would have been interesting to compare the responses from these different perspectives. However, this was not be a restricting factor when selecting participants.

Inclusion benchmarks for participants included the following:

- You are 19 years or older.
- You have been an Alberta teacher in a leadership role for at least two years (ex. Principal, vice principal, School Chaplain, Religious Education Coordinator, etc.)
- You speak English.

Recruitment

For this research, I recruited participants by email. I emailed instructions to the participant's emails with details about the research study. The intrigued respondents were then gauged for desired location, date and time to conduct interview. Please see

Appendix A and B to see a copy of a sample email and information sheet that was sent to potential participants for this research.

Interview Guide and Interview Script

I constructed a plan prior to the interviews, including key questions and dialogue to navigate the interviews based on Creswell's recommendations (2012). Please see appendices for copies of the interview questions and interview script are in Appendix C and D.

Limitations and Challenges

One limitation of this research was the ability to construct conclusions from a small number of participants. When the participant pool is small, it may be difficult to draw comprehensive conclusions.

Ethical Considerations

This research study pre-empted that there would be minimal risk to participants affiliated with this research. However, there is always a risk to participants when speaking openly about personal experiences. I addressed this risk by taking steps to shield the participants' identity and not to disclose confidentiality. The participants used alias, and identifying data related to situations were modified, without changing the context of the data.

The other foreseeable risk was the possibility that emotions might precipitate in the interview. To alleviate this risk, the research detail was given in advance about the topic of the study so that the participants would have full knowledge of the study topic before they progress. I also approached the interviews with compassion and was mindful of the participants' comfort level. Also, some varied approaches were used as needed. These included reminders that the participant involvement was voluntary, participant given as much time as needed, and the interview could end at any time should the participant choose. Please see a copy of the participant consent form in Appendix E. A complete copy of the Research Ethics Board application and addendum can be found in Appendix F and G.

The Shape of the Data

Participants

Of the four people contacted, two responded and agreed to be a part of this study. One of the two people contacted, who were not a part of this study, informed me that he was no longer in an active administrator role. Therefore, he was excluded from this study because he did not meet the inclusion criteria. The other person, who was not a part of this study, did not respond.

The two participants were female, and working in Alberta. Interviewees self-identified as individuals who filled administrator or leadership roles. Both study participants reported that they had been in their current roles for more than two years. Leah held an assistant principal role in the public school system in an urban centre in

Alberta. Becky filled a leadership role in the private Catholic school system in a city in Alberta.

Interviews

I interviewed two individuals during the month of March, 2020. Interviews lasted between 14 and 29 minutes. Each interview covered the two main topics of interest: What does discernment mean to the participants? and How do participants apply discernment when they face a difficult situation. One interview was held in person in a quiet coffee shop, while one was held in the participant's home. Location and medium were decided in collaboration with the participants to accommodate their needs and comfort level (Creswell, 2012).

Consent Process

Before the interviews started, I made sure the participants had a clear understanding of what was part of the study. If they had no concerns and were agreeing to go ahead with the study, I asked them to sign the consent forms.

Data Collection

This research study conducted the interviews in person and were captured through audio recordings, and handwritten field notes were taken during the interview process. Once the interview questions had been conducted, participants were asked for permission to be contacted for verification if required. The interviews were then transcribed.

Outcomes/Findings

As part of this research study, I interviewed two participants over the month of March in 2020. In this chapter, key findings will be highlighted and discussed.

What Does Discernment Means to the Participants

Although Becky did not express an explicit definition of what discernment is, she described what it meant to her throughout the conversation. She also described discernment as a combination of having both intellectual and spiritual components, “but [she thinks] it’s more spiritual” (*Research conversation*, March, 2020).

How is Discernment Applied in Difficult Situations

When Becky has faced difficult situations, she described using three strategies when discerning and navigating them. She first prays about the situation, then she draws on her past experiences to guide her decisions. Afterwards, she looks to the teachings of the Catholic Church to see where the church stands on the situation. She also considers the context and background of the situation to gain more understanding of the situation.

Becky mentioned that the “culture” of her school and the “community resources” available to her in her workplace were also considered when she is discerning (*Research conversation*, March, 2020). Because Becky disclosed that she works in a religious environment and that her leadership role focuses on religious education, she obtained a Master’s degree related to religion. As such, she described that, when she faces difficult

situations, she also draws on the “skills that she learned through [her] courses” (*Research conversation*, March, 2020).

Although my questioning was along the lines of how Becky encountered difficult situations, Becky chose to answer these questions by describing how she teaches discernment to her students. Becky recognized that her students face difficult situations, because “there’s so much noise in the world,” so she imparted her discernment skills and practices to her students. She described taking time out of her classes to set aside some time to allow her students to focus on “meditation and reflection”. She asked her students to focus on what the “voice of God” is really saying.

Becky set time aside for this practice for her students, because she knows initially there might be resistance from the students (*Research conversation*, March, 2020). After setting time aside for her students to discern with the practise she described above in a consistent and constant manner, she witnessed that her students eventually embody this practice. This embodiment of practice is evident because she saw her students using this dedicated class time in a “prayerful posture” (*Research conversation*, March, 2020). She concluded that although not all students got the discernment practice right away, Becky believed that by “planting the seed” and “allowing the Holy Spirit to do the rest”, students may come back to this practice at various points in the future (*Research conversation*, March, 2020).

Leah had her own way of facing difficult situations. She, first, always considered what was best for her students. She mentioned that she considers herself as the parent

during the school day to students. When facing difficult situations, Leah looked at the context of the situation. She thought it was important to check the “assumptions”, because sometimes “something might seem one way” and “emotions, sometime, get in the way” (*Research conversation*, March, 2020). When confronting these situations, she gathered as much information as possible then she talked to the students. She used the strategy of prompting students to verbalize what was going on. Leah acknowledged that “colleagues [were] a huge part of [her] decision making” and she “[relied] on the experiences of others” because “there’s things that [she] still [had] no idea of what the correct answer is” (*Research conversation*, March, 2020). Leah made a point to indicate that at the end of the day, ultimately, she had to own her decisions, even though she mentioned that she “second [guessed her] judgement a lot” (*Research conversation*, March, 2020).

Leah found it helpful to draw on the relationship of those within her educational community as she found “having one person [helped], because, for [her], it’s the one person who is going to check in on [her]” (*Research conversation*, March, 2020). She found these relationships served as mentorship opportunities, where Leah gained feedback and was asked relevant questions [that probed her to think deeper of the situation] (*Research conversation*, March, 2020).

Key Learnings

Going back to the definitions that were found in the literature, it is interesting to see how discernment was approached between the two participants. When I asked Leah

what discernment meant to her and if it was specifically spiritually related, she responded by saying it encompassed an affective, emotional component. Although I did not explicitly ask Leah if she was religious or spiritual, in her interview Leah did not mention religion or spirituality in the context of discernment. Leah's response was compared to Becky's interview where she almost immediately referred to religion and spirituality. These exchanges made it clear to me that Leah was approaching it from a secular perspective, while Becky was coming from a religious and spiritual perspective.

Interestingly, when I described this research and asked participants how they personally discern, they both took the opportunity to answer how they would help a student discern a difficult situation. This is not surprising because people in the education system often put the needs of the student first. Although they both took the same approach to answer the question, there were similarities and differences in the way they helped students discern.

Although both participants expressed that gathering information was important, the sources they gathered from were different. Becky looked to the Catholic Church teaching and her historical experience while Leah gathered information from those involved and from her colleagues. Another similarity they shared was that they both felt it was necessary to guide the student in the discernment process. Leah indicated that she needed to prompt students through conversation and asking questions, while Becky carved out time in her classes to allow the student to discern in private.

Also, both participants knew they needed to give students some strategies about how to discern, these strategies were different. Leah advised students to verbalize the situation, while Becky asked her students to meditate and reflect; both are individual exercises. Leah mentioned that it is important to count on work relationships and use trusted individuals as mentors, when navigating difficult situations. This action contrasted to what Becky did. Becky emphasised the importance of silence, prayer and meditation, activities that are often done in solitude and rely on the strength of God.

Relating back to the literature, many similarities and links were found in what the participants shared and Liebert's (2015) Social Discernment Cycle. Liebert (2015), in the social analyzing component of the cycle, asked the discerner to weed out what counts as useful information. What Liebert (2015) called "useful" information, Leah took the approach of working past "emotions" to get to the core information, while Becky described it as getting past "the noise". Similar to Liebert (2015), Leah mentioned that it is important to check what assumptions are made. Both participants mentioned that gathering relevant information is crucial to the discernment process. This mirrors what Liebert (2015) mentioned in the "noticing and describing" and "social analysis" parts of her cycle.

What's Next

Because both participants described in detail how they taught or passed on the skills of discernment to their students, future research could look more closely at how this is done, how important this is, and how students perceive this learning. In the process of

my research, I was discerning discernment. I started my research process by looking up the meaning of discernment in credible places. This search led me to the Bible, teachings from the Vatican, and the teachings of Saint Ignatius.

What surprised me was the history of the word discernment and its origin. I did not realize this term was predominantly, based on what I found in my research, a term that was derived from Old Testament. Also, I was unaware of how discernment developed through the works of St. Ignatius.

Second, I reflected and prayed about discernment. Naturally it is my tendency to pray; and, interestingly, through my research I found that prayer was an element of discernment.

Third, in discerning the discernment, I spoke to a priest who also at one point was an educator. His great insight helped me understand the deeper connections of the faith and discernment. In speaking with another person who is in a religious role, that person mentioned how today people are missing the opportunity to discern, thus making decisions that are counter to our Catholic teachings and do not align. The person strongly felt this was a missing component in educational leadership today.

Fourth, evaluating my research I felt that finding the meanings and key understandings were essential starting point to my research. I would like to further my interests in this field by using this information to go deeper into the impacts of discernment within school systems.

Many teachers have encountered difficult situations at work. In this research, the goal was to gain an understanding of how two individual administrators navigated through difficult situations using discernment. This study set out to research the experience of administrators exploring the experience of discernment of Alberta teachers in leadership roles when they face difficult situations in the education system.

This research project found that administrators and education leaders use similar processes to navigate difficult situations. They gathered relevant information, relied on their historical life experiences related to difficult situations, and sought resources (either external or internal) to help make decisions. Administrators and education leaders ultimately focus on students and believed it is also important to work with students to impart discernment skills and strategies so that they can then apply these skills when they face difficult situations.

Application of This Research in Workplaces

The findings from this research can be paired with Liebert's cycle to enhance the understanding of the leadership roles and clarify expectations around decision-making. Liebert created an excellent tool to guide teachers and leaders in the education system to action discernment. Her Social Discernment Cycle can be utilized effectively in school settings for Alberta administrators and leaders.

This Social Discernment Cycle would be an excellent resource for education leaders to use when they make impactful decisions. The cycle would be especially useful for decisions that require more intentional thinking and reflecting. The understanding of

how the participants in this study navigated discernment could be used as a benchmark when developing educational opportunities for leaders in education. This information might be found useful for teaching programs and professional development opportunities to allow teachers to deepen their abilities in effective decision making and to harness their discernment skills. The Social Discernment Cycle could also be utilized effectively in public or Catholic school settings to positively impact the multitude of decisions made each day.

Recommendations for Further Practical Research Action

The data gathered in this study would be useful to helping conduct further research in the area of discernment regarding Alberta administrators and leaders and how they discern in difficult situations. As a novice, I realized I had much to learn in researching this topic of interest. I enjoyed the research process thoroughly, but realized that there may be elements that I have overlooked.

As the primary researcher, I should have included my own personal thoughts of discernment and religious understandings to my participants. I was concerned that this might have given the research a biased slant, but then realized that, by leaving this out it, I felt it left a gap. Next time, I would interview more than just two participants, realizing the time was limited I would ensure next time to allow for more time.

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Appendix A: Sample Email and Participant Information Sheet

Dear (Name),

I am contacting you because you may be interested in participating in a research study related to discernment in leadership in educational administration. The research title is “Exploring the experience of discernment of Alberta teachers in leadership roles when they face difficult situations in the education system: a qualitative study”.

This study is being conducted by researchers from Concordia University of Edmonton (CUE). I, Jennifer McGuiness, am the primary researcher for this study which is being conducted as a part of my studies in the Masters of Education in Leadership Administration (MED).

About the study:

Many have encountered difficult situations at work. In this research, the goal is to gain an understanding of how individuals navigate through these situations: what they consider as important elements to the situation, what strategies they use in these situations, who they consult with, and ultimately how they go about making decisions.

The purpose of this study is to explore discernment. In particular, this study will be exploring the experience of Alberta teachers working in leadership roles within the Education system. I am hoping to develop a further understanding of discernment related to:

- How discernment is perceived
- How discernment is applied in practice in difficult situations

Timeframe and commitment expectations:

Study participation will involve one-to-one, face-to-face interviews facilitated by myself. The interviews are expected to last approximately 45 minutes. Voluntary participants are asked to commit to the following:

- Participate in an interview;
- Respond to follow-up questions for clarification, as needed, and
- Respond to the researcher's invitation to validate findings from the interview, as needed.

Criteria for participant selection:

- The participant criteria is outlined here:
 1. You are 19 years or older.
 2. You have been an Alberta teacher in a leadership role for at least 2 years (ex. Principal, vice principal, School Chaplain, Religious Education Coordinator, etc.)
 3. You speak English.

If you are interested in becoming a participant of this study, or have questions about participating in this study, and you meet the criteria listed please contact the researcher, Jennifer McGuinness, by phone at 780-777-7317 or by email at jmcmorro@student.concordia.ab.ca. This research has been reviewed and certified by the Research Ethics Board of CUE.

Thank you so much for your consideration and time.

Sincerely,

Jennifer McGuiness

Concordia University of Edmonton

Email: jmcmorro@student.concordia.ab.ca

Phone: 780-777-7317

Appendix B: Participant Information Sheet

Exploring the experience of discernment of Alberta teachers in leadership roles when they face difficult situations in the education system: a qualitative study.

You are being asked to participate in a research study entitled “Exploring the experience of discernment of Alberta teachers in leadership roles when they face difficult situations in the education system: a qualitative study”. Discernment is defined as “the quality of being able to grasp and comprehend what is an obscure skill in discerning and or an act of perceiving or discerning something.”

RESEARCH PURPOSE

Many have encountered difficult situations at work. In this research, the goal is to gain an understanding of how individuals navigate through these situations: what they consider as important elements to the situation, what strategies they use in these situations, who they consult with, and ultimately how do they go about making decisions.

This study is being conducted by Jennifer McGuiness as part of the Masters of Education in Leadership (MED) degree at Concordia University of Edmonton (CUE), Alberta, Canada. The researcher is conducting the study under the supervision of Dr. Jim Parsons. This consent form outlines the purpose of the study, a description of the research and pertinent information for participants. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please carefully read the information below and ask the researcher any questions you may have about the study.

The objectives that the researcher aims to achieve through the completion of the study are to:

- Describe/better understand how school education leaders perceive/view discernment
- Describe/better understand how school education leaders practice and apply discernment in the situations they face within their role

RESEARCH DESCRIPTION

Participation in the study involves face-to-face interviews conducted on a one-on-one basis with the researcher. The interview will last approximately 45 minutes. For ease of participation, interviews will be conducted at an agreed-upon location by both parties. Interviews will be audio-recorded and later transcribed for the purpose of data analysis. The researcher may also take written notes during the interview. All information collected is confidential and will only be used as part of the research work carried out by Jennifer McGuiness at CUE for this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

All information received will be confidential. Interview transcripts will be transcribed without any identifying information; pseudonyms will be used. Forms that reveal participants' personal information will be kept locked by the primary researcher. Access to the interview transcripts will only be granted to the researcher and the researcher's advisor, Dr. Jim Parsons. To protect the participants' confidentiality and privacy, all paper and digital files containing the participants' information will be shredded and destroyed upon completion of the researcher program of study. The completion of the study is expected to be no later than December 2020. Participant names and personal identifiable information will never be given out at any time or revealed in any publication of the results of the study.

The study results will be published in the form of a research project final report and may be published in a professional journal or presented at professional meetings. The knowledge obtained from the study will be of great value in contributing to the discussion of how discernment is experienced within the Alberta education system.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

It is anticipated that there will be little risk to participants. However, there is always a risk when speaking candidly about personal experiences. These risks will be addressed in the confidentiality section above.

PARTICIPANT RIGHT OF REFUSAL

Participants may choose to withdraw consent and discontinue participation in this research at any time before publication. Participation in the study is voluntary; refusal to participate will involve no penalty. Participants may also refuse to answer any question(s) asked by the researcher.

PROCEDURES

Voluntary participants are asked to commit to the following:

- Participate in an interview;
- Respond to follow-up questions for clarification, as needed, and
- Respond to the researcher's invitation to validate findings from the interview, as needed.

It is the intent of the researcher to limit the amount of time involvement from the participants where possible to respect the participant's time.

PARTICIPATION

You have been asked to participate in this study as you meet the following criteria:

1. You are 19 years or older.

2. You have been an Alberta teacher in a leadership role for at least 2 years (ex. Principal, vice principal, School Chaplain, Religious Education Coordinator, etc.)
3. You speak English.

Please contact the researcher, Jennifer McGuiness, with any questions you have regarding this study. This research has been reviewed and certified by the Research Ethics Board of CUE.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Jennifer McGuiness

Researcher

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Edmonton, AB

T5B 4E4

MEd (student)

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Dr. Jim Parsons, PhD

Primary Advisor

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T5B 4E4

jbp@ualberta.ca

Appendix C: Interview Questions Guide

Exploring the experience of discernment of Alberta teachers in leadership roles when they face difficult situations in the education system: a qualitative study.

Questions related to how they perceive/view discernment

- Main Question: What does discernment mean to you?
- Sub Questions/guiding questions:
 - Tell me how you define discernment?
 - What does discernment mean to you?
 - What strategies of discernment do you utilize?
 - Who do you consult with to help navigate the situation?

Questions related to how discernment was applied in difficult situations they faced in their role

- Main Question: How did you apply discernment when you faced a difficult situation in your role?
- Sub Questions/guiding questions:
 - Tell me a time when you faced discernment in a difficult situation in your role.
 - What discernment strategies, if any, did you use to navigate the difficult situation?
 - What did you find helpful when discerning a difficult situation?
 - What do you find most challenging related to discernment?

Appendix D: Interview Script

Exploring the experience of discernment of Alberta teachers in leadership roles when they face difficult situations in the education system: A qualitative study.

Introduction

- Introduce researchers
- Introduce the purpose of the research

“I would like to start by reviewing the purpose of this study. The study’s title ‘Exploring the experience of discernment of Alberta teachers in leadership roles when they face difficult situations in the education system: a qualitative study.

“The objectives of this study is to develop a greater understanding of your experience in how you:

- How they perceive/view discernment
- How they practice and apply discernment in the situations they face within their role”

“I’m conducting this study as part of the requirement for my Masters of Education in Leadership Degree at Concordia University of Edmonton (CUE).”

“I’m the primary researcher for this study and my advisor is Dr. Jim Parsons. Dr. Jim Parsons is Professor Emeritus from the University of Alberta and a sessional instructor for the Faculty of Education at Concordia University of Edmonton. (CUE).”

“You can choose to leave at any time if you no longer wish to participate in the discussion, however, we ask that you keep everything discussed here confidential.

Consent

- Ask if there are any questions with the study
- Review guidelines within consent
- Sign consent

Interview Questions

“My first question for you is ‘How did you apply discernment when you faced a difficult situation in your role?’”

-Ask probing/sub-questions as needed.

“My second question for you is ‘What discernment strategies, if any, did you use to navigate the difficult situation?’

-Ask probing/sub-questions as needed.

Wrap-Up and thank you

“Is there anything else you would like to add or discuss relating to this topic?”

Remind participants that follow up may be needed for clarification and validation purposes.

Thank you for your time.

Appendix E: Participant Consent Form**Exploring the experience of discernment of Alberta teachers in leadership roles when they face difficult situations in the education system: A qualitative study.**

I have read and understand the explanation and procedures provided to me in the *Participant Information Sheet*. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this Participant Consent Form. By signing this document, I consent to participate in this research study.

Printed Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date (DD/MM/YYYY)

Signature of Researcher, Jennifer McGuiness

Date (DD/MM/YYYY)

Appendix F: Concordia University of Edmonton Research Ethics Board

Concordia University of Edmonton Research Ethics Board

GRADUATE STUDENT
Application to Involve Human Participants in Research
 [Behavioural / Non- Medical]

Please refer to the Concordia's Faculty Handbook and Research Ethics Board Website prior to completion and submission of this application.

Send in this form and all accompanying material in quadruplicate if being submitted in hard-copy. If submitting by e-mail, send the application plus attachments, and forward the original signed signature page to the Chairman of the Research Ethics Board, Concordia University of Edmonton.

Date: January 26, 2020	Application Status: New <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Change <input type="checkbox"/> Renewal <input type="checkbox"/>	Protocol#:
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SECTION A – GENERAL INFORMATION

1. **Title of the Research Project:** Exploring the experience of discernment of Alberta teachers in leadership roles when they face difficult situations in the education system: A qualitative study.

2. **Investigator Information:**

	Name	Dept./Address	Phone No.	E-Mail
Graduate Student	Jennifer McGuiness	7128 Ada Boulevard, Edmonton Alberta T5B 4E4	780-777-7317	jmcmorro@student.concordia.ab.ca
Faculty Supervisor	Jim Parsons	7128 Ada Boulevard, Edmonton Alberta T5B 4E4		Jim Parsons- jbp@ualberta.ca
Other Investigator(s)				
Department Head				

3. **Proposed Date** (a) of commencement: February 22, 2020

(b) of completion: December 31, 2020

4. **Indicate the location(s)** where the research will be conducted:

Concordia University of Edmonton

Community Specify Site interviews will be conducted at an agreed upon location by both interview and interviewee

Other Specify Site

5. **Other Research Ethics Board Approval**

(a) Is this a multi-centred study? Yes No

(b) Has any other institutional Ethics Board approved this project ? Yes No

(c) If Yes, there is no need to provide further details about the protocol **at this time**, provided that **all** of the following information is provided:

Title of the project approved elsewhere:

Name of the Other Institution:

Name of the Other Board:

Date of the Decision:

A contact name and phone number for the other Board:

A copy of the application to the other institution together with **all** accompanying materials

A copy of the clearance certificate / approval

If all of the above information cannot be provided, please complete the balance of this application.

(d) Will any other Research Ethics Board be asked for approval? Yes No
If yes, please specify

6. Level of the Project

Graduate Student Research

Other (specify)

7. Funding of the Project

(a) Is this project currently being funded Yes No

(b) If **No**, is funding being sought Yes No

(c) Period of Funding: From _____ To: _____

(d) Agency or Sponsor (funded or applied for)

CIHR NSERC SSHRC

ARB

NIH Other (specify):

8. Conflict of Interest

(a) Will the researcher(s), members of the research team, and/or their partners or immediate family members:

(i) receive any personal benefits (for example a financial benefit such as remuneration, intellectual property rights, rights of employment, consultancies, board membership, share ownership, stock options etc.) as a result of or being connected to this study? **Yes** **No**

(ii) if **Yes**, please describe the benefits below. (Do not include conference and travel expense coverage, possible academic promotion, or other benefits which are integral to the conduct of research generally).

(b) Describe any restrictions regarding access to or disclosure of information (during or at the end of the study) that the sponsor has placed on the investigator(s).

SECTION B – SUMMARY OF THE PROPOSED RESEARCH – *Please be as Clear and Concise as Possible***9. Rationale**

Describe the purpose and background rationale for the proposed project, as well as the hypotheses(is)/research questions to be examined.

Many have encountered difficult situations at work. In this research, the goal is to gain an understanding of how individuals navigate through these situations: what they consider as important elements to the situation, what strategies they use in these situations, who they consult with, and ultimately how to they go about making decisions. *Discernment* refers to the mental process and capacity to recognize, to identify, to make distinctions, and, most crucially, to make judgements (Discern, n.d.; Stevenson, 2010). In this research, *discernment* refers to the experience of this process in the lives and work of educational leaders in Alberta. The purpose of this study is to explore how Alberta teachers in leadership roles (e.g., Principal, Vice/Assistant Principal, School Chaplain, Religious Education Coordinator, etc.) experience discernment when they face difficult situations. The research aims to help educational leaders better understand the practice of discernment in the most difficult situations. In the literature, there is some research on discernment, but not extensively related to Alberta teachers in leadership roles.

The objectives of the study are to:

- develop a greater understanding of the experience of the participant related to:
 - How they perceive/view discernment
 - How they practice and apply discernment in the situations they face within their role

The research question for this study is:

How do Alberta teachers in leadership roles perceive and apply discernment when they face difficult situations in the education system?

References

- enson, A. (2010). Discernment. In *Oxford Dictionary of English: Oxford University Press*. Retrieved from https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199571123.001.0001/m_en_gb0229490.
- ern. (n.d.). In *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*. Retrieved from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/discern>

10. Methodology

Describe sequentially, and in detail, all procedures in which the research participants will be involved (e.g. paper and pencil tasks, interviews, surveys, questionnaires, physical assessments, physiological tests, time requirements etc.)

Methodology: Qualitative research and 2 to 4 participants. Participation in the study involves face-to-face, unstructured interviews with 2 to 4 participants conducted on a one-on-one basis with the researcher. The interview will last approximately 45 minutes and will take place between February 22 (pending REB approval) - March 31, 2020 with the possibility of follow up interviews. For ease of participation, interviews will be conducted at an off-site location agreed upon by both parties. Interviews will be audio-recorded and later transcribed for the purpose of data analysis. The researcher may also take written notes during the interview.

Voluntary participants are asked to commit to the following:

- Participate in an interview,
- Respond to follow-up questions for clarification, as needed, and
- Respond to the researcher's invitation to review findings from the interview, as needed.

It is the intent of the researcher to limit the amount of time involvement from the participants where possible to respect the participant's time. (Please see interview guide and script on pages 16 & 20 below)

N.B. Attach a copy of all questionnaire(s), interview guides or other test instruments.

11. Experience

What is your experience with this kind of research?

The researcher has taken undergraduate and graduate courses related to research, ethics, and leadership where foundational principles are analyzed.

The researcher has had conversations with the advisors on this project to learn and clarify the steps required in the research process.

12. Participants

Describe the number of participants and any salient characteristics (such as age, gender, location, affiliation, etc.)

The study will include 1 or 2 participants.

Participants will be asked to meet the following criteria:

1. You are 19 years or older.
2. You have been an Alberta teacher in a leadership role for at least 2 years (ex. Principal, Vice Principal, School Chaplain, Religious Education Coordinator, etc.)
3. You speak English.

13. Recruitment

Describe how and from what sources the participants will be recruited, including any relationship between the investigator(s) and participant(s) (e.g. instructor-student; manager-employee).

N.B. Attach a copy of any poster(s), advertisement(s) or letter(s) to be used for recruitment.

The researcher will recruit participants using a convenience sampling approach. The researcher will use a personal private email account to email participants. The two people that the researcher plans to ask are education leaders; one is a School Chaplain, and one is a Vice Principal. An email of the convenience sample will be sent out to participants and interested individuals can respond directly to the researcher. People

who respond will then be sent an electronic description of the study as well as the timeframe and commitment details. Once individuals show interest in the study, the researcher will use the snowball sampling technique to gain more name recommendations for more people to interview. This would help with increasing the sample size while asking the people who are already in the field to direct the appropriate sample target group. **(Please see sample email on pg 18 below)**

14. Compensation Yes No

(a) Will participants receive compensation for participation?

Financial

In-Kind

Other (specify)

(b) If yes, please provide details.

(c) If participants choose to withdraw, how will you deal with compensation?

SECTION C – DESCRIPTION OF THE RISKS AND BENEFITS OF THE PROPOSED RESEARCH**15. Possible Risks**

1. Indicate if the participants might experience any of the following risks:

a) Physical risk (including any bodily contact or administration of any substance)? Yes No

b) Psychological risks (including feeling demeaned, embarrassed worried or upset)? Yes No

c) Social risks (including possible loss of status, privacy and / or reputation)? Yes No

d) Is there any deception involved? Yes No

e) Are any possible risks to participants greater than those the participants might encounter in their everyday life? Yes No

2. If you answered **Yes** to any of a – e above, please explain the risk.

It is anticipated that there will be minimal risk of harm, that is, participants will face psychological and/or social risks no greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life. However, there is always a risk when speaking candidly about personal experiences in that they may be identifiable by readers who have knowledge of a shared experience. These risks will be addressed by the researcher's confidentiality measures as outlined in the section below. The other risk, when speaking about personal experiences related to difficult situations, is the possibility of emerging emotional memories.

3. Describe how the risks will be managed (including an explanation as to why alternative approaches could not be used).

From the onset, when the emails go out, the researcher will be clear about the nature of the study, including the research question related to difficult situations. This may help mitigate risk as the detailed information sheet would allow the participant to be informed so that they can make the right decision for them regarding consent.

During the interviews the researcher will explain the topic and purpose of the study as clearly as possible so that the participants will engage in the study with the fullest understanding possible. The researcher will approach the interviews with compassion and be cognisant of the participants' comfort level and take pauses as needed.

16. Possible Benefits

Discuss any potential direct benefits to the participants from their involvement in the project. Comment on the (potential) benefits to (the scientific community) / society that would justify the involvement of participants in this study.

The knowledge obtained from the study will be of great value in contributing to the discussion of discernment and how it is navigated within the education system. This research may inform others employed in similar roles.

The research information gathered from this study may inform other Alberta teachers in leadership roles in their experience with discernment. It will also help those within and outside the profession to better define the role.

SECTION D – [THE INFORMED CONSENT PROCESS](#)

17. The Consent Process [\(link to sample consent form:](#)

Describe the process that the investigator(s) will be using to obtain informed consent, including a description of who will be obtaining informed consent and a script of what they will say, if anything.

The research purpose, objectives, and description, as well as the details of participation will be explained in the *Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form* **(Please see pages 12 & 15 below)**. Along with the *sample email*, the *Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form* will be attached so that the participant can gain a comprehensive understanding of the research details.

At the time of the interview, the researcher will have printed copies of both for review and before the interview begins, the researcher will ensure that a signed copy of the consent form is obtained. Each participant will be given a copy of this consent form

for their records. Before the interview begins, a brief review of the consent process will take place and then if the participant has no objections, he will submit his signed consent form to the researcher.

Indicate how consent will be documented. Attach a copy of the Letter of Information if applicable and the consent form if applicable. If there will be no written consent, explain why not and describe the alternative means that will be used to document consent. Attach the content of any telephone script that will be used in the consent process (if applicable)

For information about the required elements in the letter of information and the consent form, please refer to "[Instructions for the Preparation of an Information Letter/Consent Form](#)":

At the time of the interview, the researcher will have printed copies of both for review and before the interview begins, the researcher will ensure that a signed copy of the consent form is obtained. Each participant will be given a copy of this consent form for their records. Before the interview begins, a brief review of the consent process will take place. If the participant has no objections, the signed consent form will be submitted to the researcher.

18. Departures from general principles of informed consent by the use of deception or partial disclosure

Identify any use of deception or partial disclosure of information that may constitute a departure from the principles of informed consent. Provide the rationale for the deception by answering the following questions:

- a. Explain why it is impossible or impracticable to carry out the research and to address the research question properly, given the research design;
- b. Explain the alternative designs that have been considered and why they will not be utilized;
- c. Explain the risks to the participants;
- d. Explain the plan to provide a debriefing which may offer participants the possibility of withdrawing consent and/or withdrawing data and/or human biological materials.

19. Consent by an authorized party

If the participants are minors or for other reasons are not competent to consent, describe the proposed alternate source of consent, including any permission / information letter to be provided to the person(s) providing the alternate consent.

20. Alternatives to prior individual consent

If obtaining written documentation of participant consent prior to commencement of the research project is not appropriate for this research, please explain and provide details for a proposed alternative consent process.

21. Debriefing (Participant feedback)

Explain what feedback/ information will be provided to the participants after participation in the project. (For example, a more complete description of the purpose of the research, access to the results of the research).

N.B. Please provide a copy of the written debriefing form, if applicable.

22. Participant withdrawal

- a) Describe how the participants will be informed of their right to withdraw from the project. Outline the procedures which will be followed to allow the participants to exercise this right.

Participants will be informed of their right to withdraw in the *participant information sheet* that will be sent should they express interest in participating in the study. Before interviews are conducted, participants will be reminded/informed that participation is completely voluntary and that they may halt the interview and withdraw participation at any time. In the case of withdrawal, participants may also withdraw any data generated to date. However, the researcher will also inform participants that responses may not be withdrawn once the researcher submits the research project final report to the university.

- b) Indicate what will be done with the participant's data and any consequences which withdrawal might have on the participant, including any effect that withdrawal may have respecting participant compensation.

All information received will be confidential. Interview transcripts will be transcribed without any identifying information; pseudonyms will be used. Forms that reveal participants' personal information will be kept locked by the primary researcher. Access to the interview transcripts will only be granted to the researcher and the researcher's advisor, Dr. Jim Parsons. To protect the participants' confidentiality and

privacy, all paper and digital files containing the participants' information will be shredded and destroyed upon completion of the researcher program of study. The completion of the study is expected to be no later than December 2020. Participant names and personal identifiable information will never be given out at any time or revealed in any publication of the results of the study.

c) If the participants will not have the right to withdraw from the project, please explain.

SECTION E – CONFIDENTIALITY

23.a) Will the data be treated as confidential? Yes No

b) Describe the procedures to be used to ensure the anonymity of participants or confidentiality of data both during the conduct of the research and in the release of its findings.

Complete anonymity of participants is not possible as the researcher will know who the participants are and the information they are sharing. However, the researcher and research supervisor will be the only ones with access to this information. Transcripts and other data used in compiling the research data analysis will make use of pseudonyms so that others who have access to these materials will not have access to the participants' identifying data.

- c) Explain how written records, video/audio tapes and questionnaires will be secured, and provide details of their final disposal or storage.

All information received will be confidential. Interview transcripts will be transcribed without any identifying information; pseudonyms will be used. Forms that reveal participants' personal information will be kept locked by the primary researcher. Access to the interview transcripts will only be granted to the researcher and the researcher's advisor, Dr. Jim Parsons. To protect the participants' confidentiality and privacy, all paper and digital files containing the participants' information will be shredded and destroyed upon completion of the researcher program of study. The completion of the study is expected to be no later than December 2020. Participant names and personal identifiable information will never be given out at any time or revealed in any publication of the results of the study.

- d) If participant anonymity/confidentiality is not appropriate to this research project, explain, including providing details of how all participants will be advised of the fact that data will not be anonymous or confidential.

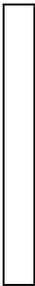


SECTION F -- MONITORING ONGOING RESEARCH

24. Annual Review and Adverse Events

a) Minimum review requires the completion of a “Renewal/Project Completed” form at least annually. Indicate whether any additional monitoring or review would be appropriate for this project.

It is the investigator’s responsibility to notify the REB using the “Renewal/Project Completed” form, when the project is completed, or if it is cancelled.



- b) **Adverse events** (unanticipated negative consequences or results affecting participants) must be reported to the REB Secretariat and the MREB Chair, as soon as possible and in any event, no more than 3 days subsequent to their occurrence.

25. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

(Use an additional page if more space is required to complete any sections of the form, or if there is any other information relevant to the project which you wish to provide to the Research Ethics Board.)



SECTION G – SIGNATURES

I confirm that I have read the *Concordia University of Edmonton Research Ethics Board Guidelines for Research with Human Participants* and I agree to comply with the conditions outlined in the Guidelines.

Signature of Graduate StudentDate

We confirm that we have carefully reviewed the above Graduate Student application and recommend that it be submitted to the Research Ethics Board for review. We also confirm that the Faculty Supervisor will supervise the research of the Graduate Student to ensure that the Graduate Student will comply with the conditions of the *Concordia University of Edmonton Research Ethics Board Guidelines for Research with Human Participants*.

Signature of Faculty SupervisorDate

Signature of Department HeadDate

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Exploring the experience of discernment of Alberta teachers in leadership roles when they face difficult situations in the education system: a qualitative study.

You are being asked to participate in a research study entitled “Exploring the experience of discernment of Alberta teachers in leadership roles when they face difficult situations in the education system: a qualitative study”. Discernment is defined as “the quality of being able to grasp and comprehend what is an obscure skill in discerning and or an act of perceiving or discerning something.”

RESEARCH PURPOSE

Many have encountered difficult situations at work. In this research, the goal is to gain an understanding of how individuals navigate through these situations: what they consider as important elements to the situation, what strategies they use in these situations, who they consult with, and ultimately how they go about making decisions.

This study is being conducted by Jennifer McGuiness as part of the Masters of Education in Leadership (MED) degree at Concordia University of Edmonton (CUE), Alberta, Canada. The researcher is conducting the study under the supervision of Dr. Jim Parsons. This consent form outlines the purpose of the study, a description of the research and pertinent information for participants. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please carefully read the information below and ask the researcher any questions you may have about the study.

The objectives that the researcher aims to achieve through the completion of the study are to:

- Describe/better understand how school education leaders perceive/view discernment
- Describe/better understand how school education leaders practice and apply discernment in the situations they face within their role

RESEARCH DESCRIPTION

Participation in the study involves face-to-face interviews conducted on a one-on-one basis with the researcher. The interview will last approximately 45 minutes. For ease of participation, interviews will be conducted at an agreed-upon location by both parties. Interviews will be audio-recorded and later transcribed for the purpose of data analysis. The researcher may also take written notes during the interview. All information collected is confidential and will only be used as part of the research work carried out by Jennifer McGuiness at CUE for this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

All information received will be confidential. Interview transcripts will be transcribed without any identifying information; pseudonyms will be used. Forms that reveal participants' personal information will be kept locked by the primary researcher. Access to the interview transcripts will only be granted to the researcher and the researcher's advisor, Dr. Jim Parsons. To protect the participants' confidentiality and privacy, all paper and digital files containing the participants' information will be shredded and destroyed upon completion of the researcher program of study. The completion of the study is expected to be no later than December 2020. Participant names and personal identifiable information will never be given out at any time or revealed in any publication of the results of the study.

The study results will be published in the form of a research project final report and may be published in a professional journal or presented at professional meetings. The knowledge obtained from the study will be of great value in contributing to the discussion of how discernment is experienced within the Alberta education system.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

It is anticipated that there will be little risk to participants. However, there is always a risk when speaking candidly about personal experiences. These risks will be addressed in the confidentiality section above.

PARTICIPANT RIGHT OF REFUSAL

Participants may choose to withdraw consent and discontinue participation in this research at any time before publication. Participation in the study is voluntary; refusal to participate will involve no penalty. Participants may also refuse to answer any question(s) asked by the researcher.

PROCEDURES

Voluntary participants are asked to commit to the following:

- Participate in an interview;
- Respond to follow-up questions for clarification, as needed, and
- Respond to the researcher's invitation to validate findings from the interview, as needed.

It is the intent of the researcher to limit the amount of time involvement from the participants where possible to respect the participant's time.

PARTICIPATION

You have been asked to participate in this study as you meet the following criteria:

1. You are 19 years or older.
2. You have been an Alberta teacher in a leadership role for at least 2 years (ex. Principal, vice principal, School Chaplain, Religious Education Coordinator, etc.)
3. You speak English.

Please contact the researcher, Jennifer McGuiness, with any questions you have regarding this study. This research has been reviewed and certified by the Research Ethics Board of CUE.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Jennifer McGuiness

Researcher

Concordia University

7128 Ada Blvd NW

Edmonton, AB

T5B 4E4

MEd (student)

jmcmorro@student.concordia.ab.ca

Dr. Jim Parsons, PhD

Primary Advisor

Concordia University

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Edmonton, AB

T5B 4E4

jbp@ualberta.ca

CONSENT FORM

Exploring the experience of discernment of Alberta teachers in leadership roles when they face difficult situations in the education system: A qualitative study.

I have read and understand the explanation and procedures provided to me in the *Participant Information Sheet*. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this Participant Consent Form. By signing this document, I consent to participate in this research study.

Printed Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date (DD/MM/YYYY)

Signature of Researcher, Jennifer McGuiness
(DD/MM/YYYY)

Date

GENERAL INTERVIEW SCRIPT

Exploring the experience of discernment of Alberta teachers in leadership roles when they face difficult situations in the education system: A qualitative study.

Introduction

- Introduce researchers
- Introduce the purpose of the research

“I would like to start by reviewing the purpose of this study. The study’s title ‘Exploring the experience of discernment of Alberta teachers in leadership roles when they face difficult situations in the education system: a qualitative study.

“The objectives of this study is to develop a greater understanding of your experience in how you:

- How they perceive/view discernment
- How they practice and apply discernment in the situations they face within their role”

“I’m conducting this study as part of the requirement for my Masters of Education in Leadership Degree at Concordia University of Edmonton (CUE).”

“I’m the primary researcher for this study and my advisor is Dr. Jim Parsons. Dr. Jim Parsons is Professor Emeritus from the University of Alberta and a sessional instructor for the Faculty of Education at Concordia University of Edmonton. (CUE).”

“You can choose to leave at any time if you no longer wish to participate in the discussion, however, we ask that you keep everything discussed here confidential.”

Consent

- Ask if there are any questions with the study

- Review guidelines within consent
- Sign consent

Interview Questions

“My first question for you is ‘How did you apply discernment when you faced a difficult situation in your role?’”

-Ask probing/sub-questions as needed.

“My second question for you is ‘What discernment strategies, if any, did you use to navigate the difficult situation?’”

-Ask probing/sub-questions as needed.

Wrap-Up and thank you

“Is there anything else you would like to add or discuss relating to this topic?”

Remind participants that follow up may be needed for clarification and validation purposes.

Thank you for your time.

SAMPLE EMAIL

Dear (Name),

I am contacting you because you may be interested in participating in a research study related to discernment in leadership in educational administration. The research title is “Exploring the experience of discernment of Alberta teachers in leadership roles when they face difficult situations in the education system: a qualitative study”.

This study is being conducted by researchers from Concordia University of Edmonton (CUE). I, Jennifer McGuinness, am the primary researcher for this study which is being conducted as a part of my studies in the Masters of Education in Leadership Administration (MED).

About the study:

Many have encountered difficult situations at work. In this research, the goal is to gain an understanding of how individuals navigate through these situations: what they consider as important elements to the situation, what strategies they use in these situations, who they consult with, and ultimately how to they go about making decisions.

The purpose of this study is to explore discernment. In particular, this study will be exploring the experience of Alberta teachers working in leadership roles within the Education system. I am hoping to develop a further understanding of discernment related to:

- How discernment is perceived
- How discernment is applied in practice in difficult situations

Timeframe and commitment expectations:

Study participation will involve one-to-one, face-to-face interviews facilitated by myself. The interviews are expected to last approximately 45 minutes. Voluntary participants are asked to commit to the following:

- Participate in an interview;
- Respond to follow-up questions for clarification, as needed, and
- Respond to the researcher’s invitation to validate findings from the interview, as needed.

Criteria for participant selection:

- The participant criteria is outlined here:
 1. You are 19 years or older.

2. You have been an Alberta teacher in a leadership role for at least 2 years (ex. Principal, vice principal, School Chaplain, Religious Education Coordinator, etc.)
3. You speak English.

If you are interested in becoming a participant of this study, or have questions about participating in this study, and you meet the criteria listed please contact the researcher, Jennifer McGuiness, by phone at 780-777-7317 or by email at jmcmorro@student.concordia.ab.ca. This research has been reviewed and certified by the Research Ethics Board of CUE.

Thank you so much for your consideration and time.

Sincerely,

Jennifer McGuiness

Concordia University of Edmonton

Email: jmcmorro@student.concordia.ab.ca

Phone: 780-777-7317

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS GUIDE

Exploring the experience of discernment of Alberta teachers in leadership roles when they face difficult situations in the education system: a qualitative study.

Questions related to how they perceive/view discernment

- Main Question: What does discernment mean to you?
- Sub Questions/guiding questions:
 - Tell me how you define discernment?
 - What does discernment mean to you?
 - What strategies of discernment do you utilize?
 - Who do you consult with to help navigate the situation?

Questions related to how discernment was applied in difficult situations they faced in their role

- Main Question: How did you apply discernment when you faced a difficult situation in your role?
- Sub Questions/guiding questions:
 - Tell me a time when you faced discernment in a difficult situation in your role.
 - What discernment strategies, if any, did you use to navigate the difficult situation?
 - What did you find helpful when discerning a difficult situation?
 - What do you find most challenging related to discernment?

Appendix G: Concordia University of Edmonton Research Ethics Board Addendum

Addendum to Concordia University of Edmonton's Research Ethics Board (REB) application submitted by Jennifer McGuiness on February 7, 2020.

- Section 12, Participants, remove "The study will include 1 to 2 participants."
- Section 13, Recruitment, remove "The three people that the researcher plans to ask are work acquaintances; one is a School Chaplain, one is a Vice Principal, another is a Religious Coordinator."